SAMHAIN’S PLACE ON THE SACRED LANDSCAPE

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Samhain was one of four festivals celebrated in pre-Christian Irish culture. It marked the beginning of the new year and the time when the veil was at its thinnest between the mortal world and the otherworld. With the arrival of Christianity the festival began to change, but did not disappear due to its popularity. The monks and traditional learned class began to record the myths that had been being told for centuries, helping to secure Samhain’s survival, giving us insight into what the festival was like in its early days. This thesis examines the people, places, actions and events that were associated with Samhain as it existed in the myths in an attempt to lay a groundwork for future study into this festival.
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## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction........................................................................................................1

  Problem Statement and Hypothesis..............................................................................6

  Contributions..............................................................................................................7

  Methods.....................................................................................................................8

Chapter 2: Literature Review............................................................................................11

  Manuscripts and Myths.............................................................................................11

  Landscape Archaeology............................................................................................15

    Early Landscape Archaeologists............................................................................18

    Problems in Landscape Archaeology....................................................................19

  Archaeoastronomy....................................................................................................20

    Early Archaeoastronomers....................................................................................21

      Sir Joseph Norman Lockyer................................................................................21

      Alexander Thom...................................................................................................22

    Problems in Archaeoastronomy............................................................................23

    Archaeoastronomy in Ireland...............................................................................25

      Newgrange...........................................................................................................25

      Calendars............................................................................................................27

Chapter 3: Data from the Tales.........................................................................................29

  Samhain Myths.........................................................................................................30

  Mythological Cycle....................................................................................................34

  Ulster Cycle...............................................................................................................47

  Fenian Cycle.............................................................................................................78

  Historical Cycle.......................................................................................................80

  Dindshenchas...........................................................................................................93

  Roll of the Kings.....................................................................................................106

  Three Myths with Samhain Timing........................................................................108
Chapter 4: Results

Myths in Summary

Motifs

People

Places

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Future Work

Appendix

Works Cited
Tables

Table 1..................................................................................................................40
Table 2..................................................................................................................43
Table 3..................................................................................................................47
Table 4..................................................................................................................52
Table 5..................................................................................................................54
Table 6..................................................................................................................57
Table 7..................................................................................................................64
Table 8..................................................................................................................67
Table 9..................................................................................................................72
Table 10...............................................................................................................77
Table 11...............................................................................................................80
Table 12...............................................................................................................82
Table 13...............................................................................................................85
Table 14...............................................................................................................88
Table 15............................................................................................................92
Table 16............................................................................................................101
Table 17............................................................................................................106
Table 18............................................................................................................108
Table 19............................................................................................................109
Table 20............................................................................................................111
Table 21............................................................................................................112
Table 22............................................................................................................113
Table 23............................................................................................................147
Table 24............................................................................................................149
Maps

Map 1 ................................................................................................................. 160
Map 2 ................................................................................................................. 161
Map 3 ................................................................................................................. 162
Map 4 ................................................................................................................. 163
Map 5 ................................................................................................................. 164
Map 6 ................................................................................................................. 165
Map 7 ................................................................................................................. 166
Map 8 ................................................................................................................. 167
Map 9 ................................................................................................................. 168
Map 10 ............................................................................................................... 169
Map 11 ............................................................................................................... 170
Map 12 ............................................................................................................... 171
Map 13 ............................................................................................................... 172
Map 14 ............................................................................................................... 173
Map 15 ............................................................................................................... 174
Map 16 ............................................................................................................... 175
Chapter 1: Introduction

Before the arrival of Christianity in Ireland, the pre-Christian Irish observed four major festivals that divided the year and reflected the agricultural cycle. Even the arrival of Christianity could not dispel the beliefs and observances that came with this calendar. Samhain, the festival that closed the year at the beginning of November, and the focus of this thesis, continued to be observed up through modern times. Modifications were made to accommodate the new religion and reflect the changing times and influences on Irish culture. Samhain even traveled with Irish immigrants to other countries, such as the United States.

Unfortunately, not much is known about the early days of Samhain beliefs and practices. The extent of almost any book or article’s information on the subject of Samhain’s history and origins deals with the supernatural presence associated with the holiday and the more recent folklore traditions. Some researchers have studied Samhain’s role in myth and the year (Danaher 1972, 1981; Hicks and Elder 2003; Hicks 2009a), but there is still much we do not know about the festival. The following research was conducted with the intention of expanding our knowledge of Samhain’s origins by focusing on the pre-Christian myths from Ireland. Those myths were examined with the intent of finding patterns in characters, locations, and motifs that appear to be important to the festival and to lay the groundwork for further research on the topic.

Calendar Customs: The Ritual and Agricultural Year

The pre-Christian Irish, like other agrarian cultures, had a ritual year based on an agricultural calendar. Agricultural calendars offer yearly landmarks for when it is appropriate to plant specific crops, when herds should be moved to seasonal pastures, when to prepare for the changing seasons, and when to bring in the harvests. These landmarks in Ireland were four festivals that divided the year into quarters. Imbolc or Oimelg marked spring and the beginning
of the lambing season, Beltaine was the beginning of summer when the herds and flocks were moved to summer pastures, Lughnasa was the beginning of the harvest, and Samhain was the end of the agricultural year and the beginning of winter (Gantz 1981: 13-14; Hicks and Elder 2003: 311; MacNeill 1962: 1).

Traditionally these festivals took place around the cross-quarter days, which fall midway between solstices and equinoxes. Based on available evidence, it seems probable that the actual dates were decided using a soli-lunar calendar so that both a solar date and a phase of the moon determined the actual dates, much as is the case with Easter today. Having these particular days at a consistent time each year required a good understanding of astronomy. Evidence of a long history of astronomical interest can be observed in patterns in the construction of many of the large monuments throughout Great Britain and Ireland, such as Newgrange and Stonehenge. Astronomical interest is also mentioned in Roman accounts of Celtic life. This is explained in further detail in the literature review of this thesis. Once Christianity came into Ireland and brought with it the Roman calendar, the festivals were assigned the dates of February 1\textsuperscript{st}, May 1\textsuperscript{st}, August 1\textsuperscript{st}, and November 1\textsuperscript{st} (Johnson 1968: 135; MacNeill 1962: 1).

\textit{Samhain}

Samhain, which may be translated as either “end of summer” or “reassembly,” perhaps reflecting a fondness for a play on words apparent elsewhere in early Irish literature, marked the end of the agricultural year and the beginning of the new year in Ireland. By this time, to prepare for the approaching winter, farmers finished bringing in the harvest and herds were moved from their summer pastures to their winter pastures (Danaher 1972:206, 1981:219; Hicks 2009b: 122; Johnson 1968:136).
The gatherings themselves were a time for both business and pleasure. These assemblies took the form of feasts in celebration of the successful harvest. Some were large like the Festival of Tara, others were small family gatherings like the ones described in the modern folklore (Hicks 2009b:122; Jestice 2000:312). The Festival of Tara was, according to the myths, a large event that brought leaders and warriors from all over Ireland to the seat of the high king of Ireland. At this event legal issues such as the legitimization of the king were discussed and settled, the annals were revised, and war games were played (Johnson 1968: 136; Mac Cana 1983:117; Mooney 1889: 405). The Samhain preparations and celebrations originally took place over a series of days at what would be the end of October and the beginning of November. With the introduction of Christianity and the Roman calendar, the official celebrations were shortened to last from sunset on October 31st until sunset November 1st. Other holidays were added to the calendar around the beginning of November as well, including All Saint’s Day (November 1st), All Soul’s Day (November 2nd), and Martinmas (November 11th). Adding these other feasts extends the new celebration timing to what it used to be before Christianity took hold.

Scholars commonly associated several characters with Samhain in the myths. Some characters were god-like beings, such as the Dagda (the good god), while others were more human, such as Cú Chúlainn. The Dagda played a key role in the Mythological Cycle of myths as a leader of the Tuatha Dé. Cú Chúlainn on the other hand was a demigod portrayed as a mortal who was a key figure in the Ulster Cycle of tales. He was a hero of Ulster fathered by the god Lugh and had super-human abilities, including the capability to transform when angry:

The Warp-Spasm overtook him: it seemed each hair was hammered into his head, so sharply they shot upright. You would swear a fire-speck tipped each hair. He squeezed one eye narrower than the eye of a needle; he opened the other wider than the mouth of a goblet. He bared his jaws to the ear; he peeled back his lips to the eye-teeth till his gullet showed. The hero-halo rose up from the crown of his head. [Kinsella 1969:77]
Other characters like the Morrigan, a goddess of war, and Conchobar, the king of the Ulstermen, also made multiple appearances. Many of the characters encountered on Samhain or many of the trials our heroes faced at Samhain occurred due to the opening of the *sídhe* (singular *sid*).

The *sídhe* were the Irish Otherworld, the land of the *Tuatha Dé* (the old gods). The *sidhe* in the myths (on the mortal plain) tended to be ancient mounds and monuments like the famous Newgrange or hills of unusual form. Jeffrey Gantz described the *sidhe* as “a stylized, idealized version of the real [world]: everyone is beautiful and there is an abundance of beautiful things, and the joys of life are endless – hunting, feasting, carousing, perhaps even love” (Gantz 1981:15). At Samhain the veil between these two worlds lifted and humans could enter the realm of the *sídhe* (Danaher 1972:200; Hicks 2009b: 122; Johnson 1968: 135; Mac Cana 1983:127-128; Rees and Rees 1991:89-90).

Along with the opening of the *sidhe* came the ability for the dead to return to the land of the living (Rees and Rees 1991:90). Myths like *The Adventures of Nera* offer instructions on some of the precautions to take on Samhain night to keep the deceased from kidnapping or killing someone. One method of protection that appeared in the folk traditions was to make a *parshell*: a stick and straw cross that was supposed to ward off ill-luck, sickness, and witchcraft for a year (Danaher 1972: 208). While there is not a lot of information available on this tradition, examples collected by the Irish Folklore Commission in the 1930s and 40s can be seen at The National Museum of Ireland’s Museum of Country Life in Turlough Park, in Castlebar, Co. Mayo.
Perhaps due to the opening of the sídhe, Samhain was also a night for magic. Various types of spells could be conducted on Samhain including magic to hurt others, gambling magic, or love magic. Divination rites were conducted as well and were practiced up through modern times by people wanting to know what the following year would bring, including warnings of impending death or marriage (Danaher 1972:202; Johnson 1968: 135; Rees and Rees 1991:90).

One divination tradition was the bairín breac, a large fruitcake with a ring, a coin, a button, a thimble, a chip of wood, and a rag baked into it. Each item predicted a different event in the finder’s future. The ring symbolized marriage, the coin was for wealth, the button and thimble meant bachelorhood/spinsterhood, the chip of wood meant the finder would be beaten by their marriage partner, and the rag symbolized poverty (Danaher 1972: 218-219). Today there are recipes for bairín breac online, usually calling for only the addition of a gold ring.

Samhain also had less magical and sinister traditions. Many games were played that involved traditional foods, including bobbing for apples and snap-apple (Danaher 1972: 205). These foods and games are not named specifically in the myths, but, as previously mentioned, the myths do say that great feasts were held and that games were played, so it is not unreasonable to assume that these relatively modern traditions could have pre-Christian origins.

Why did Samhain maintain its hold on the people of Ireland? It seems the answer may be as simple as the people refusing to give it up. “So firmly were people wedded to this pagan festival that the church was compelled to incorporate it into the Christian calendar, merely changing the name so as to give it a new significance” (Mooney 1889: 404). Pope Gregory III tried to Christianize Samhain by moving All Saints’ Day to November 1st in the year 835 AD (McNeill 1961: 12; Santino 1994:154). The hope was that Samhain would eventually die out
and the Christian holiday would replace it. Instead, people began to celebrate both Samhain and All Saints’ Day.

Whatever the reasons were for All Saints Day and All Souls Day to be moved to November, they nevertheless influenced Samhain. As the result of this blending of influences from Christianity, the pre-existing traditions, and celebrations of the dead from other cultures, Samhain eventually developed into our modern Halloween.

Problem Statement and Hypothesis

This thesis seeks to answer three questions about Samhain:

#1: What characters (real, mythical, or both) were associated with Samhain?

#2: What did people (peasants, warriors and royals alike) do at Samhain?

#3: What locations were associated with Samhain, and are there patterns in those locations?

My hypothesis for the first question (What characters [real, mythical or both] were associated with Samhain?) is that many different characters will be active at Samhain, but one or two will stand out from the rest as being particularly active and important. The other feast days tend to have a focus on a few key figures, such as Lughnasa, which according to myth was started by Lugh. These characters' personality traits, both during and not during Samhain, may tell us more about this particular festival.

My hypothesis for the second question (What did people [peasants, warriors and royals alike] do at Samhain?) is that there will be a large amount of traveling, feasting, and fighting at Samhain. We know from what research is available that feasts were held at Samhain, with the Festival of Tara holding a particularly prominent role. It makes sense then that if there are feasts people must travel to get there, and if there are large gatherings of people fights may occur.
My hypothesis for the third question (What locations were associated with Samhain and is there a pattern?) is that there will be several locations that are repeatedly used at Samhain, and there will also be many locations that are only visited once or twice during journeys. I believe there will be a pattern in the sites that occur repeatedly in connection with Samhain, specifically important feast sites, and that there will also be physical patterns to the locations associated with journeys, possibly with astronomical importance.

Contributions

A few facts are widely known about Samhain, many of which were already discussed above. We know when it was celebrated and the fact that it was a time when people and creatures could travel from the mortal world to the sídhe and back. However, no researchers have tried to understand a number of socio-cultural elements related to this holiday. This project will not only create a database of myths that pertain to Samhain, it will also contribute to the understanding of some of the associated beliefs. This research can also help better understand the lives and religion of people in pre-Christian Ireland, particularly those aspects relating to the agricultural cycle and the landscape.

Over the centuries Samhain has evolved into the holiday we today celebrate as Halloween. In the United States Halloween has become a controversial holiday for some Christians due to its associations with paganism, the occult, and Satanism. There are many websites that highlight the debate over whether or not Halloween should be celebrated, particularly by Christians. A small sampling of sites debating the issue can be found at: <http://www.dmoz.org/Society/Holidays/Halloween/Opinions/Religious/>.
Many of the anti-Halloween websites include their version of the history of Halloween, citing Samhain as the pre-Christian forerunner of the day. Often the information they use is outdated. Even the sources that support Halloween rely on outdated information about the history of Samhain. For example, a popular misconception is that Samhain was actually the way the Irish worshipped the Roman goddess Pomona (Schauffler 1946: ix). This was a theory that was popular in the late 1800s and early 1900s but has been discredited by modern scholars. However, it still finds its way into popular histories of Halloween. Other information used in popular sources casts a more sinister light on Samhain than it probably deserves. This research has the potential to help correct some of the misunderstanding we have today regarding Samhain and Halloween’s origins.

**Methods**

Since the majority of the information for this thesis came from Irish myths, the first step in research was to examine as many different Irish myths as could be found. For some myths I read more than one translation if the myth was unclear or confusing or when I knew that a different translation said something different. How a myth plays out can vary from source to source because different manuscripts pulled myths from different regions and different sources. Translations can also vary by translator depending on how the translator prefers to translate specific words or phrases and how they decide to translate for publication (usually dependent on intended audience). Many of these myths, both translated and in their original Irish form, are available online from trusted sources. This research focused on the most recent translations of myths that could be found from scholarly sources, carefully avoiding translations made for general audiences because they will sometimes edit the story to make it flow better (removing
important information) or edit it for a specific audience (such as children). More recent translations are in general a better choice because as time and research progresses we gain a better understanding of the Old and Middle Irish languages and are better able to translate them, leading to more accurate translations.

My goal in studying these myths was to determine what places, characters, and motifs are associated with Samhain and to look for patterns in these areas. Because there has been so little research done on Samhain, any information gleaned regarding patterns is useful.

After searching the tales, I used Google Earth to create a series of sixteen maps (see the Appendix) showing where these sites are located in Ireland. I chose to use Google Earth because of its ease of use, plethora of marking options, and layering tools. One can search for modern names of places, use specific GPS coordinates, or measure off known landmarks found on historic maps to place a marker over a site in the satellite photos.

I used a combination of sources to determine where the sites are located. First, I examined the *Onomasticon Goedelicum* (Hogan 1910) (available on University College Cork’s website), which is a list of Gaelic place names mentioned in the manuscripts and their locations. The *Ireland Culture Map* (3rd Edition) published by the Ordnance Survey Ireland was also useful, but because it is a paper document it is not searchable, meaning it is a tool best used when one already has an idea of where to look. When I was having problems determining locations I turned to my advisor, Ronald Hicks, and to the internet (which was not as helpful since many of the place names I had no longer exist).

There is a map showing all of the sites from all of the myths, as well as a map for each tale type. The royal sites received a special symbol (●), while other sites were marked with a
push-pin symbol ( ). Locations that I was certain of the location were given a yellow pin, locations that I was not as certain about were given a blue pin.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Archaeology is traditionally carried out by studying cultural materials including artifacts, features, ancient architecture, and more, with the goal of gaining a better understanding of past human cultures. This is more difficult to do when the aspect of a past culture you wish to study is intangible, like a festival. This thesis meets this challenge by utilizing the myths that have survived into the modern era. Those myths were studied for places of significance so Samhain could be, in a sense, mapped, using landscape archaeology. From there the landscape was further examined for astronomical alignments, which are not uncommon in pre-Christian Irish constructs.

Manuscripts and Myths

After the arrival of Christianity, monks, along with the traditional Irish learned class, the *filid*, began to record Ireland’s pre-Christian myths. The *filid* were poets whose position survived the transition to Christianity and held positions of respect as late as the eighth century (Hughes 1972:165). There were seven levels of *filid*, the highest holding ranks similar to a bishop and petty king. “They were the guardians of Ireland’s past, its ‘historians’, the men who remembered, recited and taught genealogies, lore…mythological and heroic tales, antiquarian tradition” (Hughes 1972:165). Variations on this system continued, often in schools dedicated to specific fields like poetry, history, or law. The last of the traditional schools, the *brehon* law school of the O’Davorans, survived until the mid-seventeenth century, and various families are known for being hereditary scholars in one field or another.

The results of the work done by these monks and *filid* were collections of myths that appear to have remained true to their pre-Christian origins, but were also undoubtedly influenced
by Christianity (some more than others). In fact, some myths were used by early Irish Christians to help place Ireland in biblical history by linking events to those in the Bible (Maier 2003:136-137). An example of this is *The Book of the Takings of Ireland* (*Lebor Gabála Érenn*) which tells the story of how Ireland came to be inhabited, starting with Cessair, the granddaughter of Noah (Carey 2005a:226-271).

Many beautiful manuscripts containing myths or translations of the Bible were created in Irish monasteries beginning by at least the seventh century and continuing on into the seventeenth. Many of them, such as *The Book of Kells*, were “illuminated,” meaning they were heavily and elaborately decorated. Unfortunately, many of the earlier manuscripts did not survive the Viking invasions (Gantz 1981:20; Todd 1867:139). The Vikings first arrived in Ireland in 795, attacking monastic houses (Maier 2003: 134). These Viking raids continued on and off until AD 980. Irish manuscripts were threatened again in the seventeenth century when the English started passing laws to force Irish Catholics and their Protestant supporters to become more “English” and suppress the Catholic faith. An example of one of these rules that concerned Irish literature is provided below:

7 Will III c.4 (1695):
An Act to Restrain foreign Education
Sec. 9 Whereas it has been found by experience that tolerating at papists keeping schools or instructing youth in literature is one great reason of many of the natives continuing ignorant of the principles of the true religion, and strangers to the scriptures, and of their neglecting to conform themselves to the laws of this realm, and of their not using the English habit and language, no person of the popish religion shall publicly teach school or instruct youth, or in private houses teach youth, except on the children of the master or mistress of the private house, upon pain of twenty pounds, and prison for three months for every such offence. [Schaffer 2000]
The surviving manuscripts are being digitized and shared with larger academic and lay audiences. Examples of these new digital libraries include Trinity College Dublin’s Digital Collections: <http://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/>, University College Cork’s Corpus of Electronic Texts (CELT): <www.ucc.ie/celt/> which provides translations of the manuscripts and the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies website which provides scans of the manuscripts: <http://www.isos.dias.ie/english/index.html>.

Much of what we know about pre-Christian Ireland comes from the myths. When these myths were first told and recorded they were separated into tale types. Two lists still exist, at least in part, that lay out more than two hundred myths by type, including Destructors, Cattle-Raids, Courtships, Battles, Cave Stories, Voyages, Tragedies, Adventures, Banquets, Sieges, Plunderings, Elopements, Eruptions, Visions, Love Stories, Hostings, and Invasions (Dillon 1994:1 [reprint of the 1948 edition]; Gantz 1981:22; Mac Cana 1980). The tale types that contain the Samhain myths are Aideda (death tales), Catha (battles), Comperta (birth tales), Dindshenchas (place-name lore), Geis/Gess (spell/incantation), Macgnimrada (boyhood deeds), Scéla (stories), Suidigud (disposition), Tana (cattle-raid), Tochmarca (wooings), Tochomluda (setting forth, proceeding, advancing), Togla (destruction), and Uatha (attack or plunder of a cave) (Mac Cana 1980:41-65; Scela 2007).

Modern scholars have sorted the myths into four categories – referred to as cycles – that have a very loose chronological order instead of using the tale types. The cycles were organized taking characters, locations, and timing into consideration. The first cycle chronologically is the Mythological Cycle. The Mythological Cycle details the adventures of the Tuatha Dé and contains the early battles for control over Ireland. The second cycle is the Ulster Cycle. The Ulster Cycle contains the stories of the men of Ulster including King Conchobor mac Nessa and
Cú Chulainn. The Ulstermen often found themselves at odds against Connaught, the realm in the west of Ireland ruled over by Ailill and Medb. Many of the Ulster Cycle myths detail some sort of conflict between the two provinces, including the epic saga *The Cattle-Raid of Cooley* (*Táin Bó Cúailnge*). The third cycle is the Fenian Cycle. The Fenian Cycle follows Finn mac Cumaill and his band of warriors who travel around Ireland policing the land. The last cycle is the Historical Cycle (also referred to as the Cycle of the Kings). The Historical Cycle contains myths that combine historic fact and myth from the third century BC until the eleventh century AD (Dillon 1968:10; Gantz 1981:22; Maier 2003: 138-140).

These myths give us some insight into pre-Christian beliefs. When the myths were first being told they most likely served several purposes, the most obvious being entertainment. Another was to teach proper behavior. The myths may have also served as mnemonic devices created to help scholars and those trained to understand the meanings behind them remember other lessons. One example of this is *The Wooing of Etain* (*Tochmarc Étaine*), which seems to be a mnemonic device for the characteristics of the moon’s various cycles (Hicks 2009b: 127).

There are many manuscripts found in Ireland and Great Britain today dating from the twelfth through sixteenth centuries, most of which are housed at The Royal Irish Academy, National Library of Ireland, Trinity College, University College Dublin, British Library, and Bodleian Library at Oxford. *The Book of the Dun Cow* (*Lebor na hUidre*) was written in the late eleventh or early twelfth century at Clonmacnois (Gantz 1981:20-21; Maier 2003:138). *The Book of Leinster* (*Lebor Laignech*), which was originally known as *The Book of Nuachongbáil* (*Lebor na Núachongbála*), was written starting around 1160 and continually expanded over a period of years (Gantz 1981:21; Maier 2003:138; Ní Bhrolcháin 2009:23). By 1782 it was referred to as both the Book of Leinster and the Book of Glendalough. Its original name
indicates that *The Book of Leinster* was written in Noughaval in Co. Laois, and today it is housed at Trinity College (Ní Bhrolcháin 2009:23). *The Yellow Book of Lecan (Leabhar Buidhe Leacáin)* was completed by the beginning of the fifteenth century (Gantz 1981:21; Maier 2003:138). *The Book of Ballymote (Leabhar Bhaile an Mhóta)* was also written in the fourteenth century around 1391 (Maier 2003:138). While there are many more manuscripts, both earlier and later, those just listed are the most important for the study of Irish myth.

**Landscape Archaeology**

Landscape archaeology is an approach to archaeology that focuses on human interaction with the land. This includes how humans view, interpret, interact with, and respond to the limitations of and opportunities provided by the physical world, and how their culture affects the surrounding landscape (Barrett 1999: 26; Layton and Ucko 1999:9). The world around us affects our daily lives in ways that many people might never think of, including our religious beliefs, political ideology and actions, technological abilities and needs, and how we perceive and interact with outside cultures. For example, one has only to think of how seasons influence the type of daily work that was required in non-industrial societies (Tilley 1994:26). This thesis has already discussed in the introductory chapter how seasonal change affected and altered the work in Ireland with moving herds, planting crops and harvesting. By studying how humans interact with their physical surroundings, archaeologists can gain a better understanding of factors that potentially affected the development of a culture over time.

But what is landscape, exactly? The discussion above suggests that landscape is more than the land around us. Hammond and Reeves-Smyth define landscape as the rock, dirt, and plants that make up the physical world around us and the weather and animals that correspond (Hammond and Reeves-Smyth 1983:1). There is also the more abstract view of landscape
(provided by Layton and Ucko), which is the human representation of landscape, such as those found in stories (myths) or artistic representations (drawing or paintings) (Layton and Ucko 1999:1). This thesis examines landscapes from both the physical and abstract points of view. The myths give places and landscape features special meaning and powers as well as explanations of how they were formed and how various places got their names, such as the caves and hills that house the sídhe. Most of these places described in the myths do exist in the real world. They can be studied from a physical and archaeological perspective, including location and physical relation to one another.

Representations of the landscape in folklore, myths, and art, if they are available, can provide a starting point for studying the landscape as it pertains to archaeology. Sikkink and Choque (1999:167) state that oral tradition not only reflects experience, it is “also a way of shaping that lived experience.” For example, the people who lived in the Andes told stories about giant gods who became the land, with major landscape features being actual body parts of these gods (Sikkink and Choque 1999: 167). These men and women were trying to explain what they saw and how it became that way. It is easy to brush aside these old myths when approaching a site from a scientific perspective, because they are not in the strictest sense true. However, these myths were true for the people telling them and give us an idea of how the story tellers were living (in the case of the Andes, surrounded by rock outcroppings that might fall if you did not stay away).

Written records (newspapers, letters, government documents) and ethnography, when available, can also be combined with traditional methods of archaeology in order to create a context for observations and discoveries made in the field, including the presence or absence of ornamentation on the landscape (Darvill 1999:105; Lane 2008:237; Metheny 1996:385).
“Ethnographic literature on landscapes commonly indicates that people throughout the world not only often have an intimate knowledge of their physical surroundings but also frequently associate certain “natural places” such as prominent rock formations, various watery contexts, caves, mountain peaks, and trees (among others) with the supernatural or mythological world” (Lane 2008:240). Maps and surveys state in black and white what features were once on the landscape that may now be long gone, giving archaeologists an idea of where to put trowel to dirt next. Land grants and surveys also provide detailed descriptions of the land. Even newspapers and personal journals may include mention of a place that might otherwise be overlooked using traditional archaeological methods. Written records and oral tradition can serve as a good starting place for landscape study, and for many other aspects of archaeology, but they do come with their own set of problems and biases. Some places may have been deemed too small or unimportant to be included on the maps, personal biases may prevent mentioning something in journals or reports while emphasizing another space, documents may be lost or misinterpreted, or simple forgetfulness may keep some spaces hidden from written and oral record.

The study of oral tradition and written documentation is not the only way to study the landscape. The easiest and most widely used approach to landscape is to focus on construction. Buildings and monuments can be dated into periods of construction and renovation (Barrett 1999:22). Thus, construction dates can then help date subsequent additions and removals. This provides an idea of when the space was active, even if the reason why is not always clear. This does not, however, necessarily provide a good view of how the space was used or viewed by the populace of the area, or even for how long the site was active between renovations. To get a better grasp on this aspect of a building or monument, archaeologists can turn to taskspace. The
study of taskspace, or an area that was set aside for a specific task or purpose, focuses on how we occupy space over time and how that occupation changes (Barrett 1999:24).

**Early Landscape Archaeologists**

The phrase “landscape archaeology” came into widespread use in the 1970s with Mick Aston and Trevor Rowley’s book, *Landscape Archaeology*, published in 1974 (Darvill 2008:60). This quote from their book gives readers an idea of how landscape can be considered:

> The landscape is a palimpsest on to which each generation inscribed its own impressions and removes some of the marks of earlier generations. Constructions of one age are often overlain, modified or erased by the work of another. The present patchwork nature of settlement and patterns of agriculture has evolved as a result of thousands of years of human endeavor, producing a landscape which possesses not only a beauty associated with long and slow development, but an inexhaustible store of information about many kinds of human activities in the past. [Aston and Rowley 1974:14]

While landscape archaeology began to gain popularity in the 1970s, it was not when connections were first made between culture and landscape. The use of geography in understanding the human past can be traced back at least as far as 1907 when H. J. MacKinder published *Britain and the British Seas*.

Another important name in early landscape archaeology was Sir Cyril Fox (1882-1967). Fox became the Director of the National Museum of Wales after a life of varied careers. He started out as a vegetable gardener. He was a clerk for the Royal Commission on Tuberculosis and followed the commission to Cambridge until the Ministry of Agriculture took over. It was then that Fox moved into the field of archaeology, publishing his PhD work, *The Archaeology of the Cambridge Region* (1922) (Peate 2009).
One of his most influential works was *The Personality of Britain*. This book, which went through several editions, examined Britain as an influential environment in the development of culture.

It is published by the National Museum of Wales because it provides (*inter alia*) a convenient summary of a variety of influences, internal and external, which helped to mould the successive cultures of the Highland Zone; and because it surveys the relations of the Zone (which includes Wales) to the rest of Britain, to Ireland, and to Western Europe generally. [Fox 1979:3]

Another early name in landscape archaeology was O.G.S. Crawford. Crawford, a British archaeologist who got his start in archaeology with aerial photography in WWI, used ethnography to interpret archaeology landscapes (Lane 2008:237). He was specifically interested in how ethnography could aid in identifying landscape features instead of using it to learn how the culture viewed the landscape (Lane 2008:237-8).

Ever-changing technology has also helped landscape archaeology blossom in recent years. In the 1920s aerial photography helped archaeologists find sites that could not be seen from the ground (Darvill 2008:65). Today ground-penetrating radar and other remote-sensing techniques are showing archaeologists sites that have long been destroyed, such as structures at the Hill of Tara (Newman and Fenwick 2002) and Rathcroghan (Waddell et al. 2009).

**Problems in Landscape Archaeology**

The impact that landscape has on culture is not always easy to study for several reasons. First, while it is true that “human activity, societies, and culture have a spatial dimension,” people do not always leave physical evidence behind in the places that mean the most to them or have the greatest impact on their daily lives (Darvill 2008: 60). In some cultures, spaces that are perceived to have religious significance must be left untouched. In other cultures, like many Christian groups, religious centers should include large monuments or buildings like churches or
cathedrals. Second, how people view the world is dictated by their life experiences and the influences that leave the greatest impact on their lives. This means that no two people may see the same landscape in the same way or assign it the same level of importance or significance. As one person goes through life his or her feelings and opinions about a place may change due to new experiences. Within the space of a single generation a place can go from being extremely important to insignificant (see again Aston and Rowley’s 1974 quote on how each generation covers up the last, above).

The stars and planets have always been of interest to our ancestors, and the Irish were no different. Archaeologists study this interaction between cultures, their landscape, and the sky through archaeoastronomy.

**Archaeoastronomy**

The field of archaeoastronomy, the study of how people in the past “have understood the phenomena in the sky, how they used phenomena in the sky, and what role the sky played in their cultures,” (Sinclair 2006:13) combines archaeology, anthropology, astronomy, and history in order to gain a better understanding of the cognitive and symbolic aspects of a culture and reasons behind construction choices. It can answer as well some of the questions left behind by landscape archaeology as well as answering questions about religion, calendars, and interest in the natural world.

When dealing with the issue of cognition, answers are not always quick or easy. As is the case in landscape archaeology, how a culture perceives the sky and its place within the culture will have a significant impact on how the culture pays homage to it on the ground (Ruggles and Saunders 1993:2). But, as is also the case in landscape archaeology, no two cultures, or people, will necessarily view the same sky with the same thoughts or emotions. Our
opinions are colored by our individual life experiences. Some cultures assign importance to objects in the sky that others would not even notice. As a result, what works for one culture may not necessarily work for another. Further, archaeologists have had a hard time accepting archaeoastronomy since it first came on the scene in the nineteenth century, but interest and acceptance has grown in more recent years.

We know from Julius Caesar that the druids of Gaul, a Celtic culture that inhabited lands roughly equivalent to modern France, devoted much of their time to learning and teaching about astronomy. “Besides this, they have many discussions as touching the stars and their movement, the size of the universe and of the earth, the order of nature, the strength and the powers of the immortal gods, and hand down their lore to the young men” (Caesar 2000:339). It seems likely that the Gauls’ Irish counterparts would have also shared this interest.

The early archaeoastronomers

Sir Joseph Norman Lockyer

Sir Norman Lockyer, a physicist who was born in 1836 and died in 1920 and was at one point editor of Nature, is credited with being the first in the English-speaking world to study potential astronomical alignments at archaeological sites from a scientific perspective (Ruggles 2005:227). Egyptian temples and their potential stellar alignments fascinated Lockyer. He went to Egypt and surveyed some sites, publishing his results in 1894 in The Dawn of Astronomy (Lockyer 1894). Lockyer was not just a driving force in Egyptian archaeology. He also took an interest in archaeology on the British Isles and Ireland, suggesting that these people had a widely used calendar that divided the year into eight parts (Lockyer 1909:22-23).
Alexander Thom

Inspired by Lockyer, Alexander Thom was an engineer and amateur astronomer who is considered one of the founding fathers of modern archaeoastronomy and is still highly respected in the field (Ruggles 2005:425). Thom became famous for his surveys of megalithic sites across Britain, the results of which he published in his book, aptly named, *Megalithic Sites in Britain* (1967). He starts his preface by stating that he does not feel qualified to conduct archaeological excavations, so he did not stray from what he is qualified to do: survey (though he did admit later in the book that he would prod the ground with a bayonet looking for stones if there was not one where he thought there should be in an alignment, but he would not try to excavate it any further or put something new in its place [Thom 1967:4]). In all, he surveyed some 600 sites with a theodolite and tape measure (Thom 1967:v).

Thom was proud of how accurate his measurements were, stating he had an accuracy of 1 in 1000 at Avebury, and he hoped those who followed in his footsteps would also use such accurate measures (Thom 1967:1). Through his measurements he believed that the megalithic engineers (his term, Thom 1967:2) were also painstakingly accurate since he found very precise alignments to various stars, planets, sunrises and sunsets; and that almost all of the sites he measured were based on the same unit of measurement, something he referred to as the “megalithic yard” (1967:2). Based on his surveys, Thom calculated that these prehistoric architects had a megalithic yard, which equaled 2.72 feet (Thom 1967:34) and a megalithic fathom, which equaled 5.44 feet (Hicks 1977:1). He also marveled at the fact that “1000 years before the earliest mathematicians of classical Greece, people in these islands not only had a practical knowledge of geometry and were capable of setting out elaborate geometric designs but could also set out ellipses based on Pythagorean triangles” (Thom 1967:3). When other
researchers tested these theories however, they had different results. Discrepancies of 2.54 to 3 feet were found in his megalithic yard measurements (Hicks 1977:1). Researchers also believe that these monuments with astronomical alignments were used for the sole purpose of highlighting the alignments. “In many, if not most, cases the alignments are likely to have been rough and symbolic, intended for ritual purposes rather than for precise observations.” (Hicks 1984:204) This is not to say that Thom was completely wrong. The measurements were close enough to suggest a commonly used measurement, but it was perhaps not a standard measurement. More likely it was something like a person’s height or paces or even body proportions (such as using the nose to tips of extended fingers for a yard of fabric) (Hicks 1977:1 and 2).

The result of this explosion of archaeoastronomy in the 1970s and 1980s was that many of Thom’s alignments were proven to be the result of chance and the constructions themselves were not as accurate as he believed (Ruggles 2005:426). Thom’s work, however, paved the way for archaeoastronomy in Europe. He established a methodology, he surveyed a vast number of the megalithic monuments in Britain, and he got archaeologists involved in archaeoastronomy. Reading through *Archaeoastronomy in the Old World* (Heggie 1982) it is obvious what a huge impact he had based on the fact that almost every article made some mention of him or his work.

**Problems in archaeoastronomy**

The most difficult part of archaeoastronomy may be proving that an alignment exists and that it was intentional, not just a coincidence. The simplest way to begin this is to examine the architecture constructed by the culture in question. This may be an elaborate temple like the ones seen in South America, the intricate stone circles seen in England, or simple lines of stone like those seen in Ireland. Straight lines found in the construction may point to an alignment
with a celestial body (Hively and Horn 2005:160). Finding one alignment though is not definitive proof. A repeated alignment found consistently at several similar sites or monuments lends more credence to the theory of a significant astronomical alignment.

Archaeoastronomy was not immediately widely accepted on the archaeological scene. Because it combined aspects of several different fields, it proved difficult to convince some to take the research seriously. One early issue archaeoastronomy faced was that the early archaeoastronomers were not archaeologists. Norman Lockyer was a physicist, Boyle Somerville was a Royal Navy rear admiral, Gerald Hawkins an astronomer, and Alexander Thom, perhaps the most famous of them all, an engineer (Ruggles 2001:51). With this gathering of scientists came a new nomenclature and theories that some archaeologists were not comfortable with. Even the term “astronomy” was seen as being ethnocentric, referring to modern twentieth-century astronomy (Ruggles 2001:57). “It can be misleading to think of archaeoastronomy as the study of ancient astronomy, since people in the past might have related to the sky in very different ways from people in the modern world” (Ruggles 2005:19).

Some archaeologists could not imagine standing stones as observation points to watch the night sky. “The term as such points to an account of some kind of astronomical activity of the past based on material brought to light through archaeological research. But if this were taken as a definition of the concept we should have to exclude everything based on the written books of the Middle American cultures which play such a conspicuous role in the “archaeo-astronomy” of the New World.” (Pederson 1982:266)

Archaeoastronomy grew starting in the 1960s and 1970s. Gerald Hawkins was a contemporary of Thom studying the archaeoastronomy of Stonehenge and Egypt. He wrote two books on the subject, *Stonehenge Decoded* (1965) and *Beyond Stonehenge* (1973). Research into
archaeoastronomy was also being done in Egypt, Kenya, Great Britain, Ireland, Brittany, and South and Central America (Hicks 1979). In the 1980s post-processual archaeology helped archaeoastronomy get a firmer hold in archaeology “By shifting the emphasis away from environmental and ecological determinism and toward issues of perception and cognition…” (Ruggles and Urton 2010:1-2). “The sky must be recognized as part of the total perceived environment” (Ruggles and Urton 2010:2).

Even today, despite advancements in the field of archaeoastronomy and the contributions it is making to our understanding of how prehistoric people lived, worshipped, and interacted with their environment, so called “popular archaeoastronomy” has hindered growth and acceptance in this particular subject. Sensationalized and romanticized versions of history are what sell to the general public, and these include sensational alignments and overreaching theories to go with them. This has not helped archaeoastronomy gain credibility among archaeologists not familiar with either astronomy or the sites involved.

Archaeoastronomy in Ireland

There are archaeological sites all across Ireland that were clearly constructed with astronomical alignments, the most famous of which is Newgrange in the Boyne Valley.

Newgrange

Newgrange was built during the Neolithic Period, sometime around 2500 bc* (O’Kelly 1982:22), that would be around 3100 cal BC. The people who constructed this monument were able to do so in such a way that the inner chamber is illuminated at sunrise on the winter solstice (Kelly 2001:167).

* * This date has not been calibrated to the calendar years, hence lower case bc (O’Kelly 1982:11)
Newgrange is depicted in the myths as an entrance to the Otherworld and a home to some of the gods. Today guides tell tourists that a huge component to Newgrange’s survival into modern times was those myths. People were terrified to go to the mound for fear of retribution from angry creatures from the sídhe. They suggest that even the English had a healthy respect for the site owing to the fear expressed by the locals.

When Michael J. O’Kelly was examining the site, locals mentioned, “The rising sun, at some unspecified time, used to light up the three-spiral stone (C10) in the end recess” (O’Kelly 1982:123). No one knew when exactly and no one had witnessed it as the mound had long ago slumped down over the entrance, but the story was firmly ingrained in local tradition. O’Kelly and his team assumed that there was confusion between Newgrange and the midsummer alignments witnessed at Stonehenge. “Since Newgrange faces southeast it was clear that no such comparison was valid but when we began to think about it, we realized that it might be worth while to investigate the winter solstice when the sun rises in that quarter” (O’Kelly 1982:123).

The following was recorded on December 21, 1969:

At exactly 8.54 hours GMT the top edge of the ball of the sun appeared above the local horizon and at 8.58 hours the first pencil of direct sunlight shone through the roof-box and along the passage to reach across the tomb chamber floor as far as the front edge of the basin stone in the end recess. As the thin line of light widened to a 17 cm-band and swung across the chamber floor, the tomb was dramatically illuminated and various details of the side and end recesses could be clearly seen in the light reflected from the floor. At 9.09 hours, the 17 cm-band of light began to narrow again and at exactly 9.15 hours, the direct beam was cut off from the tomb. For 17 minutes, therefore, at sunrise on the shortest day of the year, direct sunlight can enter Newgrange, not through the doorway, but through the specially contrived slit which lies under the roof-box at the outer end of the passage roof. [O’Kelly 1982:123-124]
After discussing his observations with experts in the field, O’Kelly concluded that the orientation, and subsequent illumination of the inner chamber at the winter solstice, was a deliberate part of the construction (O’Kelly 1982:124).

Would this have required an in-depth "scientific" knowledge and understanding of astronomy? O’Kelly says no. One clear solstice morning is all it would take. An observer could watch the sun and mark its movements with pegs in the ground to mark where the entrance would need to be (O’Kelly 1982:125).

There are several other sites in Ireland that have astronomical alignments besides Newgrange, including Drombeg (Hicks 1989), Beaghmore (Hayes 1999), and Beltany stone circle (O’Sullivan and Downey 2011). Eighteen sites with astronomical alignments tied to Samhain will be discussed later in this paper.

Calendars

All over the world prehistoric people created calendars to track days for festivals, religious gatherings, and agricultural events such as planting and harvesting. Some of these calendars were carved in stone such as the ones the Mayans made. Others were incorporated into the construction of entire villages like SunWatch Village, built along the Miami River near what is today Dayton, Ohio. At SunWatch Village, a large post was erected in the center of the village that cast a moving shadow. Twice a year this shadow entered the door of the largest building in the village. Those two days corresponded with the beginning and ending of the corn-growing season for that area (Redman 2005:215).

The Celts in Ireland and on the European continent had their own calendar that was based on solar and lunar movement. McCluskey lists three defining characteristics of the Celtic calendar: the calendar followed solar movement to divide the year into solstices and equinoxes,
then the year was further divided into midquarter or crossquarter days, then lunar observations were combined and attempts were made to reconcile the solar and lunar calendars (McCluskey 1993:101).

The Calendar of Coligny provides information about the Celtic year. It was found in France in 1897 and dates to around the time of Christ (Kelly 2001:168). The Calendar of Coligny laid out a five-year synchronization between the lunar and solar year with each day marked with a name and whether it was a good or bad day (Kelly 2001:168).

The astronomical tradition carried on in Ireland into the tenth century. Between the eighth and tenth century, monastic schools taught students about astronomy and produced many astronomers and astronomical texts; these show a particular interest in calendars and movements of celestial bodies (Kelly 2001:169). After dying out in the monastic schools around the twelfth century, astronomical studies made a comeback in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in secular schools (Kelly 2001:170).

With this background in Irish myths, landscape archaeology, and archaeoastronomy, we can begin to assess Samhain.
Chapter 3: Data from the Tales

In this research 136 Irish myths were studied. Of those myths, 24 (~18%) definitely made use of Samhain and 114 did not contain any reference to Samhain at all. This is not including the dindsenchas, or place name lore, which contained an additional 13 tale excerpts and abridged versions of already examined myths that included Samhain. The gap between the number of myths containing Samhain and those that did not may seem huge, but two things must be kept in mind.

First, not every Irish myth was examined due to issues such as difficulty in acquiring a copy or apparent lack of an English translation. There are also many myths that have not survived the passage of time in written form. Some surviving manuscripts describe myths or manuscripts that have never been recovered and may be presumed destroyed. Of the manuscripts that are available, many have physical damage that makes it impossible to complete the myth. It is not known how many of the myths were actually recorded or to what extent Christian recorders tampered with them. This means that there may have originally been more Samhain myths, but they are not available to us at this time. We can gain some idea of the total number of tales from the tale lists appearing in such manuscripts as Lebar Núachongbúla and Royal Irish Academy manuscript 23 N 10, among others. The preface to the first of these tells us that three hundred fifty tales must be known to reach the highest grade of scholar (MacCana 1980:41), but together they list fewer than two hundred. MacCana (1980:151-155), however, compiled a list of over three hundred from various sources. P. W. Joyce says that between 500 and 600 of the original stories survive in whole or part (Joyce 1903:533-534).

Second, not every translation is the same. Translations vary due to differences in original sources, the time period when the translation was done and our subsequent understanding of Old
and Middle Irish, and personal translation choices. All of these issues will affect the final product. This means that one translation may include Samhain where another translation will have either referred to it as something else (e.g., All Hallows) or removed the reference to Samhain altogether. The author found this to be the case mostly in abridged versions of myths, such as what is offered in *Early Irish Literature* by Myles Dillon (1994), where the events remained the same but details were omitted. For this reason I chose to read a few different translations of some of the myths if the meaning of a passage was not clear.

It is also worth mentioning that, despite the limited number of myths mentioning Samhain, it is mentioned much more frequently than the other calendrical festivals.

**The Samhain Myths**

Traditionally the Irish myths were divided into tale types. These tale types divided myths according to the focus of the story (similar to genres), such as deaths, wooings, journeys, or conceptions. It was not until recently that scholars divided the myths into cycles (discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis under the subheading *Myths*), which organized the myths according to characters, locations, and times, putting the myths in roughly chronological order. Some tale types contained more references to Samhain than others.

The tale-types included in the Samhain myths include:

- *Aídead* (Death)
  - The Tragic Death of Cú Roí Mac Dáirí
  - The Death of Diarmaid Mac Cerbaill
  - The Death of Conn
• Catha (Battles)
  o The First Battle of Moytura
  o The Second Battle of Moytura
  o The Battle of Crinna

• Comperta (Birth-Tales)
  o The Birth of Conchobar

• Dindshenchas (Place-Name Lore)
  o The Yew of the Disputing Sons
  o The Metrical and Prose Dindshenchas

• Geis/Gess (Spell/Incantation)
  o The Birth of Áed Sáine

• Macgnímrad (Boyhood Deeds)
  o The Boyhood Deeds of Finn mac Cumhaill

• Miscellaneous
  o The Intoxication of the Ulstermen

• Scéla (Stories)
  o A Story from which it is Inferred that Mongán was Find mac Cumhaill and
    Concerning the Cause of the Death of Fothad Airgdech
  o Baile of the Clear Voice

• Suidigud (Disposition)
  o The Settling of the Manor of Tara
• *Tana* (Cattle-Raid)
  - The Cattle-Raid of Regamna
  - The Raid for Dartaid’s Cattle
  - The Táin

• *Tochmarca* (Wooings)
  - The Wooing of Étaín
  - The Wooing of Emer

• *Togla* (Destruction)
  - The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel

• *Uatha* (Attack or plunder of a cave)
  - The Adventures of Nera

• None
  - The Roll of the Kings
  - The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn

• Multiple Types
  - The Book of the Takings of Ireland

When studying the myths a pattern of motifs becomes apparent in the actions and events surrounding Samhain. Some of Tom Peete Cross’ motifs, recorded in his 1952 book *Motif-Index of Early Irish Literature* can help us organize these themes. Unfortunately, Cross’ own motifs do not fit perfectly with what can be observed. Many of the motifs that can be recognized in the Samhain myths do not have adequate parallels in Cross’ index and some of his motifs that do fit the Samhain myths do not fit perfectly. A large part of this is due to the fact that Cross wrote his book to act as a continuation of Stith Thompson’s *Motif Index of Folk-Literature* (Cross
As a result, he uses language that was not found in the original myths such as using the term “fairy” to describe the Tuatha Dé. It has been a common practice among translators over the years to translate the term *aes síde*, which means “people of the sidhe,” as fairies or elves. I have decided to use Cross’ categories as much as possible here because it is a system that Irish scholars recognize, but I have created categories of my own in order to adequately describe what is reflected in the myths.

In keeping with the proposed methodology for this thesis – to examine the myths in order to find patterns in places, characters, and motifs and then to create maps to look for patterns in the locations of the myths - the following is a series of myth summaries for the myths examined in this thesis. The entire myth is summarized in order to highlight the setting of the Samhain portions of the tales. They are organized by myth cycle (Mythological, Ulster, Fenian, Historical, Dindshenchas, and Roll of the Kings). Each summary includes a chart for easy reference to each myth’s title, tale type, myth cycle, people who were active at Samhain, places that had events at Samhain, motifs, and a brief listing of actions/events that took place at Samhain. The information in the charts deals solely with the Samhain aspects of the tale, so the people, places and events listed are all directly involved with Samhain. Not all of the people, places and events from the myths are listed. Typically this was not an issue since if Samhain was in the myth is impacted the entire tale. Preceding the summary is an explanation about the tale type and the summaries are followed by a brief explanation about the myth’s importance to Samhain and an explanation for why the assigned motifs were chosen.
Mythological Cycle

*The Book of the Takings of Ireland (Lebor Gabála Érenn), The First Battle of Moytura (Cath Maige Tuired Cunga), and The Second Battle of Moytura (Cath Maige Tuired)*

*The Book of the Takings of Ireland* is a collection of stories about how Ireland became populated and how the ruling culture changed hands over time. The takings include: Cessair, Partholón, Nemed, Fir Bolg, Tuatha Dé Danann, and the Milesians. Because it is a collection of tales, it does not really have a single tale type, but the tales within each have their own. In *The Book of the Takings of Ireland* there are two stories that contain Samhain: *The First Battle of Moytura* and *The Second Battle of Moytura*. *The Book of the Takings* gives a partial account of each story, but complete versions are available. Both stories are *Catha*, or Battle, tale-types (Map 3, located on page 162).

The summary for *The First Battle of Moytura* is based on J. Fraser’s 1915 translation found in *Ériu* and the summary for *The Second Battle of Moytura* is based on Gray’s 1982 translation. Both summaries have been supplemented using the translation of *The Book of the Takings* by John Carey in *The Celtic Heroic Age* (226-271). This was done because while the versions of *First* and *Second Battle of Moytura* in *The Book of the Takings* are short summaries, in some instances they offer greater detail. For example, in *The First Battle of Moytura* by Fraser there is no explanation for how or why the Fomorians are demanding tribute, but it is explained in *The Book of the Takings*.

*The First Battle of Moytura* starts with the Fomorians forcing the Nemedians to pay tribute. “Two thirds of the children and grain and milk of the men of Ireland were brought to them in Mag Ceitne every Samain night” (Carey 2005:242). The Nemedians, tired of paying the steep tribute, sought Fintan for advice. Fintan instructed the Nemedians to divide their forces
and leave Ireland. The hope was that by splitting up they would not be perceived as a threat (Fraser 1915:5). The Nemedians took Fintan’s advice and separated. Each group went to a different corner of the earth. The children of Semeon, known as the Fir Bolg, were the first of the Nemedians to return to Ireland after facing oppression in Greece.

Upon arriving in Ireland the Fir Bolg all gathered at Tara to give thanks to the gods for their safe return and to ask Fintan to divide the land amongst them (Fraser 1915:15). Fintan divided Ireland into five portions: “From Inber Colptha to Comar Tri nUisce was given to Slainge, son of Dela, and his thousand men; Gann’s portion was from Comar Tri nUisce to Belach Conglais, Sengann’s from Belach Conglais to Limerick. Gann and Sengann, thus, had the two Munsters. Genann was put over Connacht, and Rudraige over Ulster” (Fraser 1915:15). For thirty years the Fir Bolg ruled Ireland undisputed.

The next group to return to Ireland was the Tuatha Dé Danann, led by their king, Nuada.

Now it was reported to the Fir Bolg that that company had arrived in Ireland. That was the most handsome and delightful company, the fairest of form, the most distinguished in their equipment and apparel, and their skill in music and playing, the most gifted in mind and temperament that ever came to Ireland. That too was the company that was bravest and inspired most horror and fear and dread, for the Tuatha Dé excelled all the peoples of the world in their proficiency in every art. [Fraser 1915:21] 

The Fir Bolg sent Sreng, a fierce warrior, out to talk to the Tuatha Dé in hopes of discovering where they were from and where they intended to stay. Bres, son of Elatha, greeted Sreng. The men found each other’s appearance, clothing and weapons, intriguing. After a moment, they relayed their history to each other. Bres then told Sreng to tell his people they must give the Tuatha Dé either battle or half of Ireland.
Sreng delivered the message to Tara and advised giving a share of the land to the newcomers. The leaders of the Fir Bolg decided not to give up half of Ireland, “for if we do, the land will all be theirs” (Fraser 1915:25).

The Tuatha Dé moved on to Sliabh Belgadain and decided to make that their stronghold. Once this was established, Badb, Macha and the Morrigan, three sisters who watched over battles, went to the “Knoll of the Taking of the Hostages, and to the Hill of Summoning of Hosts at Tara, and sent forth magic showers of sorcery and compact clouds of mist and a furious rain of fire, with a downpour of red blood from the air on the warriors’ heads; and they allowed the Fir Bolg neither rest nor stay for three days and nights” (Fraser 1915:27).

The two sides gathered their forces and prepared to fight. Before they did, however, the Tuatha Dé gave the Fir Bolg one more chance. They sent their poets (Cairbre, Ai. and Edan) to the Fir Bolg and asked them to divide the land between them. The Fir Bolg declined, so the two fought for control of Ireland, the battle lasting for four days. Sreng encountered Nuada on the battlefield and cut off the king’s right hand, giving him a blemish that disqualified him from being king. At the end of the four days the two sides parted. The Tuatha Dé had won for now, but the Fir Bolg considered their options before giving up. They could leave Ireland, share the land, or continue fighting (Fraser 1915:57). The Fir Bolg opted to continue fighting.

Sreng challenged Nuada to single combat. Nuada agreed, but asked that Sreng tie his right hand behind him to make it a fair fight. Sreng refused since it had been a fair fight when Nuada had lost his right hand, so he (Sreng) should not be hindered in their second encounter (Fraser 1915:57). The Tuatha Dé took counsel following this discussion, and decided to end the battle by offering Sreng his choice of provinces and that “a compact of peace, goodwill, and friendship should be made between the two peoples” (Fraser 1915:57). The Fir Bolg agreed to
the terms and Srêng took Connacht. Because Nuada had lost his hand, he could not continue as the king of the Tuatha Dé, so Bres was made their king, establishing the scene for *The Second Battle of Moytura*.

*The Second Battle of Moytura* starts with Bres as the new king of Ireland, here said to be only seven years old. He was chosen because his mother was Tuatha Dé, but his father was a Fomorian, so it was believed he would be a good diplomat between the two. Bres was not a good king, however. The Fomorians were demanding tribute from the Tuatha Dé, Bres was making the Tuatha Dé champions perform laborious tasks that were beneath them, and Bres was not hospitable to guests (Gray 1982:33). When Bres did not show proper hospitality to Cairbre, the poet, all of the Tuatha Dé suffered due to a satire placed on them by the outraged poet (Gray 1982:35). The Tuatha Dé approached Bres and told him to step down from the kingship. He asked to finish out his seven years, and they granted him the extension. Bres used the time to raise an army of Fomorians to fight for his kingship.

In the meantime, Dian Cécht the physician healed Nuada’s arm, allowing Nuada to take back the kingship, which he did. As the Tuatha Dé were preparing for battle against the Fomorians and Bres, a man came to Tara. He introduced himself to the doorkeeper as Lug Lamfada (Lug Long-Arm) and said he was skilled in every art (Gray 1982:39 and 41). He was welcomed and given temporary kingship. The Tuatha Dé quickly began to discuss the coming battle, then agreed to meet again in three years to launch their attack.

The Dagda had a house in Glenn Edin in the north. He had to meet a woman in Glenn Edin a year from that day, around Samhain (Hallowe’en), before the battle. The river Unius of Connacht roars to the south of it. He beheld the woman in Unius in Corann, washing herself, with one of her two feet at Allod Echae (*i.e.*, Echumech), to the south of the water, and the other
at Loscuinn, to the north of the water (some 16 km apart). Nine loosened tresses were on her head. The Dagda conversed with her, and they made a union. “The Bed of the Couple” is the name of the place thenceforward. The woman that is here mentioned is the Morrígan. She told the Dagda that the Fomorians would land at Mag Scetne. He should summon Erin’s men of art to meet her at the Ford of Unius. She would go into Scetne to destroy Indech son of Dea Domnann, the king of the Fomorians. She would deprive him of the blood of his heart and the kidneys of his valor. Afterwards she gave two handfuls of that blood to the hosts that were waiting at the Ford of Unius. “Ford of Destruction” became is name, because of that destruction of the king (Gray 1982:45).

“This was a week before All Hallows, and they all dispersed until all the men of Ireland came together the day before All Hallows. Their number was six times thirty hundred, that is, each third consisted of twice thirty hundred” (Gray 1982:47). Lug sent the Dagda to spy on the Fomorians and to delay their attack until the men of Ireland could gather. Soon the battle commenced. The Fomorians were puzzled by the fact that the Tuatha Dé’s numbers never seemed to dwindle. This was because they put their injured and dead in a magic well that healed them, allowing the dead and injured to come out whole. The Fomorians discovered this and filled the well, making it unusable. This helped to level the field between the two sides. Many died, including Nuada Silver-Hand of the Tuatha Dé.

After the Tuatha Dé won the battle, Bres was found alone and unguarded. He asked to be spared and said if he was, “the cows of Ireland will always be in milk” (Gray 1982:67). They would not spare him though for that. “Tell your lawyer they will reap a harvest every quarter in return for sparing me” (Gray 1982:69). This would also not spare him. Lug asked Bres how the men of Ireland would plough, sow and reap. “Say to to them, on Tuesday their ploughing; on
Tuesday their sowing seed in the field; on Tuesday their reaping” (Gray 1982:69). So, for teaching the men of Ireland to plough, sow and reap, Bres was spared.

In the First Battle there is not a lot of Samhain. Samhain is the time when the tribute is due (“Two thirds of the children and grain and milk of the men of Ireland were brought to them in Mag Ceitne every Samain night” [Carey 2005:242]). After that, the Nemedians divided their forces and left Ireland. They returned as the Fir Bolg and the Tuatha Dé and fought for control of Ireland. The Tuatha Dé won, and the two groups lived peacefully for awhile. The peace did not last, however, which lead to the Second Battle. The second battle took place at Samhain, and it is also when the Dagda had a tryst with the Morrigan.

The motifs found in these three myths would include Supernatural (Marvels: Persons with Extraordinary Powers) due to the Tuatha Dé who all had some form of magical abilities; Gatherings (Assembly) because the people of Ireland gathered at Samhain for battle. Also Harvest and Herds would fit this tale because Bres taught the men of Ireland how to plough, sow, and reap with the harvest taking place at every quarter of the year (while not specifically stated, Samhain would have been one of those quarters). There is also Wooing and Trysts due to the Dagda and the Morrigan meeting for their tryst at Samhain where she then told him what was going to happen. This is where Supernatural (Ordaining the Future) comes in. There is also Combat (Fighting and Death) and Journeys.
The Settling of the Manor of Tara (Incipit do Suidigud Tellaich Temra)

*The Settling of the Manor of Tara* is a part of the Mythological Cycle of tales. It seems fitting for this particular myth to follow *The Book of the Takings* because it continues the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: The Book of the Takings of Ireland, The First Battle of Moytura, The Second Battle of Moytura</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tale Type</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Myth Cycle</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>People</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Places</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Motifs** | - Supernatural  
  - Marvels  
  - Persons with Extraordinary Powers  
  - Ordaining the Future  
  - Gatherings  
  - Assembly  
  - Harvest and Herds  
  - Wooing and Trysts  
  - Combat  
  - Fighting  
  - Death  
  - Journeys |
| **Actions/Events** | - Tribute was paid  
  - The Dagda and the Morrigan had a tryst and the Morrigan told the Dagda about the upcoming battle  
  - The men of Ireland gathered to fight  
  - The Second Battle of Moytura was fought |
discussion of the division of Ireland and how the land should be ruled. This myth is a Suidigud (disposition) tale type (Map 12, located on page 171).

The following summary is based on the translation of *The Settling of the Manor of Tara* by R.I. Best in 1910, published in *Ériu* (Best 1910:121-172).

During the reign of Diarmait son of Fergus Cerball (the 6th century), the Ui Neill (the descendants of Niall of the Nine Hostages) were displeased with the distribution of the land surrounding Tara. Specifically, they disliked that the land immediately surrounding Tara was not used for agriculture or housing, but left green. This was considered unfavorable because every three years the Ui Neill had to feed the people of Ireland for seven days and seven nights and that land could be used to help with this chore (Best 1910:125).

One year when summoned to the “feast of the house of Tara” [Samhain], the nobles refused to participate in the feast until “the settling of the manor of Tara was determined” (Best 1910:127). Diarmait said he could not divide the land himself. He would have to consult someone wiser. What follows is a series of wise men, each summoning someone wiser, until Fintan is finally called upon. This list includes: Flann Febla son of Scannlan son of Fingen; Fiachra son of the embroideress (son of Colman son of Eogan); Cennfaelad son of Ailill son of Muiredach son of Eogan son of Niall (“It is from his head…that the brain of forgetfulness was removed at the battle of Magh Rath” [Best 1910:127]); the five seniors to us all (Finnchad from Falmag of Leinster, Cú-alad from Cruachu Conalad, Bran Bairne from Bairenn, Dubán son of Deg from the province of the Fir Olnegmacht, Tuan son of Cairell from Ulster); and Fintan son of Bóchra, son of Bith, son of Noah (from Dun Tulcha in Kerry).

Fintan arrived with his descendants and was greatly welcomed at Tara. They asked him to decide how Tara should be divided. Fintan took his seat and began by retelling the story of
the takings of Ireland and how he himself came to be on the island. He was the oldest and wisest
man in Ireland, and Diarmait declared that “it is transgression of an elder’s judgment to
transgress thy judgment. And it is for that reason we have summoned thee, that thou shouldst be
the one to pronounce just judgment for us (Best 1910:135).”’ Fintan agreed with Diarmait and
continued to detail the history of Ireland. Diarmait then asked him to relate the history of Ireland
that would help them to distribute the land around Tara.

Fintan told them about a great warrior who came to Ireland while Conaing Bec-eclach
was king. The man, named Trefuilngid Tre-eochair, caused the rising and setting of the sun. He
was traveling after hearing about a man who “has been tortured – that is, who has been crucified
by Jews to-day…”(Best 1910:141). The man had then gone on to tell Fintan where he came
from and from whom he was descended. The story he tells is basically a retelling of the Old
Testament and The Book of the Takings of Ireland. Trefuilngid had asked that all of the men of
Ireland be gathered at Tara for him to pass on the stories of Ireland. Fintan himself was
entrusted with the division of Ireland and Tara. This is how Ireland was divided: “Knowledge in
the west, battle in the north, prosperity in the east, music in the south, kingship in the centre”
(Best 1910:147). Trefuilngid went through each region then and broke down these
characteristics even further. “Her kings, moreover, her stewards, her dignity, her primacy, her
stability, her establishments, her supports, her destructions, her warriorship, her charioteership,
her soldiery, her principality, her high-kingship, her ollaveship, her mead, her bounty, her ale,
her renown, her great fame, her prosperity, from the centre position” (Best 1910:149).

“’Let it [Tara] be as we have found it,’ said Fintan, ‘we shall not go contrary to the
arrangement which Trefuilngid Tre-eochair has left us, for he was an angel of God, or he was
God himself (Best 1910:153).’”
The gathering spoken of in this myth is the Festival of Tara which takes place at Samhain. In this myth we learn that the gathering only takes place every three years and lasts for seven days and seven nights (“For every three years they [the Ui Neill] were obliged to support the men of Ireland and to feed them for seven days and seven nights” Best 1910:125). We also learn that women were expected to be present at the gatherings, though it does not explain why (“No king used to go without a queen, or chieftain without a chieftainess, or warrior without…or fob without a harlot, or hospitaller without a consort, or youth without a love, or maiden without a lover, or man without an art [Best 1910:125].”).

The main motifs reflected in this tale would be Gatherings, including the subcategories Assembly due to the gathering for the feast. Storytelling from Fintan passing on the stories of Ireland as they had been passed on to him by Trefuilngid Tre-echoair and the reasoning behind it (hence Law) and Law; with a brief moment of Supernatural, including a person with extraordinary powers (Trefuilngid, the man who caused the rising and setting of the sun).

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<tr>
<th>Tale Type</th>
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<tr>
<td>Myth Cycle</td>
<td>Mythological Cycle</td>
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<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>Diarmait son of Fergus Cerball</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fintan</td>
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<td>Trefuilngid Tre-echoair</td>
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<td>Places</td>
<td>Tara</td>
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<td>Motifs</td>
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<td>o Person with Extraordinary Powers</td>
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<td>Actions/Events</td>
<td>• Festival of Tara</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Refusal to gather</td>
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The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel (Togail Bruidne Da Derga)

The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel is from a modified tale type found in List B. This modified type is Togla, destruction (Mac Cana 1980:67, 92) (Map 11, located on page 170). The following summary is based on John T. Koch’s translation in his 2005 edition of The Celtic Heroic Age (2005:184). This translation leaves out the description of the rooms in the hostel. Stokes’ 1901 translation of The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel does include these descriptions.

Conaire, who was the son of Mes Buachalla, the daughter of Cormac Conn Longes of the Ulstermen and a bird who had “laid aside his birdskin” to lay with her, became the king of Ireland after the death of King Eterscéle (Koch 2005:168). For a while all was well and Ireland was prosperous under Conaire’s reign. One of his geis, or taboos, as king, was to not allow plunder to take place during his reign. This displeased Conaire’s foster-brothers, because they enjoyed plundering. They decided to steal livestock to see what their punishments would be. When nothing happened, they continued to steal until they were finally exiled to Britain where they joined forces with Ingcél of the One Eye, the king of Britain (Koch 2005:170). This led to the murder of Ingcél’s family, and the return of the brothers and Ingcél to Ireland in search of more riches to give Ingcél the payment they owed him.

Conaire soon broke two more of his geis by settling a dispute between two of his foster-brothers, then spending ten days away from Tara. As he returned to the royal seat, he passed Uisnech in Meath and found the territory in great turmoil. Lawlessness had broken out and the land was being burned and ransacked, apparently as a result of his broken geis. As Conaire and his people tried to escape to safety, Conaire broke two more of his geis by traveling between Tara and Bregia then hunting the cláenmíl of Cernae. “And the cláenmíl [‘evil beasts’] of Cerna were pursued by him. But he did not see it till the chase had ended. The men who made the
world that smoky mist of magic were phantoms [and they did so] because Conaire’s *gessi* ['sworn tabus'] had been violated” (Koch 2005:171). The running citizens decided to head to Da Derga’s hostel to seek shelter. Da Derga had asked for a gift from Conaire which he had received, so the king felt certain they would be welcomed at his home. As they approached, another *geis* was broken when Conaire saw three red horsemen enter the hostel before him.

Next, Conaire and his men encountered Fer Caille, or “Man of the Woods,” his hideous wife and his black swine. They too were going to Da Derga’s Hostel (Koch 2005:173). Conaire and his men went into Da Derga’s hostel and sat with the red men. They were all made welcome, when a woman came to the door. She insisted on hospitality, even though it would break another of Conaire’s *geis*, and she predicted his death that night (Koch 2005:177). As this was happening, the exiled brothers reached Ireland with Ingcéil.

A *torc tened* ['boar of a fire'] was kindled by the sons of Donn Désa to give warning to Conaire. So that was the first warning-beacon that was made in Ireland, and from it to this day every warning-beacon is kindled. This is what others recount: that it was on the eve of Samain [31 October/1 November] the destruction of the Hostel was done, and that from that beacon the [customary] beacon of *Samain* followed, and the stones are placed in the *Samain*-fire. [Koch 2005:179]

A great battle erupted between the men at the hostel and the brothers. Conaire managed to kill six hundred men without his weapons, then killed another six hundred with his weapons. In this time, the hostel was set ablaze three times, and each time the fire was quenched.

The exiled brothers brought druids with them who used their magic to cause Conaire great thirst and all of the drink in the hostel had been used to put out the fires and the rivers and lakes of Ireland to dry up (Koch 2005:180). Mac Cécht, the grandson of the Dagda, left the battle to find water for his king, but when he returned it was in time to see Conaire beheaded.
Mac Cécht killed both men who committed the act, then poured water into the head and trunk of Conaire’s body. The head thanked him. Nine of Conaire’s men died alongside him, but the attacker’s forces were decimated.

This myth may or may not have taken place during Samhain. The uncertainty comes from the passage that mentions the warning-beacon fire: “This is what others recount: that it was on the eve of Samain [31 October/1 November] the destruction of the Hostel was done, and that from that beacon the [customary] beacon of Samain followed, and the stones are placed in the Samain-fire.” (Koch 2005:179) Otherwise Samhain is not mentioned in the myth. If we assume that this myth took place at Samhain, we have the Combat (Fighting and Death) motifs. Because the king, Conaire, broke his geis, he was killed and the hostel where he was staying was destroyed. There is also the motif of Fire, because there is the warning beacon and the hostel itself was lit on fire three times.
Ulster Cycle

*The Wooing of Étain (Tochmarc Étaíne)*

*The Wooing of Étain* is a *Tochmarca*, or Wooing, tale type (Mac Cana 1980:68) (Map 9, located on page 168). The following summary is based on the translation by John Carey in *Celtic Heroic Age* (2005:146-165).

The Dagda, also known as Eochaid Ollathair, saw Eithne, also known as Boann, the wife of Elcmar of the Bruig (Newgrange), and wanted her for his own. He tricked her husband into leaving on a long errand for him and lay with her. When she became pregnant with his child, the Dagda tricked Elcmar again, keeping him away from home until the child was born and taken away by Midir to be raised in Brí Leith. The child was named Oengus, later to be known as the...
Mac Óc. All was well until the other boys in Midir’s care began to tease Oengus about his unknown parentage. Midir told Oengus the truth and accompanied him to the Dagda’s court at Uisnech Midi (located in county Westmeath and considered the center of Ireland) to seek his birthright (Carey 2005:147).

The Dagda was pleased to see Oengus, but he was not in a position to give him the gift he wanted. He wanted Oengus to have the Bruig, but Elcmar still lived there.

‘What advice do you give this boy?’ said Midir. ‘I have some for him,’ said Eochaid. ‘At Samain let him go into the Bruig, and let him bring weapons with him. That is a day of peace and concord among the men of Ireland: none fears his neighbor then; and Elcmar will be on the hill of Sidhe in Broga, bearing no arms and holding a forked stick of white hazel in his hand, with a double cloak around him, and a gold brooch in the cloak, and three times fifty in the playing field playing before him. And let Oengus go to him, and threaten to kill him; but it is best that he not kill him, provided that he promises to grant him his will. And let this be Oengus’s will: kingship for a day and a night in the Bruig; and do not release his territory to Elcmar until he submits [the matter] to my decision. And let this be Oengus’s plea when he does so: the territory became his permanent possession when he refrained from killing Elcmar. It is kingship for a day and a night that he demanded, and’ he said, ‘it is in days and nights that the world is spent.’ [Carey 2005:147]

Then Midir went back to his own territory with his foster son, and around the next Samain Oengus took weapons and went into the Bruig; and Oengus threatened Elcmar so that in exchange for his life he promised him kingship in his territory for a day and a night. That same day, and that night, the Mac Óc remained as king of the land, with Elcmar’s people doing his will. Next day Elcmar came to demand (?) his territory from the Mac Óc, and he threatened him with great threats. The Mac Óc said that he would not yield his territory until [the matter] had been submitted to the will of the Dagda in the presence of the men or Ireland. [Carey 2005:147-148]

The Dagda ruled in favor of the Mac Óc, so Elcmar lost the Bruig, but was given Cleitech beside the Bruig instead.

A year later, again on Samhain, Midir came to the Bruig to visit the Mac Óc. While he was visiting a fight broke out among the two boy troops of the Bruig. Midir told the Mac Óc to
stay where he was so he himself would not get hurt, and went down to break up the quarrel. “A holly javelin was cast at Midir as he was intervening, so that it brought one of his eyes out of his head” (Carey 2005:148). Midir was angry about his injury because he could not see and would not be able to return home. The Mac Óc assured him all would be fine, Dian Cécht would heal him. Once Dian Cécht had healed Midir, the Mac Óc asked Midir to stay at the Bruig for a year to see more of his home. Midir refused unless he had compensation. “A chariot worth seven cumals [slave-women]…and a cloak which suits my rank, and the loveliest girl in Ireland” (Carey 2005:148).

The woman given to Midir was Étaín Echraid, daughter of Ailill, the king of the north-eastern part of Ireland. Midir loved Étaín, and for the year they stayed with the Mac Óc. At the end of the year Midir took Étaín home to Brí Léith, a situation which did not please his wife, Fuamnach. Fuamnach had been trained in magic and used her magic rod to transform Étaín into a purple fly. Midir kept the fly close until Fuamnach caused a storm to blow her away. Aengus caught her and nursed her to health in a crystal bower. Fuamnach conjured another storm to blow Étaín away, and this time she landed in a cup and was drunk by the wife of Étar. She drank the fly, became pregnant, and gave birth to Étaín, 1,002 years after her first birth.

The reborn Étaín married King Eochaid, who had been looking for a wife because his people would not follow a king without a queen. When it was time for Eochaid to tour Ireland he left Étaín with his sick and dying brother, Ailill. Ailill confessed to Étaín that his illness was caused by his love for her. Étaín agreed to meet him that night for a tryst in the hopes of healing him. She met him, then in the morning returned to her rooms. When she checked on Ailill, he was still sick and dying and said he had not met her the night before. They tried twice more, and each time Étaín thought she had met Ailill, but he had not been there. At their third meeting the
man who met Étaín at the tryst revealed himself to be Midir. She did not remember him, but agreed to go with him if her husband would release her. Midir devised a plan to reclaim his wife and went to Eochaid and asked to play fidchell with him. Three times Eochaid won, building his confidence, and asked for increasing rewards from Midir. The fourth time Midir won and asked for an embrace from Étaín. Eochaid agreed, but asked Midir to wait a year [Bergin & Best has "a month" (Bergin and Best 1938:181)], which Midir agreed to do. When he returned to Tara for Étaín, Midir was greeted by all of Eochaid’s warriors surrounding the woman. Midir approached Étaín, embraced her, and transformed them both into swans and flew away.

Eochaid had his men set out to dig up the sidhe mounds in Ireland looking for Étaín. When they found Midir’s sidhe, Midir came out and promised to give Étain back. Midir brought fifty women to Tara and told Eochaid he could have Étaín if he could identify her. Using Étaín’s skill as a drink server as a test, Eochaid managed to pick two women who could be his wife. He selected one he thought was her, and took her home. Midir later went to Eochaid and informed him that the woman that Eochaid had chosen was not his wife, but his daughter. Eochaid had already slept with her, and his daughter was pregnant with his child, a little girl. Two of Eochaid’s men took the girl and left her in the house of a cowherd and his wife, who raised her. When she was grown, someone from Eterscéll’s household saw her, and told the king who came and took her away as his wife. She gave birth to Conaire son of Eterscél.

The very beginning of this myth revolved around Samhain. The Mac Óc took control of the Bruig at Samhain by taking advantage of it being a time of peace and threatening to kill Elcmar (an act that has led to his being referred to as the sun god by O’Rahilly and “Lord of day and night” by Ronald Hicks [O’Rahilly 1984:516-517; Ronald Hicks, personal Communication 15 May 2015]). A year later, Midir came to visit the Mac Óc and was injured while trying to end
a fight. He was healed by Dian Cecht, then paid by the Mac Óc to stay for a year. Part of his payment was the lovely Étaín. It is also likely that Eochaid’s royal circuit took place at Samhain since other myths including *The Death of Diarmait mac Cerbaill* state that the royal circuit ended at Tara at Samhain.

Midir is associated with Samhain throughout this myth with his appearances being made on or around Samhain. Perhaps Midir reflected an aspect of the winter sun or maybe his appearance marked the beginning of the year.

The motifs for this myth would include Supernatural (Persons with Extraordinary Powers) in the form of Midir and Fuamnach. Peace would be another motif, as it is specifically mentioned that Samhain is a time of peace: “At Samain let him go into the Bruig, and let him bring weapons with him. That is a day of peace and concord among the men of Ireland: none fears his neighbor then” (Carey 2005:147).

Combat (Fighting) fits due to the fight that broke out at the Bruig, resulting in Midir’s injury. Gatherings (Law) would arguably fit as the result of the Mac Óc and Elcmar going to the Dagda for a ruling on who would control the Bruig.
The Birth of Conchobar (Scéla Conchobuir meic Nessa)

*The Tidings of Conchobar son of Ness*, also known as The Birth of Conchobar. *(Scéla Conchobuir meic Nessa)* is a *Comperta* (birth-tale) found in the Ulster Cycle of tales *(Scéla 2007)* (Map 12, located on page 171).

Two translations were used for this summary: Kuno Meyer's (1884:131-133) and Whitley Stokes' (1910:18-38). Two translations were used because the Kuno Meyer translation did not include the Samhain portion of the tale. This difference may be because the two authors were using different manuscripts: one using a combination of Stowe 992, Egerton, and the Yellow Book of Lecan and the other using the Book of Leinster.

Conchobar mac Nessa is the son of Cathbad the druid and Nessa, the daughter of Eochaid Yellow-heel, the king of Ulster, as had been prophesized seven years prior (Meyer 1884:131; Stokes 1910:23). Originally Nessa had been called Assa, which means “gentle,” but her name
was changed to Niassa, “ungentle,” as the result of her seeking revenge for the deaths of her twelve tutors (in Stokes’ translation the men are referred to as her foster-fathers [Stokes 1910:23]). Ness became a woman-warrior and went through Ireland looking for whoever had done this, not knowing it was Cathbad the druid. “And she laid the tribes waste, she devastated all equally, because she knew not her foes in particular” (Stokes 1910: 23). One night, while her followers were preparing dinner, Ness went off by herself to bathe. Cathbad saw her, and threatened to kill her if she did not become his wife. She agreed and they were married and eventually she gave birth to their son, Conchobar (Meyer 1884:131).

When Conchobar was seven he gained the kingship of Ulster. This came about when Fergus son of Ross was the king of Ireland and he wanted Ness to be his wife. Ness said she would only marry Fergus if he allowed Conchobar to be the king of Ireland for one year. Fergus agreed and Ness slept with him. She then instructed the household to “strip every second man, and to give (his wealth) to another; and her gold and silver were given to the champions of Ulster because of the result to her son” (Stokes 1910:25). When the year was up, the Ulstermen would not allow Fergus to take back the kingship because they were upset that he had given the kingship up as a bride-price and they appreciated Conchobar’s generosity. As a result, Conchobar kept the kingship of Ulster (Stokes 1910:25).

There were three hundred and sixty-five people in Conchobar’s household and each man took a turn each year to feed the entire household. Conchobar fed the household “The three days before Allhallows and the three days after Allhallows" (Stokes 1910:27). “It was needful to provide for the great multitude, because everyone of the Ulstermen who would not come to Emain on Allhallow-eve lost his senses, and on the morrow his barrow and his grave and his tombstone were placed” (Stokes 1910:27).
In this myth, Samhain is mentioned as being the time when Conchobar himself would feed his household because it was not just the usual people who lived there, but all of his subjects. This tale gives us a very specific reason why people had to gather at the home of their king at Samhain, and it also gives us a time span for the celebrations, specifically “The three days before Allhallows and the three days after Allhallows,” giving a timeframe of six or seven days for celebrations and feasting, depending on whether or not Samhain had a specific day itself (Stokes 1910:27). Combat (Fighting and Death) plays a major role in Conchobar’s conception because his father (Cathbad) killed his mother’s (Nessa) foster fathers, which led to Nessa’s own life of violence. Conchobar’s life in the tale was fairly peaceful. He even took the kingship peacefully. Finally Gatherings (Assembly) plays a part, and this time specifically tied to Samhain since it is the time when the gatherings actually took place.

<table>
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<th>Table 5: The Birth of Conchobar</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tale Type</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Myth Cycle</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Places</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Actions/Events</strong></td>
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<td>• Festival of Samhain</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Those who do not attend the feast become insane and die</td>
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**The Tragic Death of Cú Roí Mac Dáiri (Aided Con Ruí)**

The Tragic Death of Cú Roí Mac Dáiri (Aided Con Ruí) is an Aideda (death) tale from the Ulster Cycle of tales (mac Cana 1980:44) (Map 1, located on page 160). The following summary is based on Best’s translation (1905:328-332).
Cú Roí mac Dáiri fought with the Ulstermen during the siege of the Fir Falgae, but the Ulstermen did not recognize him during the battle. As a result, he was not given his share of the spoils at the end of the siege. Cu Roi, furious at the slight, stole “the three cows of Iuchna” [presumably Iuchna Horsemouth, which seems to be another name for Eochaid] and the “three men of Ochain,” that is, the little birds that used to be on the ears of Iuchna’s cows. A cauldron was carried off with the cows [the cows’ calf] and he kidnapped a woman named Blathnat (Best 1905: 328). Cú Chualainn was the only one who could catch up to Cu Roi as he made his escape, but Cu Roi turned to him, “thrust him into the earth to his armpits, cropped his hair with his sword, rubbed cow-dung into his head, and then went home.” (Best 1905:329) Cu Chulainn avoided the Ulstermen for a year following this humiliating event.

A year later Cú Chulainn was traveling the peaks of Bairche when saw a flock of black birds. He followed those birds to Srub Brain, west of Cu Roi’s stronghold. He decided to take his revenge for his shame and for Blathnat’s capture because he was in love with her. “He made a tryst with her again in the west on the night of Samain” (Best 1905:329). The two lovers made a plan to kill Cu Roi. Blathnat convinced Cu Roi to have a wall of stone pillars built around his stronghold. He sent his soldiers out to collect the stone, leaving himself unguarded in the stronghold. While his men were out, Blathnat bathed Cu Roi in the nearby river, now called Finnglas (white flecked) because Blathnat poured milk into the water as a sign to the Ulstermen that she was bathing Cu Roi (Best 1905:329).

When Blathnat and Cu Roi were ready to go back into the stronghold, Blathnat convinced him that the men he saw approaching where his own men with the requested stones when in fact they were the Ulstermen coming to seek revenge against him. Blathnat then tied his hair to the bedposts, took Cu Roi’s sword, and opened the stronghold to the Ulstermen. Cu Roi did not
know they were there until his stronghold was filled with them and he himself was under attack. Cu Roi killed one hundred of them as soon as he got up with his bare hands. Cu Roi’s men who were not out with the warriors fought as well, killing many of the Ulstermen.

Ultimately Cú Chulainn killed Cu Roi by taking his head. The Ulster losses were heavy though, including Cairbre son of Conchobar who was killed by Fer Becrach, Cu Roi’s charioteer. Blathnat was also killed following the initial battle. Ferchertne, Cu Roi’s poet, grabbed her, crushed her, then jumped off of a cliff (Cenn Bera) with her pinned to him, assuring both of their deaths (Best 1905:332).

Nevertheless the slaughter increased on them every day from Samain to the middle of spring. The Ulstermen made a count of their forces, going and coming, and a half or a third of their heroes they left behind, as was said:
Blathnat was slain
In the slaughter above Argat-glen.
A grievous deed for a woman to betray her husband. [Best 1905:332]

The battle described in this myth began at Samhain and ended at “the middle of spring,” presumably referring to Imbolc which marked the beginning of spring and the lambing season. This means there is a tryst, major battle, and much death surrounding Samhain in this tale. As such the motifs for this tale would be Combat (fitting both subcategories of Fighting and Death) and Wooings and Trysts. In this case we know that the tryst was used to plan the death of Blathnat’s kidnapper (who is her husband at this point in the tale), but we do not know if this is also a romantic encounter. Blathnat played a major role in her husband’s death, but ultimately died as a result of her treachery (“A grievous deed for a woman to betray her husband” [Best 1905:332]).
The Adventures of Nera (Echtra Nera) and The Cattle-Raid of Regamna (Táin Bó Regamna)

The Adventures of Nera is a Uatha tale. “Uath is evidently formed from Uaimh, a cave, or cellar; and signifies some deed connected with, as the attack or plunder of, a cave” (Mac Cana 1980: 94-95). The Cattle-Raid of Regamna (Táin bó Regamna) is a Tána (cattle-raid) tale type found in the Ulster Cycle (Mac Cana 1980:42) (Map 8, located on page 167). Both of these myths are remscéla, or pre-tales that give the background for the Irish epic saga, Táin Bó Cúailnge. These have been compiled into one summary because The Cattle-Raid of Regamna takes place during The Adventures of Nera, specifically when the Morrigan steals a cow from Nera’s herd. The following summary for The Adventures of Nera is based on John Carey’s 2005 translation (127-132) and the summary for The Cattle-Raid of Regamna is based on Eleanor Hull’s 1898 translation (1898:1-6).

The tale begins with Ailill and Medb hosting the Samhain feast at their home at Rath Cruachan with the bodies of two hanged men outside. “Whoever puts a supple twig around the foot of one of the two prisoners who are on the gallows, that man will have from me as a reward anything he wishes” (Carey 2005:127). “Now the darkness and horror of that night were great, and demons used always to appear on that night” (Carey 2005:127). Each man went out and
tried, but failed. Soon, Nera took his turn, declaring he would complete the task. Ailill offered him his gold-hilted sword if he could do it.

Nera “armed himself well, and went out to where the prisoners were” (Carey 2005:128). He tried to tie the twig around one of the men’s feet, but the twig kept falling off. The dead man turned to Nera and told him “that unless he put a special spike in it, even if he were there till morning, its own spike would not hold the looped twig shut” (Carey 2005:128). Nera took the advice and the twig stayed put. Nera and the hanged man were pleased. The hanged man then asked a favor of Nera.

“By your honour as a warrior, take me upon your neck so that I can drink a drink with you. There was a great thirst on me when I was hanged” (Carey 2005:128). Nera agreed and took the man onto his back to look for water. They went to three houses. The first house had a lake of fire around it. “‘Our drink is not in this house,’ said the prisoner. ‘The hearth-fire is always raked here (Carey 2005:128).’” The second house was surrounded by water. “‘Do not go to that house,’ said the prisoner. ‘There is never any water left over from washing and bathing, nor a tub with slops, left there after bedtime (Carey 2005:128).’” The third house had nothing guarding it.

There was used washing-water and bathing-water there, and he took a drink from each. There was a tub of slops in the middle of the house, and he drank from it and then spat the last mouthful from his mouth into the faces of the people who were in the house, so that they all died. Hence it is not good for there to be water left over from washing and bathing, or a hearth-fire which has not been raked, or a tub with slops in it, in a house after bedtime. [Carey 2005:128]

Nera returned the man to the gallows and went back to Rath Cruachan. When he returned he saw that the stronghold had been burned and the people killed, their heads piled
outside and an army marching away. Nera decided to follow them into the cave of Cruachu into the sidhe.

Nera followed the army and was taken to the king. The king (Brión) instructed him to go to a nearby house where a single woman was living. Nera was to stay with her and come to the castle every day to deliver firewood. On his trips from the house to the castle, Nera saw two men. “Every day he saw before him a blind man with a lame man on his back coming out of the court. They would go to the edge of the spring in front of the court. ‘Is it there?’ said the blind man. ‘It is indeed,’ said the lame man; ‘let us go hence (Carey 2005:129)!’” Nera asked the woman about the men. She told him that they checked on the king’s crown, which was stored in the spring. One man was blinded and another lamed for the purpose. Nera then asked her about what he had seen at Ráth Cruachan.

“‘That is not true,’ said the woman; ‘it is an army of phantoms which came to you. [But] it will become true,’ said she, unless he revealed it to his comrades” (Carey 2005:129). She told Nera he had to simply return home. “‘They are still around the same cauldron, and its contents have not yet been taken from off the fire.’ But he had reckoned that he had been in the sidhe for three days and three nights” (Carey 2005:129). Nera was advised to return home and warn Ailill and Medb that they needed to either stand guard and wait for the attacking forces, or to lead an attack themselves on the sidhe and steal Brión’s crown. Nera took “fruits of summer” (wild garlic, primroses and buttercups) to prove that he had been to the sidhe. The woman also warned Nera that she was pregnant with his child, so when the Connaught army was ready to attack he must send word so that she, their son, and their cattle would all be safe.

When Nera got back to Rath Cruachan he found that everything the woman had told him was true. Everyone was still alive and sitting around the cauldron. Nera told them about his
adventures then waited out the year at Rath Cruachan. At the end of the year, Ailill told Nera to
go into the sidhe and fetch his family and cattle.

Nera returned to the sidhe and was welcomed by his wife. He then went to the castle to
deliver firewood where the king told him he was glad to see him healthy again (his wife having
told the king Nera was sick and that was why he was not delivering the firewood), but also
scolded him for getting the woman pregnant without the king’s permission. Nera then spent the
rest of the day tending his cattle.

While Nera was tending the cattle, he fell asleep. When he fell asleep, the Morrígan took
Nera’s son’s cow, “so that the Donn of Cuailnge bulled it in Cuailnge in the east” (Carey
2005:130). When she was returning the cow she encountered Cú Chulainn at Mag Muirthemne,
who would not let her leave his territory easily, “For it was one of Cú Chulainn’s gessi [‘sworn
tabus’] that cattle or women [not] be permitted [to leave] his territory, unless he knew of it.”
(Carey 2005:130) This part of the tale is recounted in greater detail in Táin Bó Regamna, or The
Cattle-Raid of Regamna, which now follows:

Cú Chulainn was awakened from his sleep one night in his home at Dun Imrith by a cry
from the north. He ran outside, his wife close behind with his armor and clothes. His charioteer,
Loeg, had also heard the cry and came from his home in Ferta Laig in the north (Hull 1892a:211).

The two men followed the sound of the cry towards Caill Cuan and went as far as Áth da
Ferta. They heard a chariot coming from Culgaire. It was the Morrigu (Morrigan) who was
driving a cow in front of her.

An argument ensued between Cú Chulainn and the Morrigan about the cow. Cú
Chulainn angered the Morrigan, who threatened him. “I am guarding thy deathbed, and I shall
be guarding it henceforth. I brought this cow out of the fairy-mound of Cruachan so that she
might breed by the bull of Daire mac Fiachna, namely the Donn of Cooley. So long as her calf shall be a yearling, so long shall thy life be; and it is this that shall cause the Cattle-Raid of Cooley” (Hull 1892a:213).

The argument continued, with the Morrigan telling Cú Chulainn that she was going to turn into various animals while he was fighting to kill him. They then parted ways and the Morrigan returned to Cruachan in Connacht and Cú Chulainn went home.

At this point the events of the story return to The Adventures of Nera.

Nera returned home with his cattle, where his wife told him to leave, “‘lest your warriors be anxious. This warband can do nothing for a year, until the next Samain. They will come again next Samain night, for the sidhe of Ireland are always open at Samain” (Carey 2005:130-131). Nera returned to Ráth Cruachan and told the people there about his adventures in the sidhe. He spent a year at Ráth Cruachan, then returned to the sidhe three days before Samhain. He fetched his wife, his son, and his cattle. His son’s calf caused strife in the mortal world. Fergus made a prophecy about the calf:

Not pleasing to me is the calf
which bellows in the plain of Cruachu:
the son of the Black One of Cuailnge…,
the son of the bull beyond Loch Loíg.

Because of him, calves will be without cows
in Bairrche, in Cuailnge.
The king will set out upon a great march
because of Aingen’s calf. [Carey 2005:131]

When the calf reached the plain of Cruachu he encountered Finnbennach. They fought for a day and a night before the calf was beaten and let out a mighty bellow. Medb asked why it had bellowed.
“’I know that, popa Fergus; it is the song which you sang in the morning,’ Bricriu said. Fergus looked aside at him at that, and struck Bricriu across the head with his fist, so that the five *fidchell*-pieces which were in Fergus’s fist went into Bricriu’s head, which was a cause of lasting ill to him” (Carey 2005:131).

Buaigle, Medb’s cowherd, had a more acceptable answer. “’He said,’ said Buaigle, ‘that if his father the Donn of Cuailnge were to come to fight against [the Finnbennach], he would not be seen in Aí, and he would be beaten from end to end of Mag nAí (Carey 2005:131).’” At that point Medb took an oath stating that she would see those two bulls fighting at almost any cost.

Once Nera, his family and belongings were out of the sidhe, the men of Connacht and the black exiles (Fergus and his exiles from Ulster) went into the sidhe and killed those who resided there and brought out the crown of Brión. Nera then returned to the sidhe “together with his people, and he has not come out yet, and he will not come out until the end of the world.” (Carey 2005:132)

This story gives readers a plethora of information about Samhain. At the beginning we learn that the dead can interact with the living. In order to protect yourself from the dead you must be sure to bank the fire and throw out any water or else, in this particular tale at least, the dead may enter your home and kill you. After Nera’s adventure with the dead man, we learn that on Samhain you may see visions of the future, such as Nera’s vision of the death of everyone at Rath Cruachan. Finally, we learn that the sidhe-folk can only attack at Samhain. Nera is told by his wife “This warband can do nothing for a year, until the next Samain. They will come again next Samain night, for the *sidhe* of Ireland are always open at Samain” (Carey 2005:130-131).

Many different motifs are represented in *The Adventures of Nera*, including Supernatural (Marvels: Otherworld Journeys, Fairies and Elves) in the form of the sidhe-folk and Nera’s
journey into the sidhe; Gatherings (Law, Assembly, Storytelling, Ordaining the Future) in the form of Ailill and Medb’s Samhain feast for the people, the hanging of the two criminals, and Nera’s telling the story of what happened to him in the sidhe; Combat (Fighting, Death) in the form of the attack on Rath Cruachan and the attack on the sidhe; and Fire from the attack on Rath Cruachan.

*The Cattle-Raid of Regamna* reiterates the importance of Cú Chulainn and his family (his wife Emer and his charioteer Loeg) to Samhain. Cú Chulainn’s household and their importance to Samhain is discussed in greater detail under *People* later in this chapter. Perhaps the biggest thing we learn about Samhain from this myth is that it is a time for cattle-raids.

Several motifs fit this myth, starting with Supernatural, including Otherworld Journeys Persons with Extraordinary Powers, and Ordaining the Future. Otherworld Journeys fits because the Morrigan tells us that she brought this cow from the *sidhe*, and then she returns the cow there at the end. The Morrigan is also a person with extraordinary powers, as is exemplified by her making her chariot, the driver, the horse, and the cow all disappear while turning herself into a blackbird. Finally, the Morrigan told Cú Chulainn that the cow was going to give birth to the calf that will start the *Táin* and he will be gravely wounded if not killed, this shows her Ordaining the Future. One could also argue that herds (Gatherings) and Fighting (Combat) are also motifs found in *The Cattle-Raid of Regamna*. The Morrigan is moving a cow from one place to another, which is typically done around this time of year (though not necessarily for this reason), and Cú Chulainn threatened the Morrigan with weapons while they were arguing, though no actual combat occurred.
The Raid for Dartaid’s Cattle (Táin bó Dartada)

The Raid for Dartaid’s Cattle is categorized with the Tána, or cattle-raid, stories (Map 8, located on page 167). It is also a remscéla tale, or pre-tale to The Táin. The translation used for this summary was done by A.H. Leahy in Heroic Romances of Ireland, Volume II (1906:69-81).

Eocho Bec, the son of Corpre, King of Cliu lived in the Dun of Cuillne with his forty foster sons from the kings of Munster and forty milk cows to feed them. Ailill and Medb asked for Eocho’s presence at Rath Cruachan, and he promised to go at Samhain, which was in a week. A man and a woman then came to Eocho in his sleep one night. The woman told Eocho that
they had come from Sid Cuillne to give him counsel. They told him to go to Rath Cruachan with fifty horsemen, decorated in the tack that the man and woman would provide from the sidhe.

“To-morrow in the morning fifty black horses, furnished with bridles of gold and silver, shall come to thee from me; and with them fifty sets of equipment of the equipment of the sidé; and all of thy foster-children shall go with thee” (Leahy 1906:74).

The next day the promised items were found at Eocho’s stronghold. The men donned their gear and went to Rath Cruachan, where they stayed for three days and three nights of feasting. It was soon revealed to Eocho that Ailill wanted to ask a favor. He wanted to borrow milk cows from Eocho. Eocho was not comfortable giving Ailill what he asked for since he had just enough to feed his foster sons. Ailill proposed that Eocho give him one cow from each farmer in his care in exchange for military assistance from Ailill if it was ever needed. Eocho agreed to this proposal.

When Eocho and his men were returning home they encountered the Sons of Glaschu, who traveled with 140 men from Irross Donnan (the peninsula of Donnan in Mayo) (Leahy 1906:76). The two groups attacked each other at O’Conchada (Inse Ua Conchada). Eocho’s foster sons all died in the battle. “And that news was spread abroad over all the land of Ireland, so that four times twenty kings’ sons, of the youths of Munster, died, sorrowing for the deaths of these princes” (Leahy 1906:76).

Later, Ailill was asleep when a young man and woman came to him in his dream. They identified themselves as Victory and Defeat and informed him they had counsel to give. “Let men march out from thy palace in the morning, that thou mayest win for thyself the cattle of Dartaid, the daughter of Eocho. Forty is the number of her milch-cows, it is thine own son, Orlam mac Ailill, whom she loves. Let Orlam prepare for his journey with a stately troop of
valiant men, also forty sons of these kings who dwell in the land of Connaught; and by me shall be given to them the same equipment that the other youths had who fell in yon fight, bridles and garments and brooches” (Leahy 1906:76;78).

Next the man and woman went to a castle on the northern bank of the river Nemain to visit Corp Liath, son of Tassach, a warrior of Munster. They introduced themselves to this man as Gathering of Hosts and Destruction.

Each son of a king and a queen, and each heir of a king that is in Connaught, is now coming upon you to bear off cows from your country, for that the sons of your kings and queens have fallen by the hand of the men of Connaught. To-morrow morning, at the ninth hour they will come, and small is their troop; so if valiant warriors go thither to meet them, the honour of Munster shall be preserved; if indeed thine adventure shall meet with success. [Leahy 1906:78]

The woman told Corp Liath to take 280 men with him on this venture. He pulled his men together and went out the next morning.

That morning, the men of Connaught saw the tack that was promised by Victory and Defeat, but they had their doubts as to whether or not they should go on the journey. Ailill told them it was shameful to refuse the gift. Orlam left his father’s house then and went to Cliu Classach on the south bank of the Shannon to see Dartaid. He asked Dartaid to bring her cattle and come with him. She agreed.

Then the young men go away with the cows in the midst, and the maiden was with them; but Corp Liath, the son of Tassach, met them with seven times twenty warriors to oppose their march. A battle was fought, and in that place fell the sons of the kings of Connaught, together with the warriors who had gone with them, all except Orlam and eight others, who carried away with them the kine, even the forty milch-cows, and fifty heifers, so that they came into the land of Connaught; but the maiden fell at the beginning of the fight. [Leahy 1906:80]
This final battle took place at Imlech Dartaid (the Lake Shore of Darta) in Cliu (Leahy 1906:80).

This myth takes place at Samhain and is full of sídhe-folk tricking mortals. There are many motifs found in this myth, including Supernatural (Fairies and Elves) in regards to the two sidhe-folk who go from person to person, organizing battle and death; Gatherings (Assembly) in regards to the Samhain feast held by Ailill and Medb; Journeys from the trips that people take at the urging of the sidhe-folk; and Combat (Fighting and Death) in regards to the battles fought and the people who died as a result of the sidhe-folk’s meddling.

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<th>Table 8: The Raid for Dartaid’s Cattle</th>
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<td><strong>Tale Type</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Myth Cycle</strong></td>
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**The Intoxication of the Ulstermen (Mesca Ulad)**

*The Intoxication of the Ulstermen* is a unique myth in the tale types. Proinsias Mac Cana (1980) found that it was actually part of a “miscellaneous” section of tales found in List B and
does not actually have a specific tale type (Mac Cana 1980:67 and 91) (Map 5, located on page 164, and 6, located on page 165). This summary was based on the translation by Koch (2005:106-127).

After the division of Ireland between the Sons of Míl and the Tuatha Dé, with the Sons of Míl receiving the half of Ireland that was above ground and the Tuatha Dé receiving the half of Ireland that was underground, Ulster was also divided. It was split between Conchobor son of Fachtna Fáthach, Cú Chulainn, and Fintan son of Niall Niamglonnach (Koch 2005:106). After a year, Conchobor held a great Samhain feast at Emain Macha, being sure to invite Cú Chulainn and Fintan. When the men arrived, each was greeted at the door by a messenger. Sencha son of Ailill greeted Cú Chulainn and his charioteer, Lóeg, and the druid Cathbad greeted Fintan (Koch 2005:107-108). Both were asked if they would give Conchobor their lands for one year. Both agreed and the lands were merged.

After Cú Chulainn and Fintan agreed to merge the land, a fight broke out among the men who were promised as guarantees to Cú Chulainn and Fintan. “The pledged men for each of them executed their obligations barbarously. And it was such barbarity in the upsurge that there were nine men wounded, and nine men bloody, and nine killed outright amongst the men on each side. Sencha son of Ailill rose up and brandished his peace-making branch, so that the Ulstermen were mute and silent” (Koch 2005:108). Sencha told the men their fight was unnecessary, since Conchobor was not king until the end of the year, so the fighting ceased. Everyone remained at Emain Macha for three days and nights to finish out the feast.

Conchobor’s year-long kingship was a success, so Cú Chulainn and Fintan both organized feasts for the new high king of Ulster, which were to take place at the same time. They both arrived at Emain Macha at the same time, then asked for their legal guarantees,
looking to fight over who would host the feast. Cú Chulainn’s foster son, Furbaide son of Conchobor, ended the fight by crying and suggesting that Cú Chulainn was ruining Ulster’s prosperity with the fight. Sencha son of Ailill suggested Cú Chulainn and Fintan end their squabble by sharing the night. The Ulstermen would spend the first half of the night with Fintan, then the second half of the night with Cú Chulainn. Everyone agreed to this arrangement, so Conchobor sent messengers to everyone in Ulster, telling them to go to Dún Dá Bend, the home of Fintan (Koch 2005:110).

When the middle of the night arrived, all of the heroes, champions, soldiers, and men of “music and poetry and story” left Fintan’s home and left for Cú Chulainn’s feast, leaving the women and children behind (Koch 2005:110-111). After going on a great journey, the men found themselves lost, and asked Cú Chulainn where they were. “Cenn Abrat in Sliabh Cain is this to the south. Sléibtí Éblinni is this on the north-east. The distant huge bright water that you see is the Pool of Limerick. Druim Collchaille is this place in which we are, which is called Áne Cliach, in the territory of the Little Déisi” (Koch 2005:112). The Ulstermen were in enemy territory, but decided to camp for a day and a night because to leave immediately would be seen as a military defeat. They went to Temair Luachra to set up their camp. Unfortunately Temair Luachra was not empty as they expected it to be. Ailill and Medb had a son who had just turned a month old. To celebrate they were there with all of their aristocracy, many warriors, and druids.

Once Cú Roi identified all of the attackers to Ailill and Medb, Medb decided to take representatives from her court to greet them in the hopes of ascertaining whether the men were there peacefully or to fight. Sencha son of Ailill explained their situation to the queen. “And it is not to do injury or battle that the Ulstermen have come, but enlivened by drink, from Dún Dá Bend to Clú Máil meic Ugiene, and they thought it no distinction to them to leave the region
until they should spend a night residing in it (Koch 2005:122).” Medb made them welcome and offered to let their best warrior choose a house in which they could stay. Some fighting broke out over that, but Sencha settled the issue by suggesting Cú Chulainn be the one to choose since they were there because they had been going to his house, so they were still his guests and under his care. He chose the largest house available, which happened to be made of iron. Once everyone was in and the servants gone, the warriors of Connaught wrapped a chain around the house and lit fires below and above, trying to kill the Ulstermen. Try as they might the Ulstermen could not get out of the house. The warriors began to bicker yet again about which warrior would get them out. Sencha calmed them down by asking them to choose the one they honored, Cú Chulainn.

With the decision made they were able to get out, though it is not clear how. Cú Chulainn showed their hosts his warrior-feats, then they were given heated water to wash with, food and drink. The men were drunk and talking, lamenting their end, because “even now they [Ailill and Medb] are debating outside about attacking us” (Koch 2005:124). Cú Chulainn roused himself and gave a great “chariot warrior’s salmon-leap”, taking the roof off of the house. He could see the surrounding army, ready to attack. Cú Chulainn then kicked the door down, allowing the Ulstermen to escape the building. A great battle ensued, but the Ulstermen lost. They won the next battle, however, thanks to Cú Chulainn’s beauty and fighting. Conchobor’s honor was saved and Ailill was given gold and silver, creating peace between the two kings.

This entire myth takes place at Samhain, creating a fairly long list of actions and events. The kingship of Ulster changes hands. There are feasts, journeys, and fighting between the Ulstermen and the men of Connaught. The motifs follow easily: Gatherings (Law and Assembly) when Conchobar calls together the men of Ulster for the festival of Samhain and asks
Cú Chulainn and Fintan to give him the total kingship of Ulster; Journeys when the men of Ulster leave the home of Fintan and travel with the ultimate goal of Cú Chulainn’s home but end up in Temair Luachra in Connaught; and Combat (fighting) when they fight the men of Connaught.

The places get a little complicated. There are four main places in this myth that are of import: Emain Macha (where the kingship of Ulster is held), Dún Dá Bend (where Fintan lives), Dún Delga which is today in Dundalk, Co. Louth (where Cú Chulainn lives), and Temair Luachra (where the Ulstermen camped). The Ulstermen all traveled to Dún Dá Bend from all across Ulster for the first half of Samhain night. The idea was they would feast at Fintan’s home for half of the night, then leave the women and children there while the men traveled to Cú Chulainn’s home for the second half of the night. Unfortunately they became lost along the way, taking them all around Ireland. The following is the Ulstermen’s journey:

Journey from Fintan’s to Cú Chulainn’s:
1. Dún Dá Bend
2. Cathir Osrin
3. Lí Thúaga
4. Dún Rígáin
5. Olarbi
6. Plain of Macha
7. Sliab Fuait
8. Áth na Forari
9. Port Nóth Con Culainn
10. Plain of Muirthemne
11. The land of Saithi
12. Dubid
13. Across the Boyne
14. Plain of Brega and Meath
15. Senmag Léna in Mucceda
16. Claithar Cell
17. Brosnachai Bladma
18. With their left to Bernán Éle
19. Sliab Éblinni ingini Guaire (the Mt of Éblenn daughter of Guaire
20. Across Findsruth (River of the Descendants of Cathbad)
21. Machaire Mór na mMuman (Great Plain of Munster)
22. Lár Martini (Lowland of Martin)
23. Smertaini
24. Their right was before the white rocks of Loch Gair, across the stream of Lind Mági, to Clíu Máil Meic Úgaine, into the borders of the Little Dési in the land of Cú Roí mac Dári.

| Table 9: The Intoxication of the Ulstermen |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Tale Type                     | Miscellaneous (Mac Cana 1980:67;91)             |
| Myth Cycle                    | Ulster Cycle                                    |
| People                        | Conchobar                                        |
|                               | Cú Chulainn                                     |
|                               | Fintan                                           |
|                               | Ailill                                           |
|                               | Medb                                             |
| Places                        | Emain Macha                                      |
|                               | Dún Dá Bend                                      |
|                               | Dún Delga (today Dundalk)                        |
|                               | Temair Luachra                                   |
|                               | See end of summary for journey route             |
| Motifs                        | • Gatherings                                     |
|                               |   o Law                                          |
|                               |   o Assembly                                     |
|                               | • Journeys                                       |
|                               | • Combat                                         |
|                               |   o Fighting                                     |
| Actions/Events                | • Kingship changes                               |
|                               | • Feasting                                       |
|                               | • Journeys to feasting locations                 |
|                               | • Fighting between Ulster and Connaught          |

*The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn (Serglige Con Culainn)*

*The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn (Serglige Con Culainn)* does not seem to fit under any tale-type according to Mac Cana (1980:91) (Map 12, located on page 171). The translation used for this summary is by A. H. Leahy.

The people of Ulster were gathered at Muirtheimne, hunting birds. Cú Chulainn tried to kill two birds for his wife, Emer, but instead hurt them. Cú Chulainn immediately fell ill after hurting the birds and fell into a coma. While unconscious, Cú Chulainn dreamed that two women, Fand and Lí Ban, who had been the birds, attacked him with horse whips and beat him.
almost to death. For a year Cú Chulainn remained in a coma. After the year, Lí Ban woke Cú Chulainn and asked him for a favor. She wanted him to come with her to Mag Mell to help Fand defeat her enemies. In return, he would be healed. Cú Chulainn refused, but his charioteer, Loeg, agreed to go. Loeg went to the sidhe and saw how they needed Cú Chulainn’s help, so he returned to Muirtheimne and worked with Emer to convince Cú Chulainn to go.

Cú Chulainn was eventually convinced to go to Mag Mell, where he defeated Fand’s enemies and slept with her. Emer quickly learned about her husband’s infidelity and decided to attack Fand. She went with a group of women, all armed with knives, to confront her. The two women spoke and each realized their deep love for Cú Chulainn and bade the other take him. In the end Fand suggested that Emer keep her husband since Fand herself was married to Manannan mac Lir. While this arrangement would keep the peace, no one was happy. Manannan found a solution. He waved his cloak between Cú Chulainn and Fand to ensure they would never see each other again, then gave Cú Chulainn and Emer forgetfulness potions to make them forget the events that had taken place.

This myth took place at Samhain. It is interesting to note that Lí Ban had to wait a year to return to Cú Chulainn to heal him and ask for his help after the attack. This, like The Adventures of Nera, seems to suggest that the Tuatha Dé are just as trapped as mortals are by the rules of the sidhe, although in The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne, Oengus seems to be able to leave the Brugh any time that Diarmuid needs his assistance. This may come down to a difference between the Ulster and Fenian cycles, which is discussed under “Motifs” in the Myths in Summary section of this thesis (see page 78).
Motifs in this tale include Supernatural (Marvels: Otherworld journeys, Fairies and Elves, and Persons with Extraordinary Powers); Gatherings (Assembly and Storytelling); Wooing and Trysts; Combat (Fighting); and Silence (in the form of Cú Chulainn not speaking for a year).

**The Táin (Táin Bó Cuailnge)**

*The Táin (Táin Bó Cuailnge)* is an epic saga that belongs to the Tána or cattle-raid, tale-type. Much of the Ulster Cycle leads up to the events in this story. *The Táin* is about a conflict between the Ulstermen and Ailill and Medb from Connaught, specifically a conflict over the loan of a bull. The translation used for the following summary was by Thomas Kinsella (1969).

The story begins with Ailill and Medb arguing about which one of them is wealthier. When they compare all of their belongings, Medb realizes that Ailill does indeed have something that exceeds her own belongings: a bull. She knows there is a bull in Cuailnge that exceeds Ailill’s and asks for loan of it for a year. Ultimately the loan of the bull is denied, so Medb and Ailill declare war on Ulster.

The armies of Connaught were raised just before Samhain. As they were preparing to set out, Medb encountered Fedelm, a woman poet of Connacht. Medb asked the girl if she had the gift of foresight, and if so what did she see.

I see a battle: a blond man with much blood about his belt and a hero-halo round his head. His brow is full of victories.

…

I see him moving to the fray: take warning, watch him well, Cúchulainn, Sualdam’s son! Now I see him in pursuit.

Whole hosts he will destroy, Making dense massacre.
In thousands you will yield your heads.
I am Fedelm. I hide nothing.

The blood starts from warrior’s wounds
-total ruin- at his touch:
your warriors dead, the warriors
of Deda mac Sin prowling loose;
torn corpses, women wailing,
because of him – the Forge-Hound. [Kinsella 1969:61-63]

Medb ignored the warning and marched on Samhain day. She and Ailill asked Fergus to lead them into Ulster. Fergus himself was from Ulster, had in fact been the king of Ulster for seven years, and had just recently gone into exile with his men for the deaths of the Sons of Uisliu. Despite his exile, he still felt lingering loyalties to Ulster. As a result, he led the Connaught army on a longer route to buy Ulster time.

The Ulstermen were cursed so that when Ulster was under attack the warriors would experience labor pains. Cú Chulainn was exempt from this curse, so he took it upon himself to fight the invading armies and buy his people time. He laid challenges out in their path and engaged them in skirmishes that resulted in hundreds of deaths. Medb asked Cú Chulainn to ease up on her men, and an agreement was made. Cú Chulainn would fight one warrior a day during which time the Connaught army would advance, but when Cú Chulainn and his opponent were done fighting, her army would halt for the day.

Cú Chulainn was quickly becoming exhausted from his continuous fighting. He was visited one night by Lug of the Tuatha Dé, who revealed that he was Cú Chulainn’s true father. He allowed Cú Chulainn to sleep for three days and three nights while Lug fought his battles. The boys of Ulster also came out to fight during Cú Chulainn’s slumber. Since they were not yet warriors themselves they were not affected by the curse. The boys killed 450 men, but they were all killed in the process. Cú Chulainn flew into a rage and fought to avenge the boys.
The next warrior that Cú Chulainn faced was Fer Diad, his foster brother. The battle lasted for three days. Each night the two men would send each other food and medicine. On the fourth day Cú Chulainn killed Fer Diad, but was left gravely wounded. The Ulstermen began to arrive to fight by his side at this point, but not everyone was there. Cú Chulainn and his human father, Sualtam, had not told Conchobar that Ulster was under attack, so they did not know to go to him. Sualtam went to the king’s stronghold to tell everyone about the attack, but he was turned away and died. Conchobar at that point believed what he had been told and went with his warriors to fight off Ailill and Medb’s army. In the end, hundreds of warriors died for the sake of a bull. Medb acquired the bull, but it fought against Ailill’s white-horned bull and both were killed.

This tale took place from “The Monday at summer’s end to the Monday at spring’s beginning” (Kinsella 1969:219). We learned earlier in the tale that the Connaught armies set out on the Monday after Samhain, meaning this tale takes place between Samhain and the beginning of spring. Quite a few motifs fit this story, including Supernatural (Fairies and Elves in the form of Lug and Ordaining the Future), Gatherings (Assembly, in this case for battle), Combat (Fighting and Death), and Journeys.
| Table 10: The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn |
|---|---|
| **Tale Type** | N/A |
| **Myth Cycle** | Ulster |
| **People** | Cú Chulainn<br>Emer<br>Loeg<br>Lí Ban<br>Fand<br>Mananan mac Lir |
| **Places** | Murtheimne<br>Mag Mell |
| **Motifs** | • Supernatural<br>  ○ Marvels<br>    ▪ Otherworld Journeys<br>    ▪ Fairies and Elves<br>    ▪ Persons with Extraordinary Powers<br>• Gatherings<br>  ○ Assembly<br>    ▪ Storytelling<br>• Wooing and Trysts<br>• Combat<br>  ○ Fighting<br>• Silence |
| **Actions/Events** | • Cú Chulainn injured two sidhe-folks who had been disguised as birds<br>• Cú Chulainn was beaten by the sidhe-folk and left in a coma for a year<br>• Lí Ban asked Cú Chulainn to return to Mag Mell with her to help fight Fand’s enemies<br>  ○ He refused, so Loeg went in his place and came back when he could report to Cú Chulainn why he was needed<br>• Cú Chulainn traveled to Mag Mell and defeated Fand’s enemies, then slept with her<br>• Emer was jealous of Fand and went to attack her, but the two women discussed their mutual love for Cú Chulainn and decided that Emer would keep him since Fand was married to Manannan mac Lir<br>• Manannan mac Lir waved his cloak between Cú Chulainn and Fand to ensure they would never see each other again and gave Cú Chulainn and Emer a potion to ensure they would never remember what happened |
The Boyhood Deeds of Finn (Macgnímartha Finn)

The Boyhood Deeds of Finn (Macgnímartha Finn) is a myth found in the Finean Cycle. Mac Cana 1980 does not list it as being on either Tale List A or B, and Scéla 2007 lists it as Macgnímrada, boyhood deeds (Map 2, located on page 161). This summary is based on the translation found in The Celtic Heroic Age by John Carey (2005:194-201).

This myth begins with a battle between Cumall son of Trénmór and Uirgrenn son of Lugaid Corr of the Luaigni. During the battle of Cnucha, Goll son of Morna slew Cumall, who was Finn’s biological father. This was the beginning of the conflict between Finn and the sons of Morna (Carey 2005:194).

Due to the animosity that the sons of Morna had for Finn (whose birth name was Deimne, Finn was a nickname given to him due to his fair hair [finn]), he spent his childhood traveling, learning different crafts and gathering tools and weapons (Carey 2005:196).

Finn eventually went to Cethern son of Finta to study poetry. There was a beautiful woman in Ireland at the time named Éile. She lived in sidhe Brí Éile. The men of Ireland would go every Samhain to try to woo her. Wooing the beautiful woman was hazardous though: a person died from every party who went to woo her (Carey 2005:199). Cethern went to woo her, much to Finn’s displeasure. When they reached sidhe Brí Éile, a man named Oirchbél Éces from their party was killed. As a result, the place was named Fert Oirchbél in Cluain Fota (Carey 2005:199).

Finn, upset and shamed by the preventable death, returned to Sliab Mairge where he was staying with Fiacail son of Conchenn (Carey 2005:199). Finn told Fiacail about what happened
and was advised to “go and sit on the two Paps of Anu west of Luachair. He went then, and sat
between the two strongholds which are between the Paps of Anu.” (Carey 2005:199)

While Finn was there on the night of Samain he saw the two side – that is, the two
strongholds – laid bare around him after their concealing enchantment (fé fiada) had
dissolved. He saw a great fire in each of the two strongholds, and heard a voice from one
of them saying, ‘Is your suabais good?’
’Good indeed,’ said the voice in the other sidhe. ‘Shall something be carried from us to
you?’ ‘If it is given to us, something will be fetched over to you after that.’ As Finn sat
there he saw a man come out of the sidhe. There was a kneading-trough in his hand with
a pig of slainsi (?) on it, and a cooked calf, and a bunch of wild garlic on that day of
Samain. [Carey 2005:199]

Finn watched the man walk into the other sidhe, then threw his spear into Sliab Mairge.
As Finn left the area, “he heard lamentation and a great keening…(Carey 2005:200)” Aed son of
Fidga had been killed by Finn’s spear. Fiacail joined Finn at the Paps of Anu and asked if Finn
had killed anyone, reminding him that if he had not, he would not be able to for another year
(Carey 2005:200). Finn reassured Fiacail that he had hit someone. Finn then grabbed a woman
outside of the sidhe, holding her hostage in return for his spear. She assured him that he would
get his spear back in exchange for her. She then went back into the sidhe and told the others
inside to throw the spear back out. Fiacail confirmed for Finn that he had killed the man who
had been killing suitors out of jealousy (Carey 2005:200).

There are many motifs that would fit Samhain in this myth. These include Supernatural
(Marvels: Fairies and Elves), Gatherings (Storytelling), Wooings and Trysts, Combat (Death),
Journeys, and Fire. The Fairies and Elves would be the inhabitants of the sidhe, Storytelling in
the form of Finn going to learn poetry, Wooing and Trysts in the men of Ireland going to Éile at
Samhain in attempts to gain her love, death from Éile’s suitors dying and Finn killing Aed,
journeys from Finn traveling from Brí Éile to Sliab Mairge to the Paps of Anu, and Fire from the two fires at the strongholds at the Paps of Anu.

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<th>Table 11: The Boyhood Deeds of Finn mac Cumhaill</th>
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<td><strong>Tale Type</strong></td>
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**Historical Cycle**

*Baile of the Clear Voice (Scél Baili Binnbérlaig)*

*Baile of the Clear Voice* is a *Scéla*, or story, tale type (Map 7, located on page 166). It has been sorted into the Historical Cycle. The translation for this summary was by Myles Dillon in *Early Irish Literature* (1994:85-86).

Baile of the Clear Voice, son of Buan, grandson of Caba, was much loved in Ireland. He had a lover, Ailinn, daughter of Lugaid son of Fergus of the Sea. Baile and Ailinn scheduled a tryst, which was to take place at Ros na Ríg on the Boyne. Baile came from Emain Macha with his men and arrived safe at the agreed upon site. After arriving, “they saw a fearful specter
approaching from the south, darting like a hawk from the cliff or like the wind from a gray sea” (Dillon 1994:85). The specter told Baile and his men that he came from Mount Leinster and he had heard “Ailinn had given her love to Baile and was on her way to meet him, when she was overtaken and killed by the warriors of Leinster. Druids and seers had foretold that they would not meet in life, but they would meet after death, never to part” (Dillon 1994:86). Baile died of grief. A yew tree grew out of his grave, “and the likeness of Baile’s head was in its branches” (Dillon 1994:86).

The specter next went to Ailinn. He told her “He was going to Mount Leinster and had no news save only that he had seen the Ulstermen dig the grave of Baile son of Buan, heir to the kingdom of Ulster, and celebrate his funeral games, for he had died on his way to meet a girl to whom he had given his love” (Dillon 1994:86). Ailinn died of heartbreak as well. An apple tree grew out of her grave, and it had a likeness of her head in the branches.

Seven years later, both trees were cut down. The vision-tales, feasts, loves and wooings of Ulster were written on Baile’s while the wooings of Leinster were written on Ailinn’s.

When the feast of Samain was held by Art son of Conn, the poets and men of every craft came and brought their tablets with them. Art noticed these two tablets and asked for them. They were brought to him, and as he held them face to face they sprang together and were joined like woodbine round a branch. It was impossible to part them. [Dillon 1994:86]

The joined tablets were kept in the treasury of Tara where they remained until Dúnlang son of Enna burned them.

Samhain does not play a significant role in this myth. In fact it almost reads as a plot device to bring the two tablets together. At the end the king, Art son of Conn of the Hundred Battles hosts the feast of Samhain. This is how the tablets made from the two lovers are brought
together. This still gives us two motifs: Gatherings (Assembly) from the feast of Samhain; and Wooing and Trysts from the two lovers arranging a tryst, failing to meet, then coming together (in the form of wooden tablets) at the end. Art son of Conn has the biggest Samhain role in the story as the host of the feast, which is held at Tara.

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The Death of Diarmait Mac Cerbaill (Aided Diarmata Meic Fergusu Cerbeoil)

The Death of Diarmait Mac Cerbaill is an Aideda (death-tale) tale-type (Scela 2007) (Map 1, located on page 160). There are two, very similar, versions of Diarmait’s death found in the manuscripts. While very similar, only one, the version found in the British Museum Egerton MS, contains Samhain. This summary is based on Carey’s translation (Carey 2005:212-216).

Diarmait Mac Cerbaill asked a group of druids how he would die, and was given this answer:

’Killing,’ said the first druid; ‘and a shirt of a single flax seed and a mantle of the wool of a single sheep will be upon you on the day of your death.’
“...’Drowning,’ said the second druid; ‘and you will have ale from a single grain on that night.’
“‘Burning,’ said the third druid; ‘and the bacon of a pig which was not born will be on your platter.’ [Carey 2005:214]

Diarmait declared this an unlikely series of events, making it a classic example of the Threefold Death. In the other version (from the Book of Lismore), Diarmait responded by banishing his foster-son, Áed Dub, from Ireland (Carey 2005:213).

After that Diarmait went on his royal circuit sunwise around Ireland. For this is how the king of Tara used to go through Ireland: from Tara into Leinster, from there into Munster, from there into Connacht, and finally into Ulster; so that he would return to Tara at the end of a year’s time, at Samain, to spend Samain with the men of Ireland [celebrating] the feis Temro ['Feast of Tara’, associated with the confirmation of the king]. [Carey 2005:215]

While taking this royal circuit, Diarmait encountered a warrior, Banbán, who invited him to his house at Ráith Bicc to be his guest. Diarmait agreed and followed the man home. Over the course of the night Diarmait was given a shirt made from a single flax seed, a mantle made from the wool of a single sheep, bacon from a pig that was not born (instead it was birthed using a cesarean-section), and ale made from a single grain (Carey 2005:215). That was when Diarmait realized that he was in a house built using the ridgepole from his own house, which he had thrown into the sea to avoid the predictions of his death (a part of the prophesy left out in the earlier portion of the myth). When Diarmait got up to leave with his men, Áed Dub appeared and stabbed Diarmait with his spear. Diarmait fell into the ale vat, was hit in the head by the ridgepole, and killed. The Ulstermen (who had been waiting outside) “seized the house and burnt it over those who were within.” (Carey 2005:216) Diarmait was buried at Clonmacnoise as
he had requested because he had been healed of a headache there when he fasted and prayed to the Irish saints.

Samhain plays a larger role in this myth than is readily apparent. Diarmait was on his royal circuit of Ireland when he was killed. The journey was supposed to end at Tara at Samhain so he could celebrate with his people. According to the Annals of Tigernach, in 559 Diarmait was the last king to celebrate the Festival of Tara (Koch 2006:587; Mac Niocaill N.d.:T559.1). If this was indeed the last time the Festival of Tara was celebrated, this was the end of Samhain playing a role in how Ireland was governed.

Diarmait’s death is an example of the Threefold Death. Kenneth Jackson described the threefold death as follows: “A prophet foretells that a certain man will die in three different ways (generally including by fire and water). This is thought to be incredible and to prove him no true seer, so that the man feels quite secure” (Jackson 1940:535). Diarmait is told that he will be hurt, drowned and burned (Carey 2005:214; O Cathasaigh 1994:63). Because the details of how he was supposed to die seemed so extraordinary Diarmait did not believe those foretelling his demise.

This myth lays out the route that the king would take through Ireland every year leading up to Samhain. “from Tara into Leinster, from there into Munster, from there into Connacht, and finally into Ulster; so that he would return to Tara at the end of a year’s time, at Samain, to spend Samain with the men of Ireland [celebrating] the feis Temro [‘Feast of Tara’, associated with the confirmation of the king]” (Carey 2005:215). Diarmait was stopped on this trip at Ráith Bicc.

The motifs include Gatherings (Assembly) in the form of the Assembly of Tara and Journeys in the form of the royal circuit of Ireland ending at Tara at Samhain. Indirectly associated, or simply found in the myth, include Combat (Death) due to the Ulstermen attacking
the house that Diarmait was in and killing him and everyone inside and Fire because the Ulstermen set the house on fire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 13: The Death of Diarmait Mac Cerbaill</th>
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<td>Tale Type</td>
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<td>Myth Cycle</td>
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<td>Actions/Events</td>
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**The Birth of Áed Sláine (Genemain Áeda Sláne)**

*The Birth of Áed Sláine* is listed on the *Scéla* website as a Geis/Gessa (a taboo, a prohibition; a positive injunction or demand; something unlawful or forbidden; a spell, an incantation) tale type, while Mac Cana (1980) does not list the tale (Map 12, located on page 171). If one follows the last definition of *Geis* given by Scéla (a spell or incantation) this tale type does make sense. In the story the clerics give Mugain blessed water to help her produce a child, and she gives birth to first a lamb, then a salmon, then finally a son. It is magic at work. However, this could also very easily be considered a Comperta, or “birth-tale” since it details the conception and birth of Áed Sláine. The translation this summary is based on was by Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha (2005:272-274).
In the time of Diarmait son of Fergus Cerrbéoil there was a great gathering, and all of the men of Ireland were there. The king’s two consorts were also present, with their women separate from the men. They were Mairenn the Bald and Mugain daughter of Conchrad son of Duach Donn of the Munstermen. Mugain was jealous of Mairenn, so she asked a woman-satirist to remove Mairenn’s crown to show everyone that she was bald. When the satirist removed Mairenn’s crown, she cried out for God and Ciarán’s help, and hair grew on her head down to her shoulders (Ní Dhonnchadha 2005:273).

Mugain’s misfortune continued. The king was considering leaving her because she was barren while his other women were producing children. Finnian of Mag Bile and bishop Áed son of Brec were visiting, so Mugain asked for their help in having a child. The men gave her blessed water to drink, which she did and became pregnant. When she gave birth, however, it was to a lamb. Mugain was very upset, but the men assured her that it was not a bad thing. “that thing will be a consecration of your womb, a likeness namely of the blameless lamb that was offered up for the human race” (Ní Dhonnchadha 2005:273). They blessed water again and Mugain drank it again. This time she gave birth to a salmon. She was upset again, but once again she was reassured by Finnian and bishop Áed. "I’ll take the silvered salmon and my insignia will be made out of it, and you will bear a son as a result. And he will surpass his brothers and more kings descended from him will rule Ireland than from the other sons” (Ní Dhonnchadha 2005:274). Once more Mugain drank blessed water from the two men and she gave birth to a son, Áed Sláine.

The gathering described at the beginning of this myth (when Mugain tries to shame Mairenn) is most likely the festival of Lughnasa since it is taking place at Tailtiu and the first paragraph of the story said the Lughnasa celebrations take place at Tailtiu while Samhain takes
Tara of the kings was the estate reserved for all kings who used to rule Ireland, and it was common practice for them to have the cáin-fines and penalties and rents of the men of Ireland brought to them there. It was common practice moreover for the men of Ireland to come from every quarter to Tara to partake of the Feast of Tara at Samain. For the two renowned gatherings which the men of Ireland had were the Feast of Tara every Samain, for that was the pagans’ Easter, and the Fair of Tailtiu every Lugnasad. During the course of the year, no one dared infringe any penalty or law that was ordained by the men of Ireland at either of those dates. [Ní Dhonnchadha 2005:272]

First, it is stated that Tara is where the high king of Ireland rules (“Tara of the kings was the estate reserved for all kings who used to rule Ireland” [Ní Dhonnchadha 2005:272]). Second, it is stated that the festivities for Samhain are held at Tara (“It was common practice moreover for the men of Ireland to come from every quarter to Tara to partake of the Feast of Tara at Samain. For the two renowned gatherings which the men of Ireland had were the Feast of Tara every Samain, for that was the pagans’ Easter…[Ní Dhonnchadha 2005:272]”). Finally, it is stated that no one broke the laws enacted at Samhain or Lughnasad.

Based on this beginning passage, we can connect the Gatherings motif to Samhain from this myth, including the subcategories of Law (“No one dared infringe any penalty or law…” [Ní Dhonnchadha 2005:272]) and Assembly (“It was common practice…for the men of Ireland to come…to Tara to partake of the Feast of Tara at Samain…” [Ní Dhonnchadha 2005:272]). Because this myth does not take place at Samhain we cannot tie any people to the day from this, but Diarmait has been associated with Samhain in other myths such as The Settling of the Manor.
of Tara due to his role as king. Tara would be associated with Samhain in this myth since it is the location for the celebration of the Feast of Tara, held at Samhain.

<table>
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<th>Table 14: The Birth of Áed Sláine</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tale Type</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Myth Cycle</strong></td>
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<td><strong>People</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Places</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Motifs** | • Gatherings  
  ○ Law  
  ○ Assembly |
| **Actions/Events** | • Festival of Samhain held at Tara  
  • Everyone must obey the law |

**The Battle of Crinna (Cath Crinna)**

*The Battle of Crinna* is a *Catha* (“battle”) tale type (Map 3, located on page 162).

Cormac, grandson of Conn, was the king of Ireland, and it fell to him to host the Feast of Tara. Where Cormac’s mansion was then was in Tara; and that of every king in Ireland as well, for the purpose of holding Tara’s Feast: for a fortnight before samhain that is to say, On samhain-day itself, and for a fortnight after. And the reason for which they practiced to gather themselves together at every samhain-tide was this: because at such season it was that mast and other products were the best matured. Here too is the reason for which the Feast of Tara was made at all: the body of law which all Ireland enacted then, during the interval between that and their next convention at a year’s end none might dare to transgress; and he that perchance did so was outlawed from the men of Ireland. [O’Grady 1892:359-360]

Fergus Blacktooth was the king of Ulster at the time. When it was time to go to Tara for the feast, Fergus and his men sent messengers ahead of them to check their housing at Tara. What they found was run-down accommodations with no roof and cattle and sheep meandering through. The Ulstermen were furious and decided to send word to Cormac that they would not
be gathering for Samhain; instead they intended to come to Tara with their armies and fight. Cormac did not have strong enough forces at Tara to face the Ulstermen, so he fled to Munster to ask Teigue, son of Clan (who was a relative) for help. Cairbre told Fergus that there was a prophecy that said Teigue was destined to fight the battle of Crinna.

Cormac went to Olioll Olom’s house to look for allies. He got them in the form of Cormac Cas son of Olioll Olom, Fiacha Broadcrown son of Eoghan and Olioll. This was the land where Teigue lived. Cormac Cas and Fiacha Broadcrown ruled Olioll’s territory, and Teigue stood in line to take over for either one next. The men decided next to find Lughaid Lágha to help as well.

They took Cormac to the glen of Aherlach where they found Lughaid bathing and defenseless. The men acted like they were going to attack Lughaid, who asked for his life to be spared in exchange for him killing someone. Cormac told him he would only accept the death of Fergus Blacktooth in exchange for Lughaid’s life. Lughaid agreed to the price. After securing Lughaid’s assistance Cormac went to Teigue, who welcomed him with open arms. He refused, however, to fight the Battle of Crinna, stating that it was not his battle to fight because no one of his was involved and his lands were not involved either. Cormac made a generous offer to Teigue. “Were I moreover to win my land, to thee and to thy race in perpetuity should be granted all so much as, between the hour at which the battle should be won and nighttime, thy chariot might encompass; and that same in excess of thine own just stipend. Howbeit, in order to thine affording us the most precious succor that we could have: the making good our claim to Tara namely, we have but to remind thee of our kinship” (O’Grady 1892:362). Teigue still refused. The men went back and forth (which was cut from the translation) and in the end Teigue agreed to go to battle.
“After all, Teigue did go with Cormac; and a great obnubilation was conjured up for him, so that he slept a heavy sleep and that things magic-begotten were shewn to him to enunciate, and power was lent him to declare that which was in store for him. But Cormac, free of sleep, listened to him…(O’Grady 1892:362)” When Teigué woke up, he declared it was time to go to battle.

The battle was harsh, with men falling equally from both sides. Lughaid, who was injured during the battle, still managed to bring Fergus’ head to Cormac. It was not the correct Fergus’ head, however. Lughaid plugged his wounds and went back out into the battle to find Fergus Blacktooth and kill him. He did thus, but Fergus was no longer king. The Ulstermen transferred the title of king as soon as they saw one fall, making Lughaid’s task nearly impossible. With a third Fergus’ head, Lughaid went in search of Cormac again. When he thought he saw him he took a shot and killed the man, but it was not Cormac. Instead it was his magician Deileenn. Now the place is known as Dumha Deiletrn or Deilenn’s Mound. (O’Grady 1892:365)

Finally, after much bloodshed and death, Cormac’s armies won. Teigue approached Cormac about the promise that had been made to him. Cormac told Teigue to go and claim his land, but then pulled aside his own charioteer, Maeldoit, and asked him to make sure Teigue did not claim Tara or Taillte and in return he would have “The freedom of thy children and of thy race for ever” (O’Grady 1892:366). Maeldoit did as he was asked. When he and Teigue reached the Liffy and Teigue realized what had been done, he killed Maeldoit. Teigue then went to Tara to ask Cormac to provide physicians to take care of his wounds. Cormac sent him physicians, but told them to introduce various “deleterious matters: beetles, awns of barley [and so forth], with the intent to work their destruction and death…” to Teigue and Lughaid’s wounds (O’Grady.
1892:366-367). When Teigue realized that he was dying, he sent word to Cormac Cas and Fiacha Broadcrown son of Eoghan, requesting them to send him physicians of their own to see if he might be saved. Cormac went to Lughaid, assuming he would die soon, and asked about the death of his father, Art son of Conn, who was killed by Lughaid. Lughaid for his part was furious about the question and his imminent death.

Hereupoun, at the question that Cormac had put to him, anger and fury seized Lughaid, a swelling and a suppuration filled him up utterly; and on the instant his coagulated blood, and all that were in his inside of beetles and of worms [there planted by the venal medicine-men], discharged themselves violently and, by operation of this rage that took him, lay before his face on the green. Then in his hand he picked up a prize flagstone, and made for Cormac; but the king evading him cleared out of his way, and Lughaid made a cast of the stone that went a man’s length into the earth. Such then was the occasion of Lughaid’s recovery this time. [O’Grady 1892:367]

Teigue was also cured in a similar manner.

Here the leeches, when the house [as we have seen] was emptied about them so that besides him and themselves there were not any present, take him in hand: under a plough’s coulter they keep a smith’s bellows a-blowing till it is red, then at Teigue’s belly they feign to make a drive of it, and so [by virtue of the emotion wrought in him] the major part of such reptiles, beetles, blood-clots, and all other noxious matters as were in him, flew out and lay before them all upon the floor. Thrice in this fashion the same application was threatened to his paunch; and it left in him neither moan nor sickness, but he was whole. Teigue by the way killed the medicos that had introduced the creeping things into his inside. [O’Grady 1892:368]

Teigue then went home and prepared to fight Cormac, since Cormac decided to not allow Teigue access to his promised land. With the threat of violence, Cormac stepped aside, and allowed Teigue to have the land as was promised (O’Grady 1892:368).
The opening paragraph of this myth gives us a significant amount of information about Samhain.

From this we learn that Samhain was when the harvest was ripe, leading it to be one of the best times to have a feast, especially if you were responsible for feeding everyone. This was also the time when laws were created. This paragraph alone gives us the motif of Gatherings (Harvest and Herds and Law). It also lasted twenty-nine days, a lunar month, in this particular tale. There is a lot of Combat (Fighting and Death) as the result of Cormac’s poor hospitality, which ultimately leads to the Battle of Crinna. Journeys is another motif that is present in *The Battle of Crinna* when Cormac went in search of people to help fight. Journeys also fits due to Cormac’s travels from Tara to Munster and the Glen of Aherlach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 15: The Battle of Crinna</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tale Type</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cycle</td>
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</table>
| People | Cormac, Grandson of Conn  
Fergus Blacktooth  
Teigue son of Clain  
Cairbre  
Lughaid |
| Places | Tara  
Munster  
Glen of Aherlach |
| Motifs | • Gatherings  
  ○ Harvest  
  ○ Herds  
  ○ Laws  
• Combat  
  ○ Fighting  
  ○ Death  
• Journeys |
| Actions/Events | • Feasting  
• Laws were created |
Dindshenchas

The Dindshenchas, or Lore of Places, are stories that relate how various locations received their names (Map 4, located on page 163). For this section the author has provided brief summaries or just quotes from the fourteen Dindshenchas tales involving Samhain found in the Bodleian Dinnshenchas, Rennes Dindshenchas, and Metrical Dindshenchas tales, followed by an explanation of their overall importance to Samhain and the tale chart. These are followed by The Yew of the Disputing Sons which is also a Dindshenchas tale but came from a different source.

The Bodleian Dinnshenchas

Tuag Inbir

At the Feast of Tara, Fiugail son of Eogabail found Tuang daughter of Conall Collamair and decided to take her to Manannan mac Lir. He used magic to make her sleep and transported her to the Land of the Everliving Women. He left her by the side of the inver of Glass mac to go talk to Manannan. After he left, a wave came and drowned her. This wave could have also been Manannan carrying her away [Stokes 1892:510]

The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindshenchas

The Two Cloenfertaes

“The Two Cloenfertaes [sloping trenches] are to the west of Gráinne’s Fort. In the southern Cloenfertae the girls were slain by the Leinstermen on the day of samain (Nov. 1)” (Stokes 1894:287-288).

Móin Gai Glais

“On Samhain Cúldub son of Dam Dub went out to find someone to kill. He killed Fidrad son of Dam Dub. Gae Glas son of Luinde, who had an intractable spear, followed Cúldub and killed him with his spear” (Gwynn 1941:65).
The Metrical Dindshenchas

Bend Etair II

This is from *The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel* when the descendants of Donn Désa placed a stone for each man going into battle at Liab Leccach. Each survivor carried a stone away after the battle, making it simple to count the dead.

It was on the very night of Samain, an occasion for foray and fighting, up to Derg’s oaken house, full of doors, when they over-mastered Conaire, This was their road from Long Laga, along shallow Tond Uairbeoil, to Glenn da Gruad across Gabar across Suan and across Sechora, To the point of outlook clear at Oe Cualann under like rule, to dark Cuilend, over Crecca, over Sruthar, over Sliab Lecga. The 'Mountain of Sobail' son of old Sengand, by every certain lawful division, till the time of Ingcel noble and splendid was the original name of the ancient mountain. Then said Lomna the buffoon, without gloom or dejection, "Leave ye here for a lucky goal a hand-stone for every hero." "Everyone of this loving lucky host that is left after the slaughter and havoc let them come hither in due order to fetch each man his stone. "Thence shall ye all know the losses of your brave band; there will not be present at the roll-call aught but a stone for every dead man slain." From those stones till now clear above the occurrences of the land is Sliab Lecga to my searching gaze; even without sight of eyes it is not wholly dark. [Gwynn 1941:117, 119, 121]
In this tale, Oengus was in love with Englec, the daughter of Elcmar of Cleitech, but she did not return his affection. When she left with Midir, Oengus was distraught.

The illustrious Mac in Oc came southward to Ceru Cermna on the blazing hurrying Samain to play with his fellow-warriors. 25] Mider came – alas the day! he came upon her after they had gone, he carries off with him Englec from her home thence to the Sid of the men of Femen. When noble Oengus heard 30] of the pursuit of his darling, he went in search of her (I say sooth) to the famous hill whence she was borne off. This was the food of his band — bright feast — blood-red nuts of the wood: 35] he casts the food from him on the ground; he makes lamentation around the hillock. Though it be called the Hill of Bua of combats, this is the equal-valid counter-tale: we have found that hence 40] from that 'nut-wailing' Cnogba is named. [Gwynn 1941:41, 43, 45, 47]

This hill was known as great Druim Elga, until the days of ireful heather-brown Fingen: here came Rothniam from the populous Sidhe to meet Fingen, tall and fair. Every Samhain-tide would the queen and the princely youth come hither; they would part from their attendants till daylight and chant an ever-doleful song. Thenceforth the son of Luchta was assured, as omens portended, that she would tell him by word of mouth that he should rule over the fair surface of Banba. The dazzling Rothniam used to say that he should make tryst with Fotla of Fal: she set forth to him severally the wonders of Banba's bright surface. [Gwynn 1941: 337, 339]

There are two for the Fornocht tale, one by Stokes from 1894 and the other by Gwynn in 1941. The author used the older Stokes translation from the prose Dindshenchas because it
includes a description of Uinche’s talent: he only spoke for three days before and after Samhain and when he did he ordained the future.

Otherwise Fornocht, that is Uinche Keymouth, and hence Keymouth is said, because of a certain man whose lips were locked when he was spoken to. For Uinche only spoke for three days and three nights before samain (Nov.1) and after samain in every year, and he would announce to his household the full deeds of the year like any prophet. One and twenty men always his complement.

Now Uinche went from the battle of Áth Cinn Mara which he had fought with Find, and came to the foot of Druim Den, that is, a druim (ridge) between two waters (dá en), a water to the east thereof and a water to the west – hence it was formerly called Druim Den and there was also a wood then. Uinche chanced to come to that fort and he divided his men into three sevens, to wit, a third for felling the trees, and another third for slaughtering the people, and the third third for burning the fort and the other buildings. So in that wise they left it quite bare, quite naked (fornocht).

After a year Find returned from the east and saw his fort quite naked, smokeless, houseless, fireless, - grassgrown, too, quite naked. And they, to wit, Find and Ossian and Cáilte, pursue Uinche to Áth ind Uinchi, and (there) Uinche fell by them, to wit, seven by each man and Uinche by Ossian and Cáilte, for Find had been badly wounded in that encounter. Whence Ath ind Uinchi and Fornocht are so called [Stokes 1894:27]

Loch Da Gabar

Loch Da Gabar—the reason of the name ye shall learn from me, in sooth, O princes from strong Bregros! 'tis a story of steeds of old. Here were drowned (inglorious might!) the horses of Eochu, king of Munster: wanton the wild thing that chased them thither: Gaeth and Grian were their names. They were brought with homage at the feast of Tara from the bull-king, Eochaid Marc-cend, ruler of chieftains, to the King, mighty Enna, noble and bounteous. A slender foal drove them once in panic, issuing from the glen where Glasgen dwelt: they fled before him, a fatal course, till they leapt their leap into the warriors' lake. [Gwynn 1941:183]
Loch Garman

Garman, son of Boinm Licce, stole the queen’s coronet at Samhain at Temair. He ran with it to Inber Slane in the South. Cathair’s men caught up to him and drowned Garman in Lough Garman.

The Feast of Temair every third year, 
for implementing of laws and ordinances, 
which were made firmly at that time 
by the noble kings of Erin. 
Cathair of the many kinsmen held 
the right pleasant feast of the kings of Temair; 
to keep the feast came — the better cheer! — 
the men of Erin to the same spot. 
Three days before Samain, a standing custom, 
three days after it, it was a good custom, 
the gathering spent, and vast the blaze before them, 
carousing ever the length of the week. 
No theft, no manslaying, 
among them at this season; 
no play of weapons nor wounds, 
no brooding over enmity. 
Whoever should do any of these things 
was a culprit fated to evil doom; 
money in atonement would not be accepted from him, 
but his life was required straightway. [Gwynn 1941:171, 173]

Mag Léna I

Mag Léna gives us another myth: Mac Dá Thó’s Pig. The myth itself does not mention Samhain, but in this passage it states that the tale takes place at Samhain. The story is from the Ulster Cycle of tales and revolves around Ailill and Medb and Conchobar’s desire to possess Mac Dá Thó’s hound, Ailbe. Mac Dá Thó’s wife comes up with a plan to decide which province would get the dog. The two sides were tricked into thinking they were being gifted the dog. They were to come to Mac Dá Thó’s home for a feast (apparently at Samhain), and ultimately
get into a grand fight over the serving of a pig. The dog was finally given to the Ulstermen, but was decapitated by Ailill’s charioteer.

Dear is the monument, visited by scores of crowds, and dear the grave of martial memory; dear is the corpse, now spiritless, to which the swine gave lasting sepulture. Thorny the tale that was bruited there, of a fighter that never needed urging, who speaks no more: the sudden fate of Lena, that fades not, has caused dread and dire dismay. Lena, son of wealthy Mess Roida, reared a swine, worst of plagues: this was that fatal boar whereby Lena, martial foe, was slain. From him shall fierce Mag Lena of martial fame answer to its name in the north, from the noble scion who faced the fray: he departed thence, a death undesired. When the five fair provinces of Erin came, on a time, in full array, at Samain-tide, to seek the swine in the east where it had its loved abode. The noble prop of constant combats bred Ailbe sleek and dappled, smooth of poll: many a host he laid under earth in the east, that perfect hound, fell and dear. [Gwynn 1941:193, 195]

Mag Slecht

Here used to stand a lofty idol, that saw many a fight, whose name was the Cromm Cruaich; it caused every tribe to live without peace. Alas for its secret power! the valiant Gaedil used to worship it: not without tribute did they ask of it to satisfy them with their share in the hard world. He was their god, the wizened Cromm, hidden by many mists: as for the folk that believed in him, the eternal Kingdom beyond every haven shall not be theirs. For him ingloriously they slew their hapless firstborn with much wailing and peril, to pour their blood round Cromm Cruaich. Milk and corn they asked of him speedily in return for a third part of all their progeny: great was the horror and outcry about him. To him the bright Gaedil did obeisance: from his worship—many the crimes—the plain bears the name Mag Slecht. Thither came Tigernmas, prince of distant Tara, one Samain eve, with all his host: the deed was a source of sorrow to them. They stirred evil, they beat palms, they bruised bodies, wailing to the demon who held them thralls, they shed showers of tears, weeping prostrate. Dead the men, void of sound strength the hosts of Banba, with land-wasting Tigernmas in the north, through the worship of Cromm Cruaich—hard their hap! For well I know, save a fourth part of the eager Gaedil, not a man—lasting the snare—escaped alive, without death on his lips. Round Cromm Cruaich there the hosts did obeisance: though it brought them under mortal shame, the name cleaves to the mighty plain. Ranged in ranks stood idols of stone four times three; to beguile the hosts grievously the figure of the Cromm was formed of gold.
Since the kingship of Heremon, bounteous chief, worship was paid to stones till the coming of noble Patrick of Ard Macha.
He plied upon the Cromm a sledge, from top to toe; with no paltry prowess he ousted the strengthless goblin that stood here. [Gwynn 1941:19, 21, 23]

**Moenmag**

Moen first received (lasting his fame)
by his science reward for much shaving
(the company of historians declares it at Samain),
in reward for shaving he got Berra-main.
Berra-main, noble guerdon of shaving,
Moen of the kingly household got it
from the children of Golam of the shouts,
so that they might be famous for unfailing generosity.
He it was who was shaved here first
.he was not urged thereto without sure knowledge)
Forbarr the wright of the hosts, a sight!
His fair cheek first was shaved. [Gwynn 1941:335, 337]

**Slemain Mide**

Slemain Mide, whence the name? Not hard to say. When all were bidden by the king of Ireland to the feast of Tara, a feast used to be celebrated by the king of Meath likewise on this hill. For the king of Meath was under a gess to keep the feast of Samain on the hill yonder, when the feast of Tara was held by the king of Ireland. It was violation of a gess for the king of Ireland if the feast of Slemain were not celebrated by the king of Meath, when he himself held the feast of Tara. Hence the place is called Slemain, that is, ‘mountain of wealth’; for it was great wealth for the king of Meath, alone among the kings of Erin, not to contribute to the feast of Tara, etcetera.
Slemain, that is, ‘the mountain of Maen’, that is, Maen, the fosterer of Morann son of Cairpre Cend Cait, dwelt there when the Peasant Tribes held sway over Erin. [Gwynn 1941:297, 299]

**Slige Dala**

There was a ban against going to Temair
to a banquet after sunset by strict custom:
to him that was under ban there was clamour (raised against him)
toward the feast of Temair.
Samain night with its ancient lore
was occasion for new and merry custom:
it was learned in deserts,
in oakwoods, from spirits, and fairy folk. [Gwynn 1941:281]
The *Dindshenchas* tales have a wide range of Samhain content and cover almost every motif established in this paper, including Supernatural (Otherworld Journeys, Fairies and Elves, Persons with Extraordinary Powers, and Ordaining the Future), Gatherings (Law and Assembly), Wooing and Trysts, Combat (Fighting and Death), Peace, and Journeys. Almost every tale contains some form of violence or death, though there were a few examples of peaceful gatherings. There were a couple of tales with some points of interest. First in the Loch Garman tale, we learn about the Feast of Temair.

The Feast of Temair every third year, for implementing of laws and ordinances, which were made firmly at that time by the noble kings of Erin...No theft, no manslaying, among them at this season; no play of weapons nor wounds, no brooding over enmity. Whoever should do any of these things was a culprit fated to evil doom; money in atonement would not be accepted from him, but his life was required straightway. [Gwynn 1941:171,173]

This gives us a basic outline of the Samhain tradition. There was a gathering where laws were made and if a law was broken during the feasts it was punishable by death.

Another interesting passage was about Slemain Mide.

When all were bidden by the king of Ireland to the feast of Tara, a feast used to be celebrated by the king of Meath likewise on this hill. For the king of Meath was under a gess to keep the feast of Samain on the hill yonder, when the feast of Tara was held by the king of Ireland. It was a violation of gess for the king of Ireland if the feast of Slemain were not celebrated by the king of Meath, when he himself held the feast of Tara. [Gwynn 1941:297,299]

It is established in other tales that not everyone went to Tara for Samhain because they attended their own king’s feast. But from this we learn that it was a violation of a geis for the Feast of Tara and the Feast at Slemain to not happen at the same time. Further investigation
should be done on the relationship between these two locations and a better understanding should be established for how often the Festival of Tara took place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 16: The Dindshenchas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tale Type</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Myth Cycle</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **People** | Conall Collamair  
Flugail, son of Eogabail  
Tuag, daughter of Conall Collair  
Etain  
Oengus/Mac Oc  
Midir  
Ossin  
Cailte  
Unchi |
| **Places** | Tara  
Cloenfertae (South)  
Tuag Inbir  
Móin Gai Glais  
Cnogba  
Fornocht  
Ford of Unchi Eochairbel  
Sliab Lecga  
Loch Garman  
Temair  
Inber Slane  
Slige Dala  
Moenmag  
Druim Fingin  
Mag Slecht  
Mag Léna  
Slemain Mide  
Loch Da Gabar |
| **Motifs** | • Supernatural  
  o Marvels  
    ▪ Otherworld Journeys  
    ▪ Fairies and Elves  
    ▪ Persons with Extraordinary Powers  
  o Ordaining the Future  
• Gatherings  
  o Law  
  o Assembly  
• Wooing and Trysts |
The Yew of the Disputing Sons

“The poem belongs to the class known as *Dindshenchas*, for it explains the name of a certain tree, the Yew of the Disputing Sons; and the story it tells is that of the cause of the Battle of Mag Mucrama, much as it is told in the text which bears that title, but with some differences of detail” (Dillon 1946:154) (Map 4, located on page 163). This summary is based on the 1994 translation by Caitlín Matthews found in *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Wisdom* (1994:428-431).

Ailill claimed a meadow for his horses to graze in which stretched from Dún Cláire to Dún Gair, to Áne, to Dún Ochair (Matthews 1994:429). This land belonged to the sidhe-folk, who were displeased by the intrusion. To show their displeasure, the sidhe-folk would “destroy the grass every Samain” (Matthews 1994:429). Ailill and Ferchess son of Commán went to watch the destruction one day. They saw three people approach; two men and one woman who...
were driving cattle. The cattle were eating and trampling the grass while the people were singing songs that would make “the race of Adam sleep” (Matthews 1994:429). Ferchess recommended that he and Ailill not take any action until they had melted wax in their ears so they would not hear the music.

Ailill fought against one of the men, Éogabul, and killed him (Matthews 1994:429). Ailill then turned his attention to the woman, Áne. Ailill raped Áne, who then took a knife and cut off his right ear, giving him the name Ailill Bare-Ear (Matthews 1994:430). Ailill, angered by her assault on him, killed Áne and left her there. Ailill and Ferchess did not harm the third man, Fer Fí, in the attack, so he returned to “the sidhe-mound where his kinfolk lived” (Matthews 1994:430)

“The next day, at dawn, the mounted hosts of the sidhe came out; they burned Dún Cláre and Dún Crott, they caused a scouring blaze” (Matthews 1994:430). The sidhe-folk then decided to move on to Dún Ochair Mág to kill Ailill and the daughter of Conn of The Hundred Battles.

Fer Fí was not comfortable with the decision to go after Conn’s daughter, saying they had no claim to her. Fer Fí instead went west with his brother, Aebléán, and created the Yew of the Disputing Sons (Matthews 1994:430). The tree was made at Ess Máge. Three people came to claim the tree: Mac Con, Cían, and Éogan. “Mac Con claimed the tree forthrightly, both the old wood and the green growth; Cían here claimed it from the seed, both the straight and crooked growth. No less comprehensively was it claimed by Eogan, who claimed all that grew above ground and all that grew beneath.” (Matthews 1994:430) The three men were mad that the other two had also claimed the entire tree, and decided to turn to Ailill to make a judgment as to who should get the tree. Ailill made a decision in favor of Éogan, upsetting Mac Con. Mac Con challenged Ailill to battle to avenge himself, and Ailill agreed to fight him, leading to the battle
of Cenn Febrat (Matthews 1994:430). The events of the battle of Cenn Febrat, including the maiming of Mac Con and the death of the jester of the Dárine, Da Dera, lead to the battle of Mag Mucrama. Many men died at this battle, including Art son of Conn (king of Ireland), Bénne Britt of the Britons, Mac Con, Ferchess son of Commán, and Sadb daughter of Conn.

It is not a tree but a fairy vision, its kind does not exist: that trunk is not of wood, but a horrible and evil substance.

The shade of the tree was shelter from keen winds for three hundred warriors; it would have been enough for a house in dry weather, it was a protection against every harm. [Dillon 1946:164]

It is hidden secretly by the elves with mysterious control; only one unfortunate in a hundred finds it, it is a lasting injury, a misfortune for ever.

Thy princes fell north and south, from the venom of the yew of russet boughs, and east and west: it is sad to ask about it. [Dillon 1946:165]

In this myth Samhain is a day for violence, starting with the annual destruction of the field that Ailill used to feed his horses. Why did the attack only come at Samhain and not all year? There is once again the possibility that this was the only time of year the sidhe-folk had the ability to attack the field either because that was when they could emerge from the sidhe or because that was when their magic was the most potent, or perhaps setting a bad precedent for the year (no grass in this field at Samhain, bad luck with grass in all fields for the rest of the year), or it could be that that is simply when they launched attacks such as this. The motifs for Samhain in this myth include Supernatural (Marvels, Fairies and Elves, Persons with Extraordinary Powers) and Combat (Fighting and Death). The key players in this myth are Ailill
(not for a typical reason a king is involved in a Samhain myth, which appears to be the hosting of a feast, but due to attacks on his land), Éogabul who was one of the sidhe-folk who attacked Ailill’s land and was killed by Ailill, Áne who also attacked Ailill’s land and was raped and murdered by Ailill, Fer Fí who also attacked Ailill but escaped, and his brother Aebleán who made the yew tree, and the three half-brothers who fought over the tree (Mac Con, Cían, and Éogan). There were other people in the myth, but they were not very active and did not seem to play a major role in the events of the tale. The main location associated with Samhain would be the field involved in the original dispute was over and Ess Máge where the tree was made.

Matthews offered an explanation preceding her translation as to why men would be driven to fight over a tree.

It may be thought strange for princely warriors to fight over a tree, but the ancient trees of Ireland were focal points of tribal meeting and were thought to possess memory and have the power of witness. Trees were central emblems of tribal continuity. The yew tree of this tale is fashioned by the skills of the sidhe and can only be discovered by those whom the faery wish to punish. [Matthews 1994:429]
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 17: The Yew of the Disputing Sons</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tale Type</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Myth Cycle</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| **People** | Ailill  
Éogabul  
Áne  
Fer Fí  
Aebleán  
Three half brothers who fought for the tree (Mac Con, Cían, and Éogan) |
| **Places** | Ailill’s field  
Ess Máge |
| **Motifs** | • Supernatural  
  o Marvels  
  o Fairies and Elves  
  o Persons with Extraordinary Powers  
• Combat  
  o Fighting  
  o Death |
| **Actions/Events** | • The sídhe-folk destroyed the field Ailill used for his horses  
• Ailill and Ferchess son of Commán fought and killed two of the sídhe-folk who attacked his field  
• The sídhe-folk made the Yew Tree to cause fighting and death in retaliation for what was done to Éogabul and Áne |

**Roll of the Kings**

Two of the kings listed in *The Roll of the Kings* have Samhain in their story.

The first is Sírna Soegalach. “He it is who separated the principedom of Ulaid from Temair; and it was he who avenged Rothechtaid s. Maen, his father’s grandfather, upon them. This is that Rothechtaid whom the Ulaid slew in treachery in Cruachu” (Macalister 1956:241). Apparently Sírna fought at the battle of Samhain, but no explanation is given in the passage as to what that was. There are two mentions of a Battle of Samhain however in the *Annals of the Four Masters*.

The first mention, which is most likely the one being discussed here:
Sirna Saeghlach, son of Dian, after having been a century and a half in the sovereignty of Ireland fell by Roitheachtaigh, son of Roan, at Aillinn. This was the Sirna who gained the battle of Aircealtair over the Ultonians; the two battles of Sliabh Airbhreach; the battle of Ceann Duin, in Assal; the battle of Moin Foichnigh, in Ui Failghe, over the Martini and Ernai; the battle of Luachair; the battle of Claire; the battle of Samhain; the battle of Cnoc Ochair. An attack was made by him on the Fomorians, in the territory of Meath. It was by him, moreover, was fought the battle of Moin Troghaidhe, in Ciannachta, when Lughair, son of Lughaidh, of the race of Emhear, had brought in a force of Fomorians into Ireland, with their king, Ceasarn by name. Sirna drew the men of Ireland to make battle against them to Moin Trogaicthe. As they were fighting the battle a plague was sent upon them, of which Lughair and Ceasarn perished, with their people, and a countless number of the men of Ireland along with them. (O’Donovan 1848)

The second mention:

These are the battles of Cormac fought against Munster this year: the battle of Berre; the battle of Loch Lein; the battle of Luimneach; the battle of Grian; the battle of Classach; the battle of Muiresc; the battle of Fearta, in which fell Eochaidh Taehfada of the Long Side, son of Oilioll Olum; the battle of Samhain, in which fell Cian, son of Oilioll Olum; and the battle of Ard Cam. [O’Donovan 1848]

The massacre of the girls at Cleanfearta, at Teamhair, by Dunlang, son of Enna Niadh, King of Leinster. Thirty royal girls was the number, and a hundred maids with each of them. Twelve princes of the Leinstermen did Cormac put to death together, in revenge of that massacre, together with the exaction of the Borumha with an increase after Tuathal. ] [O’Donovan 1848]

The second king was Congalach mac Máeil-Mithig. “Ten years, till he fell at the hands of the Foreigners of Áth Cliath in Tech Giugraind. The battle of Muine Brocain won by Congalach against the Foreigners, where seven thousand fell. Two fiery columns appeared, a week before Samain which illuminated the whole world” (Macalister 1956:401).

These two kings cover two Samhain motifs: Combat (Fighting) and Fire.
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<th>Table 18: The Roll of the Kings</th>
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<td><strong>Tale Type</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Myth Cycle</strong></td>
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<td><strong>People</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Places</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Motifs</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Actions/Events</strong></td>
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**Three Myths with Samhain Timing**

The following myths make mention of Samhain specifically as a period of time, but Samhain does not play any particular role in the story.

*The Wooing of Emer (Tochmarc Emire)*

*The Wooing of Emer* is a Tochmarca, or wooing, tale that focuses on Cú Chulainn’s bid to marry Emer (Map 9, located on page 168). It is also a remscela tale from the Ulster Cycle (Mac Cana 1980:89). This summary is based on the translation by Meyer (1892:153-171).

The Ulstermen lived in fear that Cú Chulainn was going to steal their wives and daughters away from them, so they decided to find him a wife. Unfortunately, none of the women they brought forth satisfied Cú Chulainn. Cú Chulainn heard about a beautiful woman, Emer daughter of Forgall Monach, and decided to woo her. But Forgall Monach did not approve the match, so he sent Cú Chulainn to Scotland to train with Scáthach in hopes he would die in the training. While Cú Chulainn was gone, Forgall tried to marry Emer off to Lugaid mac Nóis, a king of Munster. The king refused to marry Emer because she was in love with Cú Chulainn.

Meanwhile, Cú Chulainn’s training in Scotland was going well until Scáthach’s rival, Aife, attacked. Cú Chulainn fought her and convinced her to call off her rivalry with Scáthach.
and have his child. Cú Chulainn then returned to Emer, but her father still refused to allow her to marry him. Cú Chulainn, now a better warrior due to his training, attacked Forgall’s fortress and abducted Emer, killing Forgall in the process.

Samhain plays a small role in this tale. Emer used Samhain as a measurement of time when she told Cú Chulainn what he must do to win her heart. “’None comes to this plain,’ said she, ‘who does not go without sleep from summer’s end to the beginning of spring, from the beginning of spring to May-day, and again from May-day to the beginning of winter” (Hull 1892b:161).

There is only one motif important to Samhain here, and that is Wooing and Trysts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 19: The Wooing of Emer</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tale Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth Cycle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| People | Cú Chulainn  
Emer  
Loeg |
| Places | Luglachta Loga |
| Motifs | Wooing and Trysts |
| Actions/Events | Cú Chulainn woos Emer |

_A Story from which it is Inferred that Mongán was Find mac Cumaill and Concerning the Cause of the Death of Fothad Airgdech (Scél asa mBerar Combad hé Find Mac Cumail)

Mongán aní día fil Aided Fothaid Airgdig a Scél so sís)_

_A Story from which it is Inferred that Mongán was Find mac Cumaill and Concerning the Cause of the Death of Fothad Airgdech_ is a _Scél_ (“story, narration, tale; news, tidings”) from the Fenian Cycle (Scela 2007) (Map 7, located on page 166). This is based on the Scela website because the myth is not mentioned in Mac Cana’s book. This summary is based on Anne Lea’s translation, found in _The Celtic Heroic Age_ (2005:218-220).
“The poet [Forgoll] used to tell a story to Mongán every night. He had so many that they were thus from Samain to Beltaine – the poet receiving as his due wealth and food from Mongán in return” (Lea 2005:218).

Mongán asked the poet Forgoll to tell him how Fothad Airgdech died. Forgoll gave him an answer, but Mongán insisted that Forgoll was wrong. Forgoll was insulted and said he would satirize Mongán’s family and land. Mongán offered Forgoll all of his land except for his freedom. Mongán’s wife was devastated, her own freedom offered up to Forgoll in an attempt to stop the satire and save his people (Lea 2005:218). Mongán told her not to fear, that help was on its way and asked Forgoll to wait to claim her.

A warrior came to Ráith Mór and he was asked about the death of Fothad Airgdech. The warrior told Forgoll that he was wrong. The warrior addressed Mongán as Finn, who then told him not to call him that (Lea 2005:219). The warrior, who is revealed to be Caílte - Finn’s foster son – told Forgoll (whose name means “bearing witness”) how he killed Fothad Airgdech at the Ollarba river and offered proof (Lea 2005:219-220).

Samhain played a small part in this story. It was used at the very beginning as a measurement of time, specifically for how long Forgoll the poet could keep Mongán entertained with stories. “The poet used to tell a story to Mongán every night. He had so many that they were thus from Samain to Beltaine…” (Lea 2005:218). This puts it in the Gatherings motif under Storytelling.
The Death of Conn (Aided Chuinn Chéitchathaig)

The Death of Conn does not appear in Mac Cana’s lists. It seems logical this myth would fit under Aided, or death tales because it is about the death of a hero (Map 1, located on page 160). This very short myth has been sorted into the Historical Cycle. This summary is based on the translation by O. J. Bergin (1912).

Conn’s brother, Eochaid Bélbuide, was “ill-bred and unruly, and was destroying his brother’s rule and authority,” and felt threatened by Conn, so he went into hiding in Ulster (Bergin 1912:275). Conn sent men to each of the kings of Ulster (the kings being Cairbre Gnáthchorad son of Mál son of Rochraide and Bresal son of Brión) so that Eochaid would not find a safe place to stay. These men traveled north from Tara and learned that Eochaid was hunting at Sliab Breg. They found him there and killed him. Because he had been “unprotected,” this was seen as a horrible crime by the kings of Ulster (Bergin 1912:275). The Ulster kings said that Conn must die to make up for what had been done to Eochaid Bélbuide but peace was made. Bresal or Tibraide son of Mál would not accept the peace though, because he was afraid of Conn and feared for the Ulster kings due to Conn’s oppression (Bergin 1912:275).

Tibraide spent three years with the king of Scotland, Failbe Findloga, who suggested that Tibraide return to Ireland and make peace with Conn. He returned, but still did not trust Conn.
He and his men dressed up as veiled women and went to Conn, who was preparing for the Feast of Tara. Conn was alone, so Tibraide took the opportunity and killed Conn (Bergin 1912:277).

Only the very end of this myth, specifically when Conn dies at Tara, takes place at Samhain and it seems to be more of an aside than anything significant. Tibraide and Conn of the Hundred Battles were the major players in this myth. Eochaid Bélbuide’s death is the instigation for the tale, even though it was not connected to Samhain. The only motif that fits the Samhain portion of this myth is Combat (Fighting and Death).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 21: The Death of Conn</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tale Type</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Myth Cycles</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **People**                  | Conn  
Tibraide               |
| **Places**                  | Tara |
| **Motifs**                  | • Combat  
  o Fighting  
  o Death |
| **Actions/Events**          | Tibraide killed Conn while he was preparing for the Festival of Tara |
Table 22: All of the myths and their motifs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myths</th>
<th>Supernatural Marvellous Persons with Extraordinary Powers</th>
<th>Supernatural Marvelous Fairies and Elves</th>
<th>Supernatural Ordaining the Future</th>
<th>(Gatherings) Assembly</th>
<th>(Gatherings) Storytelling</th>
<th>(Gatherings) Law</th>
<th>(Gatherings) Harvest and Herds</th>
<th>Wooing and Trysts</th>
<th>(Combat) Fighting</th>
<th>(Combat) Death Journeys</th>
<th>Fire</th>
<th>Peace</th>
<th>Silence</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Book of the Takings of Ireland</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>The First Battle of Moytura</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Second Battle of Moytura</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Settling of the Manor of Tara</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Wooing of Étain</td>
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<td>The Birth of Conchobar</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Tragic Death of Cu Roi Mac Dairi</td>
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<td>The Adventures of Nera</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Cattle-Raid of Regamna</td>
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<td>The Raid for Dartaid's Cattle</td>
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<td>The Intoxiciation of the Ulstermen</td>
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<td>The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn</td>
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<td>The Táin</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Boyhood Deeds of Finn mac Cumhaill</td>
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Chapter 4: Results

The Myths in Summary

These myths offer a vast amount of information about Samhain, including how it was observed, for how long, and what was important about the day. The following is a breakdown of the motifs, people and places important to Samhain.

Motifs

The overarching categories that the Samhain motifs can be sorted into are: The Supernatural, Gatherings, Wooing and Trysts, Combat, Journeys, Fire, Peace, and Silence.

The Supernatural (Marvels, Otherworld Journeys, Fairies and Elves, Persons with Extraordinary Powers, Ordaining the Future)

The first category is Supernatural. This is the aspect of Samhain that most people are familiar with and has been the focus of most Samhain research. Surprisingly, there was not as great a focus on the supernatural in the Samhain myths as was expected. This category is where Tom Cross’ motifs fit the best, so we shall use his classifications to create the subcategories here.

The first subcategory within this group is Marvels. The subsections in Marvels that will be used include Otherworld Journeys, Fairies and Elves, and Persons with Extraordinary Powers (Cross 1952:x).

In Ireland, the sídhe (also referred to as the Otherworld) are the places where supernatural beings (specifically the Tuatha Dé) live. These were the old gods who eventually were known as fairies. We learn two main things about the sídhe through the myths. First, we learn in The Boyhood Deeds of Finn Mac Cumhaill (Fenian Cycle) (Carey 2005b:194-201), The Sick-Bed of Cú Chulainn (Ulster Cycle) (Leahy 1905:176-198), and The Adventures of Nera (Ulster Cycle) (Carey 2005d:127-132) that the sídhe are only open to humans at Samhain. There are at least
two different interpretations for how long Samhain is, and therefore presumably how long the sídhe was open. First is the 29-day model as seen in *The Battle of Crinna*: a fortnight (fourteen days) before Samhain, Samhain day, and a fortnight after. The second and seemingly most common model is seven days as seen in *The Tidings of Conchobar*: three days before Samhain day, Samhain day, and three days after. The few myths that do explain the length of time that Samhain was observed specifically cite Samhain day, suggesting that there may have been a specific day, probably noted by a lunar phase linked with a solar alignment at the sites mentioned later in this paper, that was specifically Samhain. Specifically mentioning the day could also be the result of Christian authors applying the new observation of Samhain, redressed as All Saints Day and All Souls Day, as only one day. This means that any business that people had with the Tuatha Dé had to be taken care of before Samhain ended.

It is not discussed in the myths whether or not the people of the sídhe can only appear on Samhain. In the Ulster Cycle it seems that the Tuatha Dé are just as bound by the restrictions of the veil, seeing as they cause the most problems at Samhain. However, during the Fenian Cycle the gods can move back and forth, like when Oengus left the Brug to assist Diarmuid in *The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne* (O’Grady 1857:370-421). This could either mean that for the Ulster Cycle the storytellers chose to focus on Samhain mischief, or, the rules were different for the Fenian tales due either to abilities in the people in the stories themselves or a change in the belief system. Perhaps by the time storytellers were passing on the Fenian tales Samhain was no longer of great significance. The idea that Samhain was only truly popular for a certain period of time would also explain why there was a higher concentration of Samhain tales found in the Ulster Cycle and not in the other myth cycles. It could be that Samhain was an integral part of the religion during the period that these stories were initially being created and told, but faded
into the background later without disappearing entirely. It could also be that there is a special association between the people of the Ulster Cycle, especially Cú Chulainn, and Samhain. Cú Chulainn’s relationship with Samhain is discussed under “People” later in this chapter.

In *The Yew of the Disputing Sons* (Historical Cycle) the “sidhe-folk” (a term found in John and Caitlin Matthews translation in *The Celtic Encyclopedia of Wisdom* [1994]) would destroy the grass in Ailill’s pasture every Samhain because they were displeased that he was grazing his horses there. The sidhe-folk also would sing songs to put humans to sleep and then steal cattle in this myth (Matthews 1994:429). This limitation to Samhain could be symbolic of something else that has been forgotten or because it was the only time that it was possible for them to do so. In *The Sick-Bed of Cú Chulainn* (Ulster Cycle) (Leahy 1905:176-198) two women attacked Cú Chulainn in a vision on Samhain. This attack in Cú Chulainn’s vision left him gravely wounded in the real world as well. A year later (the following Samhain), he was healed and one of the women returned to speak to him. The suddenness of his healing and the sudden reappearance of this woman who wants to heal him (but did not do so any sooner) could also be the result of her limited ability to enter and exit the sidhe. In a final example, in *The Raid for Dartaid’s Cattle* (Ulster Cycle) (Leahy 1906:69-81) the Tuatha Dé appear to different people and play them against each other, resulting in hundreds of deaths. These examples could exemplify that the Tuatha Dé were just as trapped by the laws of the veil as humans were, or these events may have happened when they did because Samhain was the appropriate time to engage in cattle raids and other hostilities. In his book *Seahenge*, Francis Pryor argues that confrontations occurred during the winter because that was when there was time for such things because the harvest was in and there was time before the next growing period. Pryor’s arguments came from exploring examples of gatherings and cattle stealing in Britain (Pryor
Fighting through the winter could also be an active representation of the struggle between the darkness of winter and the light of spring, a holdover from an earlier belief.

*The Adventures of Nera* is different from the previously mentioned tales, which were ambiguous as to why the attacks only occur on Samhain. In *The Adventures of Nera* it is specifically stated by Nera’s wife (who is a woman of the sidhe herself,) that the hordes will attack at Samhain because they can only attack at Samhain. “This warband can do nothing for a year, until the next Samain. They will come again next Samain night, for the *sidhe* of Ireland are always open at Samain.”(Carey 2005d:130-131)

The second thing that we learn from these myths is that time passes differently in the sidhe than it does in the human world. This is an issue that arises in *The Adventures of Nera* when Nera goes to the sidhe. To him and the people with him three days have passed, while in Connacht no time at all has elapsed (Carey 2005d:129). We also see this in a myth that does not contain Samhain, *Oisín in Tír na nÓg* (Rolleston 1990:270-276). In this myth, Oisín finds himself drawn to the sidhe by a beautiful young woman. He believes he has been there for three weeks, but when he returns to the human realm he learns that three hundred years have passed (Rolleston 1990:275).

There were some myths that gave advice on how to protect oneself from the sidhe-folk and other creatures that wandered at Samhain. *The Adventures of Nera* (Carey 2005d:127-132) was one of these myths that focused on protection against the dead in particular. In this myth a dead man came back to life and asked Nera to take him to find a drink of water, which Nera did. The first two houses they went to the dead man could not enter because they had thrown out the water and the fire had been banked. In the third house however, neither of these things had been done so the dead man was able to go inside and get his drink of water, killing the entire family
when he was done (Carey 2005d:128). The moral is a simple one: “Hence it is not good for there to be water left over from washing and bathing, or a hearth-fire which has not been raked, or a tub with slops in it, in a house after bedtime” (Carey 2005d: 128). More hints on how to protect yourself could probably be found in the myths if we knew how to interpret them. The Adventures of Nera, however, gives listeners a lot of advice and is a good place to start.

The next subcategory in Supernatural is Ordaining the Future. With the opening of the sidhe came also the availability of magic. At Samhain it was not unusual for someone to have a dream or a vision portraying the future, like Uinche who only spoke for the three days and nights before Samhain and when he would speak it was to tell his family about the future (Stokes 1894:328). There is also an example in The Cattle-Raid of Cooley when Medb encounters Fedelm, a woman poet of Connacht with the imbas forasnai, “the Light of Foresight” (Kinsella 1969:60-61). Medb asked Fedelm to look into the future to see the fate of her army at the end of the coming battle. Fedelm’s reply was “I see it crimson, I see it red,” foretelling the defeat of the army of Connacht (Kinsella 1969:61).

Another example of Ordaining the Future occurred in The Sick-Bed of Cú Chulainn (Leahy 1905: 176-198). In The Sick-Bed of Cú Chulainn Cú Chulainn has a dream that he is left for dead by two women who attacked him. As a result of this dream he becomes sick and close to death for a year. He later finds out that the women had originally come to his dream to ask him a favor, but due to the injury of the swans they had attacked him instead and now returned to ask again (Leahy 1905).

Prognostication also plays a role in The Adventures of Nera (Carey 2005d:127-132). In The Adventures of Nera Nera follows the Tuatha Dé into the sidhe after he sees Rath Cruachan, the home of his king, destroyed and the heads of all of the men who had been inside piled high
on the ground. Once he gets into the sidhe, he is told that what he saw was a vision of the future and could be prevented. In the end he manages to save his friends by warning them of the coming attack, giving them time to attack first (Carey 2005d).

**Gatherings (Harvest and Herds, Law, Assembly, and Storytelling)**

The second category is *Gatherings*. Samhain was a time for preparing the Harvest and Herds for winter and then celebrating together at the home of the king. Usually the gathering was a joyful occasion, but it could also be a gathering of warriors, preparing for battle.

The first subcategory is *Harvest and Herds*. We know from other sources that this was the end of the harvest season (Danaher 1972: 206, 1981: 219; Hicks 2009b: 122; Johnson 1968: 136). In *The Battle of Crinna*, we are told that this is the time for feasts because “mast and other products are ready to harvest” (O’Grady 1892:360).

The second subcategory is *Law*. It also in *The Battle of Crinna* where we learn that Samhain is when law meetings are held.

Here too is the reason for which the Feast of Tara was made at all: the body of law which all Ireland enacted then, during the interval between that and their next convention at a year’s end none might dare to transgress; and he that perchance did so was outlawed from the men of Ireland. [O’Grady 1892:360]

We also see an example of law being carried out in the beginning of *The Adventures of Nera* when two men were hanged at the beginning of Samhain. Unfortunately we are not told why the men were executed, just that they were. A *dindsenchas* tale might answer this question for us.

The Feast of Temair [Tara] every third year, for implementing of laws and ordinances, Which were made firmly at that time
by the noble kings of Erin.
Cathair of the many kinsmen held
the right pleasant feast of the kings of Temair;
to keep the feast came – the better cheer! –
the men of Erin to the same spot.
Three days before Samain, a standing custom,
three days after it, it was a good custom,
the gathering spent, and vast the blaze before them,
carousing ever the length of the week.
No theft, no manslaying,
among them at this season;
no play of weapons nor wounds,
no brooding over enmity.
Whoever should do any of these things
Was a culprit fated to evil doom;
money in atonement would not be accepted from him,
but his life was required straightway. [Gwynn 1913:171, 173]

This gives us a long list of things the men could have been hanged for. Basically, any broken law at Samhain was punishable by death. This is also an example of peace being important to Samhain. While it was only specifically stated that Samhain was a time of peace two times (a topic which is discussed later in this chapter under Peace), here we see that it was important enough that a person could be executed for failure to maintain the peace.

The next subcategory is Assembly. The men of Ireland gather at Samhain to feast with their king, either the provincial king or the high king at Tara. This would theoretically be determined by how often the Festival of Tara took place. In some sources it seems to be an annual affair, but in others it only took place every three or seven years. The answer may be somewhere in between. It is possible a Samhain feast took place each year but at a different level, sponsored by tuathal kings (rí tuaithe), overkings (ruiri), provincial kings (rí ruirech), or the high king (ard rí) in different years.

There are two times in the myths when the men of Ireland refused to gather for the Festival of Tara. The first time was in The Settling of the Manor of Tara when the nobles
refused to gather for the Festival until the land was divided. The second time was in *The Wooing of Étāín* when the men of Ireland would not gather for the Festival because the king did not have a queen. In *The Intoxication of the Ulstermen* there is some complication when two feasts take place at the same time, one held by Fintan and the other by Cú Chulainn. It was decided that everyone would attend both feasts, the first half of the night at Fintan’s and the second half of the night at Cú Chulainn’s home. When it was time to leave Fintan’s home the men decided that the women and children would be left there while they (the men) went to the feast that Cú Chulainn was holding (Koch 2005:110). The importance of women being present at Samhain feasts is mentioned but it is never explained why women had to be present, although it may be linked to the facts that the land was personified as a woman and at least some inauguration ceremonies involved the marriage of the king to the goddess of sovereignty.

In *The Sick-Bed of Cú Chulainn or The Only Jealousy of Emer* the Samhain feast is a time when warriors gather to boast about their triumphs and everyone played games, listened to poets, and watched acrobats. The largest Samhain gathering was the Festival of Tara, held at the Hill of Tara, which was the seat of the high king. According to the dindsenchas, the Feast of Tara was held in The House of Women, also known as the Banqueting Hall (*Tech Midchuarta*) (Stokes 1894:287). The Banqueting Hall is actually a processional way leading to the top of the hill from the north. It seems significant that it was given the name “The House of the Women” in the dindsenchas, again suggesting some link between women and Samhain, or perhaps women and Tara, but it is not clear what it is. In the story of Loch Da Gabar in the dindsenchas, Eochaid Marc-cend brought the king, Eochu, a gift. The gift was two beautiful horses who drowned (Gwynn 1924:183). In *The Tidings of Conchobar mac Ness* we are told that if one did not attend the Samhain feast (specifically in Emain Macha for this story) one
would go insane and die, giving us some idea of the importance of the Samhain feasts (Stokes 1910:27). This is in contrast to the dindsenchas tale about Slemain Mide. In this tale it is explained that the king of Meath was under a geis (taboo) that he had to hold a feast at Slemain Mide while the Festival of Tara was being held at Tara. The king of Meath, according to the dindsenchas, was the only king who did not attend the Festival of Tara (“When all were bidden by the king of Ireland to the feast of Tara, a feast used to be celebrated by the king of Meath likewise on his hill”) [Gwynn 1924:297, 299]).

The feast for the Festival of Tara seems to have been provided and hosted by the king himself. In The Tidings of Conchobar everyone in Conchobar’s household takes turns providing food for the rest of the house. Conchobar’s household is large enough that everyone only has to feed everyone else one day a year. Conchobar himself took Samhain as his day to feed the masses (Stokes 1910:27).

The myths also give us an idea of how long the Samhain celebrations lasted. According to The Settling of the Manor of Tara (Best 1910:121-172) and The Raid for Dartaid’s Cattle (Leahy 1906:69-81) the Samhain celebrations lasted for 3 days and 3 nights. According to The Tidings of Conchobar mac Ness (Stokes 1910:18-38) and The Sick-Bed of Cú Chulainn (Leahy 1905:176-198) the celebrations took place over 3 days before and 3 days after Samhain for a total of 7 days. In The Battle of Crinna (O’Grady 1892:360) we are given a very different timeline of 29 days (fourteen days before Samhain, and fourteen days after). All of these timelines could have been true. The length of the celebration could have depended on the province or how long was needed to perform all of the necessary tasks associated with Samhain, or it could have changed over time.
The last subcategory is *Storytelling*. Storytelling is found in many of the Samhain myths, especially in conjunction with a trip to the sidhe. Typically, a man will go to the sidhe and upon his return to the human world he will tell everyone what happened on his journey, as in *The Adventures of Nera* (Carey 2005d:130) or *The Sick-Bed of Cú Chulainn* (Leahy 1905:184). The Samhain gatherings were also a time when people were supposed to tell stories. It was mentioned in some of the myths that storytellers and poets would come to the feasts, sit by the fire, and tell their stories. Sometimes people would be called upon to tell a specific story as in *The Settling of the Manor of Tara* when Fintan told the history of Ireland to help decide how to divide Tara (Best 1910:129-172). The last story type mentioned in the myths were told by warriors. At the Samhain feasts the warriors would tell everyone about their accomplishments. They had stories about great battles and conquests, and the tongues of their enemies to prove it (a number sometimes padded with one or two cow tongues). Another warrior-story was the tale of Cú Chulainn as told by Ailill in *The Cattle Raid of Cooley*. Medb asked who Cú Chulainn was, so Fergus told her the story of his life from conception up to the present (*The Boyhood Deeds of Cú Chulainn*) (Kinsella 1969:76-92)

**Wooing and Trysts**

In Tom Cross’ index the trysts would best fit under the Sex motif (Cross 1952:xiii). I decided to create a different heading because I felt that this did not accurately explain what was happening in the myths, which was vague at best. It is evident that sometimes the organized trysts are for a sexual encounter like the one between Étaín and Ailill in *The Wooing of Étaín* (Carey 2005e:146-165), but sometimes they are for planning like in *The Tragic Death of Cú Roi* when Cú Chulainn and Cú Roi’s wife plotted how to kill her husband (Best 1905:328-332). It was not always explained what was going to happen at these meetings, however.
There are many examples of wooings and trysts taking place at Samhain. For example, in *The Wooing of Étaín* the whole story revolves around a man who falls in love with a woman. This is of course complicated by the fact that the man is married and his first wife casts a spell on the woman, Étaín, in an attempt to get rid of her (Carey 2005e:150). In *The Tragic Death of Cú Roi mac Dairi* Cú Chulainn arranged a tryst with Blathnat, Cú Roi’s wife, to plot his murder (Best 1905:329). In *The Sick-Bed of Cú Chulainn* Cú Chulainn had a tryst with another woman, causing turmoil between himself and Emer (Leahy 1905:176-198). Finally, in *The Boyhood Deeds of Finn mac Cumhaill* trysts take on a deadly turn with a body count. Every year at Samhain, the men of Ireland would go to Bri Ele to woo Ele, a woman of the sidhe. Whoever wooed Ele would suffer the death of one of the men in his party not long after leaving her (Carey 2005b:198-199). There is also a dindsenchas tale that includes a Samhain tryst. There is a tale about Englec, the daughter of Elcmar, who was the wife of Oengus. Oengus went to Ceru Cermna on Samhain, and Midir took the opportunity to kidnap Englec. Midir took Englec to “the Sidhe of the men of Femen” [i.e., Slievenamon, Co. Tipperary](Gwynn 1913:41-47).

*Combat (Fighting and Death)*

Many of the Irish myths in general include some sort of fighting, and the Samhain tales are no exception, in spite of the insistence that it is a peaceful day. Many of these tales include Fighting and Death, a point made by Hicks and Ward in their 2003 paper discussing the role of Samhain in the dindsenchas (Hicks and Ward 2003). We have already mentioned death in connection with the supernatural, specifically members of the sidhe-folk killing mortals. The first sub-category in this section is *Fighting*. We see fighting in *Cath Maige Tuired, The Wooing of Étaín* (Carey 2005e:146-165), *The Roll of the Kings* (Macalister 1956:137-565), *The Sick-Bed of Cú Chulainn* (Leahy 1905:176-198), *The Tragic Death of Cú Roi mac Dairi* (Best

In *Cath Maige Tuired* (first and second) the Tuatha De went to battle first against the Fir Bolg and then against the Fomorians for control of Ireland. In *The Wooing of Étaín* Midir lost an eye as a result of a quarrel that broke out during a game at Samhain. Midir offered to break up the fight himself to prevent quarrel between the Mac Oc and Elcmar, and lost an eye for his troubles. “A split of holly was thrown at Midir as he was intervening and it knocked one of his eyes out” (Leahy 1906). In *The Roll of the Kings* we learn that Sírna Soegalach fought at the Battle of Samhain (Macalister 1956:241). In *The Sick-Bed of Cú Chulainn* the myth starts out with the women of Ulster fighting over a flock of birds. Each woman wanted a bird, so Cú Chulainn killed the birds and gave a wing to each woman (Leahy 1905:177). In *The Tragic Death of Cú Roi mac Dairi* the fighting that took place between Cú Roi’s men and the Ulstermen over the kidnapping of Blathnat “increased on them every day from Samain to the middle of spring (Best 1905:332),” a time span that was also used in *The Cattle Raid of Cooley* (Kinsella 1969:63). *The Cattle-Raid of Cooley* contained many small battles between Cú Chulainn and the armies of Connacht as Connacht tried to acquire the Brown Bull of Cooley for Medb. *The Battle of Crinna* is about a battle that starts with the Ulstermen (the Ulidians) attacking Cormac because their housing for the Samhain feast was not good enough. Cormac had to retreat because he did not have the forces necessary to face the Ulstermen. Unfortunately for him, Cormac could not hide from the Ulstermen forever and the actual Battle of Crinna was fought (O’Grady 1892). The last myth to be discussed here is *The Yew of the Disputing Sons*. This myth begins with the sidhe-folk burning down Dun Clare and Dun Crott. As men began to fight over the yew tree that
the Tuatha Dé created, two battles were fought over it, the Battle of Mag Mucrama and the Battle of Cenn Febrat (Matthews 1994:430-431).

The last subcategory here is Death. Death has already been touched upon in other categories here. These deaths are mostly but not limited to warriors dying in battles and skirmishes.

In *The Tragic Death of Cu Roi mac Dairi*, Blathnat, the woman Cú Roi kidnapped to be his wife, was killed by Cú Roi’s poet, Ferchertne (Best 1905:332). In this same myth Fer Becrach, Cu Roi’s charioteer, died by driving his chariot into some rocks, killing both himself and Cairbre son of Conchobar after the battle that killed his master (Best 1905:331).

*The Yew of the Disputing Sons* also contained non-warrior deaths. First, three sidhe-folks destroyed Ailill’s pasture and drove off his cattle every year because they laid claim to the land. Ailill killed Éogabul and raped and killed Áne when he caught them and their brother in action. Ailill did not leave the encounter unscathed, however. Áne cut off his ear before he killed her. The people of the sidhe planned their revenge for the deaths of Éogabul and Áne. They created the Yew of the Disputing Sons at Ess Mage with the idea that it would cause strife for Ailill. “The tree gave shelter from the cutting winds, enough for three hundred warriors; its seasoned wood would have been sufficient for a house, it was a protection against all dangers” (Matthews1994:431). Three men (half-brothers), Mac Con, Cian, and Eogan claimed the tree. It was their attempts to divide the tree that resulted in battle. First was the Battle of Cenn Febrat where Mac Con was wounded and Da Dera (the fool) was killed. This battle caused the battle of Mag Mucrama where the high king of Ireland, Art mac Conn, was killed along with Ailill’s seven sons and several other warriors.
There fell the vengeful Mac Con and Ferchess mac Comman, and Sadb, daughter of Conn, from the venom of the beautiful yew. It is no tree but an apparition of the sidhe, its nature is not of this world; not of wood is its trunk, but of an horrific gloom...It is mysteriously hidden by the sidhe with artful skill. Only one in a hundred is unlucky enough to find it, then it is everlasting discovery of misfortune. [Matthews 1994:431]

There are many Dindsenchas tales that fit the *Combat* category, both for Fighting and Death. These are mostly deaths of warriors, but there is one, the story of Mag Slecht, that details the ritualistic killing of children for the god Cromm Cruaich. While it does not say when the sacrifices typically took place, one specific event did occur at Samhain:

Thither came Tigernmas, prince of distant Tara, one Samain eve, with all his host: the deed was a source of sorrow to them. They stirred evil, they beat palms, they bruised bodies, wailing to the demon who held them thralls, they shed showers of tears, weeping prostrate. Dead the men, void of sound strength the hosts of Banba, with land-wasting Tigernmas in the north, through the worship of Cromm Cruaich – hard their hap! [Gwynn 1934:21]

**Journeys**

Many journeys started at Samhain for many reasons. In some instances they were short journeys being made to the site of a feast, sometimes they were journeys to battlefields, and sometimes they were journeys to cattle-raids. With at least ten myths mentioning journeys it seems to be an important motif, and the places that are mentioned are probably of significance as well. These journeys seem to mostly travel from the northeast to the southwest, suggesting some importance to this particular direction. This does not align with the Samhain sunrise, but the lines between locations may align with the Samhain sunset. The places associated with Samhain are discussed later in this chapter.
Fire

The Samhain fire is a theme that has been studied by scholars for a while, so it was no surprise to find it as a recurring theme in the myths (Danaher 1972:209). In *The Roll of the Kings* it says “Two fiery columns appeared, a week before Samain, which illuminated the world” (Macalister 1956:401). This could be a Biblical reference, such as when God sent a fiery pillar to protect the Israelites as they fled from Egypt across the Red Sea. Some of these myths were recorded by monks so it would not be entirely unexpected to encounter Christian motifs in the myths, and, as previously discussed, the people recording these myths did use them to try to fit Ireland into Biblical history (specifically in *The Book of the Takings of Ireland*). Fire is mentioned a second time in *The Boyhood Deeds of Finn mac Cumhail*. Finn saw two fires at the Paps of Anu, one in each of the Tuatha Dé strongholds he was observing: “While Finn was there on the night of Samain he saw the two súde – that is, the two strongholds – laid bare around him after their concealing enchantmen (*fé Fiada*) had dissolved. He saw a great fire in each of the two strongholds, and heard a voice from one of them saying, ‘Is your suabais good? (Carey 2005b:199)” The Paps of Anu are known as a Beltaine site, but Finn does not seem to be watching the Beltaine cashel. There are other enclosures closer to the Paps that could be what is referred to here. The fact that the fire is mentioned seems to be important, seeing as it is a detail that does not appear to have any immediate impact on the story and could easily be left out of the description. This could have some astronomical significance, perhaps symbolizing the end of the summer season and the beginning of winter.

Peace

*Peace* is an issue that is brought up twice in the myth as being important at Samhain and is hinted at by the death sentence imposed on any law breaking during this time. This was likely
to have been due to the fact that everyone had to gather for his or her king’s feast. Fighting would be disastrous in these situations where hundreds if not thousands of people were gathered in a relatively confined location, so peace was encouraged. This is first mentioned in *The Wooing of Étain* when the Dagda wants to give his son, Oengus, the Brug, but Elcmar (Oengus's mother’s husband) already lives there. The Dagda tells Oengus that since Samhain is “a day of peace and concord among the men of Ireland” Elcmar will not be armed so it would be easy for Oengus to attack and demand the Brug (Carey 2005e:147). The idea of peace is also brought up in *The Sick-Bed of Cú Chulainn or The Only Jealousy of Emer*. A messenger from the sidhe, Aengus (Oengus), says:

O Cuchulain! In thy illness,
Thy stay would not be long;
If they were with thee, - and they would come, -
The daughters of Aedh Abrat.

Liban, in the plain of Cruaich, has said: -
She who sits at the right of Labraid the quick, -
That it would give heartfelt joy to Fand
To be espoused to Cuchulain.

Happy that day, of a truth,
On which Cuchulain would reach my land;
He should have silver and gold,
He should have abundance of wine to drink.

If my friend on this day should be
Cuchulain, the son of Soalte,
All that he has seen in his sleep
Shall he obtain without his army.

In the plain of Muirthemne, here in the south,
On the night of Samhuin, without ill luck,
From me shall be sent Liban,
O Cuchulainn, to heal thy disease.

O Cuchulain!” [O’Curry 1859]
This quote is taken from a poem recited while Cú Chulainn is still sick from his attack the year previously. I consider this part of the peace subcategory because there is so much insistence on not fighting. It was a peaceful visit to discuss a woman’s love for the Ulster hero.

_Silence_

In two of the Ulster myths, _The Tragic Death of Cú Roi mac Dairi_ and _The Sick-Bed of Cú Chulainn_ we see Cú Chulainn go a full year without speaking to anyone. In _The Sick-Bed of Cú Chulainn_ Cú Chulainn does not speak for a year after he was nearly beaten to death by two Tuatha Dé women (Leahy 1905:179). In _The Tragic Death of Cú Roi mac Dairi_ Cú Chulainn does not speak for a year after being humiliated by Cú Roi. In fact, he goes out of his way to not even be seen (Best 1905:329). This could be something important to Samhain, or it could be important to Cú Chulainn’s character. With Cú Chulainn’s importance to Samhain (which will be discussed later), even if it were just a part of his character it would most likely have some bearing on Samhain itself as well.

There is one other person who does not speak. The man, mentioned here previously for his prognostication, was named Uinche from Fornocht and he only spoke at Samhain. While Uinche’s behavior does not fit Cú Chulainn’s perfectly, it does suggest that there might be something with silence and Samhain.

The following is a list of all of the myths and how they fit into the motifs discussed above (also see Table 22 on page 114).

- **Supernatural**
  - Marvels
    - **Otherworld Journeys**
      - The Cattle-Raid of Regamna
      - The Adventures of Nera
      - Dindshenchas
- The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn

- **Fairies and Elves**
  - The Adventures of Nera
  - The Raid for Dartaíd’s Cattle
  - The Boyhood Deeds of Finn mac Cumhaill
  - The Yew of the Disputing Sons
  - Dindshenchas
  - The Táin
  - The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn

- **Persons with Extraordinary Powers**
  - The Settling of the Manor of Tara
  - The Cattle-Raid of Regamna
  - The Yew of the Disputing Sons
  - The Book of the Takings of Ireland
  - The First Battle of Moytura
  - The Second Battle of Moytura
  - The Wooing of Étaín
  - Dindshenchas
  - The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn

  - **Ordaining the Future**
    - The Cattle-Raid of Regamna
    - The Adventures of Nera
    - The Book of the Takings of Ireland
    - The First Battle of Moytura
    - The Second Battle of Moytura
    - Dindshenchas
    - The Táin

- **Gatherings**
  - **Harvest and Herds**
    - The Cattle-Raid of Regamna
    - The Battle of Crinna
    - The Book of the Takings of Ireland
    - The First Battle of Moytura
    - The Second Battle of Moytura
  
  - **Law**
    - The Settling of the Manor of Tara
    - The Adventures of Nera
    - The Intoxication of the Ulstermen
    - The Birth of Áed Sláine
    - The Battle of Crinna
    - The Wooing of Étaín
    - Dindshenchas

  - **Assembly**
    - The Settling of the Manor of Tara
    - The Birth of Conchobar
- The Adventures of Nera
- The Raid for Dartaid’s Cattle
- The Intoxication of the Ulstermen
- Baile of the Clear Voice
- The Death of Diarmait mac Cerbaill
- The Birth of Áed Sláine
- The Book of the Takings of Ireland
- The First Battle of Moytrua
- The Second Battle of Moytrua
- Dindshenchas
- The Táin
- The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn

  - **Storytelling**
    - The Settling of the Manor of Tara
    - The Adventures of Nera
    - The Boyhood Deeds of Finn mac Cumhaill
    - A Story from which it is Inferred that Mongán was Find mac Cumail and Concerning the Cause of the Death of Fothad Airgdech
    - The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn

- **Wooing and Trysts**
  - The Tragic Death of Cu Roi mac Dairi
  - The Boyhood Deeds of Finn mac Cumhaill
  - Baile of the Clear Voice
  - The Second Battle of Moytrua
  - Dindshenchas
  - The Wooing of Emer
  - The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn

- **Combat**
  - **Fighting**
    - The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel
    - The Cattle-Raid of Regamna
    - The Birth of Conchobar
    - The Tragic Death of Cu Roi mac Dairi
    - The Adventures of Nera
    - The Raid for Dartaid’s Cattle
    - The Intoxication of the Ulstermen
    - The Death of Conn
    - The Battle of Crinna
    - The Yew of the Disputing Sons
    - The Roll of the Kings
    - The Book of the Takings of Ireland
    - The First Battle of Moytura
    - The Second Battle of Moytura
    - The Wooing of Étaín
    - Dindshenchas
    - The Táin
- The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn
  - Death
    - The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel
    - The Birth of Conchobar
    - The Tragic Death of Cu Roi mac Dairi
    - The Adventures of Nera
    - The Raid for Dartaid’s Cattle
    - The Boyhood Deeds of Finn mac Cumhaill
    - The Death of Conn
    - The Battle of Crinna
    - The Yew of the Disputing Sons
    - The Book of the Takings of Ireland
    - The First Battle of Moytrua
    - The Second Battle of Moytrua
    - Dindshenchas
    - The Táin
- Silence
  - Dindshenchas
  - The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn
  - The Tragic Death of Cu Roi mac Dairi
- Fire
  - The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel
  - The Adventures of Nera
  - The Boyhood Deeds of Finn mac Cumhaill
  - The Roll of the Kings
- Peace
  - The Wooing of Étáin
  - Dindshenchas
- Journeys
  - The Raid for Dartaid’s Cattle
  - The Intoxication of the Ulstermen
  - The Boyhood Deeds of Finn mac Cumhaill
  - The Death of Diarmaid mac Cerbaill
  - The Battle of Crinna
  - The Book of the Takings of Ireland
  - The First Battle of Moytrua
  - The Second Battle of Moytrua
  - Dindshenchas
  - The Táin
People

There were a countless number of colorful people in Irish myth, many of whom had extraordinary powers and accomplished great feats on a regular basis. A large number of these characters can be found in the Samhain myths, but those of importance to Samhain can be narrowed down to eight. Here we will discuss the characters that appeared to be of the most importance to Samhain.

Étaín

Étaín is the focus in one myth, *The Wooing of Étaín*. Her myth is important for understanding Samhain because it gives us an idea of the importance of women and love. Étaín herself was a strong woman who was perfect in every way, giving us an idea of what the Irish were looking for in their ideal wives. She was “the girl who excels the girls of Ireland in beauty” (Carey 20053:148). She also had talent as a healer as seen in her ability to maintain Midir’s health after she turned into a fly and in a poem that was spoken about her it is revealed that she healed a king’s eye (presumably Midir).

Her importance may go beyond her obvious charms of beauty, grace, and healing abilities. Hicks has suggested that Étaín may actually be a personification of the moon. Specifically her actions seem to reflect the movements of the moon during the 19-year Metonic cycle (Hicks 2009:115). The Metonic cycle brings together the lunar and solar years to create a complete cycle of lunar and solar movement, bringing both celestial bodies back to their original starting place (a feat that takes 18.6 years because of the irregular movements of the moon across the sky [Hicks 2009:115-116]).

If Étaín does indeed represent the moon then her personal significance stems from the fact that she establishes Samhain as the beginning of the year since her own journey started at
Samhain. Her story, however, has quite a bit of significance in the early portions of the myth. First we learn that Samhain is a time of peace, but we see violence occurring, first when the Mac Oc took over the Brug and a year later when Midir lost an eye trying to break up a fight (Carey 2005e:148).

In other myths already discussed, the importance of women being present at Samhain feasts (like the Festival of Tara) is brought to light. Étain’s story also seems to be an important part of this motif. Midir acquires Étain at Samhain, he loses her at Samhain, and then reclaims her (the time of the year at that point is not specified) and takes her to his home in the sídhe. This may be another indication of the importance of having a woman who is your equal at Samhain. Midir’s first wife, Fuamnach, “Was wise and shrewd and knowledgeable in the lore and power of the Tuatha Dé Danann, for it was Bresal the druid who had fostered her until she was betrothed to Midir” (Carey 2005e:150). Unfortunately we are not told more about her in order to understand if she was actually a good wife to Midir. When looking at these women as wives this myth may tell us more about the importance of wives being comparable to their husbands in appearance and talents.

Étain herself seems to reiterate for the audience two important things. First, that the Irish new year started at Samhain (because this is when her journey as a fly started) and second, she echoes the importance of women at Samhain.

**Nera**

Nera’s story has already been discussed under the Supernatural heading of the Samhain motifs. He is another character that we only encounter once in the myths, but his story teaches us much about Samhain and what could potentially happen during that time. In Nera’s story we learn about the dangers that mortals face from the dead who return during Samhain and how to
protect ourselves from them, we learn that some people can see the future on Samhain and that future can be changed for the better, we learn that people can enter and exit the sídhe at Samhain, and we learn that time passes differently in the sídhe.

The Household of Cú Chulainn

Cú Chulainn is by far the most frequently mentioned character in the Samhain myths. This Ulster hero appeared in no fewer than eight of the myths that contained Samhain, and he played a major role in seven of them. Those myths included The Intoxication of the Ulstermen (Koch 2005:106-127), The Tragic Death of Cu Roi mac Dairi (Best 1905:328-332), The Adventures of Nera (Carey 2005d:127-132), The Cattle-Raid of Regamna (Hull 1892:211-214), The Wooing of Emer (Meyer 1892:153-171), The Sick-Bed of Cú Chulainn (Leahy 1905:176-198), and The Cattle Raid of Cooley (Kinsella 1969). Samhain played a significant role (even if only as a matter of timing for the tale) in six of those myths.

Cú Chulainn entered the myths as a child who won favor with Conchobar, the king of Ulster. He established himself as a great warrior who protected his land and the people in it. Cú Chulainn was described in The Wooing of Emer:

The women of Ulster loved Cu Chulainn greatly for his dexterity in the feats, for the nimbleness of his leap, for the excellence of his wisdom, for the sweetness of his speech, for the beauty of his face, for the loveliness of his look. For in his kingly eyes were seven pupils, four of them in his one eye, and three of them in the other. He had seven fingers on either hand, and seven toes on either of his two feet. Many were his gifts. First, his gift of prudence until his warrior’s flame appeared, the gift of feats, the gift of buanfach (a game like draughts), the gift of chess playing, the gift of calculating, the gift of sooth-saying, the gift of discernment, the gift of beauty. But Cu Chulainn had three defects: that he was too young, for his beard had not grown, and all the more would unknown youths deride him, that he was too daring, and that he was too beautiful. [Meyer 1892:154-155]
The men of Ulster, who greatly admired Cú Chulainn, wanted to help him settle down at least partly for selfish reasons.

The men of Ulster took counsel about Cu Chulainn, for their women and maidens loved him greatly. For Cu Chulainn had no wife at that time. This was their counsel, that they should seek out a maiden whom Cu Chulainn might choose to woo. For they were sure that a man who had a wife to attend to him would be less likely to spoil their daughters and accept the love of their women. And, besides, they were troubled and afraid that Cu Chulainn would perish early, so that for that reason they wished to give him a wife that he might leave an heir; knowing that his rebirth would be of himself. [Meyer 1892:155]

Cú Chulainn chose for himself Emer, the daughter of Forgall the Wily from Luglochta Loga (Meyer 1892:155).

For she had six gifts: the gift of beauty, the gift of voice, the gift of sweet speech, the gift of needlework, the gifts of wisdom and chastity. Cu Chulainn had said that no maiden should go with him but she who was his equal in age and form and race, in skill and deftness, who was the best handiworker of the maidens of Erin, for that none but such as she was a fitting wife for him. Now, as Emer was the one maiden who fulfilled all these conditions, Cu Chulainn went to woo her above all. [Meyer 1892:155]

Cú Chulainn’s wooing of Emer was a short one, made up of a coded conversation between the two lovers that Cú Chulainn later had to explain to his charioteer, Loég. Cú Chulainn and Emer did not want Emer’s family to know that he was wooing her because Emer was not allowed to marry before her older sister, Fial.

Samhain was briefly mentioned in the initial conversation between Cú Chulainn and Emer. Cú Chulainn “saw the breast of the maiden over the bosom of her smock. And he said: ‘Fair is this plain, the plain of the noble yoke.’” Emer proceeded to tell Cú Chulainn what all a man would have to do in order to woo her. “‘None comes to this plain,’ said she, ‘who does not
go without sleep from summer’s end to the beginning of spring, from the beginning of spring to May-day, and again from May-day to the beginning of winter’ (Meyer 1892:160-161)”

In Kuno Meyer’s 1888 translation, Cú Chulainn later explained what this meant to his charioteer, Loég.

‘Bend Suain, son of Rosc Mele, which she said this is the same thing, viz., that I shall fight without harm to myself from Samuin, i.e., the end of summer. For two divisions were formerly on the year, viz., summer from Beltaine (the first of May), and winter from Samun to Beltaine. Or sainfuin, viz., suain (sounds), for it is then that gentle voices sound, viz., sám-son ‘gentle sound’. To Oíomolc, i.e., the beginning of spring, viz., different (ime) is its wet (folc), viz. the wet of spring, and the wet of winter. Or, oí-melc, viz., oi, in the language of poetry, is a name for sheep, whence oibá (sheep’s death) is named, ut dicitur coibá (dog’s death), echbá (horse’s death), duineba (men’s death), as bath is a name for ‘death’. Oí-melc, then, is the time in which the sheep come out and are milked, whence oisc (a ewe), i.e., oisc viz., barren sheep. To Beldine, i.e. Beltine, viz., a favouring fire. For the druids used to make two fires with great incantations, and to drive the cattle between them against the plagues, every year. Or to Beldin, viz., Bel the name of an idol. At that time the young of every nest were placed in the possession of Bel. Beldine, then Beltine. To Brón Trogain, i.e. Lammas-day, viz., the beginning of autumn; for it is then the earth is afflicted, viz., the earth under fruit. Trogain is name for ‘earth.’’

[Meyer 1888:232]

So, Cú Chulainn wooed Emer and the two were married. Cú Chulainn continued to be “daring” and, to some extent, womanizing. In The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn or The Only Jealousy of Emer Cú Chulainn cheated on Emer, taking up with a woman from the síd. The affair ended when the woman’s husband, Manannan, returned, giving both Cú Chulainn and Emer a potion to make them forget all of the events that had transpired and waved his cloak between Cú Chulainn and Fand (the “other woman”) so that they would never cross paths again.

Emer had significant importance to not only Irish myth in general, but to Samhain as well. Emer was one of the few women to not only have her own story (The Wooing of Emer), but to also reappear as a prominent figure in other myths. She was active on Samhain, more so than
most women in the myths. She played a part in *The Wooing of Emer, The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn and The Only Jealousy of Emer, The Cattle-Raid of Regamna*, and in *The Cattle-Raid of Cooley*. In some of these myths she was mentioned by name where most women were either referred to as “the wife” or their roles were ignored altogether. An example of this is in *The Cattle-Raid of Regamna* when she brought Cú Chulainn his clothes (Leahy 1906).

Even Cú Chulainn’s charioteer, Loég, is far more active than any of the other charioteers were in the myths. He was described in *The Wooing of Emer*:

> ‘There is a charioteer before him in that chariot, a very slender, long-sided, much freckled man. Very curly bright-red hair on his head. A ring of bronze on his brow which prevents his hair from falling over his face. Patins of gold on both sides of the back of his head to confine his hair. A shoulder-mantle with sleeves about him, with openings at his two elbows. A rod of red gold in his hand with which he keeps the horses in order.’ [Meyer 1888:72]

Loég often conversed with Cú Chulainn, giving the appearance of an actual friendship between the two men. In *The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn or The Only Jealousy of Emer*, Loég even had his own adventure in the sídhe during Samhain without Cú Chulainn.

The mere number of appearances this group makes at Samhain suggests that they have some importance to Samhain. It is my opinion that Cú Chulainn, with his bright appearance and impressive chariot, may have been a representation of the sun, perhaps specifically the winter sun since Lugh seems to be the sun of the harvest and Balor the sun of the summer (Hicks letter to author 12/7/2012). In *The Wooing of Emer* it is suggested that Cú Chulainn would be reborn (“Knowing that his rebirth would be of himself” [Meyer 1892:155].). Cú Chulainn’s rebirth could be part of a cycle of birth, growth, death, and rebirth, possibly linked to agriculture or at least to the calendar.
With the violence that is present at Samhain, however, Cú Chulainn may have simply been the perfect warrior, an example of what you should strive to be once the fighting season arrived, and Emer and Loég were as well the perfect examples of a wife and charioteer.

**The Morrigan**

The Morrigan appeared in myths including *The Book of the Takings of Ireland, The First and Second Battle of Moytura, The Adventures of Nera, The Cattle-Raid of Regamna,* and *The Táin.* She was usually an antagonist, except in *The First and Second Battle of Moytura* when she was fighting for The Tuatha De for control of Ireland. In the other tales she used her powers to cause strife such as in *The Adventures of Nera* and *The Cattle-Raid of Regamna* when she stole a cow to be bulled by the Bull of Cooley to start the Cattle Raid of Cooley and argued with Cú Chulainn. In *The Táin* she fought against Cú Chulainn and then tricked him into healing her of her injuries.

If Cú Chulainn does indeed represent the winter sun, then the Morrigan could represent the darkness of winter trying to prevent the sun from reaching the earth. She is usually trying to stop Cú Chulainn or slow his progress, intercepting him during his battles.

**The Kings of Ireland**

The royalty of Ireland played a large role on Samhain. The provincial kings held feasts for the lesser kings, and in myths discussing the Festival of Tara it seems that the provincial kings were expected to make some appearance at Tara for Samhain. The Festival of Tara, the feast held by the high king of Ireland at Tara, was the largest and most important of these feasts. According to the myths, everyone in Ireland had to come to Tara for the festival. However, we know from other myths that this was not necessarily the case. In *the dindsenchas* we are told that the men of Meath could not attend the festival due to a geis against the king. The tale suggests
that the king held his own festival at Slemain Mide on that night, although some tales specify that there was one specific Samhain day with a series of days on either side for its celebration. The idea of a single day may be the result of the Christian calendar being imposed on a pre-Christian festival, or there may have indeed been one recognized day. In *The Adventures of Nera* the story starts out with Ailill and Medb, the king and queen of Connaught, hosting their own Samhain feast. In *The Tidings of Conchobar son of Ness*, Conchobar, the king of Ulster, provided the Samhain feast (Stokes 1910:27). Because the kings were expected to feed their people on Samhain, the kings were often found in Samhain tales.

Ailill, Medb, and Conchobar were the most active of the royals at Samhain [though it should be remembered that Cú Chulainn himself was a subking, ruling over Muirthemne]. This was partly due to the feasts that they held (and attended), but also because of *The Táin*, in which these three waged war against each other over the bull of Cooley, a bull that resided in Conchobar’s province. Medb decided she wanted the bull for herself and sent her messengers to the bull’s owner to ask if she could borrow it for a year. At first the farmer agreed to her terms, but after her messengers spoke ill of him he changed his mind. Medb, supported by her husband Ailill, led her warriors against Ulster in the hopes of obtaining the bull. When Medb attacked, Ulster only had Cú Chulainn for protection due to a spell placed upon the Ulstermen. In the end the Ulstermen won, but the bull died.

Many people made an appearance in the Samhain myths. However, many of them were only present for one or two myths and were only active once or twice. Many of the cast of characters that were listed as present at Samhain seem to be merely placeholders.
Places

When the Samhain sites mentioned in the myths (hereafter referred to as the myth sites) are shown on a map of Ireland, they seem to follow a northeast to southwest line (Map 13, found on page 172). The majority of the journeys also follow this trajectory, as shown in Maps 1 (page 160), 2 (page 161) and 6 (page 165). This emphasizes the importance of Samhain sunset, nightfall being when the supernatural aspects of Samhain typically began and nightfall marking the new day. “Our ancients looked on the night as the end of the year’s growth, and fairies were let loose to visit every growing plant and with their breath blast berries and hedge-rows, field blossoms, ragworts and late thistles” (Danaher 1972:200). Sites such as Emain Macha and Rath Cruachan (the capitals of Ulster and Connaught who were in near constant combat during the Ulster Cycle) (Map 12, located on page 171) are in alignment with the Samhain sunset (and Beltaine sunrise, which is Samhain’s astronomical opposite) (Hicks 2014:122). The journeys may have been a mnemonic device to remind the Irish of the journey the sun takes at Samhain, traveling from where the sun rises to where the sun sets.

The sites themselves seem to mostly be hills, either man-made or natural. In some cases – such as Newgrange and the Cave of Cruachu (located at Rath Crauchan) – this is a very blatant tie to the supernatural in that sídhe-folk live there (Mac Óc at Newgrange in The Wooing of Étain, Map 9 [Tochmarca], located on page 168) or the place is an entrance to the sídhe (the Cave of Cruachu in The Adventures of Nera, Map 12 [Comperta], located on page 171), but in other cases it may be a suggestion of it. It has been mentioned already that there was a surprising lack of discussion of the supernatural in the myths, and that that may simply be because the listeners would assume that there were supernatural happenings taking place during the tale. If the places
associated with the myths were indeed the homes of sidhe-folk or entrances to the sidhe then that could almost be a given.

The most commonly revisited sites were the royal sites; Tara, Rath Croughan, and Emain Macha, with Tara being the most frequently visited site. This makes sense since everyone was expected to attend a feast held by the provincial king or the high king at Tara. These were not the only sites revisited though. The complete list of revisited sites includes Tara (eight myths: *The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel, The Settling of the Manor of Tara, The Birth of Áed Sláine, Baile of the Clear Voice, The Death of Conn, The Battle of Crinna, The Second Battle of Moytura, and Dindshenchas*), Emain Macha (two myths: *The Birth of Conchobar and The Intoxication of the Ulstermen*), Rath Cruachan (three myths: *The Adventures of Nera, The Raid for Dartaid’s Cattle, and The Táín*), and Temair Luachra (two myths: *The Intoxication of the Ulstermen and The Dindshenchas*).

![Picture 1: The Cave of Cruachu, near Rath Cruachan. Photo courtesy of Ronald Hicks.](image)
Unfortunately it is difficult to apply more “traditional” archaeological research methods using trowels and shovels to intangible subjects such as Samhain, but occasionally discoveries are made that can be tied to intangibles. Archaeological excavations, historical research, and accidental discoveries have been made at a number of the myth sites, but the most significant discovery that can arguably be tied specifically to Samhain was at Bri Éile (Hicks, personal communication, 23 April 2014). In 2003 Bri Éile, now known as Croghan Hill, yielded a bog body, which was given the name Oldcroghan Man. Oldcroghan Man appears to have been killed, apparently a ritual sacrifice, between 362-172 B.C (Kelly 2012:234). The presence of manicured fingernails and “an absence of wear to his hands” showed that he was not someone who did manual labor, possibly a royal. His stomach contents consisted of mostly meat in the four months leading up to his death, suggesting he died in winter or early spring (perhaps around Samhain?) (Kelly 2012:236). “A stab wound to the chest killed Oldcroghan Man; however a defense-wound on the upper left arm indicates that he tried to fend off the fatal assault. The deceased was then decapitated and his thorax severed from his abdomen…Oldcroghan Man had his nipples cut partially but whether this was done before or after death is unknown” (Kelly 2012:236). The cut nipples could imply this man was a king. “The suckling of a king’s nipples was an important gesture of submission by subordinates, and the stylized representation of breasts and nipples on the terminals of gold gorgets indicates that this was a custom that extended as far back as the Late Bronze Age at least. (Kelly 2012:239)” His arms had been cut and withies, possibly the remains of spancels such as are used to hobble animals, were threaded into the cuts. He was found along a border, suggesting he, like many other bog bodies, was deposited purposefully on this border, possibly as ceremonial protection. This discovery complements The Boyhood Deeds of Finn mac Cumhaill (Map 2, located on page 161) where a
jealous suitor at the site killed men when they went to woo the woman Éile. The body shows that some form of sacrifice really did take place at the site, and the myths could have acted as an explanation for later peoples who lived in the area for why the sacrifices were made. This real sacrifice and possible others could have taken place at Samhain, giving birth to the legend. Perhaps the people of Offaly were trying to protect their borders from otherworldly beings that would attack at Samhain. Oldcroghan Man can be seen at the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin.

Croghan Hill is not the only Samhain site to have archaeological discoveries. The Discovery Programme has been working to examine the Hill of Tara and has done extensive geophysical research in hopes of uncovering features that can no longer be seen by the naked eye. Emain Macha, also known as Navan Fort, has been the center of excavations since as early as 1969. Beginning in 1962 Newgrange was excavated by Michael J. O’Kelly. O’Kelly worked to learn about who built the site, how the site was built and for what purpose, and he used his discoveries to restore the passage grave to what is theoretically its former glory.
There are sites that have archaeoastronomical alignments that relate to Samhain, but are not in the myths. The website Megalithicarchaeoastronomy gives a list of places that have known or suspected alignments to the November/February cross-quarter days (Bawn 2015). The list this site gives contains 18 sites (hereafter referred to as the alignment sites), two of which appear to be different names for the same site. Of those 17 alignment sites, three are passage tombs, 13 are stone circles, and one is a cairn. These sites are all listed on <www.archaeology.ie>, <megalithicarchaeoastronomy.blogspot.com> lists the sites that have revealed alignments. Map 14 (page 173) and 15 (page 174) show a cluster of these sites in the southwest corner of Ireland while Map 16, located on page 175, shows the alignment sites along with the myth sites. There is very little overlap between the two sets of sites. In fact, the alignment sites seem to fill in the gaps left by the myth sites. There are only three places where the sites overlap: Grange stone circle (an alignment site) is near the shore of Loch Gair (Loch Gur) (a myth site), Tara’s Mound of the Hostages has a known Samhain alignment (this is both a myth site and an alignment site), and Mag Ceitne (a myth site) and Carrowmore (an alignment site) are within about 16 kilometers from each other. The Carrowmore alignment may be a sunrise alignment instead of a sunset alignment (Hicks, personal communication, May 17, 2015).

From these alignment sites we see a large inclination towards stone circles, which are generally assumed to be Bronze Age in date. This could be because that is where researchers have thought to look for these alignments. For the myth sites which seem to be largely hills (as previously discussed in this section) you would have to look for alignments between sites, which is difficult if you do not know which ones to connect. The myths show that Samhain may have had a larger role in the landscape than has been previously thought, covering the island in potential Samhain locations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Myth</th>
<th>Types</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel The Settling of the Manor of Tara The Birth of Áed Sláine Baile of the Clear Voice The Death of Conn The Battle of Crinna The Second Battle of Moytura Dindshenchas</td>
<td>Togla</td>
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<td>Da Derga’s Hostel</td>
<td>The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel</td>
<td>Suidigud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dun Imrith</td>
<td>The Cattle-Raid of Regamna</td>
<td>Tana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferta Laig</td>
<td>The Cattle-Raid of Regamna</td>
<td>Tana</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ath da Ferta</td>
<td>The Cattle-Raid of Regamna</td>
<td>Tana</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grellach Dolluid</td>
<td>The Cattle-Raid of Regamna</td>
<td>Tana</td>
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<td>Emain Macha</td>
<td>The Birth of Conchobar The Intoxication of the Ulstermen</td>
<td>Comperta</td>
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<td>Srub Brain</td>
<td>The Tragic Death of Cu Roi mac Dairi The Tragic Death of Cu Roi mac Dairi</td>
<td>Aideda</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Peaks of Bairche to Srub Brain (Journey)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Aideda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rath Cruachan</td>
<td>The Adventures of Nera The Raid for Dartaid's Cattle</td>
<td>Uatha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cave of Cruachu</td>
<td>The Adventures of Nera The Raid for Dartaid's Cattle</td>
<td>Tana</td>
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<td>Sid Cuillne</td>
<td>The Raid for Dartaid's Cattle</td>
<td>Tana</td>
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<td>The Raid for Dartaid's Cattle</td>
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<td>Dindshenchas</td>
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<td>Brí Éile</td>
<td>The Boyhood Deeds of Finn mac Cumhaill</td>
<td>Macgnimrada</td>
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<td>Macgnimrada</td>
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<td>A Story from which it is Inferred that Mongán was Find mac Cumaill and Concerning the Cause of the Death of Fothad Airgdech</td>
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<td>The Death of Diarmait mac Cerbaill</td>
<td>Aideda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Munster</td>
<td>The Battle of Crinna</td>
<td>Tochomlud</td>
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<td>Glen of Aherlach</td>
<td>The Battle of Crinna</td>
<td>Dindshenchas</td>
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<td>The Yew of the Disputing Sons</td>
<td>Catha</td>
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<td>Ess Máge</td>
<td>The Yew of the Disputing Sons</td>
<td>Tochomlud</td>
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<td>The First Battle of Moytura</td>
<td>Tochmarca</td>
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<td>Bruig</td>
<td>The Wooing of Étaín</td>
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<td>Uisnech Midi</td>
<td>The Yew of the Disputing Sons</td>
<td>Dindshenchas</td>
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<td>The First Battle of Moytura</td>
<td>Dindshenchas</td>
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<td>Cloenfertae (South)</td>
<td>The Second Battle of Moytura</td>
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<td>The Wooing of Emer</td>
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<td>Shronebirrane</td>
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<td>Tara; Mound of the Hostages</td>
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Chapter 5: Conclusions and Future Work

There is still a lot of area to cover in the study of Samhain in myth. In this section we will explore each question laid out at the beginning of this thesis, review the results, and discuss what should be studied further.

Question #1: What characters (real, mythical or both) were associated with Samhain?

The Samhain myths had many different characters, mostly royals and warriors as is typical of these tales, but only a few actually had an active role in the myth, and even fewer appeared more than once. There were a few recurring characters including Cú Chulainn’s household and the royals. There were also characters, like Nera, who only appeared in one myth, but one that was important for its Samhain information. The most important set of characters, however, appears to be Cú Chulainn and his family.

Future research dealing with the importance of characters involved in Samhain should include a more in-depth study of Cú Chulainn and his household. Based on the number of appearances that Cú Chulainn and his household made at Samhain it is logical to assume he had some great significance to the day. The specific question that would shed the most light about Cú Chulainn’s involvement with Samhain is what was his role in myth? It is my opinion that he may have represented the sun, specifically the winter sun, which would be a possible explanation for why his charioteer Loég was also unusually active for someone in that role; the job of driving the sun across the sky would be an important one. Cú Chulainn’s fighting during the winter could be symbolic of the sun’s struggle to return after the dark season. His wife Emer could have represented the winter moon, explaining her repeated presence as well. This could be why she merits her own wooing tale, since the union of the winter sun and moon would be an important event, in fact she could be an alter ego of Étaín.
The other characters that were particularly involved in Samhain were the royals, most notably Ailill, Medb, and Conchobar – royals who interacted with Cú Chulainn. The kings were expected to hold feasts and attend feasts at Samhain and that is what they did. They also engaged in fighting and took part in journeys, not really doing anything to stand out beyond what we already knew their assigned roles to be (hosting feasts). Ailill, Medb, and Conchobar did all of these things, but seemed to garner more attention for doing so. This is mostly the result of the existence of a series of myths (the Ulster Cycle) that focuses on the conflict between their provinces, but there could be some significance to Samhain as well. Medb and Ailill both also played key roles in cattle raids that might have also influenced their importance to Samhain. In general, however, the importance of royalty to Samhain appears to be focused on their roles in the feasts.

Another important character was the Morrigán. A woman of the Tuatha Dé, she caused mischief, instigated battles, and played key roles in some of the early fights for control of Ireland. She and Cú Chulainn were enemies, with Cú Chulainn threatening to maim or kill the Morrigán on several occasions and the Morrigán gleefully tormenting and threatening him. If Cú Chulainn represents the winter sun, perhaps it is possible that the Morrigán represents the darkness and magic that tries to keep the sun away during the winter months. This could be supported by their meetings that result in angry words but little action between the two – she delays him from reaching his destinations as in *The Cattle Raid of Regamna* and *The Tain* but she does not stop him completely. In fact, in *The Tain* Cú Chulainn is detained by the Morrigán, but he grievously injures her, successfully passing her – at least until she tricks him into healing her. Perhaps this is representative of the sun piercing through fierce winter weather?
Four of these key characters are four very different women. First is Étaín, a quiet woman, the daughter of a king and the most beautiful woman in Ireland, who has talents ranging from healing to pouring drink to some limited magic abilities (related to healing). Next is Emer, the younger daughter of a king and the wife of Cú Chulainn. Typically she did not do much in the tales that she appeared in, which makes her appearance even more significant. In tales such as *The Only Jealousy of Emer* and *The Wooing of Emer* Emer was very strong-willed and fierce. After her we encounter Medb, the warrior-queen of Connaught who led massive armies against the Ulstermen in hopes of securing the bull of Cooley. Medb was also significant socially in the myths not just because she was a queen, but because she was a queen by birth. In *The Táin* we learn that her husband Ailill was the son of a king, but a lesser son who would most likely have not seen kingship if he had not married her and gained her lands. Finally, we have the Morrigan, a woman from the sídhe who appears in both the Mythological and Ulster Cycle. She is a trickster, a warrior, and a magic-user who is not afraid to speak her mind against men such as Cú Chulainn. These women display the wide range of behavior found in women in the Irish myths, ranging from meek and almost subservient towards men (Étaín) to fierce and outgoing (Emer, Medb and the Morrigan). This gives us a general idea of what was expected from women in Irish society, specifically that there was a time and a place for a woman to be a follower and a leader. In the Samhain myths there is definitely a propensity towards the stronger females, however. Emer, Medb and the Morrigan all are fighters and leaders, which fits the combat motif established earlier in this paper.

This list of women does not include Blathnat, the wife Cú Roí kidnapped who betrayed him in favor of her former lover, Cú Chulainn, resulting in not just Cú Roí’s death but the deaths of hundreds of others including herself. She is not included above because she only appeared in
one myth, *The Tragic Death of Cú Roí*. She was another woman who was a fighter. She decided to not sit idly by and be the wife of a man who kidnapped her, instead opening his stronghold to the Ulstermen. Her story is unique in that it ends with a warning towards women, “A grievous deed for a woman to betray her husband” (Best 1905:332).

In the end, the difference between the roles of men and women do not seem that drastic, at least as they are represented in the Samhain tales. Both men and women have a propensity towards violence, both embark on great journeys (the Morrigan traveled a great distance to ensure that Nera’s son’s cow was calved by the bull of Cooley and Medb traveled with vast armies to acquire said bull), and both were present at the feasts even though women’s roles at the feasts were different. At the feast it seemed to be more important that they were there as a counterpoint to the men. This is best illustrated in *The Intoxication of the Ulstermen* when the men leave the women behind at one feast to go on to another. Women did seem to be quieter than their male counterparts and there certainly were not as many.

Question #2: What did people (peasants, warriors and royals) do at Samhain?

There was a recognizable pattern to the actions, events, and personal characteristics that surround the Samhain myths, leading to the creation of motifs. By organizing the events of the myths into these motifs we can easily study these patterns.

The question of what people did at Samhain seems to be answered largely by feasting and fighting, which lead to journeys and trysts, with stories being told at the gatherings. The rules as to who attended which feast seem to be a little bit difficult to clarify given the available evidence. Some myths say everyone attended the Festival of Tara while others say the provincial kings held their own. According to some sources the Festival of Tara did take place every year, meaning both could be true. During the years that the Festival took place, everyone may have
gone to Tara, while the other years everyone went to the feast held by the provincial king. The
duration of time for these feasts seems to vary, but the most common time period was seven
days: three days before Samhain, Samhain day, and three days after (with some myths
specifically stating there was a Samhain day).

Samhain was purported to be a time of peace according to two different tales, but it was
also a time for fighting by warriors, royalty, and peasants alike. This may have been because
Samhain marked the end of the harvest and the beginning of winter, meaning there was time free
before any major farming took place again in the spring. This means that there was time for
people to do things like engage in confrontations. This could also explain the timing of the cattle
raids, all but one of which at least started at Samhain.

It was interesting to note how few of the myths actually focused on the supernatural
aspects of Samhain. The focus of the day for everyone seems to have been the gatherings. This
is interesting because more modern folklore studies suggest that the supernatural played a large
role in the events surrounding Samhain. This is not to say that the supernatural was completely
absent from the Samhain myths. The supernatural motif could be something that developed and
grew in importance over time, it could have been assumed that the people hearing the story
would simply know that supernatural events were occurring, or the supernatural aspects could
have been minimalized by Christian monks.

Silence was another motif that repeated itself in the myths, particularly Cú Chulainn’s
silence. Cu Roi rendered Cú Chulainn silent through humiliation in *The Tragic Death of Cu Roi
mac Dairi*, then Cú Chulainn was rendered silent by supernatural actions in *The Sick-Bed of Cú
Chulainn*. There was also a seer who only spoke at Samhain, a reversal of Cú Chulainn’s plight
but an interesting piece of information nonetheless. If we assume that Cú Chulainn was the
winter sun, his silence could represent the sun being blocked by the forces of winter. Cú Chulainn was not just silent during these times, he was absent from the Ulstermen’s lives, much like the sun can appear to be when winter is harsh. According to the Naval Observatory, at the time of the winter solstice there is only about 7 hours and 40 minutes between sunrise and sunset at Dún Delgan (Cú Chulainn’s home) while the December full moon is visible for nearly 15 hours and 15 minutes. Cú Chulainn’s absence and silence would fit this pattern if he was indeed the winter sun. If this is the case however, then I am uncertain how Uinche’s silence fits. This also brings up the passing of a year in the myths. In several myths a year passes between events. This may be to emphasize Samhain as the new year.

Due to their evident importance in the myths, future research in this area should focus on the feasts themselves, including how long did they last, when did the feasts occur, who had to attend, how frequently was the Feast of Tara held and did it coincide with regional feasts (in which case, who attended which), and what role did the supernatural play in all of this. Some of this information, such as more detail about the supernatural aspects, could possibly be found in the folklore, while information on the feasts should be available in the annals and law texts. The feasts played such a huge role in these myths it is important to get a better understanding of the feasts in order to gain a better understanding of Samhain as a whole. The same can be said for the supernatural. The supernatural aspects of Samhain are huge in the more modern folklore, but were minimal in the myths. This could be due to a plethora of reasons that have already been partially discussed. The answers to these questions could lie in the law annals, something not studied for this thesis. Another interesting avenue of research in this area is the artifacts of Samhain. What material culture is described in the myths? What objects were needed to
accomplish the tasks involved? We know from a few myths such as *The Wooing of Etain* that holly branches made appearances, but why is not completely clear.

### #3: What locations were associated with Samhain and is there a pattern?

Overall there is a general sloping of the sites from the northeast to the southwest of the island with a distinctive lack of sites in western Connaught. The southwest orientation may be connected to the Samhain sunset, which is in the southwest. The absence of sites in western Connaught is intriguing because a large portion of the Ulster Cycle takes place in Connaught since it chronicles the conflict between Ulster and Connaught. In order to come to a definitive answer for this lack of sites, the next step would be to do a systematic study of the Ulster Cycle and map all of the sites mentioned to see if this is a pattern seen throughout the cycle, or just found in the Samhain tales. The astronomical alignments leave plenty of room for future research. Another area that future research should focus on is site types. Specifically, was there a site type (something like raths or henges) that was repeatedly associated with Samhain? The observed pattern could be the result of placement of a specific site type. At the moment it appears that hills were a common recurrence, but what else can we learn from these particular locations?

For future research into the archaeoastronomical landscape of Samhain there should be some study into whether or not there is something celestial that would lead to the northeast to southwest alignment of the sites and journeys.

Future research into the landscape should include a study of the types of archaeological remains associated with the Samhain sites, the general topography of the sites and surrounding areas, and patterns between sites. There is still much work to be done in regards to the Samhain landscape; this thesis barely scratching the surface.
An interesting point that came up during this research outside of the research questions was the apparent importance of the Ulster Cycle. The Ulster myths contained the most references to Samhain and appeared to operate under different rules for some things, like travel to the sídhe. A complex study of the Ulster Cycle may lend some insight into why Samhain was important to this particular set of myths. It could be that the people (like Cú Chulainn) were important to Samhain, the timing in history could have been significant, or it could be the locations that these myths took place in were significant. On this same note, a study should be done of the Fenian Cycle and its apparent lack of Samhain.

In summary, we have learned several things about Samhain. First, we learned that Cú Chulainn has some great significance to Samhain, but it is not entirely clear why. Perhaps Cú Chulainn, his family, and their movements acted as mnemonic devices for the movement of the celestial bodies in the winter sky. At Samhain people mainly did two things: they gathered together for feasts and they fought, despite it being a day for peace. This led to journeys across Ireland, trysts between lovers, foretelling of the future, sharing of stories, and more. Along with the question of what people did, we can also say that the supernatural aspects of Samhain did not seem to bear as much importance in the myths as they do in the folklore, but there was a healthy respect for the dead and the sídhe-folk. People were looking into the future and having disturbing dreams, warriors changed shape and size, and gods came to the human realm to cause mischief and leave a trail of bodies behind. The majority of this took place in five different locations, the Hill of Tara, Emain Macha, Rath Cruachan, and Temair Luachra.

In all, this research brought to light some very interesting information about Samhain. In the end, Samhian seems to have been about being together. No matter the reason, you were
gathered with all of the people you lived among, and celebrated the closing of a year and the opening of a new one, always together but sometimes in peace, sometimes in war.

It feels like I have ended with more questions than answers, but this just shows how much potential there is in Samhain research, particularly in the realm of folklore and the landscape.
Appendix: Maps
Map 1: Aideda – This includes the myths *The Tragic Death of Cu Roi Mac Dairi, The Death of Diarmait Mac Cerbaill*, and *The Death of Conn*. Ráith Bicc is the only site that could not be located for this map. The blue arrow from Bairche to Srub Brain marks the journey Cú Chulainn took when he followed the black birds to Cu Roi’s stronghold.
Map 2: Macgnímrada – There is only one myth, *The Boyhood Deeds of Finn mac Cumhaill*. All of the relevant Samhain sites are listed. The blue arrow marks the journey Finn took from Bri Eile where the men were wooing Eile to the Paps of Anu where he killed a man.
Map 3: Catha – This type includes two myths, *The First Battle of Moytura* and *The Second battle of Moytura*. All of the relevant Samhain sites are listed.
Map 4: Dindshenchas – Everything is listed except for Ailill’s field and the Ford of Unchi Eochairbel, which may have been near Fornocht.
Map 5: Miscellaneous – This type only included one tale, *The Intoxication of the Ulstermen*. 
Map 6: Miscellaneous continued – This map gives a rough idea of the journey that was taken from Dun Da Bend to the Land of Cu Roi.
Map 7: Scél – There are two myths under this type, A Story from which it is Inferred that Mongán was Find mac Cumhaill and Concerning the Cause of the Death of Fothad Airgdech and Baile of the Clear Voice. All relevant Samhain locations are mapped.
Map 8: Tana – This tale type includes *The Cattle-Raid of Regamna, The Raid for Dartaid’s Cattle*, and *The Táin*. This map includes the sites for *The Cattle-Raid of Regamna* and *The Raid for Dartaid’s Cattle* except for Ferta Laig which is north of Ath da Ferta, Grellach Dolluid which is north of Dun Imrith, and O’Conchada which is unknown but near Rathcroghan.
Map 9: Tochmarca – There are two myths that fall under this type. *The Wooing of Étain* and *The Wooing of Emer*. All of the relevant Samhain sites are mapped.
Map 10: Tochomlud – There is only one tale that falls under this type, *The Battle of Crinna*. All of the relevant Samhain sites have been listed.
Map 11: Togla – There is only one myth in this type, *The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel*. Both sites from this myth have been mapped.
Map 12: Comperta, Geis/Gess, Suidigud, Uatha, and No Type – These all have only one tale associated with each and only one site associated with each tale. Comperta is *The Birth of Conchobar* at Emain Macha, Geis/Gess is *The Birth of Áed Sláine* at Tara, Suidigud has *The Settling of the Manor of Tara* at Tara, Uatha has *The Adventures of Nera* at Rath Cruachan and the immediately surrounding area, and the tales with no type includes *The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn* at Murtheimne, Emain Macha, and Mag Mell (the otherworld).
Map 13: All of the Samhain sites without labels. Yellow pins are definite locations, blue pins are relative locations, and hexagons are royal sites.
Map 14: Sites with known or suspected Samhain alignments.
Map 15: Cluster of sites in southwestern Ireland with known or suspected Samhain astronomical alignments. This cluster is the result of a higher concentration of stone circles and rows in the region. See Map 14 for how this fits into the larger landscape.
Map 16: The astronomical sites with the myth sites.
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