



# Mar Gur Dream Sí lad Atá Ag Mairiúint Fén Bhfarraige: ML 4080 the Seal Woman in Its Irish and International Context

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*Mar gur dream Sí iad atá ag mairiúint fén bhfarráige: ML 4080*

The Seal Woman in its Irish and International Context

A dissertation presented

by

Gregory Darwin

to

The Department of Celtic Literatures and Languages

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in the subject of

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*Mar gur dream Sí iad atá ag mairiúint fén bhfarráige*: ML 4080 The Seal Woman in its Irish and International Context.

### **Abstract**

This dissertation is a study of the migratory supernatural legend ML 4080 “The Mermaid Legend” The story is first attested at the end of the eighteenth century, and hundreds of versions of the legend have been collected throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Ireland, Scotland, the Isle of Man, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. I explore a number of related questions concerning this legend: its development and dissemination throughout this geographic area, the meanings it conveys for its traditional audiences and performers, and its afterlife in contemporary media and literature.

The first chapter provides an overview of all the known versions of The Mermaid Legend, demographic information about storytellers and collectors, its typical forms, and the motifs or subtypes which are subject to geographic variation. I argue that the legend originated in Ireland or Gaelic Scotland and spread from Gaelic Scotland to Shetland and Orkney, and from there to the rest of the Norse world. My second chapter explores the relationship between The Mermaid Legend and other Irish and Scottish traditions about seals and mermaids. I conclude that they represent a stable body of belief concerning such beings, and relate to broader concerns about the relationship between humans and their environment. In my third chapter, I explore medieval and early modern Irish literary depictions of seals and mermaids.

The fourth chapter explores the question of the possible functions and meanings of the legend, at both the collective and individual level. I include two individual case studies of versions of the legend recorded from storytellers with large repertoires and sufficient biographical information: Éamonn a Búrc of Carna, County Galway, and Peig Sayers of Dún Chaoin, County Kerry. In the fifth and final chapter, I explore a number of films and literary works by Irish creators which retell or draw inspiration from this legend. I explore both the relationship between these creators and oral tradition, as well as the ways in which the legend is adapted to address contemporary issues and debates about transnationalism, gender, the environment, and more.

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### Abbreviations Used

AFM	John O'Donovan, ed., <i>Annála Ríoghachta Éireann = Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland</i> (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1848), 3 vols.
AT	Whitley Stokes, ed. and trans., "The Annals of Tigernach [part 1]," <i>Revue Celtique</i> 16 (1895): 374-419; Whitley Stokes, ed. and trans., "The Annals of Tigernach [part 2]," <i>Revue Celtique</i> 17 (1896): 6-33, 119-263, 337-420; Whitley Stokes, ed. and trans., "The Annals of Tigernach [part 3]," <i>Revue Celtique</i> 18 (1897): 9-59, 150-198, 267-303;
ATU	Aarne-Thompson-Uther Type, in respect to Hans-Jörg Uther, <i>The Types of International Folktales : A Classification and Bibliography, based on the system of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson</i> (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2011), 3 vols.
AU	William M. Hennessy, et. al., eds., <i>The Annals of Ulster</i> (Dublin: A. Thom & Co, 1887), 4 vols.
CS	William M. Hennessy, ed., <i>Chronicum Scotorum</i> (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1866).
eDIL	<i>Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language</i> (dil.ie)
GPC	R. J. Thomas, ed., <i>Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru : A Dictionary of the Welsh Language</i> , (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1950-2002).
IFC	Irish Folklore Commission
IFGH	Institutet för folklöre vid Göteborgs Universitet
ISF	<i>Institutet för språk och folkminnen</i>
LC	William M. Hennessy, ed., <i>Annals of Loch Cé</i> (London: Longman, 1871), 2v.
Maclagan	School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, Maclagan Manuscripts
ML	Migratory Legend, in respect to Reidar Th. Christiansen, <i>The Migratory Legends</i> (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1958).
MLSIT	Migratory Legend, Suggested Irish Type, in respect to Bo Almqvist, "Crossing the Border: A Sampler of Irish Migratory Legends about the Supernatural," <i>Béaloides</i> 59 (1999): 209-217, 219-278.
NFC	National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, Main Manuscript Collection.



NFCS	National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, Schools Manuscript Collection.
SA	School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, Sound Archive.
UFTM	Ulster Folk and Transport Museum.
VFF	<i>Västsvenska folkminnes föreningen</i>

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**Dedication**

*Einu nafni hézk aldregi*

*siz þú með folkum fórt*

## 0. Introduction

A number of years ago, I began studying modern Irish as an undergraduate at the University of Toronto. Our normal instructor, Professor Máirín Nic Dhiarmada (*ar láimh dheis Dé go raibh a hanam*), went on leave for the first semester of our second year, and a visiting lecturer from Ulster University, Dr. Peter Smith, took over the course. With a confidence in our abilities that was, frankly, entirely unwarranted, we immediately left the comforting world of grammar drills and short exercises and plunged straightforward into the language proper, reading (to varying degrees of success) texts composed by native speakers across a range of genres, from poems to short stories to news articles to items recorded from oral narrative. The latter category included the following item, recorded from Peic Ní Shearcaigh of Tullagh, Inishowen, County Donegal by Éamon Ó Tuathail in 1929 or 1930:

Bhí fear thíos i Málainn a'n am amháin agus d'írigh sé roimh írí na gréine agus fuaidh sé síos 'n na tráighe. N'air a fuaidh sé síos chainic sé an bhean is deise chainic sé ariamh agus í a' cíoradh a cinn. Bhí seórt ínteach éagsail deas 'na luighe age n-a taobh, agus fuaidh sé cōngarach go leor duithe le greim fháilt air agus thug sé leis é. N'air a thug sé leis é lean sí é agus fuaidh sí a shuirí leis. D'fhan sí aige agus bhí tríúr do theaghlach acu. Cha dtiocfadh leis tóirt urthi gáire dheánamh. Cha dtiocfadh leis a dhath a dheánamh ach cead aici ghol ar aghaidh mar bhí sí fríd a' toigh.

N'air a bhí na tachrain a' siúl fríd a' toigh [lá amháin] bhí sí a' fiafraí dófa: "a' bhfaca tú a dhath go deas le sin?"

"Chan fhacaidh."

"Bhfaca tú a dhath go deas le seo?"

"Chan fhacaidh."

Bhí sí, lá amháin, agus d'fhiafruigh sí don leanbh is sine a' bhfaca sé a dhath ariamh a bhí go deas le sin agus dúirt sé go bhfacaidh.

"Cá bhfaca tú é?"

"Age m'athir," [arsa seisean]

"Cár chuir sé é?"

"Chuir sé thíos faoi chruaich an arbhair é."

Nuair a bhí a' t-athir ar shiúl 'n a' Cháirn fuaidh sí amach agus thiompuigh sí an chruach [agus fuair sí an rud a bhí sí a dh'iaraidh. D'imigh sí chun na tráighe innsin]. A' teacht a bhaile dó [.i. don athir] a bhí sí ar shiúl.

Cha rabh lá fhad is bhí a'n duine do phór na ndaoíní sin i Málainn nach silfeadh a srón fuil n'air a mhuirfí rón thart fa na cóstaí seo.<sup>1</sup>

There was a man down in Málainn one time, and he got up before sunrise and went down to the shore. When he went down he saw the most beautiful woman he had ever seen before, and she was combing her hair. She had something terribly beautiful lying near her, and he went close enough to her to grab it, and he brought it with him. When he brought it with him she followed him and he courted her. She stayed with him and they had three children. She couldn't laugh at all. She couldn't do anything but cry as she went through the house.

When the children were walking through the house one day, she asked them "have you seen anything as nice as that?"

"I haven't."

"Have you seen anything as nice as this?"

"I haven't."

One day she asked the eldest child if he had ever seen anything that was as nice as that, and he said that he had.

"Where did you see it?"

"My father had it."

"Where did he put it?"

"He put it down below the haystack."

When the father had gone away to Carndonagh, she went out and she knocked down the haystack and found the thing she wanted. She went to the shore then. She was leaving as the father was coming home.

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1 Donegal Pub 2, translation mine. In the interests of space, references to versions of The Mermaid Legend are given in short format references throughout the body of the dissertation. Full bibliographic information for these references, as well as the circumstances of collection and people involved, are given in Appendix I.



There wasn't a single day as long as anyone descended from those people were in Málainn that their nose wouldn't bleed whenever a seal was killed on those shores.

Like countless generations before me, I was immediately captivated by the story, and the final image of the sympathetic nosebleed stuck in my mind; it was a vivid and unambiguous statement that the boundary between human and animal was not a particularly rigid one. The title provided by the collector – “An Fear a raibh Rón mar Mhnaoi aige” ‘The Man who had a Seal as a Wife’ – primed me to think of the supernatural bride as a shapeshifter, although such an idea was not directly stated in the text, and I immediately wanted to draw connections with other shapeshifters in the medieval Irish and Welsh literary works that I had begun to explore at the same time. I would later discover that this story represented a type which was very common in both Ireland and Scotland, and was also known in Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and continental Scandinavia.

### **0.1 The Scope of the Problem and Previous Work**

Many early folklore collectors working in Ireland noted parallels between Irish stories about marriages between humans and mermaids or seal-women and stories from Scotland, the Norse world, and further afield. In the notes to *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland*, published in 1828, Thomas Crofton Croker noted that his mermaid-bride legend, “The Lady of Gollerus,” is an example of a story that is common in Ireland, and he observed parallels between these stories and accounts of seal-women from Shetland and the Faroe Islands, as well as with Classical accounts of marriages between humans and nymphs.<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah Curtin and Patrick Kennedy both noted similarities between the stories they collected in Kerry and Cork, respectively, and material that others had collected from Shetland and North Uist in Scotland,

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<sup>2</sup> Croker, *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland*, 13–20.

and W. G. Wood-Martin remarked on possible parallels between a version of this story that circulated in County Sligo and Inuit tradition.<sup>3</sup>

The story received its modern designation in 1958 with the publication of Reidar Th. Christiansen's *The Migratory Legends*, which identified this story as ML 4080, "The Seal Woman."<sup>4</sup> Christiansen refers to a single version collected in Norway as well as versions from Denmark, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands. It is unclear why Christiansen did not include any references to Irish or Scottish versions of the story which had been published at the time: while *The Migratory Legends* was primarily concerned with Norwegian and other Scandinavian traditions, it does cite Gaelic and Shetlandic traditions occasionally.<sup>5</sup> Bo Almqvist has noted that "The Man Who Married the Mermaid" is a more apt title for this story in Irish tradition, since versions collected in Ireland generally refer to the supernatural bride as a mermaid or woman from the sea rather than as a seal.<sup>6</sup> In his catalogue of Swedish legends, Bengt af Klintberg identifies the story as F51 "Water Spirit Retrieves Hidden Fish Guise"; and Alan Bruford refers to it as F75 "Seal Bride" in his index of Scottish legends.<sup>7</sup>

The scholars mentioned above have offered summaries or definitions of the legend which, naturally, reflect the form typical of the regions in whose folklore they specialize. As the

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3 Curtin, *Tales of the Fairies and of the Ghost World*, 150–51.; Kennedy, *Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts*, 109–11.; Wood-Martin, *The Rude Stone Monuments of Ireland*, 227–29. Wood-Martin refers simply to "an Esquimaux legend," and unfortunately does not provide any bibliographic information for this account.

4 Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends*, 75.

5 E.g. for type 4090 "Watersprite Teaches Someone to Play," Christiansen refers to an example from Shetland, and for 5080 "Food From the Fairies," he refers to a published version from Lewis. Christiansen, 77, 107.

6 Almqvist, "Of Mermaids and Marriages," 5n8. The card index for the National Folklore Collection, designed by Seán Ó Súilleabháin, uses the designation "An Fear a Phós an Mhaighdean Mhara" 'The Man Who Married the Mermaid' to refer to this legend, as well as other accounts of humans marrying women from the sea.

7 Macdonald, "Migratory Legends of the Supernatural in Scotland," 53; af Klintberg, *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend*, 117.

present dissertation is concerned with this legend in an international context, a more encompassing definition of the legend is necessary. For the purpose of the present discussion, I propose the following definition of ML 4080: a legend in which (1) a man encounters a supernatural woman or women by a body of water and (2) hides an object (skin, garment, comb, etc) that belongs to that woman, an act that compels (or allows) her to remain with him until (3) she finds this object again and returns to the water. Throughout this discussion, I will refer to stories of this type as “The Mermaid Legend” for two main reasons: firstly, because only a minority of versions refer to the supernatural woman as a seal; secondly, although the English word *mermaid* is conventionally understood to refer to a being that is half-fish and half-woman, the formation of the word suggests a woman from, or associated with, the sea, a broad enough concept that encompasses the whole range of supernatural women mentioned in this legend.

The Mermaid Legend has attracted some attention from scholars of folklore and related disciplines since versions of the story began to appear in print in the early nineteenth century, but has been the subject of relatively few articles or monographs. Older work has tended to interpret the legend within a cultural evolutionary framework, often portraying the connection between certain families and seals (seen in the example quoted above) as a vestige of a ‘totemic’ worldview.<sup>8</sup> More recent work has focused on the legend in the context of its traditional *milieux* and considered how The Mermaid Legend functions as part of a wider body of belief. Susan

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8 Gomme, “Totemism in Britain,” 219–20; Hull, *Folklore of the British Isles*, 156; MacCodrum, *The songs of John MacCodrum, bard to Sir James Macdonald of Sleat*, xxxiv–xliv; Ó Murchadha and Ó Súilleabháin, review of *The Songs of John MacCodrum*. Cf. Holmström, *Studier över svanjungfrumotivet i Völundarkvida och annorstädes*, 78. While he does not invoke the idea of ‘totemism,’ Wood-Martin also regards legends as vestiges of earlier ideas, that he explicitly compares to fossils. Wood-Martin, *The Rude Stone Monuments of Ireland*, 229.

For criticisms of the idea of ‘totemism’ as it relates to this material, see Mac Suibhne, *Tótamas in Éirinn*; Ballard, “Seal Stories and Belief on Rathlin Island,” 35–38. See also Mac Cana, review of *Tótamas in Éirinn*.

Schoon Eberly and Ronald Black have seen the legend as an attempt to explain and cope with common congenital disorders.<sup>9</sup> Linda-May Ballard and Bairbre Ní Fhloinn have focused on the relationship between this legend and other traditions about seals, interpreting the legend as an expression of beliefs about the close relationship between humans and their natural environment.<sup>10</sup>

The first attempt to catalogue and study all known variants of The Mermaid Legend was initiated in 1974, with the establishment of the Department of Irish Folklore at University College Dublin, under the leadership of Bo Almqvist. Most of the findings of this project have never been published, although some were presented in a 1990 article by Almqvist (as well as in an unpublished lecture), and a distribution map of the known Irish variants was included in Patricia Lysaght's 1986 study of the Banshee.<sup>11</sup> Materials relating to this project, such as lists of archival and published references, distribution maps, photocopies of manuscript pages and scholarly articles, interview transcripts, drafts, and other notes, are contained in a number of bound volumes held at the National Folklore Collection in Dublin. The present study is greatly indebted to the work done by Almqvist and his students on this project, as this project provided a preliminary index and suggested a number of research questions, and Almqvist's own familiarity with Scandinavian sources suggested a number of possible sources.

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9 Eberly, "Fairies and the Folklore of Disability"; Black, "Introduction," xxxiv–lxxvi.

10 Ballard, "Seal Stories and Belief on Rathlin Island"; Ní Fhloinn, "Tadhg, Donncha and Some of Their Relations."

11 Almqvist, "Of Mermaids and Marriages"; Lysaght, *The Banshee*, 159-63. The lecture, titled "The Seal Woman: A Northwest Atlantic Migratory Legend and its Transformations," was given at the 1991 Nordic-Celtic Legend Symposium, at National University of Ireland, Galway. Multiple drafts of this lecture are contained within the project's working papers.

## 0.2 Sources

By far the most valuable source for the present study is the archive of the National Folklore Collection, formerly the Irish Folklore Commission (IFC), housed at University College Dublin. This archive houses two manuscript collections, along with sound and video recordings, and represents the work of the IFC, which operated between 1935 and 1971, and of the faculty of the Department of Irish Folklore at University College Dublin, which was established in 1974.<sup>12</sup> The first of these two manuscript collections, the Main Collection, consists of fieldwork transcriptions by full and part-time collectors employed by the IFC, as well as the diaries of full-time collectors, questionnaires, and manuscripts donated by private individuals.<sup>13</sup> Contributors to the Main Collection, as a rule, preserved a high degree of contextual material, such the time and location where the item was recorded, biographical information about the informant, and how the informant had acquired the material that was being recorded. Further contextual and biographical information can often be found in the field diaries of full-time collectors. Questionnaires on a variety of topics were also sent out to full and part-time collectors employed by the IFC at various points; for the present project, the questionnaire on “families associated with animals (seals) and birds,” distributed in early 1939, is of particular relevance.<sup>14</sup>

The second manuscript collection, the Schools Collection, represents the fruit of a scheme undertaken by the IFC in the late 1930s.<sup>15</sup> Primary schools throughout the Irish Free

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12 For an exhaustive history of the Irish Folklore Commission, its methods, and its legacy, see Briody, *The Irish Folklore Commission 1935-1970*.

13 See Briody, 229–59 for an account of the Main collection and Briody, 281–89 for the questionnaires. For financial reasons, the Commission would re-use the wax cylinders on which material was recorded, so while the transcriptions survive, very few of the early recordings do.

14 NFC 1142:16-21, NFC 1306:193-236.

15 See Briody, *The Irish Folklore Commission 1935-1970*, 260–70. The dates commonly given for the Schools Scheme are 1937-1938, but the manuscripts reference dates ranging from 1935 to 1939.

State took part in the scheme, instructing their students to collect various items of folklore from their family and neighbours; schools would then compile their students' copybooks and submit the final manuscript (sometimes along with the copybooks) to the IFC. As the collectors were students rather than professional ethnographers, the quality of this collection varies wildly – plagiarism, both of the work of other students and from published sources, sometimes occurred. Still, because the Schools Collection operated throughout the entire Free State, it was able to record material from areas that collectors employed by the IFC did not operate, and so it is a valuable resource, especially for the folklore of districts where Irish was no longer spoken during the 1930s. In addition to these two manuscript collections, the NFC contains a number of audio and video recordings, made both during the years when the IFC was in operation and after the establishment of the Department of Irish Folklore.

Other archival materials of relevance for this project are housed at the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh, and at Institutet för språk och folkminnen 'The Institute for Dialect and Folklore' in Uppsala and Gothenburg. The School of Scottish Studies, established in 1951, employed fieldworkers throughout the country to record material from Gaelic, Scots, and English-language traditions. Most of this material exists in the form of audio recordings held at the School, many of which have been digitized and made available online.<sup>16</sup> The School also possesses a number of manuscript collections from before the establishment of the School, such as the MacLagan manuscripts which represent fieldwork done in the Highlands of Scotland

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16 Many of these recordings, as well as audio recordings from BBC Scotland and the Canna Collection (comprising material collected by John Lorne Campbell from the Outer Hebrides during the 1930s), are available online through the project *Tobar and Dualchais / Kist o Riches* (<http://tobarandualchais.com>). Any transcriptions are, for the most part, my own, and I am greatly indebted to Fiona MacDougall of the School of Scottish Studies, as well as Duncan Sneddon, for assisting me with particularly obscure passages. Any mistakes are, of course, my own.

between 1893 and 1902.<sup>17</sup> Institutet för språk och folkminnen was established as Landsmålsarkivet (‘The Dialect Archive’) in Uppsala in 1913 with the primary aim, as its original name suggests, of collecting information about dialects of Swedish.<sup>18</sup> Like the other archives mentioned, it contains a mix of fieldwork transcriptions, answers to questionnaires, and audio recordings.

In addition to these archival materials, I have consulted a number of published works as sources for the legend and the other oral traditions under discussion. A number of early travel writings or antiquarian works allude to local oral traditions in passing; while these works often provide early evidence for the tradition, they generally lack even basic contextual information. Other data include stories taken from oral tradition and published in Gaelic Revival periodicals such as *Irisleabhar na Gaeidhilde*, and the works of folklore collectors, linguists, and other academics working prior to the establishment of the folklore institutions mentioned above.

### 0.3 Genres

In using the name “The Mermaid Legend” for this story, I am attempting to be consistent with Christiansen, Almquist, and other scholars in referring to this story as a *legend*, along with the folklore collectors who identified the story as a *sägen*, an item of *seanchas*, or similar terms.<sup>19</sup> By *legend*, I mean a story that is mainly realistic but also contains supernatural or

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17 “The Maclagan Manuscripts,” University of Edinburgh, Accessed April 13, 2019, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/celtic-scottish-studies/archives/manuscripts-collections/maclagan>.

18 Åke Campbell, “Institute for the Investigation of Swedish Dialects, Folklore, and Folklife,” Institutet för språk och folkminnen, accessed April 13, 2019, [http://www.sprakochfolkminnen.se/download/18.3ba9edd1515c7b7a4f1740/1529494014676/ISO\\_FDFU%C3%85ke\\_Campbell\\_contents\\_survey.pdf](http://www.sprakochfolkminnen.se/download/18.3ba9edd1515c7b7a4f1740/1529494014676/ISO_FDFU%C3%85ke_Campbell_contents_survey.pdf). Copy of an undated and unpublished introduction to the collection written by Campbell for international visitors to the archive.

19 These terms are generally used by scholars of folklore as equivalents to German *Sage*, often in contrast to *Märchen* ‘wonder-tale.’ Irish and Scottish Gaelic *seanchas*, *seanachas*, *seanchosc*, etc., are abstract nouns derived from *sean(a)chaidh*, ‘keeper of traditional lore.’ Swedish *sägen*, Icelandic *saga*, and so on are cognate

abnormal narrative elements and which can be (although it not always is) interpreted by its traditional audience as a true account.<sup>20</sup> The corpus of The Mermaid Legend shows a high degree of generic fluidity: the plot may or may not be linked to personal experience, individual versions of the story may resemble *dites* or belief statements with narrative potential rather than true legends, and performers may expand and embellish the story so that it closely resembles a *Märchen*. This fluidity can be understood in light of recent work on genre in folklore, which emphasizes genre as a discursive strategy rather than an inherent quality of any given narrative: the generic features of a performance are informed by the context and function of that performance, rather than fixed by the story.<sup>21</sup>

The process of folklore collection creates an artificial context for performance: material which is normally shared with other members of the group is instead communicated to outsiders: that is, the collector and their recording device, and potential future readers. The performer's familiarity with the collector, the social distance between performer and collector, and the performer's own familiarity and comfort with the material being recorded all play a role in shaping the performance. As hundreds of versions of The Mermaid Legend are known, it would be impractical to pay close attention to the specific circumstances of every performance. In many cases this would be impossible, because this material was not recorded. For the purpose of the present dissertation, it is sufficient to note that the story is typically presented as a memorate,

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with German *Sage*, and all derive from verbs of speech. The English word *legend*, on the other hand, derives ultimately from Latin *legere* 'to read,' rather than any verb of speech. Despite this, it is still commonly used in English-language folklore scholarship, and is used in the present dissertation.

20 Dégh and Vázsonyi, "Legend and Belief," especially 116-19.

21 See Frog, "'Genres, Genres Everywhere, but Who Knows What to Think?': Towards a Semiotic Model," especially Postulate 5 at pp. 53-4.



fabulate, or belief statement; genres closely allied with belief.<sup>22</sup> Christiansen identifies the story as a *migratory legend*: it has a more or less stable narrative core whose migration can be traced, and as a legend it reflects beliefs that are held in the communities where it is told, a fact that has profound implications for understanding the story's function and meaning.

#### 0.4 Methodology and Outline

The present study is informed by methods and approaches from folkloristics and literary studies. A large section of the dissertation is essentially historic-geographic in nature: I identify all known versions of the legend that have been collected from oral tradition as well as antecedents from older literary sources, and attempt to trace the dissemination and development of the legend. In doing so, I use techniques from the digital humanities, such as basic qualitative data analysis and Geographic Information Systems (GIS), in order to identify patterns in this corpus. Alongside this historic-geographic approach, I study the legend in the context of other traditions about seals and mermaids from Ireland and Scotland across a variety of genres. My approach here is basically functional: I ask what these beliefs and stories *do* for the people who transmit them. I also, finally, approach both literary texts based on this legend and versions of the legend recorded from oral tradition as literature, and explore the meanings that they encode.

The first chapter of this dissertation begins with an overview of all known versions of The Mermaid Legend, the locations where the legend has been collected, and the circumstances of collection. The chapter then turns to an examination of the legend's demographics: the gender,

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22 The use of the terms *memorate* (for an account of a supernatural or unusual experience) and *fabulate* (for a legend with a more stereotyped plot) in folklore scholarship is generally attributed to Carl Wilhelm von Sydow's 1934 article "Kategorien der Prosa-Völkedichtung," and von Sydow's definitions have, more or less, been accepted by folklore scholars. von Sydow, *Selected Papers on Folklore*, 60–88, especially 73–5.

For the purposes of the present study, I consider the *memorate* and *fabulate* to be categories of legend, which I contrast with the folktale or *Märchen*, which are not closely related to belief, and with the *belief statement* (or *dite* in von Sydow's terminology), which is closely related to belief but lacks narrative content.

age, occupation, and similar details of the people from whom the legend was collected, and the relationship between informants and collectors and informants and their sources, which in turn provides evidence for the typical ways in which the legend was transmitted. Following this, I turn to the distribution of the story's component motifs and certain elements of vocabulary (such as whether the woman is identified as a seal-woman, mermaid, and so on, or the name of the hidden object), and identify those with a geographically significant pattern of variation. The chapter examines these patterns of distribution, and argues that they point to the legend's origin in the Gaelic-speaking world and its dissemination from Gaelic Scotland to Orkney and Shetland, and from there to the broader Norse cultural sphere.

The second chapter explores the relationship between The Mermaid Legend and other traditions about mermaids and supernatural seals as recorded in Scotland and Ireland. It begins with a survey of such traditions from across a broad range of genres, including memorates, fabulates, belief statements, tales, and songs. I consider the portrayal of such beings in these traditions, and conclude that those genres closely allied to belief (such as the legend) portray these creatures in a more or less consistent way that points to a common body of belief underlying these narratives, and that more fictional genres such as the folktale, while they are informed by that belief, take greater liberties in portraying the featured beings from the sea. I also conclude that, despite a significant degree of overlap, there are significant differences in the portrayal of seals and merfolk in the Gaelic world: traditions about seals emphasize their relationship with and similarity to humanities, while traditions about mermaids paint them as much more sinister and dangerous.

The third chapter looks at the depiction of mermaids and seals in medieval and early modern Irish written sources, including annals, synthetic history, hagiography, onomastic lore, and narrative literature, as well as examining the words used for these beings in earlier sources. Although depictions of seals are rare in earlier material, and there are only a few traces of the stories told about seals in the modern period in older literary sources, the depiction of seals in the latter largely agrees with modern beliefs about them: they are powerful, respected, and mentioned in narrative contexts that also involve magic and transformation. The literary evidence for the mermaid is more complex, leading us to surmise that this figure initially entered Irish tradition as a learned borrowing from the Classical siren in the twelfth century, and developed into the contemporary image of the long-haired woman with the fish-like lower half over later centuries. This historical development, I argue, is consistent with the conclusions of the first chapter regarding the transmission of the legend.

The fourth chapter turns from questions of distribution and development to those of interpretation and meaning. The first part of the chapter considers the legend as a means of communal expression and explores the various messages it conveys regarding human sexuality, marital relationships, separation and associated trauma, the relationship between humans and their natural environment, the ‘marked’ nature of certain families, and so on. The discussion considers the messages conveyed by the legend in light of the heterogeneous nature of many audiences, and the ability of some performers, especially women, to present ‘coded’ messages that not all members of the audience can interpret. Subsequently, the chapter turns to two case studies of individual performers, Éamonn de Búrc of Cárna, County Galway, and Peig Sayers of

Dún Chaoin, County Kerry, and interprets their versions of the legend in light of their biography and recorded repertoires.

The fifth and final chapter turns to the ‘afterlife’ of the legend in the literature and media of the twentieth and twenty-first century. I consider a number of works by Irish creators in both the English and Irish languages, including poetry by William Allingham, Seamus Heaney, and Nuala Ní Dhómhnaill; short fiction by Pádraic Ó Conaire and Éilis Ní Dhuibhne; and films by John Sayles, Neil Jordan, and Tomm Moore. In examining these works, I consider the sources used by these creators, the way they position themselves in relation to oral tradition, the way these works explore the same concerns as the legend does in oral tradition, and the ways in which the legend is used to address new questions and debates of the twentieth century and even of today.

This dissertation contains four appendices. The first appendix contains the bibliographic and archival information for every version of The Mermaid Legend covered in this present study, while the second lists the references to versions which have been excluded on the grounds that they are insufficiently sourced or are embellished and ‘inauthentic.’ The third appendix contains the distribution maps used in the first chapter. The final appendix identifies all versions of the legend that identify the male protagonist of the story as a member of a local family or claim that his descendants are still living.

### **0.5 Texts and Translations**

This dissertation quotes several archival and published sources in several languages which feature a non-standard orthography, either because these sources predate the establishment of a standardized spelling, or because the transcriber(s) wanted to indicate dialectical

pronunciations more accurately. I have made no attempt to normalize the spelling in these cases. For audio recordings, I have made use of published transcriptions or transcriptions provided by the archives where possible, but I have had to transcribe some materials myself, and in those cases I have followed the 'standard' spelling of the language as closely as possible. Finally, all translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

## 1. Distribution and Demographics of The Mermaid Legend

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the nature and provenance of the existing published and archival sources for ML 4080 “The Seal Woman,” also known as “The Mermaid Legend,” and to discuss some trends in the demographics of the individuals who told and who collected this legend.<sup>1</sup> Following this, I will turn to the content of this corpus, and the distribution of common motifs. This will begin with a discussion of the agents and objects found in all versions of the legend: the man, the supernatural woman, and her skin or garment; and then turn to the initial encounter between the man and woman, the method of her capture, their time together, her escape via the recovery of her stolen object, and the fate of her family or descendants after she leaves them behind. This discussion will focus on recurring themes and the typical forms of this legend, rather than what is atypical or anomalous; as this corpus is very a large, a full treatment of every single item, or even every anomalous item, would not be feasible. Following this, I will turn to a discussion of a number of more-or-less stable ‘texts,’ such as items of verse or proverbs, found within this corpus, and then, building upon the discussion of the distribution of common motifs, explore the possible dissemination of this legend across the Gaelic and Norse worlds.

### 1.1 Size of Corpus and Geographical Distribution

In total, I have identified 478 versions<sup>2</sup> of this legend, of which 392 are from Ireland, 66 are from Scotland, one is from the Isle of Man, two are from Norway, five are from Sweden, one is from Denmark, six are from the Faroe Islands, and five are from Iceland. A number of published texts, such as “The Lady of Gollerus,” from Thomas Crofton Croker’s *Fairy Legends*

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1 For the names of the legend, see p. 5.

2 In the following discussion, the term ‘version’ refers to a single recorded performance of the legend or to a published text which presents the legend (whether as a transcribed performance, or a more polished text).

*and Traditions of the South of Ireland* (1828),<sup>3</sup> or items which appeared in various popular periodicals are not included in this count, as such texts either lack even the most basic contextual information, represent literary works inspired by oral tradition, are derivative of other published texts, or some combination of these circumstances. These works are listed in Appendix II, and the possible influence of such works on oral tradition is mentioned in passing throughout this dissertation.

Unsurprisingly, the known versions of this legend are mostly confined to coastal areas and to areas near inland bodies of water such as lakes (Figure 1). In Ireland, the legend is most heavily concentrated along the west coast, extending as far to the east as Waterford in the south, and Rathlin Island in the north, with a small number of versions on the east coast in counties Louth and Armagh, and one version from the neo-Gaeltacht of Gibstown (Figure 2). The legend is particularly common in the vicinity of Dingle, Ballina, Sligo town, and Glencolmcille. On the Isle of Man, a single version is known from the parish of Patrick on the northwest coast. In Scotland, the legend is restricted almost entirely to coastal and island communities north of the Central Belt, and is especially common in North Uist and Shetland (Figure 3). Outside of Ireland and Britain, it has been collected all across the Icelandic coast, throughout the Faroe Islands, in the far north of Norway, and in a loose cluster around southwestern Sweden and western Denmark.

## 1.2 Sources

Where a version of the legend is found in a public archive as well as in a later publication or publications, the archival reference is considered to be the primary one, and that version will be referred to as a manuscript or sound version, depending on the media in which that version is

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<sup>3</sup> Croker, *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland*, 3–20.

preserved. When an archival version has been published, an attempt has been made to give this information alongside the archival reference in Appendix I. ‘Published versions,’ therefore, indicate versions which appear in a published work but not as an indexed manuscript, transcript, or recording housed in a public archive.

As a rule, published versions of the legend reflect the collection efforts of individual antiquarians and folklore collectors, often working prior to the establishment of national folklore institutions. While archives tended to impose standard practices regarding preserving contextual information about material, published sources vary significantly in terms of the amount of such information provided. The language of a published version is the language of the published text, although this does not always represent the language in which the version was initially recorded, or in which the performer would typically perform the story. In some cases, the original field notes for a publication may survive, but if those notes are not housed in a publicly accessible archive, the version is still designated as a published version.

### **1.2.1 Ireland**

The oldest known evidence for this story in Ireland is “The Lady of Gollerus,” mentioned above, which Croker published in 1828. This text has been excluded from the present study both because it lacks contextual information (except for being localized, as the name suggests, around Gollaras in the Dingle peninsula), and because it seems to have been heavily embellished and rewritten in Croker’s distinctive style. I have included 26 versions of the legend from published sources, the oldest of which dates to 1866, and the most recent to 1995. Ten of these are in English, and sixteen in Irish. Most of these published sources represent items published by the Folklore of Ireland Society representing fieldwork conducted before the Irish Folklore



Commission (IFC) began its work in 1935,<sup>4</sup> items published in periodicals and volumes produced by Conradh na Gaeilge and other Gaelic Revival organizations,<sup>5</sup> and the work of individual antiquarians, folklore collectors, and linguists.<sup>6</sup> Mayo Pub 5 is the published version of an item from one of the copybooks sent to the IFC as part of the Schools scheme, and currently held at the National Folklore Collection (NFC) in Dublin. Since the copybooks are not indexed or, in many cases, even paginated, I have referred to the published text here.<sup>7</sup> Mayo Pub 7 is a section from the memoir of Marrie Walsh, where she recalls participating in the Schools scheme as a child, and recounts a version of this story which she collected from a relative. Unfortunately, the version which Walsh contributed does not appear to have been copied into the manuscript, and I have not been able to locate it within an extant copybook.<sup>8</sup>

131 versions are found within the Main collection of manuscripts, of which 27 are in English and 104 in Irish. These items were collected mostly, but not exclusively, within

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4 E.g. Donegal Pub 2, 3, 5, Galway Pub 1, Kerry Pub 6, 8, 9.

5 E.g. Donegal Pub 1, Kerry Pub 4, 5, Mayo Pub 1, 2, 3.

6 E.g. Antrim Pub 1, Sligo Pub 1, Westmeath Pub 1.

7 Not all of the copybooks were sent to the IFC either. For a discussion of how the Schools Collection was carried out, see Ó Catháin and Uí Sheighin, *A Mhuintir Dhú Chaocháin, labhraíge feasta!*, xvii–xxvii., A discussion of the relationship between copybooks and manuscript, and the value of the copybooks as a source is found at Ó Catháin and Uí Sheighin, xxi.

8 The two performative contexts (as part of a secondary-school assignment, and as part of a recollection sixty years after the fact) are quite different, and it is regrettable that the earlier performance no longer survives, as a comparison between the two might have been an interesting case study.

Walsh tells us that her informant was a local character named Slippy, and that her brother corrected her transcriptions to meet standards of grammar and propriety before she handed her work in. After she relates the story as she heard it from Slippy, she tells us about a misadventure which occurred as she was handing in her homework: “I wonder why my brother crossed out ‘buckled’ and put ‘fathered three sons.’ As the teacher impressed upon us the need for clear and well-written work and examined the work as it came in, I explained that it was my brother who had crossed out the word and what it originally was. I got a whacking when I got home for mentioning such a word to the teacher, but of course I had no idea of its indelicate meaning.” Seeing as the language used in Slippy’s version of the legend caused some offence, it seems probable that Walsh’s teacher decided not to send her copybooks to the IFC on grounds of decency.

Gaeltacht areas, reflecting the priorities of the Irish Folklore Commission, and their stated aim of recovering folklore from Irish-speaking areas before the language passed away forever (Figures 4, 5).<sup>9</sup> Twelve of these items were recorded before the Commission officially began work in 1935 and represent items donated by individual collectors.<sup>10</sup> 217 versions are contained within the Schools manuscript collection, 161 in English and 56 in Irish, primarily along the west coast. As the Schools scheme operated throughout the Republic of Ireland, the distribution of the Schools versions confirms that this geographic pattern is not merely an artifact of the biases of the Commission (Figures 6,7). Seventeen versions exist as audio recordings at the NFC which have not been transcribed as part of either manuscript collection, although transcriptions of some have been published elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> Six of these items are in English, ten in Irish, and all date to the second half of the twentieth century. Louth MS-Other 1 is a transcript of an item collected by Brian Earles, one of the NFC's collectors, in 1978; this transcript is to be found among the working papers of the ML 4080 project initiated by the folklorist Bo Almqvist.<sup>12</sup> Finally, one audio recording of this legend is known to exist in the archives of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, recorded on Rathlin Island; more may exist, but the lack of proper indexing and labelling makes it difficult to identify them.<sup>13</sup>

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9 See Briody, *The Irish Folklore Commission 1935-1970*, 45–54, 69–70; Ó Giolláin, *Locating Irish Folklore*, 114–41. As noted below (p. 31), several informants report having first heard the story twenty to eighty years before it was recorded from them. This would indicate that the story was in oral circulation by the latter half of the nineteenth century at the latest, a date which is consistent with the earliest published and literary versions of the legend.

10 Cork MS-Main 2, Donegal MS-Main 1, Galway MS-Main 1, Kerry MS-Main 1,2,4,5,6,15, Waterford MS-Main 1,7,8.

11 Donegal Sound 1, 2, Kerry Sound 1, Mayo Sound 7. The publication information for these versions is in Appendix I, alongside their archival references.

12 See p. 6 above.

13 Antrim Sound 1. As of my visit in early 2018, material relating to folklife is somewhat indexed, but many hours of tape are simply labelled 'narrative' with no indication as to their contents. A project is underway to index,

### 1.2.2 Scotland

Fifteen versions of the legend from Scotland are found in published sources of an antiquarian nature, the oldest of which was published in 1822. Most of these are in English, but Orkney Pub 2, 3, and 4 were published in Scots and Argyll Pub 1 was published in Gaelic. Twenty items exist in manuscript form: one, in Gaelic, in the National Library of Scotland, seventeen within the Maclagan Manuscript collection, all in English; and two in other manuscripts held at the School of Scottish Studies, one in Gaelic and one in English.<sup>14</sup> The standard practice for fieldworkers who contributed to the Maclagan Manuscripts was to write summaries of performances in English, preserving Gaelic words or phrases with English translation where this was felt necessary. Given the high incidence of Gaelic words and phrases in the Maclagan collection, and the location where items were collected, it seems likely that many of these texts either reflect Gaelic-language performances of the legend, or performances in English by informants who learned this material in a Gaelic milieu.

30 sound recordings are held in the School of Scottish Studies, and were recorded between the 1950s and 1970s. Of these, fifteen are in Scots or Scots inflected-English, thirteen are in Gaelic, and two are in English.<sup>15</sup> Finally, one sound recording, Ross and Cromarty Sound

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digitize, and make available online the recordings housed in the Museum's archives; at time of writing it is estimated that this will be completed by the end of 2021. Once this material has been properly indexed, more versions of the legend from Northern Ireland may surface.

14 The Maclagan collection represents the results of fieldwork throughout the Highlands organized and sponsored between 1893 and 1902, by Doctor Robert Craig MacLagan, housed at the School of School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh. This collection is not to be confused with the Gaelic manuscript collection of Reverend James McLagan, housed at the University of Glasgow. See also p. 8-9.

15 Because Scots exists in a state of diglossia with Scottish Standard English, many informants whose native language is Scots show a tendency to speak Scottish Standard English (albeit with significant Scots vocabulary and phonology) with collectors from outside of their communities.

6, was made in 1995 by Seosamh Watson and Séamas Ó Catháin of the NFC. This recording is in English, although it includes some Gaelic words.

### 1.2.3 Isle of Man

A single version from the Isle of Man is known, in English, published in Walter Gill's *A Manx Scrapbook* (1929), which unfortunately lacks basic contextual information about the storyteller and circumstances of recording.<sup>16</sup> In his preface, Gill claims to know some of the Manx language, but states that “to-day [the Manx countryman] thinks and speaks in English only,” suggesting that the story was told to him in English.<sup>17</sup> In Gill's *A Second Manx Scrapbook* (1932), he posits that the story was more broadly-known on the island, on the basis of two short narratives included within J. J. Kneen's *Place-names of the Isle of Man*.<sup>18</sup> Both of these accounts simply state that a supernatural woman who may have come from the water married a man who lived near the place in question; as there is no mention of the theft of an object, or her return to the sea, they cannot be classified as versions of The Mermaid Legend in the form that they appear to us, although the possibility that Kneen is simply omitting or was not told these details and that there was a form of The Mermaid Legend connected with these sites cannot be discounted. The place-names in question are interesting: *Port ny Lady* and *Lady's Strand* or *Port Lady*, and suggest that if a form of this legend was known in connection to these places it must have been known when Manx was widely spoken (as these place-names show the generic-first

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16 Gill, *A Manx Scrapbook*, 442–43.

17 Gill, vi.

18 Gill, *A Second Manx Scrapbook*, 246.; Kneen, *The Place-Names of the Isle of Man with Their Origin and History*, 412, 444.

structure typical of Celtic languages)<sup>19</sup> but after English loanwords (such as *Lady*) had begun to enter the language.

#### 1.2.4 Norway

Two published versions from Norway are known, one from Finnmark and one from Nordland, both published at the end of the nineteenth century in Danish. The version from Nordland, which was known to Reidar Th. Christiansen, was published in Olof Nicolaissen's *Sagn og Eventyr fra Nordland* (1879), where it appears without any information about the storyteller or the performance.<sup>20</sup> The Finnmark version appears in Jens Andreas Friis' *Lappiske Eventyr og Folkesagn* (1871), again without basic contextual information. This text might represent a translation of a Northern Sámi original as it contains the Sámi name *Gieddegæs-galgo*, referring to the helper-figure who enables the man to regain his wife after she leaves him.<sup>21</sup>

#### 1.2.5 Sweden

One version from Sweden is only found in a published source, Pehr Johnsson's *Sägner och folktro från Blekinge* (1921), which gives no information about the storyteller. Another four versions are found in manuscript form in the Institutet för språk och folkminnen (ISF): one in the Uppsala archive and three in the Göteborg archive. These archival versions date from between

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19 In toponymics, the *generic* element of a place name refers to a non-unique feature of the physical or human landscape, such as a hill, river, port, or church, and the *specific* element is an adjective, proper noun, or another element which restricts the meaning of the generic. Celtic place-names typically have a generic-first structure, e.g. *Baile Átha Cliath*, *Inbhir Nis*, *Aberystwyth*, *Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch*, as opposed to Germanic names, which typically have a specific-first structure, e.g. *Somerville*, *Caithness*, *Göteborg*, *Odense*.

20 See Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends*, 75. Nicolaissen's text is included as Nordland Pub 1.

21 Literally 'Old Woman of the Field,' a stock figure in many Sámi *Märchen*. Private correspondence with Dr. Tim Frandy, 24 October, 2018.

1919 and 1943. All versions of the legend collected from Sweden were recorded in the Swedish language.

### 1.2.6 Denmark

A single, rather short version from Denmark is known, published in the second volume of Evald Tang Kristensen's *Danske Sagn som de har lydt i Folkemunde* (1898) in Danish. The legend would have been known to Danish readers since 1823, when a Danish-language text that sets the story in the Faroe Islands appeared in the third volume of Just Mathias Thiele's *Danske Folkesagn*.<sup>22</sup>

### 1.2.7 Faroe Islands

The oldest version of this legend comes from the autoethnographic work *Indberetninger fra en Reise i Færøe 1781 og 1782* by the Faroese musician, ethnographer, and linguist Jens Christian Svabo. Svabo's text is in Danish, contains no contextual information, and appears to be a conflation of multiple versions of the legend rather than an accurate transcription of a single performance.<sup>23</sup> As mentioned above, a text set in the Faroe Islands was published in Danish by Thiele: this text seems to be derived from Svabo's account and thus is not included in the present study. A version in Faroese with a Danish translation was published by J. H. Schröter in *Antikvarisk Tidsskrift* (1850), set in Mikladalur on the island of Kalsoy. Two versions of the legend were published in Faroese and Danish by Venceslaus Ulricus Hammershaimb, the minister and folklorist responsible for the creation of the modern Faroese orthography, in *Færøsk Anthologi* (1886). The first of these, localized in Mikladalur, closely resembles Schröter's version

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22 Thiele, *Danske folkesagn*, iii, 51-2.

23 Faroe Pub 1. Svabo tells us that “Der gives endog Familier endnu, som Eenfoldige troe, at stamme ned fra slige Ægteskabe” ‘there are even now families who, simple people believe, descended from such marriages,’ which suggests that Svabo was aware of multiple localized versions of the legend.

in many respects, but contains material not found in the older version, while the second is localized in Skálavík on the island of Sandoy. Neither Schröter nor Hammershaimb provide contextual information for their texts. An English-language version, taking place in Mikladálur, was published by Joseph Russell Jeaffreson in *The Faroe Islands* (1898). Finally, an audio recording was made in 1971 from a storyteller from Skálavík, which resembles the second of Hammershaimb's texts in many respects, but includes information not found in that text, and is connected with the storyteller's own family. This recording is housed in the Norsk Folkminnesamling (formerly Institutet for folkeminnevitenskap) at the University of Oslo, and a transcription of this recording exists at the NFC among the working papers of the ML 4080 project.

### 1.2.8 Iceland

There is a reference to this legend in a travel account by Eggert Ólafsson, first published in Danish in 1772.<sup>24</sup> Four versions were collected throughout the middle of the nineteenth century, and published in Icelandic in Jón Árnasson's *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*.<sup>25</sup> Another version in Icelandic was collected in 1904 and published in Sigfús Sigfússon's *Íslenskar þjóðsögur og sagnir*.

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24 Olafssen and Povelsen, *Vice-Landmand Eggert Olafsens Og Land-Physici Biarne Povelsens Reise Giennem Island*, 534–35. Translated and discussed in Puhvel, “The Seal in the Folklore of Northern Europe,” 327–28. Eggert's account does not include a complete narrative, but it does mention that the story is known throughout Iceland. While it is too cursory to be considered a ‘version’ of the legend, it does tell us that it was circulating across Iceland by the late eighteenth century.

25 Originally published two volumes in 1862 and 1864. A revised, expanded edition was published in five volumes between 1954 and 1961, edited by Árni Böðvarsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. The second edition includes texts not previously published, and includes contextual information from Jón Árnasson's field notes.

### 1.3 Length and Style

As the majority of versions of this legend are preserved only as archival transcriptions or published texts, word count has been taken as an indicator of length. This does not give a perfect indication of the length of a performance, as different people have different rates of speech, and a competent storyteller will speed up or slow down their speech for effect. Additionally, different transcription and editorial practices disagree as to what is considered a single word in many cases: for example, Irish *ina* ‘in his/her/theirs, in which’ may be written as *i n-a* or ‘*na*, and Scottish Gaelic *a-rithist* ‘again’ may be written as *a rithist* or *arithist*, and unstressed particles which are often dropped in speech (such as the Irish interrogative particle *an*) may or may not be written. Despite such issues, word count does give a rough indication of performance length, as well as the relative length of performances: a 600-word-long text would clearly take longer to deliver than a 200-word one, for instance.

355 versions of the legend, approximately 75% of all versions, contain 400 words or fewer; of these, 187 are under 200 words long. Versions shorter than 400 words are found in every country where the legend is known. Some of these shorter items are found in published sources, the Maclagan manuscripts, or the Schools manuscript collection, and are therefore likely to represent summaries of longer performances, but a large number of audio recordings and entries in the Main collection are of this length, which seems to indicate that performances of this story are typically fairly short. 50 texts, collected in Ireland, Scotland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands are between 401 and 600 words in length; 29 texts, collected from Ireland, Scotland, and Sweden, are between 601 and 800 words in length; while only 32 texts, collected from Ireland, Scotland, the Faroe Islands, and northern Norway, are over 801 words in length (Figure 8).



The short length seen in most attested versions of the legend is typical of the legend genre. With the exception of Finnmark Pub 1, versions longer than 800 words have only been collected in areas where the legend is well attested: the Faroe Islands, North Uist, Shetland, Orkney, and the west coast of Ireland. Finnmark Pub 1 is atypical in terms of style: Almqvist described it as “a *Mischform* between *Sage* and *Märchen*.”<sup>26</sup> This version contains a greater attention to detail than is typical of other versions of the legend, frequent tripling of events, and an additional episode where the husband consults a supernatural helper-figure, the *Gieddegæs-galgo*, and succeeds in re-capturing his supernatural bride. Although the pattern of longer versions being collected in areas where this tradition is well known may simply be due to sampling bias, it seems at least plausible that these longer versions could indicate a tendency for more accomplished storytellers to take greater creative liberties with well-known stories.

Unsurprisingly, most versions of this legend are performed in a rather spare style. Actions are simply narrated and individuals and locations are named rather than being described. The supernatural woman is an exception to this pattern: performers may take some time to describe her appearance, her beauty, and what she is doing when the man first comes across her. Because the woman’s initial appearance marks the intrusion of the supernatural into the otherwise mundane world of the legend, it is not surprising that she receive the most narrative attention. Dialogue is often simply reported or restricted to fairly short sentences, and performers often simply tell us the mental states of the characters – for example, when the man falls in love with the woman upon seeing her, or when the woman is unhappy and wishes to return home. The plot is presented as two or more significant episodes, with large stretches of compressed time between them: usually when the man finds and captures the woman and when she escapes, with

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26 Almqvist, “Of Mermaids and Marriages,” 7n13.

the intervening years attracting little attention, and in some cases allowed to pass without comment.

### 1.4 Demographics

For the purposes of the following discussion, there are three roles which can be identified for any particular version of the legend: *collector*, *informant*, and *source*. The *collector* is the person (or people) who did the fieldwork, either a freelance or institutionally-affiliated folklore collector (or team) or, in the case of items from the Schools collection, a primary school student. The *informant* is the person (or people) from whom the material was collected, while the *source* is the person whom the informant identifies as the one from whom they heard the legend. The persons who filled these roles are not known for every version. Multiple people can fulfill a single role, and the same person can fulfill multiple roles, although these three roles are mutually exclusive in most cases. There are a small number of exceptions, where the same person is both informant and collector; in such cases, the fieldworkers are writing down material from their own memory.<sup>27</sup>

For published sources, the author is identified as the collector unless otherwise noted. Gender is inferred from personal names, gendered surnames or patronymics, titles such as ‘Mr.’, or relational terms such as ‘father’ or ‘wife.’

#### 1.4.1 Collector Demographics

The collector can be identified for 414 versions of this legend; in six the collector is also the informant. Most collectors are only attested once or twice in this corpus, but a minority of collectors are responsible for several recordings of the legend. These collectors were among some of the most active who were employed by the IFC, by Robert Craig Maclagan, and by the

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<sup>27</sup> Argyll MS 1, Mayo Pub 7, Orkney MS 1, Waterford MS-Main 1,5,8.

School of Scottish Studies, so this imbalance may be due to the fact that these collectors were simply doing most of the collecting in general, rather than due to any particular interest they may have had in this legend. Further research into the fieldwork diaries of individual collectors might shed some light on this issue.<sup>28</sup>

**Table 1: Collectors who have recorded several versions of The Mermaid Legend.**

Name	Number of Versions collected	Location(s) collected
Seán Ó hEochaidh	21	West Donegal, north Sligo
Elizabeth Kerr	17	Western Isles and mainland Scotland
Seósamh Ó Dálaigh	16	Kerry, West Cork
Tadhg Ó Murchadha	9	Kerry, Limerick
Liam Mac Coisdealbha	9	Galway
Liam Mac Meanman	8	Donegal
Alan Bruford	7	Orkney, Shetland, eastern Scotland
Proinnsias de Búrca	6	Galway
Michael J. Murphy	6	Ulster, Sligo
Calum MacLean	6	Shetland, Barra, mainland Scotland
Nioclás Breatnach	4	Waterford

<sup>28</sup> In an interview with Bo Almqvist, Seamus Heaney states that he had learned the legend from Ó hEochaidh and in fact, dedicates his poem *Maighdean Mara* to him. Almqvist, “Of Mermaids and Marriages,” 43–45.

In a personal conversation with Dr. Maxim Fomin in late 2017, he noted that the first story which Ó hEochaidh had collected for the IFC was a version of this legend. Finally, one version of this legend, Donegal Sound 2, was recorded from Ó hEochaidh. Ó hEochaidh, at least, seems to have had a particular interest in the legend.

271 versions were recorded by a male collector or collectors, 140 by a female collector, and 2 by a male and female collector working together.<sup>29</sup> When the Schools collection is not included, 206 versions were recorded by a male collector or collectors, while only 35 were recorded by a female collector, of which 17 were recorded by Elizabeth Kerr. Notably, no versions of the legend recorded outside of Ireland or Scotland were known to have been recorded by a female collector. When considered on its own, the Schools Collection itself presents a very different picture. 105 versions were recorded by female student-collectors, and only 67 by male ones; in other words, female collectors outnumber male ones almost three to two.

#### **1.4.2 Informant Demographics**

The name of the informant can be identified in 353 versions. Most of these informants have only contributed one or two versions of the legend, with some exceptions such as Brucie Henderson of Arisdale, Shetland, from whom the story was recorded four times. 240 versions were recorded from a male informant or informants, and 115 from a female informant. Two versions were recorded from a male and a female informant: in one case, the informants are husband and wife, in the other case, the relationship is unknown.<sup>30</sup> While there is a bias towards male informants, it is nowhere near as pronounced as the bias towards male collectors.

The informant's age is known in 221 cases. Only 25 informants are under the age of 50, 42 are in their 50s, 55 in their 60s, 53 in their 70s, and 43 in their 80s or 90s, with another three simply identified as 'old.' The informant's occupation is known in 133 cases. While ten informants are described as schoolteachers, shopkeepers, or in other middle-class occupations,

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29 Angus Sound 1, collected by Alan Bruford and Linda Headlee of the School of Scottish Studies, and Westmeath Pub 1, collected by "Dr. Norman Moore, of St. Bartholomew's Hospital" and "Miss Raynells of Killynon," relationship unknown.

30 Kerry MS-Main 31 and Limerick MS-Schools 2, respectively.

and three are identified as students, the remaining majority are described as farmers, fishermen, housewives, and other manual labourers. With some notable exceptions, including Eoghan Mac Pháidín who lived in Baile an Ghib, County Meath, but was a native of Rann na Féirste, County Donegal, and Travellers such as Stanley Robertson, born in Aberdeenshire, informants tended to reside in, or not far from, the districts where they were born.<sup>31</sup>

### 1.4.3 Source Demographics

Information on the source from whom the informant learned the story is much scarcer, and mostly to be found in Irish and Scottish versions, especially those from the Main collection, where such information was explicitly requested. Only 91 versions identify the source as a specific person, and only 48 give the source's name. In 44 cases, the informant states how long ago they learned the story, ranging from twelve years to 80. In 26 of these cases, the informant reports learning this story 40 or more years ago, and in another four cases the informant simply states that they learned it 'many years' ago. The informant states the age of their source when they learned the story in 43 cases; only in three cases was the source under the age of 60.<sup>32</sup> The source's occupation is only given in ten cases: seven are farmers, one is a fisherman, one is a housewife, and one is a captain. Not surprisingly, these occupations reflect those typical of the informants.

In 50 cases, the relationship between an informant and their source is explicitly stated. In the case of 35 versions, the informant learned the story from a parent; in eleven other cases, another elder relative; in one case, from their brother; and in another, their wife. In one case the

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31 E.g. Meath MS 1 was recorded from Eoghan Mac Pháidín, Midlothian Sound 1 and Aberdeen Sound 1 were recorded from Stanley Robertson, and Midlothian MS 1 was recorded from Mrs McFarlane, a resident of Edinburgh but native of Ross-shire.

32 Galway MS-Main 9, age 23; Cork MS-Main 5, age 45; Waterford MS-Main 4, age 55.

informant recalls learning the story from a neighbour, and in one case from the farmer for whom the informant used to work.<sup>33</sup> Male informants are roughly three times as likely to have learned the story from a male source (33 cases) than from a female one (fourteen), while female informants are equally likely to have heard the story from a male (eleven) or female source (eleven).

#### 1.4.4 Collector and Informant

The relationship between collector and informant is specified in 40 versions, 35 of which are from the Schools collection. In most cases, the collector and informant are family: parent and child in 31 cases, and otherwise related in another six cases.<sup>34</sup> In one case, the collector is the informant's neighbour; in another case, the collector is their student; and in one from the Main collection, the informant is a young student of the collector's.<sup>35</sup> In many other versions from the Schools collection, informant and collector share a surname and address, and are presumably related, but this connection is not explicitly stated.

In 168 cases, a male collector has recorded a story from a male informant or informants, in 50 cases from a female informant, and in one case from both a male and female informant.<sup>36</sup> In 63 cases a female informant has collected from a male informant, in 50 cases from a female informant, and in one case from both male and female informant.<sup>37</sup> This is consistent with the pattern noticed in the relationship between informants and their sources: men are much more

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33 Shetland Sound 7 and Ross and Cromarty MS 3, respectively.

34 Collector is the informant's grandchild in Orkney Pub 4, Leitrim MS-Schools 6, Mayo MS-Schools 10, Limerick MS-Schools 20, and Kerry MS-Schools 68; the informant's nephew in Kerry MS-Schools 6.

35 Sligo MS-Schools 7, Mayo MS-Schools 23, and Kerry MS-Main 2, respectively.

36 Kerry MS-Main 31, recorded by Seosamh Ó Dálaigh from Davey Nolan (68) and Mrs. Davey Nolan (62).

37 Limerick MS-Schools 2, recorded by Anetta Dalton from John O'Callahan (67) and Mrs. Dan O'Sullivan (81). The relationship between all three people is unclear.

likely to record or learn stories from other men, while women are equally likely to record or learn stories from men and women. The same pattern holds true within the Schools collection: male collectors are far more likely to record this story from another man (44) than a woman (eleven), while female collectors are only somewhat more likely to record this story from a man (49) than from a woman (32). In all six cases where the informant is also the collector, this person is a man.

Since the clear majority of versions of this legend are from Ireland, and the Irish archival material tends to give more demographic information, any conclusions regarding the demographics of this tradition may only be applicable to Ireland. The foregoing information paints a picture of legend transmission within relatively stationary communities, along family lines, especially from elderly parents or grandparents to young children. This may have been the case, although another possibility is that informants were simply more likely to report learning the story from an elderly source, whether to keep alive the memory of a deceased relative, because childhood events are more memorable than the day-to-day conversation in which legends are often told, or to emphasize the antiquity of this tradition to collectors who privileged old stories.

Where the informant is known, slightly under one third of all versions were recorded from a woman. Given that the Irish Folklore Commission employed mostly male collectors, who tended to prioritize male storytellers, the high proportion of female informants is striking. The same proportion of male (33) to female (seventeen) informants is seen in Scotland; in Sweden, two out of four versions where the informant is known were collected from the same woman,

Fredrika Pålsson; and in Iceland, in all three cases where the informant is known, that informant was a woman.

While a clear majority of independent folklorists and fieldworkers employed by national archives were men, a clear majority of the student-collectors who recorded versions of this story in the Schools collection were female. This suggests that, at least in the 1930s in Ireland, this story was thought of as being more appropriate for young girls than boys. In the Schools collection, the legend is frequently presented as being a story essentially about the mermaid; informants might have thought that young women were more likely to appreciate a story about a female figure, or female students might have sought out such stories on their own. On the other hand, given the sexual undertones of the legend, people might simply have been less likely to tell such a story to young boys. Further work into the demographics and content of the Schools collection as a whole could shed light into this issue.

The large number of female informants, as well as the large number of female students who collected this legend suggest that most women living in communities where this story is told, at least in Ireland and Scotland, would have heard and known this story, even if they might not have necessarily told it themselves. Given that women were likely to have learned this story from other women, while men were far more likely to have learned it from another man than a woman, this suggests that in many cases the story was transmitted in female-only contexts. This has strong implications for the interpretation of this legend, which will be discussed later on. While it may not be accurate to classify The Mermaid Legend as a woman's story, given the ratio of male informants who told it, it is certainly not a men's story.



## 1.5 Actors and Objects

### 1.5.1 The Supernatural Woman.

The supernatural woman is usually anonymous, although a personal name is given in two Irish-language versions: “Úna” in Galway MS-Main 2, and “Inghean Mhaor an Eirc” in Kerry Pub 5. Both of these versions are rather long, include elements of the wonder-tale, and also give the man a personal name: “Fergus” (without a patronymic) and “Donnchadh Ó Dubhda,” respectively.<sup>38</sup> Where she is not simply identified as a woman, girl, or an equivalent terms, the words used to describe her fit into two categories. The first category consists of compound words or phrases formed from a word indicating a human female and a word indicating a body of water, like the English word *mermaid*, and the second category consists of words which indicate seals or words derived from a word for *seal*.

The most common word in the first category is *mermaid*, which is attested in 185 versions throughout Ireland and Scotland (Figure 9). This term predominantly occurs in English-language versions, but three Scots versions contain the word.<sup>39</sup> The Irish and Gaelic word *maighdean mhara* is attested in 63 versions from Ireland and Gaelic Scotland, while the variant *maighdean chuain* appears in three versions from northern Scotland (Figure 10).<sup>40</sup> In Ireland, this

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38 In Galway NFC-Main 2, Úna performs some of the actions associated with heroines in other tales: she attracts the attention of the king for the quality of her singing, is awarded a prize by the king, and is later invited to a ball; this high amount of agency presumably necessitates naming her. In Kerry Pub 5, on the other hand, Inghean Mhaor an Eirc plays a typically passive role, but her suitor has known of her for some time, has decided that he will marry nobody else but her, and discusses this with his brother before he captures her.

Úna is a relatively unremarkable name, but Inghean Mhaor an Eirc is unusual, and can be literally translated as ‘Daughter of the Steward of the Lizard.’ The name Donnchadh Ó Dubhda is also atypical for Kerry, as the O’Dowd family is more commonly mentioned in versions from Mayo and Sligo. See Appendix IV.

39 Argyll Sound 1, Orkney Pub 2, Shetland Sound 1.

40 For the etymology and history of *maighdean mhara* ‘sea maiden,’ see p. 147 below. The form *maighdean chuain* ‘bay-maiden’ seems to have been formed by analogy. With the exception of Midlothian MS-1, recorded from a native of Ross residing in Edinburgh, the term is limited to Sutherland.

term is almost entirely restricted to the northern half of the island, although three versions from Kerry contain this term.<sup>41</sup> In the southern half of the island, the older Irish term *murúch*, alongside dialectal variants such as *mrúch* and *bruach*, is most common, appearing in 41 versions from across Munster (Figure 11).<sup>42</sup> Terms such as *bean na fairrge* ‘woman of the sea,’ and *sea woman*, whose meanings are transparent, are found in a handful of Irish and Scottish versions of the legend.<sup>43</sup> In Denmark, the word *havfru* ‘sea-woman’ is found, while in Sweden, the terms *havstroll* ‘sea-troll, sea-magical being,’ *sjöjungfru* ‘sea-maiden’ and *sjörå* ‘lake-spirit’ are known.<sup>44</sup>

Representing the second category, the Irish word *rón* ‘seal’ and Scottish Gaelic *ròn* ‘seal,’ along with derivative terms such as *maighdean ròin* ‘seal maiden,’ are attested in twelve versions from Ireland and Scotland: four from West Galway, one from Mayo, and one from Kerry; one from Argyllshire and five from the Outer Hebrides.<sup>45</sup> One version (Argyll MS 1) refers to the supernatural bride as both a “ròn” and a “maighdean mhara.” The English and Scots terms *seal*

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41 Kerry MS-Schools 36, 48, 70. As these are from the Schools collection, the possibility cannot be discounted that an overzealous teacher ‘corrected’ the students’ use of a dialect word.

42 On the etymology and history of the word *murúch*, see p. 148 below.

43 “Bean farraige” (Kerry MS-Schools 72), “bean na fairrge” (Galway MS-Schools 6), “bean mhara” (Cork MS-Main 1, Kerry MS-Schools 70), “bean uisce” (Donegal MS-Main 19), “óig mhara” (Mayo Pub 3), “Sea maid” (Inverness Pub 2), “sea woman” (Cork MS-Main 1), etc.

44 *Havfru* is conventionally translated ‘mermaid,’ and typically signifies a half-fish half-human creature, as in Hans Christian Andersen’s *Den lille Havfrue*, or Edvard Eriksen’s statue in Copenhagen with the same name. Similarly, *sjöjungfru* is conventionally translated ‘mermaid,’ and seems to refer to a half-fish being. *Sjörå* refers to a solitary female lake-spirit, who is sometimes said to reward fishermen with good catches, to warn them about imminent bad weather, or to tempt men with the prospect of a sexual relationship. cf Klintberg, *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend*, 111. The second element of *sjörå*, *rå* is derived from the verb *råda* ‘to rule, advise’ and, curiously, is a neuter noun. Her terrestrial counterpoint is the *skogsrå*, a guardian spirit of the forest (*skog*), who also frequently appears as a beautiful woman, and can aid woodsmen, lead them astray, or tempt them into disastrous sexual relationships. cf Klintberg, 97. See also Rooth, “The Conception of ‘Rulers’ in the South of Sweden.”

45 *Rón* is sometimes spelled *rún* in NFC manuscripts, reflecting the raising of *ó* to *ú* in the presence of a nasal consonant in West Galway dialects of Irish (De Bhaldraithe, *The Irish of Cois Fhairrge*, Co. Galway, 85–86.) This introduces an interesting possible *double entendre* with *rún* ‘secret.’

and *selkie* ‘grey seal’ are found in Orkney and Shetland, but also throughout Scotland, in County Mayo, and in the one English-language text from the Faroe Islands (Figure 12). Words derived from Old Norse *selr* ‘seal’ are found in Iceland and southern Sweden, and words deriving from Old Norse *kópr* ‘seal’ are found in the Faroe Islands and northern Norway (Figure 13).<sup>46</sup> Other terms include *eala* ‘swan’ (Mayo MS-Main 3, Galway MS-Main 12), *bean sí* ‘fairy woman’ (Cork MS-Schools 3), *leannan shìth* ‘fairy lover’ (Sutherland MS 2), and *Finn* (Orkney Sound 1).<sup>47</sup>

The woman is frequently described as beautiful (84), or in hyperbolic terms as the most beautiful being whom the man has ever seen (43). Another five versions specify that she is the most beautiful of her companions who appear at the shore with her, which causes the man to single her out for capture.<sup>48</sup> She is described as young in 35 versions; only a single version (Roscommon MS-Schools 3) describes her as an old woman. Descriptions of the woman’s youth and beauty are found evenly distributed across the legend’s geographic range.

73 versions, 63 from Ireland, nine from Scotland, and one from Värmland describe the woman’s hair (Figure 14). Her hair is typically long (44), and fair, yellow, or golden (43),

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46 Svabo uses the term ‘Sælhunden’ in his version, published in Danish, but at the beginning of his discussion on seal-hunting, he states “Keupar er nu et almindeligt Navn for hele Sælhunde Slægten. Selur er det ældre Navn” ‘Keupar is now a common name for the whole species of seal. *Selur* is the older name.’ Svabo, *Indberetninger fra en reise i Færøe*, 48–49. Svabo was writing before a standard orthography had been established for the Faroese language. His spelling, “Keupar,” reflects the pronunciation of the word, while the contemporary Faroese spelling, *kópur*, reflects its etymology. Faroese *kópur* and Old Norse *kópr* both derive from the Old Norse verb *kópa* ‘to stare, gape.’ Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, s.v. *kópa*.

47 In the folklore of Orkney and Shetland, the terms *Fin(n)* or *Fin(n)-folk* refer to a race of human-like beings possessed of various magical powers, including the ability to change shape. The name may suggest a cultural memory of Sámi shamanic practices, brought to Shetland and Orkney from northern Scandinavia. See Teit, “Water-Beings in Shetlandic Folk-Lore,” 193–96.

48 Galway MS-Main 8, Inverness Sound 3, Orkney MS 1, Shetland Sound 8, Faroe Pub 5.

although less often it is red (sixteen), black (three), brown (three), or even green (one).<sup>49</sup>

Descriptions of her hair typically are consistent with the image of the woman as a mermaid or similar being, but there are three exceptions.<sup>50</sup> Her eyes are described as the colour of the sea in four Irish versions, and two Irish versions describe her voice as beautiful.<sup>51</sup> 50 versions describe the woman as conforming the common contemporary image of the mermaid: human from the waist up and fish from the waist downwards (Figure 15). These are mostly found in Ireland in both Irish and English, although two versions from Scotland and one from Sweden describe her in this way.<sup>52</sup> Unsurprisingly, this description only occurs when the woman is identified as a *maighdean mhara*, *mermaid*, *murúch*, or *sjöjungfru*.

Six versions from southern Ireland state that the woman's kin is unknown, while another five from northern Scotland and western Ireland identify her as supernatural, related to the fairies, or not a Christian.<sup>53</sup> She is identified as royalty, and related to an aquatic king, in five versions, while one version from Iceland identifies her as a descendant of the biblical Pharaoh.<sup>54</sup>

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49 Black hair: Clare MS-Schools 1, 9, Värmland MS 1; brown hair: Galway MS-Main 15, Mayo MS-Schools 6, Waterford MS-Main 3; green: Limerick MS-Schools 2.

50 Galway MS-Main 8, 15 (*rón*), Stirling Pub 1 (*selkie*).

51 Mayo Pub 2, Galway MS-Main 5, Kerry Pub 5, 8 describe her eyes as the colour of the sea; Donegal MS-Schools 10 and Galway MS-Main 2 describe her as having a beautiful voice.

52 Midlothian MS 1, Blekinge Pub 1.

53 The woman's kin is unknown in Cork MS-Schools 9, 10, Kerry MS-Main 1, Waterford MS-Main 5, MS-Schools 2. She is identified as a supernatural being in Sutherland Sound 1, Sligo MS-Main 2, Kerry MS-Schools 43 and Kerry Pub 8, and as not a Christian in Ross and Cromarty Sound 6 and Mayo Pub 1.

54 The woman is identified as royalty in Clare MS-Schools 4, Galway MS-Main 3, 8, Kerry MS-Main 29, Mayo MS-Main 12. She is stated to be a descendant of the Pharaoh in Iceland Pub 5. Cf. Puhvel, "The Seal in the Folklore of Northern Europe," 328–31.

### 1.5.2 The Stolen Object

Names for the stolen object also generally fit into two categories: those that signify a skin or hide, and those that signify a garment of some sort. There is a much greater diversity of names for the stolen object than there is for the woman, and this object is more likely to be known by multiple names.

The first category of terms are relatively rare in Ireland and limited to the northern half: “sloosh” in Antrim MS-Main 1 (possibly from Scots *sloch*),<sup>55</sup> “skin” in Antrim MS-Main 3, “sloch” alongside “mole” in Donegal MS-Schools 16, “craiceann róin” ‘seal skin’ in Mayo MS-Schools 1, “shark skin” alongside “tail” in Sligo MS-Schools 8, and “seaskin” alongside “comb” in Sligo MS-Schools 18. Isle of Man Pub 1 refers to this object as a “skin” and a “covering.” The Gaelic words *craiceann* ‘skin,’ *bian* ‘hide,’ and *seiche* ‘pelt’ are attested in the Outer Hebrides and Sutherland, while *skin*, *selkie skin*, *seal skin*, and *sea skin* are found in Shetland, Orkney, Sutherland, and throughout the Hebrides (Figures 16, 17, 18). In the Nordic countries, terms descended from Old Norse *húð* and *hamr* are common, often compounded with a word meaning *seal* (e.g. *selshamur*), but both *fiskhamn* ‘fish-*hamr*’ and *sjöjungfruhamn* ‘mermaid-*hamr*,’ which suggest a piscine being rather than a mammal, are found in Sweden.<sup>56</sup> Words derived from *húð* and *hamr* appear alongside one another in Faroe Pub 2,3,4 and Bohuslän MS 1. Other similar words include “Saelhundekind” ‘seal-skin’ in Denmark Pub 1, and “selsbelgur” ‘seal-hide’ in Iceland Pub 2 (Figure 19).

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55 “The pelt or coat of a sheep taken, skin and wool together, from a dead animal[...]; also *transf.* of any similar covering.” Grant et al., *The Scottish National Dictionary*, s.v. *sloch* (1).

56 *Húð* is defined as ‘hide (of cattle),’ and *hamr* as ‘skin, slough; shape, form’. Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, s.v. *húð*, *hamr*. The word *hamr* is used in the expression *skipta hömum* meaning ‘to change one’s shape,’ and the goddess Freyja is said to possess a *valshamr* ‘falcon-*hamr*’ or *fjaðrhamr* ‘feather-*hamr*’ that allows her to assume the shape of a falcon or hawk. Guðni Jónsson, *Eddukvæði*, i: 163-173; Faulkes, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, 2.

The second category of terms, those signifying clothing, are much more common in Ireland and Scotland than outside of those countries, and most often refer either to a concealing exterior garment, a piece of headgear, or a more generic term for clothing. *Cochall* ‘cloak’ is well-attested throughout the Gaelic-speaking world (in 63 versions), although sometimes in combination with other words such as *craiceann* ‘skin,’ *tail*, or *slige* ‘shell,’ which suggests that there may have been some confusion as to the meaning of this word (Figure 20).<sup>57</sup> Other words with a similar semantic range include *brat* ‘mantle’ (75) which occurs throughout Ireland, especially in Kerry; *cloak* or *clóca* (58) which is found throughout Ireland and in Argyll, *coat* or *cóta* (twelve) in western Ireland, North Uist, and Orkney, and *mantle* (nine) in western Ireland and mainland Scotland (Figures 21-23). The most common word designating headwear is *cap* or *caipín* (64), found throughout Ireland but especially in western Munster (Figure 24). A number of other words designating cloak-like garments, headgear, and clothing in general occur only once or twice in Ireland and Scotland within this corpus. Outside of Ireland and Scotland, words designating a skin or hide are the norm, but the word *klaeder* ‘clothes’ is found in Finnmark, and both *fjällklädnaden* ‘mountain clothing(?)’ and “tröja” ‘jumper(?)’ are found in Sweden.

Inverness Pub 3 refers to the stolen item as a “seal coat,” which combines both semantic categories. The terms *hood* (in Kerry Pub 2, Mayo MS-Schools 9, and Sutherland MS 1) and *sealie hood* (in Aberdeen Sound 1 and Midlothian Sound 1) are potentially ambiguous; while the versions from Kerry and Mayo likely refer to a piece of headwear, the versions from Scotland were collected in areas of heavy Scandinavian influence, and so *hood* in this context might be a

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57 In Mayo Pub 4, the collector Nathaniel Colgan notes that “[he] was unable to discover the precise meaning attached by the Clare Islanders to the word *cochall* which so often recurs in these seal legends. All the authorities agreed that the word had dropped out of the ordinary colloquial Gaelic of the island, and survived there only in the seal legends. One man believed the *cucul* was a cap, another thought it might be a cape, a third preferred to english it hood, and a fourth was inclined to extend its meaning to the whole skin or vesture of the seal.”

loan-word from Old Norse *húð*, indicating skin rather than headgear. In support of this interpretation, Aberdeen Sound 1 specifies that the woman is naked without her “sealie hood.”<sup>58</sup>

In 22 versions from Scotland and the northern half of Ireland, the stolen object is referred to as a *tail* or *fish tail*; twice alongside the term *sloch*, once alongside *skirt*, and once alongside *cochall* (Figure 25).<sup>59</sup> Fifteen versions from across Ireland describe the stolen object as a *comb* or *cíor* ‘comb,’ and Orkney Pub 2 mentions that the man steals a “petticoat” and a “comb.”<sup>60</sup> Sligo MS-Main 2, Donegal MS-Schools 10, and Ross and Cromarty 3, 4 state that the man stole the woman’s *shell*, while Inverness Sound 1 refers to the stolen object as both a “cochall” and a “slige.” The word *caul* (i.e. the amniotic membrane which sometimes covers the head of a newborn mammal) occurs in Orkney Pub 1 alongside *sloch* and *skin*, and in Limerick MS-Schools 2 on its own. Limerick MS-Schools 15 and 19 refer to the mermaid’s *cap and call*, which might indicate something similar. The stolen object is a *wand* in seven versions, a *rod* in two, and a *slat* ‘rod, wand’ in another two.<sup>61</sup> It is a “web” in Cork MS-Schools 6, a *net* in seven versions, and “eangach” in Mayo MS-Schools 5.<sup>62</sup> The term “sprat,” indicating a fish which accompanies the mermaid, appears in Cork MS-Schools 5 where it appears to be a misunderstanding of the Irish word *brat* ‘mantle.’<sup>63</sup>

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58 The description of this recording, presumably written by the collector, Barbara McDermitt, notes that “there may be some confusion with a seelie hoo, the Scots word for a caul on a baby’s head.”

59 “Tail” and “sloch” occur together in Angus Sound 1 and 2; “tail” occurs with “cochall” in Argyll Sound 2, and with “skirt” in Ross and Cromarty 6.

60 Patricia Lysaght discusses the forms of The Mermaid Legend which feature the comb, and their possible relationship with another legend known as The Banshee’s Comb, in Lysaght, *The Banshee*, 157–63.

61 Wand: Kerry MS-Schools 18, 19, 20, 29, Limerick MS-Schools 8, Mayo MS-Schools 15, 29; rod: Kerry MS-Schools 47, Sligo MS-Schools 5; slat: Mayo MS-Main 4, MS-Schools 17.

62 Net: Kerry MS-Schools 12, Mayo MS-Main 22, MS-Schools 3, 6, 13, Pub 7, Roscommon MS-Schools 3.

63 “There was always a sprat (small fish) with or near her. The fishermen that saw her were continually trying to catch the sprat because once the sprat is caught it is then quite easy to catch the mermaid.” The idea that the

Like its owner, the stolen object is often described as beautiful (61) or hyperbolically as the most beautiful thing of its kind ever seen (ten). Such descriptions apply to both garments and skins. The colour of the stolen object is specified in 34 versions: red (*red, dearg*) in fourteen versions; green (*green, uaithne, grön*) in eight versions, many-coloured in five versions, golden in one version, and white in one version. Descriptions of the colour of the stolen object, as a rule, coincide with descriptions of this object as a garment, although in Mayo MS-Schools 9 the stolen object is a golden comb. Sixteen versions from Ireland describe the stolen object as small; Kerry MS-Schools 24 describes the woman's "clóca" 'cloak' as large, while in Argyll MS 1 the "cochull èisg" 'fish-cochall' which belongs to the supernatural woman is larger than those of her companions; because her *cochall* is the largest, the man notices it and steals it. Otherwise the stolen object is described as like a net, scaled like the skin of a fish, or made of seaweed: descriptions which emphasize the item's connection with the sea.<sup>64</sup>

### 1.5.3 The Man

The man who marries the mermaid or seal-woman in the legend is most often anonymous and, because of the rather spare style of most versions, not described in any great detail. When he is given a name, it may be a rather unremarkable name, identifying him as an 'everyman' figure, such as "Johnnie Croy" in Orkney Pub 2, "Seán" in Waterford MS-Main 8, "Eoin Óg" in Donegal MS-Main 30, "Demmus" in Faroe Pub 4 and Faroe Sound 1, and "Mårten Kille" in Blekinge Pub 1.<sup>65</sup> It may also be a name which connects him with a particular kin-group, and in

mermaid is accompanied by a small aquatic animal is also found in the traditions about Lí Bán (pp. 164-9), but as this text was recorded in English, and in Macha na gGlaidhe, County Cork, far from Lí Bán's native Bangor, this is most likely an attempt to rationalize a word, *brat*, which was no longer understood.

64 Like a net in Galway MS-Main 15; scaled in Inverness MS 3 and Värmland MS 1; made of salmon skin in Westmeath Pub 1; made of seaweed in Sligo MS-Schools 17.

65 Johnie is a diminutive form of John, a very common name in English and Scots. The meaning of the second element, "Croy," is unclear: the normal meaning of *croy* in Scots is "an inclosure, more commonly wattled, for



such cases he is often only given a surname. Family names are only attested in connection with the legend in Scotland and Ireland, where there is a marked geographic pattern to the distribution of the most common names e.g. O’Shea in Kerry or O’Dowd in Mayo and Sligo.<sup>66</sup>

Blekinge Pub 1 describes Mårten Kille as gloomy and having a bad reputation in the neighbourhood, which is presumably why he needed to marry a woman from the sea. Similarly, Mayo MS-Main 4 describes its anonymous hero as having a bad reputation in his local district. More often, however, the man is described in complimentary terms: he is beautiful in fourteen versions from Ireland and Scotland, and young in 46 versions from Ireland, Scotland, and Iceland. Only two versions, Kerry MS-Schools 4 and Cork MS-Schools 5, describe him as old. Other versions mention his bravery, his skill at dancing, singing, sailing, or hunting, his kindness, his work ethic, his strength, and/or his luck.<sup>67</sup> 51 versions indicate his profession; most commonly he is a fisherman, farmer, or farm labourer; the same rural professions which the informants themselves typically have. Halland MS 2 states that the man was a “jägare” ‘hunter,’ Cork MS-Schools 8 that he was a sea captain, and Ross and Cromarty MS 3 that he was a shoemaker. Ten versions mention the man’s poverty.<sup>68</sup> In contrast to these working-class

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catching fish” (Grant et al., *The Scottish National Dictionary*, s.v. croy.), and so this might indicate that Johnie was a fisherman. Alternately, as his children were said to become crusaders, “Croy” might be a corruption of French *croix* ‘cross.’ “Seán” is a very common name, equivalent to John, as is Eoin – “Óg” simply means ‘young’. “Mårten” is a common name equivalent to English Martin, while “Kille” simply means ‘young man, boy.’ “Demmus” is a not uncommon Faroese given name derived from Nicodemus.

66 See Table 3 in Appendix IV.

67 Bravery: Orkney Pub 2, Shetland Sound 4, Kerry MS-Main 38, MS-Schools 24, 59, Pub 2, Cork MS-Main 2, Mayo MS-Main 8, Pub 2; good dancer: Kerry MS-Schools 60, Cork MS-Main 2; good singer: Kerry MS-Schools 60, Pub 2, Cork MS-Main 2; good sailor: Shetland Sound 4, Galway MS-Main 13; good hunter: Mayo MS-Schools 15; kind: Mayo Pub 2; hard-working: Kerry MS-Schools 72; strong: Galway MS-Main 1, Mayo MS-Main 8; lucky: Orkney Pub 3.

68 Galway MS-Main 11, MS-Schools 9, Cork MS-Schools 3, Kerry MS-Schools 34, 62, Pub 7, Donegal MS-Main 23, 30, Mayo Pub 1, Waterford MS-Main 1.

depictions, fourteen versions from Mayo and Sligo identify the man as an aristocrat, usually the chieftain of the O'Dowd family.<sup>69</sup>

The man's marital status is not explicitly stated in most versions of the legend, although it is typically implied that he is unmarried. Fifteen versions state that the man lives alone, and eight that he lives alone with his mother.<sup>70</sup> Nine versions state that he wants to marry; conversely, five state that the man was unwilling to marry prior to his encounter with the supernatural woman, and three state that the man has said that he refuses to marry a human woman.<sup>71</sup> Six versions state that the man is a widower.<sup>72</sup> Only three versions identify the man as being married when he encounters this woman.<sup>73</sup>

### **1.6 Encounter and Capture.**

Most versions simply begin with the initial encounter between the man and the supernatural woman, although a small number include an introductory episode. Two versions, Kerry Pub 5 and Mayo MS-Main 6, both of which identify the man as a member of the O'Dowd family, begin with a brief family history. Kerry Pub 4 states that a saint named Tóime established a monastery, which was later flooded by the sea, and would re-appear every seventh year after the flood. In a small number of versions, it is said that the woman is the enchanted daughter of a

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69 Aristocrat and O'Dowd: Mayo MS-Schools 15, 16, 17, 30, 32, 34, Pub 2, 6, Sligo MS-Schools 4, 14, 16, Pub 1; aristocrat but not O'Dowd: Kerry MS-Schools 12, Mayo Pub 3.

70 Lives alone: Ross and Cromarty Sound 6, Kerry MS-Main 15, MS-Schools 19, 60, Pub 2, 9, Cork MS-Main 2, Donegal MS-Main 28, Pub 3, Galway MS-Main 1, 6, 7, 8, Mayo MS-Main 12, 13; lives alone with mother: Ross and Cromarty Sound 3, Shetland Sound 3, Donegal MS-Schools 10, Cork MS-Schools 3, Kerry MS-Schools 72, Limerick MS-Schools 21, Clare MS-Main 2, Waterford MS-Main 1.

71 Man wants to marry: Ross and Cromarty Sound 5, Galway MS-Main 1, MS-Schools 5, Sligo MS-Schools 17, 18, Antrim Sound 1, Kerry MS-Main 29, Mayo MS-Main 4, 8; does not want to marry: Orkney Pub 2, 3, Kerry Pub 5, 8, Mayo Pub 2; will not marry a human: Isle of Man Pub 1, Kerry Pub 5, Mayo MS-Main 12.

72 Donegal MS-Schools 11, Kerry MS-Main 13, MS-Schools 7, 8, 34, Waterford MS-Main 4.

73 Cork MS-Schools 1, Sligo MS-Schools 3, Donegal MS-Main 23.

supernatural king, or a king from the distant past. In Stirling Pub 1, it is said that selkies are the children of the King and Queen of the Sea, who were cursed to assume the forms of seals, but could resume their human forms on land every full moon. In another four Irish versions (Galway MS-Main 16, MS-Schools 12, Mayo Pub 3, MS-Main 12), mermaids are said to be the daughters of pagan kings, young women who were transformed into an aquatic form by their fathers to spare them from the coming of Saint Patrick.<sup>74</sup> Except for Mayo MS-Main 12, all of these versions state that the *cochall* of one of these women was damaged, preventing her from reaching the deep sea, and forcing her to remain near the surface. Because she spends much of her time by the shore, she is eventually captured.

The location where this encounter takes place is often unstated, or simply said to be by the shore, but 279 versions identify a real-world location, one which is typically quite close to where the story was collected. 146 versions specify the time when this story is said to have taken place: typically this is a vague *long ago*, *fadó* ‘long ago,’ *ins a’ t-sean-aimsir* ‘in the old time,’ and so on; a few versions are somewhat more precise, setting the story a century or centuries in the past. Only two versions reference a specific date or historic event: the year 1206 in Sligo MS-Schools 8, and “when Kerry was a kingdom” in Kerry MS-Schools 12.<sup>75</sup> 29 versions specify the time of year when the man encounters the woman: *Bealtaine* or May in five versions from Kerry, during the summer in ten versions from Ireland and Orkney, during October in one version from Galway, Easter Sunday in one version from Antrim, Halloween or Hallowmass in three versions

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74 On the relationship between Galway MS-Main 16 and Mayo Pub 3, see pp. 69-70.

75 The anonymous student who contributed Sligo MS-Schools 8 seems to have either confused two or more accounts, or else to have invented freely: the supernatural bride is described first as “the Cannibal Lady,” then “the Mermaid,” then as a “seal woman,” and then she is said to have been “in disguise as a mermaid.” This account also mentions that she lived with her brother for some time in a cave as outlaws, and that she was an Italian woman with the unlikely name of “Appolls Mobbs.” The precise date is hardly the most unusual feature of this account.

from Shetland (all collected from Brucie Henderson), and Epiphany (*trettánda nátt*) in five versions from the Faroes. In Iceland, the encounter takes place either on New Year's Eve, Christmas, Epiphany, or *Jónsmessa* 'Midsummers's Night' (Figure 26). 86 versions specify the time of day when the encounter takes place: in 52 versions from Ireland, Scotland, and Sweden, the encounter occurs early in the morning; in the remaining 34 versions, it occurs at night. Eight versions from Ireland specify that the encounter took place on a Sunday, while one states that it took place on a Monday.<sup>76</sup>

In sixteen versions – from Shetland, the Faroe Islands, Mayo, and Kerry – the man sets out with the intent of seeing or capturing the woman, or stealing her magical garment. In six versions, from Cork, Kerry, and Munster, the man attends the first mass of the day and encounters the mermaid on his trip home, and in four from Galway the man seeks shelter on an island, where he encounters the supernatural woman or women (Figure 27). Otherwise, the man happens to be at the shore when he encounters the woman or women, and is frequently already engaged in some mundane activity such as fishing, gathering seaweed, foraging for shellfish, or watching his livestock. Seven versions from Ireland note that he is part of a group during the encounter; otherwise he is stated or implied to be alone.<sup>77</sup> The man is said to see the woman in most instances (275); less frequently he hears her (nine), finds her in his net (three), or finds her skin or garment before encountering her (fifteen).

The woman is usually alone when the man encounters her, although 52 versions, most of which identify the woman as a seal or a swan, state that she appears along with a group of similar

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76 Sunday: Cork MS-Schools 9, 10, Kerry MS-Main 1, MS-Schools 33, 45, Antrim MS-Main 1, Waterford MS-Main 5, 6, MS-Schools 2; Monday: Clare MS-Main 2.

77 In a group: Clare MS-Schools 2, 11, Kerry Pub 4, MS-Schools 15, Limerick MS-Schools 14, Mayo Pub 3, Roscommon MS-Schools 1

beings (Figure 28). 55 versions state that the woman was known to appear repeatedly at a specific point near the shore. In most of these versions, the woman appears every day, although in Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and some versions from Kerry and Galway, she returns every year, and in some other versions from Kerry, every seven years (Figure 29). When the woman is ashore, she is frequently described as combing her hair (234), sitting on a rock or on the shore (218), or both (183), especially in areas where she is said to be a mermaid. In those areas where she is said to be a seal, she is often said to be dancing (thirteen) or playing (six) (Figure 30). She is also described as bathing or washing herself (eleven), swimming (ten), sunning herself (five), walking around (six), or sleeping (sixteen). In 90 versions, the woman is wearing her skin or garment when the encounter takes place, while in 150 versions, she has already removed it, and it is lying somewhere near her. 63 versions describe her as turning into a human when she removes this object or when it is taken from her. She is often said to be unable to return to the water without this object (123), powerless without it (ten), or compelled to follow or remain with the man who possesses it (78). Usually the man captures, or otherwise domesticates, the woman shortly after this initial encounter, although in sixteen versions the woman returns to the water successfully, and the man only captures her after two or more successive encounters (Figure 31).

There is some variation in the way that the woman is captured or domesticated, but this section of the narrative typically conforms to one of three patterns: the man simply captures the woman and brings her home, he steals her skin or garment and she must follow him, or she agrees to marry him. 123 versions from Ireland, Scotland, and Sweden belong to the first category, in which the man is said to capture the woman and bring her home, rather than compelling her to follow him through stealing her magical object. In 58 of these versions, the

man takes the woman's skin, garment, or tail off of her during or after capturing her (Figure 32). Most of these versions identify the woman as a mermaid or similar being, although five from northern Ireland and Scotland identify the woman as a seal. The second category, in which the man steals the magical object from the woman and she is compelled to remain on land with him, includes 295 versions from every region where the legend is known (Figure 33). As many legends in the first category are quite short, it is uncertain whether they represent a compressed form of the narrative or a distinct sub-type.

Two sub-categories of the compulsion-*via*-stolen-object narrative can be observed. The first consists of 36 versions from Ireland, Scotland, and throughout the Nordic countries. (Figure 34). The man encounters a group of women, often seals, who are engaged in some activity, usually dancing or playing music, and steals one of their skins. In 16 of these versions, the women decide to return to the water, while the one whose skin was stolen unsuccessfully searches for it; in the remaining 20, the women all attempt to return to the water when they notice the man, and the one whose skin was taken is unable to do so and must remain on land. In two versions, the man encounters a group of women and, rather than stealing one of their skins, captures one of them, prompting the rest of the women to flee.<sup>78</sup> The second sub-category is represented by twelve versions from west Kerry, localized in the parish of Gleann Beithe (Figure 35). Two details characterize these versions: the mermaid and her *brat* are in a sunken city known as Cathair Tonn Tóime which has risen from the depths (7); and after the man steals this *brat*, he flees on horseback and a wave almost overtakes him, removing the back half of the horse in the process (11). As is the case with many versions of the legend from Kerry, the man who steals the *brat* is often a member of the O'Shea family.

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<sup>78</sup> Galway MS-Main 13, Inverness MS 1.

Ten versions, nine from Ireland and one from Sweden, state that the woman (who is described as a mermaid) agrees to marry the man (Figure 36). In a number of versions, she instructs the man to take and hide her skin, garment, or tail, and not to let her see it.<sup>79</sup> These versions show an affinity with MLSIT 4081 “Mélusine,” another migratory legend in which a man marries a supernatural being, often with aquatic associations, who imposes taboos upon him and leaves him when he violates those taboos.<sup>80</sup> Unsurprisingly, these versions are from areas where the Mélusine legend is known, and can therefore be understood as hybrid narratives. The fact that the supernatural woman consents to marry changes her characterization significantly: while in most versions of The Mermaid Legend, she is unwillingly captured and returns at the first opportunity, in these twelve versions she is happy to remain on land, but is compelled to leave her family and return to the sea upon discovering her hidden cloak or tail.

At some point during the process of capturing or domesticating the supernatural woman, the man hides the magical object somewhere so that she cannot find it. The most frequently attested hiding places follow a clear geographic pattern. In 85 versions, predominantly from southwestern Ireland, the stolen object is hidden in the loft. In 84 versions, predominantly from Donegal, Mayo, and Sligo, the skin or garment is hidden within a stack of drying hay (78) or turf (6). 22 versions from Scotland and northern Ireland state that this object is hidden in a barn, outhouse, or other external structure (Figure 37). In 42 versions from across western Ireland, the man hides this object within the thatched roof of his house (Figure 38). In 38 versions from

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79 Clare MS-Schools 7, Donegal MS-Schools 10, Leitrim MS-Schools 5, Blekinge Pub 1, Antrim Pub 2.

80 The SIT in MLSIT refers to “Suggested Irish Type,” and indicates a migratory legend known in Ireland but not included in Christiansen’s catalogue. Almqvist, “Irish Migratory Legends on the Supernatural: Sources, Studies and Problems,” 27. For the Mélusine legend in Ireland, see Almqvist, “The Mélusine Legend in the Context of Irish Folk Tradition”; in Sweden, Bengt af Klintberg classifies this legend as F52 “Husband spying on bathing wife (‘Melusine’)”; af Klintberg, *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend*, 117. The relationship between these two legends is discussed further in chapter 2, at pp. 108-110.

Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands, the man hides the stolen skin or garment in a locked chest or press (Figure 39).

### 1.7 Marriage and cohabitation

The time that the woman spends on land typically receives very little attention compared to the other episodes common to the legend; years of narrative time are often compressed down to a sentence or two.<sup>81</sup> Marriage is explicitly mentioned in the majority of versions of the legend (344); fourteen versions from Finnmark and Western Ireland mention the involvement of a priest (Figure 40).<sup>82</sup> The majority of versions of the legend (348) specify that the woman bears children as well; when it is specified, the number of children varies seemingly randomly, but she often has three children (123), and is only said to have eight or more children in seven cases. Like their mother, the children are described as beautiful (seventeen); five versions from Ireland mention their health, and four from Ireland and Scotland mention their exceptional strength.<sup>83</sup> Two versions from Ireland state that, like their mother, the children have fair or red hair.<sup>84</sup> In addition to these positive traits, the children show the signs of their aquatic heritage in other ways: the children regularly visit the shore to go swimming in three versions,<sup>85</sup> and in twelve versions from Ireland, Scotland, and Sweden they are said to have webbed fingers or toes.<sup>86</sup>

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81 When a period of time is specified, it is almost always a number of years. Exceptions to this are Clare MS-Main 2 (three days), Donegal MS-Main 23 (six weeks), and Kerry MS-Schools 65 (one day).

82 Priest reluctant to marry the couple: Galway MS-Main 3, Kerry MS-Main 29, Pub 2.

83 Health: Donegal MS-Main 28, Kerry MS-Main 1, Cork MS-Schools 10, Waterford MS-Main 5, MS-Schools 2; strength: Inverness Sound 1, Mayo Pub 5, MS-Main 5, Waterford MS-Main 2.

84 Donegal Sound 2, Roscommon MS-Schools 1.

85 Mayo MS-Schools 7, Cork MS-Schools 7, Stirling Pub 1.

86 Orkney MS 1, Shetland Pub 1, Cork MS-Main 2, 5, MS-Schools 7, Kerry MS-Schools 42, Limerick MS-Schools 10, Bohuslän MS 1, Antrim MS-Main 2, Kerry MS-Main 22, 26, Pub 2.



A handful of versions briefly narrate the process by which the supernatural woman is integrated into human society: through the sacrament of baptism (Finnmark Pub 1, Mayo Pub 2), formal education (Galway MS-Main 16, Kerry Pub 5, Mayo Pub 3), or with gradual adjustment to human life and language (Argyll MS 1, Cork MS-Schools 4, Donegal MS-Schools 10, Orkney Pub 4). She may retain some anti-social or inhuman character traits,<sup>87</sup> but more often she is said to be a good housewife (49), and to bring prosperity to her husband (seventeen).<sup>88</sup> The woman is said to be happy, or at least to seem happy, living on land in 64 versions, and in eleven versions she is said to fall in love with her husband eventually (Figure 41). On the other hand, she may be unhappy while living on land (14), want to return to the water (37), visit or watch the sea regularly (five), or sing songs about the sea while living on land (five), while the man may restrain her or keep her in his home (seventeen) (Figure 42). In seven versions, a seal repeatedly visits the shore near where the woman lives; this animal is sometimes identified as her former husband or another relative.<sup>89</sup>

The woman's unhappiness or alienness manifests itself as an inability or unwillingness to speak (twenty) or laugh (46) – or to speak or laugh only on certain significant occasions – in a number of versions from Ireland, most of which were collected in and around County Kerry (Figure 43). Three versions, all from the Great Blasket in Kerry, contain this silence motif, and state that the man was unwilling to marry the woman before he could obtain her verbal consent.<sup>90</sup>

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87 E.g.: the woman is reclusive in Leitrim MS-Schools 7, Limerick MS-Schools 1, and Ross and Cromarty Sound 6; she stuffs her hair into her ears to avoid hearing prayers in Orkney Pub 2; and she eats raw fish in Mayo MS-Schools 1.

88 This prosperity takes a more concrete form in Kerry MS-Schools 62, where she brings black cattle out of the sea with her, or in Sutherland MS-1 and Värmland MS 1, where the man has good fishing after marrying the mermaid.

89 Bohuslän MS 1, Faroe Sound 1, Kerry MS-Main 8, MS-Schools 26, 32, Shetland Pub 1, Sutherland MS 3.

90 Kerry Sound 1, MS-Main 5, Pub 8.

He obtains the help of a relative or neighbour, who physically and/or verbally abuses the woman in an attempt to make her speak; finally, the man abusing her insults her family, saying that she has no real lineage worth discussing, and the woman responds with a short poem in praise of her father's home.<sup>91</sup>

The woman laughs significantly on one (28), two (seven), or three (fifteen) occasions, and both storytellers and collectors may refer to 'the three laughs of the mermaid' as the title of the legend, or as a detachable element of the story.<sup>92</sup> The final laugh almost always occurs when the woman discovers her stolen garment; when the mermaid laughs three times, her final laugh always occurs when she discovers this object. The situations that prompt the other laughs vary somewhat, but they are almost always ironic, and the woman's laughter reveals her possession of secret knowledge. Common situations include a visitor refusing food or drink, not knowing that they will not have another opportunity to eat that day (thirteen); someone slipping on a stone under which treasure has been hidden (nine); the slaughter of a sheep, when that animal is still a viable source of milk and wool (five); someone discarding the water in which an egg has been boiled (two); and the birth or death of a child (two).<sup>93</sup> As Michael Chesnutt notes, this motif of

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91 These versions are discussed below at pp. 65-7. There is an interesting parallel to be found in Argyll MS 6: the man frequently insults his wife and her upbringing, and she is said to respond with "tha copain oir 'us airgeid ann an tigh mo mhuinntirsa" 'there are gold and silver cups in my people's home.'

92 E.g. Séamus Ó Dúilearga gives Kerry Pub 6 the title "Na trí gháire" 'The three laughs,' and Mícheál Ó Gaoithín titles Kerry MS-Main 38 "Na trí gáire a dein an Bhrúch" 'The three laughs that the Mermaid made.' Seán Ó Súilleabháin and Reidar Th. Christiansen identify a tale type as "The Three Laughs of the Mermaid," which they include under AT 670 "The Animal Languages." Ó Súilleabháin and Christiansen, *The Types of the Irish Folktale*, 137. For other accounts about the mermaid's cryptic laughter which are not versions of The Mermaid Legend, see pp. 111-1.

93 The virtue of egg-water has parallels in other Gaelic traditions about mermaids, as well as folk medicine, for which see pp. 112-4. In Kerry MS-Schools 71, the captive mermaid is said to weep whenever a child is born and laugh whenever anyone dies. When she is asked why she states "mar go raibh crosa agus trioblóid an tsaogail rómpa, agus nuair cailltí iad go mbeadh siad imthighthe ón trioblóid go léir" 'because the trials and tribulations of the world are before them, and when they die they will have departed from all of the hardship.' This grim outlook is paralleled in Welsh fairy bride traditions; see Wood, "The Fairy Bride Legend in Wales," 69.

the cryptic laughter of a captive supernatural being has parallels in medieval Irish, Icelandic, and Latin literature, and can be traced ultimately to the Babylonian Talmud.<sup>94</sup> Given the deep roots of this motif, it is perhaps unusual that it is not attested more widely in contemporary traditions.

### 1.8 Discovery and escape.

While in a small number of versions the woman gains her freedom and returns to her underwater home after the man gives her the stolen object back or lets her go,<sup>95</sup> and a few versions simply state that the woman left, with no account of how she managed that,<sup>96</sup> in the overwhelming majority of versions the woman is only able to escape her captivity when she finds her stolen skin, garment, or tail.

In 171 versions from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Scotland, and Ireland (predominantly the northern half), the children are instrumental in the woman gaining her freedom (Figure 44). In 84 of these versions, the children discover the location of the stolen object when they watch their father examine it or move it from one hiding place to another. This detail corresponds mostly with areas where the object is hidden in a stack: i.e. northwestern Ireland, North Uist, and Shetland, although Finnmark Pub 1, in which the stolen garment is hidden in a chest, also has this detail (Figure 45). In seven versions, it is the woman, rather than her children, who learns about the location of the stolen object this way.<sup>97</sup> Another 34 versions specify that the children

94 See Chesnutt, "The Three Laughs: A Celtic-Norse Tale in Oral Tradition and Medieval Literature." Chesnutt's comments on the relationship between the modern Irish and Icelandic material and older literary sources are based on a relatively small number of versions of The Mermaid Legend, and are worth reconsidering in light of the corpus assembled in the present dissertation. In a somewhat later article, Chesnutt revisited this topic in light of the evidence of the late Middle Irish text, *Imthechta Tuaithe Luachra 7 Aided Fergusa*. Chesnutt, "On Hidden Treasure, Useless Shoes, and the Gullibility of Husbands." See also Krappe, "Le Rire Du Prophète."

95 Man returns the stolen object: Clare MS-Main 2, Cork MS-Schools 8, Galway MS-Schools 9, Kerry MS-Schools 13, Limerick MS-Schools 14, Donegal MS-Main 23; man allows the woman to leave: Clare MS-Schools 6.

96 E.g. Midlothian MS 1, Inverness MS 1.

97 Donegal MS-Schools 2, 3, Sligo MS-Schools 4, Mayo MS-Schools 7, 16, 30, Leitrim MS-Main 1.

discover the hidden object by chance, often while playing. In most of these versions (134), the children tell the woman where this object is, and she then goes out and finds it, but 33 versions state that the children bring it to her, either unprompted (23), or after she requests they bring it (twelve).

In many versions, the husband inadvertently allows the woman to escape, either by accidentally revealing the location of the hidden object, or by failing to secure it properly. In 86 versions, almost all from southwestern Ireland, the man has hidden the stolen object in the loft of his house and, while searching for something else, unwittingly tosses it to the floor or causes it to fall (Figure 46). Less often, the children, a helper, or the woman herself are the ones who reveal the object over the course of a search.<sup>98</sup> In eleven versions, scattered across western Ireland, the man, or an assistant, unwittingly reveals the stolen object, which was hidden in the thatching, while repairing or replacing the roof (Figure 47). Finally, in 26 versions in which the man hides the stolen object in a chest, the man neglects to lock the chest one day, or leaves the key in an accessible place, which allows the woman to open it and find her stolen skin or cloak. Thirteen of the versions which include this detail are from Ireland, mainly from the south; the other thirteen are from Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and Sweden, where they represent nearly every version of the legend collected in those countries (Figure 48).

A relatively small number of versions of the legend, mostly found in counties Mayo and Galway, depict the natural elements as responsible for the woman's liberation (Figure 49). A high wind damages or destroys the thatched roof of the house, which reveals the woman's stolen cloak or skin that had been hidden in the thatch, in eight versions. In Galway MS-Schools 5, a flock of

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98 Children reveal the object: Kerry MS-Schools 24, 25; the woman reveals it: Kerry MS-Schools 19; a neighbour, relative, or helper reveals it in: Clare MS-Schools 3, 9, Galway MS-Main 1, Kerry MS-Schools 6, Waterford MS-Main 7.

birds arrives and picks straws from the thatched roof, revealing the stolen object in the same way. In eleven versions, the house catches fire, and as the charm starts to smoulder, the woman follows the smell and finds it. In Galway MS-Schools 2 and 3, the woman sets the house on fire herself out of desperation, and finds her skin in the same way. Finally, in six versions scattered across the west coast of Ireland, the stolen object simply falls from its hiding place, allowing the woman to escape.<sup>99</sup>

Once she has recovered her stolen property, the woman leaves the house and returns to the same body of water where she was found. In most versions of the legend (369), the woman leaves right away, or after some brief preparations for her journey; in another 40 versions, she waits for an opportune time to leave. In 167 versions, her husband is away from home, typically at a market or fishing, when she recovers her stolen covering and/or returns to the sea. While, as noted, most versions of the legend state that she escapes immediately as soon as she recovers what was stolen from her, and state that she is unambiguously delighted to return home, a few versions portray her as bearing some affection for her terrestrial family: before leaving, she may take the time to clean her children and comb their hair (twenty), to kiss them goodbye (fourteen), to bid her family farewell (sixteen), or to prepare them a final meal (nine) (Figure 50). In 45 versions, mostly from Ireland, the woman's children follow her underwater (Figure 51). In Kerry MS-Schools 15 and Mayo MS-Schools 8, she transforms her children into fish or mermaids, respectively, before they join her underwater. Another 40 versions, almost all of which are collected from northern Mayo or Sligo and which identify the man as an O'Dowd, state that the woman brought her children to the shore with her but, either because their human ancestry

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<sup>99</sup> Galway MS-Schools 1, 2, Kerry MS-Schools 39, Leitrim MS-Schools 2, Limerick MS-Schools 3, Sligo MS-Schools 21.

prevented them from joining her underwater or because she wanted to avenge herself upon her captor, she transformed them into standing stones, typically identified as the Mermaid Stones near Ballina (Figure 52).

In 49 versions the man notices, or returns home in time to notice, his runaway bride and pursues her to the water in a vain attempt to capture her once again. In the process, they may exchange final words: the man asks her to return home with him in fifteen versions, a request which she of course refuses, and in seven versions counters with a request that *he* follow *her* underwater instead; the man asks for his children back in three versions and asks that she explain her enigmatic laughter in another three (Figure 53). The woman, for her part, tells the man that she prefers her former (aquatic) husband to her terrestrial husband, in five versions from northeast Scotland, the Faroe Islands, and Sweden; or that she prefers her previous existence underwater in three versions from Ireland (Figure 54). She curses her husband or his descendants in seven versions from Ireland, blesses them or otherwise promises them aid in six from Ireland and Scotland, leaves him advice in two versions from Argyll and Kerry, or otherwise speaks before entering the water in eight versions from Ireland and Iceland (Figure 55).

The woman is reunited with her aquatic husband, usually described as a seal, waiting for her at the shore as she returns home, in fourteen versions from northeast Scotland, the Faroe Islands, Sweden, and Kerry (Figure 56). In Galway MS-Main 1, the aquatic husband tells the terrestrial husband that his wife has returned to the sea for good, and to abandon his search for her, and that the aquatic husband would have sought revenge had his wife not been treated so well on land. In another twelve versions from across Ireland, the woman is greeted instead by a group of other mermaids (Figure 57) In ten of these, the other merfolk ask the woman whether

she had revealed any secret knowledge to her husband or any other humans during her time on land; she denies revealing any secret knowledge. In five of these versions, that secret had to do with the properties of water in which an egg has been boiled.<sup>100</sup>

### **1.9 Subsequent events.**

Typically, the story ends abruptly after the woman has run away from her former husband and returned to her home underwater; many versions simply state that she was never seen again after her escape (a detail found in 202 versions). Other versions do, however, describe the fate of the woman's husband and children, or any subsequent interactions she might have had with the terrestrial world. 50 versions of the legend, collected from Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Scotland, and the northern half of Ireland, state that the woman would regularly return to land in order to visit and care for her children, and another six from Ireland, Scotland, and Iceland state that she would leave fish at the shore for her children without directly interacting with them (Figure 58). In twenty versions from Ireland and Scotland, the woman's care for her children specifically involves combing their hair, mirroring her own grooming activity when she was first captured. This habit of returning to the land allows the man to capture her once again in five versions from this area; in another four versions, the man tries but is unsuccessful (Figure 59). In another five versions from Sweden, Scotland, and Ireland, the man rejoins, or attempts to rejoin, his wife underwater.<sup>101</sup>

While a handful of Irish versions state that the man becomes prosperous, or discovers gold hidden beneath or near the house,<sup>102</sup> he is more often stated to have suffered as a result of

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100 Donegal MS-Main 15, 22, Leitrim MS-Main 1, Kerry MS-Schools 55, Limerick MS-School 6. Cf. pp. 112-114.

101 Värmland MS 1, Blekinge Pub 1, Angus Sound 1,2, Kerry MS-Main 31.

102 Galway MS-Schools 9, Clare MS-Main 2, Cork MS-Schools 3.

this separation: he may be depressed or miserable in his wife's absence (22), lose the prosperity and wealth he had gained while married to her (five), never marry again (four), or die prematurely (thirteen) – by his own hand in two versions.<sup>103</sup> He may lose his children as well: their mother may come and take them back with her,<sup>104</sup> they may simply leave one day,<sup>105</sup> or they may drown in an attempt to follow their mother back into the water.<sup>106</sup> Typically, however, it is implied if not outright stated that the children remained on land with their father, and lived fairly normal lives, marrying and having children of their own. This detail is implicit in the 110 versions of the legend from Ireland, Scotland, and the Faroe Islands that mention that people are, or at least are believed to be, descended from this couple.

Such descendants are usually conspicuous, either marked by their appearance, or in a more abstract sense by their inheritance. 22 versions from the Faroe Islands, northeastern Scotland, and southwestern Ireland, state that the descendants of this union have webbed feet or hands, or other fish-like characteristics (Figure 60). Such physical characteristics are explicitly connected to those of a seal in three versions of the legend from Kerry, which, nonetheless, identify the woman from the sea as a mermaid.<sup>107</sup> Alternatively, they are, like their ancestress, said to be exceptionally beautiful, in Donegal MS-Main 24, 27, 28 and Kerry MS-Main 36; to have red hair, in Donegal MS-Main 25 and 26; and to be strong, in Donegal MS-Main 24 and Sound 1. The family is said to be cursed or to have lost their prosperity and influence in twelve Irish versions, nine of which are from counties Mayo and Sligo, or to be prone to drowning at sea

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<sup>103</sup> Donegal Pub 4, Limerick MS-Schools 18.

<sup>104</sup> Kerry MS-Schools 39, Värmland MS 1, Galway MS-Main 5, 12.

<sup>105</sup> Argyll Pub 1, Limerick MS-Schools 10.

<sup>106</sup> Donegal Pub 4.

<sup>107</sup> Kerry MS-Main 8, 34, MS-Schools 72.



in fifteen versions from Kerry (Figure 61). Alternately, they are protected from drowning, or from drowning in certain bodies of water, in thirteen versions from Kerry, Limerick, and Leitrim (Figure 62). They are also said to be skilled at sea, or to have occult knowledge of some sort, in ten versions from western Ireland and north-eastern Scotland. They may also bear some visible connection with aquatic beings: in Kerry MS-Schools 40, members of the family are visited by mermaids when they go to sea; in Kerry MS-Schools 49, music is heard from the sea whenever a member of the family dies; and in Donegal Pub 2, the descendants of the *maighdean mhara* suffer nosebleeds whenever a seal is killed on the shores of their home district.

In those versions where the mermaid transforms her children into stones before returning to the sea, the family line is rather dramatically cut off at that point, making human descendants impossible. The standing stones, instead, serve as inanimate witnesses in the landscape to the legend. Like her animate progeny, the stones are often attributed with unusual qualities. The stone bleed, either every six or seven years, or when struck, in six versions,<sup>108</sup> weep in Mayo MS-Main 10 and Sligo MS-Schools 2, and sweat in Mayo MS-Schools 34. Mayo MS-Schools 14 states that no member of the O'Dowd family can pass the stones without dying shortly afterwards; Sligo MS-Schools 2, that people do not touch the stones because "it is not right"; and Sligo MS-Schools 7, that touching the stones causes one to dream of fairies. Another six versions state that some of these stones have vanished since the children were petrified; four of these state that Ireland will become free when the last stone has vanished.<sup>109</sup> The mermaid regrets her

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108 Sligo MS-Schools 4 (every seven years), 7 (every six years), 9 (every seven years if pierced), 28 (when struck), 31 (every seven years), Pub 6 (every seven years, when an O'Dowd is about to die). Mayo MS-Main 7, 10 state that *sgeana mara* lit. 'sea-knives,' presumably seaweed or detritus, appear on the shore to mark the death of an O'Dowd. See Darwin, "'Súil Uí Dhúbhda Le hÁrd Na Ríogh': Oral Tradition and History on the Mayo-Sligo Border," 83.

109 Stones vanish: Galway MS-Main 16, MS-Schools 31; prophecy about the last stone: Mayo MS-Main 12, MS-Schools 24, Pub 3, Clare MS-Schools 1. It is worth observing that, with the exception of Mayo Pub 3, recorded

decision and attempts to disenchant her children by sending a being referred to as the *rón mór* ‘great seal’ or *rón mara* ‘sea seal’ ashore in order to make accomplish this, but the seal is accidentally killed before this can be done.<sup>110</sup>

### 1.10 Stable texts

In several versions of the legend, the narrator or one of the characters gives voice to a proverbial statement or poetic utterance, often at the climax of the story.<sup>111</sup> In other cases, the narrator may mention the existence of a song or another discrete ‘text,’ which accompanies the legend but the narrator is unable to perform.<sup>112</sup> Some of these examples of elevated speech are unique within the extant corpus of this legend, although they may be attested elsewhere; others appear in multiple versions of the legend, where they normally occur at the same point in the narrative. The following discussion will focus on those proverbs or poems that are found in more than one version of the legend, and examine the geographic relationship among those versions; the relationship, if any, among the informants; and the degree of textual variation, all in order to determine how these ‘texts’ have been disseminated, and whether they indicate oral transmission or the influence of a written version.

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in 1908, all of these versions were collected after Irish independence. In most versions of the legend which contain the petrified-children motif, the woman bears either three or seven children, but when the author visited the site in March 2018, he only found six stones. The belief that the stones are vanishing might have its origins in this discrepancy.

110 *Rón mór*: Mayo MS-Schools 16 (English); *rón mara*: Mayo MS-Main 10 (Irish), MS-Schools 34 (Irish). For a discussion of these terms, see Darwin, “‘Súil Uí Dhúbhda Le hÁrd Na Ríogh’: Oral Tradition and History on the Mayo–Sligo Border,” 84–85.

111 Almqvist, “Of Mermaids and Marriages,” 9.

112 E.g. “‘An bhrúch a sgreadaig ar maidin gan tuínte á brat.’ Amhrán éigin, nú caoíneadh, ab eadh é sin. Níl sé agam, fáin d’airíghinn é nuair a bhíos óg.” “‘The Mermaid who Cried Out in the Morning without a Stitch of her Mantle.’ That was [the title of] a song or a lament. I don’t know it, even though I used to hear it when I was young.’ Cork MS-Main 6.

### 1.10.1 “Shiubhail mé an domhan”

A song ostensibly composed by the grieving husband is found in four versions of the legend from western Donegal, and one from Mayo (Figure 63). Donegal Pub 1, recorded by Seosamh de Laoide from Eoin Mac an Luain in Cruach Mhín an Fheannta, is the longest and earliest known version, published in 1913. It consists of four stanzas of eight lines, alternating between four and three stressed words per line, with no clear rhyme scheme:

Shiubhail mé an domhan ‘s ní fios damh go bhfaca mé  
 a samhailt ná a cosamhlacht i gcásaibh  
 acht an mhaighdean mhara bhí ar láimh le bannadh  
 agus bhí sí ag síór-ghealladh grádh’ damh  
 a dís-bhéal tanaihe chuir smuid ar fhearaibh  
 ‘s bud deirge í ná’n rós i ngarrdhaidh  
 ‘s nár chumhartha liom d’anál ná na hubhlaí folláin  
 ‘s iad a bheith idtaisgidh le ráithe ann?

Is deirge í ‘ná’n chorcaighe, a dís-bhéal ‘s a leaca  
 sí is deise ‘ná a bhfaca mé dhe phéarlaibh  
 a’ méire ‘s a’ londubh ag triall fá n-a coinne  
 ar a fheabhas is chluinfeadh sé a táin mhaith  
 a ciall is a deise ‘s a méin mhaith eil  
 is ní breag ar bith a bhfuil mise ‘ráidht libh  
 ‘s nach aoibhinn do’n bhunadh a bhí riamh dhod’ oileamhain  
 ar fheabhas a’ chinneamhaint ‘s bhí ‘ndán duit.

Is binne liom í ‘ná fidil is fliúit  
 ‘s iad a bheith ‘seinm i bpárlur  
 is binne a guth béil ‘na na horgáin ‘s ná an méit  
 ‘s ná’n chuach ar ghéig sa ghráinsigh.  
 Tá naoi míle eochair i gcuintaibh th’ochta  
 a sgaoilfeadh glais ag gach ghéibhinn  
 osna gan sochar ag méadughadh mo dhochair  
 tráth smaoithighim ar fhoclaibh dá béal liom

Is doiligh liom trácht ar aicíd a’ ghráidh  
 is leannán damh é nach sgaoileann  
 ‘s ní’l a’n dhuine ‘san áit dá gcluinfedh mo chás  
 nach gcuirfeadh ‘gos árd mo chaoineadh  
 is doiligh damh a’ pháirt sin eághradh go bráth  
 le hainnir na reád nár shiolruigheadh

Dá dtógthá do lámh is mé thabhairt ó'n bhás  
do mhalairt go bráth 's ní theánfainn.

I have wandered the world, and I do not know  
whether I have ever seen the likeness or equal  
of the mermaid who was by Banagh  
and who was promising me eternal love.  
Her slender lips made men despair  
and she was redder than a rose in a garden.  
Wasn't her breath sweeter than wholesome apples  
that had been stored away for a season?

She is redder than the marsh(?), her lips and her cheeks  
She is more beautiful than any pearl I have ever seen.  
The *méire* and the blackbird journeying towards her  
For its excellence he would hear her fair fame (?)  
Her sense and her beauty, her fine bearing  
I am telling you no lie at all.  
Is the excellent fate which is in store for you  
not delightful for the stock who have always reared you?

She is more melodious to me than fiddles or flutes  
When they are playing in a parlour.  
And her voice is sweeter than the greatest organ (?)  
or the cuckoo on a branch in the grange.  
There are nine thousand keys in the harbours of your heart  
that would open the locks of any prison  
a profitless sigh that increases my distress  
when I think of the words of her mouth.

It is difficult for me to speak of the illness of love  
it is an affliction from which I am not released.  
There is no-one here who might hear my distress  
who would not loudly lament for me.  
It is hard for me to maintain my partnership forever  
with the maiden of the treasures who was never born.  
If you would raise your hand to save me from death  
I would never harm you.

The other four versions which contain this song were collected by the NFC between 1936 and 1974 and, with the exception of Mayo MS-Main 4, are all shorter than the published version.

Donegal Sound 1 was recorded from Pádraig Eoghain Phádraig Mac an Luain, Eoin Mac an Luain's son, in 1974 by Séamas Ó Catháin. Pádraig claimed to have heard the song from his father, and stated that there are a total of four 'quatrains' (*ceathrú*), but that he is unable to remember them all. He recited the first stanza and then, with some difficulty, the final one, noting that the two do not follow each other directly. Despite these difficulties, Pádraig's performance closely resembles the published text with some minor variations, most of which do little to change the meaning (e.g. "nach doiligh domh trácht" for "is doiligh domh trácht"; "a leithéid i gcosaibh" for "a samhailt ná a cosamhlacht i gcosaibh").<sup>113</sup>

Donegal MS-Main 27 was recorded nearby in An Leath Chruach in 1957 by Seán Ó hEochaidh from Peadar Ó Tiománaidhe. Ó Tiománaidhe, like the younger Mac an Luain, admitted to only knowing part of the song ("níl agam ach cúpla focal de" 'I only know a few words of it'), and recited eighteen lines, which Ó hEochaidh divided into stanzas of eight and ten lines. The first stanza corresponds closely to the final stanza of the Mac an Luain's text, but the longer second stanza is a combination of the first half of Mac an Luain's first stanza (beginning "shiubhail mé an domhan" 'I have walked the world') and the second half of the third stanza ("tá naoi míle eochair" 'there are nine thousand keys'), with some stray lines from elsewhere in the poem added for good measure.

The last Donegal version, MS-Main 7, was recorded in 1936 in Rann na Cille, approximately 70 kilometers away from Cruach Mhín an Fheannta, from Máire Ní Dhonnagáin and Nansaí Ní Liadhain, who had no clear connection with Eoin Mac an Luain. Their song is much shorter than the published text, at only ten lines long, and less metrically fixed. The final

<sup>113</sup> More substantive alterations are: "ní breág a bhfuil mise a rá libh" (Pádraig), "'s bud deirge í ná'n rós i ngarrdhaidh" (Eoin); "nach gcuirfeadh 'gcois aird mo chaoineadh" (Pádraig), "nach gcuirfeadh 'gosárd mo chaoineadh" (Eoin); and "do gheallúint gan spás ní dhéanfainn" (Pádraig), "do mhalairt go bráth 's ní theánfainn" (Eoin).

three lines are identical to the first three, a device known in Irish metrics as a *dúnadh*, and provide a clear link to the plot of the legend: “mo mhallacht go buan / do’n fhollamh a chuir mé sa chruaich / ‘sí d’fhág m’intinn buaidheartha” ‘my everlasting curse / on the cloak I put in the haystack / she has left my mind vexed.’<sup>114</sup> Three of the remaining four lines reflect lines from the first and third stanzas of the published text, but with a greater degree of variation than seen in the other versions collected from Donegal.

Mayo MS-Main 4 was recorded in 1937 from Cait Ní Mhaoir in Béal Átha na Muice, near the river Moy; there is no obvious personal connection between the informant and Eoin Mac an Luain. Ní Mhaoir’s song closely resembles the published text: four stanzas of eight lines, each of which corresponds to a stanza in Mac an Luain’s version, and the stanzas occur in the same order in both versions. Ní Mhaoir’s version has some minor textual variation from Eoin Mac an Luain’s, and perhaps because of this has a less regular pattern of stress than his version does. Because of the distance between Béal Átha na Muice and the Bluestack Mountains, the high degree of textual correspondence, and the fact that Eoin Mac an Luain’s version had been in print for over twenty years, the possibility that Ní Mhaoir learned the text by reading it cannot be discounted. Her version of the legend, however, contains some details which are not found in Mac an Luain’s, such as the story’s taking place in An Spidéal, County Galway, the man’s stealing a *slaitín draoidheachta* ‘magic wand’ from the mermaid, and the resemblance between some of the variant lines in Ní Mhaoir’s song and the lines corresponding to them in Eoin Mac an Luain’s being more phonetic than semantic (e.g. “a sgaoilfeadh aon ghlais mór in *Éirinn*” vs “a sgaoilfeadh glais ag gach *ghéibhinn*,” “nach gcuirfeadh ‘gosárd mo *chaoineadh*” vs “nach

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<sup>114</sup> *Sí* ‘she’ could refer either to *follamh* ‘cloak,’ a feminine noun, or to the mermaid herself. These lines state that the man hid the stolen cloak in a *cruach* ‘haystack,’ which is a detail typical of Donegal versions.

ndéanfadh liom brón le mo *shaoghalsa*”). These three details are suggestive of oral, rather than written, transmission.

The foregoing suggests that the poem was known around the turn of the twentieth century, mainly in the area of Na Cruacha but possibly throughout southwestern Donegal more generally. The existence of a single version from Mayo, near the river Moy, may indicate that the song was been transmitted over water, rather than by land. The conceit of love as a sickness, as well as the mention of high-status dwellings and objects (parlour-houses, flutes, pearls, and so on) is suggestive of *dánta grádha*, the courtly love poetry of earlier centuries, and might indicate a literary origin for this poem.<sup>115</sup>

### 1.10.2 “Ní mar sin atá tigh m’athar-sa”

As noted above, in three versions from the Great Blasket in County Kerry, the captive mermaid is unable to speak, and a male relative or neighbour of the captor offers to make her speak through physical and/or verbal abuse.<sup>116</sup> He tries a few tactics with no success, but when he insults the mermaid’s family, she responds with a quasi-poem in praise of her father’s house. In Kerry Pub 8, collected by Kenneth Jackson from Peig Sayers between 1932 and 1937, her utterance is as follows:

“Fhir mhath,” er sise, “ná cáin a theile me, ní mar sin atá tig m’athar-sa, ach:

Srólach srólach cliarach cláarach finiúgach;  
ni tig druíon e, ná tig cárthan,  
ná tig atá tócaithe a mbár er fhadhb,  
ach tig do chabhail fhín fhada ghléigil,

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115 See Ó Tuama, *An grá i bhfilíocht na nUaisle*.

116 See p. 52 above. As noted in chapter four, at p.199n45, a third version of The Mermaid Legend was recorded from Peig Sayers by Robin Flower c. 1930; however, the author only became aware of this manuscript after his visit to the NFC. For the purpose of the present discussion, it is worth nothing that Almqvist saw no differences that deserved comment between all three versions collected from Peig. Almqvist, “Of Mermaids and Marriages,” 30.

agus is minic a léutar an t-Aifirean ann.  
 Tá cliain ó Éirin agus cliain ó Áran  
 'gus cliain ó Chúil na Seabhac.  
 Riarthar iad a dtig Uí Cheala,  
 is bíon an Nolaig gach lá don tseachtain ann.”

“Good man,” she said, “do not reproach me anymore, my father’s house is not like that, but:

Abounding in silks and satin, well-framed, many-tabled, many-windowed,  
 it is not a house of blackthorn, nor a house of rowan-wood,  
 nor a house which is raised at the top of a hill,  
 but a house of long, fair, brilliant construction,  
 and Mass is often read there.  
 There is a fosterling from Ireland and a fosterling from Árann  
 And a fosterling from Cúl na Seabhac.  
 They were reared in Ó Ceallaigh’s house  
 And Christmas is every day of the week there.

The legend was recorded from her a second time (Kerry Sound 1), by Seán Ó Súilleabháin when she was staying in Saint Anne’s Hospital in Dublin in 1952. The mermaid’s response in this later version is almost identical, differing significantly only in two places (“tig cabhail” ‘ruin’ for “tig druíon” ‘house of blackthorn,’ and “cliamhain ó Spáinn ann” ‘there [is] a fosterling from Spain’ for “cliain ó Áran” ‘a fosterling from Árann’). The third collected version that contains this episode as well as the mermaid’s poetic response to her tormentor is Kerry MS-Main 5, recorded in 1933 from Muiris Ó Conchúbhair by one of Séamas Mac hÍcidhe’s students on the Great Blasket. Ó Conchúbhair’s version is shorter than Peig’s and cuts off shortly after this episode, lacking the discovery and escape episodes found in almost all other versions of the legend. Ó Conchúbhair’s version contains a condensed version of this poem as well, one that lacks any mention of daily Mass readings, fosterage, or the personal name Ó Ceallaigh. Given the lack of detail in this version, it seems unlikely that Peig learned the story from Ó Conchúbhair. The converse is possible, although as Kerry MS-Main 5 was recorded in 1933, five years before Peig



Sayers' version was published, any direct transmission must have been oral rather than mediated through print.

In Kerry Sound 1, Peig comments on the second-to-last line and speculates as to its meaning (“de dheabhramh gur de mhuintir Cheallaigh ab ea í” ‘it seems that she was a Ó Ceallaigh’), which suggests that she did not compose this utterance herself, although the decision to attribute it to the mermaid and incorporate it into performances of the legend might have been hers. As the mermaid’s complaint is not attested, to the best of my knowledge, outside of the versions of the legend discussed above, it is impossible to say where it originated, or whether it existed independently of this narrative setting at some stage in its history.

### 1.10.3 “A Mhéirdreach Bhalbh!”

In six versions from southwestern Kerry, four in Irish (Kerry MS-Main 7, 25, MS-Schools 69, Pub 4) and two in English (MS-Main 19, 28), once the man steals the mermaid’s *brat*, a voice calls out and warns her about the theft. In half of these versions (Kerry MS-Main 19, 25, Pub 4), the voice belongs to another inhabitant of the sunken city Cathair Tonn Tóime.<sup>117</sup> The earliest version, Kerry Pub 4, was published in the periodical *An Lóchrann* in 1908. The warning is as follows:

A mhéirdreach bhalbh,  
Na feiceann tu do bhrat  
Dá scuabadh ón gcathair  
Ag fear de Mhuintir Shéaghdha  
Ó Thráigh na mBan Marbh?

O mute harlot,  
do you not see your mantle  
being taken from the city  
by a man of the Ó Sé family  
from the Shore of the Dead Women?

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<sup>117</sup> See pp. 48-9.

The other versions begin, similarly, with an alliterative phrase in the vocative case, followed by a mention of the stolen *brat* ‘mantle.’ Kerry MS-Main 7, 25, and 28 end at that point, the other two versions both identify the thief as “Vockey Hay” [i.e. *A Mhac Uí Shéaghdha*, ‘O Son of Ó Sé’] (MS-Main 19) or “fear de mhuintir Shéaghdha” ‘a man of the Ó Sé family’ (MS-Schools 69), and the site from which the *brat* is stolen as “tír na man marriv” [i.e. *Tír na mBan Marbh*, ‘land of the dead women’] (MS-Main 19) or “[T]ráig na mBan marbh” ‘Shore of the Dead Women’ (MS-Schools 69). The initial vocative phrase varies considerably across versions: “a mhéirdreach bhalbh” ‘O mute harlot’ (Pub 4), “A Bhé Bhailbh” ‘O mute woman’ (MS-Main 7), “a bhéim bhalla” ‘O wall-strike(?)’ (MS-Main 25), “a mhaol mhala” ‘O bare slope(?)’ (MS-Main 28), “a mheirdreach mhaluighthe” ‘O cursed harlot’ (MS-Schools 69). While some of these make little sense in context, they all alliterate and share assonance with each other; this type of variation is consistent with oral circulation. The first element is often a word signifying a woman (*bé* ‘lady’ and *méirdreach* ‘harlot’), while the second is often *balbh* ‘mute,’ possibly alluding to the motif that the woman never speaks while on land, which is found in some Kerry versions of the legend.<sup>118</sup>

#### 1.10.4 “Súil Uí Dhúda le hArd na Ria”

The proverb “Súil Uí Dhúda le hArd na Ria” ‘O’Dowd’s hope for Ardnaree’ occurs in three versions from Mayo (MS-Main 6, MS-Schools 17, Pub 2), which, unsurprisingly, identify the protagonist as a member of the O’Dowd family and mention the downfall of that family. The same proverb is attested in other legend traditions about the O’Dowds, and is included in Tomás Ó Máille’s collection *Seanfhocla Chonnachta*.<sup>119</sup> One version of The Mermaid Legend, Mayo 118 pp. 51-2.

<sup>119</sup> For other traditions about the O’Dowds and the loss of Ardnaree, see Darwin, “‘Súil Uí Dhúbhda Le hÁrd Na Ríogh’: Oral Tradition and History on the Mayo–Sligo Border.” Tomás Ó Máille’s collection of proverbs

Pub 2, references the use of the proverb outside of a narrative context, and its typical meaning: “Seo sean-fhocal do bíodh 'ghá rádh le mo linn-sa i measg na ndaoínidh fad ó i dtuaithe-Chonnacht le aon duine do bheadh ag súil le rud ar bith míodhoicheamhail, do réir cáil” ‘this is a proverb that used to be said in my time among the people in northern Connacht long ago, to anyone who would be hoping for something that seemed unlikely.’ Because the proverb is a genre that lends itself well to oral transmission, and because of the heterogeneity of the accounts where this proverb is found, it is not necessary to posit the influence of a written text.

A seemingly prophetic utterance occurs in another two versions of the legend, which mention the O’Dowds. The first, Mayo Pub 3, which was published in 1908 by Seosamh de Laoide, concludes with a discussion of the standing stones that used to be O’Dowd’s children, and how Ireland will be free when the last stone has vanished. Following this is a single stanza:

Cúirt gan cheann  
Caisleán gan bárr  
Dá mbeadh neart na nDubhdaighthe  
Cuireadh faoi lár

A court without a head,  
A castle without a summit:  
However mighty the O’Dowds  
They were cast down.

Galway MS-Main 16, recorded on Inis Oírr from Joe Mháirtín O’Flaherty in 1957, concludes in a similar fashion: “‘nois, níl cúirt a bhfuil ceann air, ná caisleán a bhfuil bárr air, agus tá deire leis na Dúdachaí go deo agus go bráth” ‘now, there is no court that has a head, nor castle that has a summit, and the O’Dowds have been ended for ever and always.’ The language is by no means identical, but both describe the downfall of the O’Dowds, and juxtapose *cúirt* ‘court’ with *ceann*

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includes the variant “Súil Uí Dhubhda, súil leis an rud nach bhfuil le fáil” ‘O’Dowd’s hope, hope for something that cannot be gotten.” Ó Máille, *Seanfhocla Chonnacht*, § 4522.

‘head’ and *caisleán* ‘castle’ with *barr* ‘summit.’ O’Flaherty’s version resembles the published text very closely in many other respects; strikingly, both versions include the relatively rare motif that the woman sends her husband away to obtain a plant (“*bogalach*” in Galway MS-Main 16, “*boglus*” in Mayo Pub 3)<sup>120</sup> and that she finds her stolen *cochall* in his absence. These similarities, especially the closeness of to the names given to the plant, along with the considerable distance between Inis Oírr and the Moy, as well as the complete lack of any other versions from Galway mentioning the O’Dowds, suggests that O’Flaherty had read, or had read to him, de Laoide’s volume.

#### 1.10.5 “Mér er um og ó”

In three versions from Iceland (Pub 2, 4, 5), the seal-woman recites three or four lines before she enters the sea, articulating her conflicted state and her mutually exclusive sets of obligations, to her terrestrial and aquatic families. In Iceland Pub 2, it runs as follows:

Mér er um og ó  
ég á sjö börn í sjó  
og sjö börn á landi.

Woe is me  
I have seven children in the sea  
And seven children on land.

An identical text occurs in Iceland Pub 4. Iceland Pub 5 adds an additional line, referencing the seal-woman’s kinship, and introduces a more regular rhyme sequence:

Mér er um og ó,  
ein af fólki Faraó,

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<sup>120</sup> *Buglas* is an herb, known as ‘bugloss’ or ‘oxtongue’ in English, which is used to treat boils, swellings, and minor injuries (NFCMS MS 125:430, 881:361, 271B:2, 137B:20, 221:533a, 158:7, 211:228, etc.). *Bogalach*, to the best of my knowledge, is not the name of an herb, but does sound similar to *buglas*. Additionally in Mayo Pub 3, the woman pretends to be ill and sends her husband away to find the herb after the children tell her that they saw where their father hid her *cochall*. In Galway MS-Main 16, many of these details are lacking, and the woman gives no explanation for why she needs the *bogalach*.

á sjö börn í sjó  
og sjö á landi þó.

Woe is me,  
one of the Pharoah's people,  
who has seven children at sea  
and seven still on land.

A similar contrast between terrestrial and aquatic family is made in Iceland Pub 1. Upon the birth of her children, the seal-woman states “mörg á ég nú börnin hérna, en fleiri á ég þau í sjónum” ‘I have many children here, but more have I in the sea.’

Iceland Pub 4 appeared in the first edition of Jón Árnason's *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur*, published in 1862. Since the other versions containing this element were possibly collected after the publication of the first edition of Jón Árnason's collection, the possibility of literary borrowing cannot be discounted; however, the relative simplicity of the text, and the presence of variation, suggests oral transmission. The Icelandic versions are only preserved as texts, with no indication as to how the legend was performed, or how this verse might have been set apart from the rest of the performance. It is possible, given its metrical form, that it was sung, perhaps as a lullaby,<sup>121</sup> which would have aided its transmission and given it stability.

### 1.10.6 “Í kvöld verði eg konuleysur!”

As mentioned above, Faroe Pub 2, 3, and Sound 1, all of which are in Faroese and set in Mikladalur, closely resemble one another.<sup>122</sup> So close is this resemblance that the possibility that Faroe Pub 3 is derived from Pub 2, and/or that the sound recording is a re-oralized version of one of these printed texts, cannot be discounted. In all three of these versions, when the man realizes

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121 The lullaby is a genre normally performed for children, and therefore most likely to have been utilized and transmitted by women, who have most of the responsibility for child-rearing in many European societies. It is significant that all three versions which contain this verse were recorded from women, two of whom are referred to as a *húsfreyja* ‘housewife.’

122 Pp. 24-5.

that he has left the key to the chest in which he hid his wife's sealskin at home, he sorrowfully proclaims that he is now without a wife: "í kvöld verði eg konuleysur!" 'tonight I become a widower' (Faroe Pub 2), "í dag verði eg konuleysur!" 'today I become a widower' (Faroe Pub 3), "konuleysur eri eg í dag" 'a widower am I today' (Faroe Sound 1).

A similar event occurs in Shetland Sound 5: "And when the old man and the men was comin' home from the fishing then they saw two seals comin' out from the shore, and the man looked out over the board and said 'this night I am a widower, for that's my wife that's gone there.'" The similarity in phrasing between "this night I am a widower" and "í kvöld verði eg konuleysur" is striking, but literary borrowing seems unlikely for a number of reasons: I am unaware of any English-language translation of Schröter or Hammershaimb's texts which was in print when Shetland Sound 5 was recorded in 1970; Catherine Mary-Anderson, the informant, refers to the legend as an "old, handed-down story"; and this version differs from the Faroese versions in some important ways (e.g. the stolen seal-skin is hidden in a stack of corn rather than a locked chest). Similarity in the phrasing mentioned above may, of course, be merely coincidental, but it may also indicate transmission of the legend between Shetland and the Faroes, either when Shetland was Norn-speaking, or more recently, via bilingual Faroese-Scots or Faroese-English speakers.

#### **1.10.7 "Farewell... I always loved my first husband much better."**

As in the Icelandic versions where the woman expresses her competing familial obligations before entering the sea, in three published from Shetland and Orkney, collected during the nineteenth century the seal-woman states her preference for her aquatic husband over her terrestrial one. In Shetland Pub 1, published in 1822, the woman tells her grieving husband:

“Farewell...and may all good attend you. I loved you very well when I resided upon earth, but I always loved my first husband much better.” In Shetland Pub 2, collected in the middle of the nineteenth century but not published until 1971, “she said she had a husband and children also under the sea and she liked them better.” In Orkney Pub 3, published in 1893, she says “Goodman o' Wastness, fareweel tae thee! I liked dee weel, doo war geud tae me; bit I lo'e better me man o' the sea!” Further afield, in Faroe Pub 5, published in 1898, the seal woman “bade [her husband] ‘farewell,’ saying that, fond as she had been of him, she could not give up her old life.”

These four versions convey the same basic idea, but the language is different enough, and these four versions vary enough in other details for literary borrowing to be unlikely. That the woman has an aquatic along with a terrestrial husband is suggested, although not outright stated, in two versions from the same general area (Faroe Sound 1, Sutherland MS 3); this detail points to a shared belief in the symmetrical nature of aquatic and terrestrial family structures. Along with the man’s sudden revelation that his wife has left him, the presence of the motif of an aquatic husband seems to indicate an affinity between the legend as collected in the Faroe Islands and in Shetland and Orkney.

Another version of this same encounter occurs further east, in Bohuslän MS 1: “Farväl. Jag önskar dig att lycka och välgång. Jag älskade dig alltid, då jag var på jorden, men min förste man har jag dock älskat mer än dig! Jag väl vara på våra barn och må du bra lycklig tills du dör” ‘Farewell. I wish for you to prosper and be happy. I always loved you when I was on land, but I always loved my first husband more than you! I wish well for our children, and that you will be happy until you die.’ This version is unusual in many respects: in addition to being the only one that includes this statement outside of Faroe or northeastern Scotland, it is unique among

Swedish versions in unambiguously identifying the woman as a seal, and in stating that it is the children who discover their mother's stolen skin. The collector, Tomas Sandberg, reports that he collected this version from a sea-captain, and that the version "är kanske icke av bohuslänsk ursprung" 'is perhaps not native to Bohuslän.' This version does, however, closely resemble Shetland Pub 1, both in the language of the woman's benediction ("Farewell... and may all good attend you") and in several other details, such as the seal-woman's initial appearance while dancing with her companions on a moonlit night, the webbed fingers of her children, and the woman's habit of visiting the shore during her time on land. These similarities, especially in the phrasing of the benediction, suggest that the version from Bohuslän is a re-oralized version of Shetland Pub 1, or at least that someone along the chain of transmission was familiar with Shetlandic versions of the legend. Even after the loss of Norn as a community language in Shetland, it should be noted, the islands maintained cultural ties with the broader Scandinavian world.

#### 1.10.8 "Mairg a thugann cúl le cine"

At the conclusion of four versions from Munster, the man voices his sorrow at having been abandoned by his mermaid bride with a gnomic utterance: "mairg a thugann cúl le cine agus ná pósann bean ar a aitheantas!" 'woe to him who turns his back on his people and marries a woman not of his acquaintance'<sup>123</sup> The texts of these four versions are nearly identical, and they all share the otherwise unattested detail that the man was returning home from the earliest mass on Easter Sunday when he came across the *murúch*. Another version, Cork MS-Schools 9, strongly resembles these four, although it ends with the marriage of the man and the woman, and does not recount her escape. Two versions (Waterford MS-Main 5 and MS-Schools 2) were

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<sup>123</sup> Cork MS-Schools 10, Kerry MS-Main 1, Waterford MS-Main 5, MS-Schools 2.



recorded from the same informant, Labhras Ó Cadla of Béal na Molt, and so a high degree of similarity is to be expected, but the other three versions were recorded in other counties, from informants who have no clear connection to Ó Cadla.<sup>124</sup> Given the high degree of textual similarity, along with the far-flung geographic distribution of these versions, and the lack of any obvious connections between the informants, it seems likely that most if not all of these are derived from a published source, one which I have been unable to find.

### 1.11 Conclusions.

From the foregoing, there appear to be two primary divergences in the legend where a geographically significant distribution pattern can be observed: the characterization of the woman as a mermaid (or aquatic woman) or seal (or seal-woman), and the means by which the woman recovers her stolen skin, garment, tail, and the like.

The alternation between the woman as a seal or as a mermaid (or sea-woman) frequently correlates with the description of the stolen object, and whether the woman is alone or part of a group when the man encounters her: the seal-woman is most often said to possess a (seal)skin; while the mermaid possesses a garment, tail, shell, or comb; and the seal-woman often appears as part of a larger group, whereas the mermaid is more solitary. With two exceptions, these descriptions are mutually exclusive: in Argyll MS 1, the woman is described as both a “ròn” and a “maighdean mhara,” she appears as one of a group of seven, and possesses a “cochull èisg”; in Denmark Pub 1, the woman is described as a “havfru” ‘mermaid’ but appears in a group and possesses a “sælhundeskind” ‘sealskin’ and is part of a group. Generally speaking, the mermaid identification is characteristic of areas where a Gaelic language is spoken or was spoken until

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<sup>124</sup> Kerry MS-Main 1, Seán O Suilleabháin (64) of Baile Uachtarach, Baile an Fhiréaraigh; Cork MS-Schools 9, Pádraig Ua Murchadha of Doirín Áluinn, Baile Mhúirne; and MS-Schools 10, no informant mentioned.

quite recently (i.e. Ireland and the Highlands and Hebrides of Scotland), whereas the seal-woman is typical of those areas where Scots or a language descended from Old Norse is or was spoken (Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Scandinavia, northeastern Scotland). There are some important exceptions to this pattern, however: solitary mermaids and sea-women are more typical of Swedish tradition, and seal-women are found in some versions from the Gaelic world, often but not exclusively associated with families, such as the Mac Codrum of North Uist and the Mac Confhaola of County Galway. As noted above, the children and descendants of mermaids in versions of the legend collected in some parts of Ireland may possess seal-like characteristics, or retain some connection with that animal.<sup>125</sup>

Within Ireland, there is a strong divide between the northern and southern halves of the island, corresponding to several dialectical differences in the Irish language, as well as to the pseudo-historical division between *Leath Cuinn* ‘Conn’s half’ and *Leath Mogha* ‘Mugh’s half.’<sup>126</sup> In the northern half, the children are involved in the recovery of the stolen object, either in observing their father examining or moving it, or in discovering it by chance themselves and bringing it to their mother’s attention. In this area, the stolen object is usually hidden in a stack of drying grass, and the woman often visits her children after she has returned to the sea. In versions from the southern half of the island, the stolen object is hidden either in the loft or within the thatching of the roof, and the man accidentally reveals it while repairing or replacing the roof, or, more often, while searching for something in the loft and carelessly throwing things about in his search. In a smaller number of versions from Mayo and Galway, the stolen object is

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125 Pp. 58-9.

126 Cf. O’Rahilly, *Irish Dialects Past and Present*, 17–18.

hidden in the roof or the walls of the house and is revealed by the elements, when a storm damages the roof or the house catches fire.

Versions collected from Scotland, like those from the northern half of Ireland, state that the children are instrumental in the woman's recovering her stolen object. With the exception of versions collected in Shetland, in Scotland the stolen object is more likely to be hidden in a shed or outhouse rather than a stack of drying hay; still, it is hidden in a structure built outside the house, rather than within the house itself. As with the versions mentioned above from the north of Ireland, the woman often visits her children after she returns to the sea. As already noted, the woman is typically a mermaid, in versions recorded in Gaelic, or from traditionally Gaelic-speaking communities throughout the Highlands and Western Isles and a seal in versions from the northeast coast, Shetland, and Orkney. There are some exceptions, such as versions from North Uist, which all describe the woman as a seal.

The versions from Norway and Denmark, like those from northeastern Scotland, identify the supernatural woman as a seal (except for Finnmark Pub 1, in which she is an “unge Pige” ‘young girl’), have the children play a key role in her recovery of her stolen skin or clothes, and, in Finnmark Pub 1, the woman visits her children after she returns to the sea. Unlike what happens in versions from Scotland, the stolen object is not hidden in an external structure: in Finnmark Pub 1, it is locked in a chest, in Nordland Pub 1, under the floorboards, and in Denmark Pub 1, the hiding place is unspecified. Unsurprisingly, given the geographic proximity and similar language of the two areas, versions collected from Iceland and the Faroe Islands bear a close resemblance to each other: in both sets the initial encounter is set around a winter holiday, and describing the man as hiding the stolen skin in a locked chest. Like versions from

northeastern Scotland, Norway, and Denmark, those from Iceland and the Faroe Islands describe the woman as a seal; unlike those versions, the children do not play a major role in the recovery of the skin, except in Iceland Pub 2, where one of her children brings the woman the key to the chest. As in the versions from Shetland and Orkney, however, the woman does return to visit her children in many versions from the Faroe Islands and Iceland. In Sweden, the stolen object is typically hidden in a locked chest but, unlike what is told in the rest of the Nordic world, the woman is more typically described as a mermaid, the children do not play any role in the recovery of the object, and she does not visit her children after fleeing from the land.

These patterns are consistent with the legend having originated in the Gaelic-speaking world, and spread from there to north-eastern Scotland, and from there to the rest of the Nordic world. It seems plausible that this dissemination occurred when Norn was still a community language in Orkney and Shetland, because speaking a cognate language with the rest of the Norse world would have aided the transmission of the legend (although linguistic similarity is not necessary for transmission, as the legend must have been transmitted between speakers of Gaelic and Scots or Norn). Svabo, writing at the end of the eighteenth century, describes the legend as if it were long-established in the Faroe Islands.<sup>127</sup> The prevalence of the locked chest, as opposed to the hay-stack or shed, in versions from the Nordic world is a development that likely happened in Shetland or Orkney, or as the legend was transmitted from those islands.<sup>128</sup>

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127 Faroe Pub 1. The legend was also apparently known across Iceland at the same time (p. 25n24). Conventionally, the language shift from Norn to Scots is understood as having started at the beginning of the eighteenth century, although Michael P. Barnes has suggested that it may have occurred at the beginning of the seventeenth. See Barnes, "Jakob Jakobsen and the Norn Language of Shetland."

128 Much of the specific vocabulary used for haystacks in Shetland and Orkney (Fenton, *The Northern Isles*, 348–57) has clear cognates with Old Norse and other Scandinavian languages. It therefore seems unlikely that these terms could not translate. One possibility is that the individuals who transmitted the legend were professional sailors and merchants, rather than farmers, and may not have been familiar with agricultural terminology; alternately, as highly mobile individuals, it may have made more sense to them to store something valuable within a locked chest or box rather than a stationary haystack.

The lack of involvement of the children seen in Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and Sweden seems like a natural development from this detail: the possession of the key gives him almost exclusive access to the stolen skin, and so her ability to find it again must be due to a lapse on his part, and not to the involvement of a third party.

The geographic distribution of versions which portray the supernatural woman as a seal or as a mermaid might be taken to indicate that an original mermaid was changed to a seal-woman as part of the process of Norse oicotypification. This cannot, however, explain the (admittedly infrequent) presence of seals and seal associations in versions from Ireland and Gaelic Scotland: while the MacCodrum family can claim a Norse pedigree,<sup>129</sup> and the Hebrides have a long history of contact with the Norse world because of the Kingdom of the Isles, the same cannot be said for the Conneely family, or more generally, the west coast of Ireland. This explanation, furthermore, also does not adequately explain the Swedish material. It seems more likely that the seal was original to both Gaelic and Norse tradition, and the mermaid is a more recent development in both Gaelic and Swedish traditions. The various versions of the legend which identify the woman as a seal or associate her or her descendants with seals in some way, would then reflect older strata of tradition, strengthened in some cases by other traditions connecting families with that animal.<sup>130</sup> This explanation is consistent with the relatively late appearance of words for mermaid in Gaelic languages, as well as the lack of early examples of half-fish half-women figures in Irish literature or the plastic arts;<sup>131</sup> seals, on the other hand, have been known in northwestern Europe since prehistory.

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129 MacCodrum, *The songs of John MacCodrum*, xliv-1.

130 See pp. 115-8.

131 See pp. 170-1.

The Swedish corpus is unusual in many respects. As discussed above, one atypical version closely resembles Shetlandic tradition and was likely imported via a re-oralized version of a published version.<sup>132</sup> The other versions agree with much of the Norse tradition in having the man hide the stolen skin or garment in a locked chest, but differ in portraying her as a mermaid or water-being rather than a seal, not having the children play a role in the recovery of the object, and not describing the woman as visiting her children after her escape from land. The children do play a reduced role in many Icelandic and Faroese versions, as mentioned above, most likely because the possession of the key shifts the attention away from the children to the man. The fact that the woman does not visit her children on land may be a further development reflecting their diminished importance to the narrative. The shift from a seal to a mermaid can perhaps be explained by the influence of other Swedish traditions about more anthropomorphic female supernatural beings.<sup>133</sup>

The following chapter turns from The Mermaid Legend to the broader context of traditions concerning seals and mermaids. I examine items from a range of genres, including songs, other legends, and anecdotes, in order to assess the degree to which they represent a coherent body of belief, and how such a body of belief relates to a broader vernacular worldview. In the interest of space, this discussion is limited to traditions recorded in Ireland and Scotland, the two countries where the majority of versions of The Mermaid Legend have been recorded.

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132 p. 74

133 cf Klintberg, *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend*, 111–12.

## 2. The Seal and Mermaid in Gaelic and Scots Oral Tradition

The previous chapter examined The Mermaid Legend in depth, focusing on the nature of the extant sources for this legend, the content of the legend, the distribution of variants, and the possible development and dissemination of that legend. This chapter will focus instead on the primary supernatural figure in that legend – the mermaid or seal-woman – and how similar beings are portrayed and conceived of in the broader context of Irish and Scottish oral tradition. The discussion will begin with a (necessarily incomplete) overview of other traditions concerning mermaids and seals, covering a range of genres including memorates, fabulates, belief statements, songs, and tales, followed by a discussion of the degree of heterogeneity across this material, the extent to which these various traditions present a more or less coherent body of belief concerning seals and mermaids, and the extent to which mermaid and seal-belief overlap. As this chapter will consider texts recorded in English, Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and Scots, this chapter will also assess the degree to which the role played by seals and mermaids in narrative and belief differs between these linguistic communities.

The following discussion will group traditions about these beings according to genre, rather than whether they concern seals or mermaids; not only can the same tradition be about either seals or mermaids (or both), but a classification of stories as “mermaid” or “seal” stories presupposes that they are thought of as entirely distinct species in Irish and Scottish tradition, which is not always the case.<sup>1</sup> Division by genre is not entirely unproblematic either, as the generic labels used here are mostly etic categories, and the same narrative type can be told in different genres even within the same traditional milieu.<sup>2</sup> Genre, nonetheless, is a useful category

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1 See p. 76.

2 See pp. 9-11.

to think with here, especially because genres such as the legend are defined by folklorists according to their relationship to personal experience and belief.

Before examining oral traditions concerning mermaids and seals, it is useful to take into account the different relationships that humans have with these beings. Seals are a common sight in the waters of the north Atlantic, where they occupy many of the same coastal zones as humans and compete with them for stocks of fish. People who live by the sea regularly interact with these animals, and their appearance and habits are well known. Encounters with seals are only worthy of a story when they place a human in danger or behave in an uncanny or unusual way.<sup>3</sup> Mermaids, on the other hand, are elusive and rarely seen, to the point that people express doubts about their existence. Their very appearance, neither fully human nor animal, marks them as creatures beyond the natural order of things.

The folklore archives contain, along with supernatural narratives and statements of belief, numerous straight-forward accounts of seal hunts; how seals disrupt fishing operations by tearing up nets; and how humans have used them for their meat, hides, oil, bones, and other body parts.<sup>4</sup> A comprehensive assessment of this ethnographic material is beyond the scope of the current study, but there are two aspects to this material which bear consideration. The first is the complex relationship between humans and seals: the latter are simultaneously a resource to be exploited and direct competitors with humans for fish stocks. Secondly, this material indicates that seals were regularly hunted and slaughtered in northwestern Europe, even in areas where

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3 For example, Tomás Ó Criomhainn gives an account of a seal-hunt in which the seal bites off a piece of his leg, and he is left in mortal danger until an elderly neighbour heals him in an unlikely but symbolically appropriate manner, replacing the flesh that was removed with seal flesh. Ó Criomhainn, *An tOileánach*, 85–94.

4 References to some of these accounts are given in Ní Fhloinn, “Tadhg, Donncha and Some of Their Relations” 224n3.



beliefs about kinship between seals and humanity were in circulation, and even where informants mention taboos against killing seals.

## 2.1 Memorates

The Irish and Scottish folklore collections contain dozens of individual accounts of people who claim to have seen a mermaid or, less frequently, a merman.<sup>5</sup> Some of these accounts were recorded directly from the one who experienced the event, while others are second or third-hand accounts. The witness (usually a man) comes upon the mermaid at the coast (or less often while on the sea in a boat), and the mermaid vanishes when she realizes she is being watched, or when the human tries to get closer. The following first-hand account, recorded from Séamus Bairéad of Inis Géidhc, Couty Mayo, is a typical example:

Bhí mé lá i n-Innis Géidhc d'éirigh mé ar maidin agus chuaidh mé chun na cladaighe ag iarraidh leas. Bhí cailín ar an mbaile a raibh mé braith uirthi agus chonnaic mé an cailín mar shaoil mé gurb'é mo chailín féin a bhí ann ina suidhe ar an gcarraig cois na fairrge agus í a' cíoradh a cinn agus ghá réidhteach.

Theann mé léithi go mbaininn póg dí ar maidin acht cia bhfuighinn ann acht an mhaighdean mhara.

Nuair a bhí mé i ngar dí chuaidh sí de léim amháin amach ins an bhfairrge, agus ní fhaca mé níos mó í.<sup>6</sup>

I was in Inis Géidhc one day, I woke up that morning and I went to the shore to gather seaweed for fertilizer. There was a girl from town that I was waiting for, and I saw this girl who I thought was the girl I was waiting for, sitting on a rock by the sea, combing and fixing her hair.

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5 The people who see mermaids in these accounts are typically men, which is unsurprising given that the spaces where one might encounter a mermaid are associated with male labour in many European societies. Experiences are typically male in Icelandic tradition as well, although curiously sightings of *mermen* are reported more often than of mermaids. E.g. sightings of a *hafmaður* 'sea-man' occur in Ólafur Daviðsson, *Íslenskar Þjóðsögur*, i: 117, 124, 236; Guðmundur Jónsson, *Skaftfellskar Þjóðsögur og sagnir*, xii: 98-100; Sigfús Sigfússon, *Íslenskar Þjóðsögur og sagnir*, iv: 7-10, 21-25, 52-3, 64-5, vi: 290, and so on. Sightings of mermaids occur much less frequently, e.g. Helgi Guðmundsson and Arngrímur Fr. Bjarnason, *Vestfirzkar sagnir*, 66-67; Sigfús Sigfússon, *Íslenskar Þjóðsögur og sagnir*, iv: 13, 19-20.

6 NFC 1649:10; Séamus Bairéad, Inis Géidhc, County Mayo. Collector: Míchéal Ó Tiománaidhe, 1903.

I pressed towards her so that I might get a kiss from her that morning, but who should I find but the mermaid.

When I was close to her, she leapt out into the sea, and I never saw her again.

The description of the mermaid (*maighdean mhara*) in this account is similar to her description in *The Mermaid Legend*: she is human-like in appearance (so much so that she can be mistaken for a particular human at a distance), young, and attractive. No mention is made of her fish-tail, but this feature may be implicit in the name *maighdean mhara*. The mermaid's habit of sitting on a rock by the sea and combing her hair is paralleled in many Irish versions of *The Mermaid Legend*. The erotic overtones of this account are worth noting: while Séamus' main reason for being at the shore is to gather seaweed for fertilizer, he is also waiting for a young woman to meet him there. The mermaid is an aesthetically pleasing object of the male gaze seen from a distance, and sexual desire motivates the man to approach her, as in many versions of *The Mermaid Legend*. Perhaps significantly, this account does not seem to moralize: Séamus suffers no real consequences for acting on his desire, other than the unexpected disappearance of the object of that desire.

Tom Tressey of Clonmel, County Waterford, reports that his father had a similar experience upon seeing a mermaid, which he never saw again after attempting to capture it:

I used to hear my father to say that when he used to be fishing along the banks of the Suir he used to see this woman & he used to be looking at her. She was half a woman & half a fish. The upper part of her was a woman & other part of her was a fish. So begor he said that it used be a great thing to catch her. So he went this evening at dusk to get at the woman at *Cloch na Brúch* [*sic*] and when he came to the place he saw no one. He waited on there for some time & if he did the *brúch* did not come & he never saw her after. He told me that he had very good luck after seeing her on the bank & that he used to catch a good lot of fish & that when he used to be going along the river he used to hear sweet songs near *Cloch na Brúch* but he never saw the *brúch* from that day on.<sup>7</sup>

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7 NFC 317:83-84; Tom Tressey (70), pensioner, The Cross, County Waterford. Collector: Níoclás Breatnach, 15 February 1937.

Although Tom relates this text in English, he uses the Irish term *brúch*, which suggests that his father might have been an Irish speaker. Unlike what happens in Séamus’s account, Tom’s father sees the mermaid again and again, and is well aware of what she is. The mermaid vanishes for good, but only after Tom’s father decides to capture her. The attempt to capture the mermaid is motivated by the knowledge that “it used to be a great thing to catch her” – knowledge that might have come from legends about captive mermaids who bring prosperity and luck to those who catch them. Unlike Séamus’ account, Tom’s clearly states that the mermaid only resembles a human above the waist, and that her lower half resembles a fish. The placename *Cloch na Brúch* ‘The Mermaid’s Stone,’ where Tom’s father goes in his attempt to capture her, might suggest that the mermaid was believed to sit upon a rock near the shore, as in Séamus’ account, and many others. The mention of her fine singing voice occurs in some versions of The Mermaid Legend as well, although it is not a common detail.<sup>8</sup>

The mere sight of the mermaid is a prodigious suspension of the natural order. While the narrator’s father reports having good luck and an increased fishing haul as a result of this interaction, the consequences are usually more dire: the mermaid often portends for those who see her bad luck, an oncoming storm, or death (often by drowning). In the following account from Mártan Ó Baoghail of Burrishoole, County Mayo, the mermaid is a portent of a coming storm, and those who report seeing her barely escape with their lives:

Joe Sammon and John Joe Mac Donnell of Acres near Newport sailed one day as far west as Roc Island fishing for coalfish. Joe was in the stern steering and as he chanced to look behind him he saw a woman's head of hair appear above the water at the stern of the boat, and the woman's face looking up at him. He spoke to his mate: “it is time for us to be making for home at once.” Before they had gone twenty yards a terrible storm arose and almost swamped the boat. They

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<sup>8</sup> For her singing voice, see p. 38, but also cf. p. 51-2 for the mermaid’s silence. As noted below, p. 150, the etymology of *murúch* suggests an auditory phenomenon, or at least a highly vocal being.

could not attempt the seven miles journey home, but with great difficulty they succeeded in reaching Roigh Pier.<sup>9</sup>

Duncan Duffie of Port Charlotte, Islay, reports someone dying mysteriously some time after seeing a mermaid:

[Duncan Duffie] says he knew a man who saw a mermaid on one occasion when he was out fishing. She came above the water until she could be seen down to the waist. It is said it is not lucky to see them, and not long after this man saw her he died.<sup>10</sup>

Accounts of sightings, with or without consequences for the beholder, form the most common type of experience narrative involving mermaids. Less frequently, informants may report a more violent confrontation between the mermaid and her human witnesses, as in this account from Seán Bhait Inglis of Baile an Sceilg, County Kerry:

I mBólus a thuit sé amach. Bhí fear de Mhuíntir Laoghaire a' máirseáil tímpal na faille lá, agus do thainig a' bhean air ó'n bhfaraige. Bhí sí ad iarraig é chur leis a' bhfaill, ach n'fhéad sí mar bhí sé ró-láidir di, ach ar a shon san do chaill sé a shláinte dá deasgaibh. Duairt an bhean nár chuaig aon fhear riamh di go dí é.<sup>11</sup>

This happened in Bólus. A man of the Laoghaire family was wandering about the cliff one day, and a woman from the sea came upon him. She was trying to throw him off the cliff, but she could not because he was too strong for her, but he lost his health as a result of her. The woman said that no man had matched her before him.

This portrayal of the woman from the sea as a violent aggressor bears a close resemblance to Icelandic accounts of *skrímsli* 'sea monster,'<sup>12</sup> and is a marked contrast with those accounts in which she timidly flees as soon as she realizes she has been seen. Despite these obvious differences, all of these narrative portray encountering the mermaid as something dangerous –

9 NFC 1206:3; Mártain Ó Baoghill (66), farmer, Maol Raithní, County Mayo. Collector: Pádraig Ó Moghráin, 3 December 1942.

10 School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan 633; Duncan Duffie, Port Charlotte, Islay. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr, 1894.

11 Inglis, "An Bhean Ó'n Bhfaraige," 291.

12 See Gunnell, "On the Border: The Liminality of the Sea Shore in Icelandic Folk Legends of the Past."

not only does the man risk drowning but he later loses his good health permanently as a result of this encounter – and attribute to her the power to draw men towards her and her domain, either passively through her conspicuous beauty, or actively through her use of force.

The mermaid's attack may also occur on the open sea, as in this account from Bridie Rowlands of Greenans, County Mayo:

This is a short story I heard about a mermaid. One day long ago when a ship was sailing across the sea to England the people on board saw a mermaid who asked them to throw out a girl which she had seen on board but they refused. There was a man in the ship and it was he that would not let the girl out. He began to sing a song and the mermaid was listening to him all the time because his voice was so sweet, and by the time he had the song finished the ship had arrived at its destination. The mermaid forgot all about the girl.<sup>13</sup>

This story appears to be undergoing the shift from memorate to fabulate: identifying details are not included, and the storyteller no longer claims direct acquaintance with those involved. The fact that the mermaid is said to ask for a member of the crew implies that she is able to speak in a way that humans understand. She is also shown as having an appreciation for music; unlike what happens in Classical accounts of the sirens, singing saves humans from a watery grave.

The same shift from memorate to fabulate can be seen in the following account, recorded from Mrs Norman MacAndrew of Ardgay, Sutherland:

Referring to the stories of the *Vow* that was often seen in the river Carron, the reciter, whose house was quite beside the place, says: she, the *Vow*, was there sure enough, and there is a rock at the side of the river, on which she used to be seen constantly sitting combing her hair. It is called *The Vow's Seat*.

One time a man was bathing in the river, and she got a hold of him, and was dragging him down, but he cried "for goodness sake let me go" and she let him go. People said that was quite true, and I believe it, but we do not hear anything about her now, if she is still there.<sup>14</sup>

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13 NFCS 94:232; Bridget Rowland. Collector: Bridie Rowland, Greenans School, County Mayo; 10 June 1938. Teacher: Máiréad Bean Uí Riagáin.

The word *Vow* is mentioned in a few other items collected from eastern Scotland in the MacLagan manuscripts, where it refers to a water spirit or mermaid of some kind.<sup>15</sup> None of these items describe the *Vow*'s appearance in any great detail, but the fact that she sits on a rock and combs her hair calls to mind the typical image of the mermaid in Gaelic tradition. The idea that such a being would grant mercy when asked for it, without making a demand of her own, is unusual, but it is possible that "for goodness sake" is a minced oath, and that the man would have been released after calling upon God.<sup>16</sup> The word *Vow* is likely of Gaelic origin; while initial /v/ is not permitted in Gaelic, the fact that the word is always preceded with the definite article means that the initial /v/ could represent the lenited initial *m* or *b* of a feminine noun. Scottish Gaelic *baobh* 'wizard, wicked mischievous female' is the most likely candidate, and Edward Dwelly's dictionary does include the definition "she-spirit supposed to haunt rivers."<sup>17</sup> If "the *Vow*" is an Anglicization of *an bhaobh*, then this word can be traced back to Old Irish *badb* 'name of war-goddess, hooded crow.'<sup>18</sup>

As noted above, seals form part of the day-to-day life of coastal communities in northwestern Europe. Merely seeing a seal is not an interesting enough experience to make a story; encounters with seals are only worth talking about when the human is in danger, or when

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14 School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan 8057; Mrs Norman MacAndrew, Ardgay, Rossshire. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr (?), 1903 (?).

15 Maclagan 6798, 8056-9.

16 A parallel to this can be seen in Swedish water-horse (*bäckhäst* or *näck*) legends in which someone is freed from the water-horse after mentioning the name of Jesus or the cross. See types F102 "Rider who mentions name of Jesus is thrown off brook horse," F103B "'Christ's cross, what a long horse!'" af Klintberg, *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend*, 122–23.

17 Dwelly, *Faclair Gaidhlig*, s.v. *baobh*.

18 Macbain, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language*, s.v. *baobh*. As Patricia Lysaght discusses, the typical name of the banshee in southeastern Ireland derives from the same Old Irish word. The sinister *vow* might well be an aquatic oicotype of the normally terrestrial banshee. Lysaght, *The Banshee*, 34–39.

the seal does something uncanny or unusual. A common theme in experience narratives is the close resemblance between the voices of seals and of humans. A fairly naturalistic account from George Peterson of Papa Stour, Shetland, remarks on the uncanny effect of listening to seals:

Oh, they never considered it lucky to, to kill a seal [...] There were some connection between the seal and the human being. They... Some folks say that the seals...the spirits of the shipwrecked sailors [...] And if you hear them, in the *gyo*, especially at night-time, you hear the song of the seals in the *gyo* and it's a very weird experience [...] echoing up through the caves [...] it's just like voices.<sup>19</sup>

Other stories go further and attribute to seals the power of speech and knowledge of human languages. Because human interactions with seals often occur during a hunt or a fishing expedition, many stories about speaking seals involve seals begging humans for mercy. Séamus Mac Fionnlaoich of An tSaobh, County Donegal, recounts how one man gave up hunting seals after one such encounter:

Bhí fear ann uair amháin i Mín na Saileach a dtugad siad *Hughdie* Ó Maonuigh air, agus bhí sé 'n-a ceird an uair sin ag an fhear sin – bhíod sé ar siubhal leis a tráigh eadar chladaigh a marbhadh rónta. Cé bith úsáid a gníodhad sé de'n ola a bhíodh ionnta nó rud ínteacht mar sin.

(Agus) ach chuaidh sé amach lá amháin, chóir a bheith amuigh ag an tráigh. Agus bhí an úig ann. Sílim gur fochair a' tuir bhriste a bheiread siad air. Chuaidh sé síos 'na chladaigh, agus an úig a ba ghráthach leis a dhul ann d'amharc sé agus bhí trí rón mhóra ann, astoigh san úig. Bhí cineál de *mhellet* mhór aige fá choinne na h-ócóide, agus bhuailead sé sa chloigeann leis a *mhellet* seo iad agus mharbhad sé iad. Bhí siad 'n-a gcodladh i mbárr a chladaigh, agus thóg sé'n *mellet* go mbuailead sé ceann aca, agus d'éirigh an rón 'n-a sheasamh agus dubhairt sé leis:

"Stop your blow." Níor tharraing *Hughdie* an buille, agus bhain na trí rón an fhairrge amach arais, agus níor mharbh *Hughdie* an rón ó'n lá sin go dtí 'n lá a fuair sé bás. Tá sé curtha i gcás a bith le deich mbliadhna agus dá fhichead.<sup>20</sup>

19 SA 1960.217.B6; George Peterson (28), teacher, Papa Stour, Shetland. Collector: Tom Anderson, 1960. A *gyo* is "a creek in the seashore with steep, rocky sides." Graham, *The Shetland Dictionary*, s.v. *gyo*.

20 NFC 179:451-3; Séamus Mac Fionnlaoich (68), farmer and shopkeeper, an tSaobh, County Donegal. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 16 April 1936.

There was a man in Mín na Saileach once who they called Hughdie Ó Maonaigh, and at that time his job was – he would walk along the shore killing seals. He would use their oil in some way, or something like that.

And he went out one day, in order to be out at the shore. And there was a cave. I think that they used to go close to the broken stone. He went down to the shore, and he looked into the cave where he would go, and there were three big seals there inside the cave. He had a sort of big mallet for the occasion, and he struck them in the head with this mallet, and he killed them. They were sleeping in the upper part of the beach, and he took the mallet to strike one of them, and the seal stood up and said to him:

“Stop your blow.” Hughdie didn’t strike him, and the three seals made it back to the sea, and Hughdie didn’t kill another seal from that day until the day he died. This is supposed to have happened fifty years ago.

The seal’s plea may be more involved or plaintive as in this account from Stiofán Ó hÉalaoire, of

Baile Uí Choileáin, County Clare:

Do bhí bád ar muir sa t-seana-shaol, agus do bhí sí ag iascaireacht líonta. Do bhí a cuid líonta amuh aici, agus í dá dtarrainnt. Ar tharrainn[t] na líonta dhóib cad a ráingeódh i’s na líonta ach rón, agus labhair a’ rón leóthu dó nú trí fhocaile:

“Ní Clann Í Chonaíola ná Seóigeach me!  
Ach is fada ó mo mhuintir a seólag me!”

Níor thógadar [na líonta] níos sia ná sin suas. Scaoileadar uathub ansin (a’ rón).<sup>21</sup>

There was a boat on the sea long ago, and the crew were fishing with nets. They had cast out their nets and were drawing them back in. As they were drawing them back in, what should be in their nets but a seal, and the seal spoke two or three words to them:

“I am not a Conneely or a Joyce!  
But it is far from my family I have sailed!”

They didn’t draw their lines any further up. They let the seal go then.

Curiously, while the seal mentions its own *muintir* ‘family, people,’ it explicitly denies being a member of either the Conneely family (who are frequently identified with seals, as discussed below, p. 118) or the Joyce family (who are not, to the best of my knowledge). The utterance

<sup>21</sup> Ó hÉalaoire, *Leabhar Stiofáin Uí Ealaoire*, 268.



does, however, seem to draw an analogy between human and seal kinship structures in a way designed to garner sympathy from the humans who hear it.

Seals may also be heard mourning for their dead companions, as in the following account from Mícheál Corduff of Iorrus, County Mayo:

Bhí m'athir *turn* ag iascuireacht amúí ar a' mbáighe – ar Chuan an Inbhir – le eangachaí insan uíhe, agus insan eanguí nuair a bhí siad a' bordú, fuair síad rón ceapúí. Thug siad isteach sa gcurrach a' rón, agus thug leóf' é. *Well*, ní dheacha siad i bhfad gur mhuithi siad an caoiniú ba cráitíocha bhu[a]fa a mhuithí éinne ariamh ag na róna eile insan allt agus ar a' bhfaraige. Mhuithi siad ceann go na róna a' rá – labhair sé i nguf duine:

"Ah, bo-bó, go cé mharúí Anna, go cé mharúí Anna, go cé mharúí Anna!"

Agus rónaí eile á bhfreagairt:

"An fear i gcônuí, an fear i gcônui, an fear i gcônui!"

[...] Níl fhios agum haon ar lig siad uafa an rón aríst; ach mhuithí siad an chaint sin aice.

*Well* ar án áwar sin ní maith lé iasgairí a'n roinn a bheith acú le róna chor ar bith. Cuireann go leór acu geis ann, agus ní math leóf' a gceapú.<sup>22</sup>

My father was out fishing in the bay once – in Cuan an Inbhir – with nets at night, and when they was boarding the ship, they found a seal trapped in the nets. They brought the seal into their currach, and took it with them. Well, they didn't go far until they heard the most tormented lament that anyone had heard before coming from the other seals on the cliff and in the sea. They heard one of the seals saying – he spoke with a human voice:

“Ah, bo-bó, who killed Anna, who killed Anna, who killed Anna!”

And the other seals answered:

“Man, as always; man, as always; man, as always”

[...] I don't know myself whether they let the seal go, but they heard that speech.

Well, for that reason fishermen don't like to deal with seals at all. Many of them forbid it, and they don't like to capture them.

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22 Ó Duilearga, “Measgra,” 174.

These accounts of seals speaking with human voices often end with the statement that the witness never killed a seal again, or that members of the community avoided interactions with those animals, on account of these events. Despite these statements, the degree of ethnographic detail in such accounts, along with other recorded statements (often from the same communities) about hunting and preparing seals, strongly suggests that seals continued to be killed in communities where these stories were in circulation. These stories may function as a way to resolve the tension between, on the one hand, the need to cull seals and to exploit the economic value of their bodies (especially their oil and water-proof skins), and, on the other, feelings of guilt arising from slaying creatures that resemble humanity in many respects. Performance of these stories provides a means of catharsis, and their protagonist(s) act as a sort of scapegoat, undergoing this experience and (at least in the story) resolving never to kill seals again, while the life and folkways of the community as a whole remain unchanged.

## **2.2 Fabulates**

Several legends about encounters between humans and mermaids or seals fall into the category of interference legends, a category which encompasses encounters with a variety of supernatural beings, including the banshee, ghosts, and fairies. As the designation indicates, these legends begin when a human interferes with a supernatural being in some way – by harassing or killing it, or by stealing something which belongs to it; as a result of this interference the human suffers from bad luck or a supernatural visitation. This situation can only be resolved if the human returns the stolen object or otherwise makes amends to the injured party. In the following example, told by Tom Montcrieff of Shetland, the consequences of this interference are permanent:

You see there was a crofter who was a great master with the ol' fowling piece. One day he saw what he thought was a seal lying on a rock. So he loaded his gun in the normal manner with lead shot, went out to the shore and crawled along till he got within range and then he took aim and pulled the trigger, but the gun misfired. He re-primed the nipple, put on a fresh cap, and tried again. Again the gun misfired. He thought this was strange. He started up towards the house and then he saw a crow. So he took aim at the crow and pulled the trigger, and the gun fired right enough and the crow fell. He thought, well, if this was something [out of the ordinary], lead-shot may not be enough, but I'll try silver. And he broke up a silver coin and he loaded the gun with silver, went back, and he took aim with this creature, and he fired, and the gun went off. He went to examine what he'd shot and he couldn't tell what it was, it was like no seal ever he'd seen. So he started for home, and he put his arm behind his back, [he had a habit,] he were carrying his gun right behind him, and the arm remained there the rest of his life, and never came back. And when he came into the byre they found one of his best beasts lying dead at the stake. According to... my informant, it had been a Finn, a Finn-man, not a seal at all, [in his seal-form]. And this was what his punishment was.<sup>23</sup>

Interference legends about the mermaid often revolve around the theft of an object, most often a garment, as in *The Mermaid Legend*. In contrast to what happens in the latter story, in these interference legends the mermaid is not compelled to remain on land or to marry the thief, but she does clearly want the object returned to her and may exert considerable effort in the attempt to regain it. The stolen object is a plaid *breacan* 'tartan' in the following version, collected from an anonymous student from Lewis:

Many people in our place believed in the existence of mermaids and there was a story I often heard told of a man who one time found a *breacan* (highland plaid) of one of them on the shore. It seems it was very beautiful, and made in many colours. He brought it home with him, and kept it for a good while, but by and by one after another of his family became ill, and the man could not make out the cause of their illness, till he asked some body about it. This person told him the mermaid's plaid being in his house was the cause, and advised him to put it away, for it was a very unlucky thing for one to have in his house. The man was lazy to part with it, but he went and left it back, on the shore, where he had found it, and after that his children were well, and strong.<sup>24</sup>

23 SA1975.163; Tom Moncrieff, crofter, Virkie, Shetland. Collector: Alan Bruford 1975.

24 School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan 9169; Alex Beaton, Barvas, Lewis. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr(?). The phrase "the man was lazy to part with it" strongly implies that the informant's first language was Gaelic; the

In other interference legends, the supernatural being may demand the return of her property in more obvious ways, such as visiting the thief. Patrick Neylon of Cahercalla, County Clare, gives the following account:

Mick Reynolds, Corbally, Quin, Co. Clare, used to go every night to the well in Mick Labor's field, Corbally for a bucket of water. He used to see a mermaid walking around the field near the well. She had a rack which she used to comb her hair stuck in the poll. He took the rack from her, and she followed him for it. He brought it down home and left it on the mantelpiece in the kitchen. She came to the window for three nights, crying for her rack and the people around advised him to give it back to her and he gave it back to her and he never saw her afterwards.<sup>25</sup>

As in The Mermaid Legend, the man finds the mermaid and steals something from her, and the mermaid follows him in an attempt to get it back. Two details of this story – the stolen comb, and the mermaid's appearing at the window and crying for that comb – suggest an affinity with another legend, one involving the *bean sí* or banshee, MLSIT 4026 “The Banshee's Comb.”<sup>26</sup> In Patrick's account, the man returns the comb to the irate mermaid without further incident, while in the Banshee's Comb legend this is done with great care, and the act of returning the stolen property carries great personal risk to the thief: for example, the thief uses a pair of tongs to return the comb to the banshee through a window, and the banshee takes a sizeable piece of the tongs with her.<sup>27</sup> While Patrick's account lacks these details, it is possible that he (or his

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word *leisg* can mean both 'lazy' and 'loath.'

25 NFCS 596:44; Patrick Neylon, Cahercalla, Country Clare. Collector unknown, 26 May 1938. Teacher: Stiofán Mac Clúin.

26 Lysaght, *The Banshee*, 154–81. Lysaght notes that the Banshee's Comb is unknown in areas of Ireland where The Mermaid Legend is common, and suggests “Most tradition-bearers who already knew Man Marries Mermaid might have reasoned [that] a legend about a supernatural being with a comb is not about the banshee but about the mermaid. Man Marries Mermaid might thus have presented a barrier in the west inside which The Comb Legend could only very occasionally penetrate.” Lysaght, 161–63.

27 Lysaght, 172–79.

informant) forgot them, in which case it represents a version of Banshee's Comb adapted to a traditional milieu in which the mermaid is a more prominent figure.

Another interference legend, which has been collected throughout the south and west of Ireland, relates how a man captures a seal and returns it when the seal says that his companions are looking for him. I refer to this legend as "Tadhg and Donncha," after the names most commonly given to the two seals. The following version was collected from Mícheál Ó Murchadha of Páirc an Teampuill, County Kerry:

Do bhí fear fadó i bparóiste Clocháin ag Cé Leitriúigh na chomhnuidhe 7 chuaidh sé a d'iarraidh ualach gainimhe lá 7 fuair sé rón dar leis marbh ar a' dtráigh. Dhein sé dhá pholl de'n dá roth chun go n-isleochadh a chairt dó, bhí sé chomh trom san, 7 thug sé leis abhaile é. Chuir sé go dtí an doras iadtha é istigh 'na thigh féin 7 bhí sé a' caitheamh a dhinnéir. Bhí an tráigh na barra taoide airís, agus bhailigh na róna go léir 7 bhí árd-ghleó go léir acu. Bhí rón amháin acu 7 sé ruda bhí á' rádh aige "a' bhfeicfeadh sibh Domhnall? A' bhfeicfeadh sibh Domhnall?" "Ó" arsan rón a bhí sa tigh ag an bhfear so, "Tadhg atá am' lorg-sa." "Má's é," arsa fear a' tigh, agus scannradh air, "ní fada bheidh sé mar sin." Ghaibh sé a chapall airís 7 chuir se amach 'an chairt é 7 d'árduigh sé leis é go dtí an dtráigh. D'iompuigh sé a chapall ag imeall an uisce 7 is mór a' seódh a bhí ag na róna a bhí amach uatha a' failtiú roimis.<sup>28</sup>

There was a man who lived at Cé Leitriúigh in the parish of Clochán long ago, and he went out to get a load of sand one day, and he found a seal that he thought was dead on the beach. He made two holes in the wheels so that his cart could be lowered, the seal was that heavy, and he brought it home. He brought the seal into his own house and locked the door, and then he ate his dinner. It was high tide again, and the seals all gathered and made a lot of noise. There was one seal, and he said "Do you see Domhnall? Do you see Domhnall?" "O," said the seal that the man had in his house, "Tadhg is looking for me." "If that's so," said the man of the house, who was frightened, "he won't be for long." He took his horse again and brought out the cart and brought him to the shore. He turned his horse around at the edge of the water, and the other seals made a great show welcoming him back.

As in some of the accounts discussed above, the Tadhg and Donncha Legend hinges on the unexpected ability of a seal to speak – a feature this legend shares with another migratory legend,

28 NFC 34:239-40; Mícheál Ó Murchadha, Páirc a' Teampuill, County Kerry. Collector: Séamas Mac hIcidihe, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1929.

ML 6070B “The King of the Cats.”<sup>29</sup> The story emphasizes the affinity between humans and seals: interpersonal bonds motivate the seals to look for each other, and both seals possess human names, perhaps because all seals do. The seals bear traditionally Gaelic names, such as Tadhg, Donncha, or Diarmuid, in most versions of this legend, a detail that seems likely to garner sympathy from an Irish-speaking audience. As in the other accounts of speaking seals discussed above, the Tadhg and Donncha legend may end by stating that the man who captured the seal never interferes with the species again.

The following two interference legends are closely related, and perhaps may be regarded as variants of each other. The first, sometimes referred to as The Wounded Seal, is found in Ireland and Scotland, predominantly in Donegal and Shetland.<sup>30</sup> The following example was recorded from Pádrúig Mac an tSaoir of Sliabh Liag, County Donegal:

Chuaidh fir amách i mbád uair amháin go dtí uaighe ag márbuigheadh rón. Ba ait mór de na rónaibh a bheith na luighe san uaigh seo. Bhí bátaí móra lé cuid acú acht bhí fear amhain a rabh gabhal leis.

Nuair a bhí siad támallt ag obair bhí rón mór amhain ag imteacht orthú agus shaith an fear seo an gabhal ann acht d'imtigh an rón air agus bhris cos an ghabhla inda cuid. Acht ma d'imtigh fein bhí an gabhal i bhfastodh ann.

Thainig an fear abhaile indiaidh lá mór sport a chuir isteach indiaidh na rón. Támall fada na dhiaidh seo d'imtigh sé go h-Álban agus ina siubhal chuaidh sé isteach i dteach ag iarraidh lóistín. Fuair sé sin.

Bhí seandúine sa teach agus chaith an bheirt acú an oidhche ag seánachus cois teineadh. Bhí seisean ag innse dó fa'n cineal áma a bhí aige sa bhaile i nÉirinn ag iasgairacht agus an spórt a bhí acú lá indiaidh na rón agus mar d'fág sé fein a gabhal sáithe igcinn acú. D'fíafraigh an tseandúine an aithneochadh sé a gabhal agus dúbhairt sé go ndeánfadh. D'éirigh an tseandúine agus leag sé anuas an gabhal briste a bhí shuas ins na taobhain. “B'sin é an cionn ceadna” arsan

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29 Ní Fhloinn, “Tadhg, Donncha and Some of Their Relations” 233.

30 One version, however, has been recorded in County Kerry from Peig Sayers, although to the best of my knowledge the story is otherwise unknown in Munster or Connacht. Jackson, “Scéalta on mBlascaod,” 71–74.

tÉireannach. “Is beag a shaoil tú nuair a sháith tú sa rón é gur ionnamsa a sháith tú é” arsan tseanduine.<sup>31</sup>

One time the men went out in a boat to a cave to kill seals. That cave was a place where many seals would go and lie. Some of the men had big sticks, but one man had a fork.

When they had been working for a while, one big seal came upon them, and this man stabbed his fork into him, but the seal got away, and the neck of the fork broke into two parts. And the seal left, and the fork was stuck in him.

The man came home after a busy day hunting seals. Long afterwards, he went to Scotland and during his journey he came to a house looking for shelter. He got it.

There was an old man in the house, and the two of them spent the night telling stories by the fire. The first man was talking about the sort of life he had at home in Ireland, fishing, and the seal-hunt that day, and how he left his fork stuck in one of them. The old man asked if he would recognize his fork, and he said that he would. The old man rose and brought down the broken fork that he had kept up in the roofbeams. “That’s the same one,” said the Irishman. “You hardly thought when you stabbed it into the seal that it was me you were stabbing,” said the old man.”

In a handful of versions from Ireland, the seal was an enchanted human, and the act of wounding it with a fork, spear, or knife is sufficient to lift the enchantment, but more typically the seal is displeased with the human who wounded it. In versions from Shetland, the encounter is often said to take place in Norway. Like “Alba” ‘Scotland’ in the version from Donegal quoted above, Norway is both distant and familiar for a Shetlandic audience. There is a long history of trade and travel between Norway and Shetland, even after Shetland was annexed by Scotland, and so a voyage to Norway is realistic enough to satisfy the generic demands of the legend. Norway is also far enough away from the realm of everyday experience for the audience to believe that supernatural or extraordinary events might occur there. The connection with Norway may have

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31 NFCS 1047:63; Pádrúig Mac a’ tSaoir (65), Málainnbig, County Donegal. Collector: Cait Nic a’ tSaoir, 28 May 1938. Teacher: Caitlín Nic an tSaoir.

been strengthened by the frequent identification of seals as “Finns” in the oral tradition of Shetland; at least one version states that the encounter took place in Finland.<sup>32</sup>

The legend known as *The Knife Against the Wave* is popular in Ireland, where around 150 versions have been collected, but it is unknown outside of that country.<sup>33</sup> The name comes from the opening episode, in which a man is on or by the sea or another body of water, and a wave almost overtakes him. He throws a knife, nail, or another metal implement at the wave and the wave subsides. Later, a person from the sea visits the man, and brings him to an underwater dwelling in order to heal a young woman, who was responsible for the wave that almost drowned the man and was injured by his projectile. The man heals her by removing the missile from her side or forehead and then returns home, possibly being rewarded for his effort. Like *The Wounded Seal*, this story shares the motif of the wounding of an apparently inhuman being, followed by an encounter with a human-like being with the same wound, a motif that is also found in the land-bound legend MLSIT 3056, “*The Old Woman as Hare*.”<sup>34</sup> Unlike some of the legends discussed above, the interference that motivates the plot is an act of self-defence and is therefore of a different nature from capturing a seal or stealing a comb. Nevertheless, the *Knife Against the Wave* is informed by the same principle of reciprocity between humans and the sea: any injuries that humans inflict upon the sea or its inhabitants must be set right, or else.

Another legend in which a human is conscripted to undo some of the damage he had previously inflicted is known in Shetland, where it is set in the *Ve Skerries* near *Papa Stour*. A

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32 e.g. SA 1975.163.B3. By the late twentieth century, the ties between Shetland and Orkney and the Norse world were not as strong as they had been in previous centuries. Precise geographic knowledge of Scandinavia would have deteriorated as a result of this, and so the confusion between two Scandinavian countries seems plausible.

33 Ross, “*The Knife against the Wave*,” 84.

34 Ní Fhloinn, “*Tadhg, Donncha and Some of Their Relations*” 229–30. See also Ní Dhuibhne, ““*The Old Woman as Hare*.””



group of men are killing and skinning seals in the skerries until a storm arises, forcing them to return to the mainland. In their hurry to flee the storm, they leave one of their number behind. He overhears seals lamenting for their companions who are dead or cannot return to their homes underwater without their skins. One of the seals notices the man, and promises to take him safely to the mainland if he will then retrieve the skin of her son, so that he can safely return home with her. He agrees to do so, and in some versions is said never to hunt seals again. This legend first appears in Samuel Hibbert's *Description of the Shetland Islands*, in which the seals are given the curious names Gioga (for the mother) and Ollavitinus (for her temporarily excorticated offspring).<sup>35</sup> A handful of versions have been collected from western Shetland; while few of them name the seals, they closely follow Hibbert's story in most respects, and so the possibility that they derive from this source cannot be ignored. Regardless of its origin, the Ve Skerries Legend<sup>36</sup> contains many of the same themes found in the material discussed above: the consequences of interfering with the supernatural, reciprocity between humanity and the sea, and the human-like behaviour and speech capabilities of seals. It also portrays the belief, found in many versions of The Mermaid Legend, that a seal's skin can be restored after being removed, that this skin grants the seal the ability to travel underwater, and that without the skin the seal must remain on land.

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35 Hibbert, *A description of the Shetland Islands*, 262. None of the versions of the story recorded by the School of Scottish Studies which I consulted specified the names of the two seals (SA 1970.244.B7, SA 1972.241.B2, SA 1974.4.11, SA 1974.204.A8, SA 1975.178.A5). A version told by John Spense, Whalsay, and published by R. Stuart Bruce in 1933 offers the similar names "Geoga" and "Ulga-na-meiga" (Bruce, "Foula Lore.") "Geoga" or "Gioga" might be derived from *gyo*, a Shetland and Orkney dialect word for type of coastal feature where seals frequent. The etymology of "Ollavitinus" and "Ulga-na-meiga" are less easy to explain, but the two names share phonetic similarity, and one may be a misheard version of the other. The latinate gendered endings in -a and -us in Hibbert's account are highly suspect as well.

36 Most, but not all versions of the legend take place in the Ve Skerries. The version given by Bruce (see the previous note) takes place on Foula, an island southwest of the Ve Skerries, and in the version recorded from Catherine Mary Anderson in 1970 (SA1970.244.B7), she is uncertain whether this story took place at the Ve Skerries or at Sule Skerry. The latter detail is most likely due to the influence of the ballad "The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry," discussed at pp. 130-2 below.

Mermaids and other beings from the sea play a hostile role in several legends and accounts, in which they attempt to drown humans or to bring them to their realm. While some, such as those discussed above in the section on memorates, are relatively simple experience narratives, others conform to the plots of migratory legends or form distinct legends with a limited geographic distribution. One example of the latter is a story known in the Western Isles, which concerns a man of the MacPhee or MacPhail family who is captured by a mermaid or seal woman:

One of the MacPhees – so it is believed in Argyll and in the Hebrides – was retained in captivity in a cavern by the shore of Colonsay by a seal-woman, who ministered to all his requirements, except the need he always expressed for his freedom. Came a day when MacPhee, taking advantage of the seal-woman's temporary absence, effected his escape. But, on her returning to find that he had gone, the seal-woman instantly gave pursuit. MacPhee fled to the protection of his home, where he kept a dog, black of hue, and fierce – so fierce, in truth, that the Colonsay folks dreaded it, and often tried to persuade MacPhee to dispose of it. But MacPhee consistently gave them the same reply. "The Black Dog's day is yet to come!" he always urged, this being a Gaelic equivalent of the saying "every dog has its day!"

Now, the seal-woman overtook the fleeing MacPhee by the shore; and she would have captured him, had not the black dog engaged her. And the old folks of Colonsay, reciting island folk-lore at their ceilidhs round the peat-fires on winter nights, narrate that the contest between dog and seal-woman continued until the black dog killed the seal-woman, and the seal-woman killed the black dog!<sup>37</sup>

Other versions identify the woman as a *maighdean mhara* and specify that the man was a captive for seven years. His means of escape vary: the black dog may save his life, another mermaid may free him, or the means of his escape may simply be left unsaid.<sup>38</sup> The legend is reminiscent of Odysseus' captivity by Calypso on Ogygia, although it is not similar enough to suggest

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<sup>37</sup> MacGregor, *The Peat-Fire Flame*, 97.

<sup>38</sup> Rescued by another mermaid: SA 1953.123.8, unspecified means of escape: SA 1969.5.A7.

derivation from the Homeric source.<sup>39</sup> The motif of a black dog belonging to MacPhee or MacPhail who rescues him from supernatural menaces is found in other traditions from the Hebrides, as is the expression “thig là a’ choin duibh fhathast” ‘the black dog’s day will come yet’.<sup>40</sup> The black dog makes an appearance in one Sutherland version of The Mermaid Legend, where it helps a shepherd haul a mermaid ashore.<sup>41</sup>

Another hostile-mermaid legend with limited distribution is F141 “Supernatural Being Defeated in Contest of Words,” known in the Hebrides and primarily in the area of North Uist.<sup>42</sup> A mermaid approaches a man at sea, and threatens to drown him unless he can satisfactorily answer the question “an robh thu riamh ann a leithid seo dh’èigin?” ‘were you ever in such danger?’<sup>43</sup> The man replies that he was, mentioning the fraught time when he was born, or when he first learned to walk, or some other important transitional moment in his life. The mermaid is either satisfied with this answer and releases the man, or the man strikes her (sometimes with a wheel of cheese) after answering her and makes his escape. Despite the memorability of the mermaid’s question and the man’s response, this legend does not appear to have travelled beyond the Hebrides, although the mermaid’s possession of hidden knowledge is a motif found in several other mermaid traditions from Ireland and Scotland.<sup>44</sup>

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39 Homer, *The Odyssey*, bk. v. The eponymous hero of the *Odyssey*, like MacPhee, has a loyal hound named Argos, who dies of old age after the hero returns home. The two dogs play quite different narrative roles, but both die after the hero is liberated.

40 E.g. F112 “Wish for Female Company,” and F150 “Dogs Drive away Supernatural: Return Hairless or not at all.” Macdonald, “Migratory Legends of the Supernatural in Scotland,” 28, 32. For the expression, see Macintosh and Nicolson, *A collection of Gaelic proverbs and familiar phrases*, 366.

41 Sutherland Sound 2

42 Macdonald, “Migratory Legends of the Supernatural in Scotland,” 58.

43 SA1957.85; Donald MacDougall (42), Malaclete, North Uist. Collector: Donald Archie MacDonald, August 1957.

44 See pp. 113-5 below

The following account, from Kinsale, County Cork, relates how a young boy was kidnapped by a mermaid, and later recovered:

One fine day in the month of July, a little boy named Johnnie Driscoll went down to the Scilly Rocks and sat there watching the fish jumping in the water. It was thought that there was a Mermaid on the other side near the Block House. The little boy never noticed the Mermaid coming over until suddenly he was grabbed and brought under the water where he was kept for two days.

That night his people were looking everywhere for him. Several told them that they had seen the boy sitting on the rocks, but that when they looked again he had disappeared. At the end of two days he was brought back safe and sound, but he never got his memory back after that. The people said that if it were a little girl she would be kept for ever.<sup>45</sup>

While the high level of specific detail is suggestive of a personal experience, the account closely resembles legends of abduction by terrestrial fairies: a victim is taken by otherworldly beings, later seen in a halfway state between our world and the otherworld, and then rescued by their family.<sup>46</sup> Upon returning to this world, the victim may be mute or suffer from a loss of memory, a condition that may or may not prove curable. As with other accounts of fairy abductions, this story lends itself well to interpretations as euphemistic coping mechanism for real-life tragedies, such as traumatic loss of memory or a developmental disorder.<sup>47</sup>

The following account from Lochtayside emphasizes both the potentially destructive nature of the mermaid and expresses a belief that those she has marked for death are beyond saving:

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45 NFCS 319:350-1; informant unknown. Collector: Treasa Ní Chochláin, Scoil Clochar na Trócaire, Ceann tSáile, County Cork, 1937-8. Teacher: Sister Úna.

46 E.g. “An dóigh ar shábhaíil an gréasaí a bhean” “How the shoemaker saved his wife,” Ó hEochaidh et al., *Síscéalta ó Thír Chonaill*, 56–61. See also “An bhean a thuit ón spéir” “The woman who fell from the sky,” where the woman is rescued by a stranger and later found by her husband, or “Suantraí na mná a tugadh as” “The stolen woman’s lullaby,” in which the woman’s relatives fail to rescue her. Ó hEochaidh et al., 54–57, 66–69.

47 Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 23–38; Black, “Introduction,” xxxiv–lxvi; Kimpton, ““Blow the House Down.””

It was said to be a common belief in the Highlands that there was a mermaid at every ford, waiting to catch people when crossing. It was only now and again, sometimes at long intervals, that a person was really caught, but it was believed that if it was to be one's fate, nothing on Earth could prevent it. It is said that there were cases where friends rescued and tried to persuade some from crossing in certain circumstances, for fear of the mermaids, but cross they would, nor could they help it, with the result that they were caught, disappeared, and were never again heard tell of.<sup>48</sup>

This is an example of a common migratory legend known as ML 4050 “River Claiming Its Due,” which has been recorded in Ireland, Scotland, and throughout Scandinavia.<sup>49</sup> In most versions of the legend, the man who is fated to die simply drowns in the river, lake, or another body of water; only a handful of versions from the Highlands describe a mermaid as responsible for the man's death.<sup>50</sup> While this variant is fairly rare, it is not inconsistent with other traditions which portray mermaids as powerful, hostile, and prone to abducting or drowning people.

The following story, given by Pádraig Ó Dálaigh of Killeenagh, County Kerry, highlights the perils of interacting with the people of the sea, even if one approaches them with respect:

There was a man from Brandow wan time gone with a bout of seaweeds down to Limerick Quay. So when he was gon' to come on the followin' day they was a young man shteped up to him and asked him if he'd take his luggage on the way to Brandow. So he told him he would. They came on nice on gintly down the Shannon ond all along for Brandow. So when he came to the centre of the Bay he told um to shlow down here on' to put out his luggage. The man ashked him what did he want to do. He told him that this was his native place on' that the name of this place was: *An Chathair 'dir Dhá Dhrol* [‘The City Between Two Loops.’] He jumped out afther the luggage on' got undher the wather. Sometime afther the man gone to Limerick agin on' he was taking a great notice of this young man when he walked up to him on' for being lookin' at him he struck him a shlap of a fisht into the eye on' took the eye out of him.<sup>51</sup>

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48 Maclagan 1733; Mr. Stewart, Lochtayside.

49 Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends*, 66–68. See also O'Reilly, “River Claiming Its Due & the Sod of Death Predestined (ML 4050 & MLSIT 4051).”

50 Maclagan 1733-4, 9001.

51 NFC 272:91-3; Pádraig Ó Dálaigh (68), farmer, Cillíneach, County Kerry. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 18 November 1936.

The removal of the eye some time after the initial encounter appears to be a motif borrowed from ML 5070 “Midwife to the Fairies,” although the man’s ability to see the supernatural man is never explained, unlike in the latter legend.<sup>52</sup> This legend highlights a certain asymmetry between humans and the world of the supernatural (whether terrestrial or aquatic): humans can be expected to be punished for meddling with supernatural beings, but not necessarily to be rewarded for aiding them, and the wisest course of action may be simply to avoid their attention altogether.

Other legends portray the mermaid as a benefactor-figure, bestowing gifts and rewards upon humanity. These gifts often take the form of cattle, which is not surprising given the long-standing importance of dairy production in rural European economies. The following story, collected from Mary Fitzgerald of Bantry, County Cork, contains this motif:

Long ago a mermaid arose out of the sea in the west of Ireland. She came ashore and was treated like a queen. After a time she learned the Irish language and she said that she had been sent to this country to announce the coming of the three cows. They were the Bó Fhionn, the Bo Ruadh and the Bó Dhubh.

All the people were overjoyed at this good news because they understood that many other cows would come from the three and at this time food was very scarce.

The mermaid remained with them for a good spell and then she said that she would have to return to her own people. On the first day of May she went, with a great throng down to the strand before she departed she promised that on the same day, the next year, she would send the cows. She then plunged into the sea and was seen no more.

On the next May day the people gathered on the shore to watch. About noon, three cows came out of the sea, a white, a black, and a red one. They stood on the shore for some time and then each moved off in a different direction. The black went south, the red north and the white went to the centre of Ireland. Every place the Bó Fionn went was named after her.<sup>53</sup>

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52 Mac Cárthaigh, “Midwife to the Fairies (ML 5070).”

This account belongs to a wider Gaelic and Scandinavian tradition about fairy cattle and cattle from the sea.<sup>54</sup> While these cattle appear to remain on land permanently and produce calves, it is more common for supernatural cattle that fall into the possession of a mortal to return whence they came after their human owner neglects or abuses them. The implicit or explicit prohibition against striking an aquatic being, in general or with a specific object such as a bridle, is found in other traditions about water horses and supernatural brides, such as MLSIT 4086 “The Water Horse as Work Horse” and MLSIT 4081 “Mélusine.”<sup>55</sup>

In the following legend related by Peig Sayers in *An Blascaod Mór*, County Kerry, a man from the sea offers his services as a sailor and, at the end of a period of time, rewards the man who employed him:

Aon uíhe 'mháin do bhí na báid go léir dá chuir a bhfearas. Ach do bhí fear a bp'róiste Fiúntá, agus do bhí bád nú déanta aige fein, ach do bhí fear a n-easnamh air; ach an tránhúna, pé scéal é, do bhuail strapaire d'fhear óg trasna na páirce chuige. Do bheanuíodar gah aon da' chéile; Mac Uí Shé do b'ainm d'fhear an bháid; do labhair sé leis an stróinséir: "Measaim, fhir mhath," er seisean, " gur stróinséir 'san áit seo tú." " Isea go deimhin," ers' an stóinséir; " do chuala go raibh fear do chriú an bháid a n-easnamh ort, agus do thána a' trial ort. B'fhéidir go réiteóimist araon le chéile." " Tá fáilte 'gum ruit, a mhic o," erse Mac Uí Shé. Do bhí na báid réig ansan, agus iad ag teacht ag iascach go dí an áit seo gach uíhe bhreá. Ach do bhí an bhliain caite aige'n stóinséir a dteannta Mhic Uí Shé. Ach an uíhe seo, pé scéal é, do bhí na báid go léir 'sa Leacha Chlúch [variant form of the name] ach bí seo an bád déanach a bhí a' cuir an bhealaig siar di. Do dh'eighrig an stóinséir 'n-a sheasamh 'sa bhád agus do labhair sé le Mac Uí Shé, " Táim-se a d'theannta le bliain agus 'n uíhe 'nucht; níor fhiarhuís díom cé h-é mé féin ná cad as dom; anis táim á rá an meid seo leat: má dhinean tu rud oram ná téire siar a thuile, ach má tá aene 'sna báid gur'b unmhúinín leat iad, glaeg-se ortha abhaile."

53 SMS 281:59-60; Mary Fitzgerald, Bantry, County Cork. Collector: Thomas Fitzgerald, Bantry National Boy's School, County Cork, 1937-8. Teacher: Dd. Mac Carthaigh. The idea of cattle traversing Ireland and giving places their current-day names, has a significantly more violent parallel in the Middle Irish *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge, Recension 1*, 124, 237.

54 Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends*, 178; Macdonald, "Migratory Legends of the Supernatural in Scotland," 54., etc.

55 Almqvist, "Waterhorse Legends (MLSIT 4086 & 4086B): The Case for and against a Connection between Irish and Nordic Tradition," 113; Wood, "The Fairy Bride Legend in Wales," 57, 60.

Do tháinig fearag mhúr er Mhac Uí Shé, agus dúirt se, " Goidé 'n bhrí atá 'gut leis an méid sin cainnte do ré?" "Tá, fhir mhath," ers' an stóinséir, "níl aene 'san áit seo anucht a thucfaig saor gan bá, ach tusa má dhinean tu rud oram." " Ba chóir go ndéanfain," erse Mac Uí Shé; do chuir sé 'n-iúil do chuid dosna daoine muínteara a bhí 'sna báid eile fil' abhaile, ach is amhla a bhíodar a' maga fé. D'úmpuig Mac Uí Shé a bhád féin ansan, agus do bhuaileadar trasna bhéal na trá ó-dheas. Nuair a chuadar có fada leis a' nGob, do ch'nucadar bád seóil bháin ag eighró 'mach ó'n dtalamh, agus do bhí úna mhúr er Mhac Uí Shé an seól do bheith er an mbád, mar do bhí an ghaoth 'n-a gcuine. Is cuma san, do bhí bád Mhic Uí Shé a' ramhuíocht trasna bhealaig an oileáin ó-dheas, agus an bád eile fe sheól suas le, nú go dí gur chuadar go dí Ceann Slé. Ta' poll múr ansan isteach fé an bhfaill, go nglaoon siad Poll an Róin air; d'eighrig an stoinseir 'n-a sheasamh a mbád Mhic Uí Shé agus dúirt sé leis, " Slán agut anis, a Mhic Uí Shé," er seisean, "táimid araon a' scarúint le chéilig; beir bua agus beanacht, tá t'anam saor agut anucht, ní fhílfí aen fhear beó dá bhfuil 'sa Leaca Dhúch anucht." Ansan do thug sé bao' léim is do chuai' sé isteach er bord a mbád an tseóil bháin. Sara raibh amm aige Mac Uí Shé agus aige n-a chuid fear an t-iúna do chuir dóibh, do bhí an bád bán a tosach buailte síos aici, agus í imithe fé'n uisge as a radharc.<sup>56</sup>

One night all of the boats were being put into order. But there was a man from the parish of Fionntrá, and he had made a new boat, and he needed a man for its crew, but that afternoon, anyway, a strapping young man came across the green to him. They greeted each other: Mac Uí Shé was the name of the man who owned the boat, and he spoke the stranger: "I think," he said "that you are a stranger in this place." "I am indeed," said the stranger, "I heard that you needed a man for the crew of your boat, and I came here to meet you. Maybe we will get along well together." "You're welcome, boyo," said Mac Uí Shé. The boat was made ready then, and they went to go fishing to this place on every fair night. And the stranger spent the year with Mac Uí Shé. And this night, anyway, all of the boats were in Leacha Chlúch, and this boat was late in making the trip west. The stranger stood up on the boat and said to Mac Uí Shé, "I have been with you for a year and a night tonight, you have not asked me who I am or where I am from, and now I tell you this: if you do anything for me, don't go any further west, and if anyone in the other boats is dear to you, call them home." Mac Uí Shé became greatly angry, and said "what is it that you mean by saying that?" "I mean, good man," said the stranger, "there is no-one here tonight who will come home safely without drowning, except for you if you do this for me." "I should do this," said Mac Uí Shé; he let some of his relatives who were in the other boats know that they should come home, but they made fun of him. Mac Uí Shé turned his own boat around then, and they made ground on the south shore. When they went as far as the Gob, they saw a ship with a white sail rising out of the earth, and Mac Uí Shé wondered greatly that the ship had its sail up, because the wind was against it. Anyway, Mac Uí Shé's boat was rowing across the way to the southern island,

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56 Jackson, "Scéalta on mBlascaod," 65–66.



and the other boat had its sails up, until they came to Ceann Slé. There's a cave there in the cliff, that they call Poll an Róin ['the Cave of the Seal']; the stranger stood up on Mac Uí Shé's boat and said to him "Farewell, Mac Uí Shé," said he, "we are parting from each other now, goodbye, your life has been spared tonight, but no-one who is in Leaca Dhúch will return alive." Then he took a leap and landed aboard the ship with the white sail. Before Mac Uí Shé and his men had time to recover from the shock, the white boat had gone underwater and left their sight.

As mentioned previously, the Ó Sé family are frequently associated with beings from the sea in versions of The Mermaid Legend collected from the same area. The story above is an example of ML 4055 "Grateful Sea-sprite Gives Warning of Approaching Storm," a legend which has been collected throughout Scandinavia but is apparently unknown in Scotland. Only a handful of versions are known from Ireland, all from south-west Kerry.<sup>57</sup> In Scandinavian traditions, the man typically gives a mitten or another item of clothing, or perhaps bread, to the water-spirit, whereas in Kerry the spirit typically expresses gratitude at the end of a period of service, as above. The sudden storm and the survival of the man and his companions who had been warned by the spirit present two messages which occur in much of the material discussed above: the sea and its inhabitants are dangerous, and it is important to treat them with respect.

Other gifts that mermaids bestow include such intangible benefits as prosperity or good luck with fishing, or more concrete things such as tools or gold.<sup>58</sup> In some versions of the Knife Against The Wave Legend, members of the Ó Lia family are given a manuscript containing medical knowledge as a reward; a similar detail occurs in some Welsh versions of the Mélusine

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57 Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends*, 68–70; Kristensen, *Danske sagn*, ii: D, 4-8; af Klintberg, *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend*, 115. Other Irish versions include NFC 256:152-6; Pádraig 'ac Síhte (69), farmer, Baile Bhiocáire, County Kerry. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1935; NFC 744:473-4; and NFC 966:238-41.

58 E.g. luck: NFCS 1057:246-8; informant unknown. Collector and teacher: Seán P. Ó Gallchobhair, Scoil Áth na gCoire, County Donegal, 1937-8; NFCS 1064:329-33; Róise Ní Dhubhthaigh (82), Rann na Féirsde, County Donegal. Collector: Róise Ní Ghallchobhair, Scoil Rann na Féirsde. Teacher: Domhnall Ó Baoghaill, 1937-8; tools: NFCS 79:224; informant unknown. Collector unknown, Newcastle Girls School. Teacher: Máire, Bean uí Staic, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1938.

legend, in which the fairy bride gives her descendants a similar manuscript.<sup>59</sup> In Norway and Sweden, legends about (typically male) water spirits teaching humans how to play the violin or other musical instruments are common (ML 4090 “Watersprite Teaches Someone to Play”). In Ireland and Scotland, however, this does not seem to be the case, and the role of music teacher is more often played by terrestrial spirits.<sup>60</sup>

Along with The Mermaid Legend discussed in the previous chapter, a number of other legend types from Ireland and Scotland relate how humans marry supernatural aquatic women or otherwise force them to live among them. One of these legend-types, MLSIT 4081 “Mélusine,” has been collected in Ireland, Wales, and Sweden.<sup>61</sup> As in The Mermaid Legend, a man encounters a supernatural woman, mermaid, or swan by a body of water and marries her; unlike The Mermaid Legend, the woman invariably agrees to marry the man, imposes one or more taboos on him, and leaves when he inevitably violates those taboos. In Irish and Welsh tradition, the Mélusine Legend is often attached to particular families, such as the Quinn family in Clare, the Gláimhín family in west Cork, the McKenna family in Monaghan, the hereditary physicians of Myddfai in Carmarthenshire, Wales, and so on. In Ireland, the Mélusine legend often explains how those families lost their power and influence.<sup>62</sup>

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59 Ross, “The Knife against the Wave,” 84–85; Wood, “The Fairy Bride Legend in Wales,” 61.

60 Almqvist suggested the designation MLSIT 4091 “Music Taught by Fairies (The Fiddle on the Wall)” for such narratives. Almqvist, “Crossing the Border,” 271.

61 See Almqvist, “The Mélusine Legend in the Context of Irish Folk Tradition”; Kavanaugh, “The Mélusine Legend in Irish Folk Tradition”; Ó Súilleabháin and Christiansen, *The Types of the Irish Folktale*, 88. (as AT 400 I-II). See also Wood, “The Fairy Bride Legend in Wales”; af Klintberg, *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend as F52* “husband spying on bathing wife (‘Melusine’).”

62 Almqvist, “The Mélusine Legend in the Context of Irish Folk Tradition,” 29–40, 50; Darwin, “On Mermaids, Meroveus, and Mélusine: Reading the Irish Seal Woman and Mélusine as Origin Legend.,” 132–33.

Some versions of the legend from Kilmoe, County Cork, show the influence of The Mermaid Legend: the woman is identified as a mermaid, she refers to a seal as her brother and/or prohibits her husband from slaughtering seals, and in one version the man steals the mermaid's *brat* before marrying her.<sup>63</sup> Proinsias Mac Cana and others have argued that this legend has deep roots in Ireland, and Mac Cana identified the Old Irish tale *Noínden Ulad* as an early literary version of the legend.<sup>64</sup> Versions of the legend collected in Wales portray the woman as a supernatural human-like being with water associations rather than a mermaid, swan, or seal-woman but otherwise resemble those from Ireland. In Sweden, the family connection is typically absent, and the man is forbidden from intruding on the woman's privacy when she bathes once a week. The man eventually becomes convinced that his wife is entertaining another lover in secret, spies on his wife, and discovers her inhuman nature. These details strongly resemble those of a key episode in the fourteenth-century French romance *Le romain de Mélusine ou la noble histoire de Lusignan*; and so it seems likely that these Swedish versions ultimately derive from the romance.<sup>65</sup>

The lack of Mélusine legends in Norway and Denmark, and the rarity of The Mermaid Legend in continental Scandinavia, may be explained by the popularity of another supernatural bride legend, known as ML 5090 "Married to a Fairy Woman," in Scandinavia.<sup>66</sup> All three

63 Almquist, "The Mélusine Legend in the Context of Irish Folk Tradition," 39–40.

64 Mac Cana, "Les Analogues irlandais de la légende de Mélusine." *Noínden Ulad* was most recently edited and translated by Hull, "Noínden Ulad: The Debility of the Ulidians." For a critique of Mac Cana's argument, see Darwin, "The Mélusine Legend Type and the Landscape in Insular and Continental Tradition," 171–73.

65 Most recently edited and translated by Jean-Jacques Vincensini as Jean d'Arras, *Mélusine ou la noble histoire de Lusignan*. A modern English translation was published in 2011 as Jean d'Arras, *Melusine ; or, The Noble History of Lusignan*. See also Darwin, "The Mélusine Legend Type and the Landscape in Insular and Continental Tradition," 163n1 for a discussion of the extant editions and translations of this text.

66 Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends*, 113–23. Almquist notes that this legend is, to the best of his knowledge, entirely absent in Icelandic and Faroese tradition (Almquist, "The Mélusine Legend in the Context of Irish Folk Tradition," 51n97) The absence of this legend in those countries possibly explains why The Mermaid Legend

legends describe marriages between humans and supernatural women, and all three are often connected with particular families. Unlike the other two legends, in ML 5090 the supernatural woman is a terrestrial fairy, she is not compelled to remain with the man, and in most versions she does not leave her husband at all. Instead, the man usually becomes upset with his wife (often because of her inhuman origin) and neglects her and his domestic duties until she displays her superhuman strength (often by straightening a horseshoe or carrying a massive log unaided), after which his treatment of her improves considerably. The woman's dowry may include fairy cattle, which come with instructions for the man on their proper care, including an injunction against striking or insulting them. In many versions the woman has a tail, which either falls off before the wedding or is removed. These similarities could explain why the other stories, *Mélusine* and *The Mermaid Legend*, failed to gain a significant hold in those areas where *Married to a Fairy Woman* is popular.

In a small number of accounts from Ireland and Scotland, a human captures a mermaid (or similar being) who only gains her freedom by performing some service for him. The mermaid grants three wishes in the following example collected by John Gregorson Campbell:

A native of Eilein Anabaich (the 'Unripe Island'), a village in North Harris, caught a mermaid on a rock, and to procure her release she granted him his three wishes. He became a skilful herb-doctor who could cure the king's evil and other diseases ordinarily incurable, and a prophet who could foretell (particularly to women) whatever was to befall them; and he obtained a remarkably fine voice. This latter gift he had only in his own estimation; when he sang, others did not think his voice fine or even tolerable.<sup>67</sup>

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was able to take root there.

67 Campbell, *The Gaelic Otherworld*, 108.

In the following example, collected from Tarbat, Rossshire, the man coerces the mermaid through the theft of her *cochall*, and, as in The Mermaid Legend, his children are set apart because of his interaction with a mermaid:

One day when an old man, who lived in a fishing village in Easter Ross, was down at the shore, he found a mermaid's *cochull* (mantle), which he picked up. In a little while the mermaid appeared, and requested him to give up her cochull, but he refused to give it up until she would grant him three wishes. The mermaid said she was quite willing to take his terms, and requested him to state his wishes, which he did. The first was, that neither he, nor any of his descendants should meet death by being drowned. The second was that a wave would never break over the village harbour. His third wish, the reciter could not remember, but he says the story is quite current and strongly believed by many people in the district, and all the more so, that for many years now, not one of that man's descendants have been known to have been drowned, although quite a large number of them were sea men.<sup>68</sup>

In some stories collected from the southern half of Ireland, a human captures a mermaid and keeps her for some time, during which she laughs cryptically. The human, usually but not always a man, agrees to release her if she explains the reason for her laughter, as in the following story from Mrs Griffin of Cappoquin, County Waterford:

This story was told to me by an Irish speaker. Long ago a man had a mermaid living with him. He had found her by the sea and brought her home. She lived there for many years. He used to set her on the window sill, to sew and knit.

One day his wife was ready to go to town. Just as the woman was going across the floor, she fell. The mermaid began to laugh until the tears rolled down her cheeks. The man was very angry with her and asked what she was laughing at. She said if he would put her back where he got her she would tell him. He consented and she told him to make a hole in the ground where his wife fell and he would find a boiler of gold. He did so and all that she said came to pass. When he took up the boiler there was something written in Irish around the edge of the cover. She asked him could he read it. This is what it was. "Tá tógaint na míle ar an dtaobh eile." There is the rising of thousand on the other side. It is not told when he touched the other lot.<sup>69</sup>

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68 Maclagan 2149.

69 NFCS 637:144-5; Mrs Griffin, Ceapach Chuinn, County Waterford. Collector: Kathleen Flynn, Convent of Mercy, Ceapach Chuinn, County Waterford. Teacher: Sister M. Teresita.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the mermaid's cryptic laughter is a motif found in several versions of the legend collected in Munster.<sup>70</sup> One of the most common triggers for her laughter is her captor or another occupant of the house tripping over a stone under which buried treasure lies. It is tempting to regard accounts such as Mrs Griffin's as defective versions of The Mermaid Legend, but this view is unsupportable for a number of reasons. First, the story makes perfect sense on its own – the mermaid's release on the condition that she explain the reason for her laughter follows logically from the man's confusion about her laughter – and so there is no reason to suppose that something is missing. Secondly, legends like the one quoted above that lack mention of marriage and the recovery of a stolen object are attested outside of the Schools collection.<sup>71</sup> Finally, the motif of the cryptic laughter of a captive supernatural water-being is attested in older Irish-language sources, in which there is no mention of marriage to this being.<sup>72</sup> While the motif of the mermaid's cryptic laughter seems to be more common in versions of The Mermaid Legend than in stories where the mermaid does not marry her captor, the presence of this motif in The Mermaid Legend seems to be a secondary development.

Christiansen used the designation ML 4060 "The Mermaid's Message" for legends in which a captive water-spirit offers the human who caught it knowledge in exchange for freedom.<sup>73</sup> In several Norwegian versions, after the water-sprite is released it laughs at its former captor, saying that he could have asked for something of greater value. This legend, along with

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70 Pp. 51-3.

71 Mac Giollamáh, "An Dara Tiachóg as Iorrus Aithneach," 84.

72 Discussed in Chesnutt, "On Hidden Treasure, Useless Shoes, and the Gullibility of Husbands."

73 Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends*, 71.

this motif, is rare in the Gaelic world but at least one version is known, collected by Kenneth Jackson in Sculpay, Harris:

Bha duine mór làidir a'n Eilean Leòdhais aig iasgach air creig; bha e anmoch ma'n deach e dhachaidh. Bha e coiseachd ri taobh a' chladaich, chunnaic e trì maighdeanan mara na' sudhe. Liùg e orra gu fàilidh agus huair e faisg air té aca, 's rug e oirre. Bha i làidir, ach bha'n duine na bu treasa. Nuair a dh'aithnich i nach b'urra dhi faighinn as a làmhan, thuirst i ris gu'n innseadh i rud 'sa' bith a dh'fhoighneachdadh e, na ligeadh e air failbh i. Thòisich e ri (a) ceasnachadh, dh'inns i dha mórán nach chual' e riamh. Ma dheireadh thall cha robh 'n corr aige dh'fhoighneachdadh e, agus lig e as i. Chaidh i 'mach air a mhuir, agus thionndaidh i 's thuirst i ris, "Tha ao' rud a dhìochannaich thu fhoighneachd, agus nach faigh thu 'mach rit mhaireann." "Dé bha sin?" ars esan. "Thà," ars ise, "dè ciall th'aig *uisge nan uighean*?" Agus dh'fhàg i e. Bha mhotha na sin thà fhios agam-sa, bheil fhios agat fhéin?<sup>74</sup>

There was a big strong man on Lewis who was fishing on a rock, and it was late before he went home. He was walking by the shore, and he saw three mermaids sitting. He snuck up on them unobserved, and he got close to one of them, and he caught her. She was strong, but the man was stronger. When she recognized that she could not get out of his arms, she said to him that she would tell him anything that he might ask, if he would let her go. He began to question her, and she told him much that he had never heard before. At last, he didn't have anything to ask her, and he let her go. She went out into the sea, and she turned and she said to him, "there's one thing that you forgot to ask, and you'll never find it out as long as you live." "What's that?" he said. "It is," she said, "what is the use [lit. 'meaning'] of *the water of the eggs*?" And she left him. There was more than that, I know, do you know it?

Mermaids are said to possess this same knowledge – the virtues of water in which an egg has been boiled – in some Irish versions of The Mermaid Legend. In some versions, after her escape she tells other mermaids that she never revealed this knowledge on land, and in other versions, she laughs when her husband discards the water after he boils an egg.<sup>75</sup> While these legends don't describe the potential uses of this water, medical lore collected in the Schools Collection

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74 School of Scottish Studies MS 16 (K H Jackson Notebook 1 XL 1): 17-19.

75 Pp. 51-3, 7.

suggests that the water left from the boiling of eggs could be used as a cure for warts.<sup>76</sup> The mermaid may also be knowledgeable about other precautions humans should take to remain healthy: in one version of The Mermaid Legend from Sutherland, she warns her children to strain sea-water before using it, and in Sweden, there is a widespread legend in which a water-sprite rewards a fisherman by warning him against eating boiled fish unless the water has been skimmed.<sup>77</sup> The allusion to these details in performances of these legends serves to reinforce awareness of these practices and taboos, and the attribution of them to a supernatural being helps to legitimize them.

### 2.3 Belief Statements

Indications of popular belief occur in the archive as sections of larger narratives, as in some of the examples above, or as more or less stand-alone belief statements. Such statements summarize or explain what has just been related, or serve as starting points from which the performer can begin a story. When encountered in isolation, they are allusive and suggestive, hinting at a longer story that the narrator, through ignorance or faulty memory cannot, or perhaps will not, tell us.

Unsurprisingly, belief statements about mermaids and seals articulate many of the same beliefs that are to be found in the memorates and fabulates discussed above. The mermaid, we find, resembles a young woman with long hair, which she often combs, from the waist-up, and a

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76 e.g. NFCS 404:176; informant unknown. Collector: Mary Mulvihill, Murher Girls' School, County Kerry. Teacher: Máire, Bean Uí Chonaill; NFCS 405:461, informant unknown. Collector unknown, Listowel Boy's School, County Kerry. Teacher: Brian Mac Mathúna, 1935-9; NFCS 889:193; informant unknown. Collector and teacher: C. Mullane, Ballycanew National School, County Wexford.

77 Sutherland Pub 1, F44 "Warning against unskimmed fish" of Klintberg, *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend*, 116.



fish from the waist-down.<sup>78</sup> They are known to inhabit certain bodies of water, at whose shores they are known to appear from time to time.<sup>79</sup> They are dangerous: they may drown people or lure them to their deaths, or their appearance may be a sign of death, bad luck, or a coming storm.<sup>80</sup> Killing, harassing, or otherwise interfering with mermaids or seals can have negative consequences, and fishermen tend to avoid these beings for that reason.<sup>81</sup>

Mermaids are often said to possess lost or hidden knowledge, which they are reluctant to surrender to humanity, as in the version of ML 4060 from North Uist quoted above, or in the following statement recorded by Michael Corduff of Rosspport, co. Mayo:

I was once told by an old woman "sanachie" that the secret of the Danish beer-making, in the territory of Dun Caechán, is now unknown even in "Inis Lochlan", and the only people who now know it are the mermaids of the sea... No amount of coaxing or wooing of that aquatic female will induce her to part with that precious piece of knowledge.<sup>82</sup>

The belief that the Scandinavians who inhabited Ireland possessed the secret of a special type of brewing, sometimes involving heather, is widely attested throughout Ireland, as is the story of how that secret was lost in Ireland.<sup>83</sup> Corduff's anonymous informant states that this knowledge has been lost not only in Ireland but to humanity in general and is only to be found in the depths

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78 E.g. NFC 1312:235-6; Seán Briútean, Na Faille Muaire, County Kerry. Collector: Tadhg Ó Murchadha, October 1952; SA1965.138.A11; Peggy MacDonald, Loch Aoineart, South Uist. Collector: Donald Archie MacDonald, 1965.

79 E.g. MacLagan 1732-4; D. Gillchrist, Coll; D. Shaw, Jura; Mrs. S., Tiree.

80 E.g. SA1953.025.B8; Angus MacLellan (61), Mallaig, Inverness-shire. Collector: Calum Iain MacLean, 19<sup>th</sup> March 1954; SA 1968.53.A6; Marion Campbell (100), Loch Aoineart, South Uist. Collector: Donald Archie MacDonald, August 1968; NFCS 140:659; James McHale, Muingrevagh, County Mayo. Collector: Maura McHale, Cillín National School. Teacher: Pádraic Ó hUabáin; NFC 1350: 26; Dan Hyndman, Cusskib, County Antrim. Collector: Michael J. Murphy, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1953;

81 E.g. SA1953.85.A13; Hector MacLean (71), Balevulin, Tiree. Collector: Calum Iain MacLean, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1953.

82 NFC 1395:514; Michael Corduff, Rosspport, County Mayo, 9 February 1955.

83 See Almqvist, "The Viking Ale and the Rhine Gold."

of the sea. While the idea of underwater beings brewing might seem absurd, it is not without parallels; in Old Norse tradition, the *jötun* ‘giant’ known as Aegir brews beer for the gods in his underwater hall.<sup>84</sup>

Mermaids and seals are connected with families, generally the same ones mentioned in *The Mermaid Legend*, in a number of belief statements from Ireland and Scotland. As in that legend, the relationship is usually one of descent, with the mermaid or seal-woman standing as an ancestor-figure, such as in this example from Cahersiveen, Kerry: “near Ballinskelligs, in Kerry, is a family named Hennessy, which had a mermaid ancestress. Her descendants always return from the fishing with their boats full of fish when others can catch nothing.”<sup>85</sup> This connection is not always beneficial to the family, as in the following example from Baile Uí Dhuibhne, co. Kerry: “bíonn dochma ag daoine roim éinne de'n sloinne sin ‘Seaghdha’ do bheith istig leotha ag iascach, nó ar an bhfairge in-aic’ chor leotha. Bíonn eagla a mbáidte ortha dá mbeadh aon “Seaghdha” na measc. Deirtear gur thuit eascainne mBrúgach fadó ar an treibh sin” ‘People were reluctant to have anyone of the name Shea in a boat fishing with them, or to have anything to do with them on the sea. They would be afraid of drowning if any “Shea” were among them. It is said that the mermaids’ curse fell on that family long ago.’<sup>86</sup>

Occasionally, the mermaid plays the role of the death-messenger, weeping if anyone belonging to a particular family is about to die: “An Islay woman says that she remembers hearing it often said, when she was young, that a mermaid always followed people of the clan

84 Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, 128–32.

85 Jones, “Irish Folklore from Cavan, Meath, Kerry, and Limerick,” 319.

86 NFCS 429:116; Eoghan Ó Néill (65), Baile Uí Chuinn, County Kerry. Collector unknown. Teacher: Seán Ó Loingsigh. The spelling “mbrúgach” is unusual: the medial ‘g’ is likely missing a mark of lenition, as often happens in the Schools collection, and is likely a hypercorrection. The eclipsis would suggest the genitive plural, “the mermaids’ curse,” although a single mermaid is mentioned in this account. The Schools manuscripts do show a high degree of morphological irregularity, so a reading as genitive singular is possible.

Morrison who were living in the parish of Kildalton; and that at the time of the death of any of them, she would be heard weeping.”<sup>87</sup> In this account, the mermaid plays the role normally held by the *bean sí* or banshee, and her relationship with the family is described with the same language.<sup>88</sup> Similarities between interference legends involving the mermaid and the banshee have been noted above.<sup>89</sup> Such similarities are not surprising: both banshee and mermaid are described as supernatural women with unbound hair, whose normal habitat is outside the domestic space, who possess secret knowledge, and who have a connection with specific families.

The families typically connected with seals are the Coneelys of county Galway, and the MacCodrums of North Uist. Some informants state, often in connection with The Mermaid Legend, that these families trace their descent back to an ancestor who married a seal.<sup>90</sup> Others report a belief that seals are members of these families, and these families may have nicknames identifying them with seals: *na rúintí* ‘the seals’ or *cloigeann aníos* ‘head up’ for the Coneely family, and *Clann ‘ic Codrum nan ròn* for the MacCodrum family.<sup>91</sup> A handful of older literary

87 MacLagan 5792a; cf. “There were some local families connected with mermaids in the past. When there was going to be a death in the family the mermaid came and cried outside the house. Fairies do the same thing in certain families but when they cry, they are known as the ‘banshee.’” NFCS 1118:512; Pat McColgan (87) and John Norris (62), Ballymagaraghy, County Donegal. Collector: Robert Mc Eldowney, Carrowbeg National School. Teacher: Rachel Nic an Ridire, 1938.

88 I.e. the mermaid and the banshee *follow* (Irish and Scottish Gaelic *lean*) the families in their care, and they weep or cry before a death. Lysaght, *The Banshee*, 53–54.

89 p. 95-6.

90 “Bha ‘ad, ò chionn fhada, ràithe gur ann òna ròn a thàinig Clann ‘ac Codrum... gur ann òna ròn a thàinig Mac Codrum an tòiseach, gur e maighdean de bhuinidh nan ròn a bha sin, agus gun d’fhuair cuideigin ann an Uibhist i” ‘They have been saying for a long time that Clann MacCodrum came from the seals....that Mac Codrum came from the seals at first, that there was a maiden of seal-stock, and that someone found her in Uist.’ SA1971.277.A13; Katherine Dix, crofter, Berneray, Harris. Collector: Ian Paterson, 1971.

Cf. also SA1963.7.B13; Archie MacAulay, Ileray, North Uist. Collector: Donald Archie MacDonald, 1963.

91 NFC 1142:16; Míceál Ó Cadhain, Dúloch, County Galway. Collector: Proinnsias de Búrca, 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1939. SA1971.186.A4; Donald Alasdair Johnson (82), Ardmore, South Uist. Collector: Angus John MacDonald, 1971.

sources bear witness to a belief that human members of these families have the power to assume the shapes of either humans or seals.<sup>92</sup> A sense of kinship with seals is expressed in the following account of the funeral of the last MacCodrum, told by Katherine Dix of Berneray, North Uist:

Ach an duine mu dheireadh de Chlann 'ic Codrum chaidh a thiodhlacadh anns a' chlachan ann an Uibhist.

Tha e colach gur do chunntais iad trì cheud ròn a' falbh a' bruach na mara go deochaidh an corp fo'n ùir. Agus nuair a chaidh an corp sìos 's a thiodhlacadh dh'fhalbh na ròn 's iad ag cubhach a mach dhan chuan, 's chan fhacas riamh tuleadh iad.

Agus 's e an fhìrinn a th'ann a sin. Chan eil ach mu dheich bliadhna ann on uair sin. 'S e an fhìrinn a th'ann.<sup>93</sup>

But the last Mac Codrum was buried in the churchyard in Uist.

It seems that they counted three hundred seals who came to the shore [and stayed] until the body was buried in the ground. And when the body was buried, the seals left the bay sorrowfully, and they were never seen again.

And that's the truth. It is only about ten years since then. It's the truth.

This account calls to mind the memorates about seals mourning their dead discussed above. It is unknown when the last person by the name MacCodrum might have been buried, but Archibald MacDonald refers to it as “a name long extinct” in 1894,<sup>94</sup> so Katherine Dix's statement, given in 1971, that “chan eil ach mu dheich bliadhna ann on uair sin” ‘it is only about ten years since then’ is suspect.

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Moireasdan, *Ugam agus bhuam*, 66. NFC 850:263; Éamon a Búrc (74), tailor, Áill na Brón, County Galway. Collector: Liam mac Coisdealbha, 18<sup>th</sup> July 1942. Campbell, *The Gaelic Otherworld*, 155.

92 James Hardiman's 1846 notes to Roderic O'Flaherty's *A Chorographical Description of West or h-Iar Connaught* (1684) relates a belief that “a some distant period of time, several of the Clan Coneelys (*Mac Conghaile*), an old family of iar-Connaught, were, by ‘Art magick,’ metamorphosed into seals!” and that some individuals were unwilling to kill or eat seals. O'Flaherty, *A Chorographical Description of West or H-Iar Connaught*, 27. See also MacGregor, *The Peat-Fire Flame*, 98–99 for similar statements about the MacCodrum family of North Uist.

93 SA1971.277.A13; Katherine Dix, crofter, Berneray, Harris. Collector: Ian Paterson, 1971.

94 MacCodrum, *The songs of John MacCodrum*, iv.

Beliefs regarding the origin of mermaids and seals in Ireland and Scotland appear to be very similar: they are either said to be transformed or enchanted humans (*faoi dhraíocht* or *fo gheasaibh*), the spirits of drowned humans, or angels who were cast out of heaven. A handful of accounts from Counties Galway and Mayo specify that mermaids were humans who were transformed prior to the coming of Christianity and have lived in the water since then; as noted above, some versions of The Mermaid Legend include this detail.<sup>95</sup> The belief that seals are the souls of the drowned is not well documented in Ireland and Scotland, although it is occasionally mentioned in archival and published sources.<sup>96</sup> The belief that seals are the souls of the Egyptians who drowned pursuing the fleeing Israelites across the Red Sea, while attested in Iceland and in the Baltic, is unknown in Ireland and Scotland.<sup>97</sup>

Statements identifying mermaids and seals as fallen angels form part of a larger complex of belief concerning the fairies. When the angels who rebelled against God along with Satan were cast out of heaven, those who fell onto the earth became the fairies, while those who fell into the sea became mermaids or seals.<sup>98</sup> These accounts rationalize a (possibly pre-Christian) belief in these entities within a Christian cosmological framework. As discussed above, there are several other examples of overlap between traditions about fairies and those about mermaids and seals. Like the fairies, mermaids and seals are human or human-like in appearance and intelligence but live outside of normal human society and, like the sea they can be said to embody, are unpredictable and dangerous.

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95 p. 45.

96 Puhvel, “The Seal in the Folklore of Northern Europe,” 330–31.

97 Puhvel, 326–30. Cf. Iceland Pub 5, in which the seal-woman is the daughter of a Pharaoh.

98 In the School of Scottish Studies index, this is F1B “Fall with Lucifer.” Macdonald, “Migratory Legends of the Supernatural in Scotland,” 43. The tradition is also attested in Ireland, e.g. NFCS 159:315. Collector: Rosalind Irwin, An Mhódh-Scoil, County Sligo, 1937-1938. Teacher: Tomás Guy.

## 2.4 Folktales / *Märchen*

The longer folktales or *Märchen* are generally accepted to be fiction by both their performers and folklore scholars: stories told for entertainment purposes, and not intended to reflect personal experiences. They, therefore, are not indicative of supernatural belief in the same way that the genres discussed above are.<sup>99</sup> Although the longer tales do not directly communicate beliefs about mermaids and seals, they are the product of a traditional milieu in which those beliefs circulate, and the depiction of such beings in tales tends to conform to those beliefs. There are, as will be seen, some differences, which likely spring from the different generic requirements of the tale.

The mermaid figures prominently in the international tale ATU 316 “The Nix of the Mill-Pond,” which is widely attested throughout Europe and the Americas. It has been collected throughout Ireland, especially in the provinces of Connacht and Munster, and the Scottish Highlands.<sup>100</sup> Uther’s summary of the tale is as follows:

A poor fisherman (miller) (unwittingly) promises his son [S240] to a water nix [F420.1.2], who makes the fisherman wealthy. The parents keep the child away from the water.

When the appointed time comes, the son learns about his father’s promise and flees. On the way the youth divides the carcass of a animal among a lion, a falcon, and an ant (other animals) by taking the animals’ characteristics into consideration. In return he receives from the grateful animals the power to transform himself into their shapes. Using this power he wins a princess as his wife.

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99 Honko, “Memorates and the Study of Folk Beliefs,” 6–7.

100 Seán Ó Súilleabháin and Reidar Th. Christiansen were aware of over one hundred versions of the story (Ó Súilleabháin and Christiansen, *The Types of the Irish Folktale*, 72–73.). Early published Scottish Gaelic versions can be found at Campbell, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, i: 72–104. I encountered a number of versions during my visit to the School of Scottish Studies’ archive, e.g. Maclagan 2413-7, SA1969.113, SA1970.198.B2 – SA1970.199.B1, SA9171.112 – SA1971.113.A1, SA 1971.167.B1, SA 1974.156.B3 – SA1974.157.B1, SA1975.228.A6-B1.

After winning a battle (while hunting) the youth comes near the water and is seized and pulled down (swallowed) by the water nix [F420.5.2.2.]. By offering precious objects (three golden apples), his wife tempts the nix to the surface. In exchange for these objects the water nix exhibits her husband: first up to his head, then up to his waist. When the water nix exhibits the husband's whole body, he changes into a bird and escapes [R152, D642.2].<sup>101</sup>

In Gaelic versions of the story, the poor man is a fisherman whose wife has been unable to bear a child; the mermaid promises that the man will become prosperous and that his wife will bear him a child if he agrees to give her that child when he comes of age. The tale is often combined with ATU 302 "The Giant Without a Heart": the capture and recovery episode is repeated three times, and the mermaid is only finally stopped when the young man or his animal helper finds the egg which contains the mermaid's external soul, and the young man kills the mermaid or forces her to relinquish her claim on him.<sup>102</sup>

While lengthy physical descriptions of the mermaid or *maighdean mhara* are rare in Gaelic versions of this tale, she is portrayed in a way consistent with descriptions of the mermaid in other traditions: an amphibious woman who frequents the sea or the shore, is capable of human speech, and possesses of supernatural abilities.<sup>103</sup> The portrayal of the poor man as a fisherman is logical (as it gives him a reason to be on the water) but also consistent with The Mermaid Legend and other fabulates that relate encounters between fishermen and mermaids. The fact that the mermaid is responsible for giving the fisherman a son, although she does not directly bear his child, could be interpreted as an echo of other traditions about the children of mermaids and humans. Despite her apparent benevolence in bringing the fisherman prosperity a

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101 Uther, *The Types of International Folktales*, i: 203-204.

102 E.g. Campbell, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, 72–95.

103 The lack of physical description might stem from the fact that the mermaid is a villain rather than the object of desire.

first, the mermaid plays the role of the villain in the tale, and her attempts on the young man's life set the plot in motion.

The mermaid is portrayed in Gaelic versions of this tale in a manner that is more or less consistent with the broader Gaelic folk tradition: her appearance, habitat, ability to bring prosperity to mortals, and habit of drowning or attempting to drown people, all parallel traditions discussed above. This is not unexpected: storytellers would have drawn upon this shared cultural knowledge in developing their version of the story, and a story that presented a female water-spirit in a manner inconsistent with the Gaelic mermaid would either not have been adopted at all or changed so that the role was played by a more situationally appropriate being. There are, however, two major points of divergence. The first of these is the mermaid's possession of an external soul contained within an egg, a detail which is not attested in other traditions about the mermaid. While the idea that the mermaid possesses a *cochall*, garment, or comb, and that anyone who obtains this item will have power over her, is widely attested in Irish and Scottish legends and belief statements, this idea is not, to the best of my knowledge, expressed in any version of this tale from Ireland or Scotland. The second is the fact that humans are able to overcome the mermaid's power and recover people who have been taken by her. This latter difference seems to spring from different generic requirements: the tale is about the triumph of a hero, and requires a happy ending, whereas the legend tends to portray humans as victims overpowering supernatural forces.

Less frequently, the mermaid plays the role of the love-interest or imperilled princess in other tales. Unsurprisingly, such stories are more likely to include a description of the appearance



and beauty of the mermaid, as in this example collected from Proinsias Ó Conchubhair, then living in Baile Átha Luain, County Roscommon:

Tháinig síon ann sin agus tiomáineadh an curach asteach faoi bhun carraige móire. Nuair a d'fhéach Aodh suas chonnaic sé cailín sgiabhach 'na suidhe ar an carraig, sgáthán óir in a leath-láimh agus ciar ins an láimh eile, agus í ag ciaradh a gruaige óir-bhuidhe. Shaoil an mac-righ nach bhfacaidh sé aon bhean riamh do bhí chomh h-áluinn léi. Chuir sé caint uirri agus dubhairt "an tu Bhénus no réalt na maidne, no cad fáth a bhfuil tu id' aonar chomh moch so ar charraig loim?"

"Ní mé," ar sise, "acht cailín atá gan athair gan máthair gan gaoltaibh saoghalta."<sup>104</sup>

A storm came then, and the boat was driven in beneath the base of a large rock. When Aodh looked up he saw a beautiful girl sitting on the rock, a golden mirror in one hand and a comb in the other hand, and she was combing her golden-yellow hair. The king's son thought that he had never seen any woman who was as beautiful as she. She spoke to her, and said "are you Venus or the morning star, or why are you alone so early on this bare rock?"

"I am only," she said, "a girl without father, without mother, without worldly relations.

Aodh (the son of a king like so many heroes in Gaelic tradition) invites the woman to remain in his castle with him, and she in turn offers to bring him to her castle underwater. There, he enjoys her company and otherworldly wealth until "maighdean mhara na mara duibhe" 'the mermaid of the black sea' challenges the first mermaid, defeats her in battle, and Aodh makes his way home and is reunited with his family. This tale is not known to me outside of Ireland, but it parallels legends about humans who visit supernatural dwellings and return, such as Knife Against the Wave and Midwife to the Fairies. Another tale, collected from Bríghid Ní Allmhúráin of Corr na Móna, County Galway, resembles the popular legend of Oisín and Niamh: a rider at the shore encounters a mermaid, follows her underwater, dwells there happily for some time but becomes

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104 Hyde, *Sgéaluidhe Fíor Na Seachtmhaine*, 59–60. Unlike many *Märchen*, this story is set in a real-world location, namely Inis Eoghain, County Donegal. It is implied that the supernatural woman is human in appearance, rather than being half-fish, but she later identifies herself as a *maighdean mhara*.

homesick and eventually, despite being warned that he would not be able to see the mermaid again if he left, returns to his old home on land.<sup>105</sup> In another tale collected by Tadhg Ó Murchadha in Uibh Ráthach, County Kerry, the hero aids a mermaid whose *brat* has been stolen by another man, and in turn is given help in finding a wife.<sup>106</sup>

The physical description of the mermaid in these tales (as a beautiful young woman with long hair and a comb), the locations where she is encountered, and her vulnerability to having her *brat* stolen all reflect common ideas attested in the legends and belief statements discussed above. The rivalry and battle between the two mermaids is unknown in the legend tradition but fits nicely with other tales. Similarly, the happy ending in marriage or reunion is required by the tale, whereas legends about visits to supernatural realms are more likely to end with the protagonist injured or narrowly escaping harm: for example, they might dramatically age or crumble to dust upon touching the ground, receive a cursed gift which almost kills them, or have an eye knocked out by an invisible being some time later.<sup>107</sup>

Seals, unlike mermaids, are extremely rare in longer tales from Gaelic tradition. They do feature in a handful of versions of a tale about the conception of Lugh and his combat with Balar, characters who are known in the early medieval pseudo-historical texts *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* and *Cath Maige Tuired*.<sup>108</sup> In the modern tales, Cian and a helper-figure (whose name includes the

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105 NFC 1016:16-19; Brigid Ní Allmhúráin (70), farmer, Corr na Móna, County Galway. Collector: Máirtín Ó Mainnín, February 1947.

106 NFC 28:7-32; informant unknown, An Coireáin, County Kerry. Collector: Tadhg Ó Murchadha, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1933.

107 As frequently happens Midwife to the Fairies, Knife Against the Wave, or F22 “Man goes into fairy dwelling and spends year or more there” (Macdonald, “Migratory Legends of the Supernatural in Scotland,” 46.).

108 Macalister, *Lebor gabála Éirenn*; Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*. The precise relationship between oral traditions about Lugh and Balar – whether they derive from these texts or represent cognate traditions – is outside the scope of the current discussion.

element *Gabhann*, ‘smith [gen. sg.]’) sail to Tory Island and sneak into Balar’s fortress where his daughter is kept. The hero sleeps with Balar’s daughter while the helper-figure sleeps with her (often several) servants. Nine months later, they return to bring the children to safety (as it was prophesied that Balar’s grandson would be the one to kill him); on the way home the helper-figure releases his children into the sea, where they become seals.<sup>109</sup> One version states, “agus tá sé ráidte gur Cathánaigh na rónaí o shoin” ‘and it is said since then that seals are Ó Catháins’<sup>110</sup> The Ó Catháin family are identified in one version of *The Mermaid Legend* (Mayo MS-Main 1) as the descendants of a “maighdean mhara.”

This aetiological episode (or indeed, any conception-tale for Lugh) is not attested in written sources older than the twentieth century, so it is difficult to say when this episode first became attached to traditions about Lugh. The connection between seals, the Ó Catháin family, and the conception of Lugh might derive from the fact that the Ó Catháin family were considered part of the Ciannachta kin-group, who derived their ancestry from the pseudohistorical figure Tadhg mac Céin ‘son of Cian’. This episode reflects beliefs about seals discussed above: namely the fact that they are originally enchanted humans, and that they have close associations with certain families. Regardless of how old this association ultimately is, the presence of this episode within a story collected in the twentieth century is further evidence for the popularity of such beliefs.

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109 NFC 83:55-8; Seán Ó hOileáin, Cill Comáin, County Mayo. Collector: Anraoi Ua Cordubh, 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 193?. NFC 289:300-1; Sorcha, Bean Nic Grianna (61), housewife, Rann na Féirste, County Donegal. Collector: Aodh Ó Domhnaill, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1936.

110 NFC 83:55-8; see previous note for biographical information.

## 2.5 Songs

Like the tale, songs are not performed in order to convey an experience or express a belief about the world; songs are sung to entertain, as displays of virtuoso skill, to create group cohesion, or to provide rhythm needed for repetitive tasks. While songs sometimes have narrative content, and that narrative may even be one regarded as true, it is dangerous to assume that the content of a song reflects a belief held by the community where it is performed. As with tales, however, songs about mermaids and seal-folk are products of the same traditional milieu that produced the legends and belief statements discussed above, and it is potentially illuminating to explore them in the light of the broader tradition.

The song *An Mhaighdean Mhara* has been collected from a number of performers native to the Donegal Gaeltacht, and is widely known today thanks to professional recordings by Áine Uí Laoi, and by the bands Clannad and Altan.<sup>111</sup> The song, as performed by Nóra Dunlop of Ranna Féirste, goes as follows:

Is cosúil gur mheath nó gur thréig tú an greann  
 Tá sneachta go frasach fá bhéal an áith  
 Do chúl bhuí daite is do bhéilín séimh  
 Seo chugaibh Mary Heeney is í i ndéidh an Éirne a shnámh.

“A mháithrín mhilis,” dúirt Máire Bhán  
 fá bhruach an chladaigh is fá bhéal a trá,  
 Maighdean mhara mo mháithrín ard  
 Seo chugaibh Mary Heeney is í i ndéidh an Éirne a shnámh.

Tá mise tuirseach agus beidh go lá  
 Mo Mháire bhruineall, mo Phádraig bán  
 Ar bharr a dtonnaí is fá bhéal na trá,  
 Seo chugaibh Mary Heeney is í i ndéidh an Éirne a shnámh.

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111 Áine Uí Laoi, “An Mhaighdean Mhara,” track 3 on *Amhráin ar an Sean-nós*, RTÉ, 1985, compact disc; Clannad, “An Mhaighdean Mhara,” track 5 on *Clannad*, Philips Ireland, 1973, vinyl; Altan, “An Mhaighdean Mhara,” track 4 on *Island Angel*, Green Linnet, 1993, compact disc.

It seems that you're in decline and have lost heart,  
 The snow is plentiful at the mouth of the ford,  
 Your fair hair and your small gentle mouth,  
 And here is Mary Heeney and she has crossed the River Erne.

“Dear mother,” said Fair Máire,  
 At the edge of the shore and the mouth of the sea,  
 My dear mother is a mermaid,  
 And here is Mary Heeney and she has crossed the River Erne.

I am weary, and will be until dawn,  
 My beautiful Máire, my fair Pádraig  
 On the crest of the waves and at the mouth of the sea,  
 And here is Mary Heeney and she has crossed the River Erne.<sup>112</sup>

As almost all known versions of the song were collected in Donegal, it seems likely that it was originally composed in that county.<sup>113</sup> Síle Mhicí Uí Ghallchóir, from whom the song was also recorded, refers to it as “Amhrán Thoraí,” which suggests that it may have been originally composed on Tory Island, and that the reference to the “Éirne” might have originally been “Éire.”<sup>114</sup> Ríonach Uí Ógáin and Tom Sherlock note that “according to tradition, the context of the song ‘An Mhaighdean Mhara’ (‘The Mermaid’) stems from the legend ‘The Man Who Married the Mermaid.’”<sup>115</sup> While the song does not contain much narrative content, it does agree with most Donegal versions of the legend in its use of the term *maighdean mhara*, the presence of children, and the continuation of the relationship between mother and children after she returns to the sea. No recorded version of the legend from Donegal mentions the names of the mermaid’s children (as indeed, very few recorded versions of the legend do), but since both of

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112 Sherlock and Uí Ógáin, *The Otherworld*, 101–2. Translation by Ríonach Uí Ógáin. Another verse is found at Ó Conghaile, Ó Tuairisg, and Ó Ceannabháin, *Leabhar mór na nAmhrán*, 209. but it adds little to the present discussion.

113 A version from County Louth, however, is published in Ní Uallacháin, *A Hidden Ulster*.

114 Ó Conghaile, Ó Tuairisg, and Ó Ceannabháin, *Leabhar mór na nAmhrán*, 677–78.

115 Sherlock and Uí Ógáin, *The Otherworld*, 102.

these names, Máire and Pádraig, are exceptionally common in Ireland, their presence in this song requires no explanation.

*Is Mise Chunnaic An-Diugh an t-Iongnadh* ‘it is I who saw today the wonder’ is a waulking song which has been recorded from a number of performers from the Outer Hebrides.<sup>116</sup> In the earliest recorded version, collected by Father Allen McDonald in 1904, a ship arrives carrying a mourning woman, who relates the death of the father of her children at sea and the murder of her three brothers.<sup>117</sup> A variant collected from Màiri Nighean Alasdair of Snaoisbheal, South Uist, in 1949 describes a long and difficult journey to a *cèilidh*-house, before jumping to an encounter with a woman sitting on a rock at sea:

‘S mise chunnaig	an diugh an t-iaonadh
Air nigheann donn	a’ chuailein chraobhaich
Chaidh i ‘n tràigh	a bhuaich a’ mhaoraich.
Shuidh i air cloich	‘s rinn i sraonadh.
Thug i sùil bhuaithe	air gach taobh dhith.
Chaidh i an riochd na	béiste maoileadh <sup>118</sup>
Sgoltadh nan tonn	air gach taobh dhith.
Cha chreid iad mi	‘s mi nam aonar
Nach robh agam	tuilleadh daoine,
Sgiobadh bàta	ràmh is taoman. <sup>119</sup>

It is I who saw	today the wonder
The dark-haired girl	with curly hair
She went to the shore	to gather shellfish
She sat on a rock	and she made a start
She looked around	on every side of her
She took the shape	of a seal
Splitting the waves	on every side of her
They won’t believe me,	since I was alone,
That I did not have	more people:
A boat crew,	with oars and a bilge.

<sup>116</sup> Campbell et al., *Hebridean Folksongs*, i: 194.

<sup>117</sup> Text: Campbell et al., i: 156-159.; music: Campbell et al., i: 341-344..

<sup>118</sup> *Béist mhaol* ‘bald beast’ is a term for ‘seal’ that attested in the Hebrides.

<sup>119</sup> Craig, *Òrain luaidh Màiri Nighean Alasdair*, 112.

The two versions of this song present completely unrelated narratives, which have almost nothing in common except for a maritime setting and the sudden appearance of a young woman. They are, nonetheless, clearly versions of the same song, as they share the same tune, refrain, and the phrases “is mise a chunnaic an diugh an t-iaonadh” ‘it is I who saw today the wonder’ and “cha chreid iad mi ‘s mi nam aonar” ‘they will not believe me since I was alone.’ While the latter phrase is almost identical in both versions, it comes to mean quite different things: in Màiri nighean Alasdair’s song, it is a simple statement of the incredibility of this encounter; in Bean ‘ic Domhnaill’s, it is a tragic recognition of the young woman’s status as the sole survivor of an atrocity.

What is relevant about Màiri nighean Alasdair’s song for the purposes of the present discussion is the depiction of the *nighean donn* ‘dark-haired girl.’ She emerges from the sea, sits on a rock for some time, and skittishly retreats back to the sea, assuming the shape of a seal in the process. This conforms very closely to some of the memorates of mermaid sightings discussed above, and it seems likely that this version of the song was inspired by such an account.

Child 113, “The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry,” is a ballad that is widely known today thanks to popular recordings by Joan Baez and other artists from the 1960s on.<sup>120</sup> While the oldest known version of the ballad, recorded in 1852 and published in Francis James Child’s *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, is from Shetland, most versions of the ballad were

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120 Joan Baez, “Silkie,” track 4 on *Joan Baez, Vol. 2*, Vanguard Records, 1961, vinyl. The use of *selkie* in English to mean ‘human who can assume the shape of a seal’ (unlike in Scots, where it normally refers to a seal) is likely due to the popularity of recordings of this song in the twentieth century.

collected from Orkney.<sup>121</sup> In the version published by Child,<sup>122</sup> a seal-man from Sule Skerry visits an unwed mother; he then reveals himself to be the child's father, compensates her for raising his son, takes him away in order to teach him to swim, and prophesies that the woman's next husband will be a gunner who will inadvertently shoot and kill the seal-man and his son. The versions from Orkney add further details: the seal-man offers to marry the woman, but she refuses, the woman later offers to marry the seal-man who now in turn refuses, and the seal-man gives his son a golden chain, which becomes the evidence that her son has been killed. Alan Bruford argues that, although the ballad may have been based on older (possibly Norse) traditions, it is a singular composition, which cannot have been composed much earlier than beginning of the seventeenth century.<sup>123</sup>

The eponymous *Silkie* or *Selkie* of the ballad<sup>124</sup> is a seal who is capable of assuming human form while on land and of breeding with ordinary humans; this is entirely consistent with the Scottish and Irish traditions about seals discussed above. In contrast to *The Mermaid Legend*, it is a seal-man here rather than a seal-woman or mermaid who produces a child with a mortal: this is a rare motif, but not without parallels in Ireland and Scotland.<sup>125</sup> Many details found in the ballad, such as the rejected offers of marriage, the nursing fee, the seal-man's prophecy of his death and the death of his son, and the golden chain that serves as a token of recognition, do not

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121 Bruford, "The Grey Selkie."

122 Unlike most other ballads in his collection, Child only included a single version of "The Great Silkie." Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, iii:494.

123 Bruford, "The Grey Selkie," 77.

124 On how Child's name for the ballad is atypical, see Bruford, 63.

125 Cf. Hillers, "The Man Who Never Slept (MLSIT 4082): A Survey of the Redactions and Their Relation to the *Lai de Tydorel*."; and the Shetlandic legend of "The Selkie Boy of Breckon" (e.g. SA1955.109.6; Brucie Henderson (64), Arisdale, Shetland. Collector: Calum Iain MacLean, 1955).



appear to have parallels in the other legends and beliefs about seals discussed above. In light of these differences, “The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry” can be understood to be a ‘fictional’ composition, intended to entertain and evoke pathos, and not a serious attempt to communicate beliefs and experiences about seals and how they relate to humanity. Such beliefs are part of the traditional milieu that produced the ballad, however, and therefore it is not surprising to see those beliefs reflected, albeit dimly, in the ballad.

## **2.6 Conclusions**

The legends and belief statements about mermaids and seals discussed above present a fairly consistent set of ideas about these beings. Physical descriptions the mermaid emphasize her youth, her beauty, and her long hair. Some accounts call attention to her fish-like lower half, others suggest that she is human-like in appearance, and others are ambiguous on the matter. Descriptions of the appearance of seals are rarer, presumably because this was common knowledge. Instead of describing how they look, accounts of seals instead emphasize their uncannily human-like voices or their unexpected ability to use human language. Mermaids may be said to speak, sing, or bewail the deaths of members of a family, but in memorates they are usually seen and not heard. Both seals and mermaids are attributed similar origins as fallen angels or enchanted humans, and both beings are said to be related to certain human families. This consistency points to a fairly stable cluster of belief about these beings that can be found throughout coastal communities in Ireland and Scotland.

Two further observations can be made here. The first is that while legends and other stories about seals are ubiquitous in Orkney and Shetland, the mermaid is practically unknown in the oral tradition of the Northern Isles. It is not clear why this would be the case, as mermaids

and mermaid-like beings are common in the traditions of other Nordic countries. The second is that, while seals and mermaids are both aquatic beings that resemble humans in many respects, there are some noteworthy differences in the way that these beings are portrayed in Gaelic narrative traditions. As mentioned above, seals appear in non-supernatural contexts: people see and hear them, hunt them, and interact with artifacts made from their bodies. Seals figure in legends when the seal does something an animal would not normally do. In the traditions discussed above, this is usually speaking with a human voice or appearing in a human shape, occurrences which show that seals are not dumb animals but intelligent beings or even enchanted humans.<sup>126</sup> The mermaid, on the other hand, is an inherently supernatural being, and the mere sight of one is worthy of a story. She is a prodigious sign that the natural world has been, or is about to be, disrupted, whether for good or for ill.

Because of her more human-like appearance, the mermaid is also able to play the parts of other human-like supernatural beings, such as the banshee, the dead, and terrestrial fairies, all of whom have the power to influence human fate for better or worse. The mermaid can be described as a *tradition-dominant*: a figure for whom there is such a strong “regional or group-based preference” that other migratory traditions are often adapted so that they feature a mermaid in those areas where belief in her is strong.<sup>127</sup> Examples discussed above include “The Banshee’s Comb,” and “River Claiming Its Due.”<sup>128</sup> The same cannot be said for the seal in Gaelic tradition; with the exception of “The Wounded Seal,” which can be understood as a maritime

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126 Cf. Ní Fhloinn, “Tadhg, Donncha and Some of Their Relations” 226.

127 Honko, “Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition,” 178.

128 See pp.95-6, 103-4.

adaptation of “The Old Woman as Hare,”<sup>129</sup> seals are not expansive figures in the same way that mermaids are. On the other hand, stories and motifs normally associated with seals are sometimes found in connection with the mermaid: for example, some versions of The Mermaid Legend incorporate the central episode of the Tadhg and Donncha Legend discussed above.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, the presence of details suggestive of seals in many versions of The Mermaid Legend points to the possibility, discussed in the previous chapter, that an older normal form of The Mermaid Legend in the Gaelic world involved a seal-woman, and that she was transformed into her present form under the influence of strong and widespread belief in mermaids.<sup>131</sup>

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129 Ní Fhloinn, “Tadhg, Donncha and Some of Their Relations” 229–30.

130 E.g. in Kerry MS-Main 8 and Kerry MS-Schools 32, during the mermaid’s period of captivity a seal comes ashore and calls out for her. She identifies that seal as Tadhg, and states that he is looking for her, much as the captive seal does in the Tadhg and Donncha legend. See pp. 96-7 above.

131 See pp. 79-80.

### 3. The Seal and the Mermaid in Early Gaelic Literature

The previous two chapters focused on sources recorded from oral tradition, mostly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, tracing the distribution of The Mermaid Legend and placing it within the context of a larger body of popular belief and stories about mermaids and seals within Ireland and Gaelic Scotland. The present chapter will examine the depiction of these beings in earlier written sources – such as historical annals, hagiography, literary sagas, and onomastic lore – from the Gaelic world, in order to identify evidence for beliefs and stories attested in later tradition in an earlier period and, if possible, to trace the development of some of these motifs. A couple of considerations and cautions need to be kept in mind when dealing with older written material as a potential source for folklore. The first is the incommensurate nature of the two corpora: in addition to the obvious temporal distance, the folklore archives represent material that is popular, traditional, and non-institutional; whereas earlier literary sources are elite, authored, and produced with institutional support. Medieval authors and compilers frequently drew upon both oral and literary sources in the production of literature, and would have freely worked and reworked those sources in order to further the political and ideological goals of their patrons.<sup>1</sup> The second consideration is that the absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence. Medieval literati were not folklore collectors and did not attempt to record the oral traditions, popular or otherwise, of their surroundings in a systematic fashion. The surviving Gaelic manuscripts also represent a fraction of those that must have been in circulation during the medieval and early modern periods; early Scottish Gaelic tradition is particularly poorly represented, as there are no extant Gaelic manuscripts from that country prior

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1 Ó hógáin, “Migratory Legends in Medieval Irish Literature,” 63–65.

to the fourteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Despite these issues, in the absence of folklore collecting or ethnographic writing, these older literary and historical works are the only possible source for folklore in an earlier period and are worth careful consideration.

### 3.1 The Seal in Early Gaelic Literature

The most frequently used words for ‘seal’ in the modern Gaelic languages are Modern Irish *rón*, Scottish Gaelic *ròn*, and Manx *raun*; all of which can be traced back to Old Irish *rón*, which is the most common word for ‘seal’ in earlier sources.<sup>3</sup> This word is attested at least as early as the ninth century, where it appears in a gloss on Servius Maurus’ commentary on Vergil: “focam .i. *rón*” ‘seal .i. *rón*.’<sup>4</sup> In the early medieval *Sanas Cormaic* ‘Cormac’s Glossary,’ the etymology of the word is explained as: “*rōn* .i. animal *ōn* rošnam donī asberar de,” ‘seal, that is an animal, it is called this from the great swimming that it does.’<sup>5</sup> This etymology is, of course, dubious, but it does indicate an awareness that seals are powerful swimmers despite their clumsiness on land, and the use of the Latin term *animal* might indicate that Cormac (or a later redactor) thought of the seal as a mammal rather than a fish.

The actual etymology of *rón* is somewhat disputed. Holger Pedersen claims that *rón* is a loan-word from Old English *hrán* ‘whale’ by way of a Brittonic language.<sup>6</sup> W. B. Lockwood argues that Old Irish *rón* ‘seal’ and *rón* ‘horsehair’ are originally the same word, and both derive

2 A notable exception is The Book of Deer, a tenth century Latin missal with Gaelic glosses and marginalia from the twelfth century. The edited and translated marginalia, along with a discussion of their historical significance, can be found in Jackson, *The Gaelic Notes in the Book of Deer*. For further information on Gaelic manuscripts, see MacKechnie, *Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts in Selected Libraries in Great Britain and Ireland*.

3 *eDIL*, s.v. ‘*rón*.’ The dictionary contains other words for ‘seal’: *fiad fairrge*, *focach*, *géire*, *mulach*, *rasmoel*, *seg*; most of these words, however, are mainly attested in glossaries, and so it is unlikely that they were ever widely used.

4 Stokes, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, ii: 235.20. For the manuscript context, see Stokes, ii: xxv.

5 Meyer, *Sanas Cormaic*, § 1115.

6 Pedersen, *Vergleichende Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen*, i: 21.

from Welsh *rhawn* ‘horsehair’; *rón* was used as a taboo-avoidance word, referring to the animal’s thick whiskers.<sup>7</sup> A similar semantic development can be posited for the Welsh *moelrhon* ‘seal,’ perhaps derived from *moel* ‘bare, bald’ and *rhawn* ‘horse-hair.’<sup>8</sup> Both etymologies seem plausible on semantic grounds. Regardless of which one is more accurate, it is surely significant that no Goidelic root meaning ‘seal’ survives.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.1.1 Mongán mac Fiachnai

A common motif in medieval Irish literature is the transformation of a human or human-like being into a series of animals, especially where that human is a witness to the distant past.<sup>10</sup> There are two known instances in which this series of transformations involves a seal, each involving the legendary figure of Mongán mac Fiachnai. The first occurs in the Old Irish text *Immram Brain* ‘the Voyage of Bran son of Febal.’ During his voyage, Bran and his men come upon a man riding a chariot upon the surface of the sea, who identifies himself as Manannán Mac Lir and says that he is heading to Ireland to father a child, Mongán mac Fiachnai. Before departing, Manannán recites thirty stanzas that discuss the difference between the mundane world that Bran perceives and the supernatural world of Manannán and his companions, and that prophesy the greatness and premature death of Mongán. Two quatrains are relevant to the present discussion:

Biaid i fethol cech míl  
itir glasmuir ocus tír

7 “Die Robbe wurde offensichtlich nach ihren auffallenden Schnurrborsten benannt. ‘Schnurrbart’ wird in der Sprache der alten Robbenschläger als Noaname entstanden sein.” Lockwood, “Wortkundliches,” 26.

8 *GPC*, s.v. ‘moelrhon.’

9 The alternate words for ‘seal’ mentioned in note 3 are either borrowings (*focach* from Latin *phoca*, *rasmoel* from Old Norse *hrosshualr*), kennings (*fiad fairrge* ‘wild animal of the sea’), or of uncertain etymology (*géire*, *mulach*, *seg*). None of these words can be traced back to a Goidelic word or root meaning ‘seal.’

10 See Nic Cárthaigh, “Surviving the Flood: Revenants and Antediluvian Lore in Medieval Irish Texts.”

bíd drauc ré m-buidnib i froiss  
bíd cú allaid cech indroiss.

Bíd dam co m-bendaib arggait  
i mbruig i n-agtar carpait  
bíd écne brecc il-lind lán  
bíd rón, bíd ela findbán.

He will be in the shape of every beast,  
both on the azure sea and on land,  
he will be a dragon before hosts at the onset,  
he will be a wolf of every great forest.

He will be a stag with horns of silver  
in the land where chariots are driven,  
he will be a speckled salmon in a full pool,  
he will be a seal, he will be a fair-white swan.<sup>11</sup>

These descriptions are not merely the poetic epithets common in elegy; it is predicted that Mongán will be in the *fethal* ‘distinctive shape, appearance’ of these animals. It is significant that the seal is juxtaposed here with other animals associated with power and wisdom, such as the wolf, dragon, and salmon.

Mongán features again in the short text *Imacallam Choluim Cille ocus ind óclaig i Carn Eolairg* ‘The Colloquy of Colum Cille and the Youth at Carn Eolairg,’ which John Carey argues was “composed not later than the eighth century.”<sup>12</sup>

Immacaldam Choluim Cille 7 ind óclaig oc Carraic Eolairg: as-berat alaili bad é  
Mongán mac Fiachnai.

As-bert Colum Cille fris: ‘Can do-lod-su, a óclach?’ ol Colum Cille.

Respondit iuuenis: ‘Do-dechad-sa,’ ol ind óclach, ‘a tírib ingnad, a tírib gnáth, co  
fesur uait-siu fót<sup>13</sup> forsa mbeba ocus fót fora ngénir fis 7 anfis.’

11 Meyer, *The Voyage of Bran, Son of Febal, to the Land of the Living*, i: § 54–55. Translation by Kuno Meyer.

12 Carey, “The Lough Foyle Colloquy Texts,” 55–57.

13 The “fót forsa mbeba” ‘spot on which dies’ is possibly an early example of the *fód báis* ‘sod of death’ motif found in both early Irish literature and contemporary Irish folklore. See Carney, “Fót Báis / Banaþúfa,” and especially p. 175 for reference to this passage. See also O’Reilly, “River Claiming Its Due & the Sod of Death

Respondit Colum Cille: ‘Cesc,’ ol Colum Cille; ‘cóich robo riam, a lloch-sa at-chiam?’

Respondit iuuenis: ‘Ro-fetur-sa aní-sin. Ba buide, ba scothach, ba glas, ba tilcach, ba ólach, ba osrach, ba airgtech, ba cairptech. Ro giult-sa a mbasa os; ro šenasa mbasa é, a mbasa rón,<sup>14</sup> ro ráth a mbasa cú allaid, imma-rulod a mbasa duine. Ro gabus fo thríb seólaib: seól mbuie beres, seól nglas bádas, seól nderg foa combretha feóili. Ro iachtsat mná dím; acht nád fitir atharmáthair, cid beras: co lubair fri doíni bíu, co timthach fri marbu.’

The conversation of Colum Cille and the youth at Carn Eolairg; some say that he was Mongan mac Fiachna.

Colum Cille said to him: ‘Whence do you come, youth?’ said Colum Cille.

*Respondit iuuenis:* ‘I come,’ said the youth, ‘from lands of strange things, from lands of familiar things, so that I may learn from you the spot on which died, and the spot on which were born, knowledge and ignorance.’

*Respondit Colum Cille:* ‘A question,’ said Colum Cille. ‘Whose was it formerly, this lough which we see?’

*Respondit iuuenis:* ‘I know that. It was yellow, it was flowery, it was green, it was hilly; it was rich in liquor, and strewn rushes, and silver, and chariots. I have grazed it when I was a stag; I have swum it when I was a salmon, when I was a seal; I have run upon it when I was a wolf; I have gone around it when I was a human. I have landed there under three sails: the yellow sail which bears, the green sail which drowns, the red sail under which bodies were conceived (?). Women have cried out because of me, although father and mother do not know what they bear, with labour for living folk, with a covering for the dead.’<sup>15</sup>

After the youth answers another of Colm Cille’s questions, the saint takes him aside so that they can continue their discussion without his followers overhearing. While many of the youth’s statements are deliberately obscure,<sup>16</sup> this passage seems to suggest that Lough Foyle was

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Predestined (ML 4050 & MLSIT 4051).’

14 The text’s previous editor, Kuno Meyer, reads this passage as “rón rothrath [*leg.* rothrechtach]” which he translates as ‘seal of great strength.’ Meyer, “The Colloquy of Colm Cille and the Youth at Carn Eolairg,” 315–16.

15 Carey, “The Lough Foyle Colloquy Texts,” 60–61. Translation by John Carey.

16 Cf. Carey, “Obscure Styles in Medieval Ireland.”



formerly a plain which flooded in the distant past, and that the youth had lived since then in the form of various animals.

Both of these passages deal with the same figure, Mongán mac Fiachnai, and both portray him as changing into a number of animals, including a seal. It would be a mistake to identify Mongán as a precursor to the seal-folk of later tradition: the seal is only one of a series of animals, and is not presented as any more significant than the other animals in either passage. The emphasis of both passages is on Mongán's protean power, his ability to assume multiple shapes, rather than any one particular transformation. The list of animals is almost the same in both passages: stag, salmon, seal, wolf; *Immram Brain* adds dragon and swan. These other animals are well-represented in early Irish literature, often in supernatural contexts, and are often associated with strength, violence, or wisdom; some of them function as heroic epithets in praise poetry.<sup>17</sup> The inclusion of the seal alongside these animals strongly suggests that it was thought of in similar terms in medieval Ireland.

### 3.1.2 *Stair ar Aed Baclámh*

The transformation of seals into horses occurs in an episode in a text found in the fifteenth-century Book of Lismore, known as *Stair ar Aed Baclámh*.<sup>18</sup> The eponymous Áed was a retainer of Diarmait Mac Cerbaill, supposedly a sixth-century high king of Ireland, and had the habit of carrying a long spear athwart when he was sent to visit the king's vassals, demanding that any door or gate through which he would enter be breached in order to accommodate this spear. When Áed was sent to visit Gúaire Aidne, king of Uí Máine in Connacht, he made the same demand and was promptly slain by the outraged Gúaire. After killing his over-king's servant,

<sup>17</sup> *eDIL* s.v. 'éicne,' 'draic,' 'cú,' 'dam.'

<sup>18</sup> Last edited and translated by Standish O'Grady. Text: O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, i: 66-72; translation: O'Grady, ii: 70-76, manuscript information: O'Grady, i: viii.

Gúaire fled to seek the protection of Saint Ruadán of Lothra. When Diarmait heard about the killing, he demanded of Ruadán that he surrender Gúaire to him. Neither party could reach an agreement, and so they began to fast against one another.<sup>19</sup> After a year passed in this way, Saint Brendan of Clonfert was sent by an angel to assist Ruadán in his cause:

Cid tra ó atchuala Diarmaid dail Brénainn do thecht d'fóiridin na naemh ocus na cléirech ro ghabh uaman mór hé co ndubhairt frisna naemhaibh: dá tucadh sibh damhsa ar sé coece ech súlghorm co srianaib órdha dobérainn Aedh guaire dháibh. Ra riacht co Brénainn sin. Togairmios Brénainn coeca rónocus sódhais iat a ndealbhaib ech ocus do chuir roime iat co faithchi na Temhrach. Is ann sin ro fersat na cléirig ocus sluag na Temhrach fáilti re Brénainn. Ocus ro ghabh iar sin ag innisi dhocra na mara dhóibh ocus ba binn le sluaghaibh na Temrach innsce Brénainn. Do fhiarfaig Brénainn iar sin do Dhiarmaid in ngébad crodh ná comha tar ceann Aedha guaire. Gébatsa ar Diarmaid in coeca each súlghorm úd acht co mbeither fúthaibh dhamh ráithe ocus bliadain. Tugadh tra in eachradh do Dhiarmaid ocus ro bóí in cléirech friu frisna naimsir sin. Ocus ro coimhleangait na heich ar faithchi na Temhrach. Ocus nír lór leisna marcachaib luas na hechraide gur gabhsat fleascadh dá neachlascaib dhóib co ndeachadar ar dásacht. Ocus nír féfad ní dhóibh nó gu tucsat a cinn fó'n muir guna marcachaib leo co nderna[dh] róin díobh diblínaibh.

‘Howbeit, whenever Dermot heard of Brendan’s arrival, and how he came to succour the saints and clergy, great fear took him; in so much that he said to the saints: “were ye to give me fifty horses, blue-eyed and with golden bridles, I would yield you up Aedh Guaire.” This came to Brendan’s ears; he summons fifty seals, turns them into the forms of [so many] horses, and drives them before him to the green of Tara. Then it was that the clergy and all Tara’s host welcomed Brendan, who fell to narrate to them all the hardship of the sea; and to the hosts of Tara Brendan’s utterance was sweet. He enquired of Dermot whether in lieu of Aedh Guaire he would accept cattle or other consideration. “I will accept,” Dermot said, “yon fifty blue-eyed horses; but on condition that one shall guarantee them to me for a year and a quarter.” So the horses were made over to Dermot, and the cleric went security for them for that time. [Which being now run out] the horses one day raced on Tara’s green, and the riders (judging their speed to be insufficient) plied them with their horse-rods, at which they became frantic; nor could a pull be got at them before they, taking their riders with them, dived into [lit. ‘put their heads under’] the sea, and both parties of them [men and horses] were turned into seals.<sup>20</sup>

19 On the use of fasting as a legal procedure in medieval Ireland, see Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 182–83.

20 Text: O’Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, i: 67-8., translation: O’Grady, ii: 72..

The same episode occurs in the life of Saint Brendan of Clonfert in Míchéal Ó Cléirigh's seventeenth-century compilation of hagiographical material.<sup>21</sup> A similar episode occurs in both Ó Cléirigh's life of Saint Ruadhán and in *Aided Diarmada meic Cherbaill* 'Death of Diarmaid mac Cerbaill,' found in a fifteenth-century manuscript.<sup>22</sup> Both Ruadhán's life and Diarmaid's death-tale omit the involvement of Saint Brendan and any mention of seals; instead the horses which are given to Diarmaid providentially appear from the sea.

Two elements of this account in *Stair ar Aed Baclámh* are reminiscent of modern oral tradition. The first is the inclusion of unpredictable and dangerous aquatic horses, which call to mind beings such as the *each uisge*, *nykkur*, and *bäckhäst*, which are found in Gaelic and Norse oral traditions.<sup>23</sup> Several details of this account closely resemble those of a legend found in contemporary Irish tradition, designated MLSIT 4086A "The Water Horse as Race-Horse": someone obtains a miraculous horse and rides it in a horse-race. After the rider strikes the horse (or fails to control the horse properly), the horse runs into a nearby body of water, taking the rider with it.<sup>24</sup> A possible authorial intervention can be seen in the detail that Brendan becomes a surety on behalf of the horses: Brendan accepts limited legal responsibility on behalf of the horses, which perhaps lessens the duplicitous and deceptive nature of the deed. In later tradition, the horse turns on its rider as soon as the rider strikes it or otherwise maltreats it. The

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21 Text: Plummer, *Bethada Náem nÉrenn*, i: 88-89., translation: Plummer, ii: 85-86.

22 For the episode in the Life of St Ruadhán, text: Plummer, *Bethada Náem nÉrenn*, i: 325., translation: Plummer, ii: 317.; for the episode in *Aided Diarmada* text: O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, i: 78., translation: O'Grady, ii: 83..

23 See Almqvist, "Waterhorse Legends (MLSIT 4086 & 4086B): The Case for and against a Connection between Irish and Nordic Tradition."

24 Almqvist, 115–17. Almqvist does reference the texts discussed above, but states that they "[do] not testify to the existence of the fully-developed legend at that time." Almqvist's scepticism is perhaps overstated here:, as all of the elements of legends known in oral tradition (striking or abuse, racing, drowning of the rider) are to be found in these literary sources although.

introduction of the saint's surety confuses the story somewhat, as it is unclear whether the horses were used to race during that period of time or, if they were raced, how they were treated.<sup>25</sup> The author attempts to solve this tension by simply passing over the year and a quarter in silence.

The fate of the horse-riders, who are transformed into seals when they are dragged underwater, is also reminiscent of later traditions that identify seals as the souls of drowned humans.<sup>26</sup> Legends about water horses and those about seals are typically distinct in later tradition, so it is possible that the account in *Stair ar Aed Baclámh* is a conflation of two earlier accounts: one that contains the water-horse motif, and one in which Brendan drowns his enemies, who are then transformed into seals. The episode in the life of Ruadhán and the death-tale of Diarmait, which includes the water-horse motif but lacks the involvement of Brendan or any mention of seals, would appear to support this conjecture. It seems plausible that the simpler account is the older one, and that the redactor of *Stair ar Aed Baclámh* added to the account to enhance the status of Brendan and, by extension, Clonfert. Regardless of the precise relationship between these texts, the fact that the redactor was able to associate seals with water-horses suggests that, at least as far back as the fifteenth century, seals were thought of as menacing and supernatural beings.

### 3.1.3 *Betha Bhrigde*

Another miracle involving a seal is included in the life of Saint Brigit from the Book of Lismore, mentioned above, although it does not feature in any of her earlier lives:

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25 A parallel to this may be seen in a version of The Waterhorse as Race-horse collected from Pádraig Ó hArdagáin of Cor an Dola, County Galway in 1931 (Almqvist, "Crossing the Border," 237–39.). In this version, the man captures a horse and leaves it in his stable, having heard that if he keeps it there for a year and a day, the horse would become tame. The man decides to ride the horse at the end of a year, and, after removing the blinkers from the horse, is tossed off the horse and dies when he collides with a pile of stones.

26 p. 120

Feacht ann tancatar áighidh co Brigit: at iat uaisli craibdecha .i. na secht n-espuic fileat a tilaigh in airrter Laigen. Is ann sin forcongair Brigit for araili fer dia muinntir techt dochum in mhara co ndernad iasgach dona haighedhuibh. Teit in fer 7 a mhurgha lais 7 techmhaing ron dó. Saidhidh inn in rónghai 7 cenglaid a theit dia laim. Tairngidh in ron leis in fer tar in bhfairrce co traigh mara Breatan, cu bharcuibh annsin he for carraic iar mbrisiudh na téta. Rocuired dano in ron forculai, 7 a ghai ann, cu rolaa in mhuir he forsin traigh ba comfhocraibh do Brigit. Doratsat immorro iascaire Bretan curach do iascaire Brigitte o roindis a scela dhoibh. Tainic iarsin tar muir co bhfuair a ron i traigh mhara Laigen ibhus, co ruc leis co háigeda Brigitte. Isin maduin dochuaidh tar muir 7 dorocht dar muir mBreatan doridisi dochum Brigitte medhon lai. Romhorsat na hæggheda 7 in slúag arcena ainm De 7 Brigitte triasin bhfirt-sin 7 triasan n-adhamhra.

Once upon a time guests came to Brigit: noble and pious were they, even the seven bishops who are on the hill in the east of Leinster. Then Brigit ordered a certain man of her household to go to the sea and catch fish for the guests. The man goes, taking with him his harpoon; and a seal chanced to come to him. He thrusts the seal-spear into it, and ties the sting of the spear to his hand. The seal drags with him the man over the sea unto the shore of the sea of Britain, and, after breaking the string, leaves him there on a rock. Then the seal was put back with his spear in it, and the sea cast it on the shore that was near to Brigit. Howbeit the fishers of Britain gave a boat to Brigit's fisherman, when he told his tales to them. Then he crossed the sea and found his seal here on the shore of the sea of Leinster, and took it with him to Brigit's guests. In the morning he went over sea and passed again over the sea of Britain to Brigit at midday. The guests and the rest of the host magnified God's name and Brigit's through the miracle and through that prodigy.<sup>27</sup>

Although the seal in this account does not change its form, as in the episodes discussed above, it is distinguished by its exceptional strength and speed: even injured, it is able to drag a fully grown adult male from Leinster, in the south-east of Ireland, all the way to Britain, a distance of at least 120 kilometres. Miraculously, the fisherman is able to return home safely with the body of the seal, pierced by his harpoon, as evidence for the veracity of his tale.

The passage contains a wealth of ethnographic information. Seals were hunted with an implement similar to the modern harpoon: a spear with a rope attached to one end that the hunter could attach to something to prevent the injured seal from escaping; this implement is referred to

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<sup>27</sup> Text and translation in Stokes, *Lives of Saints, from the Book of Lismore*, ll. 1637–50.

as a *murghae* ‘sea-spear,’ a *rónghae* ‘seal-spear,’ and as simply a *gae* ‘spear’ in the quoted passage. Seal was evidently considered prestigious enough that it might be served to visiting bishops. The fact that Brigit sent someone to catch *fish* for her guests’ meal (*co ndernad iasgach dona haighedhuibh*) suggests that Brigit and/or her guests were fasting, and that the seal, as an aquatic animal, might not have been considered meat for the purpose of a fast.<sup>28</sup>

The relationship between this passage and later traditions concerning seals is unclear. It is possible to see a connection with the Wounded Seal legend discussed in the previous chapter: a hunter attempts to kill a seal and lodges his weapon in the seal’s body, the seal escapes, and the hunter later finds the seal and recognizes his weapon. There are some significant differences, however: in later tradition the hunter travels abroad, encounters his former victim in human form, and usually promises or is made to promise not to harm seals again. In this account, the hunter finds the seal’s corpse on the shore, presents it to his mistress’ guests as proof of the miracle (after which it might have been eaten), and makes no promise to abstain from hunting seals. It is, of course, possible that a version of the Wounded Seal or another interference legend lies behind this passage, in which case these differences might be due to a desire on the part of the author to exalt the glory of God, rather than to attribute power to quasi-human beings that lack a clearly-defined place within a Christian cosmology.

### 3.1.4 *Acallam na Senórach*

The final reference to seals in early Irish literature which will be discussed in this chapter occurs in the Middle Irish Fenian text, *Acallam na Senórach* ‘The Colloquy of the Ancients.’ Roughly halfway through the text, the King of Ulster asks Caílte to tell the story behind two burial

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<sup>28</sup> While medieval Irish penitentials, in both Irish and Latin, make frequent references to fasting and abstention from meat, to the best of my knowledge, these texts do not explicitly state which animals are or are not considered to be meat or fish. See Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*.

mounds at Tráigh Rudhraighe (now Dundrum Bay in County Down).<sup>29</sup> Cailte explains that Art and Eoghan, the two sons of Fidach mac Fintan, king of Connacht, lie buried there, and that they died defending the Fianna from a surprise attack at night that occurred on their watch:

Ocus tangadur in da cath mora sin a tír, 7 ro bo mor in t-anborlann dona hocht cet óclach in da chath mora d'fúlang, 7 ro chumaisc in n-imguin annsin 7 in t-imbualad o fúined néll nóna co tainic medonaídhchi. Ocus issí sin ais 7 uair at-chonnairc Find fíis 7 aislingthi, 7 iss ed atchonnairc, da ron glasa ac díul a da chich, 7 ro muscail in flaith Find asa chotlud. 'Cáit a fuil Fergus Fínbél?' ar eissium. 'Sunna', ar se. 'Créd ind aislingthi atconnarcus .i. da rón muiride ac díul mo da chich?' Da mac ríg Connacht do chuiris do forcomét na Féinde anocht atait a n-éccomlann ac allmurchaibh,' ar in fili. 'Eírgid, a firu,' ar-si Find, '7 is fír a n-abair in fili rib.' Ocus is annsin ro eirgedur ind Fíann a n-aenfécht 7 a n-aenuair, 7 tangadur co Tráig Rudraigi, 7 ní fuaradur béo da Feind féin acht da mac Ríg Connacht, 7 irsi a sciath imma mbraigdib, 7 ní mó ro bóí fer máiti gnima<sup>30</sup> don da chath tangadur na hallmuraig béo, 7 is amlaid do frith da mac rig Connacht, 7 a cuirp ina crólintib fola 7 a sceith 7 a slega ica congail ina sessum, 7 nir' dingbadur dias reime sin riam don Féind comrac mar sin.<sup>31</sup>

And those two great companies came to land, and it was a great difficulty for the eight hundred warriors to endure the two great companies, and they fought together then, striking at one another from the setting of the clouds of the evening until midnight. And that was the time and the hour when Finn saw a vision and a dream, two grey seals suckling his two breasts, and the chieftain Finn awoke from his sleep. "Where is Fergus Wine-mouth?" he said. "Here," said he. "What is the dream that I saw, namely, two seals of the sea suckling my two breasts?" "Two sons of the king of Connacht, whom you set to watch the Féinne tonight are in danger from the foreigners," said the poet. "Rise, men," said Finn, "it is true what the poet says to you." And then the Fianna rose together at the same time, and they came to Tráigh Rudhraighe, and they found no-one alive of the Féinne but the two sons of the king of Connacht with the straps of their shields about their necks, and not a single man alive of the two companies of foreigners who had come that might tell the tale, and this is how the two sons of the king of Connacht were found: their bodies were pools of blood and gore, their shields and their spears were keeping them standing, and no two men of the Fianna had ever fought a battle like that before.

29 Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, s.v. tráig rudraigi.

30 I interpret the word *máiti* in *fer máiti gnima* as the genitive singular of *moídem* 'declaring, avowing,' i.e. 'a man who might tell of the deed.' *eDIL* notes a similar construction that occurs in *Aided Guill Maic Carbada* 'the violent death of Goll mac Carbada' from the Book of Leinster: "na ranic fer maíti airgni uad innund" 'and no one escaped to boast of the slaughter.' *eDIL*, s.v. 'moídem.'

31 Text: Stokes, *Irische Texte mit Übersetzungen und Wörterbuch*, iv: 89-90.

It is unclear why the two sons of the King of Connacht would appear in Finn's dream as two *rón ghlasa* 'grey seals,' why Finn would nurse them, or why either of these details might be interpreted as an omen of death.<sup>32</sup> This obviously maternal image of Finn might serve to identify the two referents of the omen as people under Finn's care, and for whom Finn would have played the role of foster-parent.<sup>33</sup> The image of the two warriors nursing might also serve to emphasize their youth, and therefore enhance the pathos of their early deaths. Although Art and Eoghan died in battle rather than drowning, they did die fighting a menace which came over the sea and their final resting place is by the shore. Thus, this passage might also be an early literary reflex of the belief attested in modern sources that seals are the transmigrated souls of the drowned.<sup>34</sup>

The episode can also be interpreted as paralleling later traditions that identify certain families with seals.<sup>35</sup> Art and Eoghan are not any two warriors of the Fianna, but two brothers, sons of the king of Connacht. A number of families that are associated with seals in later tradition, namely the Conneelys, Keanes, O'Dowds, and Glavins, are identified as descendants of the Uí Fíachrach, a dynasty that ruled over parts of modern-day Galway, Mayo, and Sligo in the middle ages.<sup>36</sup> It is possible that these associations are very old, and derive from beliefs about the Uí Fíachrach family itself – as discussed above, seals appear alongside other prestigious animals in early Irish literature, and so the association may have been a flattering one. This passage

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32 On the motif of sucking at a man's breast in medieval Ireland, see Bieler's commentary to §18 of Saint Patrick's *Confessio*. Howlett, *Liber Epistolarum Sancti Patricii Episcopi*, ii: 139-140.

33 On fosterage in medieval Ireland, see Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 86–90. For a discussion of fosterage in Fenian literature, see also Nagy, *The Wisdom of the Outlaw*, 99–123.

34 p. 120.

35 Pp. 117-119.

36 Ní Fhloinn, "Tadhg, Donncha and Some of Their Relations" 235.



would seem to support this view, although in the absence of further evidence for any association between the Uí Fiachrach and seals, this can only be conjecture.

The previous examples make it clear that seals were respected, and viewed as powerful and potentially dangerous animals in medieval Ireland. They are listed alongside culturally significant animals such as the salmon or the wolf, although references to seals are much less frequent than references to those animals. Seals are often mentioned in narrative contexts that involve transformation: in particular, humans can be transformed into seals, or represented by seals in dreams. All of this is highly suggestive of later tradition, although there are no unambiguous examples of seals turning into humans and back, humans marrying seals, seals having a society which parallels that of humanity, or other ideas and scenarios that are well-attested in the modern period. It is, of course, possible that antecedents to these beliefs and stories did exist in an earlier period but simply were not recorded. In the modern period supernatural traditions about seals are mainly attested in rural maritime communities, among people whose livelihood depended upon the sea. It seems likely that this association could have obtained in an earlier period as well, whereas earlier written sources, as observed above, were the products of societal élites.

### 3.2 The Mermaid in Early Gaelic Literature

As discussed in previous chapters, there are two primary words in the modern Gaelic languages for *mermaid*: *maighdean mhara*, which is found in Scotland and (predominantly) the northern half of Ireland; and *murúch*, which is restricted to the southern half of Ireland.

*Maighdean mhara*, as discussed above, appears to be a partial calque of the English *mermaid*: *maighdean* is a loan-word from Old English *mægden*, while *mara* ‘sea (gen. sg.)’ corresponds

both phonetically and semantically to *mere* ‘sea.’<sup>37</sup> Other words, such as Scottish Gaelic *maighdean chuain* and Manx *ben varrey* are formed according to the same pattern, a word indicating a woman or maiden, followed by a word indicating a body of water. The fact that *maighdean mhara* is widely used in both Ireland and Scotland might suggest that the word was known during the middle ages, but the word is unattested before 1725, when it occurs in *Eólas ar an Domhuin*, a didactic dialogue about the world by Tadhg Ó Neachtain:

Ar frídhe maighdean mhara ‘bhfogas do Edom san bhliadhuin 1430?

Do frídhe, ag Purmerend; 7 do nith 7 do ghlan na cailínidh do fuair í, ag cur éadach uirre; 7 gí nach raibhe caint ná éisteacht aice do fhoghluim sníomh 7 cárdáil uatha, 7 do chromadh ré a cionn an tan tífeach céus; 7 do mhair ag ithe 7 ag ól 7 ag obair ‘na measg ar feadh dtreimsi, 7 a dúl do ghnáth ealóghadh uatha don mhuir.<sup>38</sup>

Was a mermaid found near Edam in the year 1430?

Yes, at Purmerend, and the girls who found her washed and cleaned her, putting clothing on her, and although she could not speak or hear, she learned to spin and to card from them, and she would bend her head whenever she would see suffering and she lived among them for a while, eating, and drinking, and working, and always wanting to escape to the sea from them.

*Eólas ar an Domhuin* contains very few other narratives, none of which concern mermaids.

While this is not an actual version of The Mermaid Legend, there are some curious similarities: a mermaid is captured, she proves adept at domestic tasks but does not speak to her captor or captors, and desires to return to the sea. Unlike the mermaid in most contemporary legends about mermaids, she is captured by a group of girls, rather than a man who becomes infatuated with her appearance. Ó Neachtain specifies that this event was supposed to have taken place at Purmerend, in the province of North Holland in the Netherlands, in the year 1430. This level of

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37 eDIL s.v. ‘maighden’; Mearthúr, Lam-Mearthúr, and Fontaine, *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. *mere*, mermaid.

38 Text: Ó Neachtain, *Eólas ar an domhan*, 38.

detail implies that Ó Neachtain (or one of his sources) had heard this story from a Dutch informant, although it is possible that the original account was expanded with details supplied from Irish tradition.

While the term *murúch* has a much more restricted distribution in the modern period, it can be traced back much further than *maighdean mhara*, that is, to Middle Irish *muidúchann*, attested as early as the twelfth century.<sup>39</sup> This word appears to have originally been a masculine o-stem noun derived from *muir* ‘sea’ and *dúchann* ‘chant, song’ which, because of the gendered nature of its referent, was later re-analysed as feminine n-stem noun with a nominative singular *murdúchu*. This in turn led to the modern Irish word *mur(dh)úch* and variants such as *mrúch*, *brúch*, and *bruach*.<sup>40</sup> While *murdúchann* might have originally referred to some sort of auditory phenomenon at sea, the earliest attestations of this word refer to the Sirens of classical tradition, who lured sailors to their deaths with their song or chant, or to beings that were intended to resemble the sirens. At some point in the word’s history, the association with sound became secondary, and the word came to refer to a half-woman half-animal aquatic being. As is discussed below, at least one early reference to a *murdúchann* makes no mention of her song, and in later tradition the *murúch* may even be said to be completely silent.<sup>41</sup>

### 3.2.1 Annals

There are four accounts in the Irish annals of encounters with beings that might be regarded as merfolk. The earliest of these is recorded in the Annals of Ulster (hereafter AU) for

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39 Bowen, “Varia I.”

40 Munster dialects of Irish have a tendency to shift the primary stress from the first syllable of a word to the first syllable with a long vowel; this frequency results in the syncope of syllables ending in *l* or *r*, as in *murúch*. The confusion of *m* and *b* results from the fact that these letters are pronounced identically in their lenited forms and, as feminine nouns, are commonly lenited. Ua Súilleabháin, “Gaeilge na Mumhan,” 479–81, 487.

41 Pp. 51-2.

572.5 A.D. : “In hoc anno capta est in muirgeilt” ‘In this year the *muirgeilt* was captured.’<sup>42</sup>

Other annals, namely *Chronicon Scotorum* (hereafter *CS*), the Annals of Tigernach (*AT*), and the Annals of the Four Masters (*AFM*) provide further details: this event took place at Larne Lough in County Antrim, the *muirgeilt* is Lí Bán (or Airiu in *AT*), daughter of Eochu mac Muireda, and she was captured by Beóán mac Innle, fisherman to Saint Comgall, abbot of Bangor.<sup>43</sup> These details are consistent with those found in the text *Aided Echach mac Muireda*, which is discussed in more detail below. As *AU* does not include these details, it seems likely that they were not part of the original entry, but were added to a text of the Clonmacnoise group at some point, perhaps as a marginal gloss that was later incorporated into the main text. It is possible that the original entry had nothing to do with *Lí Bán*, and that this connection was drawn by a later scribe who noticed the uncommon word *muirgeilt*, also used to describe Lí Bán in *Aided Echach*.

The word *muirgeilt* is a straightforward compound formed from *muir* ‘sea’ and *geilt* ‘one who goes mad from terror, a crazy person living in the woods, a lunatic.’ In other sources, *geilte* are humans who have suffered a traumatic experience (such as battle), lost their sanity, and fled human society to live in the wilderness.<sup>44</sup> The term *muirgeilt*, ‘sea-*geilt*,’ could indicate a supernatural being such as Lí Bán, but it could also be taken to indicate a human who suffered a traumatic experience at sea, such as shipwreck or attack by pirates, and, possibly after spending some time alone at sea or on an island, had lost their mind as a result. The participle *capta* is feminine but, since *geilt* is a grammatically feminine noun, this does not indicate anything about the actual gender of the *muirgeilt*. The use of the definite article in all of these entries is possibly

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42 *AU* s.a. 572.5. For all annalistic entries, the translation quoted is that included in the edition cited.

43 *CS* s.a. 565, *AFM* s.a. 558.2, *AT* s.a. 546.1. On the spelling of *Lí Bán* versus *Lí Ban*, see de Vries, “The Names of Lí Bán,” 43–44.

44 eDIL, s.v. ‘geilt.’

significant, and might indicate that this entry refers to a unique being – although, if this is the case, it is not clear from the entry what sort of being the term represents, except that it is associated with the sea, exile, and insanity.

Another strange being from the sea is mentioned in *AU* s.a. 891.9: “Banscal ro lai an muir a n-Albain, .cxc.u. traighidh ina fot; .xuii. fot a trillsi; .uii. traighi fot meoir a laime; .uii. traighi fot a srona; gilithir geis uile h-i” ‘The sea cast ashore a *banscál* in Scotland, 195 feet in length, seventeen feet the length of her hair, seven feet the length of the fingers of her hand, seven feet the length of her nose, as white as a swan.’<sup>45</sup> A similar passage occurs in *CS* s.a. 900 (which refers to this being as a “ben mór” ‘big woman’) and *AFM* s.a. 887.14. *Banscál* in these passages has been translated or identified as a ‘mermaid’ by many scholars.<sup>46</sup> This rendering seems inaccurate, however, insofar as the English word ‘mermaid’ typically refers to a half-human, half-fish being. These entries describe the unusual size of this prodigy in great detail; the fact that none of these entries mention a fish-tail implies that the *banscál* did not possess one. The word *scál* also normally indicates a being of human appearance, possibly of gigantic proportions, rather than a monstrous hybrid.<sup>47</sup> A similar entry is found at *AU* s.a. 1030.13: “Fear do taíair a traíct Corcabaircinn, 7 bátar oct troigí edir a cíd 7 a fódrann” ‘A man was found at the shore at Corca Baiscinn [South Clare?], and there were eight feet between his head and his groin.’ Similarly, this entry has been understood as a reference to a merman, although though the

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45 Ranke de Vries observes a number of similarities between an episode in some of the Lives of St. Brendan of Clonfert in which the saint discovers a dead giant girl. de Vries, *Two Texts on Loch nEchach*, 27.

46 E.g. W. M. Hennessy refers to the word “banscal” as “meaning, of course, a mermaid” (Hennessy, *Annals of Ulster*, i: 409n6.), Tom Peete Cross includes the passage in *AU* as an example of the motif B81 “Mermaid” (Cross, *Motif-Index of Early Irish Literature*, 56.), and John O’Donovan translates *banscál* as “mermaid” (O’Donovan, *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann*, i: 541.)

47 *eDIL*, s.v. ‘scál,’ ‘banscál.’

passage depicts a gigantic but fully anthropomorphic being.<sup>48</sup> It is unclear in all of these entries whether the giant was alive or not when it came to shore, but the fact that none of these entries mention any interactions between these beings and people on land seems to indicate that they were not. The verbs used in these passages, all passive forms of *do-cuirethar* ‘puts, places,’ supports this interpretation: the phrasing suggests something that, like driftwood, is cast ashore by chance, rather than an intelligent being that comes to ground of its own volition.

Another brief account of a being from the sea coming to land occurs in the Annals of Loch Cé (*LC*) s.a. 1118.9: “Sgél ingnad eli in n-Erinn féin bheós .i. murrdhúbhconn do ghabháil diasgairibh lis Arglionn a n-Ossraighibh, & aroile a Port Lairge” ‘Another wonderful story in Ireland itself, moreover, that is, a mermaid was captured by fishermen at Lis Airglinn in Osraige, and another in Waterford.’ This passage refers to the being from the sea as a *murdúchann*, the term used in other contemporary sources to describe a mermaid or siren, and thus, unlike the passages quoted above, this is an unambiguous reference to a being that might be described as a mermaid. Regrettably, this brief passage includes very little details, such as how the mermaid was captured or what her ultimate fate was, and so it is impossible to know whether this story represents an early version of The Mermaid Legend or any of the other narrative types known in modern tradition about captive mermaids. The *murdúchann*’s song or chant, which provides her name and is a key element of her portrayal in the pseudohistorical and onomastic accounts, is entirely absent here. It may be that a contemporary reader would have assumed the *murdúchann*’s dangerous musical talent, but it is also possible that this passage is evidence that the semantic shift from ‘siren’ to ‘female aquatic being’ had already gone underway. The

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<sup>48</sup> Cross includes this passage as an example of motif B81.2.4 “Giant mermaid (man) cast ashore.” Cross, *Motif-Index of Early Irish Literature*, 57.

reference to “Port Lairge” ‘Waterford’ is also of interest: the roughly contemporary *Dindshenchas* of Waterford, discussed below, features *murúcha*, and appears to be independent of the annalistic account. While this may simply be a coincidence, it could also indicate a belief that mermaids were thought to frequent the sea near Waterford.

### 3.2.2 Classical Adaptations and Imitations

The word *murdúchann* is used to refer to the classical sirens in a verse overview of world history attributed to the twelfth century poet Gilla in Choimded úa Cormaic found in the Book of Leinster:

Achilochus Tribonna tall  
athair mathair murduchand.

Ulixes tuc céir na chlúais.  
ra iarraid cu lléir lúathguais  
rapa gné soraid co sert.  
ras conaig tria chelgairecht.<sup>49</sup>

Achilochus [Achelous] and Tribonna long ago  
Were father and mother of the sirens.

Odysseus put wax in his ears,  
He carefully sought swift danger  
It was a pleasant appearance [?]  
He sought them through his cunning.

This passage presents some textual problems, but this is clearly a reference to Book XII of the *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus’ vessel sails past the island of the sirens, and his fellow crew members place wax in their ears so that they might not be lured to their deaths by the entrancing song of the sirens.<sup>50</sup> In Homer’s account, Odysseus is the only member of the crew not to put wax in his ears, and he orders his men to tie him to the mast so that he can hear the sirens’ song

49 Best, O’Brien, and Bergin, *The Book of Leinster*, ll. 17813–18. Translation in Bowen, “Varia I,” 143.

50 Homer, *The Odyssey*, bk. xii: ll. 153-201.

without harming himself. The passage from the Book of Leinster, on the other hand, simply states that Odysseus put wax in his own ears. This is a fairly minor discrepancy, however, and for present purposes it is sufficient to note that the term *murdúchann* clearly refers to the siren of classical myth, a female water-dwelling being with an entrancing voice who poses a peril to humans.

The *murdúchann* also features in an episode from the pseudo-historical compilation *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* ‘The Book of Invasions of Ireland.’ The followers of Míl Easpáine, precursors to the modern Irish, were travelling across the Caspian sea when they encountered the sirens. This episode can be found in the text’s first recension, dated to the eleventh century: “Is é in Cacher drui dorat in leges dóib, dia mboí in murdúchand oca medrad, .i. bóí in cotlud oca forrach frisín ceól. Is é in leiges fuair Caicher dóib, .i. céir do legad na clúasaib” ‘It is Caicher the druid who gave the remedy to them, when the Siren was making melody to them: sleep was overcoming them at the music. This is the remedy which Caicher found for them, to melt wax in their ears.’<sup>51</sup> A similar account occurs in the somewhat later second recension, although in this version the ship is held fast by the power of the *murdúchainn*, but the crew is able to resist their songs by putting melted wax in their ears, until Caicher arrives and saves his companions.<sup>52</sup>

The similarities between these passages and the classical tradition are striking. Charles Bowen refers to this as “obvious petty larceny,”<sup>53</sup> while Robert MacAlister, the text’s editor, claims that the druid Caicher is “merely a compound of the seer Calchas of Troy and the

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51 Macalister, *Lebor gabála Éirenn*, ii: 20-21. A verse version of this same passage occurs in the poem *Gáedel Glas ótat Gáedil* ‘Gaedel Glas, of whom are the Gaedil,’ that forms part of the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* tradition. Macalister, ii: 100-101.

52 Text and translation: Macalister, *Lebor gabála Éirenn*, ii: 68-71.

53 Bowen, “Varia I,” 144.



sorceress Circe.”<sup>54</sup> Like their classical antecedents, the *murdúchainn* are hostile to sailors, and have an entrancing song. The *múrduchainn* dwell in the Caspian Sea rather than the Mediterranean, but it seems likely that a medieval Irish compiler would not have had a particularly precise understanding of the geography of southern Europe and central Asia. The fact that their music causes sleep rather than convincing sailors to leave their ships and risk drowning appears to be an adaptation of the tradition to the Irish context, as it calls to mind the *súantraige* ‘sleep-music’ played by supernatural figures in other early literary texts.<sup>55</sup> Neither Gilla in Choimded’s poem nor the passages from *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* describe the *murdúchann* in any way (not even specifying its gender) but in keeping with Classical tradition and the assertion that they had parents, one should presumably imagine a female corporeal being, rather than a disembodied voice.

A much more detailed description of the *murúch* and the danger that they pose to sailors appears in Míchéal Ó Cléirigh’s recension of *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, which he finished in the first half of the seventeenth century:

Ba he Caicher fuair leighius doib ar medhradh na murduchann, dia mbatar for muinchind Mara Caisp. Amlaid tra bit an muirmil hisin, coneccosg mbanda leó ó nimlendaibh suas, dergsnaighes da gach bairdelb ar chaoime 7 cruthaige, cona mongaibh fionnbuide tar a formnaibh sios; iascc dana iaidside o a nimlindaibh ier niochtair. Canaitside ceol sirrechtach sirbinn do foirnibh na long ruait ina ccomhfochraibh, contuilit ina ttoirchim suain ag coistecht friu; sreangthairrngit-siomh iaromh foirne na long chuca o foghabat ina ccodladh samlaidh, conus toimlitt.<sup>56</sup>

It was Caicher who found a remedy for them against the singing of the mermaids, while they were in the strait of the Caspian Sea. In this wise are those sea-monsters, with the form of a woman from their navels upwards, excelling every

54 Macalister, *Lebor gabála Éirenn*, ii: 1.

55 See references in eDIL s.v. ‘súantraige.’

56 Text and translation: Ó Cléirigh, *Leabhar Gabhála*, 204–5.

female form in beauty and shapeliness, with light yellow hair down over their shoulders; but fishes are they from their navels downwards. They sing a musical ever-tuneful song to the crews of the ships that sail near them, so that they fall into the stupor of sleep in listening to them; they afterwards drag the crews of the ships towards them when they find them thus asleep, and so devour them.

The idea that the *murdúchann* eats the flesh of humans is consistent with the classical depiction of the siren, as well as the depiction of these beings in the *Dindshenchas* of Waterford discussed below. This idea was likely implicit in the earlier passages, as merely falling asleep, even at sea, does not necessarily invite mortal peril. The physical description of the *murdúchann* as a fish from the waist down and a beautiful woman with long golden hair from the waist up closely resembles the descriptions of the *murúch*, *maighdean mhara*, or mermaid common in later Irish tradition. As this description does not have a clear antecedent in earlier accounts of the *murdúchann*, it is possible that Ó Cléirigh drew upon his own awareness of contemporary oral traditions about the mermaid. This would suggest that, by the seventeenth century, this image of the mermaid as half-woman, half-fish had begun to become widespread in Ireland.

### 3.2.3 *Dindshenchas Éirenn*

*Dindshenchas Éirenn* ‘The Lore of Places of Ireland,’ is a collection of approximately two hundred articles explaining the names of historically significant places in Ireland; the majority of this collection is thought to have been composed during the twelfth century.<sup>57</sup> In most manuscripts containing the *Dindshenchas Éirenn*, these articles consist of a short prose paragraph preceding one or more poems; the verse and prose usually, but not always, tells or alludes to the story or stories found in the prose. Three articles in this collection refer to beings that can be

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57 For a recent discussion of *Dindshenchas Éirenn* and the history of the scholarship regarding it, see Marie-Luise Theuerkauf, “The Death of Boand and the Recensions of *Dindshenchas Éirenn*,” 49–60. A discussion of the various recensions of *Dindshenchas Éirenn*, even as they relate to the articles referenced in this chapter, is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For the sake of the present discussion, it is sufficient to note that all of these articles are found in the Book of Leinster, and therefore cannot be any later than the twelfth century.

understood to be mermaids: the *dindshenchas* of Ess Rúaid ‘Assaroe,’ in County Donegal; the *dindshenchas* of Inber n-Ailbine near present-day Garmanston, County Meath; and that of Port Láirge ‘Waterford.’

The article for Ess Rúaid ‘Rúad’s Waterfall’ offers a number of explanations for that place-name.<sup>58</sup> The second explanation states that Rúad ‘red,’ daughter of Máine Milscoth, had come to Ireland in a boat made of bronze to meet with her betrothed, Áed mac Labrada. When she reached the estuary of what is now Ess Rúaid, she heard supernatural music coming from the water: in the prose, it puts her to sleep and she falls out of her boat; in the verse, she confusingly both falls asleep and jumps out of her boat. In either case she drowns, giving the waterfall its name.

The prose account states “co cuala dord na samguba isinn mbiur nach cuala nech [riam],” which Stokes translates as ‘in the inver then she heard the mermaid’s melody which none had ever heard.’<sup>59</sup> The translation of “dord na samguba” as ‘mermaid’s melody’ is problematic, as neither of these nouns can be translated as ‘mermaid.’ *Samguba* is a compound noun formed from *sam* ‘joint, united, whole,’ and *guba* ‘mourning, sighing, lamenting,’ and therefore indicates some sort of mournful sound, rather than an aquatic being. While *dord* ‘buzzing, droning, intoning’ is used to indicate the song of the *murdúchann* in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, it can also indicate natural sounds such as the bellowing of stags or bulls, and in modern Irish the word can

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58 Two manuscript witnesses of the prose have been published as Stokes, “The Bodleian Dinnsenchas,” 505–6; Stokes, “The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindsenchas,” 1896, 31–33. Two different verse *dindshenchas* exist for this article. The first was edited and translated as “Ess Ruaid I” in Gwynn, *The metrical Dindsenchas*, iv: 2-7.

59 Stokes, “The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindsenchas,” 1896, 31–32. The Bodleian prose *dindshenchas* contains the nearly-identical phrase “co cuala dord saimguba isind inbiur nach cu[a]lla nech aile riam and,” which Stokes translates as “till she heard in the river-mouth a burden of seamaids which no one else had ever heard therein.” Stokes, “The Bodleian Dinnsenchas,” 505.

signify the murmuring of the sea.<sup>60</sup> While the *dord* which puts Rúad to sleep and leads to her death might be supernatural in origin, the language of the passage could also be interpreted as referring to the hypnotic murmuring of the falling water.

In the verse *dindshenchas*, this sound is explicitly said to be a supernatural occurrence: “luid dar bord cen brig m-bluga fri dord síd na sam-guba” ‘she leapt overboard, not mastered by a spell, but at the doleful music from the fairy mounds.’<sup>61</sup> While Gwynn translates *síd* as ‘from the fairy mounds,’ the music emerges from the water, and it seems more likely that *síd* is being used adjectivally here to simply mean ‘wondrous, enchanting.’<sup>62</sup> Although neither the prose or verse *dindshenchas* identify the source of this music, both accounts closely resemble the *murdúchann* episodes in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*: they all describe a sonic menace which threatens sailors at sea, use the word *dord* to describe the sound, and describe that sound as putting people to sleep with fatal consequences. Although the term *murdúchann* is not used, it seems likely that the *dindshenchas* of Ess Rúaid is informed by accounts like those in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*.

The *dindshenchas* of Inber n-Ailbinne describes a group of women who live under the sea and have a sexual encounter with a mortal:

Rúad mac Rigduind meic rig Fer Muirigh tarclam lucht .iii. noad do techt tar muir do acallaim a comalae [.i.] meic rig Lochlainne. [Feb] amluidset co leth lenna feimidset imram nach leth amal nos-fastad ingir. Imluid iarum Rúadh tar luíng amach ar co fesad cid dia mbôí ani nos-mert 7 nomsaoi falii. Atchi iarum .ix. mna coimiu do mnaib [domain] 'ga fostad, triar fo cach nóadh. Rucsat leo Ruad dono co fáoi .ix. n-oidhci la cach; mnoi for tir tartha nó for longaib credumai. Cor[o] toirrci áon dib úaidhib, 7 rogeall afrithisi a tiachtain andochum ma roised a set.

Luid dono Rúad co tech a comalta 7 fáí lais .uii. mbliadna., 7 luid forcúla, 7 ní rofir a dáil, co torachi Magh Muirigh. Luidset [didiu] na nóí mna cusin mac 7 ros-

<sup>60</sup> *eDIL*, s.v. ‘dord’; Dineen, *Foclóir Gaeidhilge-Béarla*, s.v. dord.

<sup>61</sup> Gwynn, *The metrical Dindsenchas*, iv: 4-5.

<sup>62</sup> *eDIL* s.v. ‘síd.’

fucsat léo dia [te]tarracht, 7 ni mon-airnic doib. Marbaid dono a máthair a mac fein annsin, 7 aen mac Rúaid, 7 focerd urchur [dó] dia chind, conid and asbert cach amail bid o oengen : «Is ollbine, is oillbine ! » Unde dicitur Inber n-Oillbine.<sup>63</sup>

Rúad son of Rigdonn, son of the king of Fir Murig, mustered the crews of three ships to go over sea to have speech with his fosterbrother the son of the king of Lochlann. When they had got half way across they were unable to voyage in any direction, just as if an anchor was holding them. So then Rúad went out over the ship's side that he might know what it was that was stopping them, and he turned under the vessel. Then he sees nine women, the loveliest of the world's women, detaining them, three under each ship. So they carried Rúad off with them and he slept for nine nights, [one] with each of the women, on dry (?) ground or on beds of bronze. And one of them became with child by him, and he promised that he would come again to them if he should perform his journey.

Then Rúad went to his foster-brother's house and stayed with him for seven years, after which he returned and did not keep his tryst truly, but fared on to Magh Muirigh. So the nine women took the son (that had been been among them), and set out (singing, in a boat of bronze,) to overtake Rúad, and they did not succeed. So the mother then kills her own son and Rúad's only son, and she hurled the child's head after him; and then said every one as if with one mouth, « It is an awful crime ! It is an awful crime ! » Hence Inber n-Oillbine.

Both the prose and verse versions of this story identify the women who live underwater as women (Old Irish *ben* and inflected forms) or “female forms” (*baindelba*), terms which suggest fully anthropomorphic beings rather than ‘mermaids.’ These women are described as exceedingly beautiful, have sexual encounters with humans, and are capable of bearing children with humans; all of these details are suggestive of later seal and mermaid-bride legends, although in this account it is the women who initiate the encounter rather than the man. Like the mermaids in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, these women are able to hinder Roth’s sea voyage although, unlike those mermaids they do not pose a direct threat to him. A number of other details in this passage suggest parallels with other traditions. The combined details of a child born to a human and an aquatic being, an appointment made by the father, and the death of the child caused by its mother

63 Text and translation: Stokes, “The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindsenchas,” 1894, 294–95. Text and translation for the verse *dindsenchas* has been published as Gwynn, *The metrical Dindsenchas*, ii: 26-35.

(or her associate) is suggestive of the Scots ballad “The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry” although, since the ballad was composed several centuries later, these similarities might be coincidental.<sup>64</sup>

The motif of a mother murdering and dismembering her child in order to exact revenge upon the father is found in Euripides’ *Medea* and might have influenced this account.<sup>65</sup> In an otherwise lost poem quoted by Snorri Sturluson, the god Heimdall claims to have nine mothers, which some have identified as the nine daughters of Ægir and Rán, sometimes identified as the nine waves.<sup>66</sup> Although only one of the women in the *dindshenchas* of Inber n-Ailbine is the mother of the unnamed child, all nine women act as one, and bewail the evil deed with a single voice.

The *dindshenchas* of Waterford consists of four layers of tradition: a fairly obscure poem in *roscad* metre, a prose account, a verse account that closely agrees with the earlier prose one, and a later prose account which synthesizes the earlier prose and verse.<sup>67</sup> The *roscad* poem states that Roth died and was dismembered while crossing the Sea of Wight, and that his body parts, including his thigh (*lárac*, genitive *láirce*) drifted back to Ireland on the sea.<sup>68</sup> The earlier prose account attributes this violence to a group of *murdúchainn*:

Fectas doluid Roth mac Cithing, maic rig Insi Aine a tirib iath Fomorach la  
hairchind tiri do chu[a]ird a coicriche, co cuala [inní] .i. dord na murdunchunn do

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64 See p. 131.

65 Text and translation: Euripides, *Cyclops* ; *Alcestis* ; *Medea*, 284–413. The relevant passage occurs at ll. 1231–1292. The severed head as projectile is a distinctively Irish motif, of course, so if this passage stems from an imitation of *Medea*, it has been well-adapted to conform to Irish literary tradition.

66 For the nine mothers of Heimdallr, see Faulkes, *Edda: Introduction and Gylfaginning*, 25–26; Faulkes, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, 19. For the identification of the nine mothers of Heimdallr with the nine daughters of Ægir and Rán, see Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, 105–7.

67 Bowen, “Varia I,” 144–45.

68 The *roscad* was first published in Stokes, “The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindshenchas,” 1894, 433. alongside the later prose redaction. Stokes attempted to translate the first two lines of the *roscad* and stated that “the rest of this production is by me untranslatable.” Bowen offered a tentative translation of a portion of this *roscad* in Bowen, “Varia I,” 147. A critical edition and translation of the entire poem by Ranke de Vries, who graciously shared her translation with me, is forthcoming in *Ériu*.

Muir n-Icht. Is ed in fuath atconnairc .i. in murduchund fo deilb ingine mac[d]acta. Is blaithem [u]as lind 7 ichtar brotharluibnech biastaide fothi fo lind. Co n[d]uadar na biasda he, co ndaralsat he ina aigib, co ruige in fairge a da lairg cosin port hut, 7 no[t]hallad da[il] ced for mael gach cnama. Unde Port Lairge dicitur.<sup>69</sup>

Once upon a time, Roth, son of Citheng, son of the King of Inis Aine, went from the lands of the Fomorian countries with a chief (?) of the land to go round his boundary, when he heard somewhat, the burden of the mermaids of the Ictian Sea. This is the form that he beheld, the mermaid with the shape of a grown-up girl. Above the water she was most smooth; but below the water her lower parts were hairy-clawed and bestial. So the monsters devoured him and cast him away in joints. And the sea carried his two thigh-bones to yonder port, and the share of a hundred would fit on the flat of each bone. Hence Port Lairge ("Port of the Thighbone") is (so) called.

Both the later prose and the verse *dindshenchas* agree with this account closely, adding the detail that the *murdúchainn* have long, golden hair, but omitting to mention that they devoured Roth before scattering his dismembered remains on the seas.<sup>70</sup> The *murdúchainn* in this passage act in the same way as the ones in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*: they bewitch sailors with their sleep-inducing song, kill or lead them to their deaths, and then eat their remains. As noted above, this behaviour resembles that found in classical accounts of the siren, although the siren's voice entices sailors rather than putting them to sleep. As in the *dindshenchas* of Ess Rúaid, the sleep-inducing music is referred to as a *dord*, a term which suggests a low, repetitive utterance that one could easily imagine as having hypnotic qualities.<sup>71</sup>

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69 Text and translation: Stokes, "The Bodleian Dinshenchas," 489–90.

70 The verse appears in Gwynn, *The metrical Dindsenchas*, iii: 190-193.

71 *Dord* often refers to natural sounds and the vocalizations of animals, although it may refer to a human vocal performance, especially in connection with the Fianna. *Dord* covers a similar semantic range as *sían* and *esnad*, and the latter word is connected to *dúchann* (as in *murdúchann*) in some early Irish sources. Nagy, "Fenian Heroes and Their Rites of Passage," 175–76.

Although there are no extant accounts of the performance of *dord*, *sían*, or *esnad*, the use of these words, to me at least, suggest a type of overtone singing,

The *dindshenchas* of Port Láirge is of particular interest for the present discussion as it contains the earliest clear physical description of the *murdúchann*. Both the prose and verse accounts state that they have one appearance above the water (that of a beautiful woman), and another, dramatically different, appearance beneath the water. It is possible to interpret this description as indicating that the *murdúchann* can assume a human form but reverts to her natural form when immersed in water, or that she was hiding her inhuman part in order to lure her prey. In both prose accounts this lower part is described as *brotharluibnech biastaide* ‘hairy-clawed and bestial,’ which is suggestive of an aquatic mammal such as an otter or seal rather than a fish.<sup>72</sup> The verse identifies her lower part as “métithir tulaig tend-glain, do muraig do mór-femnaig” ‘as big as a broad bright hill, of shell-fish and heaps of weed.’<sup>73</sup> While the prose *dindshenchas* presents the *murdúchann* as a hybrid of human and aquatic animal (similar to the modern image of the mermaid, albeit not piscine), the verse description instead presents a partially human embodiment of the sea, made up of the seaweed and shells that are regularly cast upon the shore. While the *murdúchainn* of the Waterford *dindshenchas* are similar to the modern *murúch* in many ways – they are partially human, beautiful, alluring, and dangerous – there are some prominent differences: mermaids in recent tradition do not lure humans with their song, usually bringing death through more occult means rather than engaging in violence, and they are usually not described as bestial. The exact relationship between the Waterford *dindshenchas* and oral tradition (including oral traditions contemporary to the *Dindshenchas*) is unclear, but these passages do confirm that an image similar to the contemporary mermaid – the upper half of a

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72 For the often sinister character of otters in medieval Irish as well as later Irish and Scottish tradition, see Falaky Nagy, “Otter, Salmon, and Eel in Traditional Gaelic Narrative,” 124–26. See also Hillers, “The Man Who Never Slept (MLSIT 4082): A Survey of the Redactions and Their Relation to the *Lai de Tydorel*,” 94–96.

73 Gwynn, *The metrical Dindsenchas*, iii: 192-3.



beautiful woman, the lower half of an aquatic being – was already present as early as the twelfth century.

### 3.2.4 Lí Bán

The ninth-century martyrology *Féilire Óengusso* mentions a figure known as Muirgen in the entry for the sixth calends of February (i.e. the 27<sup>th</sup> of January): “carais moéda Muirgen, mírbail gein co mbúadaib” ‘My Lord loved Muirgen, a wondrous birth with victories!’<sup>74</sup> Four manuscript witnesses to *Féilire Óengusso* contain a gloss which identifies this Muirgen as a figure named Lí Bán:

Carais 7rl moirgein .i. gein in mara .i. ab Glinne Uisen, *ut Oengus dicit*. No Muirgein ingen Aedan i mBelach Gabrain, *qui martires alebat pro Deo, et Deus amabat illum per hoc*. Nó Muirgein .i. gein in mara .i. Liban ingen Eeach mic Muireda, *a quo Loch [n]-Eeach nominatur*. Is i ro bóí .ccc. bliadan il-Loch Eeach co n-asragaib Beóán iascaire Comgail ina lin, 7 [co] ros-baist Comgall iarsin, 7 coro innis fein a inthusa do Chomgall 7 co ndecheid docum nime, *et narrauit ei omnia quae accederant ei in aquis*.<sup>75</sup>

[My Lord loved Muirgein, i.e. the birth of the sea, i.e. abbot of Glen Uissen, as Oengus says. Or Muirgein, daughter of Aedán, in Belach Gabráin, *who nurtured martyrs for the sake of God, and God loved him for this*. Or Muirgen, i.e. the birth of the sea, i.e. Líbán daughter of Eochaid, son of Muirid, from whom Loch n-Eeach (*Lough Neagh*) is named. ‘Tis she that was three hundred years in Loch n-Eeach, till Beóán, St. Comgall’s fisherman, caught her in his net, and Comgall afterwards baptized her, and she herself told her dealings to Comgall, and went to heaven, *and recounted to him everything that had befallen her in the waters*.]

This gloss is followed by a version of the poem *Muirgein, is gein co mbuadaib* ‘Muirgein, ‘tis a birth with triumphs,’ found in *Aided Echach meic Muireda*, discussed below.<sup>76</sup>

74 Stokes, *Féilire Óengusso céli dé*, 38. Translation by Whitley Stokes.

75 Stokes, 50–51. Translation by Whitley Stokes, Latin translated by author. Stokes’s edition of this note is derived from a single manuscript, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson B512, with readings from Bodleian Library MS Laud 610. de Vries notes that a third manuscript, National Library of Ireland MS G10 contains a nearly identical text, although the fourth, University College Dublin Franciscan MS A7, contains significant variation. This variant gloss can be found, with translation, at de Vries, *Two Texts on Loch nEeach*, 46–48.

76 The version of *Muirgein, is gein co mbuadaib* in the gloss on *Féilire Óengusso* differs considerably from that in *Aided Echach mac Muireda*, and contains a number of quatrains from *Fo Loch Echach*, another poem in the

The term *muirgein* is a compound of *muir* ‘sea’ and *gein* ‘birth,’ and could easily be interpreted as referring to an aquatic human-like being, but the context in which it appears (a calendar of saints) suggests that Muirgein is the personal name of a saint. The first two parts of the gloss identify possible subjects of the half-quatrain (implying that the name Muirgen is unisex), while the third identifies her as Lí Bán, a figure whose story is given in *Aided Echach meic Muireda*, and who is connected to the *muirgeilt* mentioned in annalistic sources.<sup>77</sup> It is unclear when Muirgein would have first been identified with Lí Bán. Pádraig Ó Riain has dated most of the commentary on *Féilire Óengusso* to 1170-1174 although, as this particular gloss is not found in every manuscript, it might be later. The presence of this gloss does indicate, at least, that the story of Lí Bán found in *Aided Echach* was well-known in late medieval Ireland.

Another figure named Lí Bán appears in *Acallam na Senórach*, although she is identified as the daughter of Eóchaid mac Eógain meic Ailella, rather than Eóchaid mac Muireda.<sup>78</sup> Shortly after the episode discussed above, in which the two sons of the king of Connacht appear to Finn in a dream as two seals, Caílte and the king of Ulster came to Beanna Boirche, the Mourne mountains in present-day County Down. At the shore, a beautiful young woman appeared on the wave and spoke to Caílte, identifying herself and claiming that she had been living underwater for a hundred years since the death of Finn mac Cumhaill, but that she has come to the shore on this day in order to see Caílte. Shortly after this conversation, the king’s hunting dogs chase a

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latter text. De Vries notes these quatrains in her editions of these two poems, and includes diplomatic editions of all versions of the gloss to *Féilire Óengusso* in an appendix. De de Vries, *Two Texts on Loch nEchach*, 204–15, 272–75.

77 See pp. 151-2.

78 Stokes, *Irische Texte mit Übersetzungen und Wörterbuch*, 91–92. Translation: Roe and Dooley, *Tales of the Elders of Ireland*, 97–98.

number of wild deer into the sea. Lí Bán asks Caílte for the loan of his spear, and she kills a great number of deer before departing from them.

*Aided Echach maic Maireda* is a compilation of earlier materials relating to the flooding of Loch n-Echach ‘Lough Neagh,’ which is found only in the late eleventh or twelfth-century manuscript *Lebor na hUidre*, in the hand of the last scribe to work on that manuscript, conventionally known as H.<sup>79</sup> The text’s most recent editor, Ranke de Vries, argues that H is responsible for the compilation but that the text includes poetry that can be dated back to the ninth or tenth century.<sup>80</sup> Despite the title, the eponymous Eóchu mac Maireda only appears in the first third of the story, and the rest focuses on the figure of Lí Bán. Eóchu is a king who resides in the plain of Líathmuine, where there is a well that he keeps covered and guarded. One day, the woman he had set to watch over the well neglected to cover it, and the well flooded, creating present-day Loch n-Echach, and killing everyone who lived in Líathmuine except for Lí Bán, Curnán (who died shortly afterwards of grief), Conaing (whose fate is unknown), and Lí Bán’s lapdog. Lí Bán lived under the waters of Loch n-Echach for three hundred and one years accompanied by her lapdog, who had been transformed into an otter.<sup>81</sup> At the end of this time, Beóan, fisherman to Saint Comgall of Bangor, finds her in his nets. She tells him her life’s story,

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79 See the introduction to Best and Bergin, *Lebor na Huidre*. Other scholars have raised the possibility that H is not a single hand, but a number of separate hands trained in the same school. For the purposes of the present discussion, it is sufficient to note that *Aided Echach Maic Maireda* is the work of a single hand, and was one of, if not the, last hand to add to the manuscript. For a more recent discussion of H, see Duncan, “The Paleography of H in *Lebor Na hUidre*.”

80 de Vries, *Two Texts on Loch nEchach*, 15–19, 191.

81 The otter is referred to as a *dobrán* in this text, but the word *doburchú* (a compound of *dobur* ‘water’ and *cú* ‘hound’) is well attested in early Irish literature, and many early Irish sources draw a connection between otters and dogs. Falaky Nagy, “Otter, Salmon, and Eel in Traditional Gaelic Narrative,” 125–27.

Numerous terms for ‘otter’ in Irish and Scottish Gaelic include a canine element, e.g. *cú dobhráin*, *gaidhrín sáile*, *mad(r)a uisce*, *madadh donn*, *cù donn*, *cù-odhar*, and so on. In transforming into an otter, the lapdog is changing into another type of dog better suited to an underwater life.

and then makes an arrangement to meet the other saints of Ireland a year later. At that meeting, she relates her experiences to the saints, and they offer her the choice of baptism followed by an immediate death and salvation, or baptism followed by a long life and the promise of heaven. She chooses the former, and is subsequently buried at Beóan's dwelling in Tech Dabeóc (possibly Loughbrickland, County Down), and is venerated as a saint.<sup>82</sup>

For the present discussion, the most relevant elements of this text are Lí Bán's time spent underwater, the transformations she undergoes, and the names she is given during that time. In the poem *Fo Loch Echach*, Lí Bán describes herself in a variety of ways: “bá-sa inon bíast án, oll” ‘I was the same as a splendid, great monster’ (9h), “i rricht íaich acht mo chend” ‘in the shape of a salmon but for my head’ (9h), “ciapsa duine, ciapsa bled” ‘whether I was a person or a sea-monster’ (9i),<sup>83</sup> “mé muc mara méthas tond” ‘I, a porpoise which a wave fattens’ (9l), “cenid me in Murgelt már” ‘although I am not the famous Muirgeilt’ (9m),<sup>84</sup> “nirbo mé in Murgeilt már” ‘I was not the famous Muirgeilt’ (9s), “rom-ain, co cían funchi fó” ‘save me, a *fuinche* under it for a long time’ (9u). Following this poem, the prose states that Lí Bán was given the name Muirgein (explained as “gein mara” ‘sea-birth’) following her baptism, and that “a leth ‘na bratán ro boí 7 a lleth n-aill ‘na duni” ‘she was half fish, half human.’<sup>85</sup> The poem *Muirgein, is gein co mbúadaib* which follows this statement identifies her as both Lí Bán (10b) and Muirgen (10a, 10e), and describes her appearance twice, first as simply dreadful: “cé do-rat Ísu i n-

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82 For the identity of this location, see de Vries, *Two Texts on Loch nEchach*, 43–45.

83 An alternate reading of this line in National Library of Ireland MS G 7 is “ciabsa bledmil, nipsa bledh” which de Vries translates as ‘although I was a whale, I was no monster.’ De Vries, 206–7.

84 De Vries glosses *Muirgeilt* as “Sea-roamer.” De Vries, 209.

85 De Vries translates *bratán* as ‘fish,’ although normally the word specifically refers to salmon. *eDIL*, s.v. ‘bratán.’

anrecht” ‘although Jesus gave her a dreadful appearance’ (10a),<sup>86</sup> and then as half-human, half-fish:

Ingnad in richt as baí lus  
 - Día do-rigni in firt follus -  
 a drech abbán, ceirbo cacht;  
 a lleth do bratán bitbalc.<sup>87</sup>

[‘Remarkable was the shape out of which grew a tail  
 - God has wrought the manifest miracle -  
 her face [was] very white, although she was a captive;  
 half of her [was] that of a very strong salmon.]

Elsewhere in the text, it is said that God transformed Lí Bán into a salmon (*bratán*) and her dog into an otter (*dobrán*), and that ‘her appearance and shape were remarkable’ (“ba ingnad a túarascbáil 7 a delb”).<sup>88</sup>

Lí Bán assumes a dizzying variety of forms: a sea mammal, a monster, a fish with a human face, a half-human and half-fish being, and even a *fuinche*, a term which likely refers to a demonic creature of some sort.<sup>89</sup> The text states at two points that Lí Bán was known as Muirgein after her baptism, and the conclusion notes that she was also known as Muirgeilt and Fuinche afterwards. The statement that Fuinche is one of Lí Bán’s names perhaps derives from the statement in *Fo Loch Echach*, where she refers to herself as a *fuinche*.<sup>90</sup> The reference to Muirgeilt as one of her names might also stem from the use of this word in that poem, although in both cases where the word is used, she *denies* being *in muirgeilt mór* ‘the grand/famous

86 In her notes, de Vries explains that she interprets *anrecht* as *ainricht* ‘dreadful shape, evil plight,’ and interprets this as a reference to her physical form on the basis of the rest of the poem. De Vries, *Two Texts on Loch nEchach*, 249.

87 de Vries, 212–13.

88 de Vries, 214–15, 216–17.

89 de Vries, 246.

90 de Vries, 208–9. De Vries discusses the possible influence of another amphibious figure, Fuinche Garb, from the commentary on Féilire Óengusso on Lí Bán at de Vries, “The Names of Lí Bán,” 46–50.

*muirgeilt*.<sup>91</sup> It is possible that there was a being known as *In Muirgeilt Mór* in earlier tradition, from whom Lí Bán distinguishes herself, that became eclipsed by Lí Bán as the body of material around her developed. If this is the case, then this earlier tradition might have informed the mention of *in muirgheilt* in *AU* 572.5.<sup>92</sup>

De Vries notes that “while Lí Bán in [*Aided Echach meic Muireda*] undeniably has certain mermaid/siren-like features [...] she is hardly a generic mermaid.” She is not a member of a distinct ‘species’ of partially human beings native to the sea but a human who happens to live underwater, and her fish-like appearance can be seen as an aquatic analogue to the partially avian appearance of that other famous literary *geilt*, Suibne mac Colmáin.<sup>93</sup> The Lí Bán mentioned in *Acallam na Senórach* is undoubtedly related to her ‘sister’ in *Aided Echach*: both have a very similar genealogy, both are survivors of a tragedy (the death of Finn and much of the Fianna, and the flooding of Loch Neagh), and both have lived underwater for many years since that tragedy; but the Lí Bán who speaks to Caílte is described as a human-shaped being. It may be, as de Vries argues, that the human-shaped Lí Bán represents an earlier stage in the development of the figure seen in *Aided Echach*.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, because of the many differences between their two stories, along with the fact that other women named Lí Bán are found in early Irish literature, it may be more accurate to regard the two figures as multiforms of a common narrative tradition.

The oldest section of *Aided Echach*, the poem *Fo Loch Echach*, which de Vries dates to the ninth or tenth century on linguistic grounds, portrays Lí Bán as a person who lives

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91 de Vries, *Two Texts on Loch nEchach*, 206–7, 208–9.

92 Pp. 151-2.

93 de Vries, *Two Texts on Loch nEchach*, 33–34.

94 de Vries, 35.

underwater for hundreds of years in a variety of forms, which, with the exception of the salmon with a human face or the *fuinche*, are those of animals. This portrayal is consistent with other stories about encounters between survivors from the pre-Christian era and saints, such as *Imacallam Choluim Cille ocus ind óclaig i Carn Eolairg* (discussed above) and *Scél Túain meic Chairill*, in which the representative of the past is able to survive up until the present day by transforming him or herself into a series of different beings.<sup>95</sup> Those passages identifying Lí Bán as something like a mermaid are linguistically later, specifically, a quatrain in *Muirgein, is gein co mbúadaib*, which de Vries tentatively dates to the eleventh century, and descriptions in the prose, which she dates to the twelfth.<sup>96</sup> These dates are consistent with the lack of any obvious mermaid-like figures in Irish literature prior to the twelfth century, as noted above. It seems likely, therefore, that the image of Lí Bán as half-fish and half-human is a relatively late addition, which evolved under the influence of literary representations of the *murdúchann*.

Despite some obvious similarities – her appearance, aquatic habitat, and association with music – Lí Bán is a very different sort of being than the mermaids found in other medieval literary works or in modern oral traditions. She is benign, rather than menacing; a holy virgin rather than an object of desire or a seductress; and she willingly seeks out interaction with humanity (or at least with the Church). While Lí Bán is a survivor who seeks re-integration into the human community, the mermaids of later Gaelic tradition are essentially inhuman, and their relations with humanity are typically short-lived. There may be an element of continuity between Lí Bán's story and the theme found in Irish folklore that mermaids were the daughters of pagan

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95 See p. 137n10. De Vries discusses this function of Lí Bán at de Vries, 36–37.

96 de Vries, 191–94.

kings who were transformed in order to avoid the coming of Patrick,<sup>97</sup> but this frames the relationship between mermaid and saint as one of opposition, unlike what we see in *Aided Echach meid Muireda*. Lí Bán seems to have had very little influence on the contemporary folklore of Ireland or Scotland. This absence is unsurprising: her biography conforms to a literary pattern of survivors from the distant past who narrate their story to a saint, justifying the authority of the Church in Ireland (and the authority of that particular saint and his *familia*). This type of story reflects, among other things, an ecclesiastical and institutional set of interests, far removed from those of the rural, maritime, working class from whom the bulk of modern traditions was recorded.<sup>98</sup>

### 3.3 Conclusions

While seals are not particularly well attested in early Irish literature, those depictions that do exist are fairly consistent: seals are portrayed alongside other prestigious animals, they are respected for their physical strength, they are mentioned in contexts involving transformation and magic, and they are at times portrayed in a sinister light. While very few of the specific beliefs and stories connected with seals in modern Gaelic tradition are directly attested in the older literature, the ideas and attitudes implicit in these older literary depictions are more or less consistent with those known in later tradition.

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97 See p. 45

98 Twentieth-century accounts of the creation of Lough Neagh may preserve the detail that a well overflowed when someone forgot to replace the covering stone (e.g. NFCS 835:138. Collector: Theresa Daly, Straboe National School, County Laois, 25<sup>th</sup> November, 1937), but these accounts do not feature Lí Bán. An alternate explanation is that Fionn MacCumhaill (or some other giant) tore a sod of earth out of the ground to throw at another giant, creating both Lough Neagh and the Isle of Man (e.g. NFCS 1031:483. Collector: Derrick Harron, Ballynakew Mountain National School, County Donegal, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1938).



The story of the mermaid, however, is far more complex. Human-like beings who normally dwell underwater appear relatively early on in the records of Irish tradition,<sup>99</sup> but nothing resembling the image of the mermaid or siren – half-human and half-fish or half-bird – is to be found before the eleventh century at the earliest. The term *murdúchann* ‘sea-chant’ first appears in the twelfth century, mostly in literary contexts that are derivative of Classical depictions of the Siren. Some of these twelfth-century texts describe the *murdúchann* as a composite being, a beautiful woman with long hair combined with some aquatic animal, much like the contemporary *murúch*. A reference to a *murdúchann* in the Annals of Loch Cé indicates that at least some people believed such beings existed, implying that legends about *murúcha* were in circulation by this point. The various stone carvings of long-haired half-fish mermaids in Irish churches begin to appear from the fifteenth century onward.<sup>100</sup> By the seventeenth century, when Míchéal Ó Cléirigh produced his redaction of *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, he included a description of the *murdúchainn* that would not have been out of place in a contemporary legend.

This particular image of the mermaid, along with the word *murdúchann*, appears to have spread from the learned culture of the scriptoria into the oral culture of farmers and fishermen throughout the Gaelic world, possibly displacing or combining with older representations of the ‘people of the sea.’ This is not to suggest that nothing comparable to the mermaid existed in earlier Gaelic tradition; it is scarcely conceivable that any maritime culture would not tell stories about the sea and the beings that dwell within it. Rather, narrative patterns which were likely

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99 A diminutive human-shaped figure, referred to as a *lúcorpán* (whence modern Irish *leipreachán* ‘leprechaun’), who lives underwater appears in *Echtra Fergusa maic Léti* ‘The Saga of Fergus mac Léti,’ which D. A. Binchy dated to the eighth century. Binchy, “The Saga of Fergus Mac Léti.”

100 Of the examples from church art that Jim Higgins discusses, none of them can be dated to any earlier than the early fifteenth century (Higgins, *Irish Mermaids*, 39-96) This is only slightly later than the first attested use of the word *mermaid* in the English language, in 1350. McArthur, Lam-McArthur, and Fontaine, *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. mermaid.

quite old, as they speak to very basic human concerns and material conditions which were unlikely to have changed much in rural maritime communities, likely accommodated the new figure of the *murdúchann*. In other words, the *murdúchann* became a tradition-dominant in the Gaelic world, because of the influence of literati and, perhaps, visual depictions of such beings such as those which survive in late medieval churches. It is unclear when, or even if, the term *maighdean mhara* replaced *murúch* or *murdúchann* in Ulster, Connacht, and Gaelic Scotland; *maighdean mhara* is a more obvious description of this being, whereas the relatively late survival of scribal culture in Munster may have contributed to the use of a literary word in the local dialect.

In the first chapter, it was suggested that The Mermaid Legend originated in the Gaelic world, and that the normal form of the tradition involved a marriage to a seal. While there are no direct written sources for this legend in the Gaelic world prior to the nineteenth century, and this thesis is therefore impossible to prove with certainty, the idea that the more familiar image of the ‘mermaid’ entered Ireland in the later middle ages is consistent with that idea. The normal form of the legend involving marriage to a seal was transmitted from Scotland to Orkney and Shetland, and from there to the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and continental Scandinavia. Shetland and Orkney were Norse possessions from about the ninth century until the end of the fifteenth, and it seems likely that the legend would have been transmitted during this period, when Shetland and Orkney maintained robust connections with the rest of the Scandinavian world. If the legend had travelled to Orkney or Shetland towards the beginning of this range of dates, it would have done so before this image of the mermaid had developed and spread throughout this world; if it had

travelled closer to the end of this range, it may have done so before this shift had become complete.

#### 4. Understanding The Mermaid Legend

The previous three chapters have focused on the content of The Mermaid Legend, and its relationship with oral and literary Gaelic traditions. This chapter will focus on the *function* and *meaning* of the legend: in other words, what a performer hopes to accomplish by telling the story (the behaviour they wish to encourage, the norms they wish to uphold or question, and so on), and the emotional responses that the legend triggers in the minds of the performer and their audience. It is worth noting from the outset that there is not a single answer to these questions; what a performance means and does depends much on variable factors such as the time and place of the performance, the people involved, and their relationships with one another. Like its subject matter, The Mermaid Legend is fluid and protean, traversing boundaries of language and genre and feeding off the influxes of other traditions; any attempt to pin down this legend into watertight categories runs the risk of apprehending only its surface. Any given story cannot simply mean anything, of course – if that were the case, there would be no point in asking these questions. As with any creative work, the form of the legend both imposes restraints on the performer, and suggests new directions their imagination can take.

In his discussion of mermaid legends from Gotland, Sweden, Ulf Palmenfelt makes some comments which are worth quoting in full:

Characteristic of all folklore is its dual quality of being both collective and individual. Any corpus of folklore can be understood, at one level, as the collective expression of ideas and values existing within a certain group of people. From this communal stock the individuals of a society are free to compose their own repertoires of stories, jokes, songs, or proverbs, all in accordance with their respective personalities. The collective ownership of folklore permits the individual users to hide behind a screen of anonymity, liberating them from taking personal responsibility for the values expressed in it.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Palmenfelt, “Seductive, Generous, and Dangerous like the Sea Itself: Gotlandic Mermaid Legends as Moral Examples,” 261.

Similarly, performers of folklore are both representative members of folk groups with their own sense of identity, traditions, and values, and individuals with their own histories, tastes, and values, which may dissent from those of the group. Tradition, like the sealskin cloak, can present a familiar appearance to the world while concealing a more complex inner reality.

This chapter will examine The Mermaid Legend at both collective and individual levels. The communities where the legend has been collected can hardly be said to be homogeneous – they speak different languages, adhere to different sects of Christianity, and relate to the dominant groups of their respective nations in different ways – but the legend, by and large, relates to aspects of life that are substantially the same wherever the story is told: dependence upon the sea for food, travel, and trade; isolation; a stigma against sexual encounters outside of wedlock; and so on. Because the majority of known versions of The Mermaid Legend were collected from Ireland, this discussion will focus mainly on the Irish material, although many of the observations made about the legend as a “collective expression of ideas and values” are applicable to communities beyond Ireland as well. Following this discussion, the chapter will turn to an analysis of versions of the Mermaid legend recorded from two performers, who have been chosen for their skill, the size of their repertoires, and the existence of detailed biographic information about them: Éamonn a Búrc of Carna, County Galway, and Peig Sayers of Dún Chaoin, County Kerry.

#### **4.1 The Mermaid Legend as Collective Expression**

Several popular legends take the form of an encounter between a representative of the community and an Other, and much of the meaning of such legends – the norms and customs

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In an earlier article, Palmenfelt had made a tripartite distinction between the “immediate textual level,” the “collective contextual level,” and the “individual level,” while still emphasizing the “dual quality” of folklore as collective or individual. Palmenfelt, “On the Understanding of Folk Legends.”

that are enforced, the conceptual categories explored, and the anxieties and fears which are voiced – comes from the nature of that Other and its relation to the community. Legends about the restless dead explore the line between living and dead, voice anxieties about mortality, and re-enforce funerary customs; contemporary legends about foreigners disseminate stereotypes, encourage self-segregation, and articulate fears about immigration; and so on. The mermaid and the seal are powerful and multivalent symbols, and the relationship between the male protagonist of *The Mermaid Legend* and these beings can be understood in terms of a number of binary oppositions: man *versus* woman, human *versus* animal, land *versus* sea, domestic *versus* foreign, culture *versus* nature, and other oppositions. Both the mermaid and the seal occupy the liminal space betwixt and between the poles of many of these dichotomies: the hybrid body of the mermaid incorporates both human and animal, terrestrial and aquatic features; the seal is an amphibious animal, constantly moving between land and sea, who bears an uncanny resemblance to humanity.<sup>2</sup>

As almost all versions of the legend state that the man marries and/or has children with the supernatural woman from the sea, most performers are drawn to the opposition man *versus* woman and use the legend to explore and discuss issues of human sexuality, marriage, and gender relations. On the one hand, the legend re-enforces traditional attitudes towards marriage, choice of partner, and the dangers of sexual desire; on the other hand, performers may use the “screen of anonymity” noted above to critique those norms, to voice frustration and hurt caused by those norms, and to violate them through fantasy. The same performance may do both;

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2 On the resemblance between seals and humans, see p. 90ff.

The mermaid can be seen as occupying a liminal space between the two binary genders: while she is described as a woman from the waist up, her lower half – the somewhat phallic fish tail – obscures her primary sexual characteristics. Hayward, *Making a Splash*, 13–14.

characteristic of much women's folklore is *coding*: "The adoption of a system of signals...that protect the creator from the dangerous consequences of directly stating particular messages. Coding occurs in the context of complex audiences, in situations where some of the audience may be competent to decode the message, but others – including those who might be dangerous – are not."<sup>3</sup> In other words, men (who may identify with the male protagonist of the legend) interpret the legend in different ways from how women (who may identify with the captive and isolated mermaid) and children do.

For male storytellers and audiences, one obvious function of the legend is to give expression to sexual fantasy and wish fulfillment.<sup>4</sup> The mermaid or seal woman is consistently described as young and beautiful, and she exposes her body to the man's gaze by removing her skin or cloak and dancing or combing her hair. Combing one's hair is an act normally done in private, so this detail emphasizes her vulnerability and exposure. As women in rural Ireland and Scotland commonly wore head-coverings until fairly recently, the mere fact that the mermaid's hair is fully visible might have a quasi-fetishistic appeal to some.<sup>5</sup> The man encounters her alone, outside of the domestic space, with no observers; as an outsider, she is not subject to the same obligations and social entanglements as women from the community would be. The legend provides a safe outlet for fantasy and desire but also discourages young men from acting on that desire. The young man encounters the supernatural woman in an exposed state, steals her clothing, and marries her soon after; this sequence of events likely reminded members of the audience of sudden and unanticipated marriages between young people in everyday life. The two

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3 Radner and Lanser, "The Feminist Voice," 414.

4 Cf. pp. 84-5.

5 Cf. Hayward's discussion of *trichophilia* in modern art. Hayward, *Making a Splash*, 15–16, and in passing.

partners are incompatible, literally from different worlds, and their marriage inevitably leads to separation and trauma for more than just themselves. In a handful of versions, the man's neighbours or family advise him against marrying the woman;<sup>6</sup> infatuated with his latest catch, the man ignores their advice and suffers the consequences.

Bo Almqvist observed that the fact that the mermaid is a stranger and outsider is central to the central message of the legend, which he understood to be “to marry one of your own kind, station, and neighbourhood.”<sup>7</sup> Almqvist further links this idea to the Irish proverb *pós ar an gcarn aoiligh* ‘marry on the dung heap’ – that is marry someone who lives close enough to you to share a refuse pile. At least one informant, Mícheál Ó Corrduibh, drew a similar connection; in National Folklore Collection (NFC) Main Manuscript 1586, his version of The Mermaid Legend is immediately followed by an account of marriage practices in the Gaeltacht:

"Cleamhnas an Charnaoiligh agus Caras Chríost i bhfad ó bhaile." Cineal teagais nó cómhairle a bhí san abairt sin.

Chuireadh na daoíní suim mhór fadó i gcongnamh na gcómharsan, agus bhíodh sé go theagas aca cómharsa béil dorais a phósadh, go mbfearr é ná pósadh i bhfad ó bhaile. Nuair a phosadh fear óg cailín as an mbaile, bhíodh muinntir an chailín sin, agus a cuid gaoltaí gar dhó i gcómhnuidhe le congnamh a thabhairt dhó am ar bith a bheadh ceall leis. Sin é an fáth ar moladh "Cleamhnas an Charn Aoiligh" se sin cleamhnas gar go bhaile.<sup>8</sup>

“Marriage at your own front door, and a godparent far from home.” That saying was a sort of instruction or piece of advice.

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6 Mayo Pub 2, Angus Sound 1, Sutherland Sound 1, Galway MS-Main 15.

7 Almqvist, “Of Mermaids and Marriages,” 38.

8 NFC 1586:235; Mícheál Ó Corrduibh (80), farmer, Ros Duach, County Mayo. Collector: Mícheál Mac Énrí, 1961. I translate *carn aoiligh* (lit. ‘dung heap’) as ‘front door,’ on the grounds that the metaphor does not translate easily. A number of variations of this proverb are contained in *Seanfhocla Chonnacht*; the second element is either some variation of “díol do bhó i bhfad ó bhaile” ‘sell your cattle far from home,’ or “cairdeas Críost i bhfad ó bhaile” ‘a godparent far from home.’ Tomás Ó Máille interprets the proverb as meaning “pós ean aitheantais, ach déan gnó ceannaíochta le strainséirí” ‘marry a familiar woman, but do business with strangers.’ Ó Máille, *Seanfhocla Chonnacht*, § 2903.



Long ago, people used to take great interest in help from their neighbours, and it was their advice to marry a close neighbour, that it was better than marrying far from home. When a young man would marry a girl from the townland, that girls' family and her relations would always be near him to give help anytime there would be need for it. That's the reason that a "marriage at your own front door," that is, a marriage close to home, was recommended.

An anti-exogamous sentiment is made more explicit in a handful of versions collected from Munster, including two from Labhras Ó Cadla. After the mermaid bride escapes, taking her children with her, the man exclaims: "'Á,' ar seisean, go diombádach: 'mairg a thugann cúl le cine agus ná pósann bean ar a aitheantas!'" "'Á," he said, sorrowfully, "woe to him who turns his back on his people and marries a woman not of his acquaintance."'<sup>9</sup> While, as noted in the first chapter,<sup>10</sup> this statement occurs in versions of the legend likely stemming from a common written source, its presence in oral tradition would suggest that it articulates ideas compatible with that tradition. The mermaid or seal-woman is a foreigner, unfamiliar to the young man, and lacks any human kin. While she may bring dowry with her, such as mysterious cattle, and the household may prosper under her management, the couple do not have access to the material and emotional support of her kindred. They are deeply incompatible; the supernatural woman is often said to spend her time on land in misery and, due to her nature, she must eventually return home underwater.

In addition to the functions discussed above, the legend also has the potential to provide advice about proper conduct to those who are already married. While the man is rarely said to be abusive or cruel towards his wife,<sup>11</sup> she is very often able to escape as a direct result of his own

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9 Waterford MS-Main 5

10 P. 75.

11 With the noteworthy exception of Argyll MS 6, in which the husband rebukes his wife for her base or inhuman origins.

neglect or oversight. In most versions from the southern half of Ireland, the man searches for something in the loft and, as a result of anger or impatience, inadvertently throws the stolen cloak or skin to the floor where the woman finds it. In Scotland and the northern half of Ireland, the children find out where their father has hidden this stolen object, and tell their mother where it is. Often they find this out by watching their father move the cloak or skin from one haystack to another or take it out to examine it before returning it; in a number of versions it is explicitly said that the man ignored the fact that his children were nearby when he was doing this. In versions from Iceland and the Faroe Islands, as well as in some versions from Munster, the man locks the stolen object in a chest, and the woman finds it when he leaves the key at home one day. The implicit message in these details is that the stability of the family depends, in no small part, on the man paying attention to his wife, children, and domestic property, and on his not acting rashly. Alternatively, the woman's escaping as soon as her husband lets his guard down, or her returning to an aquatic husband, might be a coded way to express anxieties about infidelity for some tellers.<sup>12</sup>

Like the supernatural bride, women in rural Ireland and Gaelic Scotland married into their husband's family and community and could expect to experience similar feelings of loneliness and discomfort in their marriages. It seems likely that many women telling or listening to the story would identify with this figure. Through this identification, women in the audience could receive lessons about proper behaviour and sexual mores and explore wish-fulfillment fantasies. Identifying with the mermaid also allows female storytellers to communicate their own

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12 It is perhaps significant that the motif of the aquatic husband is more common in Protestant regions, where divorce and remarriage was at least nominally permissible under certain circumstances.

experiences, desires, and fears through the voice of the mermaid, while distancing themselves from those statements and maintaining plausible deniability.<sup>13</sup>

One function of The Mermaid Legend, observed above, is to warn young men about the possible consequences of sexual indiscretions; women may, of course, find similar messages in the legend. The theft of the mermaid's cloak (often described as red) or seal-woman's skin by the young man could be functioning as a metaphor for the sexual act and perhaps the loss of virginity.<sup>14</sup> After this encounter, many versions state, the woman is compelled to follow the man who stole her skin or garment; this compulsion can be understood as representing the pressures of shame and societal pressures on young people who get pregnant (or have sex) outside of wedlock to marry.<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting that, even in versions of the story told by women, the mermaid or seal-woman typically plays a passive role in the initial encounter. Although some versions state that she takes an interest in the man and agrees to follow him home, in most versions she is unambiguously a victim, and the young man an aggressor. The legend provides somewhat different messages to young men and young women: while both groups are warned about the dangers of pre-marital sexual encounters, young women are also warned about being alone and vulnerable in the presence of young men.

As noted in the first chapter, the time between the supernatural bride's capture and her escape attracts relatively little attention from most narrators: many simply state that children

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13 Radner and Lanser, "The Feminist Voice," 420.

14 Sylvie Muller draws attention to the potential significance of the colour red, as symbolic not only of the placenta or amniotic membrane, but of menstruation. Muller, "Trésor d'archives," 234–36. While her analysis of the colour symbolism is plausible, her attempt to connect the figure of the mermaid to pre-Christian cthonic goddesses oversteps what the available evidence can say.

15 cf. Almqvist, "Of Mermaids and Marriages," 37. With the loss of her skin, cloak, or tail, the mermaid becomes unable to swim and transitions from one world (the sea) to the other (land). This can be read as analagous to the sexual act, which entails a similar transition from 'innocence' to adulthood.

were born and that a number of years passed, while some state that she was happy or came to love her husband, or state that she was miserable and longed for her home underwater. These details do not follow any discernible geographic pattern, as if performers had a certain degree of freedom in characterizing the woman's time on land and could use this episode to send coded messages to some of their audience. In light of this, it is perhaps significant that most recorded versions of the legend (which were told to collectors and not close kin or friends) do not pay much attention to this part of the story.

As noted above, marriages in rural Ireland (and elsewhere) in the early twentieth century (and in previous centuries) was patrilocal – women commonly left home and travelled to their husband's homes and communities. The mermaid or seal woman's longing for the sea could represent the homesickness and isolation experienced by young women struggling to find a place for themselves in a new community. This motif allows performers to talk about their own experiences in coded language and provides a warning to young women about the consequences of marrying too far away.<sup>16</sup> The supernatural bride's unhappiness while on land also seems to relate to the unhappiness and dissatisfaction that many real-life women feel in their marriages. While the mention of spousal abuse in the legend is rare, personal incompatibility can lead to a breakdown of communication and a loss of any meaningful connection with one's spouse. Hence, the aquatic husband who visits the woman on land or watches her from a distance could symbolize regret over having chosen the wrong suitor.

It is worth noting that many of the descriptions of the unhappy captive woman – her moroseness, social isolation, unwillingness or inability to speak or laugh – correspond with what we would now recognize as the symptoms of mental illnesses such as chronic depression,

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<sup>16</sup> In other words, *cleamhnas an chairn aoiligh*.

postpartum depression, and disassociation.<sup>17</sup> While the causes of these illnesses were poorly understood, the people who knew this legend would have been familiar with women who, in response to harsh conditions, trauma, genetic inheritance, or some combination of these factors, would isolate themselves and lose the ability to connect and engage with the world around them. These descriptions of the mermaid or seal-woman's behaviour lend themselves well to coded discourse about one's own mental state, or that of one's family, friends, and neighbours. In light of this, it is worth noting that some versions of the legend contain what are more or less obvious references to suicide. In Mayo MS-Main 5, collected from Peadar Buiréad, the man is said to move the stolen *brat* from hiding place to hiding place until his children see him doing so and tell their mother what they have seen. Their mother finds her stolen *brat* and leaves immediately; Peadar concludes by saying: “agus 'se mo bharúil go ru an brat 'fhad faoi obair, dá chuir siar 7 aniar 7 dá chur in chuile-át, 7 go ru sé b'fhéidir stróicthí i n-áiteachaí 7 nuair a fua sí sa bhfaraige aríst chuala mé an sgéala dhá rá gur báithiú í nuair nach ru an brat iomlán aici” ‘and it is my opinion that the cloak had been worked over for a long time, being taken out and put back in, being put everywhere, and that it might have been torn in places, and when she went into the sea again I heard the story that she was drowned because she didn't have the whole cloak.’ If the cloak is an extension of the woman herself, and the husband caused so much damage to it over the course of their marriage, then it is no wonder that she could no longer go on living. This idea is more explicit in two versions (Aberdeen Sound 1 and Midlothian Sound 1) recorded from

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17 This parallels the well-attested belief that conditions which we would now recognize as mental disorders are due to the interference of the fairies, or because one has been replaced by a changeling substitute. Cf. Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 29–34.

Stanley Robertson; in both versions Stanley tells the informant that he believes that the selkie might have been a real woman who drowned herself in the river Dee.<sup>18</sup>

If we exclude those few examples where the supernatural woman drowns in the attempt to escape, or where she is re-captured later by her husband, she is able to recover her stolen property and leave her husband for good in nearly every version of the legend. It seems natural to interpret this outcome as a wish-fulfillment fantasy for female storytellers and audiences: a socially condoned way for women to express their frustrations with their current living arrangements and their desire to leave. In the legend, when the woman gets back her stolen skin or cloak, she is often joyful, although in many versions she is reluctant to leave but must do so. This ambivalence seems like a tacit acknowledgement of the complex nature of human relationships: even in stifling and unhealthy relationships there is often something – for example, young children, or genuine affection between the couple – that still binds people together. It is worth noting that, like the tenor of the supernatural woman's relationship to her husband, these details do not follow a geographic pattern and may reflect deliberate choices by the performers rather than tradition.

Many versions of The Mermaid Legend emphasize the supernatural woman's connection with her children. In many versions from Scotland, the northern half of Ireland, and the Nordic countries, the children help her escape and, after she returns to her native element, she visits them at the shore, bringing them fish or combing her hair. She is also said to kiss her children goodbye, comb their hair and wash their faces, prepare a final meal, and so on, before she leaves them on land. Less frequently, she takes her children underwater with her. While many women

18 "She might've been a real woman who just, commi- drooned herself in the river, but her body was never found, so..." (Midlothian Sound 1). "But my father said to me, it could have been, she wis found by the river, and it could have been she committed suicide... because he was a real man, he had a real wife, his wife went to the river and was never found again. And that's the selkie of the river Dee" (Aberdeen Sound 1).

living in rural communities would have wanted to leave their marriages in some way (suicide being a rather drastic option), the emphasis on children in many versions of the legend can be seen as reminding them of what they would lose; alternatively, these versions can be seen as a fantasy in which a woman can leave and yet still have access to her children. While the episode in which the mermaid transforms her children into stones, found in several variants from northern Connacht, can be seen as having a primarily etiological function (explaining the presence of a rock formation in County Mayo), it is certainly relevant here. Almqvist suggested that this episode may be seen as “an allegory on the destructive effect of divorce on children.”<sup>19</sup> This is certainly possible; some versions state that she turns her children to stone because they cannot follow her underwater (with the implication that she does not want her former husband to have them), and when she regrets this decision, she tries but is unable to disenchant her children. This episode also lends itself well to interpretation as a wish-fulfillment fantasy: raising children is a stressful and exhausting experience, and, while few would admit to wishing harm on their own offspring, the thought of being free of them is attractive, especially if one is only married because of an unintended pregnancy.

In the first chapter it was noted that several informants recall learning the story from parents or other relatives, information that suggests that the Mermaid legend was one that was frequently told to children, and so it is worth considering how they might have interpreted and benefited from the story.<sup>20</sup> Along with other legends, the story would have formed part of the informal education of a child: although they would likely have missed its sexual subtext, children

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19 Almqvist, “Of Mermaids and Marriages,” 40.

20 As noted above (p.71), Icelandic versions of the legend include a verse which might function as a lullaby, a genre typically performed for children. Numerous modern adaptations of the legend, such as the films discussed in chapter five, and the illustrated books that are ubiquitous in Scottish bookshops, are aimed at contemporary children.

would nonetheless have internalized its lessons about proper behaviour. The legend may also be seen as a coping mechanism, as it provides young children with a model for understanding difficult events such as the death of, separation from, or conflict between parents. The emphasis found in many versions of the legend on the relationship between the supernatural woman and her children reflects the reality that women were responsible for most of the labour of raising children in Ireland and elsewhere; it is also conceivable that mothers telling their children this story might have emphasized this connection in order to express their affection for their children. That the children are responsible for the mermaid or seal-woman's escape, a motif found in Scotland, the northern half of Ireland, and some of the Nordic countries, could be potentially troubling for children, and lends itself to multiple possible understandings as an example to be contrasted with the storyteller's (presumably cohesive) family, a warning not to interfere in a delicate situation, or a coded cry for help.

While many versions of The Mermaid Legend identify particular families as being descended from a mermaid or seal-woman, there is very little evidence to suggest that members of these families told stories in which they identified themselves as the descendants of such a being.<sup>21</sup> There is, on the other hand, some evidence that members of such families not only did not disseminate this belief, but might have reacted negatively to any mention of this connection.<sup>22</sup> It is not immediately obvious why people would deny or react negatively to statements connecting their family to a mermaid or seal-woman: while it is possible that this

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21 As noted in Appendix IV, very few tellers connect themselves or their own family to the people involved in the Mermaid Legend.

22 E.g. in Cork MS-Main 4 "breed na púice" is used as a disparaging nickname for descendants of the nickname, and in Waterford MS-Main 2, it is said that her descendants would not tolerate being called "clann na brúch" more than once. David Thomson reported being warned not to mention any connection between seals and the Conneelys in the presence of a member of that family. Thomson, *The People of the Sea*, 182–83.



association could be considered an accusation of bestiality, the supernatural bride does always take on a human form while she lives on land. Both mermaids and seafolk are uncanny, dangerous beings with supernatural powers; interfering with or even simply seeing one can have disastrous consequences. To be associated with such beings, whether through contact or ancestry, might suggest that a person is dangerous or untrustworthy as well.<sup>23</sup>

Many versions of The Mermaid Legend state that the descendants of the mermaid or seal-woman have webbed hands and feet or scaly patches on their skin: common congenital conditions known as simple syndactyly and ichthyosis vulgaris, respectively.<sup>24</sup> These accounts thus perform a straight-forward etiological function, explaining why these conditions are to be found within the population, and why they are more likely to occur within certain families. In other versions, families descended from the supernatural woman are ‘marked’ in less visibly apparent ways: good or bad luck at sea, great strength, possession of a cure or other magical gift, and so on.<sup>25</sup> In addition to playing an etiological role, explaining why these families are set apart in some way, the legend in these cases helps to transmit and reinforce knowledge of that difference: it is important for members of the community to know which families possess magical and/or medical skills, or which families are good or bad luck to be with in a boat, qualities not readily apparent, unlike the congenital defects noted above.

In some areas The Mermaid Legend acts as a form of oral history, memorializing an event, usually a tragic or unfortunate one, while at the same time obscuring its historic causes. As the author has demonstrated elsewhere, versions of the legend that mention the downfall of the

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23 In Kerry, the belief that it is unlucky to be in the same boat as a member of the O’Shea family has been recorded. See p. 117 above.

24 Eberly, “Fairies and the Folklore of Disability,” 73.

25 See Appendix IV

O'Dowd family represent a historical memory of the O'Dowds as a prominent dynasty in northern Mayo and Sligo in the late middle ages, their decline, and the significance of Ard na Ria as a contested site during the period of their downfall.<sup>26</sup> Versions of the Mélusine legend collected from County Clare play a similar function, explaining the downfall of the O'Quinn family at the hands of an angry supernatural bride.<sup>27</sup> Many versions from Kerry mention that the O'Sheas who descend from the mermaid will drown if they go to sea, or if they travel any further out to sea than the bar at Rossbeigh strand, an account indicating a possibly distorted memory of a drowning at that place involving the O'Sheas. Further, references to other descendants of the mermaid who are prone to drown in particular bodies of water, or who will never drown in particular bodies of water, might be derived from memories of mass drownings, in which members of these families died or were the sole survivors.

While the foregoing discussion has been preoccupied with the binary of man *versus* woman, and related questions about marriage, the family, and kin-groups, other related oppositions informing the legend are those of human *versus* environment and land *versus* sea. As Kate Chadbourne states, The Mermaid Legend is a “[narrative form] commenting on the proper relationship of fisherman to the sea itself.”<sup>28</sup> The protagonist of the story is often a fisherman or coastal farmer and is typically engaged in regular maritime labour (such as fishing, gathering seaweed, and so on) at the beginning of the legend. When he finds the mermaid or seal woman, a personification of the sea, he oversteps a boundary and attempts to kidnap her. This decision ultimately has negative consequences for him: he loses his wife and possibly his luck, children,

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26 Darwin, “‘Súil Uí Dhúbhda Le hÁrd Na Ríogh’: Oral Tradition and History on the Mayo–Sligo Border.”

27 Almqvist, “The Mélusine Legend in the Context of Irish Folk Tradition,” 29–31, 50; Darwin, “On Mermaids, Meroveus, and Mélusine: Reading the Irish Seal Woman and Mélusine as Origin Legend.,” 11–12.

28 Chadbourne, “The Knife Against the Wave,” 83.

or even his life. The mermaid may bring him prosperity for a time, but her gifts are contingent upon her favour, and can be easily revoked.

The opposition between humans and the sea is most obvious in those versions of the legend that mention the sunken city of Cathair Tonn Tóime, which periodically rises from the deep. In these versions, the young man, who is almost always an O'Shea, usually tries to steal the *brat* because he wants to disenchant the city or prove his own valour, rather than because he is infatuated with the mermaid and wants to take her for his wife. In response to the theft, the mermaid (or some other being) summons a wave that almost overpowers the man and sometimes kills his horse, sweeping away the back half of the animal. After the mermaid earns her freedom, her former husband and his entire family earn the undying enmity of the sea: any O'Shea who crosses the bar at Rossbeigh strand, or who is on the sea at all, will be drowned. The young man's transgression has consequences for the community as a whole, as even a single O'Shea can imperil the entire crew of a ship.

The Mermaid Legend, like maritime folklore in general, urges people to treat the sea with respect and a healthy degree of caution, and to expect sudden and drastic changes of fortune and circumstance. It articulates anxieties about both the necessity of engaging with the sea and its unpredictable nature: on the one hand, it provides food, allows for quicker travel than is possible overland, and provides access to international trade. On the other hand, it is an unpredictable neighbour, and storms and adverse weather will disrupt and delay human activity, and at worst lead to tragic loss of human life. This complex relationship is symbolized by two ideas that appear frequently in The Mermaid Legend: the mermaid as avenging mother-figure, bringing both life and death, and kinship networks that encompass both land and sea. Just as humans are

implicated with their own terrestrial kin they are inextricably bound to the sea in complex ways that involve obligation, reward, and often danger.

#### 4.2 Éamon de Búrc

Éamon de Búrc was born in 1866 in Carna, County Galway, and at the age of fourteen his family moved to Graceville, Minnesota, as part of an ill-fated attempt by the Archbishop, Father John Ireland, to colonize land from which the Dakota had been recently expelled with Irish immigrants.<sup>29</sup> Three years later, de Búrc lost one of his legs in a railway accident, and the family returned to An Aird Mhóir in Carna. There, he trained to be a tailor and opened a small shop and, despite his disability, worked as a sailor and fisherman for most of his adult life. He married twice and outlived both of his wives but never had any children of his own.<sup>30</sup> In 1928 or 1929, de Búrc met Liam Mac Coisdealbha, who was working as a school-teacher in Carna at the time, after mac Coisdealbha's students provided him with a list of local storytellers and tradition-bearers, a list which included de Búrc.<sup>31</sup> Mac Coisdealbha began recording stories from de Búrc at his home, and would return to Carna almost every year to record material until de Búrc's death in 1942.

While de Búrc is primarily known for his mastery of the longer heroic tale – Kevin

O’Nolan refers to one of his stories, *Eochair Mac Rí in Éirinn* [‘Eochair, a King’s Son in

29 Bourke, “Economic Necessity and Escapist Fantasy in Éamon A Búrc’s Sea-Stories,” 19–20.

An Bunachar Náisiúnta Beathaisnéisí Gaeilge states that de Búrc was four or five years of age when he travelled to America (Diarmuid Breatnach and Máire Ní Mhurchú, “DE BÚRC, Éamon,” [ainm.ie, https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=14](https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=14) (accessed March 21)). Bourke, on the basis of research conducted by Seosamh Ó Cuaig for a documentary on the colony, states that de Búrc must have been much older.

30 Little is known about de Búrc’s own relationship with his wives. While it is possible that his experiences of courtship, marriage, and becoming a widower informed his telling of the legend, it is impossible to say this with any certainty.

31 See the introduction to *Eochair Mac Rí in Éirinn* and de Búrc’s obituary published in *Béaloides*. de Búrc, *Eochair, Mac Rí in Éirinn*, 26–39; Mac Coisdealbha, “Éamonn (Liam) A Búrc (Áill Na Brón, Cárna, Co. Na Gaillmhe).”

Ireland'] as “the longest tale ever recorded in Irish from oral narration”<sup>32</sup> – he was also an accomplished teller of supernatural legends. His versions of legends, as Angela Bourke notes, were considerably longer than average, and often began with the formulaic openings typical of the longer tales.<sup>33</sup> One version of The Mermaid Legend is known to have been collected from de Búrc: this was recorded by Mac Coisdealbha on the evening of July 18, 1942, a few months before de Búrc died.<sup>34</sup> Mac Coisdealbha was at that point a full-time collector of the Irish Folklore Commission and had been regularly visiting de Búrc for over a decade, so the two men had developed a close personal relationship. While the manuscript does not note who else was present at the time of recording, Mac Coisdealbha states elsewhere that these recording sessions were typically public affairs, drawing visitors from the area to hear de Búrc’s stories.<sup>35</sup> His version of The Mermaid Legend is quite long, taking up eight pages in the manuscript, and a summary follows.

The story takes place a few hundred years ago in Errismore, western Connemara. Every year at Beltane (the first of May), three seals would come to a rock near the shore, remove their cloaks (de Búrc uses the term *ceann-cochall* ‘head-cochall’), and transform themselves into beautiful women. They would swim for a while in human form before putting on their cloaks and returning to the sea in the shape of seals. A young man named Mac a Conuíola ‘Conneely’s son,’ who lived alone by the shore and watched them every year, became infatuated with the youngest of the three seal-maidens. One spring, Mac a Conuíola met a stranger while working in the field,

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32 de Búrc, *Eochair, Mac Rí in Éirinn*, 9.

33 Bourke, “Economic Necessity and Escapist Fantasy in Éamon A Búrc’s Sea-Stories,” 21.

34 Galway MS-Main 8. This was translated as “The Conneelys and the Seals” in Ó Súilleabháin, *The Folklore of Ireland*, 113–19.

35 de Búrc, *Eochair, Mac Rí in Éirinn*, 32–35.

and they began talking. Mac a Conuíoia told the stranger about the seal-maidens and his desire for the youngest one; in exchange for his blessing the stranger told him how to capture her: Mac a Conuíoia should hide near the rock before they arrive, and steal their cloaks while they were swimming, hiding the cloak of the youngest seal-woman under his shirt. When they notice that their cloaks are missing, the stranger says, they will lament and ask Mac a Conuíoia to give them back; he is to give the two older seal-women back their cloaks, but, no matter how much she asks for it, he is not to give the youngest woman back her cloak. She will follow him home, and have no choice but to stay with him as long as he keeps the cloak hidden from her. The following Beltane, Mac a Conuíoia sets out to the rock, and things come to pass as the stranger said. The youngest seal-woman follows Mac a Conuíoia home, eventually marrying him and bearing him five sons. Years later, while Mac a Conuíoia is away fishing, the thatched roof of the house catches fire, and as neighbours are tearing the thatching off the house to prevent the spread of the fire, she finds her *ceann-cochall*, seizes it, and returns to the sea despite the efforts of her children to stop her. After this, she visits her children at the shore and converses with them every day for the next five years, before vanishing forever. Most people in the area by the name Conneely are descendants of those five children, hence the family's nickname of “na rúintí” ‘the seals.’<sup>36</sup>

Several important details of de Búrc's story are consistent with the way the legend is often told in county Galway: the young man is a member of the Conneely family, his supernatural bride is a seal-woman, she discovers her stolen garment when the house catches fire, and she visits her children at the shore for some time after she returns to the sea. What

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36 Standard Irish *róinte*. The long vowel *ó* is often raised to *ú* in the presence of a nasal consonant, and strong plurals frequently end in *-í* in Connemara dialects of Irish.

stands out most about de Búrc's version is its length: it is over seventeen hundred words long, most of which describe the initial episode in which the man encounters and captures the seal-woman. De Búrc achieves this length through the use of narrative techniques such as repetition and tripling: there are three seal women, each of whom are described as taking off their cloak and assuming human shape; the stranger tells Mac a Conuíoia how to capture the seal woman and how she and her sisters will react to his ploy, and then Mac a Conuíoia and the seal women are described acting as he predicted. Another striking element of de Búrc's performance is that he seems to express a great degree of sympathy for the captive seal woman: he emphasizes her emotional distress at being unable to return to sea and her unwillingness to follow her captor home.<sup>37</sup> After her capture, de Búrc says, "go gcaoineat sí a dóthain achuile lá," 'she would cry her fill every day.' The helper figure who tells the man how to capture his would-be bride is found in other versions of the legend, but the motif that the young man is too poor to offer him any reward other than his blessing is, to the best of the author's knowledge, unique.

At first glance this story might appear to be a wish-fulfillment fantasy. Mac a Conuíoia has no family or material wealth to speak of at the start of the story but falls in love with a beautiful young woman, who, as the daughter of the king of the sea, is even a princess. Despite his poverty he receives aid from a mysterious (and possibly supernatural) benefactor, and is able to obtain the object of his desire, become prosperous, and have children to carry on his name. The concluding episodes of the story tear down this fantasy: an unexpected and accidental fire triggers a series of events causing Mac a Conuíoia to lose much of what he had won for himself: "Nuair a tháinic Mac a Conuíoia trathnúna bhí leath a' tí dóghte 7 a bhean imithe 7 a chúigear

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37 When the author read Ó Súilleabháin's English translation of the story to an undergraduate Celtic class in November 2018, many of the students commented on what they saw as de Búrc's unusual degree of sympathy for the seal woman.

mac a' caoine,” ‘When Mac a Conuíola arrived in the evening, half of his house was burned down, his wife had gone, and his five sons were weeping.’ While the children are still able to visit their mother, this state of affairs does not last. The element of fantasy is clearly present in de Búrc’s telling of the legend, as most of his performance is dedicated to relating how the poor farmer escaped poverty and married a beautiful princess, but the story ends on a more sombre, moralistic note. De Búrc allows the audience temporary escape through a fantasy but then reminds us how unlikely that fantasy is – things that seem too good to be true often are.

De Búrc characterizes the captive seal woman as a highly social being: her first appearances were in the company of her sisters, and when her *cochall* was stolen she was worried about her father’s reaction to her absence. While on land she pined after her aquatic family, and after she found her *cochall* and returned home, she would visit her terrestrial children. In contrast, Mac a Conuíola lived on his own before, with no close family or meaningful connection with his neighbours: before capturing the seal woman, his only interaction with another human was with a stranger. He chose his bride for purely selfish and superficial reasons, rather than considering the needs of his own family, her kin, or indeed, her wishes in the matter. By acting in this way, he made the woman he claimed to love miserable by forcibly separating her from her family and ultimately brought disaster upon himself. At the same time, the couple’s involvement in the community prevented the outcome from being much worse: when the fire started, several neighbours immediately acted to try to put the fire out, preventing the house from being completely consumed.

When the visiting stranger asked Mac a Conuíola what he would give the person who told him how to capture his bride, Mac a Conuíola replied, “Níl ionam... ach fear bocht 7 níl mé i



n-ánn aon duais a thóirt duit ach mo sheacht míle beannacht” ‘I am only a poor man and I cannot give you any reward save my seven thousand blessings,’ which the stranger considered to be adequate compensation. This motif is rather unusual and since it appears to be unique to de Búrc’s version, as noted above, it is worth considering in more detail. In a longer tale, one might expect that the blessing would have further significance later in the story: the stranger might return and aid the hero out of gratitude for his blessing, the stranger might be a ghost whose soul is put to rest by the hero’s blessing, and so on. That is not the case here: after the stranger has been blessed, he leaves the narrative and does not return. While the stranger clearly does expect some compensation for sharing his knowledge about the seal women, he is willing to share it with someone in need in exchange for nothing more than his blessing, a simple statement of goodwill. As the stranger is just passing through the community, it seems unlikely that he would expect to ever be fully compensated for his help.

The contrast between Mac a Conuíaola’s interactions with the stranger and with the seal women is striking. He treats the stranger respectfully and as an equal and seeks nothing from the encounter except for a friendly conversation. When the stranger offers to tell him how to capture the seal-woman, Mac a Conuíaola is honest about what he is able to offer in return and makes no attempt to deceive the stranger. The stranger in turn gives Mac a Conuíaola what he wants and neatly leaves the story without causing any mischief. In contrast, Mac a Conuíaola treats the seal woman as a prize rather than a person, kidnapping her and forcing her to remain on land and away from her family against her will. While he does benefit from these actions for a while, this state of affairs cannot last, and he inevitably loses what he has gained.

The motif that the woman would visit her children at the shore, after she had recovered her stolen skin or garment and left her husband, is well-attested in versions of the legend from County Galway and elsewhere.<sup>38</sup> Very few recorded versions outright state that she stopped visiting her children (although this can be inferred from the fact that her children are mortal and therefore eventually died), and no other recorded version of the legend states that she told her children that she would cease visiting them after a set period of time. It's not obvious why this latter detail is included here, or why the woman is said to stop visiting her children after *five* years in particular. This could be seen as an attempt to close off any narrative 'loose ends': if the woman continued to visit her children, her husband would have had the opportunity to capture her again, and the woman's daily visits with her children would have forced them to remain in the area, preventing them from spreading the family across Connemara. Alternatively, this detail might be a compromise: for aesthetic or ethical reasons, de Búrc might have preferred a total separation between the seal woman and her former family, but was unwilling to go against tradition by completely removing the motif of the woman visiting her children.

As with his other supernatural legends, De Búrc's version of The Mermaid Legend presents an attractive fantasy in which young men are able to act freely on their desire, independent of the constraints and obligations placed on them by their family and community, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of these constraints and obligations and warning against the ruinous consequences of selfish behaviour.<sup>39</sup> Mac a Conuíola marries the young woman who is the object of his desire without consulting anyone; this leads to her being miserable during her time on land, and to him and his children being heartbroken when she

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38 Pp. 57-8.

39 Bourke, "Economic Necessity and Escapist Fantasy in Éamon A Búrc's Sea-Stories," 28.

inevitably returns to the sea. Their neighbours are quick to help trying to put the fire out and continue attempting to do so after the woman finds her cloak and runs to the sea, with her children following in an attempt to restrain her. The house was only “half-burnt” when Mac a Conuíoila returns from fishing; without their aid there would have been nothing left. Arguably, his choice in partner placed the whole community in danger: the houses are described as being close to one another, and had Mac a Conuíoila married a human female, she would not have run away from the burning house upon discovering a choice garment. The stranger who tells Mac a Conuíoila how to capture his would-be bride can be read as a sinister figure, given that this knowledge does lead to ruin for the man. If this bargain is regarded as a self-contained episode, however, it promotes the idea that one should give help freely, without expecting anything more than a blessing, a simple statement of good will, in return.

These messages are consistent with de Búrc’s own behaviour. He gave freely of his time to Mac Coisdealbha, providing him material and helping him make connections with other tradition-bearers, and took great offence when he heard that another storyteller from Carna had refused to be recorded. After his death, Mac Coisdealbha stated that Éamonn had never been interested in accumulating wealth and would readily share anything that he had.<sup>40</sup> De Búrc lived a difficult life in many respects: because he had no children, he (and his wives, when they were alive) were solely responsible for the labour of managing the household, While the loss of his leg did not prevent him from sailing, it was a definite impairment, even more so on land. It’s not unreasonable to draw a connection between these experiences and de Búrc’s generosity: he likely

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40 “Ní rabh aon dúil i maoin a’ tsaoil seo ag Éamonn. Aon nídh a d’fhághadh sé sgaoileadh sé uaidh arís go fánach” Mac Coisdealbha, “Éamonn (Liam) A Búrc (Áill Na Brón, Cárna, Co. Na Gaillmhe),” 213.

would have benefited from the kindness of his neighbours at several times in his life and would have felt sympathy for those who needed help in distress that was no fault of their own.

De Búrc's recorded repertoire was collected in the later years of his life, most often during public performances in his own house. His age and his status as the host gave de Búrc an air of authority in these settings, which allowed him to mould the behaviour and outlook of younger members of his audience. Life on the sea is harsh and demanding, and a rugged individualism will only lead to one's death. De Búrc reminds us of the communal character of life in rural coastal communities: actions have consequences that extend beyond the individual. One should act mindfully of their obligations to the community (especially in matters of the heart) and freely give aid where it is needed. These are lessons de Búrc himself would have learned from his many years on the sea, the hardships he faced in his life, and perhaps his experiences during the failed attempt to settle in Minnesota.

### 4.3 Peig Sayers

Peig Sayers is best-known for her autobiography, *Peig*, which she dictated to her son Mícheál Ó Gaoithín (known locally as 'An File'). *Peig* was required reading in Irish schools for several decades and, along with Tomás Ó Criomthainn's *An tOileánach* and Muiris Ó Súilleabháin's *Fiche Blian ag Fás*, formed the core of the canon of the Gaeltacht autobiography, a genre whose influence on Irish-language writing in the twentieth century can scarcely be overstated.<sup>41</sup> In addition to her importance in the history of writing in modern Irish, Peig was an accomplished storyteller, with a broad repertoire that encompassed local history, supernatural legends, and the longer tales traditionally associated with male tellers.<sup>42</sup> During her life she

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41 O'Leary, "Contemporary Poetry in English, 1940-2000," 258-59.

42 E.g. Delargy, *The Gaelic story-teller*, 6-7.

worked with no fewer than a dozen folklore collectors and dialect scholars from Ireland and other European countries.<sup>43</sup>

Peig was born in 1873 in Ballyferriter, County Kerry, as one of thirteen children, of whom only four survived to adulthood.<sup>44</sup> Because of interpersonal conflicts between her sister-in-law and the rest of the family, she spend most of her teenage years working away from home in An Daingean, until the age of eighteen, when her brother Seán arranged a marriage for her with Peatsaí Ó Gaoithín of An Blascaod Mór, who was thirty years old at the time. Peig moved to the island and lived with Peatsaí and his extended family. They had ten children who, with the exception of Mícheál, died or emigrated to America. Peatsaí suffered poor health throughout the length of their marriage, and after his death Peig relocated to Baile an Bhiocháire on the mainland in 1942, where she lived until she passed away in 1958.

The Mermaid Legend was collected from her on at least three occasions: by Robin Flower, c. 1930, during a visit to An Blascaod Mór; by Kenneth H. Jackson, sometime between 1932 and 1937, during his visits to the island; and in 1952 by Seán Ó Súilleabháin, Caoimhín Ó Danachair and Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha, while Peig was staying in Saint Anne’s Hospital in Dublin.<sup>45</sup> All three versions present the same course of events, and all contain a poem that the *murúch* recites in response to an insult to her family; in all three versions the text of this poem is

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43 Almqvist, “Kenneth Jackson and Peig Sayers The Creation of ‘Scéalta Ón mBlascaod,’” 99. See also references in Sayers, *Labharfad le cách*.

44 Diarmuid Breatnach and Máire Ní Mhurchú, “SAYERS, Peig,” ainm.ie, <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=676> (accessed March 21).

45 The versions recorded by Jackson and Ó Súilleabháin et al. are Kerry Pub 8 and Kerry Sound 1, respectively. Flower’s recording is housed at the National Folklore Collection in Dublin, among a collection of his papers (Almqvist, “Of Mermaids and Marriages,” 30.) I was unaware of the version recorded by Flower during my stay in Dublin, and was therefore unable to include it in the present study.

substantially the same.<sup>46</sup> It is worth noting that all three versions were recorded by male outsiders; while her personal relationship with the different collectors varied – Flower was closer to her in age, and she would tease him and joke with him like an old friend, whereas her attitude toward Jackson can be described as maternal – all of the collectors were from places with a significant degree of cultural capital: both Jackson and Flower were English, while Ó Súilleabháin and Ó Danachair were employed by the Irish Folklore Commission, which was based in Dublin.<sup>47</sup>

In Peig’s version of the legend, a young farmer’s son lived by the sea and had been unmarried for some time, since he had not met a satisfactory match yet: “Ní phósfach se an bhean a gheóch sé, agus an bhean a bhíoch bhuaig ní bhfaigheach sé í” ‘He would not marry the woman he would find, and he would not find the woman he wanted.’<sup>48</sup> One morning, this young man was by the shore when he came across a young woman sitting on a rock, combing her hair, with a green cloak laying beside her. The young man sneaked up on her, stole her cloak, brought it home, and hid it from her. She followed him home and stayed with him for some time but never spoke. Although he quickly fell in love with her and wished to marry her, he was not willing to do so because she could not verbally agree to a union. Shortly afterwards, a neighbour or relative approached the young man and offered to make her speak: the young man agreed on the condition that his beloved not be abused or insulted. Despite agreeing to these conditions, the helper begins to verbally abuse and insult the mermaid; when he insulted her family she was able

46 See pp. 65-7 for a discussion of the two I’ve consulted in this dissertation. Almqvist, 30, states that the texts differ little.

47 Almqvist, “The Creation of ‘Scéalta Ón mBlascaod,’” 101–2. At the time Kerry Sound 1 was recorded, Peig was also staying in a hospital in Dublin, and was worried about her health, which would have added to the power imbalance between her and Ó Súilleabháin’s team. That Kerry Sound 1 is a more disorganized telling of the legend is probably also due to her illness and anxiety over her health.

48 Kerry Pub 8.

to endure no more and finally spoke up, reciting a poem in praise of her father's house. After this outburst she was able to speak normally and married the young man, bearing him three children. One day, when the man was looking for something in the house, he accidentally let the stolen cloak fall to the ground. The mermaid seized it, cried out, and ran back into the sea, never to be seen again.

Two features of Peig's version of The Mermaid Legend stand out. The first is that the husband is portrayed in a very sympathetic light: while he does steal his would-be bride's cloak, he does not marry her before she is able to give her verbal consent, and he asks that his wife not be tortured or insulted in the attempt to make her speak. The mermaid is compelled to return to the sea when she finds her cloak but does not seem to want to in Peig's version. The second feature is in the episode in which the mermaid is verbally abused until she speaks. In response to the accusation that she is a nobody, she responds with a poem that establishes her place in the world along with her aristocratic credentials.

These details lend themselves rather well to a biographic interpretation. Peig's marriage to Peatsaí was arranged by her older brother; before the engagement ceremony in which Peig and her father gave their consent for the marriage, she had never met her husband-to-be or any of his family.<sup>49</sup> The wedding took place shortly afterwards on the mainland. When Peig travelled to An Blascaod Mór for the first time a few days later, accompanied by her husband and his relatives who had come to the mainland for the ceremony, she was leaving the community where she had grown up to live in a house with a man she barely knew, in a community where she was a total stranger. When she reached the island, she was greeted by a mass of people, none of whom she

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49 On arranged marriages in rural Ireland in the later nineteenth century, see Connell, "Peasant Marriage in Ireland after the Great Famine."

recognized. In her autobiography, Peig recalls feeling unmoored and cast adrift in an uncertain world at this moment:

Bhíos ag cuimhneamh conas a chuirfinn suas lena leithéid de bhaile, gan gaol gan cairde in aice liom. Ní raibh aithne agam ar aon duine acu a bhí ag croitheadh lámh liom. “N’fheadar,” a deirim liom féin, “an dtiocfadh an lá go deo go ligfeadh mo chroí leo, nó an ndéanfaidh mé chomh dána ina measc is dhéanfainn i measc muintir Bhaile Bhiocáire? Ó, ní bheidh siad go deo, dar liom, chomh deas le muintir Bhaile Bhiocáire! Mo shlán beo chugat, a Cháit Jim! Nach leat a bhí an t-ádh! Beidh lán do chos den talamh míntíreach agat, pé scéal é. Ní mar sin domsa! Is uaigneach atáim anseo ar oileán mara, gan le cloisint feasta agam ach glór na dtonnta á radadh fein ar ghaineamh na trá!”<sup>50</sup>

I was wondering how I would put up with this sort of a place, without relations or friends nearby. I didn’t know anyone who was shaking hands with me. “I don’t know,” I said to myself, “if the day will ever come when I would open my heart to them, or if I would be as self-assured among them as I would be among the people of Baile Bhiocáire. Oh, they will never be, I thought, as nice as the people of Baile Bhiocáire! My fond farewell to you, Cáit Jim! Aren’t you the lucky one! You will have your fill of cultivated land beneath your feet, anyhow. Not so for me! I am lonely on an island in the sea, without anything to listen to except the sound of the waves flinging themselves onto the sand of the shore!”

Peig was warmly welcomed by her new family and the island community upon her arrival and had little difficulty making new friends. By marrying Peatsaí she was no longer an outsider, but had an identity and a clear position within the community, albeit one contingent upon her relationship with Peatsaí: “Tá cairde mo dhóthain ar an Oileán seo agam a fhad a fhágfaidh Dia agam é” ‘I have as many friends as I need on this Island as long as God will let me have him [i.e. Peatsaí].’<sup>51</sup> This new identity erases, or at least occludes, her former one: although she maintains her former name, she is thought of mainly as Peatsaí’s wife rather than Tomás and Peig’s daughter. Scholars, as well, have tended to privilege Peig’s secondary identity: Jackson refers to

50 Sayers, *Peig*, 127. It is worth noting the contrast that Peig draws between her experiences and those of her friend Cáit Jim. Cáit Jim marries within the community and remains in Baile Bhiocáire; she has ample cultivated earth to walk on. Peig, on the other hand, marries outside of her community into a literally insular one, and connects her feelings of isolation with the sea and the wilderness.

51 Sayers, 127.



the stories he collected from her as *Scéalta ón mBlascaod*, despite the fact that she learned most of her repertoire from her father, and although over half of the book takes place on the mainland, *Peig* is commonly referred to as a “Blasket Autobiography.”<sup>52</sup>

When the mermaid is brought ashore, she cannot speak and thus cannot relate to anyone in the community or assert an identity. She is moved to speak when her would-be-husband’s assistant insults her family, thereby attacking her own sense of self. The interaction, and the poem, are worth quoting in full:

Do thosanaigh sé er a bheith dá brú suas a gcúine an chúine; ansan do thosanaig sé er a bheith a' cainnt agus a' cáine agus a' dí-mhola a muintire gur díobh í. Do bhí sí cortha ó bheith ag éisteacht leis an bhfear críona. Fé dheire d'eighrig an fhuil uasal a n-uachtar an ocht' aici; agus do labhair sí agus seo mar dúirt sí: "Fhir mhath," er sise, "ná cáin a theile me, ní mar sin atá tig m'athar-sa, ach:

Srólach srólach cliarach cláarach finiúgach;  
ni tig druíon e, ná tig cárthan,  
ná tig atá tócaithe a mbár er fhadhb,  
ach tig do chabhail fhín fhada ghléigil,  
agus is minic a léutar an t-Aifirean ann.  
Tá cliain ó Éirin agus cliain ó Áran  
'gus cliain ó Chúil na Seabhac.  
Riarthar iad a dtig Uí Cheala,  
is bíon an Nolaig gach lá don tseachtain ann.<sup>53</sup>

He began to push her down against the corner, then he began to speak and to condemn and to dispraise the people she came from. She was riled up from listening to the old man. At last, the noble blood rose up in her breast, and she spoke, and this is what she said: “good man,” she said, “do not reproach me anymore, my father’s house is not like that, but:

Abounding in silks and satin, well-framed, many-tabled, many-windowed,  
it is not a house of blackthorn, nor a house of rowan-wood,  
nor a house which is raised at the top of a hill,

52 Almqvist, “The Creation of ‘Scéalta Ón mBlascaod,’” 118–19. In the Cambridge History of Irish Literature, Philip O’Leary includes Peig in the canon of the “Blasket Autobiography.” O’Leary, “Contemporary Poetry in English, 1940-2000,” 33.

53 Kerry Pub 8. The similarities in phrasing between this version and Kerry Sound 1 are striking, especially in the use of the phrase “d’éirigh an fhuil uasal in uachtar a h-uchta aici” (Kerry Sound 1) and in the language of the poem.

but a house of long, fair, brilliant construction,  
 and Mass is often read there.  
 There is a fosterling from Ireland and a fosterling from Árann  
 And a fosterling from Cúl na Seabhac.  
 They were reared in Ó Ceallaigh's house  
 And Christmas is every day of the week there.”

After hearing these insults, the mermaid's *fuil uasal* 'noble blood' is stirred, and she responds to the insinuation that she and her family are people of no account with a poem in praise of her father's house, a prominent symbol of the family status, which is rooted in the landscape.<sup>54</sup> The poem begins with a praise of the wealth on display in the house: silks and rich fabrics are prominent, the house has many windows (unlike rural Irish houses at the time), and many tables for the provision of food. The house is well-constructed and conspicuous, rather than being made out of woods such as rowan or blackthorn, which are less suitable for construction, and it was not built in an inaccessible, out-of-the-way place. The reference to Mass being read in the house is surprising given the otherworldly nature of its inhabitants, but it may signal its owner's the ability to patronize the church. Her father has many foster-children from across the world, an indication of his power and far-reaching influence.<sup>55</sup> The mention of “tig Uí Cheala” ‘Ó Ceallaigh's house’ calls to mind the Irish phrase *fáilte Uí Cheallaigh* ‘Ó Ceallaigh's welcome,’ which refers to a particularly generous or princely welcome, evoking a feast hosted by William Ó Ceallaigh in 1351 which was immortalized in a praise poem by Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh.<sup>56</sup> The reference to Christmas, like the reference to Mass, is unusual but perhaps indicates the ability to

54 In Kerry Sound 1, the man's slander about the mermaid's family includes the phrase “ní raibh iontu ach siúd so agus so siúd” ‘they were only this and that.’

55 In Kerry Pub 8, the fosterlings are from *Éire* ‘Ireland’ (presumably the mainland), *Árainn* ‘The Aran Islands,’ and either *Cúl na Seabhac* ‘Corner of the Hawks’ or *Coill na Seabhac* ‘Wood of the Hawks.’ The location of the last place is uncertain. Kerry Sound 1 substitutes *Árainn* for the phonetically similar and more impressive *Spáinn* ‘Spain.’ These place-names imply a large sphere of influence maintained mainly by sea-travel.

56 *Filidh Éireann go hAointeach* ‘the Poets of Ireland to a single house.’ Edited and translated Knott, “Filidh Éireann Go Haointeach.”

regularly host feasts.<sup>57</sup> Together these details indicate that, rather than being a nobody, the mermaid is a person of means and influence, with a clear sense of identity and a place in the world.

While the poem may not have been originally composed by Peig, as mentioned earlier,<sup>58</sup> its inclusion in her performance constitutes a creative act on her part. Even at a young age, Peig was someone who had a strong sense of who she was and of her own history. Like the mermaid in her story, she had very little say in her choice of partner or her decision to marry, and she was brought as a foreigner to a strange community where she knew nobody; it seems likely that she would identify with the figure of the mermaid, whether consciously or not. The mermaid responds to an attack on her identity with a poetic affirmation of that identity. After her outburst, she becomes a speaking subject and is welcomed into the community. While Peig's situation was nowhere near as dramatic as the mermaid's, she was a stranger in her new community and aware that her status and identity on the island were contingent upon her husband. Verbal art – storytelling – gave Peig an identity of her own on the island, and eventually in the broader world.

The mermaid's outburst acquires an added layer of significance from the contexts in which it was recorded. In all three instances, Peig told the story to outsiders who commanded a certain degree of authority by virtue of the places and institutions which they represented: Flower and Jackson came from England, the imperial power for most of Peig's adult life, and were employed by prestigious institutions – the British Museum and Cambridge University, respectively – at the time these versions were recorded; although Ó Súilleabháin was from Kerry, he represented an organization based in Dublin, the nation's capital. Peig, like the mermaid in her

<sup>57</sup> As Ó Dálaigh's poem describes a Christmas feast, there is a slight chance that the juxtaposition of *teach Uí Cheallaigh* with *Nollaig* might represent the echo of a historical memory of this event.

<sup>58</sup> P. 67.

story, is vigorously asserting herself: she is a person of considerable (immaterial) wealth, with her own history and genealogy, and not the anonymous anthropological stereotype of the elderly peasant woman.

Another prominent element of Peig's tellings of the legend is the degree to which the young man is portrayed in a positive light. While he does capture the mermaid by stealing her cloak, as the story demands, he is unwilling to marry the mermaid because she is unable to speak and give verbal consent to any partnership. When a helper-figure offers to make the mermaid speak, the young man agrees but only on the condition that she not be tortured or verbally abused. These details introduce a certain tension between what the young man says and what he actually does or allows to be done, but their inclusion can be seen as part of an attempt to portray the young man in a more positive light and to distance him from blame for capturing the mermaid in the first place. If Peig identified with the mermaid in the story, it follows that she would have associated the young man who captures the mermaid with her own husband – hence her seeming exculpation of this character. While her marriage to Peatsaí had been arranged without her having had much say in the matter, she appears to have been pleased with the match and to have genuinely cared for her husband even through his long period of illness.<sup>59</sup> All of the versions of the legend collected from Peig, along with her autobiography, were recorded years after Peatsaí's death. Time may have erased the memory of some of his faults.

At the end of the version recorded at Saint Anne's Hospital, Ó Súilleabháin asks Peig whether the man ever married again after the mermaid had left him:

SÓS: D'fhag sí ansan é?

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59 Sayers, *Peig*, 127, 165–66. Her autobiography was recorded after Peatsaí's death, so it is entirely possible that nostalgia had coloured Peig's memory at the time it was recorded, although her versions of The Mermaid Legend were also recorded many years after Peatsaí's death, so one would hardly expect them to be indicative of different attitudes towards her former husband.

PS: D'fhag si ansan e.

SÓS: Is ea! Sin é! Is dóigh go bhfuair sé bean éigin eile!

PS: Ní bhfuair, mhuis! Ní bhfuair, a mhic ó!

SÓS: Níl aon tseana-stoca ná faigheann seana-bhróg lá éigin!<sup>60</sup>

SÓS: She left him there?

PS: She left him there.

SÓS: Yes! That's it! He probably got another wife!

PS: He didn't, indeed! He didn't, boy-o!

SÓS: There's no old sock that doesn't find an old shoe some day!

The answer to Ó Súilleabháin's question appears to have had personal significance for Peig, considering how marked her response is. For Ó Súilleabháin it seems obvious that a 'widower' would marry again, as often happened in rural Ireland (and elsewhere), while for Peig it was important that the man who married the mermaid never took another spouse. While it is possible that there is no more significance to her statement than that Ó Súilleabháin's assumption conflicted with the story as she remembered it,<sup>61</sup> the inclusion of this detail might represent an attempt to claim ownership over her deceased husband, or to convey the fact that her own family had been sundered by death and emigration and could not be made whole again.

#### 4.4 Conclusions

This chapter examined The Mermaid Legend as both as a form of collective expression and as a work of the storytelling art of individual performers working within a traditional milieu. As a form of collective expression, the legend reinforces norms of behaviour and values, while

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60 Kerry Sound 1.

61 Earlier in this recording, however, Peig is unable to remember how many children the man is said to have had, and is entirely unconcerned about this detail.

also presenting fantasies in which people can escape the constraints of society and the world, and even allowing for a coded critique of those norms. The two case studies of individual storytellers yielded rather different results, showing the versatility of the legend. For de Búrc, the legend has a basically cautionary purpose: it reminds its audience of the potentially disruptive nature of sexual desire and selfish behaviour, and encourages them to act in a way that takes into account the needs and circumstances of neighbours and the broader community. The versions recorded from Peig, which present a remarkable degree of stability, are more biographical: the figure of the mermaid allows her to articulate her own experiences and anxieties over marrying into an insular community, as well as to distance herself from what she expresses.

The content of The Mermaid Legend makes it well-suited for exploring topics basic to life in rural maritime communities: the relationships between humans and the sea, between men and women, and between children and their parents. It also lends itself well to expressing a range of attitudes towards these topics, some of them mutually contradictory. The archival evidence shows that the legend was widely told by male and female performers of all ages, in different performative contexts, to a range of audiences. The ambiguity and inconsistency of the legend should be seen as a strength in this light, for it allows the legend to serve various purposes in different contexts. The combination of the legend's relevance to such basic matters of daily life and its flexibility as a discursive tool undoubtedly contributed to its popularity in those same communities, especially in Ireland and Scotland.

Because of the circulation of published texts derived from oral tradition from the nineteenth century onward, The Mermaid Legend becomes known in social contexts quite different from those in which it was originally recorded. While the form of the legend remains

more or less the same, it can take on very different meanings in these new contexts, as different material circumstances of life necessitate different responses to the fundamental problems explored in the legend. The following chapter will explore a number of literary and film adaptations of the legend, which represent the ‘afterlife’ of the legend beyond oral tradition and represent the forms of the legend with which most people today, especially outside of the legend’s traditional distribution, are familiar.

### 5. Afterlife of The Mermaid Legend in Irish Literature and Media.

In his discussion of The Mermaid Legend, Bo Almqvist states that:

One of the virtues of our legend is that it stands so close to every-day life and its problems, but at the same time it appeals to the taste for magical and mysterious experiences. In other words, it is simultaneously realistic and romantic. Not only does the legend give rise to a number of intellectual problems – such as whether nature is stronger than nurture, and what are the qualities required for a lasting marital relationship – it is also loaded with strong emotions: homesickness, love, conflicts between double loyalties. Obviously this lends poetic qualities to the narrative. There are even a number of versions in which the *dramatis personae* break out in verse to express their feelings.<sup>1</sup>

Considering these strong “poetic qualities” of the legend, as well as its immense popularity in oral tradition, particularly that of Ireland and Scotland, it is not at all surprising that it has served as an inspiration for numerous writers and film directors. Some of these creators simply attempted to retell the legend in a traditional style or (in the case of some authors) to pass off their works as genuine items of traditional narrative with varying degrees of success.<sup>2</sup> Others took much greater liberties with the legend, expanding upon or altering its plot significantly or using images and themes from the legend to inform their works rather than directly re-telling the story. Such adaptations, of course, are not particularly useful as sources of information for oral tradition, as they bear the stamp of the individual artist working in an intellectual milieu where individual creativity is highly valued, but they do show that the creative forces underlying the tradition are still vital, and provide insight into some of the contemporary meanings of the legend. This chapter will study such creative adaptations of The Mermaid Legend. Because a full study of every adaptation of this legend would be beyond the scope of a dissertation chapter, this

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1 Almqvist, “Of Mermaids and Marriages,” 8–9.

2 Some of these written re-tellings of the legend are mentioned in Appendix II. As Archer Taylor notes, most authors who write literary imitations of folklore, or write work which is meant to pass *as* folklore, “show surprisingly little understanding of the conventional aspects of folk materials,” and their work, as a rule, fails to achieve much longevity in popular tradition. Taylor, “Folklore and the Student of Literature,” 41–42.



chapter will focus on a relatively limited selection of works by Irish creators which have enjoyed considerable popularity or critical recognition across a wide range of genres and media, including film, literary prose, and poetry.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the basic structure of this legend is a binary opposition between two beings who each embody the different poles of a series of dichotomies, such as land *versus* sea, man *versus* woman, human *versus* animal, nurture *versus* nature, culture *versus* environment, and others.<sup>3</sup> Much of the meaning and power of this legend comes from these oppositions and various attempts to reinforce, mediate, or transgress them, as well as the ways in which the poles of these various dichotomies can be compared analogically: man is to woman *as* land is to sea, *etc.* By using this legend as a source, creators are able to explore such oppositions through new ideological lenses, in relationship with new concerns and debates, or to critique existing ideologies which make use of these oppositions. The opposition between male and female obviously invites feminist interpretations, while the relationship between humans and their environment, or between male and female, can be used to critique imperialist ideologies which frame the relationship between the colonizer and colonized in such terms.<sup>4</sup>

Another question concerning artistic adaptations of The Mermaid Legend worth considering in this context is that of sources. Do the creators under discussion take inspiration directly from oral tradition (and if so, which traditions are they drawing upon?), or is their access to the legend mediated via other literary, popular, or scholarly works? Such questions can be answered if informed by an awareness of the forms which the tradition takes, and the distribution

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3 p. 177.

4 In an interview with Bo Almqvist, the poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill notes that she draws analogies between these oppositions in her own work. “Cuirimse Gaeilge agus bainneann agus fliuch le chéile” ‘I place the Irish language and ‘feminine’ and ‘wet’ together.’ Quoted in Almqvist, “Of Mermaids and Marriages,” 64.

of these variations. An awareness of an author's source, whether direct or mediated through other written works, is a necessary part of understanding the ways in which they creatively transformed their material, which, in turn, is potentially illustrative of the author's attitudes towards folklore and oral literature in general.<sup>5</sup> Finally, in an increasingly literate and media-savvy world adaptations such as those discussed in this chapter (especially in visual media such as film) become the most familiar, if not canonical, forms of the legend for many people.<sup>6</sup> While this state of affairs arguably reflects a decline in the diversity seen in the oral traditions of the twentieth century, adaptations of folklore material will continue to inspire some to seek out folklore collections and scholarly works which reflect those older traditions, and these adaptations reflect a continuation of The Mermaid Legend, forming part of its life-cycle, and are therefore deserving of attention in the context of this legend.

This chapter will discuss the following works: William Allingham's narrative poem *Mervaunee*, Seamus Heaney's poem *Maighdean Mhara* from the collection *Wintering Out*, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's poem *An Mhaighdean Mhara* from the collection *Dealg Droighin*, and her *Na Murúcha a Thriomaigh* sequence initially published in the collection *Cead Aighnis*, Pádraic Ó Conaire's short story *Páidín Mháire* and his novella *An Cochall Draíochta*, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's short story *The Mermaid Legend*, Jack Sayle's film *The Secret of Roan Inish*, Neil Jordan's film *Ondine*, and finally Tomm Moore's animated film *Song of the Sea*.

### 5.1 *Mervaunee*

*Mervaunee* is a long narrative poem, and was originally published in serial form in *Cornhill Magazine* in 1876, and again the following year in William Allingham's collection

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5 Almquist, 31–33.

6 Cf. Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell."

*Songs, Ballads, and Stories*, where it is the final poem of the last section of the volume, “Stories.”<sup>7</sup> Allingham was an Anglo-Irish poet born in Donegal, and active throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. In addition to his poetry, he is known for his posthumously published diary and his work as a ballad collector.<sup>8</sup> Like many of his Irish contemporaries who wrote in English, Allingham spent much of his career “in British intellectual circles, working with British publishers yet writing on Irish subjects” for both British and Irish audiences.<sup>9</sup> *Mervaunee*, published in London, is no exception.

The poem is divided into two sections. The first begins with a note of romantic escapism, inviting the reader to flee the city for the peace of the wilderness, and to hear the narrator tell tales of the past. We are then introduced to the dead king Erc and his two sons: the elder Diarmad who now rules West Ierné (glossed as “ancient Ireland”), and the younger, Dalimar.<sup>10</sup> While a heroic figure in his own right, Dalimar spends much time in the company of the ancient and blind poet Conn, who teaches the young prince about the fairies who live throughout the land and under the sea, and how they enchant mortals. Diarmad cautions his younger brother, and advises that he wed soon, to which Dalimar states that he will recognize his wife when he sees her. Soon after this exchange, the poet Conn dies and Dalimar becomes lonely.

One spring day, Dalimar goes out to sea on his coracle, and lands on a small island near the coast. On the beach, he sees “a little Cap, of changeful sheen, a seamless Cap of rippled

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7 Allingham, *Songs, Ballads and Stories*, 305–26.

8 Allingham’s collected ballads were published in Allingham, *The Ballad Book*. This collection includes no ballads relating to seal-folk or mermaids which might have served as inspiration for *Mervaunee*.

9 de Paor, “Contemporary Poetry in English, 1940-2000,” 528–29.

10 Dalimar is one of the few obviously non-Gaelic names in the poem, and Allingham does not explain his reasoning for including this name. One possibility is that the name is derived from the French phrase *de la mer* ‘from the sea,’ although it is *Mervaunee* rather than Dalimar who comes from the sea.

green mingling with purple like the hue of ocean weeds.” He stoops to pick up the cap, and then sees an unknown woman “strange and bright, with long loose hair, and her body fair, shimmering as with watery light; for nothing save a luminous mist, of tender beryl and amethyst, over the living smoothness lay, statue-firm from head to feet, a breathing woman soft and sweet, and yet not earthly.” When she notices Dalimar, she gestures towards him and utters “some sound of foreign speech,” seemingly asking for her cap back. When Dalimar refuses, she sings a song which begins to put Dalimar to sleep, until he threatens to pierce the cap with his dagger.

Dalimar then wraps the woman in his mantle, notices her finely webbed toes, and takes her to his sister's *rath* ‘fortress.’ The first section ends with a change of metre, and a lullaby to the stranger.

The second section of the poem jumps ahead an indeterminate amount of time: Dalimar and the woman from the sea, the eponymous Mervaunee, are now married, have two sons, and are rather hyperbolically said to love each other more than any other couple has since. One day her two children playfully suggest that they get a boat and sail on the open sea; Mervaunee reacts quite negatively to this, and soon begs her husband to move the family inland, as “the moaning restless water kills all peace within me, day or night, and soon will be my death outright.” The family lives happily away from the shore for a while, until Mervaunee confronts her husband about the fact that, while Dalimar has begun to show signs of aging, she is just as young as the day they married. She tells Dalimar that her people live for three hundred years or more, and that she dreads watching him grow old and die while she remains young. In an attempt to comfort her, Dalimar relocates the family to the coast, but this does little good, as Mervaunee remains miserable. One day, he shows her her cap, and offers her the choice of remaining with him or returning to the sea; she chooses the latter and is never seen again.

Like the first section, the second half of the poem features a ‘song’ marked by a change in metre towards the end: a ballad whose refrain of “this befell in the olden time” underscores the purported antiquity of the events described. Dalimar, now an old man, sets sail in search of his former wife, accompanied by his two sons. During his voyages, Dalimar comes close to death, and as his companions discuss returning to bury him in his ancestral tomb, he dives into the sea and is never seen again. Later, his two sons are visited in a dream by a vision of Dalimar and Mervaunee, both “immortally fair,” floating from the seas into the heaven. After the conclusion of the song, there is a brief coda which again states that these events took place in the distant past, that the *rath* of Dalimar and Mervaunee is now in ruins, and that the *ogham* inscriptions which bore their names are now barely legible.

In his explanatory notes to the poem, Allingham states that Mervaunee is a “coined name” derived from the term “Merrow,” and that her cap is known as the “Cohuleen Driuth.” Thomas Crofton Croker uses both of these terms, spelled the same way, in his story *The Lady of Gollerus*, which suggests that Croker was Allingham’s ultimate source, although Allingham offers no comment on this.<sup>11</sup> The notes further state that this poem takes place in “Pagan Ireland,” mistakenly refer to Parthalon and Balor as traditional ancestors of the Irish, and explain the poem’s references to raths, crannogs, and *ogham*-stones for a lay audience, with reference to a number of contemporary archaeological publications.<sup>12</sup> All of this apparatus shows a high level

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11 Croker explains *merrow* as an Irish word, “correctly written *Morúadh*, or *Morúach*,” which are reasonable approximations of *murúch*, the word for ‘mermaid’ most commonly used in the south of Ireland. His *cohuleen driuth* is most likely derived from *cochailín draíochta* ‘little magical cloak.’ Croker, *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland*, 17. Allingham speculated, correctly, that *driuth* (in Irish, *draíochta*) is related to the word *druid* in English. Fortunately for the reader, while Allingham borrowed these terms from Croker, he chose not to borrow Croker’s rather tortuous prose style.

12 In his notes, Allingham mentions that *ogham* was in use within the Christian period, which somewhat undermines his use of *ogham* as a signifier of the pre-Christian past. Allingham, *Songs, Ballads and Stories*, 335–36.

of awareness on Allingham's part of contemporary antiquarianism, not only as an artistic phenomenon but as a scholarly discipline as well.

Allingham's mermaid is silent throughout the first half of the poem except for her "sound of foreign speech" and "solemn song of words uncouth," and only becomes an articulate character in the second half. Her portrayal in this later section contains some unexpected psychological depth in the emotional distress which the sea causes her (the cause of which she doesn't appear to understand at first), and in her conflicted feelings about her husband, but she can scarcely be considered a fully-fleshed figure. One interesting aspect of Allingham's portrayal of Mervaunee is her greatly extended lifespan and different experience of the passage of time, which may have its origin in Gaelic traditions which portray the passage of time as different in our world and in the Otherworld.<sup>13</sup> This serves to establish the incompatibility of Mervaunee and Dalimar, and of their respective worlds, although this point is undermined by the romantic ending which reunites the two. Allingham attempts to gloss over some of the more problematic aspects of their relationship by emphasizing the intensity of their love for each other ("and never since was any fairer couple wed or loved each other more"), and by ending the poem with the lovers reunited in spirit for eternity. Nonetheless, some of the more sinister elements of the source material remain in the poem: Dalimar captures Mervaunee by stealing her cap and forces her into submission by threatening to destroy the object with her dagger, and despite her professions of love for Dalimar, Mervaunee spends most of the second half of the poem in obvious emotional distress.

Many of the details in *Mervaunee* seem to come from Croker's account, such as the use of the term *merrow* to describe the eponymous mermaid, the term *cohuleen druith* used to

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13 Carey, "Time, Space, and the Otherworld," 7–12.

describe her cap, her family under the sea, and her noble status – Croker’s *merrow* is the daughter of the king of the sea.<sup>14</sup> Other details, such as her long-standing fascination with the surface world, and her three-hundred year life-span, might come from Hans Christian Andersen’s *Den Lille Havfrue* ‘The Little Mermaid,’ first published in 1837.<sup>15</sup> Other details, such as the mermaid’s sleep-inducing song, reminiscent of the *súantraige* ‘sleep-music’ of early Irish tradition, and the description of Dalimar’s household, show the influence of medieval literature. Allingham takes a number of liberties with his source material, introducing elements of other traditions, coining names, and changing the nature of the mermaid’s escape and reappearance, but nonetheless produces a narrative which is recognizable as a form of The Mermaid Legend. He also uses a folk model, the ballad, for his poem, and except for the initial lyric scene-setting passages, adheres to many of the generic requirements of the ballad, such as a linear, straight-forward narration, and a preference for action and dialogue over interior voices. Unlike the other poems discussed in this chapter, however, the emphasis is on plot and not subjectivity.

A final noteworthy feature is the poem’s repeated emphasis on the antiquity of the events which it describes: Dalimar is the “son of a long-forgotten king,” the refrain to the last song reminds us “this befell in the olden time,” while the closing lines of the poem tell us that the Ogam stones raised for Mervanee and Dalimar are so weathered as to become illegible. By setting the poem in the distant past, Allingham makes it difficult for the poem to comment on contemporary questions of gender and social inequality, although he does show an interest in

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14 “‘What!’ said the Merrow, ‘did you never hear of my father? He’s the king of the waves to be sure!’” Croker, *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland.*, 8.

15 Published in Andersen, *Eventyr, Fortalte for Børn*, iii. Andersen’s works were translated into a number of European languages, including English, shortly after their publication, and would have been readily available to Allingham.

social commentary and the plight of the rural poor in other works, notably *Laurence Bloomfield*.<sup>16</sup> The antiquarian intellectual milieu upon which he was familiar may have conditioned him to see folklore and oral narrative as a survival from the ancient past, and therefore more properly of the past than of the present. Alternately, the tragic and romantic aspects of the legend, which Allingham emphasizes with some of his changes to the plot, are better suited by situating the poem in a non-specific ancient past, and may have interested Allingham more than the legend's subversive potential.

### 5.2 *Maighdean Mara*

The poem *Maighdean Mara* appears in Heaney's third collection, *Wintering Out*, published in 1972.<sup>17</sup> Written during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the collection explores themes of martyrdom, sacrifice, and sectarian violence through the discourses of onomastics, archaeology, and material culture. The first half of the collection focuses on the image of the bog body and the inscription of recurring patterns of violence within the landscape, while the second half presents a series of female figures impacted by this violence, figures who belong at once to the world of lived human experience and that of myth.<sup>18</sup> The use of a folk legend as source material is unusual for Heaney, who tended to draw inspiration from medieval literary sources as

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16 de Paor, "Contemporary Poetry in English, 1940-2000," 532-33.

17 Heaney, *Wintering Out*, 68-69. Heaney's poetry has attracted a considerable amount of critical and popular attention over the years; a fairly comprehensive guide to Heaney's own publications and to Heaney criticism published prior to 1996 is Durkan, *Seamus Heaney*. More recent critical discussions of Heaney's work can be found in O'Donoghue, *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*.

*Maighdean Mara* has tended to be overshadowed by the other, better-known poems in the collection, such as *Tollund Man* or *Summer Home*, even in contexts where it is highly relevant: for example, in her discussion of the "feminine principle" of Heaney's work, Carlanda Green does not even mention this poem (Green, "The Feminine Principle in Seamus Heaney's Poetry.") Discussions of the poem can be found in: Almqvist, "Of Mermaids and Marriages," 15-25, Foster, *Seamus Heaney*, 43-44, McGuinn, *Seamus Heaney*, 73-75, Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, 50-52, Andrews, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, 72, Johnston, "Irish Poetry after Joyce (Heaney and Kavanaugh)," 201-2.

18 Andrews, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, 48-49.



well as the material, customary, and non-narrative aspects of folklore, such as vernacular speech, place-names, settlement patterns, agriculture, and vernacular architecture.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to the ‘coined’ name used by Allingham, Heaney uses a term taken directly from Irish tradition, although in a way which signals his relative unfamiliarity with the Irish language: as *maighdean* is a feminine noun, one would expect the following *mara* to undergo lenition, and the lack of definite article in this phrase is unidiomatic. The poem’s dedication, “for Seán Oh-Eocha” indicates that Heaney was in contact with the collector Seán Ó hEochaidh, and by extension was at least somewhat familiar with the work of the Irish Folklore Commission, although some critics have misunderstood this reference.<sup>20</sup>

The poem opens with a description of the titular woman, presented ambiguously as either asleep or dead: “she sleeps now, her cold breasts dandled by undertow, her hair lifted and laid. Undulant slow seawracks cast about shin and thigh, bangles of wort, drifting liens catch, dislodge gently.” Her connection with her watery environment is foregrounded in this passage: her hair drifts in the manner of seaweed, while the water and flora which embrace her blur the boundary between her body and her environment. The potential horror of the image is undercut by the sumptuous, almost erotic quality of the language.

From this initial image, the poem turns back to describe her long spell on land: “eight land years between hearth and bed,” brought to an end when she recovers her “magic garment, almost ocean-tinctured still.” A man, referred to simply by the pronoun *he*, steals this garment

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19 Almqvist, “Of Mermaids and Marriages,” 11–12.

20 E.g. “The most successful poem in *Wintering Out* is “Maighdean Mara.” Heaney explains the title is Irish for ‘mermaid,’ but the dedication “For Sean [*sic*] Oh-Eocha,” suggests some unidentified event on which the poem is based.” Johnston, “Irish Poetry after Joyce (Heaney and Kavanaugh),” 201. In an interview with Almqvist, Heaney identifies Ó hEochaidh as his source for the legend. Quoted in Almqvist, “Of Mermaids and Marriages,” 43.

and hides it the eaves of his house. They marry, and have children – described rather arrestingly as “she suffered milk and birth” - until a thatcher comes and hides the garment again in a stack outside the house. The children tell their mother, who finds and cloaks herself again in her garment in language redolent of decay: “she wrapped herself with smoke-reeks from his thatch, straw-musts and films of mildew.” The poem ends with a repetition of the first two lines, and their image of the sleep/suicide. This repetition evokes the recurrence of the tide, as well as the biological rhythms central to the mermaid’s role as a mother. The image of death which begins and ends the poem connects it to the bleaker patterns of recurring violence which concern the whole collection, and calls our attention to some of the human consequences of these acts of violence.

Unsurprisingly, given the dedication to Ó hEochaidh, the poem contains several details typical of versions of the legend from northern Ireland, such as the fact that the garment is hidden in a stack outside the house, that the garment is moved around and hidden multiple times (the fact that it is hidden in both a stack and the eaves is a detail attested in Donegal), and that the children tell their mother when they see the stack.<sup>21</sup> Heaney presents the husband and the thatcher responsible for moving the garment as separate people; while this is not an otherwise attested detail, Heaney claimed that this is how he was told the story, although he admits that he may have misremembered.<sup>22</sup> Heaney also presents the mermaid’s ‘homecoming’ in far more morbid terms than is typical of oral tradition, although the mermaid or selkie’s death upon returning to the sea is implied or outright stated in some recorded versions of *The Mermaid*

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21 Pp. 53-4.

22 Almqvist, “Of Mermaids and Marriages,” 48–49.

Legend.<sup>23</sup> On the whole, the *fabula* of the poem adheres quite closely that of the legend; where Heaney innovates is in his arresting phrasing and in breaking free from the traditional linear unfolding of narrative.

By beginning and ending with the same image, the poem gains a recurring, archetypal quality, strengthened by the image of the sea with its relentless patterns of high and low tide. The woman/mermaid is described in terms which strengthen her connection with the sea, and more generally, with fluid: as discussed earlier, the image of her death/sleep blurs the lines between her body and the environment; while on land she is “steeped and dishevelled” and her garment is “almost ocean-tinctured still”; her motherhood is described in terms of “milk and birth”; and her time on land “drained the tidesong from her voice.” The language draws a connection between the broader cycles of history, the cosmic cycles of the tide, and the more intimate biological rhythms of motherhood, characterized here, like the tide, as the exchange of life-giving fluid.

While Heaney’s mermaid fulfills the traditional gender roles of wife and mother, the poem, and the collection as a whole, critically explores these roles and the relationship between men and women in rural communities. This relationship is presented as unequal, imbalanced, and unhealthy: the man plunders with no thought but for his own gain, and while the woman does fulfill her expected role of life-giver, she is clearly diminished by this relationship, ‘drained,’ and forced to become something which she is not. Importantly, the poem is presented in the third person; while the mermaid’s predicament is *described*, it is not actually voiced. Heaney’s status at the time as a man, husband, and later father, perhaps made it difficult for him to give voice to the mermaid; however, as Thomas C. Foster notes, “strangeness is a key to much of *Wintering Out* – the past, the sea, the moon, the other sex, the underground. More than either of the earlier

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23 Pp. 183-4.

volumes, it explores the alien as a necessary component to understanding the familiar.”<sup>24</sup>

Sympathy for the other, manifested here as the silent mermaid, Heaney seems to suggest is the key to breaking free from the patterns of recurring violence which haunt us.

### 5.3 *An Mhaighdean Mhara and Na Murúcha a Thriomaigh*

Unlike Allingham or Heaney, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill is a native speaker of Irish, who spent much of her childhood living in the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht in County Kerry where she was immersed in Irish-language oral narrative traditions first-hand.<sup>25</sup> The poem *An Mhaighdean Mhara* first appeared in her first collection of poetry, *An Dealg Droighin*, published in 1981, and then appeared with a translation by Michael Hartnett in 1986 in *Rogha Dánta / Selected Poems*.<sup>26</sup> The entire collection is preoccupied with folklore, and especially tales of the supernatural: the title is that of a tale told by Cáit Bab Feirtéar, excerpt from which gives the collection its foreword.<sup>27</sup>

The lyric opens with a first-person utterance, invoking the tide and demanding its return: “‘Lagtrá,’ adúrt, ‘ní miste don taoide casadh’” “‘Ebbtide,’ I said, “the tide will have to turn.”” This invocation continues as the speaker demands that the tide bring about a change in the external world, which is currently in a bad way, described in terms of dryness (the absence of

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24 Foster, *Seamus Heaney*, 46.

25 Ní Dhomhnaill discusses her upbringing, and the personal significance of the folklore of Corca Dhuibhne for her, in a number of her essays, especially *Cé Leis Thú* and *Unalive Beings and Things that Don't Exist*. Ní Dhomhnaill, *Selected Essays*, 97–155, 202–20.

26 Ní Dhomhnaill, *An dealg droighin*, 81–82; Ní Dhomhnaill, *Rogha Dánta*, 52–55.

Important critical work on Ní Dhomhnaill’s poetry includes de Paor, “Contemporary Poetry in English, 1940–2000,” 339–42. (and bibliography), Nic Dhiarmada, *Téacs baineann téacs mná*, Nic Eoin, *Trén bhfearann breac*, and Shay, *Of Mermaids and Others*.

27 The eponymous story is a version of ATU 706 ‘The Girl Without Hands.’ In the quoted episode, after the heroine’s brother cuts off her hands, she curses him so that a *dealg droighin* ‘spine of blackthorn’ will penetrate his foot and not be removed until the sister herself removes it from him.

life-giving water) and decay, reflecting the speaker's own inner state. She restates her hope or expectation that the tide will turn, only to deny the possibility of change: “tuilleadh agus trá, tuilleadh agus trá, tuilleadh agus trá agus tuilleadh arís, a cheapas. Tá gach aon rud chomh hola anois nach féidir leis éirí níos measa” ‘floottide ebbtide floottide ebbtide rise and fall rise and fall the same again. Everything's so bad now but it can't get worse.’ She alludes briefly to physical torture (“ach ‘tá slíte againn chun tú a chur ag caint’ á chlos agam i dtuin Gestapo” ‘but “we have ways of making you talk” I hear in Gestapo accents’) before returning to the image of the absent tide.

The speaker contemplates her own hybrid body, beginning with an echo of the Song of Songs’ *nigra sum sed formosa*: “má tá eireaball éisc orm nílím gan dathúlacht éigin” ‘though I’ve got a fishes [*sic*] tail I’m not unbeautiful.’ We are presented with her hair, her scales (the colour of which “ná chifeá riamh ag mná mhíntíre” ‘you won’t see on landlocked women’), and her eyes, which are the colour of stones, and in which seals and other aquatic animals can be seen at play; her hybrid body is a microcosm of the sea and the high tide which is now painfully absent.

The next verse paragraph recounts her transition to land: it is painful (“ní gan pian a thángas aníos ar thalamh” ‘not without pain have I landed’), and entails a violation of the natural order (“do bhriseas an slabhra réamhordaithe” ‘I broke the natural law’). This rupture was caused by *grá* ‘love’ rather than *Dia* ‘God,’ although both represent masculine influences: she trades her fish tail for legs, and her natural affinity for the rhythms of the tide, of ebb and flow, for the linear time of history, and as a consequence is out of step with her natural element, something which she neurotically dwells upon throughout the poem. The final verse paragraph gives a brief account of the theft of her cap, although she subverts the traditional account: while other

mermaids have regained their cap, she has failed (“dheineas tocailt síos ‘dtí an gaíon is níl aon rian do” ‘I dug to the subsoil and saw no sign of it’). The closing lines present images of the rhythms of the natural world failing: the tide is still absent, and a rat gnaws away at the sun.

The poem shares many details typical to Kerry versions of the mermaid legend: the object is described as a *caipín*, it is hidden somewhere within the house, and the wife is physically abused by her husband in an attempt to make her speak. Ní Dhomhnaill mentions that she had heard the story from Tom Martin, a family friend and neighbour in Kerry, although the detail about the wife’s silence and subsequent abuse was taken from the version which Kenneth Jackson had collected from Peig Sayers in *Scéalta Ón mBlascaod*.<sup>28</sup> Another detail in the poem, the fact that walking is painful for the mermaid, is borrowed from Andersen’s *The Little Mermaid*, which the poet had read as a child.<sup>29</sup>

While the details of the implied narrative of the poem are mostly traditional, its form, a lyric monologue, is decidedly not. This form allows the mermaid to speak for herself and appear as a person rather than a plot device, and allows both poet and reader to explore her subjectivity and, indeed, her pathology, as she appears to be suffering from profound depression. The mermaid’s state of mind likely relates to that of Ní Dhomhnaill as she was writing the poem: between May and June 1980, she recalls living in her uncle’s house by the sea while her husband was away in Turkey, and feeling deeply depressed and out of step with the world.<sup>30</sup> Less personally, the mermaid functions as a symbol for the alienation suffered by many young rural

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28 Almqvist, “Of Mermaids and Marriages,” 53–55. The version recorded by Jackson is Kerry Pub 8.

29 Almqvist, 55–57.

30 Ní Dhomhnaill, *Selected Essays*, 207. See also Almqvist, “Of Mermaids and Marriages,” 55–56.

women of the poet's generation, and the mental illnesses which are the possible manifestations of this alienation.<sup>31</sup>

The mermaid's pathology is also a direct result of her 'translation': from the sea to the land, but also from country to country, language to language, or worldview to worldview. Like Heaney's mermaid (who only learns to count years while living on land), Ní Dhomhnaill's *alter ego* gives up a world dominated by the monolithic sea and its tidal rhythms for one characterized by the forward arrow of time; she gives up what Julia Kristeva calls *le temps de femmes* 'women's time' for the male time of genealogy and history.<sup>32</sup> An indigenous mode of social organization, in which human beings are defined by their relations with one another, and of history, in which events are tied inextricably to the landscape, is exchanged for the mental world of the metropole, in which individuals are 'dried up' as they are pulled out of this sea of relationality.<sup>33</sup> The pain the mermaid feels while walking on legs that don't quite fit is the pain and awkwardness of expressing oneself in a foreign language or cultural idiom.

These theme of dysphoric 'translation' is explored further in Ní Dhomhnaill's later sequence of poems, *Na Murúcha a Thriomaigh*, initially published as the third section of her 1999 collection *Cead Aighnis*, and then separately and with a facing-page translation by Paul Muldoon in 2007 as *The Fifty-Minute Mermaid*.<sup>34</sup> The single lyric voice of *An Mhaighdean*

31 Almqvist, "Of Mermaids and Marriages," 62.

32 Kristeva, "Women's Time," 16.

33 "I found myself toying with a rather dangerous opposition of the amniotic fluid of the local Irish-speaking community as being akin to the sea, while the lonely, because perforce individualised, reaches of the professional middle classes might be akin to dry land." Ní Dhomhnaill, *Selected Essays*, 115.

34 Ní Dhomhnaill, *Cead aighnis*, 101–51, Ní Dhomhnaill, *The Fifty Minute Mermaid*. The latter publication gives the collection the title *The Fifty Minute Mermaid* (a reference to the 'fifty-minute hour' of psychoanalytic practice), for which no Irish translation is offered, alters the sequence of the poems somewhat, and contains five poems which are not in the 'Na Murúcha a Thriomaigh' sequence: *Aurora Borealis* (which is found in the first section of *Cead Aighnis*), *Fáidhiúlacht na Murúiche* 'The Mermaid's Gift of Prophecy', ' *Filleadh na Murúiche ar an dTír-fó-Thoinn* 'The Mermaid Returns to Land-Under-Wave,' *An Mhurúch i nDeireadh a Saoil*

*Mhara* gives way to a multiplicity of voices in *Na Murúcha a Thriomaigh*, covering a range of registers from the conversational, to the clinical, to the mock-ethnographic.<sup>35</sup> Most of these poems are delivered in the third person; those in the first person are not delivered by the mermaids but by a curious outsider. The collection contains a wealth of reference to oral narrative, custom, popular belief, and other aspects of folklore, as well as references to the collection of folklore, linguistics, archaeology, and other related disciplines.

As is the case for the mermaid in *An Mhaighdean Mhara*, return to their former life is no longer possible for the merfolk of the collection; in contrast to what we find in the earlier poem, the emphasis here is not on recollection of that life, or the trauma of separation, but on active attempts by the merfolk to distance themselves from their past lives. The poems dramatize attempts at forgetting or denying the past, as occasional significant Freudian slips and vivid ‘returns of the repressed’ at the personal and intergenerational levels, as in *Mélusine* where a mother’s unspoken past is presented as the unquiet dead wailing from beneath the floorboards where they have been hidden, or *Cuimhne an Uisce* where a mermaid’s daughter who lacks the vocabulary to discuss water is overtaken by a sudden flood from the bathroom sink. Unlike *An Mhaighdean Mhara*, at no point in this collection are we told how or why the merfolk came on

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*Thiar* ‘The Mermaid Nears the End,’ and *An Mhurúch seo ‘gainne fó Thoinn Arís* ‘Our Mermaid Goes Under Again.’ See also Shay, “Of Mermaids and Others: Remarkable Revelations in ‘The Fifty Minute Mermaid,’” Shay, *Of Mermaids and Others*, 218–41, Ikeda, “Toward Our Own ‘Murúch’: Reading Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill’s ‘The Fifty Minute Mermaid,’” Nic Eoin, *Trén bhfearann breac*, 284–320.

It is worth noting that, while the earlier poem uses the more broadly-attested term *maighdean mhara*, the poems in *Cead Aighnis* and *The Fifty-Minute Mermaid* exclusively use *murúch*, which is a term generally limited to Munster.

35 “Agus ó Féar Suaithinseach ar aghaidh, is go mór mór in *Feis* mar a chonacthas, agus sa tsraith ‘Na Murúcha a Thriomaigh’ as *Cead Aighnis*, níl aon amhras ná go bhfuil seachtarú déanta ar na ‘carachtair inmheánacha’ i slí shistéimeach a fhágann gur fada ó thréithe na lirice comharthaí sóirt an tsaothair seo” ‘and from *Féar Suaithinseach* onwards, and especially in *Feis* as we have seen, and in the sequence ‘Na Murúcha a Thriomaigh’ from *Cead Aighnis*, there is no doubt that these ‘interior characters’ have been exteriorized in a systematic way such that the distinguishing features of this work are quite distinct from the characteristics of lyric.’ Nic Dhiarmada, *Téacs baineann téacs mná*, 183.



land, but the final poem, *Spléachanna fánacha ar an dTír-fó-Thoinn*, presents their lost homeland as a cold, empty, and abandoned place, with piles of cast-off clothing, spectacles, and false teeth that call to mind the extermination camps of the Second World War, an evocation implying that the merfolk are refugees fleeing an attempted genocide. The details of this past are never disclosed, as the collection presents again and again the inability of the merfolk to articulate their trauma or their pre-traumatic past in any language.

#### 5.4 *Páidín Mháire* and *An Cochall Draíochta*

Pádraic Ó Conaire was born in Galway City, but spent much of his childhood in the Irish-speaking townland area of Ros Muc, where, like Ní Dhomhnaill, he was exposed to Irish-language oral traditions.<sup>36</sup> After his untimely death in 1928, Ó Conaire himself would become a figure in the folklore of county Galway.<sup>37</sup> The short story *Páidín Mháire* was first published in serial format in the newspaper *An Claidheamh Soluis* in 1908 and later in his 1909 collection *Nóra Mharcuis Bhig agus Scéalta Eile*.<sup>38</sup> The eponymous Páidín Mháire, a member of the Ó Conaola (Coneely) family, is employed by a public works program, supporting his elderly parents, until an accident leaves him partially blind. He is awarded compensation for his injury but, as happens often in Ó Conaire's fiction, he has drunk most of the money by the end of the first year, and enters the poor-house so that his parents might receive financial support. While in the poor-house, Páidín's eyesight becomes worse, and he becomes increasingly irritable and unstable, until he escapes one night, catches consumption, and is brought home only to die

36 For Ó Conaire's biography, see Ní Chionnaith, *Pádraic Ó Conaire*; and Riggs, *Pádraic Ó Conaire, deoraí*, 11–58. See also O'Leary, "Contemporary Poetry in English, 1940-2000," 242–43. (and bibliography), Mac Grianna, *Pádraic Ó Conaire*, De Bhaldráithe, *Pádraic Ó Conaire*, and Denvir, *Pádraic Ó Conaire*.

37 Ó Conghaile, "Sean-Phádraic i mBéal na nDaoine."

38 *An Claidheamh Soluis*, August 29 and September 5, 1908; Ó Conaire, *Nóra Mharcuis Bhig*. The story was reprinted, edited by Tomás de Bhaldráithe according to more modern spelling conventions, in Ó Conaire, *Scothscéalta*, 133–45. The text published in *Scothscéalta* is the one quoted in this discussion.

shortly thereafter in his mother's care. While the plot of the story is not directly based on that of The Mermaid Legend, it refers at several points to one aspect of this tradition, the relationship between members of the Ó Conaola family and seals.

Throughout the story, the sea and Páidín's alleged familial relationship with it have a destabilizing influence. The initial disaster which leaves Páidín partially blind happens during an attempt to bring order to the maritime environment by building a bridge between Oileán na Trá and Caladh Éamoinn. Páidín is in a restless and impatient mood the day of the accident, causing him to act rashly and approach an apparently defective explosive before giving it enough time to go off; the narrator attributes this impatience to his relationship with the sea, and the sympathetic connection between its swellings and those of his own blood: "agus nuair a bhíodh an rabharta mór sa bhfarraige shíl sé go mbíodh rabharta fola ag coipeadh ina chuisleacha nach ligfeadh dó gan a bheith ar an bhfarraige" 'and when the great torrent would be in the sea, he thought that there was torrent of blood surging in his veins that forced him to be on the sea.' After Páidín has spent some time in the poor house, he is referred to simply as "an bádóir fiáin sin as Caladh Éamoinn" 'that crazy boatman from Caladh Éamoinn' and an off-handed reference to seal hunting triggers a violent outburst from Páidín. When he escapes from the poor-house, it is the pursuit of the sea that leads him to sleep outside overnight, where he contracts consumption. In his dying moments, he recounts his fever dream to his mother, in which the sea rises and overtakes the land, putting an end to any human attempts to impose order upon the landscape ("meas tú, dá dtiocfadh an rabhartha i ngan fhios orthu, an mbeadh siad in ann obair a dhéanamh faoi fharraige?" 'do you think if the floodtide would come on them unawares, that they would be able to work under the sea?').

The gendered conflict which is at the forefront of most versions of the legend is largely unexplored in *Páidín Mháire* since, with the sole exception of Páidín's mother Máire, all of the story's characters, named or unnamed, are men. Instead, the story explores the relationships between the modern state and the natural environment, and between that state and its poorest subjects. What emerges is a critique of the state's failure to provide for its most vulnerable members: the elderly, the disabled, and more generally, the rural poor, a theme which recurs through much of Ó Conaire's fiction. It's worth noting that while traditional beliefs and ways of life inform much of the story, they are not presented as an alternative to modernity or to an indifferent state apparatus. While Páidín's friend Stiofán Pheig laments that Páidín wasn't fishing on the day of the accident, nobody seems to consider subsistence fishing an economically viable activity. Páidín identifies more and more with his supposed supernatural ancestry as he becomes more and more disconnected from the world around him, but this provides him with no material benefit and arguably exacerbates his condition by driving him apart from other people. This attitude towards folklore places Ó Conaire in stark contrast to Douglas Hyde and many other intellectuals also associated with the Gaelic League, who saw Irish folklore as a defense against encroaching modernity.<sup>39</sup>

Ó Conaire returned to The Mermaid Legend in his novella, *An Cochall Draíochta*, which was published in serial format in *The Weekly Freeman* in 1919.<sup>40</sup> Unlike *Páidín Mháire*, which is

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39 This is unsurprising, given Ó Conaire's own Marxist sympathies, as are explicitly stated in his essay "Cumannachas Céard [*sic*] san am atá le teacht" 'Communism in the time to come.' Ó Conaire, "Cumannachas Céard san Am atá le Teacht."

40 Published weekly, in twelve instalments, between May 10 and August 9, 1919. A transcription of the text was included in Kenny, "Pádraic Ó Conaire," 745–92. The present discussion is based off of the text from Kenny's dissertation.

a social realist work informed by the legend, *An Cochall Draíochta* is a straight-forward retelling of it, albeit one which is significantly longer than any version recorded from oral tradition, at almost 14,000 words long.<sup>41</sup> The story begins by introducing a young man named Máirtín Ó Grianáin, who was a talented musician that would spend most of his nights away from home playing at social gatherings. One evening he overheard music being played at the shores of Loch na nDamh,<sup>42</sup> followed it to its source, and discovered a group of young woman singing and dancing. When they noticed Máirtín's presence they scattered and returned to the lake, except for one woman who could not find her *cochall*. Máirtín grabbed ahold of the *cochall*, and its owner asked for it back, saying that she must remain where her *cochall* is. Máirtín refuses to return it, claiming that he was in love with the woman, and, just as she could not live without her *cochall*, he could not live without her.

The woman followed him home, and Máirtín attempted make her feel welcome by preparing porridge for dinner. Máirtín's lack of domestic skills was noticeable, and the woman from the lake criticized the way he prepared the food and the end result in the hopes that he would become tired of her and return her *cochall*, but this did not happen. Máirtín next began to play his violin in an attempt to win her over and, despite herself, she enjoyed his playing and began to dance. His playing attracted the other women from the lake, and they danced together for a while before returning to the water. The woman whose *cochall* Máirtín stole begged him to return it, and while he was almost moved to do this, in the end he refused. The woman fell into a

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41 Narratives longer than this are not unknown in Irish tradition – for example, the story “Eochair, Mac Rí in Éirinn,” recorded from Éamon a Búrc, was over 30,000 words long (de Búrc, *Eochair, Mac Rí in Éirinn*, 9) – but such long stories are typically *Märchen* rather than legends.

42 This is possibly Loch an Daimh in the parish of Cill Chuimín, County Galway. “Loch an Daimh / Lough Aday,” Logainm.ie, accessed April 1, 2019, <https://www.logainm.ie/1167483.aspx>.

depression and, despite Máirtín's many attempts to get her to talk to him, she would not speak except to call him a fool for not washing a fish before roasting it.<sup>43</sup>

The following morning, the woman made Máirtín breakfast and began to tell him about all of the things on his property that require attention: the sick cow, the unplanted potatoes, the broken fence, and so on. Máirtín was irritated by her requests but unwilling to release her; when it became apparent that she will not get her *cochall* back, she suggested that they marry, but made Máirtín promise to give up his bad habits, to do a better job of caring for the property, and to stop playing music at parties every night. Máirtín agreed to these terms and they were married the following evening. Some time later, Máirtín's neighbours speculated about his new wife, and the fact that she was never seen outside of the house during the day. Some of the neighbours followed the couple one night, and observed Máirtín playing music for the host of women from the lake. After the neighbours left, the women from the lake held a court and heard both Máirtín and his wife's case. The presiding judge found Máirtín guilty at first but, because he saw concern in Máirtín's wife's eyes when he was seized, decided that they both love each other and reverses his decision.

The new couple had ten children in total, and the narrator notes that their descendants are known to live in the community to this day. Máirtín's children were exceedingly fond of swimming, so much that they earned the nickname *na lachain* 'the ducks,' although their mother was afraid for them whenever they swim too far out into the lake. One day, Máirtín is away fishing, and the children tell their mother that they saw their father hiding a *seancheirt* 'old rag' somewhere, handling it with great care as if it were a valuable. The suppressed memory of her

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43 As noted above (pp., 114-5), the mermaid is said to have knowledge about the proper way to prepare fish in some accounts from Scottish and Swedish tradition. It is possible that Ó Conaire is drawing upon these traditions although not necessary, as the woman is critical of Máirtín's lack of domestic skills earlier in the story.

former life returned, and she tried to find what she assumed was her *cochall* but could not. The next day, she asked her youngest child where it was, and finds out that it was hidden in a stack of turf. She went to the bog and knocked down all the stacks until she found her *cochall*. Her children followed her, and saw her put the *cochall* on, sing for some time, and then leap into the sea. Máirtín returns home to discover that his wife has fled for good.

The neighbours, predictably, gossiped about the disappearance of Máirtín's wife, some speculating that she had run away with a visiting tailor. Máirtín, for his part, refused to provide any answer, and would visit the lake at night, playing his violin in the hopes of seeing his wife again. One night, he returned home early because of the rain, and found his wife inside the house, attending to the children and trying to put them to sleep. She noticed Máirtín and began to speak with him, but could not stay with him, as she was only allowed on land long enough to care for her children. Máirtín saw her *cochall* and tried to steal it from her again but failed. She told him that, because he had tried to do this, she could never return to land, and left him heartbroken to watch after his children.

Ó Conaire's story largely conforms to the way that the legend is told in Donegal and northern Connacht: the woman has a *cochall*, the young man hides it in a stack of drying grain or turf, the children inadvertently tell their mother where it has been hidden, and the woman returns to visit and care for her children. The woman is beautiful, with long red hair, and lives in a body of water where others of her kind are known to frequent. The normal term *maighdean mhara* is not used in the novella: instead she is simply a *maighdean* or *bean ón loch* 'maiden/woman from the lake.' Her interest in music has parallels in some versions of The Mermaid Legend and other traditions about mermaids from Ireland.<sup>44</sup> Her initial appearance with a group of other mermaids,

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<sup>44</sup> e.g. pp. 85, 88, 157-61.

who are engaged in singing and dancing, is uncommon for Irish tradition, and instead suggests the traditions of Shetland, or even Faroe or Orkney.<sup>45</sup> Her nocturnal habits are also unusual for Irish tradition, although it does proceed logically from the idea that the mermaid is sometimes antisocial and out of step with her community. The episode with the “cúirt cois toinne” ‘court by the wave’ has no parallel in any recorded versions of The Mermaid Legend, and is a poor fit in the story, but it has parallels with folk and literary traditions about fairy courts, such as Brian Merriman’s *Cúirt an Mheán Oíche*.<sup>46</sup> It is possible that Ó Conaire heard a version (or versions) of the story during his upbringing in county Galway although, considering that versions of the legend from Donegal and Mayo had been published by 1919, it is equally likely that Ó Conaire had read such a version. Neither of these possibilities, of course, are exclusive.<sup>47</sup>

In *An Cochall Draíochta*, Ó Conaire makes extensive use of dialogue and internal monologue to reveal the psychology of his characters; a side effect of this is to make the story significantly longer than it usually is in oral performance. Ó Conaire also introduces several perspectives other than those of the main characters: the speculations of Máirtín’s neighbours are directly voiced, and the narrator references local folklore, learned scholarly opinion, and the supposed testimony of one of Máirtín’s children. While the plot of the legend can be clearly recognized, the author’s extensive use of dialogue and multiple perspectives means that *An Cochall Draíochta* is a very ‘bookish’ work which is aligned more towards early twentieth-

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45 P. 47.

46 Merriman, *Cúirt an mheon-oíche*. For translated excerpts, see also Ó Tuama and Kinsella, *An Duanaire*, 1600-1900, 220-47.

47 The presence of a motif typical of Shetlandic and Nordic tradition – the dancing and singing group of women at the shore – in a story that otherwise closely aligns to northern Irish tradition suggests that Ó Conaire may have been familiar with Scottish or Nordic published material as well, and combined it with the version of the legend that he had learned. Ó Conaire was, of course, an author rather than a folklorist, and felt no obligation to accurately report his source materials.

century modernist writing than towards its oral antecedents. Like much of Ó Conaire's fiction, *An Cochall Draíochta* was published serially and, as the work was never published in any of his collections, would have been read serially. The potential pitfalls of this approach to writing can be seen when the novella is read as a whole: unnecessary repetition, and minor inconsistencies and contradictions which undermine the author's attempts at psychological realism.

The main subject of the story is the dysfunctional relationship between Máirtín and the woman from the lake. She cannot live without being near her *cochall*, while Máirtín claims that he cannot live without her; both have leverage over the other. The relationship demands massive sacrifices from both parties: she is unable to see her family, while Máirtín has to give up carousing and playing music at celebrations, something which was fundamental to his identity in the community. While both partners have common ground, such as a mutual appreciation for music, their home environment is highly fraught: Máirtín is inconsiderate of her feelings, while her desire for Máirtín to do his fair share of domestic labour causes him to resent her. Both are isolated from the community. They have children, which keeps the couple together for a while, but she fears for the children when they go swimming; she is perhaps afraid that they are too much like her. While she does fall in love with Máirtín, and is unwilling to see him harmed, she does nonetheless leave him at the first chance that she gets, and when she sees him again she is unable, or perhaps unwilling, to remain with him.

A common theme in Ó Conaire's fiction is the suffering caused (especially to women) by the material conditions and social norms of the Gaeltacht. Máirtín and his bride are bound together but cause each other to suffer even after they have separated. As discussed in the previous chapter, The Mermaid Legend often warns against choosing a partner whom one does



not know well; in a society without easy divorce, the wrong choice can lead to a lifetime of misery.<sup>48</sup> While formally and stylistically, *An Cochall Draíochta* is far removed from the legend that it draws inspiration from, Ó Conaire draws upon more or less the same concerns that are operational in oral performances of that legend.

### 5.5 *The Mermaid Legend*

Éilis Ní Dhuibhne is a native of Dublin who has written novels, short fiction, drama, and poetry under several pen names, in both Irish and English, aimed at both adults and young people.<sup>49</sup> In addition to her considerable accomplishments as a literary author, she has studied folklore at University College Dublin and Copenhagen, published a number of academic articles on Irish folklore, and was one of the collectors for the Urban Folklore Project conducted at University College Dublin.<sup>50</sup> She is therefore familiar with folklore not only as a body of material but as an academic discipline.

*The Mermaid Legend* is the final story in Ní Dhuibhne's 1991 collection, the evocatively titled *Eating Women is not Recommended*.<sup>51</sup> It takes the form of a lengthy monologue spoken by a young English woman sitting in a pub, preparing for a sea journey, and recalling her unsuccessful marriage to a rural Irishman named Michael. They met in Dublin, and, after a brief and passionate courtship, she agreed to marry him and move to Spiddle, despite being aware of their incompatibility from the start ("Him and me was just too different. Not just the old English

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48 Pp. 178-80.

49 A bibliography of Ní Dhuibhne's works, as well as a number of important critical essays, can be found in Pelan, *Éilís Ní Dhuibhne*.

50 In addition to her own accomplishments as a folklorist, Ní Dhuibhne is the widow of Bo Almqvist, former director of the National Folklore Collector, and director of the project conducted on *The Mermaid Legend* in the 1990s. For Ní Dhuibhne's involvement in the Urban Folklore project, see Ní Dhuibhne, "They Made Me Tea and Gave Me a Lift Home."

51 Ní Dhuibhne, *Eating Women Is Not Recommended*, 169-75.

and Irish bit, or the Protestant and Catholic bit, or whatever. We were deep down different, like different species or something. Fish and fowl we were.”) She bears two children while in Spiddle but is miserable during her time there, failing to fit in with her community, despising her mother-in-law, unable to occupy herself, hating the weather, and fighting more and more with her husband. Michael refuses to discuss any kind of legal separation, so she decides on “divorce Irish style”: running out in the middle of the night while her husband sleeps. The end of the monologue focuses on her children, her regret over leaving them, and her anxiety over whether she will be able to see them again. Once she convinces herself that she cannot legally be kept from her children, she resolves to contact them once she is a safe distance away, calling to mind the sporadic reappearances of the mermaid to care for her children in some versions of the legend.

Like Ní Dhomhnaill’s poem *An Mhaighdean Mhara*, *The Mermaid Legend* takes the form of an extended monologue uttered by the mermaid-figure, which allows for an exploration of her mental state. The monologue in Ní Dhuibhne’s story is interspersed with passages Máire Mac Néill’s translation of a version of *The Mermaid Legend* collected in Donegal by Seán Ó hEochaidh.<sup>52</sup> Ní Dhuibhne uses this strategy of juxtaposing her fiction with the text of an oral narrative in other works, such as her short story *Midwife to the Fairies* and her novel *The Search for the Lost Husband*, both of which, like *The Mermaid Legend*, take their titles from traditional narratives. Jacqueline Fulmer refers to this device as “indirection,” which allows Ní Dhuibhne to subtly introduce ideas to her audience that they might resist if discussed plainly, such as a frank discussion of gender inequality in Ireland.<sup>53</sup> This juxtaposition of a literary narrative with a

52 Donegal MS-Main 30.

53 Fulmer, “Indirection in Éilis Ní Dhuibhne’s Re-Telling of ‘The Search for the Lost Husband’ and ‘Midwife to the Fairies’.”

traditional form of the legend also foregrounds just how much Ní Dhuibhne's story departs from traditional storytelling practices: it is a self-referential and autobiographical monologue, in which the mermaid herself speaks and takes a central position; the speaking subject is an imagined persona quite different from the actual storyteller, and the narration begins at the end and jumps back and forth rather than obeying the linear pattern of folk narrative.

*The Mermaid Legend* begins and ends with the same scene: the narrator sitting in a pub, waiting for her boat. In the opening paragraph, she notes that her relationship with Michael both began and ended in a pub, before meditating on the circular patterns of her own experience: "Life's a circle that's got a beginning and nobody knows where the circle ends... I bloody well do, don't I though? Going around in circles I am, like one of them goldfish in that aquarium over there." Like Heaney's and Ní Dhomhnaill's poems, Ní Dhuibhne's story dramatizes a non-linear, more fluid experience of time as monumental and recurring. While in Heaney's poem the sea represents a place of final repose, and in Ní Dhomhnaill's poems it is a traumatic memory, in *The Mermaid Legend* it is a source of freedom for the narrator: as she says in the closing lines of the story, "I'm a sea girl myself." Her time in Spiddle has changed her, however, and, like the mermaid who returns again and again to visit her children, the narrator still remains bound to her past life through her "half breed" children.

Another effect of the juxtaposition of the monologue and the legend is to call attention to the continuity of women's experiences. Despite the distance in time between the legend and the contemporary narrator, and the difference in culture (an English woman vs. an Irish-speaking mermaid), the two women nonetheless share the same experience of isolation, abuse, and the inability to make a clean break because of an ongoing attachment to one's children. Ní Dhuibhne

points out that women, as distinct group, have many shared experiences that cut across cultural and historical contexts, most of them rooted in the restrictive roles imposed by a patriarchal culture. The story ends, however, on a hopeful note, suggesting that circumstances can be changed for the better.

### 5.6 *The Secret of Roan Inish*

The film *The Secret of Roan Inish*, written and directed by John Sayles, was released in 1994.<sup>54</sup> It was loosely based on Rosalie Fry's 1957 novella *A Child of the Western Isles*, published in the U.S. under the title *The Secret of the Ron Mor Skerry*.<sup>55</sup> Some critics have claimed that *Roan Inish*, with its magical realism and status as a children's film, is the most anomalous film of Sayles' *oeuvre*, although several aspects, such as its exploration of community life and social issues such as emigration and industrialization, are typical of his work.<sup>56</sup> Sayles took several liberties with Fry's novella, incorporating folklore from other sources, and placing a much greater emphasis on seals and The Mermaid Legend than is to be found in the novella. He also changed the setting of the film from the Hebrides to rural Donegal on account of "that sense of Ireland being this island that's obsessed with loss...seemed to me perfect for this particular story, which is about the loss of an island and a way of life."<sup>57</sup>

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54 Sayles, *The Secret of Roan Inish*.

55 Fry is credited as a writer on the film. For critical appraisals of Sayles' work, see Carson and Kenaga, *Sayles Talk*; Ryan, *John Sayles, Filmmaker*; Shumway, *John Sayles*; Bould, *The Cinema of John Sayles*. For appraisals of *Roan Inish* in particular, see also Aitken, "The Edge of the World"; Barton, "The Ballykissangelization of Ireland"; Selby and Dixon, "Between Worlds: Considering Celtic Feminine Identities in The Secret of Roan Inish"; Falkenstein, "Critical Remembering"; Graham, "Seaweed Soup: The Secret (Ingredients) of Roan Inish"; Duncan, *Irish Myth, Lore and Legend on Film*, 11–40. Common threads in critical work on *Roan Inish* is its relation with the rest of Sayles' body of work, and the politics of representing Ireland for an international audience, concerns which are beyond the scope of the present study.

56 Turim and Turim-Nygren, "Of Spectral Mothers and Lost Children: War, Folklore, and Psychoanalysis in The Secret of Roan Inish," 135.

57 Sayles, *Sayles on Sayles*, 208. The entire interview (pp. 208-233) sheds valuable insight into Sayles' rationale for adapting Fry's novella, as well as his own attitudes towards his source material, and his views on the anti-

The opening shots of the film show the heroine, Fiona Conneely, on a boat approaching land. Through a series of flashbacks we learn that her mother had recently passed away, and that her father, who was working a factory job in an unnamed city, had sent her to live with her grandparents in the countryside rather than staying with him. As the boat draws closer to land, Fiona notices a seal watching her with unusual intensity. Fiona settles in with her grandparents and gradually learns about the family's history, including their recent evacuation from the island of Roan Inish<sup>58</sup>, the disappearance of Fiona's younger brother Jamie, and his sporadic reappearances, sailing in his cradle, like a small curragh on the sea. Eventually Fiona visits Roan Inish herself and finds signs of recent human habitation on the island. Soon afterwards, Fiona and her grandmother visit town, where Fiona meets a cousin, Tadhg Conneely, whom her grandmother refers to as one of the "dark ones" of the family, and as one "touched." While cleaning fish, Tadhg tells Fiona a story about an ancestor of theirs who captured and married a selkie by stealing her seal-skin until, predictably, she discovered where it is hidden and returned to the sea again, leaving behind her husband and children. The 'dark ones,' members of the normally fair-coloured Conneely family with dark hair and dark eyes, such as Tadhg and the missing Jamie, are supposedly proof of this encounter and have a special connection with their seal kin.

On her second visit to Roan Inish, Fiona sees her brother, who runs away from her and takes to the sea in his cradle before she is able to speak with him. On her return to the mainland

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capitalist message of the film, as well as technical aspects of filmmaking.

58 There is a Roaninish (Irish *Róninis*) in the parish of Inishkeel in County Donegal. The syntax of the name is unusual: in Irish one would expect the specific element (*rón* 'seal') to follow the generic (*inis* 'island'), although this is not unknown in Irish: for example, both Dublin and Doolin, County Clare (from Irish *dubh* 'black' + *linn* 'pool') are also specific-first place-names. "Róninis / Roaninish," Logainm.ie, accessed April 1, 2019, <https://www.logainm.ie/14610.aspx>.

she learns that her grandparents are now facing eviction, because their landlord has decided to sell their house to a wealthy foreigner who wants a holiday home. Fiona returns to the island again and sees Jamie in the company of a seal although, as before, he runs away before she can get close. When she asks Tadhg about this, he confirms that the seals are keeping him safe. Fiona convinces her cousin Éamon that the seals want the family to return to the island, so they begin restoring the settlement on the island in secret. On the night of a bad storm, Fiona lets slip that she has seen Jamie several times, and her grandmother insists that they return to the island to find Jamie. When they find him on the island, he attempts to return to his cradle, but a pod of seals block him and chase him back onto land to join his family. The final shot of the film shows the Conneely family together in their newly restored house, the grandmother making a seaweed soup supposedly taught to the family by their selkie ancestor, and Jamie uttering his first words.

The legend told by Tadhg combines details from various parts of Ireland and Scotland. The term *selkie*, used to describe the seal-woman, is a Scots word; the fact that the husband hides the stolen skin in a haystack, and that the children tell their mother about it, is a detail typical of Donegal versions of the legend; the fact that the woman rarely speaks is typical of Kerry versions of the legend; and the name Conneely (Ó Confhaola) is connected with this legend in Galway. Other stories and practices shown in the film, such as a fire-raking charm taken from the *Carmina Gadelica* and an account of an accidental voyage to Teach Duinn ‘The House of Donn’ off the coast of Cork, are borrowed from diverse parts of the Gaelic-speaking world. The immediate source for many of these details appears to be David Thompson’s *The People of the Sea*.<sup>59</sup> Despite the liberties which Sayles takes in combining details from disparate regional

59 For example, Fiona’s grandfathers’ account of the ‘cingulum’ or Irish knot used to punish children for speaking Irish appears to be derived from Thomson, *The People of the Sea*, 40. A character in the film uses a fire-smoothing charm from the *Carmina Gadelica*, which is also printed in Thomson, 37. Fiona’s grandfather tells a story about an ancestor who was rescued from a shipwreck and brought to shore by seals which also closely

traditions, he nonetheless remains fairly faithful to the outline of the legend, and, like many other traditional narratives featured in the film, conveys the story to the audience by means of Tadhg's oral performance.

While Tadhg's version of The Mermaid Legend is one of several stories told via flashbacks during the film, it stands apart in a number of ways. It is by far the longest flashback of the film, with comparatively little narration, only a single line of dialogue, in Irish, and the only blatantly supernatural on-screen event, the selkie's transformation from seal to human form.<sup>60</sup> Rather than forming the plot of the film, this legend serves as an etiology for the unique relationship between the Conneely family and the seals and their maritime environment, and provides a background for exploring the tensions and conflicts between the family's indigeneity and modern industrial capitalism. The initial scenes present the city as cramped, dirty, anonymous (the only visible face is Fiona's), and distinctly unhealthy for both the girl and her father. The Conneelys originally leave Roan Inish for economic reasons, as global capitalism has made their traditional livelihoods economically unsustainable, and Fiona's grandparents face eviction from their home near the island on account of the tourism industry.

The "other branch of the family," the seals who exert an uncanny influence over the maritime environment, play a crucial role in the plot of the film at several points. They raise a storm that allows them to steal Jamie when the family evacuates the island, eventually cause his return, and manipulate the weather so that Fiona is able to visit the island in the first place and so

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resembles Thomson, 81–85. In the film, the character mistakenly believes that he has reached the island *Teach Duinn* 'Donn's House,' which is in Cork and makes little geographic sense for film taking place in Donegal. Teach Duinn is, however, mentioned in Thomson's book shortly before one of the passages that Sayles re-tells in the film: Thomson, 39.

60 Several of the posters for the film featured the selkie, played by Susan Lynch, prominently, even though she only appeared in the film during this flashback.

that she is grounded on the island long enough to encounter Jamie. Several shots throughout the film imply that the seals are lurking out of sight, closely observing the family. They are presented more as supernatural presences, protective deities or guardian spirits concerned with the integrity of the family, rather than as mere animals. They are not, however, without menace: they cause Jamie to disappear, giving no indication to his family of his survival, and when they strand Fiona on the island during a fog, her grandparents are left to suspect the worst.

The film ends on a fairly happy note, with a return to the old country and older, pre-industrial, ways of living; this ending would have appealed to the nostalgia of the film's Irish-American audience. Such a return is possible only after Fiona lives with her family for some time, absorbing traditional history and knowledge from her grandparents, and only after a great deal of hard work, to which she and Éamon apply this traditional knowledge. Another revival of traditional knowledge occurs when the grandmother makes the seaweed soup, the recipe for which the family learned from their selkie ancestor, for their first meal back on the island. Jamie's return to his family parallels the capture of the selkie in Tadhg's legend: while Jamie is a male child rather than an adult woman, he is, like his earlier counterpart, taken from the shore and separated from his aquatic kin, clothed in human garb, and slowly taught how to speak human languages. While the selkie's capture is the beginning of a story about isolation, grief, and the dissolution of the family, Jamie's transition from the sea to land points towards future reintegration and healing.



### 5.7 *Ondine*

*Ondine* was written and directed by the Irish film-maker Neil Jordan, and released in 2009.<sup>61</sup> The film, set in Castletownbeare, Cork, outlines the complicated family dynamic between Syracuse, a fisherman and recovering alcoholic, his daughter Annie who is suffering from premature kidney failure, his alcoholic ex-wife Maura, her boyfriend Alex, and the unconscious young woman whom Syracuse finds in his net one day. When the young woman comes to, she claims to remember nothing of her previous life and insists that Syracuse keeps her hidden from the outside world, so he hides her in a cabin which belonged to his deceased mother. When visiting his daughter, Syracuse tells her about his encounter with the strange woman as if it were a fairy tale. Annie begins to suspect that her father has found a selkie and begins to research the topic of selkies in the town's library. The strange woman joins Syracuse on his boat one day, tells him to call her Ondine, and sings a song in a language unknown to Syracuse which dramatically increases the size of Syracuse's catch. Annie later follows her father to the cabin and confronts Ondine, telling her that she believes her to be a selkie; Ondine, for her part, plays along.

Ondine begins to grow quite close to Annie and Syracuse, and slowly integrates herself into town life, while Syracuse continues to enjoy considerable luck at sea. Ondine, who enjoys spending time in the water, begins to teach Annie to swim, and during one of their sessions discovers a dark object, covered in seaweed, in the water by the cabin. Annie asks her if this is her selkie coat, to which Ondine gives a noncommittal answer. Annie suggests that they bury it, as this will allow a selkie to remain on land for seven years; they bury it together in a greenhouse nearby. Eventually, a sinister-looking man arrives in town, and begins to ask questions about

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61 Jordan, *Ondine*. For critical assessments of Jordan's work, see Rockett, *Neil Jordan*; Chouinard, "Water-Sites in the Fiction and Cinema of Neil Jordan"; Møllegaard, "Global Flows in Coastal Contact Zones."

Ondine. He becomes involved in a car crash with Annie, Maura and Alex. The crash kills Alex, and at the hospital it is discovered that Alex was a compatible kidney donor for Annie. In the hospital chapel, the stranger confronts Ondine, noting with surprise and outrage that she “speak[s] their language now,” presumably referring to English. At Alex’s wake, Maura pressures Syracuse into drinking again. While heavily intoxicated, he becomes convinced that Ondine is in fact a selkie, and maroons her at the nearby Roancarrig lighthouse so that she can rejoin her people.<sup>62</sup> The next day, while spending time with Annie, he hears Ondine’s song on the television, Annie tells him this is a song by the Icelandic band Sigur Rós. Realizing his mistake, Syracuse returns to the island to find Ondine, who confesses the truth: her real name is Joanna, she is a drug mule from Romania, and the man looking for her was a drug smuggler named Vladic from whom she had previously escaped. When they return to the cabin they discover that Vladic and an armed associate are waiting for them and holding Annie hostage. Joanna digs up her “coat” (actually a backpack full of heroin), only to discover that Annie has moved it to an undisclosed location. In the rather rushed final minutes of the movie, Annie, Joanna, and Syracuse are able to outwit Vladic, drowning him and incapacitating his associate, who is soon arrested. Joanna, who faces deportation, marries Syracuse in order to stay in Ireland.

Jordan seems to draw upon multiple sources of information for *The Mermaid Legend*. In an interview, he mentions being inspired by Yeats’ *The Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*, which included Croker’s *The Lady of Gollerus*.<sup>63</sup> It is perhaps significant that Annie learns about selkies primarily through reading about them, rather than through participation in an oral tradition. Like

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62 There is a townland named Roancarrigmore (Irish *Róncharraig mhór* ‘big seal-rock’) in the parish of Bear, where Castletownbeare is located. “Róncharraig mhór / Roancarrigmore,” Logainm.ie, accessed April 1, 2019, <https://www.logainm.ie/8731.aspx>. For the unusual syntax of *rón-charraig*, cf. p. 240 note 58.

63 Zucker, *Neil Jordan*, 154–55.

Crocker, Jordan sets the the story in south-western Ireland; unlike Crocker (but like Sayles), he uses the Scots term ‘selkie’ and presents her as a seal-woman rather than a mermaid. The fact that the magical garment is hidden in a series of different locations is a detail found in Donegal forms of the legend, as mentioned above, while the idea that the woman has an aquatic husband looking for her (Annie asks Joanna if Vladic is her “selkie husband”) is found in some Irish, Scottish, and Icelandic forms. The idea that the woman must hide her own coat in order to remain on land for seven years is unattested in oral tradition, and is incompatible with the usual motif of hiding and discovery; this detail seems to have been invented by Jordan. Joanna’s initial desire not to be seen by anyone calls to mind some Irish forms of the ‘Mélusine’ legend. The film calls some attention to the diverse nature of its sources when Alex, who himself is Scottish, tells Annie that selkies are Scottish and suggests that Ondine had swum to Castletownbeare from the Hebrides.

*Ondine* explores the idea that the mermaid is a foreigner, adapting to a new way of life in a community which doesn’t quite understand her. In a contemporary context, the mermaid is a transnational migrant, and the film explores this idea in a few ways before revealing Joanna’s true identity: Alex jokingly suggests that she swam from Scotland, Annie points out that Ondine is a French name, and the song that she sings is by an Icelandic band. When Vladic confronts her in the hospital chapel, he notes his surprise that she speaks “their language,” rather than their own.<sup>64</sup> Like the legendary mermaid, Joanna has mixed loyalties to her ‘land’ and ‘sea’ families, and spends much of the film torn between two sets of obligations: she is bound to one by love, and to the other by violence and terror. Like the mermaid, Ondine is a victimized woman,

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64 Presumably Vladic is surprised that she is speaking English *with him*, rather than speaking English at all, given the status of English as a contemporary *lingua franca* in Europe.

although crucially her land family are not responsible for her distress; she is already displaced and victimized when she washes ashore. The nature of this exploitation is updated in the film to represent more modern concerns: international organized crime rather than exogamy. Joanna is a drug mule, under the thumb of a violent and ruthless smuggler; the possibility of sexual violence is implied but never fully explored,<sup>65</sup> it is not a huge leap to see Joanna as representative of victims of human trafficking, refugees, or other displaced persons. Unlike her mermaid archetype, Joanna seems perfectly happy in her new circumstances once she has severed ties with her old life; she readily embraces her new role as wife and step-mother, as well as embracing the language and customs of her new community.<sup>66</sup>

Joanna is not characterized merely as a victim, since she does take direct action to save herself, outwitting Vladic (and killing him, albeit unintentionally), and manipulating stories in order to evade notice. Initially, she plays the role of amnesiac with Syracuse, evading any questions about why she was in Irish waters in the first place. After she meets Annie, she plays along with the idea that she might be a selkie, further avoiding questions about her past and deflecting Annie's curiosity. The film plays with the idea that Joanna and Vladic might be seal-folk: several scenes feature Joanna swimming or otherwise immersed in water, her singing attracts fish, and one shot lingers on the 'webbing' formed between her fingers as she puts on a fishnet top. Vladic has a minor confrontation with a very curious seal in his pursuit of Joanna and

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65 She refers to Vladic as her *pushta*, which she translates as 'pusher.' This term may be the Romanian word *pește*, 'fish,' which also has the colloquial meaning of 'pimp.' Levițchi, *Dicționar român-englez*, s.v. *pește*.

66 Møllegaard reads this ending in a more negative light: "The colonial fantasy about the sexualized, exotic woman who willingly betrays her own kind (Vladic) out of love for a White man (Syracuse) is perhaps Ondine's lasting point." Møllegaard, "Global Flows in Coastal Contact Zones," 101. It is difficult to accept this interpretation without reservations: both Alicja Bachleda, who plays Ondine/Joanna, and Colin Farrell, who plays Syracuse, are white (and Bachleda is lighter-skinned than Farrell in the film), and Ireland can hardly be said to have a colonial relationship with Romania.

eats fish directly from the tin. By the end of the film, all of these ambiguities are resolved. Joanna abandons the pretense that she may be a selkie and reveals her true name and history. With the death of Vladic, her dual obligations vanish, and she abandons her past life entirely for her new one in Ireland. Annie's dual family is also simplified, with the marriage of Joanna and Syracuse, the death of Alex, and the seeming disappearance of Maura.

### **5.8 *Song of the Sea***

*Song of the Sea* is the second feature-length animated film by the studio Cartoon Saloon, which was directed by Tomm Moore and released in 2014.<sup>67</sup> In the opening scenes, a young child, Ben, and his pregnant mother Bronagh are painting a mural together, depicting a selkie diving into the sea and turning into a seal, while Bronagh tells Ben about selkies and teaches him a song.<sup>68</sup> She becomes mysteriously ill and vanishes, leaving behind a newborn daughter named Saoirse. Six years later, Ben and Saoirse (who has not spoken a word in six years) live on an island lighthouse along with their father Connor, who has become severely depressed after his wife's disappearance. On Saoirse's birthday, their grandmother comes to visit the island. After the party, Saoirse discovers a sealskin coat in a locked chest, puts it on, dives into the sea and becomes a seal for a while. Her grandmother discovers her washed ashore and convinces Connor that the island isn't safe and that the children should live with her in Dublin. Connor throws the chest and key into the sea, in order to prevent Saoirse from discovering the coat again. Ben and Saoirse arrive in Dublin on Halloween night, and are punished by being sent to bed early after Saoirse ruins one of her grandmother's fur coats by wearing it in the bath while playing a musical sea-shell which her mother had left for Ben.

<sup>67</sup> Moore, *Song of the Sea*. Will Collins is credited for the screenplay, but Moore is credited for the story.

<sup>68</sup> Bronagh is an Anglicization of the Irish personal name *Brónach*. The phonetic similarity to *rón* 'seal' is perhaps deliberate.

Ben decides to make the trip back home and sneaks away, followed by his sister. Three fairies, who had heard Saoirse playing the sea-shell, follow them and bring them inside their fairy-mound. The fairies explain that an owl-witch named Macha had been turning their people into stone by stealing their emotions, and that Saoirse has the power to disenchant them with her song, although she would need to wear her coat in order to sing it. During this encounter, Macha's owls attack, turning the three fairies to stone while Ben and Saoirse flee, beginning the long journey back to the lighthouse in order to find Saoirse's coat. Along the way, Saoirse begins to sicken as her mother did, impressing upon Ben the urgency of their mission.

On their journey, Ben and Saoirse become separated at a holy well, and Ben meets a being known as the Great Seanchaí, who shows him that Macha's owls have captured Saoirse and begun to transform her into stone. The Seanchaí reminds Ben of what is at stake, and sends him along to Macha's house. There, Ben confronts the witch, who believes that she is helping those she enchants, by removing their ability to suffer. Ben and Saoirse destroy her enchantments, thus making Macha see the error of her ways, and she subsequently helps Ben on his mission by conveying him to the lighthouse. Ben asks Connor where the coat is hidden and, when Connor refuses to help Ben find the coat, insisting that Saoirse needs to be taken to a hospital, Ben dives into the sea and, aided by seals, finds the chest and key. After Saoirse puts on her coat, she begins to sing, a performance that disenchants the fairies who had been turned into stone, and allows them to pass, like Tolkien's Eldar, into the west. Their mother, Bronagh, reappears to ask the half-human Saoirse whether she would want to follow her or to live among humans; Saoirse chooses the latter.

Unlike most traditional stories involving marriages with mermaids and seal-women, *Song of the Sea* focuses on the children of this union rather than the supernatural mother. The film offers no details as to how she married her human husband, or even how they met. She disappears immediately after giving birth to her second child, and although she appears unwilling or at least unhappy to leave, it is unexplained why she must. Since Bronagh plays a fairly minor role in the film, most of the legendary material skips a generation and is applied to Saoirse instead: she is silent for most of the film, her sealskin is locked away in a chest (a detail which is attested in southern Ireland as well as in Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and continental Scandinavia)<sup>69</sup>, and she is seemingly compelled to visit the sea when she puts on her sealskin. Other details, such as the lights which guide her to the sealskin, the liberating power of her song, and her inability to sing without her coat, are authorial inventions; as such, *Song of the Sea* resembles no single folk or literary version of the legend. Some material in the film unrelated to The Mermaid Legend seems to be inspired by contemporary folk practices, such as the use of dock leaves to cure nettle stings or the practice of leaving offerings at holy wells, or by medieval Irish literature, although the film takes considerable liberties with this material.<sup>70</sup> *Song of the Sea* also resembles *Roan Inish* in many respects: in both films, the fair-haired sibling plays an active role while the dark-haired sibling, who is more closely associated with the seals, must be found or healed. Both films involve a missing mother-figure, the recovery of a lost sibling, the re-integration of a family, and a return to a utopian existence on an island.

Despite the importance of the selkies in the film, *Song of the Sea* is very much Ben's story, and many of the potential tensions and conflicts in The Mermaid Legend remain

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69 P. 50.

70 For example, the names Macha and Lír are borrowed from medieval Irish tradition, although the author is aware of no text which associates Macha with emotion-stealing owls, or identifies Lír as a giant rock in the sea.

unexplored. The tension between Ben and Saoirse, based on the resentment an older sibling feels for having to care for a younger sibling, especially if that sibling is disabled or developmentally challenged, has no real parallel in traditional forms of the legend. Ben's story conforms to the hero's journey pattern familiar in cinema and popularized by George Lucas and others:<sup>71</sup> Ben journeys into an otherworldly realm, faces several challenges, and returns to our world with something of value, with which he is able to heal his family. The otherworldly inhabitants, for their part, vanish once their purpose has been served.

This healing that Ben brings is effected through storytelling, and indeed a prominent concern of the film is the therapeutic power of stories and story-telling. Both Connor and Ben struggle with grief over the loss of Bronagh. While in the otherworld, Ben is told a number of stories that dramatize various strategies for coping with grief and other emotions, and, armed with this knowledge, is able to convince Macha that her approach leaves people literally paralysed and unable to cope with their situation. He is able to free Macha and her petrified son, who closely resemble Ben's own grandmother and father; once this has happened, their real-world counterparts are able to move on, heal, and become a happy family once again. Despite this emphasis on stories and storytelling, the legend of the mermaid or selkie bride which informs *Song of the Sea* is not actually told anywhere in the film. Instead, the selkies are portrayed as real beings who play a key role in the family drama.

## 5.9 Conclusion

The adaptations discussed in this chapter explore many of the same every-day problems and intellectual challenges that are examined in many traditional performances of The Mermaid

71 While many scholars have attempted to identify cross-cultural patterns in the biographies of heroic figures, The term *hero's journey*, and the pattern of departure, initiation within the underworld, and return were introduced by Joseph Campbell, Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. For Campbell's influence on science fiction and fantasy film, see Palumbo, *The Monomyth in American Science Fiction Films*.



Legend. Many of these adaptations go further and use the intellectual framework of the legend to dive into contemporary issues and debates: feminism, transnationalism, post-colonialism, environmental issues, and language loss, to name a few. Like the mermaid or seal-woman herself, the legend is fluid, shape-shifting, and can be adapted to a dizzying variety of media, genres, and ideological ends.

Some of the creators responsible for the adaptations discussed above have drawn upon their own knowledge as active or passive tradition-bearers in working the legend into new forms. Others have drawn upon archival sources directly, and their use of these materials is an argument for the cultural value of folklore collection and archiving, as well as the importance of public access to these resources. Still others, especially film-makers, have drawn upon published versions or other adaptations of the legend. In the absence of the social structures that facilitated the oral transmission of supernatural legends in earlier times, print, television, film, and other mass media will continue to be the dominant paths of transmission for this story, as well the vehicles by which it circulates well beyond its original homeland in the Gaelic-Scandinavian cultural sphere. As mentioned earlier, these multiforms presented in mass media are becoming the canonical versions of the legend: *Roan Inish* was invariably mentioned whenever the author brought up the topic of this dissertation to non-specialists. This suggests that The Mermaid Legend will continue to be known, if not told, in ways that show the influence of these adaptations, especially those available through popular media such as film and television.

### **Appendix I : Short references to ML 4080.**

Each version of ML 4080 discussed in this dissertation has been assigned a short-format reference by which it is referred in the body of the text. These short-format references consist of three parts: the first indicates the county (Ireland), historic county (Scotland), *landskap* (Sweden), *fylke* (Norway), or country where the item was collected. The second part indicates the type of resource in question: ‘Pub’ signifies an item only attested in a published source, ‘Sound’ an audio recording, and ‘MS’ an archival manuscript. Irish manuscripts are further divided into ‘MS-Main’ and ‘MS-Schools’ for the Main and Schools collections, and ‘MS-Other’ for anything else. The last part of the reference is a number. For items in a numbered manuscript collection, this number follows the relative order in which the items appear, while for everything else this indicates the chronological order in which items were recorded. Thus, Kerry Pub 1 indicates the oldest version from a published source collected in county Kerry, while Galway MS-School 7 occurs in a higher-numbered Schools manuscript than Galway MS-School 5, regardless of which was collected first.

**Aberdeen Sound 1** = SA 1979.20.A1; Stanley Robertson (39), Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire. Collector: Barbara McDermitt, 1979.

**Angus Sound 1** = SA 1975.51.B2; Betsy White (56), Montrose, Angus. Collector: Alan Bruford, 26/4/1975.

**Angus Sound 2** = SA 1976.109.B5; Betsy White (56), Montrose, Angus. Collector: Linda Williamson, 2/8/1976.

**Antrim MS-Main 1** = NFC 1360:24-6; Dan Hyndman, Cusskib, County Antrim. Collector: Michael J. Murphy, 15/1/1953.

**Antrim MS-Main 2** = NFC 1365:140; Rose McCurdy, Ballinagard, County Antrim. Collector: Michael J. Murphy, 8/1954.

Published in Michael J. Murphy, 'Folklore Collector on Rathlin', *Sinsear* 2 (1980): 16-24 at 22; Michael J. Murphy, *Rathlin: Island of Blood and Enchantment* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press, 1987), 57-8.

**Antrim MS-Main 3** = NFC 1365:146; John Heggarty, Ballinagard, County Antrim. Collector: Michael J. Murphy, 8/1954.

**Antrim MS-Main 4** = NFC 1390:68; Paddy Anderson, Church Bay, County Antrim. Collector: Michael J. Murphy, 6-7/1955.

Published in Michael J. Murphy, *Rathlin: Island of Blood and Enchantment* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press, 1987), 58.

**Antrim Pub 1** = Nils Holmer, *The Irish Language in Rathlin Island* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co. Ltd, 1942), 152-3; Mrs. Mary Craig (née McCurdy), Lower Cleggan, Upper End, Rathlin Island, County Antrim. Collector: Nils Holmer.

**Antrim Pub 2** = Sam Henry, *Dunluce and Giant's Causeway* (Belfast: Baird, 1945), 36-8; Katie Glass, Raghery, Rathlin Island, County Antrim. Collector: Sam Henry.

**Antrim Sound 1** = UTFM C 79, 29; Tommy Cecil, shopkeeper, Rathlin Island, County Antrim. Collector: Linda May Ballard, 16/7/1979.

Published in Linda May Ballard, 'Seal Stories and Belief on Rathlin Island,' *Ulster Folklife* (1983): 33-42 at 35-6.

**Argyll MS 1** = National Library of Scotland, Campbell MS X:102; John Dewar, Glendaruil, County Argyllshire. Collector: John Dewar, 8/1859.

Published in John G. MacKay, ed., *More West Highland Tales* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Press, 1960), ii, 116-9.

**Argyll MS 2** = School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan: 633; Duncan Duffie, Port Charlotte, County Argyll. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr, 1894.

**Argyll MS 3** = School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan: 5213-4; Miss MacDougall, Oban, County Argyll. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr, 1894.

**Argyll MS 4** = School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan: 6799; Mrs Stewart, Whiting Bay, County Argyll. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr, 1901.

**Argyll MS 5** = School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan: 7692; informant unknown, Appin, County Argyll. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr, 1902.

**Argyll MS 6** = School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan: 8686-7; Miss McNicoll, Torbeg, County Buteshire. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr, 1903.

**Argyll Pub 1** = W.M. MacKenzie, ed., *The Book of Arran* (Glasgow: Hugh Hopkins, 1914), 285-7; informant unknown, Arran. Collector: Mr. Duncan Reid.

**Argyll Pub 2** = Alasdair Appin MacGregor, *The Peat-Fire Flame: Folk-tales and Traditions of the Highlands & Islands* (Edinburgh: The Moray Press, 1937), 97.

**Argyll Sound 1** = SA 1976.37.A8; Mary Williamson, Lochgilphead, Argyll. Collector: Linda Headlee, 22/4/1976.

**Argyll Sound 2** = SA 1976.74.A6; Mary McArthur, Lossit, Argyll. Collector: Mary MacDonald, 1976.

**Armagh MS-Main 1** = NFC 1758:209-11; Frank 'Wings' Campbell (75), Forkhill, County Armagh. Collector: Michael J. Murphy, 4/1965.

**Blekinge Pub 1** = Per Johnsson, *Sägner och folktrö från Blekinge* (Karlshamn: E.G. Johanssons boktryckeri, 1921), 14-15.

**Bohuslän MS 1** = VFF41:68-70; T. Sandberg, Uddevalla, Bohuslän. Collector: T. Sandberg, 1919.

**Cavan MS-Schools 1** = NFCS 966:353; Mr M. Byrne, National Teacher, Coratillon, County Cavan. Collector: Maureen Byrne, 5/2/1938-14/10/1938. Teacher: Ml. O'Brien.

**Clare MS-Main 1** = NFC 961:47-50; Pádraig Ó Gríobhtha (Peatsaí Mheáigí) (93), díonadóir 7 sclábhaí, Dún Beag, County Clare. Collector: Tadhg Ó Murchadha, 16/6/1943.

**Clare MS-Main 2** = NFC 1276:542-3; Seán Ó Conláin, Baile na Leacan, County Clare. Collector: An Bráthair P. T. Ó Riain, 10/9/1948.

**Clare MS-Schools 1** = NFCS 591:406; B. O'Keily (Bríd, Bhean Uí Chadhla), teacher, Lúbán Díge (Bodyke), County Clare. Collector unknown, 11/1937-9/1938. Teacher: B. O'Keily (Bríd, Bhean Uí Chadhla).

**Clare MS-Schools 2** = NFCS 592:427-8; informant unknown, Cill Chláráin, An Fhiacail, County Clare. Collector: Treasa Ní Chomhraidhe, 4/5/1938.

**Clare MS-Schools 3** = NFCS 596:143-4; Mrs Meaney, An Daingean, an Cuinche, County Clare. Collector: Mary O'Loughlin, 26/3/1938. Teacher: Stiofán Mac Clúin.

**Clare MS-Schools 4** = NFCS 601:95-6; Michael Foley (76), Tullach Cruinn, Inis (Tullycrine, Ennis), County Clare. Collector: Mary Hennessy, 1937-1938. Teacher: Mícheál Ó Maranáin.

**Clare MS-Schools 5** = NFCS 607:439; Crissie Russell, student, Clarecastle, County Clare. Collector: unknown, 1937-1938. Teacher: Aoife Ní Mhíodhcháin.

**Clare MS-Schools 6** = NFCS 623:139-40; Nora McGuare (40), Scoil Scropul, Mullach, County Clare. Collector: Mary E. McGuare, 1937-1938. Teacher: M. Ó Callanáin.

**Clare MS-Schools 7** = NFCS 624:600; Andy Shanahan (64), Cill Mhuire, Sráid na Cathrach, County Clare. Collector: Margaret Shanahan, 11/11/1937. Teacher: Tomás Ó Conaill.

**Clare MS-Schools 8** = NFCS 627:224; informant unknown, Cill Chaoi, County Clare. Collector: Thomas Falvey, 1937-1938. Teacher: Anraoi Ó Cathaláin.

**Clare MS-Schools 9** = NFCS 628:79-80; Seán Mac Conmhara (60), bácaer, Clochar na Trócaire, Cill Chaoi, County Clare. Collector: Bernadette Nic Chonmhara, 20/5/1938. Teacher: Máire Gromail.

**Clare MS-Schools 10** = NFCS 629:124; informant unknown, Knockera, Killimer, County Clare. Collector: Joseph Bonfield, 25/3/1938. Teacher: Mícheál Ó Cuinneagáin.

**Clare MS-Schools 11** = NFCS 633:58; informant unknown (50), Carraig an Chabhaltaigh, County Co. an Chláir. Collector: Peggy Maloney, 12/1937-12/1938. Teacher: Bríd Bhean Uí Chatháin.

**Cork MS-Main 1** = NFC 54:382; T. Ó Rioghbhardáin (78), Airglinn, County Cork. Collector: Tomás Ó Ciardha, 7/1936.

**Cork MS-Main 2** = NFC 283:323-6; Éilís Ní Iarfhlaithé (54), feirmeoir, Baile Mhic Íre, County Cork. Collector: S. Ua Cróinín, 1932.

**Cork MS-Main 3** = NFC 353:360-2; Connchubhar Ó Súilleabháin (79), feirmeoir, Trá Chaiseal, County Cork. Collector: Eoghan Ó Súilleabháin, 3/5/1937.

**Cork MS-Main 4** = NFC 736:394-6; Seán Ua hAodha (79), iasgaire, Baile na Creige, Cill Fachna Beag, County Cork. Collector: Seán Ua Cróinín, 8/5/1940.

Published in Donncha Ó Cróinín, ed., *Seanchas Ó Chairbre* (Baile Átha Cliath: Comhairle Bhéaloideas Éireann, 1985), 268-70.

**Cork MS-Main 5** = NFC 808:450-1; Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin (Maidht Reachtaire) (71), Saor cloiche, Drom a' Chláraig, County Cork. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 16/12/1941.

**Cork MS-Main 6** = NFC 913:290-2; Dhonnachadh Uí Dhonnabháin (An Coiríneach) (74), iasgaire, Gleann an Mhaghráin, County Cork. Collector: Seán Ua Cróinín, 9/10/1943.

**Cork MS-Schools 1** = NFCS 274:16-17; informant unknown, Oileán Baoi (Dursey), County Cork. Collector: Nóra Ní Dhuinneacha, /10/1937-1938. Teacher: Eoghan Ó Súilleabháin.

**Cork MS-Schools 2** = NFCS 274:189; Con Harrington (44), An Chathair Mhór, County Corke. Collector: Patrick Harrington, 5/1936-1/1939. Teacher: Donncha Ó Súilleabháin.

**Cork MS-Schools 3** = NFCS 280:371-3; Conchubar Ó Úrdail (80), feirmeóir, Doire Chonaire, County Corke. Collector unknown, 11/1937-12/1938. Teacher: Éamonn de Paor.

**Cork MS-Schools 4** = NFCS 281:60-1; Mrs Sugrue, Beantraighe, County Corke. Collector: Micheal Sugrue, 1937-1938. Teacher: Dr. Mac Carrthaigh.

**Cork MS-Schools 5** = NFCS 283:465; informant unknown, Macha na gClaidhe, County Cork. Collector: J. Barry, 3/1938-1/1939. Teacher: Cathal Ó Macháin.

**Cork MS-Schools 6** = NFCS 288:245-6; Dan Sullivan, Dunmanus, Toormore, County Cork. Collector: Nora O'Sullivan, 1937-1938. Teacher: Helena Lucey.

**Cork MS-Schools 7** = NFCS 321:20; Jim Lyons, Rennies, Cionn tSáile, County Cork. Collector: Kitty Kiely, 1937-1938. Teacher: Liam Ó hAilín.

**Cork MS-Schools 8** = NFCS 325:122-3; informant unknown, Cill Chóirne, Bán-tír, County Cork. Collector unknown, 1/9/1937-1/8/1938. Teacher: Eibhlín Bean Uí Shúilleabháin.

**Cork MS-Schools 9** = NFCS 328:186-7; Pádraig Ua Murchadha, Sliabh Riabhach, Maghcromtha, County Cork. Collector: Siobhán Ní Mhurchadha, 1937-1938. Teacher: Éamon Mac Suibhne.

**Cork MS-Schools 10** = NFCS 338:58-9; informant unknown, Béal Átha'n Ghaorthaidh, Maghcromtha, County Cork. Collector: Máire Ní Críodáin, 30/11/1937. Teacher: Gobnait, Bean Uí Liatháin.

**Cork MS-Schools 11** = NFCS 358:123-4; Pádraig Ó Conchobhair (43), Cnoc na Groighe, County Cork. Collector: Seán Ó Conchubhair, 1937-1938. Teacher: Diarmuid Ó Muimhneacháin.

**Cork Sound 1** = NFC T0127; Tadhg Ó Donnabháin, County Cork.

**Denmark Pub 1** = Evald Tang Kristensen, *Danske Sagn, 2. Afdeling: Ellefolk, Nisser og adskillige Uhyrer, samt religiøse Sagn, Lys og Varsler* (Århus: Århus folkeblads bogtrykkeri, 1893), 16; P. K. Madsen, Staby, Midtjylland. Collector: Evald Tang Kristensen

**Donegal MS-Main 1** = NFC 89:171; informant unknown, Gabhla, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Corlett Ó Cuinn, 7/6/1932.

**Donegal MS-Main 2** = NFC 139:346-9; Séamus Ó Casaide (79), iasgaire, Teilionn, County Tírconaille. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 19/9/1935.

**Donegal MS-Main 3** = NFC 142:1681-2; Máire ní Bheirn (68), bean-toighe, Málainn Bheag, County Tírconaille. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 31/12/1935.

**Donegal MS-Main 4** = NFC 142:1753-5; Seán Mac Fionnlaoich (90), iasgaire, Málainn Bheag, County Tírconaille. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 3/1/1936.

- Donegal MS-Main 5** = NFC 143:2067-8; B. Ó Baoghail (76), féirmeoir, Min a Cheárghaigh, County Tírconail. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 6/2/1936.
- Donegal MS-Main 6** = NFC 143:2260-1; Pádraic Mac Fionnlaoich (80), Féirmeoir, Min a Cheárghaigh, County Tírconail. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 17/2/1936.
- Donegal MS-Main 7** = NFC 179:169-70; Máire ní Dhonnagáin (67), bean-toighe, Rann na Cille, County Tírconail. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 30/3/1936.
- Donegal MS-Main 8** = NFC 185:27; Mici mac Monagail (82), gréasaidhe bróg, Mín na Gualanna, County Tírconail. Collector: Liam mac Meanman, 11/4/1936.
- Donegal MS-Main 9** = NFC 187:45-6; Neddy Ua Muigheaos (81), feirmeóir, Glaiseach Beag, County Tírconail. Collector: Liam mac Meanman, 9/5/1936.
- Donegal MS-Main 10** = NFC 223:3674-6; Pádraic Ó Beirn (40), iasgaire, An Chill Bhig, County Tírconail. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 20/7/1936.
- Donegal MS-Main 11** = NFC 233:4156-8; Séamus Ó Aidhne (61), féirmeoir, Mín a Charraoin, County Tírconail. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 28/8/1936.
- Donegal MS-Main 12** = NFC 260:294-5; Rón Mac Aodhchaoain (68), feirmeóir, Druim na hÁtha, County Tírconail. Collector: Liam mac Meanman, 5/10/1936.
- Donegal MS-Main 13** = NFC 270:119-20; Pádraic Ó Beirn (83), feirmeóir, Ruadhloch, County Tírconail. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 2/2/1937.
- Donegal MS-Main 14** = NFC 311:109; Anna Carr (79), bean-toighe, Gleann Domhain Beag, County Tírconail. Collector: Liam mac Meanman, 2/2/1937.
- Donegal MS-Main 15** = NFC 311:448-9; Tadhg Ua Colla (86), feirmeóir, Srath Mór, County Tírconail. Collector: Liam mac Meanman, 5/2/1937.
- Donegal MS-Main 16** = NFC 348:178-9; Aodh Mac Cauley (83), feirmeoir, Mín Leac Dubh, County Tírconail. Collector: Liam mac Meanman, 17/5/1937.
- Donegal MS-Main 17** = NFC 365:181-2; Proinnseas Ó Gallachubhair (68), féirmeóir, Leac Conaill, County Tírconail. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 21/6/1937.
- Donegal MS-Main 18** = NFC 366:229-30; Micheal Mac Conagail (68), feirmeoir, Cionn Garbh, County Tírconail. Collector: Liam mac Meanman, 16/5/1937.
- Donegal MS-Main 19** = NFC 366:306-7; Peadar Mac Meanman (58), feirmeoir, Mín a' tSionnaigh, County Tírconail. Collector: Liam mac Meanman, 21/5/1937.
- Donegal MS-Main 20** = NFC 391:526-31; Padaí mac Ruaidhrigh (70), feirmeoir, Rann na Feirsde, County Tír-Chonail. Collector: Aodh Ó Domhnaill, 18/8/1937.

**Donegal MS-Main 21** = NFC 509:67-8; Feidhlimidh Mac Faidín (70), féirmeóir, Cruc Fola, County Tírchonaill. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 23/4/1938.

**Donegal MS-Main 22** = NFC 509:441-3; Máire Ní Fhionnlaich (65), bean toighe, Machaire Loisce, County Tírchonaill. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 25/5/1938.

**Donegal MS-Main 23** = NFC 540:318-20; Dómhnall Ó Briain, féirmeóir, Mín a' Chladaigh, County Tírchonaill. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 4/10/1938.

**Donegal MS-Main 24** = NFC 694:31-4; Seán Mac Sidheail (65), iasgaire, Árd Bán Uachtarach, County Tírchonaill. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 1/1940.

**Donegal MS-Main 25** = NFC 740:62-3; Brian Mac Giolla Chearra (85), feirmeóir, An Tón Bhán, County Tírchonaill. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 15/12/1940.

**Donegal MS-Main 26** = NFC 990:423-8; Mícheál Ó Ighne (73), iasgaire, Atharach, Teilionn, County Tír Chonaill. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 7/1946.

**Donegal MS-Main 27** = NFC 992:368-71; Peadar Ó Tiomanaidhe (76), feirmeóir, An Leath Chruach, County Tír Conaill. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 6/1957.

Published in Áine Ní Dhíoraí, ed., *Na Cruacha: Scéalta agus Seanchas* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar Tta., 1985), 115-6.

**Donegal MS-Main 28** = NFC 1032:354-6; Anna nic a' Luain (62), bean toighe, Cruach Thoibrid, County Tír Chonaill. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 1957.

**Donegal MS-Main 29** = NFC 1279:202; Nóra Nic Subihne, Bailechonaill, Fálcarrach, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Seán Mac Maonagail, O.S., 29/8/1936.

**Donegal MS-Main 30** = NFC 1735:60-1; Pádraig Mac Seáin, An Cheapach Uachtarach, Teilionn, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 20/6/1966.

Published in Seán Ó hEochaidh, 'Seanchas Iascaireachta agus Farráige,' *Béaloides* 33 (1965): 1-96 at 39-40; Seán Ó hEochaidh, Séamus Ó Catháin, eds., Máire Mac Néill, trans., *Fairy Legends from Donegal = Síscéalta ó Thír Chonaill* (Dublin: Comhairle Bhéaloides Éireann, 1977), 223-5.

**Donegal MS-Schools 1** = NFCS 1031:410-2; informant unknown, Ballinakillew, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Willie McCrea, 25/1/1938.

**Donegal MS-Schools 2** = NFCS 1039:253; Brian Mac Niallghuis (58), Scoil Niall Mór, Na Cealla Beaga, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Máire Ní Dhomhnaill, 1937-1938. Teacher: Brian Mac Niallghuis.



**Donegal MS-Schools 3** = NFCS 1039:307-8; Mr William Molloy (81), Scoil Niall Mór, Na Cealla Beaga, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Moira Molloy, 12/1938. Teacher: Brian Mac Niallghuis.

**Donegal MS-Schools 4** = NFCS 1039:309; Mrs Rowan, Scoil Niall Mór, Na Cealla Beaga, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Joseph Ward, 3/1/1939. Teacher: Brian Mac Niallghuis.

**Donegal MS-Schools 5** = NFCS 1040:161-3; Brighid Ní Gallchobhair, Mín Teineadh Dé, County Tír Chonaill. Collector: Cáit Ní Ghallchobhair, 1937-1938. Teacher: Pádraig S. Mac a' Ghoill.

**Donegal MS-Schools 6** = NFCS 1045:349; informant unknown, Málainn Mór, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Pádrúig Ó hÉigeartaigh, 25/7/1938. Teacher: Liam Ó Beirn.

**Donegal MS-Schools 7** = NFCS 1047:35-6; Dimnic Mac Lochlainn (47), Sliabh Liag, Mín na bhFiann, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Mícheal Uí Cinneide, 3/5/1938. Teacher: Caitlín Nic an tSaoir.

**Donegal MS-Schools 8** = NFCS 1047:396-7; Padraic Ó Gallochobhair, Leac Chonaill, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Máirín Nic Grianna, 1/2/1938. Teacher: Séamus Mac Grianna.

**Donegal MS-Schools 9** = NFCS 1048:187; Pat McNelis (80), An Tulach Mór, County Dún na nGall. Collector: John McHugh, 20/11/1937-31/12/1938. Teacher: Máire, Bean Uí Bhrisleáin.

**Donegal MS-Schools 10** = NFCS 1048:297-9; Mrs B. O'Keeney (39), farmer's wife, Cronaghbois, County Dún na nGall. Collector unknown, 16/10/1938. Teacher: Críostóir Ó Beirn.

**Donegal MS-Schools 11** = NFCS 1079:215-6; Seán Mac Páidín (63), Doire Chasáin, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Roise Níc Pháidín, 1937-1938. Teacher: Tomás Mac Fionghaile.

**Donegal MS-Schools 12** = NFCS 1097:90; Miss Bridget Gallen, Mín Riabhach, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Kathleen Gallen, 1937-1938. Teacher: Anton Ó Domhnaill.

**Donegal MS-Schools 13** = NFCS 1097:90-1; Miss Bridget Gallen, Mín Riabhach, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Kathleen Gallen, 1937-1938. Teacher: Anton Ó Domhnaill.

**Donegal MS-Schools 14** = NFCS 1115:447-8; James Mac Laughlin (58), farmer, Gleann Tochair, County Dún na nGall. Collector unknown, 26/9/1938. Teacher: An tSr Sorcha A. Ní Dhómhnaill.

**Donegal MS-Schools 15** = NFCS 1118:511-2; John Norris (62), Carrowbeg, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Robert Mc Eldowney, 1938. Teacher: Rachel nic an Ridire.

**Donegal MS-Schools 16** = NFCS 1119:188-90; Mrs Treacy, Convent of Mercy, Merville, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Frances Molloy, 1938-1939. Teacher: Sr M. Celestine Clarke.

**Donegal Pub 1** = Seosamh de Laoide, ed., *Cruach Chonaill: Tiomsughadh Spíontóg de Sgéalaidheacht an Fhocla* (Áth Cliath Cualann: Connradh na Gaedhilge, 1913), 83-4; Eoin Mac an Luain, Cruach Mhín an Fheannta, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Seosamh de Laoide.

**Donegal Pub 2** = Éamonn Ó Tuathail, ed., ‘Seanchus Ó Inis Eóghain,’ *Béaloideas* 11, no. 1/2 (Jun.-Dec. 1941): 83-115 at 94; Peic Ní Shearcaigh, Tullagh, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Éamonn Ó Tuathail, 1929-1930.

**Donegal Pub 3** = León Ó Baoighill, ed., ‘Sgéalta Sídhé Ó Theileann,’ *Béaloideas* 8, no. 2 (Dec. 1938): 146-66 at 157.

**Donegal Pub 4** = Harry Percival Swan, *Romantic Inishowen: Ireland’s Wonderful Peninsula* (Dublin: Hodges & Figgis, 1947), 81-2; Barney McGonagal, Ballygorman, Malin Head, County Donegal. Collector: D.J. O’Sullivan, 1947.

**Donegal Pub 5** = Coislett Ó Cuinn, ed., *Scian a Caitheadh le Toinn* (Baile Átha Cliath: Coiscéim, 1990), 17; Peic Ní Shearcaigh, Tullagh, County Dún na nGall. Collector: Coislett Ó Cuinn, 1936.

**Donegal Sound 1** = NFC SÓC 84/i; Pádraig Eoghain Phádraig Mac an Luain (89), Cruach Mhín an Fheannta, County Donegal. Collector: Séamas Ó Catháin, 28/12/1974.

Published in Ó Catháin, ed., *Uair a Chloig Cois Teallaigh* (Baile Átha Cliath: Comhairle Bhéaloideas Éireann, 1985), 28-33.

**Donegal Sound 2** = NFC BA?; Seán Ó hEochaidh (61), Gort a’ Choirce, County Donegal. Collector: Bo Almqvist, 28/12/1974.

Published in Almqvist, “Of Mermaids and Marriages,” 67-69.

**Donegal Sound 3** = NFC SÓC0308; Francie Gillespie, County Donegal. Collector: Séamus Ó Catháin, 4/11/1989.

**Faroe Pub 1** = Jens Christian Svabo, *Indberetninger fra en Reise i Færøe 1781 og 1782* (København: Selskabet til udgivelse af Færøske kildeskrifter studier, 1959), 53.

**Faroe Pub 2** = J. H. Schröter, ‘Færøiske Folkesagn’, in *Antiquarisk Tidsskrift udgivet af det Kongelige Nordiske Oldskrift-selskab* (Kjøbenhavn: Brødrene Berling, 1850), 190-3.

**Faroe Pub 3** = V. U. Hammershaimb, *Færøsk Anthologi* (København: S.L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1886), 345-8.

**Faroe Pub 4** = V. U. Hammershaimb, *Færøsk Anthologi* (København: S.L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1886), 348.

**Faroe Pub 5** = Joseph Russell Jeaffreson, *The Farøe Islands* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1898), 84-7.

**Faroe Sound 1** = Institutt for folkeminnevitenskap, Oslo, MN 1971 bd. 10; William Tindskarð, Skálavík. Collector: Mortan Nolsøe, 20/5/1971.

**Finnmark Pub 1** = J. A. Friis, ed., *Lappiske Eventry og Folkesagn* (Christiania: Alb. Cammermeyer, 1871), 27-32.

**Galway MS-Main 1** = NFC 65:151-4; informant name unknown, fear siubhail, Cloch na Rón, County Galway. Collector: Liam Mac Coisdealbha, 1931.

**Galway MS-Main 2** = NFC 349:304-8; Seán Ó Sgulla (80), feilméara, Baile na Coille, County Galway. Collector: Liam Mac Coisdealbha, 4/5/1937.

**Galway MS-Main 3** = NFC 450:361-5; informant unknown, Baile Brúnach, County Galway. Collector: Brian Mac Lochlainn, 7/11/1937.

**Galway MS-Main 4** = NFC 624:204-7; Colm Ó Súilleabháin (65), feilméara, Currach Dubh, County Galway. Collector: Proinnsias de Búrca, 9/5/1939.

**Galway MS-Main 5** = NFC 669:233-5; Micheal Ó Máinín (65), feilméara, Fárnocht, County Galway. Collector: Máirtín Ó Máinín, 28/9/1939-8/10/1939.

**Galway MS-Main 6** = NFC 739:1-3; Beartla Ó Conaire (61), feilméara, Roscíde, County Galway. Collector: Proinnsias de Búrca, 25/11/1940.

**Galway MS-Main 7** = NFC 825:260-2; Seósamh Ó Griallais (34), feilméara, Cill Bhriocáin, Ros Muc, County Galway. Collector: Monica Ní Mhaodhbh, 21/4/1942.

**Galway MS-Main 8** = NFC 850:256-63; Éamonn a Búrc (74), taílliúir 7 iasgaire, Áill na Brón, County Galway. Collector: Liam Mac Coisdealbha, 18/7/1942.

**Galway MS-Main 9** = NFC 855:7-8; informant unknown, Baile a' Rugáin, County Galway. Collector: Calum J. Mac Gill-Eathain, 9/10/1941.

**Galway MS-Main 10** = NFC 1142:16-17; Tomás Ó Cadhain, Corr na Mónadh, County Galway. Collector: Proinnsias de Búrca, 23/3/1939.

Published in Proinnsias de Búrca, 'Sgéalta Faoi Róinte,' *Béaloides* 14 no. 1/2 (Jun.-Dec. 1944): 267-8.

**Galway MS-Main 11** = NFC 1175:184-6; Maitias Mac Conámha (77), feilméar, Dubhros, County Galway. Collector: Proinnsias de Búrca, 9/12/1946.

**Galway MS-Main 12** = NFC 1211:192-7; Colm Ó Maoilchiaráin (65), Camus, Casla, County Galway. Collector: Cóilín Ó Maoilchiaráin, 21-22/8/1951.

**Galway MS-Main 13** = NFC 1235:329-31; Micheál Ó Cualáin (91), pinsinéar, Camus, County Galway. Collector: Cóilín Ó Maoilchiaráin, 10-20/4/1952.

**Galway MS-Main 14** = NFC 1473:248-9; Beartla Ó Conaire (77), feilméara, Roscúde, County Galway. Collector: Proinsias de Búrca, 18/12/1956.

**Galway MS-Main 15** = NFC 1509:227-30; Pádhraic Ó Madaoin (68), feilméara, Coill Sáille, County Galway. Collector: Proinsias de Búrca, 8/10/1958.

**Galway MS-Main 16** = NFC 1688:47-50; Joe Mháirtín O'Flaherty (78), Baile an Chaisleáin, County Galway. Collector: George D. Pearson, 14/12/1957.

**Galway MS-Schools 1** = NFCS 4:366; Seán Dáibhis (74), Cushatrough, County Galway. Collector: Peadar Ó Conceanáin, 4/10/1938. Teacher: Máire, Bean Uí Ghoilidhe.

**Galway MS-Schools 2** = NFCS 6:8; Mr Malley, Leitirfreag, County Galway. Collector: Noel Heffernan, 4/11/1937-15/12/1938. Teacher: Mícheál Ó hÍfearnáin.

**Galway MS-Schools 3** = NFCS 6:82-4; informant unknown, Nead an Iolraigh, County Galway. Collector unknown, 1937-1938. Teacher: Bríd Ní Chadhain.

**Galway MS-Schools 4** = NFCS 19:297-8; Pádraig Ó Comáin (70), Creag Mór (Naomh Pádraig), County Galway. Collector: Máire Ní Uicín, 1937-1938. Teacher: Cathal Ó Murchadha.

**Galway MS-Schools 5** = NFCS 24:110-3; Mícheál Ó Concheanainn, Anach Cuain, County Galway. Collector: Pádraig Ó Concheanainn, 1937-1938. Teacher: R. S. Ó Conaill.

**Galway MS-Schools 6** = NFCS 30:82-3; informant unknown, Mionlach, County Galway. Collector: Nóra Ní Maoldomhnaigh, 5/10/1936. Teacher: Riocard Ó Tighearnaigh.

**Galway MS-Schools 7** = NFCS 47:193-4; informant unknown, Cill Mhic Duaigh, County Galway. Collector unknown, /1/1938-/9/1938. Teacher: Pádhraic Ó Cathail.

**Galway MS-Schools 8** = NFCS 60:312-3; Mrs O'Toole (45), Baile Locha Riach, County Galway. Collector unknown, 1937-1938. Teacher: An tSr Adrian.

**Galway MS-Schools 9** = NFCS 61:449-53; Seán Ó Tuairisg, Sailearna, County Galway. Collector: Mícheál Ó Tuairisg, /11/1937-/3/1938. Teacher: M. Ó Catháin.

**Galway MS-Schools 10** = NFCS 73:190-1; Beartla Ó Súilleabháin, Scoil Mhic Dara Naofa, An Cheathrú Rua, County Galway. Collector unknown, 23/11/1938. Teacher: Mícheál Ó Nualláin.

**Galway MS-Schools 11** = NFCS 75:340-1; Máire Ní Shúilleabháin, Cluain an Bhrúnaigh, County Galway. Collector: Sorcha Ní Shúilleabháin, 11/11/1938. Teacher: Máire Ní Ghiobúnaigh.

**Galway MS-Schools 12** = NFCS 76:276-7; Seán Breathnach (65), An Fháirche, County Galway. Collector: Máirtín Ó Somacháin, 15/2/1938. Teacher: Énrí Ó Maille.

**Galway Pub 1** = Máirtín Ó Cadhain, 'Cnuasach Ó Chois-Fhairrge,' *Béaloides* 5 no. 2 (Dec. 1935): 219-272 at 222; Máirtín Beag Ó Cadhain (c. 60), An Cnocán Glas, County Galway. Collector: Máirtín Ó Cadhain, 12/1930.

**Halland MS 1** = IFGH 3021:4; Fredrika Pålsson (58), Brånalt, Halland. Collector: Erik Johansson, 1931.

**Halland MS 2** = Institutet för språk och folkminnen, Uppsala 23019:115:13; Fredrika Pålsson (70), Knäred, Halland. Collector: Erik Brånberg, 1943.

**Iceland Pub 1** = Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, Ed. Árni Böðvarsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Þjóðsaga, 1954-1961), iv, 10; informant unknown, Barð, Fljót, Skagafjarðarsýsla. Collector: Jón Norðmann Jónsson, 1849-1877.

**Iceland Pub 2** = Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, Ed. Árni Böðvarsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Þjóðsaga, 1954-1961), iv, 10-11; Björg Jónsdóttir (27), Háagerði, Austur-Húnavatnssýsla. Collector: Jón Norðmann Jónsson, 6/1/1871.

**Iceland Pub 3** = Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, Ed. Árni Böðvarsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Þjóðsaga, 1954-1961), iv, 11-12; informant unknown, Holt, Mýrar, Austur-Skaftafellssýsla. Collector: Runólfr Runólfsson, 1862.

**Iceland Pub 4** = Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1862-1864), i, 632-633; Hólmfríður Þorvaldsdóttir, húsfreyja, Kirkjubæjarklaustur, Vestur-Skaftafellssýsla. Collector: Skúli Gíslason, 1812-1862.

**Iceland Pub 5** = Sigfús Sigfússon, *Íslenskar þjóðsögur og sagnir*, ed. Óskar Halldórsson et al., 2nd ed. (Reykjavík: Þjóðsaga, 1982-1993), iv, 187-188; Jóhanna Stefánsdóttir (47), húsfreyja, Tunghagi, Suður-Múlasýsla. Collector: Sigfús Sigfússon, 1904.

**Inverness MS 1** = School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan: 6797; Mr J Fraser, Rothiemurchus, Inverness. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr, 1901.

**Inverness MS 2** = School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan: 7354; Mr MacDonald, Dochfour, Inverness. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr, 1902.

**Inverness MS 3** = School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan: 9001; Mrs Grant, Carrbridge, Inverness. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr, 1903.

**Inverness MS 4** = School of Scottish Studies MS 16 (Tales from North Uist, K H Jackson I XL 1):17-19; Angus McLeod (66), tailor, Malaclete, Inverness. Collector: Kenneth H Jackson, 6-7/1951.

**Inverness Pub 1** = John Gregorson Campbell, *Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1900), 284.

**Inverness Pub 2** = Mary Julia McCulloch, 'Folk-Lore of the Isle of Skye, II,' *Folklore* 33 no. 3 (Sept 30 1922): 307-17 at 309-10; Mrs MacKinnon, Raasay, Inverness. Collector: Mary Julia McCulloch.

**Inverness Pub 3** = Alasdair Appin MacGregor, *The Peat-Fire Flame: Folk-tales and Traditions of the Highlands & Islands* (Edinburgh: The Moray Press, 1937), 98-9.

**Inverness Sound 1** = SA 1952.127.2; John MacDonald (76), Spean Bridge, Inverness. Collector: Calum MacLean, 25/5/1952.

**Inverness Sound 2** = SA 1955.131.A14+B1; Alexander Stewart (53), Tinsmith, Borve, Inverness. Collector: Calum MacLean, 7/1955.

**Inverness Sound 3** = SA 1968.212.B1; Donald MacDougall (56), Blacksmith, Malaclete, Inverness. Collector: Angus John MacDonald, 8-9/1968.

**Inverness Sound 4** = SA 1969.114.B8; John MacIsaac, Tigharry, Inverness. Collector: Angus John MacDonald, 1969.

**Inverness Sound 5** = SA 1971.7.B3; Mary Margaret MacLean, Sollas, Inverness. Collector: Angus John MacDonald, 1971.

**Inverness Sound 6** = SA 1972.37.B2+B3; Michael MacIntyre, Gerinish, Inverness. Collector: Donald Archie MacDonald, 1972.

**Inverness Sound 7** = SA 1974.156.A3+B1; Peter Morrison (85), crofter, fisherman, Grimsay, Inverness. Collector: Donald Archie MacDonald, 7/1974.

**Isle of Man Pub 1** = W. Walter Gill, *A Manx Scrapbook* (London: Arrowsmith, 1929), 442-3.

**Kerry MS-Main 1** = NFC 6:492-3; Seán O Súilleabháin (64), Baile Uachtarach, Baile an Fhirtéaraigh, An Daingean, County Ciarraí. Collector: Bríd Ní Shúilleabháin, 20/7/1932.

**Kerry MS-Main 2** = NFC 25:89-90; Pádraig Ó Chonaill, sgolaire óg, Dún Géagáin, Baile 'n Sgeilg, County Ciarraí. Collector: Seán Ó Súilliobháin, 11/10/1928.

**Kerry MS-Main 3** = NFC 27:411-20, 26:154-8, 128-9; Tadhg Ó Murchadha, An Coirreán, County Ciarraighe. Collector: Tadhg Ó Murchadha, 15/6/1938.

**Kerry MS-Main 4** = NFC 34:238; Micheal Ó Murchadha, Páirc an Teampuill, Lios Póil, County Ciarraighe. Collector: Seámas Mac hÍcidhe, 19/10/1929.

**Kerry MS-Main 5** = NFC 34:263-4; Muiris Ó Conchúbhair (56), An Blascaod Mór, County Ciarraighe. Collector unknown, 23/10/1933.

**Kerry MS-Main 6** = NFC 52:11; informant unknown, Béarra, County Ciarraí. Collector: Sean O Conaill, 8/1934.

**Kerry MS-Main 7** = NFC 146:333-5; Muiris Ó Ríoghbhardáin (67), sclábhuidhe feirme, Baisleacán, County Ciarraighe. Collector: Tadhg Ó Murchadha, 26/9/1935.

**Kerry MS-Main 8** = NFC 256:347-9; Mícheál Ó Muirheartaigh (78), feirmeóir, Iarrthar Ínnse, County Ciarraighe. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 16/11/1936.

**Kerry MS-Main 9** = NFC 272:333-4; Seán Ó Líthe (67), feirmeóir beag, Árt na Caithne, County Ciarraighe. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 2/12/1936.

**Kerry MS-Main 10** = NFC 308:63-70; Pádraig Mac Cearaill (77), feirmeoir, Cill a' Ghoirtín, County Ciarraighe. Collector: Tadhg Ó Murchadha, 1/3/1936.

**Kerry MS-Main 11** = NFC 324:195-7; Eibhlín Bhean Uí Dhómhnaill (60), bean tige, an Feóthamach, County Ciarraighe. Collector: Eibhlín Í Shéaghda, 23/3/1937.

**Kerry MS-Main 12** = NFC 324:322-39; Séamus Ó Conchúbhair (74), pinsnéir, Cill Cholmáin, County Ciarraidhe. Collector: Muiris Mac Gearailt, 28/1/1937.

**Kerry MS-Main 13** = NFC 459:249-50; Séamus Ruiséal (54), iasgaire, Baile Loisge, County Ciarraighe. Collector: Eibhlín Ní Shéaghda, 11/2/1938.

**Kerry MS-Main 14** = NFC 462:64-9; Bean Mhic Coisdealbha (44), feirmeóir, Coill Choidhtheach, County Ciarraidhe. Collector: Liam S. Ó Leidhe, 30/12/1937.

**Kerry MS-Main 15** = NFC 489:111-3; Ó Domhnaill, fear tige, Cathair Dómhnaill, County Ciarraighe. Collector: F. Mac Coluim, 3/12/1929.

**Kerry MS-Main 16** = NFC 531:172-3; Máire Ní Mhurchadha (78), bean tíge, Cnocán Uí Fhoghladha, County Ciarraighe. Collector: Tadhg Ó Murchadha, 28/4/1938.

**Kerry MS-Main 17** = NFC 613:286; Mícheál Géiní (75), feirmeóir, Túirín Fliuch, County Ciarraighe. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 31/3/1939.

**Kerry MS-Main 18** = NFC 658:398-400; Séamus Ó Riada (79), feirmeóir, Gleann-daithilion, County Ciarraighe. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 1/10/1939.

**Kerry MS-Main 19** = NFC 696:80-1; Norah O'Sullivan, Lomanaugh, County Kerry. Collector: John O'Donoghue, 4/9/1939.

**Kerry MS-Main 20** = NFC 701:329-30; Peig Bean Uí Mhistéil (82), bean feirmeóra, Ceathrú an Fhirtéaraig, County Ciarraighe. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 1/7/1940.

**Kerry MS-Main 21** = NFC 701:577; Seán Bruic (86), iasgaire, Tír Íochtarach, County Ciarraighe. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 27/7/1940.

**Kerry MS-Main 22** = NFC 744:105-8; Máire Ní Cheinnéide (76), farmer, Derry Gorman, County Kerry. Collector: Pádraig O'Sullivan, 1/11/1941.

**Kerry MS-Main 23** = NFC 771:208; Bríghid Bean Uí Dhálaigh (70), bean feirmeóra bige, Cam Uí Neól, County Ciarraige. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 3/3/1941.

**Kerry MS-Main 24** = NFC 967:519-20; Sean Crithin (67), feirmeóir beag, Cíllmhaolcéadair, County Ciarraige. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 18/2/1945.

**Kerry MS-Main 25** = NFC 998:515-9; Micheál Ó Seochrú (78), feirmeóir, Clochán na hUagha, County Ciarraige. Collector: Tadhg Ó Murchadha, 23/5/1957.

**Kerry MS-Main 26** = NFC 1100:578-9; Seán Ó Muircheartaigh (80), feirmeóir beag, saor cloiche, Baile an Lochaig, County Ciarraige. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 10/1948.

**Kerry MS-Main 27** = NFC 1151:324-6; Domhnall Ó Murchadha (60), feirmeóir, Cill na mBreac, County Ciarraige. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 4/1949.

**Kerry MS-Main 28** = NFC 1151:386-9; Séamas Mac Mathghamhna (79), obair ar an mbothar iarainn, Cúil Ruadh, County Ciarraige. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 4/1949.

**Kerry MS-Main 29** = NFC 1151:412-4; Domhnall Ó Muircheartaigh (82), feirmeóir beag, Curraicín, County Ciarraige. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 4/1949.

**Kerry MS-Main 30** = NFC 1152:79-80; Seán Ó Ríoghbardáin (86), feirmeóir beag, Curraicín, County Ciarraige. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 6/1949.

**Kerry MS-Main 31** = NFC 1177:366, 337-9; Davey Nolan (68), sglábhaí, Carraig Ceannfhionn, County Ciarraige. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 4/1950.

**Kerry MS-Main 32** = NFC 1225:3-5; Séamus Ó Clúmháin (82), feirmeóir, Cathair na mBan, County Ciarraige. Collector: Tadhg Ó Murchadha, 17/2/1952.

**Kerry MS-Main 33** = NFC 1279:383-5; Siobhán Bean Uí Shúilleabháin (48), Cinnáird, County Ciarraige. Collector: Bríde Ní Shúilleabháin, 21/6/1948.

**Kerry MS-Main 34** = NFC 1306:210-2; informant unknown, Dún Chaoin, An Daingean, County Ciarraí. Collector: Seósamh Ó Dálaigh, 28/2/1939.

**Kerry MS-Main 35** = NFC 1307:258-9; Seán Ó Conaill, leanbh scoile, Cluain Chaoin, Gleann Fleisce, County Ciarraí. Collector: Mícheál Ó Scannail, O.S., 10/1939.

**Kerry MS-Main 36** = NFC 1315:620-1; Máire Ní Dhuihneacha bean Pheadar Uí Lí (94), bean fheirmeóra, Cin Áird Thiar, County Ciarraige. Collector: Tadhg Ó Murchadha, 12/4/1953.

**Kerry MS-Main 37** = NFC 1396:481-2; Síobhán Ní Shéaghdha (77), bean fheirmeóra, Fearann na hAbhann, County Ciarraí. Collector: Tadhg Ó Murchadha, 26/5/1955.

**Kerry MS-Main 38** = NFC 1532:176-9; Seán Óg de hÓra, Cluthar, County Ciarraí. Collector: Mícheál Ó Gaoithín, 6/11/1958.



**Kerry MS-Schools 1** = NFCS 399:57-8; informant unknown, Beale, County Ciarraí. Collector: Martin Leahy, 5/10/1938. Teacher: Martin Beasley.

**Kerry MS-Schools 2** = NFCS 400:8-9; informant unknown, Rahavanig, County Ciarraí. Collector: Nóra de Staic, 1937-1938. Teacher: Máire de Stac.

**Kerry MS-Schools 3** = NFCS 401:124-5; informant unknown, Lisselton, County Ciarraí. Collector: Maurice Murphy, 25/4/1938. Teacher: Liam Brún.

**Kerry MS-Schools 4** = NFCS 401:126-7; informant unknown, Lisselton, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 27/4/1938. Teacher: Liam Brún.

**Kerry MS-Schools 5** = NFCS 404:438-9; William Flaherty (55), Murher, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 1937-1938. Teacher: Tomás Ó Conaill.

**Kerry MS-Schools 6** = NFCS 407:615-6; informant unknown, Dromlogach (Mainistir na Féile), County Ciarraí. Collector: Seán Ó Catháin, 22/9/1936. Teacher: Eighneachán Ó Muircheartaigh.

**Kerry MS-Schools 7** = NFCS 408:52; informant unknown, An Drom Clochach (B), Lic Snámha, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 9/1/1939. Teacher: Partholán Ó Ruadhacháin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 8** = NFCS 408:123; informant unknown, An Drom Clochach (B), Lic Snámha, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 11/1937-11/1939. Teacher: Partholán Ó Ruadhacháin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 9** = NFCS 409:158-63; Ellen Faley (74), Dromclough(C), County Ciarraí. Collector: Bridie Flaherty, 12/1938.

**Kerry MS-Schools 10** = NFCS 411:404-5; Martin Prenderville, Baile an Chlochair, Lic Snámha, County Ciarraí. Collector: Nellie Prenderville, 1937-1938. Teacher: Partholán Ó Gealbháin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 11** = NFCS 411:408-10; Mary Hanlon, Baile an Chlochair, Lic Snámha, County Ciarraí. Collector: Bridget Leahy, 1937-1938. Teacher: Partholán Ó Gealbháin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 12** = NFCS 414:103-5; Mr James Fennerty, Tiobraid, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 1937-1938. Teacher: Tadhg Ó Ciarmhaich.

**Kerry MS-Schools 13** = NFCS 414:161; Mr William Davis, Tiobraid, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 1937-1938. Teacher: Tadhg Ó Ciarmhaich.

**Kerry MS-Schools 14** = NFCS 414:344; Mr Micheal Connell, Beanna, County Ciarraí. Collector: Mary Kirby, 1937-1938. Teacher: Mícheál Ó Cearbhaill.

**Kerry MS-Schools 15** = NFCS 415:139-40; Jack Flynn (65), Ballyduff, County Ciarraí. Collector: Eddie Ross, 1937-1938. Teacher: Tadhg Ó Leathlobhair.

**Kerry MS-Schools 16** = NFCS 416:238; William Casey, Sliabh an Mhadra, County Ciarraí. Collector: Kathleen Connell, 1937-1938. Teacher: Eibhlín Ní Chearbhaill.

**Kerry MS-Schools 17** = NFCS 417:242; Thomas Burke (70), Drom na Coradh, County Ciarraí. Collector: Pat Leen, 4/9/1937-23/12/1938. Teacher: Cathal Máinséal.

**Kerry MS-Schools 18** = NFCS 417:405-6; Mrs Godley (60), Booleenshare, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 1938. Teacher: Mary A. Walsh.

**Kerry MS-Schools 19** = NFCS 417:450; Mrs Laide (50), Booleenshare, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 1938. Teacher: Mary A. Walsh.

**Kerry MS-Schools 20** = NFCS 417:508; Thomas Williams, Booleenshare, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 1938. Teacher: Mary A. Walsh.

**Kerry MS-Schools 21** = NFCS 418:113-4; Muiris Ó Conchubhair (65), An Blascaod Mór, an Daingean, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 1936-1937. Teacher: Máire Nic Gearailt.

**Kerry MS-Schools 22** = NFCS 419:179-80; informant unknown, An Blascaod Mór, an Daingean, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 1937-1938. Teacher: Máire Nic Gearailt.

**Kerry MS-Schools 23** = NFCS 419:180-2; informant unknown, An Blascaod Mór, an Daingean, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 1937-1938. Teacher: Máire Nic Gearailt.

**Kerry MS-Schools 24** = NFCS 420:163-4; Mícheál Mac Gearailt (42), Scoil N. Íde, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 1937-1938. Teacher: Éamonn Ó Catháin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 25** = NFCS 420:612-3; Pádraig Mac Eóin (52), Smerwick (B), Baile na nGall, An Daingean, County Ciarraí. Collector: Tomás Mac Eóin, 1937-1938. Teacher: Dd. Ó Loingsigh.

**Kerry MS-Schools 26** = NFCS 420:307-9; Eibhlín Ní Chonchubhair, Scoil N. Bríde, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 11/1937-12/1938. Teacher: Síle Granville.

**Kerry MS-Schools 27** = NFCS 424:255; Tadhg Ó Muircheartaigh, Scoil na mBráthar, an Daingean, County Ciarraí. Collector: Pádrúigh Ó Muircheartaigh, 1937-1938. Teacher: An Br. P. Ó hAragáin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 28** = NFCS 424:377; Seamus Mac Síthigh, Scoil na mBráthar, an Daingean, County Ciarraí. Collector: Éamon O Ruaidhrí, 1937-1938. Teacher: An Br. P. Ó hAragáin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 29** = NFCS 424:401-2; Séamus de Baróid, Scoil na mBráthar, an Daingean, County Ciarraí. Collector: Seán de Baróid, 1937-1938. Teacher: An Br. P. Ó hAragáin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 30** = NFCS 426:463-4; Brigid, Bean Uí Dhubháin (68), baintreach feirmeóra, Mín Árd, Abhainn an Scáil, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 1/11/1937-30/6/1938. Teacher: Ml. Ó Caomháin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 31** = NFCS 426:502; Patrick Flahive (55), farmer, Breac Cluain, Abhainn an Scáil, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 18/3/1938. Teacher: Pádhraig Ó Séaghdha.

**Kerry MS-Schools 32** = NFCS 428:128-9; Séamus de hÓra (72), Clochán, County Ciarraí. Collector: Maitias Ua Dubhda, 1937-1938. Teacher: Seán Ó Curnáin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 33** = NFCS 429:41-3; Mícheál Ó Fínn (60), Baile Uí Dhuibhne, Caisleán Ghriaire, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, /3/1936-/4/1936. Teacher: Séan Ó Loingsigh.

**Kerry MS-Schools 34** = NFCS 429:52-7; Pádraig O'Morda (89), Baile Uí Dhuibhne, Caisleán Ghriaire, County Ciarraí. Collector: Peig Ní Dhéadha, 3-4/1936. Teacher: Séan Ó Loingsigh.

**Kerry MS-Schools 35** = NFCS 430:19-20; Brigid Bean Uí Chathaláin, Achadh Caisle, Caisleán Ghriaine, County Ciarraí. Collector: Eibhlín Ní Dhomhnaill, 16/3/1938. Teacher: S. Ó Téacháin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 36** = NFCS 430:21-2; Bean Mhic Gabhann, Achadh Caisle, Caisleán Ghriaine, County Ciarraí. Collector: Nóra Ní Ghearailt, 29/3/1938. Teacher: S. Ó Téacháin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 37** = NFCS 430:59-60; informant unknown, Achadh Caisle, Caisleán Ghriaine, County Ciarraí. Collector: Cait O'Connor, 3/1938. Teacher: S. Ó Téacháin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 38** = NFCS 433:289-90; Diarmuid Ó Séaghdha (77), An Clochar, Baile an Mhuilinn, County Ciarraí. Collector: Eibhlín Ní Mhurchadha, /5/1938-/11/1938. Teacher: An tSr. M. Fionnbhara.

**Kerry MS-Schools 39** = NFCS 434:210-2; informant unknown, Cill Orglan, County Ciarraí. Collector: Eóin Ó Séaghdha, 30/11/1938. Teacher: Úna Nic Coluim.

**Kerry MS-Schools 40** = NFCS 435:213-4; informant unknown, Cill Orglan, County Ciarraí. Collector: Áine Ní Chonchubhair, 11/1937-12/1938. Teacher: Úna Nic Choluim.

**Kerry MS-Schools 41** = NFCS 435:218; informant unknown, Cill Orglan, County Ciarraí. Collector: S. Ní Laoghaire, 11/1937-12/1938. Teacher: Úna Nic Choluim.

**Kerry MS-Schools 42** = NFCS 435:321-2; Bríghid Ní Shéaghdha (63), bean feirmeora, Dubhglas, County Ciarraí. Collector: Eibhlín Ní Shúilleabháin, 11/1937-6/1938. Teacher: Eibhlín Bean de Róiste.

**Kerry MS-Schools 43** = NFCS 437:53; Pádraig Ó Séaghdha (57), Cromáin, County Ciarraí. Collector: Tomás Ó Séaghdha, 7/1934-1/1939. Teacher: Stiophán Ó Cobhthaigh.

**Kerry MS-Schools 44** = NFCS 437:90; Fionán Mac Carthain (50), Cromáin, County Ciarraí. Collector: Patrick McCarthy, /7/1934-/1/1939. Teacher: Stiophán Ó Cobhthaigh.

**Kerry MS-Schools 45** = NFCS 438:111; informant unknown (63), Barrow, County Ciarraí. Collector: Cait Ní Dhubbáin, 9/3/1938. Teacher: Ml. Ó hUallacháin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 46** = NFCS 439:27; informant unknown, Scoil na mBráthar, Tráighlí, County Ciarraí. Collector: Miss M. Fitzgerald, 12/1938. Teacher: Ss. Ó Ruacháin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 47** = NFCS 439:142; John Kerrins (62), Clochar na Toirbhirte, Tráighlí, County Ciarraí. Collector: Joan Savage, 12/1937-12/1937. Teacher: An tSr. Bríd.

**Kerry MS-Schools 48** = NFCS 440:385-7; Bean Mhic Gabhann, Clochar na Trócaire, Moyderwell, County Ciarraí. Collector: Máire Ní Gearailt, 1937-1938. Teacher: An tSr. Antoin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 49** = NFCS 440:404-5; Murtach Ó Laoghaire, Clochar na Trócaire, Moyderwell, County Ciarraí. Collector: Mary A Griffin, 1937-1938. Teacher: An tSr. Antoin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 50** = NFCS 440:512-4; Jeremiah Williams (58), Naomh Breandán, Blennerville, County Ciarraí. Collector: Mary Quinlan, 1937-1938. Teacher: Bean Uí Mhuircheartaigh.

**Kerry MS-Schools 51** = NFCS 440:557; Mrs. Tangney (55), Naomh Breandán, Blennerville, County Ciarraí. Collector: Mary A. Tangney, 1937-1938. Teacher: Bean Uí MhuircheartaighX.

**Kerry MS-Schools 52** = NFCS 440:591-2; Mrs O'Connor (82), Naomh Breandán, Blennerville, County Ciarraí. Collector: Nora Greaney, 1937-1938. Teacher: Bean Uí MhuircheartaighX.

**Kerry MS-Schools 53** = NFCS 441:106-7; Mrs Slattery (65), St. Brendans, Blennerville, County Ciarraí. Collector: Anne Hurley, /9/1937-/12/1938. Teacher: Máire, Bean Uí Mhuircheartaigh.

**Kerry MS-Schools 54** = NFCS 448:322; informant unknown (49), farmer, Kilmurry, County Kerry. Collector: Norry Prendiville, 28/1/1938. Teacher: Mrs Ellen Mary O'Connor.

**Kerry MS-Schools 55** = NFCS 449:521-2; Mrs Lane (47), Brosna, County Ciarraí. Collector: Sheila Lane, 24/6/1938. Teacher: Bean Uí Dhúnaighe.

**Kerry MS-Schools 56** = NFCS 449:523; James Guiney (50), Brosna, County Ciarraí. Collector: Mary A. Guiney, 2/7/1938. Teacher: Bean Uí Dhúnaighe.

**Kerry MS-Schools 57** = NFCS 458:194-5; James Murphy (52), Kilbonane, Lios an Phúca (Beaufort), County Ciarraí. Collector: Tomás Ó Murchadha, 1937-1938. Teacher: Dll. Ó Clúmháin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 58** = NFCS 458:100; informant unknown, Gort na Cloiche, Magh gCoinche, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 1937-1938. Teacher: Donnchadh Ó hÉaluighthe.

**Kerry MS-Schools 59** = NFCS 458:196; Charles Connor (54), Kilbonane, Lios an Phúca (Beaufort), County Ciarraí. Collector: Tadhg Ó Conchúbhair, 1937-1938. Teacher: Dll. Ó Clúmháin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 60** = NFCS 460:357-9; John Sullivan (81), Firies, County Ciarraí. Collector: Fred O'Sullivan, 8/1/1936. Teacher: Pádraig Ó Mainchín.

**Kerry MS-Schools 61** = NFCS 460:638-9; John Moriarty (74), Baile an Oileáin, County Ciarraí. Collector: Eugene Moriarty, 1/9/1937-30/5/1938. Teacher: Eoghan Ua Muircheartaigh.

**Kerry MS-Schools 62** = NFCS 463:144-5; Mike Shea, Leithead, County Ciarraí. Collector: Shelia O'Shea, 1937-1938. Teacher: Diarmuid Ó Súilleabháin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 63** = NFCS 464:33; informant unknown, Leithead, County Ciarraí. Collector: Eibhlín Ní hUrdail, 5/7/1934-14/2/1935. Teacher: Diarmuid Ó Súilleabháin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 64** = NFCS 465:56; Mrs Daniel Donoghue (70), Farmer's wife, Droichead na Dóinne, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 5/1936. Teacher: Tadhg Ó Scolaidhe.

**Kerry MS-Schools 65** = NFCS 465:165; Mrs T. O'Donoghue (55), farmer's wife, Droichead na Dóinne, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 7/1936. Teacher: Tadhg Ó Scolaidhe.

**Kerry MS-Schools 66** = NFCS 465:166-7; Mrs Con McCarthy (45), farmer's wife, Droichead na Dóinne, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 7/1936. Teacher: Tadhg Ó Scolaidhe.

**Kerry MS-Schools 67** = NFCS 471:219-20; Mrs Doyle, Kilgobnet, County Ciarraí. Collector unknown, 6/1934-12/1938. Teacher: Eibhlín, Bean Uí Fhoghladha.

**Kerry MS-Schools 68** = NFCS 472:249-53; Pádraig Ó Curráin, Curraichín, County Ciarraí. Collector: Cait Ní Curráin, 9/1937-12/1938. Teacher: Eibhlín Ní Chonchobhair.

**Kerry MS-Schools 69** = NFCS 472:403-7; Pádrúig de Róiste (63), Curraichín, County Ciarraí. Collector: Pádrúig de Róiste, /11/1937. Teacher: Seán Ó Scothlaoich.

**Kerry MS-Schools 70** = NFCS 473:2-3; Mícheál Ó Muirceartaig (75), Leitir, County Ciarraí. Collector: Tomas Mac Eóin, 1/2/1938-1/12/1938. Teacher: Tomas Mac Eóin.

**Kerry MS-Schools 71** = NFCS 473:107-8; Pártalán Mac Suibhen, Gleann Beithe, County Ciarraí. Collector: Seán Mac Suibhne, 8/11/1937-15/12/1938. Teacher: Séamus Ó Dochartaigh.

**Kerry MS-Schools 71** = NFCS 477:319-21; Bean Uí Mhuircheartaigh, Achadh Tiobraid, County Ciarraí. Collector: Tomás Ó Muircheartaigh, 1937-1938. Teacher: Tomás Ó Muircheartaigh.

**Kerry Pub 1** = Patrick Kennedy, *Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1866), 121-2.

**Kerry Pub 2** = Jeremiah Curtin, *Tales of the Fairies and the Ghost World* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1895), 150-4.

**Kerry Pub 3** = John Millington Synge, *Travels in Wicklow, West Kerry and Conamara* (Dublin: Maunsell & Company, Ltd., 1911), 132-3.

**Kerry Pub 4** = An Seabhac, ed., *An Seanchaidhe Muimhneach* (Baile Átha Cliath: Institute Béaloideas Éireann, 1932), 67-8; informant unknown, Na Dumhacha, County Ciarraige. Collector: Máirtín Breathnach, 1908.

**Kerry Pub 5** = An Seabhac, ed., *An Seanchaidhe Muimhneach* (Baile Átha Cliath: Institute Béaloideas Éireann, 1932), 69-72; informant unknown, Cill Mhich a' Domhnaigh, County Ciarraige. Collector: Siobhán Ní Mhainnín, 1911.

**Kerry Pub 6** = Séamus Ó Duilearga, ed., *Leabhar Sheáin Í Chonaill* (Baile Átha Cliath: Brún agus Ó Nualláin Tta., 1964), 314-5; Seán Ó Conaill (72), near Cathair Saidhbhín, County Ciarraige. Collector: Séamus Ó Duilearga, 8/1925.

**Kerry Pub 7** = Domhnall Ua Murchadha, *Rann-scéalta, Scéalta Gearra, agus Paidreacha Áluinne* (1930), 11-12; Domhnall Úa Murchadha (71), An Rinn Áird, County Ciarraige.

**Kerry Pub 8** = Kenneth Jackson, 'Scéalta Ón mBlascaod,' *Béaloideas* 8 no. 1 (Jun. 1938): 3-96, at 70-1; Peig Sayers, An Blascaod Mór, County Ciarraige. Collector: Kenneth Jackson, 1932-1937.

**Kerry Pub 9** = Ristearc Breatnach, ed., *Ar Muir is ar Tír: Caiblidí do Bheatha* (Maigh Nuad: An Sagart, 1991), 58-9; Muiris Ó Catháin (90), An tOileán Tiar, County Ciarraige. Collector: Ristearc Breatnach, 1960.

**Kerry Sound 1** = NFC ?; Peig Sayers (78), Baile an Bhicáire, County Kerry. Collectors: Seán Ó Súilleabháin, Caoimhín Ó Danachair, Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha, 14/1/1952.

Published in Almqvist, "Of Mermaids and Marriages," 70-74.

**Kerry Sound 2** = NFC Muckross Collection, Tape 8; Mrs. Joan Lyne, game-keeper's wife, Muckross Estate, Killarney, County Kerry. Collector: Bairbre Ní Fhloinn, 15/11/1982.

**Kerry Sound 3** = NFC 1409; Mrs. Mary O'Keefe (née Walsh), Holyoake, MA, USA; raised in county Kerry.

**Leitrim MS-Main 1** = NFC 104:463-5; Mary Goffney (Over 70), Arigna, County Leitrim. Collector: Tadhg Ó Rabhartaigh, 15/7/1935.

**Leitrim MS-Schools 1** = NFCS 189:8; John Cullen, Gleann Éada, County Co. Liathdroma. Collector: Bean Uí Mhaolaith, 22/11/1937. Teacher: Bean Uí Mhaolaith.

**Leitrim MS-Schools 2** = NFCS 189:98; informant unknown, Dubhthrian, Manorhamilton, County Co Liathdroma. Collector: Delia Mac Ternan, 1937-1938.

**Leitrim MS-Schools 3** = NFCS 190:219; informant unknown, Cloonty, County Liathdruim. Collector: Annie M. Gallagher, 1937-1938. Teacher: Michael MacGowan.

- Leitrim MS-Schools 4** = NFCS 192:137-8; James Kerrigan (50), Kilasnett, County Co. Liathdroma. Collector: Bridget Meehan, 1937-1938. Teacher: Eoghan Mac Oirealla.
- Leitrim MS-Schools 5** = NFCS 195:87-8; Patrick Bennett, Coillte Clochair, County Co Liathdroma. Collector: Margaret Bennett, 10-12/1938. Teacher: Sorcha Ní Mhuireagáin.
- Leitrim MS-Schools 6** = NFCS 199:256-7; informant unknown, Newtownmanor, County Co. Liathdroma. Collector: Rose Anne Smith, 4/3/1938. Teacher: P. Mac Néill.
- Leitrim MS-Schools 7** = NFCS 204:187; Patrick McTernan (52), Shibvillagh, County Co. Liathdroma. Collector: James McTernan, 4/4/1938. Teacher: Thomas Byrne.
- Leitrim MS-Schools 8** = NFCS 205:400; informant unknown, Tulach Cliabháin, County Co Liathdroma. Collector: Eibhlín, Bean Uí Iarfhlaithe, 1937-1938. Teacher: Eibhlín, Bean Uí Iarfhlaithe.
- Leitrim MS-Schools 9** = NFCS 206:461; Eoghan Mac Aodha (92), Urbal NS, County Co Liathdroma. Collector: Séamas Mac Aodha, 14/5/1934. Teacher: Gerald Kelliher.
- Leitrim MS-Schools 10** = NFCS 206:575-6; John Loughlin (55), Urbal NS, County Co Liathdroma. Collector: Brigid Loughlin, 25/3/1938. Teacher: Gerald Kelliher.
- Limerick MS-Main 1** = NFC 296:302-3; Johnny Cregan (65), butcher, Rathkeale, County Limerick. Collector: Micheál Ó Conchubhair, O.G., 7/1936.
- Limerick MS-Schools 1** = NFCS 482:47-8; Mrs Margaret Connolly (95), Cluain Leith Áird, County Luimneach. Collector unknown, 9/11/1935-17/12/1938. Teacher: Máirtín de Barra.
- Limerick MS-Schools 2** = NFCS 482:276; John O'Callahan (67), Ballyhahill (C), County Luimneach. Collector: Anetta Dalton, 1937-1938. Teacher: H. Fitzgerald.
- Limerick MS-Schools 3** = NFCS 483:8; Mrs Barron (78), Foynes, County Luimneach. Collector: Máire Ní Dhubhghaill, 10-12/1938. Teacher: Eithne Ní Mhaidín.
- Limerick MS-Schools 4** = NFCS 83:66-7; Mrs K. Madigan (56), Foynes, County Luimneach. Collector: Caitlín Ní Madagain, 10-12/1938. Teacher: Eithne Ní Mhaidín.
- Limerick MS-Schools 5** = NFCS 483:333-4; Mrs Fitzsimmons, Sean-Ghualainn, County Luimneach. Collector: Nora Fitzsimmons, 1937-1938. Teacher: Úna, Bean Uí Riada.
- Limerick MS-Schools 6** = NFCS 490:54-6; informant unknown, Áth an Lín, County Luimneach. Collector: Máire Nic an Aodhaire, 1937-1938. Teacher: Máire Nic an Aodhaire.
- Limerick MS-Schools 7** = NFCS 491:304; Seán Ó Caoimh (69), othar, Teampall an Ghleanntáin, County Luimneach. Collector: Bríd Ní Chonchubhair, 23/3/1938. Teacher: Meadhbh Ní Ghormáin.

**Limerick MS-Schools 8** = NFCS 495:31; Patrick Riordan, Árd na Glaise, Mainistir na Féile, County Luimneach. Collector: Patrick Riordan, 1937-1938. Teacher: Seosamh Ó Ceallaigh.

**Limerick MS-Schools 9** = NFCS 495:157-8; William Lane, Radharc na Féile, County Luimneach. Collector unknown, 17/11/1938. Teacher: Tadhg Mac Coitir.

**Limerick MS-Schools 10** = NFCS 496:187; Thomas Harrold (72), Kilmeedy, County Luimneach. Collector: James O'Flynn, 13/5/1938. Teacher: John O'Grady.

**Limerick MS-Schools 11** = NFCS 496:357; Mrs Dunworth (50), Cill Mhíde, Caisleán Nua, County Luimneach. Collector: Eily McKessy, 26/11/1937-9/2/1939. Teacher: Eibhlín Ní Bhraonáin.

**Limerick MS-Schools 12** = NFCS 496:357; Mrs Keogh (52), Cill Mhíde, Caisleán Nua, County Luimneach. Collector: Margaret Keogh, 26/11/1937-9/2/1939. Teacher: Eibhlín Ní Bhraonáin.

**Limerick MS-Schools 13** = NFCS 500:13; Patrick Irwin (60), Baile an Gharrdha, County Luimneach. Collector: James Irwin, 1937-1938. Teacher: Dll. Ó Conaill.

**Limerick MS-Schools 14** = NFCS 500:14; Mrs Dowling (35), Baile an Gharrdha, County Luimneach. Collector: Eddie Fuller, 1937-1938. Teacher: Dll. Ó Conaill.

**Limerick MS-Schools 15** = NFCS 500:15; informant unknown, Baile an Gharrdha, County Luimneach. Collector: Eddie Fuller, 1937-1938. Teacher: Dll. Ó Conaill.

**Limerick MS-Schools 16** = NFCS 500:16; James Lee (92), Baile an Gharrdha, County Luimneach. Collector: Tony Noonan, 1937-1938. Teacher: Dll. Ó Conaill.

**Limerick MS-Schools 17** = NFCS 502:250-2; Mr Moran (66), Askeaton, County Luimneach. Collector: Margaret Casey, 1937-1938. Teacher: Áine, Bean Mhic Eoin.

**Limerick MS-Schools 18** = NFCS 502:253-4; Mr W O'Donnell, Askeaton, County Luimneach. Collector: Bridgett O'Donnell, 1937-1938. Teacher: Áine, Bean Mhic Eoin.

**Limerick MS-Schools 19** = NFCS 502:409-10; John O'Shaughnessy (54), Askeaton, County Luimneach. Collector: Micheal O'Shaughnessy, 1937-1938. Teacher: D. Mac Eoin.

**Limerick MS-Schools 20** = NFCS 507:89; Mrs John Ryan (68), Cromadh, County Luimneach. Collector: Georgie Reynolds, 19/7/1935-2/1/1937. Teacher: Dáithí Ó Ceanntabhail.

**Limerick MS-Schools 21** = NFCS 507:603-5; informant unknown, Cromadh, County Luimneach. Collector unknown, 12/1937-12/1938. Teacher: Bríd, Bean Mhic Eoin.

**Limerick MS-Schools 22** = NFCS 522:12; Thomas Kemp (60), Mágh Rua, County Luimneach. Collector unknown, 4/6/1934-6/12/1938. Teacher: Máire Ni Riain.



**Longford MS-Main 1** = NFC 1457:392; Mrs. Eugene Reilley (née MacNaloe) (45), bean tí, Carrickmaguirk, County Longford. Collector: James G. Delaney, 3/1956.

**Louth MS-Other 1** = National Folklore Collection; Mary Oakes (50s), Black Gates, Ravensdale, County Louth. Collector: Brian Earls, 1978.

**Louth MS-Schools 1** = NFCS 673:114-5; informant name unknown (40), Díseart, County Louth. Collector: Detta Campbell, 1936-1938. Teacher unknown.

**Mayo MS-Main 1** = NFC 191:254-5; Mícheál Ó Máille (86), Dubhloch, County Muigh Eó. Collector: Eoghan Ó Súilleabháin, O.S., 27/4/1936.

**Mayo MS-Main 2** = NFC 195:480-2; Seán Ó Roitleáin, The Lodge, Rosspport, County Mayo. Collector: Henry Corduff, N.T., 27/3/1935.

**Mayo MS-Main 3** = NFC 238:372-3; Páraic Ó Uigin (76), feilméara, Cill Bheidin, Baile an Daingin, County Muigheó. Collector: Liam Mac Coisdealbha, 7/9/1936.

**Mayo MS-Main 4** = NFC 342:342-4; Cáit Ní Mhaoir, Cnocha, Béal Átha na Muice, County Muigheó. Collector: Bríd Ní Chollaráin, 24/4/1937.

**Mayo MS-Main 5** = NFC 507:273; Peadar Buiréad (76), feilméara, Muigh Raithin, County Muigh Eó. Collector: Liam Mac Coisealbha, 29/4/1938.

**Mayo MS-Main 6** = NFC 606:462; Ainrias Ó Maoldomhnaigh (70), feilméara, Gleann na Muaidhe, County Muigheó. Collector: Liam mac Coisdealbha, 11/3/1939.

**Mayo MS-Main 7** = NFC 606:646-8; Séamas a Géanlaigh (65), feilméara, An Cartún Beag, County Muigh Eó. Collector: Liam Mac Coisdealbha, 30/3/1939.

**Mayo MS-Main 8** = NFC 625:227-9; Ainrias Ó Maoldomhnaigh (70), feilméara, Gleann na Muaidhe, County Muigheó. Collector: Liam Mac Coisdealbha, 3/5/1939.

**Mayo MS-Main 9** = NFC 662:66; Mícheál Ó Mongáin (60), feilméara, Tulachán Duf, County Muigheo. Collector: Liam Mac Coisdealbha, 17/2/1939.

**Mayo MS-Main 10** = NFC 1140:66; Seán Ó Longáin, Caisleán an Bharraigh, County Muigheo. Collector: Seán Ó Longáin, 24/8/1935.

**Mayo MS-Main 11** = NFC 1208:391-3; Seán mac Ainrias (52), feilméirí, Barr na Coilleadh, County Muigheó. Collector: Mícheál Ó Sírin, 23/10/1951.

**Mayo MS-Main 12** = NFC 1230:133-41; Peadar Buiréad (45), feilméirí, Ceathrú na gCloch, County Muigheo. Collector: Mícheál Ó Sírin, 14/1/1952.

**Mayo MS-Main 13** = NFC 1244:433-7; Henry Corduff, N.T., The Lodge, Rosspport, County Mayo. Collector: Henry Corduff, N.T., 14/5/1946.

**Mayo MS-Main 14** = NFC 1317:496-7; Seán Ó Roithleáin (90), feilméirí 7 iasgaire, Ros Dúmhaich, County Muigheo. Collector: Mícheál Ó Sírin, 20/9/1952.

**Mayo MS-Main 15** = NFC 1330:212-4; Bríd (ní Ghallachuir) níc Ghiollabháin (69), feilméara, Sáile (Baile Thiar), County Muigheo. Collector: Pádraig Ó Moghráin, 16/6/1953.

**Mayo MS-Main 16** = NFC 1349:84/6; informant unknown, Dú Goirt, County Muigheo. Collector: Pádraig Ó Moghráin, 24/5/1954.

**Mayo MS-Main 17** = NFC 1585:320-2; Antoine Ó Gionáin (68), feilméir 7 iasgaire, Cill Gheallagháin, County Muigheo. Collector: Mícheál Mac Énrí, 4/7/1960.

**Mayo MS-Main 18** = NFC 1586:231-4; Micheal Ó Corduibh (80), feilméar, Rosduach, County Muigheo. Collector: Micheal Mac Énrí, 7/3/1961.

**Mayo MS-Main 19** = NFC 1587:184; Máire Bean Uí Ghearrabháin (94), bean feilméaraidhe, Cill Ghallagáin, County Muigheo. Collector: Micheál Mac Énrí, 21/6/1960.

**Mayo MS-Schools 1** = NFCS 85:68-70; Mártan Ó Lochlainn (59), Sáile, County Maigheo. Collector: Maireadh Ní Lochlainn, 1937-1938. Teacher: R. Ó Cuinn.

**Mayo MS-Schools 2** = NFCS 86:360-1; Cáit Ní Mhaoir, Tóin an tSean-Bhaile, County Muigheo. Collector: Bríghid Ní Mhaoir, 23/3/1938. Teacher: Pádhraic Mac Pháidín.

**Mayo MS-Schools 3** = NFCS 89:130-1; informant unknown, Eaglais, County Muigheo. Collector unknown, 27/10/1938-16/12/1938. Teacher: S. Ó Mongaigh.

**Mayo MS-Schools 4** = NFCS 93:58-9; Mr. J. P. Kineavy, Cruimghlinn, County Mayo. Collector: Kathleen Kineavy, 1937-1938. Teacher: Ml. Ó Conchobhair.

**Mayo MS-Schools 5** = NFCS 94:23; Antóine Breatnach, An Pháirc, County Muigheo. Collector: Máire Nich hÉil, 1937-1938. Teacher: Mícheál Mac Cathmhaoil.

**Mayo MS-Schools 6** = NFCS 94:230-1; informant unknown, Grianán, County Muigheo. Collector: Bridgie Timlin, 8/6/1938. Teacher: Máiréad, Bean Uí Riagáin.

**Mayo MS-Schools 7** = NFCS 94:434-7; Michael Moran (87), Belcarra, County Muigheo. Collector: Kathleen McDonnell, /10/1937-/12/1938. Teacher: Mary T. Moran.

**Mayo MS-Schools 8** = NFCS 114:167-8; Thomas Mullen, Cill Moibhí, County Muigheo. Collector: Kathleen Mullen, /11/1937-/7/1938. Teacher: Áine, Bean Uí Dhubhthaigh.

**Mayo MS-Schools 9** = NFCS 121:115-8; A. Kelly, Ceathrú Gabhann, County Muigheo. Collector: Molly King, 1937-1938. Teacher: Caitlín Bean Uí Shioradáin.

**Mayo MS-Schools 10** = NFCS 125:139-40; Éamonn Ó Ruagáin, Naomh Eoin, Béal Easa, County Muigheo. Collector: Caitlín Ní Mhaoldhomhnaigh, 29/11/1937-12/1/1938.

**Mayo MS-Schools 11** = NFCS 128:130-1; Mrs Mary Joy, Gort na mBó, County Muigheo. Collector: William Foy, 21/11/1938. Teacher: Tadhg Ó Laoghaire.

**Mayo MS-Schools 12** = NFCS 128:136-7; Pat Moran, Gort na mBó, County Muigheo. Collector: John Moran, 21/11/1938. Teacher: Tadhg Ó Laoghaire.

**Mayo MS-Schools 13** = NFCS 128:175-7; Mrs Bridget Flannelly, Gort na mBó, County Muigheo. Collector: Kathleen Flannelly, 21/11/1938. Teacher: Tadhg Ó Laoghaire.

**Mayo MS-Schools 14** = NFCS 128:255-7; Peter O'Hara (52), Muine Chonalláin, County Muigheo. Collector: Belinda O'Hara, 1937-1938. Teacher: M. Ní Lochnáin.

**Mayo MS-Schools 15** = NFCS 128:485; Mrs Gillard, Carra, County Muigheo. Collector: Breeta Gillard, 1/5/1938. Teacher: P. Ó Torna.

**Mayo MS-Schools 16** = NFCS 128:501-2; Mrs Anthony Jordan, Carra, County Muigheo. Collector: Molly Richards, 12/5/1938. Teacher: P. Ó Torna.

**Mayo MS-Schools 17** = NFCS 128:528; informant unknown, Ceathrú na gCloch, Gleann Fraoigh, County Muigheo. Collector unknown, 1937-1938. Teacher: Bríd Bhreatnach.

**Mayo MS-Schools 18** = NFCS 131:242-3; Séamas Mac Craith (50), Ceathrú Thaidhg, Béal Átha an Fheadha, County Muigheo. Collector: Eibhlín Ní Craith, 4/1/1939. Teacher: Pádraig Mag Shamhráin.

**Mayo MS-Schools 19** = NFCS 131:244-6; Pádhraig Ó Taidhg, Ceathrú Thaidhg, Béal Átha an Fheadha, County Muigheo. Collector: Tomás Ó Sírin, 4/1/1939. Teacher: Pádraig Mag Shamhráin.

**Mayo MS-Schools 20** = NFCS 131:246-7; Mícheál Ó Conghaile, Ceathrú Thaidhg, Béal Átha an Fheadha, County Muigheo. Collector: Mícheál Ó Conghaile, 4/1/1939. Teacher: Pádraig Mag Shamhráin.

**Mayo MS-Schools 21** = NFCS 131:248; informant unknown, Ceathrú Thaidhg, Béal Átha an Fheadha, County Muigheo. Collector unknown, 4/1/1939. Teacher: Pádraig Mag Shamhráin.

**Mayo MS-Schools 22** = NFCS 131:491-2; Cathal Ó Dochartaigh, Ceathrú Thaidhg, Béal Átha an Fheadha, County Muigheo. Collector: Nóra Ní Dhochartaigh, 4/1/1939. Teacher: Pádraig Mag Shamhráin.

**Mayo MS-Schools 23** = NFCS 141:367-8; Áine Nic Oirealla, teacher, Gort an Tuair, County Muigheo. Collector: Katie Bourke, 1937-1938. Teacher: Áine Nic Oirealla.

**Mayo MS-Schools 24** = NFCS 142:93-4; informant unknown, Eanach Mór, County Muigheo. Collector: Máirtín Ó Braonáin, 1937-1938. Teacher: Máirtín Ó Braonáin.

**Mayo MS-Schools 25** = NFCS 142:96; informant unknown, Eanach Mór, County Muigheó. Collector: Máirtín Ó Braonáin, 1937-1938. Teacher: Máirtín Ó Braonáin.

**Mayo MS-Schools 26** = NFCS 142:184; Thomas Finegan, Ráth Sheiscinn, County Muigheó. Collector: Anna Ní Chléirigh, 1937-1938. Teacher: Anna Ní Chléirigh.

**Mayo MS-Schools 27** = NFCS 132:79-80; Mrs Howard, Teampall Mhuire, County Muigheó. Collector: Bridie Howard, 1937-1938. Teacher: Eithne Bean Uí Mhaonghaille.

**Mayo MS-Schools 28** = NFCS 145:15; Patrick Walsh, Baile Nua an Fhaoitigh, County Muigheó. Collector: Robert Fair, 24/11/1937. Teacher: Éilís Ní Mharascáil.

**Mayo MS-Schools 29** = NFCS 145:167; Peter Naughton, Cooneal, County Muigheó. Collector: Bridget McHale, 14/12/1938. Teacher: Patrick Timbin.

**Mayo MS-Schools 30** = NFCS 146:149; informant unknown, Clochar na Trócaire, Béal Átha'n Fheadha, County Muigheó. Collector: Kathleen Duffy, /11/1937-/12/1938.

**Mayo MS-Schools 31** = NFCS 147:655-6; informant unknown, Clocháin, County Muigheó. Collector: Kate O'Neill, 1937-1938. Teacher: John Kelly.

**Mayo MS-Schools 32** = NFCS 151:87-8; James Convey, Ráithíní, County Muigheó. Collector: Seán Gaughran, 1937-1938. Teacher: Máirtín Ó Longáin.

**Mayo MS-Schools 33** = NFCS 162:117-8; Patrick Keane, Cúige na Mainséar, County Muigheó. Collector: James Keane, 1937-1938. Teacher: Antoine Mac Amhalghladha.

**Mayo MS-Schools 34** = NFCS 162:265-6; informant unknown, Cúige na Mainséar, County Muigheó. Collector unknown, 1937-1938. Teacher: Antoine Mac Amhalghladha.

**Mayo Pub 1** = An Connachtach, 'An tIasgaire 7 an Mhaighdean Mhara,' *An Claidheamh Soluis agus Fáinne an Láe*, June 6 1901, 260-1.

**Mayo Pub 2** = Seághan Ua Ruaidhrí, 'Súil Uí Dhúda le árd na Ríogh', *Irisleabhar na Gaeidhilge* 13 (July 1903): 355-7.

**Mayo Pub 3** = Seosamh de Laoide, ed. *Éan an Cheoil Bhinn agus Sgéalta Eile* (Dublin: Imtheachta an Oireachtais, 1908), 25-8.

**Mayo Pub 4** = Nathaniel Colgan, 'Gaelic Plant and Animal Names, and Associated Folk-Lore,' *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature* 31 (Apr. 12 1911): 4.1-30 at 27-29.

**Mayo Pub 5** = Séamas Ó Catháin, Caithlín Uí Sheighin, eds., *A Mhuintir Dhú Chaocháin, Labhraigí Feasta!* (Indreabhán: Cló Chonamara, 1987), 45-6; Nóra Ní Dhochartaigh (58), Ceathrú na gCloch, County Maigh Eó. Collector: Máire Ní Bhroin, 3/11/1938.

**Mayo Pub 6** = J.F. Quinn, 'The History of Mayo,' *The Western People*, Aug. 19, 1998 (reprint); Rev. Mr. Greer, reverend, Scurmores, County Sligo. Collector: J. F. Quinn, 1930-1939.

**Mayo Pub 7** = Marrie Walsh, *An Irish Country Childhood* (London: Smith Gryphon, 1995) 89-90.

**Mayo Sound 1** = NFC T0096; Mícheál Ó Corrduibh, County Mayo. Collector unknown, 1960.

**Mayo Sound 2** = NFC T0469; Thomas Burns, County Mayo. Collector: Séamus Ó Catháin, 14/8/1969.

**Mayo Sound 3** = NFC SÓC0006.1; Seán Ó hEinrí, County Mayo. Collector: Séamus Ó Catháin, 1973.

**Mayo Sound 4** = NFC SÓC0010.1; Seán Ó hEinrí, County Mayo. Collector: Séamus Ó Catháin, 1974.

**Mayo Sound 5** = NFC NFC SÓC0010.2; Seán Ó hEinrí, County Mayo. Collector: Séamus Ó Catháin, 1974.

**Mayo Sound 6** = NFC T0473, SÓC0030; Peadar Bairéad, County Mayo. Collector: Séamus Ó Catháin, 18/2/1975.

**Mayo Sound 7** = NFC BFT 32/A; Mrs. Elizabeth Padden (86), housewife, Crosspatrick, County Mayo. Collector: Bairbre Ní Fhloinn, 1979.

Published in Bairbre Ní Fhloinn, "'The Cat was as Big as a Good-sized Little Calf": A Lacken Storyteller and some Otherworld Beings,' in *Atlantic Currents: Essays on Lore, Literature, and Language*, ed. Bo Almqvist, et al. (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2012).

**Mayo Sound 8** = NFC T0435; John Barret, County Mayo.

**Mayo Sound 9** = NFC T0607; Patrick Kileen, Dublin; raised in County Mayo.

**Meath MS-Main 1** = NFC 458:207-14; Eoghan Mac Pháidín (55), feirmeoir, Baile Ghib, County Meath. Collector: Aodh Ó Domhnaill, 12/1/1937.

**Midlothian MS 1** = School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan: 9169-70; Mrs McFarlane, Lawnmarket, Edinburgh, Midlothian. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr, 1903.

**Midlothian Sound 1** = SA 1979.143.B4; Stanley Robertson (39), Silverburn, Midlothian. Collector: Barbara McDermit, 1979.

**Nordland Pub 1** = O. Nicolaissen, *Sagn og Eventyr fra Nordland* (Kristiania: B. T. Rallings boghandel, 1879), i, 27-8.

**Orkney MS 1** = School of Scottish Studies MS 53 (Miscellaneous Orkney Lore, John D. MacKay, M.A.):i:23-24; John D MacKay (50), schoolmaster, Papa Westray, County Orkney. Collector: John D MacKay, 7/5/1960.

**Orkney Pub 1** = R. Menzies Fergusson, *Rambles in the Far North* (Paisely: Alex Gardner, 1884), 237-40.

**Orkney Pub 2** = W. Traill Dennison, 'Orkney Folklore: Sea Myths,' *The Scottish Antiquary, or, Northern Notes and Queries* 6 no. 23 (1892): 115-21 at 118-21.

**Orkney Pub 3** = W. Traill Dennison, 'Orkney Folk-Lore,' *The Scottish Antiquary, or, Northern Notes and Queries* 7 no. 28(1893): 171-77 at 173-5.

**Orkney Pub 4** = J. A. Pottinger, 'The Selkie Wife,' *Orkney and Shetland Miscellany of the Viking Club* 1 vol. 5 (January 1908): 173-5.

**Orkney Sound 1** = SA 1968.196.B6; John George Hacro, Herston, St. Margaret's Hope, Orkney. Collector: Alan Bruford, 1968.

**Orkney Sound 2** = SA 1972.168.A4; James Henderson, Burray, Orkney. Collector: Alan Bruford, 28/9/1972.

**Roscommon MS-Schools 1** = NFCS 233:568-9; informant unknown, Scoil Naomh Pádraig, Knockvicar, County Roscommon. Collector: Cláir Nic Dhíarmada, 1936-1938. Teacher: Mícheál Ó Ceallaigh.

**Roscommon MS-Schools 2** = NFCS 239:46-7; informant unknown, Lisacul, County Roscommon. Collector: Máire Ní Gréill, 15/12/1938. Teacher: Bríd Uí Ghiollanátha.

**Roscommon MS-Schools 3** = NFCS 248:254; informant unknown (65), Cluain Fhada, County Roscommon. Collector: Thomas Madden, 30/5/1938. Teacher: Pádhraic Ó Fathaigh.

**Ross and Cromarty MS 1** = School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan: 2417-8; Murdoch McLeod, Berneray, County Ross and Cromarty. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr, 1896.

**Ross and Cromarty MS 2** = School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan: 6458; Mr McLennan, Bernera, County Ross and Cromarty. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr, 1901.

**Ross and Cromarty MS 3** = School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan: 8373; Colin Grant, farm labourer, Black Isle, County Ross and Cromarty. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr, 1903.

**Ross and Cromarty MS 4** = School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan: 8446; John Ross, Bayfield, Nigg, County Ross and Cromarty. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr, 1903.

**Ross and Cromarty MS 5** = School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan: 9074; Mr McKay, Port-Mheadhon, County Ross and Cromarty. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr, 1903.

**Ross and Cromarty Pub 1** = Iasdaire Appin MacGregor, *The Peat-Fire Flame: Folk-tales and Traditions of the Highlands & Islands* (Edinburgh: The Moray Press, 1937), 109-10.

**Ross and Cromarty Sound 1** = SA 1960.191.B8; Roderick MacLean, Alltan Dubh, Coigach, County Ross and Cromarty. Collector: John MacInnes, 7-8/1960.

**Ross and Cromarty Sound 2** = SA 1960.192.B10; Mrs Kate Shaw (89), Coigach, County Ross and Cromarty. Collector: John MacInnes, 7-8/1960.

**Ross and Cromarty Sound 3** = SA 1973.122.B4; Mrs Cirsty Mary Fleming (64), nurse, Berneray, Ross and Cromarty. Collector: Ian Paterson, 1973.

**Ross and Cromarty Sound 4** = SA 1973.125.A1; Mrs K. Dix, Berneray, Ross and Cromarty. Collector: Ian Paterson, 1973.

**Ross and Cromarty Sound 5** = SA 1973.126.A12; Mrs Cirsty Mary Fleming (64), nurse, Berneray, Ross and Cromarty. Collector: Ian Paterson, 1973.

**Ross and Cromarty Sound 6** = IFC SÓC 359; Mrs Dolly MacDonald (79), Hilton, Easter Ross, Ross and Cromarty. Collector: Seosamh Watson, 31/7/1995.

Published in Seosamh Watson, Séamus Ó Catháin, 'An Easter Ross Mermaid (ML 4080 The Seal Woman),' *Béaloidias* 64/5 (1996/7): 339-41.

**Shetland Pub 1** = Samuel Hibbert, *A Description of the Shetland Islands* (Edinburgh: A. Constable, 1822), 569-70.

**Shetland Pub 2** = Laurence Gilbert Johnson, ed., *Laurence Williamson of Mid Yell* (Lerwick: The Shetland Times, 1971), 146.

**Shetland Sound 1** = SA 1954.111.6; John Robertson, seaman, fisherman, Burravoe, Shetland. Collector: Calum MacLean, 1954.

**Shetland Sound 2** = SA 1954.112.1; Brucie Henderson (63), Arisdale, Shetland. Collector: Calum MacLean, 1954.

**Shetland Sound 3** = SA 1955.101.8; Kitty Nicholson (76), Yell (Island), Shetland. Collector: Calum MacLean, 1955.

**Shetland Sound 4** = SA 1970.243; Brucie Henderson (79), Arisdale, Shetland. Collector: Alan Bruford, 21/9/1970.

**Shetland Sound 5** = SA 1970.244.B2; Catherine Mary Anderson (84), housewife, North Dale, Fetlar, Shetland. Collector: Alan Bruford, 22/9/1970.

**Shetland Sound 6** = SA 1972.241.A2; Brucie Henderson (81), Arisdale, Shetland. Collector: Tadaaki Miyake, 18/12/1972.

- Shetland Sound 7** = SA 1973.60.A7+B1; Andrew Irvine (71), crofter, motor hirer, local government, Westing, Shetland. Collector: Alan Bruford, 1973.
- Shetland Sound 8** = SA 1976.92; Brucie Henderson (84), Yell, Shetland. Collector: Alan Bruford, 23/7/1976.
- Sligo MS-Main 1** = NFC 1548:101-2; Dominick Harte (55), iascaire, Moneygold, County Sligo. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, 26/10/1959.
- Sligo MS-Main 2** = NFC 1705:33-4; Michael Herrity (88), iascaire, Gráinsí, County Sligo. Collector: Seán Ó hEochaidh, /1/1964.
- Sligo MS-Main 3** = NFC 1757:226-8; Joseph Meehan (57), farmer, Shrananagh, Sooeey, County Sligo. Collector: Michael J. Murphy, /3/1969.
- Sligo MS-Schools 1** = NFCS 155:629; Charles McGowan, Castlegal, County Co Shligigh. Collector: Alice McGowan, 1/7/1938. Teacher: Máire Ní Oineachtaigh.
- Sligo MS-Schools 2** = NFCS 158:54-5; informant unknown, Rathcormac, County Co Shligigh. Collector: John Gilmartin, /2/1938-/12/1938. Teacher: M. Bean Uí Fhéinneadha.
- Sligo MS-Schools 3** = NFCS 159:178-9; Mrs Cullen (63), Calry, County Co. Shligigh. Collector: Annie Cullen, /9/1937-/7/1938. Teacher: Róisín Mhig Ualghairg.
- Sligo MS-Schools 4** = NFCS 163:249-50; Mrs M. Jordan, Stucán, County Co Shligigh. Collector: Mary Sweeney, 24/2/1938. Teacher: Bríd Ní Mhiadhaigh.
- Sligo MS-Schools 5** = NFCS 163:449; informant unknown, Liath Mhuine, County Co Sligigh. Collector: Leslie Henry, 1937-1938. Teacher: Bean Mhic Fhionnlaoich.
- Sligo MS-Schools 6** = NFCS 163:450-1; informant unknown, Liath Mhuine, County Co Sligigh. Collector: Elizabeth Gordon, 1937-1938. Teacher: Bean Mhic Fhionnlaoich.
- Sligo MS-Schools 7** = NFCS 164:18-19; Nora Whyte, Enniscrone, County Co Shligigh. Collector: Emily O Connor, 29/11/1937-23/12/1938. Teacher: Bean de Búrca.
- Sligo MS-Schools 8** = NFCS 164:248; informant unknown, Kilglass, County Co Shligigh. Collector unknown, 11/1937-1/1938. Teacher: Bean Uí Chléirigh.
- Sligo MS-Schools 9** = NFCS 164:309; informant unknown, Mairnéulaigh, County Co Shligigh. Collector: Connie Carroll, 1937-1938. Teacher: Anna, Bean Uí Bhlachnaigh.
- Sligo MS-Schools 10** = NFCS 165:10-11; Seán Ó Tioralla, teacher, Iascach, County Co Shligigh. Collector: Tom Curley, 22/11/1937. Teacher: Seán Ó Tioralla.
- Sligo MS-Schools 11** = NFCS 166:39; Mrs Feeney, Cluainín Mór, County Co. Shligigh. Collector: John Kelly, 1937-1938. Teacher: Seán Ó Murchú.



**Sligo MS-Schools 12** = NFCS 166:53-4; Críostóir Ó hIceadha, teacher, Ráth Laogh, County Co. Shligigh. Collector: Pádraig Ó hÁnlaigh, 22/12/1937. Teacher: Críostóir Ó hIceadha.

**Sligo MS-Schools 13** = NFCS 166:57; Críostóir Ó hIceadha, teacher, Ráth Laogh, County Co. Shligigh. Collector: Brighidh Ní Fháigh, 22/12/1937. Teacher: Críostóir Ó hIceadha.

**Sligo MS-Schools 14** = NFCS 167:108-9; Johnny McDonagh, Druim Mór, County Co. Shligigh. Collector unknown, 1937-1938. Teacher: Seosamh Ó Catháin.

**Sligo MS-Schools 15** = NFCS 169:136-7; Seán Ó Maolagáin, teacher, Dún Floinn, County Co. Shligigh. Collector: Patrick Davis, 10/7/1938-23/12/1938. Teacher: Seán Ó Maolagáin.

**Sligo MS-Schools 16** = NFCS 169:364; Mr James Farrell, Páirc Árd (Highpark), County Co. Shligigh. Collector: Philomena Dooney, 1937-1938. Teacher: Eoghan Ó Conaill.

**Sligo MS-Schools 17** = NFCS 172:397; Mrs D Henry (78), farmer's wife, Carrowmore, County Co. Shligigh. Collector: Mary Henry, 1937-1938. Teacher: Tomás Mac Gabhann.

**Sligo MS-Schools 18** = NFCS 176:65-6; James Neary, Ballysadare, County Co. Shligigh. Collector: T. Neary, 1937-1938. Teacher: Seán Mac Sitric.

**Sligo MS-Schools 19** = NFCS 176:129-30; Mr John Battle, Ballysadare, County Co. Shligigh. Collector unknown, 1937-1938.

**Sligo MS-Schools 20** = NFCS 176:315-6; Mrs Anderson, Lios an Aonaigh, County Co. Shligigh. Collector: Sarah Anderson, 1937-1938. Teacher: Patrick Cawley.

**Sligo MS-Schools 21** = NFCS 188:190; informant unknown, Tamhnach Breac, County Co. Shligigh. Collector unknown, 3-9/1939. Teacher: Ss. Ó Corcoráin.

**Sligo Pub 1** = William Gregory Wood-Martin, 'The Rude Stone Monuments of Ireland (Continued),' *The Journal of the Royal Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland, Fourth Series* 8 no. 73/4 (Jan.-Apr. 1888): 254-99, at 289-91.

Also published in William Gregory Wood-Martin, *The Rude Stone-Monuments of Ireland: Co. Sligo and the Island of Achill* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Company, 1888), 227.

**Stirling Pub 1** = Sue Stewart, ed., *A World of Folk Tales: From Multi-Cultural Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Cultural Press, 1994); Jenny Todd, Stirling.

**Sutherland MS 1** = School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan: 7324; Donald MacKay, Creich, Sutherland. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr, 1902.

**Sutherland MS 2** = School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan: 7981; Mrs Calder, Airdeen, Sutherland. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr, 1903.

**Sutherland MS 3** = School of Scottish Studies, Maclagan: 8961-2; informant unknown, Tongue, Sutherland. Collector: Elizabeth Kerr; date unknown.

**Sutherland Pub 1** = Mary MacKellar, 'The Mermaid,' *Celtic Magazine* 11 (1885-6): 566-7.

**Sutherland Pub 2** = Alasdair Appin MacGregor, *The Peat-Fire Flame: Folk-tales and Traditions of the Highlands & Islands* (Edinburgh: The Moray Press, 1937), 109.

**Sutherland Sound 1** = SA 1955.128.A13+B1; George Murray, Morness, Sutherland. Collector: Calum MacLean, 19/7/1955.

**Sutherland Sound 2** = SA 1957.44.A5; Alec Stewart (73), Tinsmith, Lairg, Sutherland. Collector: Hamish Henderson, 6/1955.

**Tipperary MS-Schools 1** = NFCS 530:249-50; Patrick King (80), Redwood, County Tipperary. Collector unknown, 7/1936-12/1938. Teacher: Máighréad Nic Chormaic.

**Värmland MS 1** = IFGH 3915:26-31; Carl Erisksson (69), Eskilsäter, . Collector: Ragnar Nilsson, 1937.

Published in Ragnar Nilsson and Carl-Martin Bergstrand, ed., *Folketro och folksed på Värmlandsnäs* (Göteborg: Gumperts förlag, 1952-62), iii, 52-55.

**Waterford MS-Main 1** = NFC 84:291-3; Pádraig Ó Milleadha (54), múinteoir Gaeidhíle, Cill Chianaigh, County Portlárige. Collector: Pádraig Ó Milleadha, 25/7/1934.

Published in Pádraig Ó Milleadha, 'Seanchas Sliabh gCua,' *Béaloides* 6 no. 2 (Dec. 1936): 169-256 at 242.

**Waterford MS-Main 2** = NFC 246:300-3; Micil Paor (65), feirmúir, Curra Chinn, County Waterford. Collector: Nioclás Breatnach, 19/9/1936.

**Waterford MS-Main 3** = NFC 259:522-3; Johnny Rowen (40), oibrí, Rí Meánach, County Waterford. Collector: Nioclás Breatnach, 28/10/1936.

**Waterford MS-Main 4** = NFC 259:630-2; Sean Maylan (35), oibrí, Bóthar na Trágha, County Portlárige. Collector: Nioclás Breatnach, 8/11/1936.

**Waterford MS-Main 5** = NFC 289:54-6; Labhras Ó Cádla, Scairt, Bailínamolt, County Waterford, 12/1936.

**Waterford MS-Main 6** = NFC 318:349-50; Seán Ó hAirtaós (45), feirmeóir, Cnoc a' Reatha, County Waterford. Collector: Nioclás Breatnach, 31/3/1937.

**Waterford MS-Main 7** = NFC 1239:34, Séamus Ó Mathúna, Árd Mhór, County Waterford. Collector: Fionán Mac Coluim, 8/4/1933.

**Waterford MS-Main 8** = NFC 1659:41; Liam a' tSrotháin (91), An Chill, County Waterford, 1917.

**Waterford MS-Schools 1** = NFCS 635:271-2; Mr. T. Feeney, Clochar na Toirbhirte, Lios Mór, County Waterford. Collector: Mary Feeney, 1936-1938. Teacher: Sr. M. Gráinne.

**Waterford MS-Schools 2** = NFCS 646:285-7; Labhras Ó Cadla, Cill Bhriain, Béal na Molt, County Waterford. Collector: Micheál Scelton, 29/10/1937. Teacher: Tomás de Bhál.

**Westmeath Pub 1** = Sir John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1901), i, 124-5; Mrs. Dolan, Cookesborough, County Westmeath. Collector: Norman Moore, 7/3/1882.

## Appendix II: Published texts not included

This appendix lists possible versions of The Mermaid Legend which were not included in the current study on the grounds that they lack basic contextual information, are written works inspired by and attempting to imitate oral tradition, are derivative of other published texts, or some combination of these circumstances. For the sake of space, literary works which are inspired by this legend, and which do not attempt to present themselves as a version of the legend, are not included here.

### Texts from Ireland:

NFC 1140:68-80; Seán Ó Longáin, Caisleán an Bharraigh, County Muigheo. Collector: Seán Ó Longáin, 24/8/1935.

Anonymous, "The Seal Woman," *Ireland's Own*, September 10, 19?.

Anonymous, "The Mermaid Bride (From the Irish)," *Ireland's Own*, April 25, 1932.

Aodh de Blácam, *The Black North: An Account of the Six Counties of Unrecovered Ireland: Their People, Their Treasures, and Their History* (Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son, 1938), 136-9

Brian Bonner, *Our Inis Eoghain Heritage: the Parishes of Culdaff and Cloncha* (Pallaskerry, co. Limerick: Salesian Press, 1972), 41-2.

Mary Campbell, *Sea Wrack, or, Long-ago tales of Rathlin Island* (Ballycastle, Co. Aintrim: Scarlett, 1957), 28.

Wallace Clark, *Rathlin: Disputed Island* (Portlaw: Volturna Press, 1971), 142.

Lizzie R. Cooney, "Children of the Mermaid," *Ireland's Own*, August 30, 1922.

Thomas Crofton Croker, *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* (London: J. Murray, 1825-1828), ii, 3-13.

Robert Gibbings, *Lovely is the Lee* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1945), 90-2.

Samuel Carter Hall, *Ireland: its Scenery, Character, &c* (London: Jeremiah How, 1843), iii, 407-14.

Maureen Jolliffe, "The Woman from the Sea," *Ireland's Own*, August 4, 1956.

Thomas Keane, "The Green Seal: A Munster Legend," *Ireland's Own*, June 9, 1909.

Patrick Kennedy, *Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1866), 122-4.

Eamon Kelly, 'The Shea Man and the Mermaid' in *Stories from an Irish Fireside* (New Rochelle, New York: Spoken Arts, 1980), compact disc.

Lena McKeon, "A Legend of the River Lee (Cork)," *Ireland's Own*, January 1, 1913.

W. J. Murphy, "A Legend of the Lee," *The Shamrock* 30 no. 1 (Saturday, October 29, 1892): 69-70.

John O'Connor, "Glenbeigh, Co. Kerry," *Ireland's Own*, date unknown.

A. O'Neill, "A Mermaid Wife," *Ireland's Own*, April 4, 1932.

M. Ó Raghallaigh, "Sgéalta na n-Gaodhal: An Bhrúch," *An Gaodhal* (September 1901): 285.

Richard Rowley, *Tales of Mourne* (London: Duckworth, 1937), 11-22.

#### **Texts from Scotland:**

Anonymous, "The Mermaid Wife," in *Folk-Lore and Legends: Scotland* (London: W. W. Gibbings, 1889), 86-89.

Halbert J. Boyd, *Strange Tales of the Western Isles* (Stirling: E. MacKay, 1930), 89-111.

Robert Cowie, *Shetland: Descriptive and Historical* (Edinburgh and Glasgow: John Menzies & Co., 1874), 284-6.

George Brisbane Douglas, *Scottish Fairy and Folk Tales* (New York: Burt, 1894), 153.

Helen Drever, *The Lure of the Kelpie: Fairy and Folk Tales of the Highlands* (Edinburgh: Moray Press, 1937), 32-6.

Elizabeth Sheppard Jones, *Scottish Legendary Tales* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1962), 145-9.

Thomas Keightly, *The Fairy Mythology* (London: William Harrison Ainsworth, 1828), i, 265-72.

Alexander MacBain, "Highland Superstition," *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 14 (1887-8), 232-272 at 249-50.

Carl MacDougall, *A Cuckoo's Nest: A Collection of Lesser-Known Scottish Folk-tales* (Glasgow: Molendinar Press, 1974), 71-75.

W. J. MacKay, "The Mermaid of MacKay," in *Selected Highland Folktales*, ed. R. MacDonald Robertson (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1961), 151-3.

W. J. MacKay, "The Mermaid of Kessock," in *Selected Highland Folktales*, ed. R. MacDonald Robertson (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1961), 156-73.

John MacLean, *Historical and Traditional Sketches of Highland Families and of the Highlands* (Inverness: John Noble, 1895), 134-7.

Tom Muir, *The Mermaid Bride and Other Orkney Folk Tales* (Kirkwall: Orcadian Limited, 1998), 15, 21-2, 45-6, 53-4, 66-7, 97-8, 122-4, 133-4, 142-5, 154-9, 237-40.

Ernest W. Marwick, *The Folklore of Orkney and Shetland* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1955), 28-9.

James R. Nicolson, *Shetland Folklore* (London, Robery Hale, 1981), 84-9.

R. MacDonald Robertson, *More Highland Folktales* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), 103-4.

Jessie M.E. Saxby, *Shetland Traditional Lore* (Edinburgh: Grant & Murray, 1932), 139.

Gregor Ian Smith, *Folk Tales of the Highlands* (London: Nelson, 1953), 131-5.

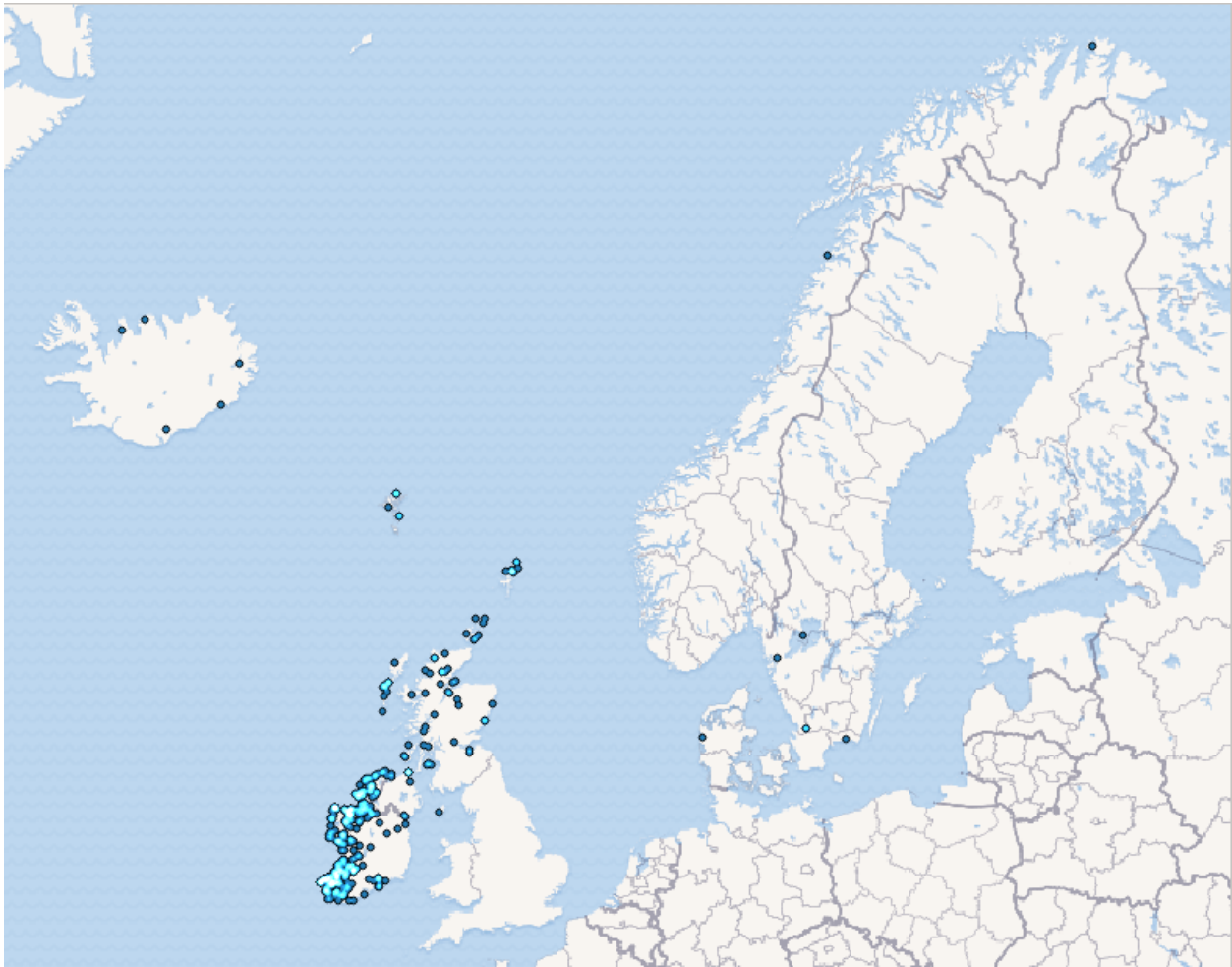
George Stewart, *Shetland Fireside Tales: or the Hermit of Trosswickness* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Publishing Co., 1877), 32-7.

Douglas Sutherland, *Against the Wind: An Orkney Idyll* (London: Heinemann, 1967), 42-3.

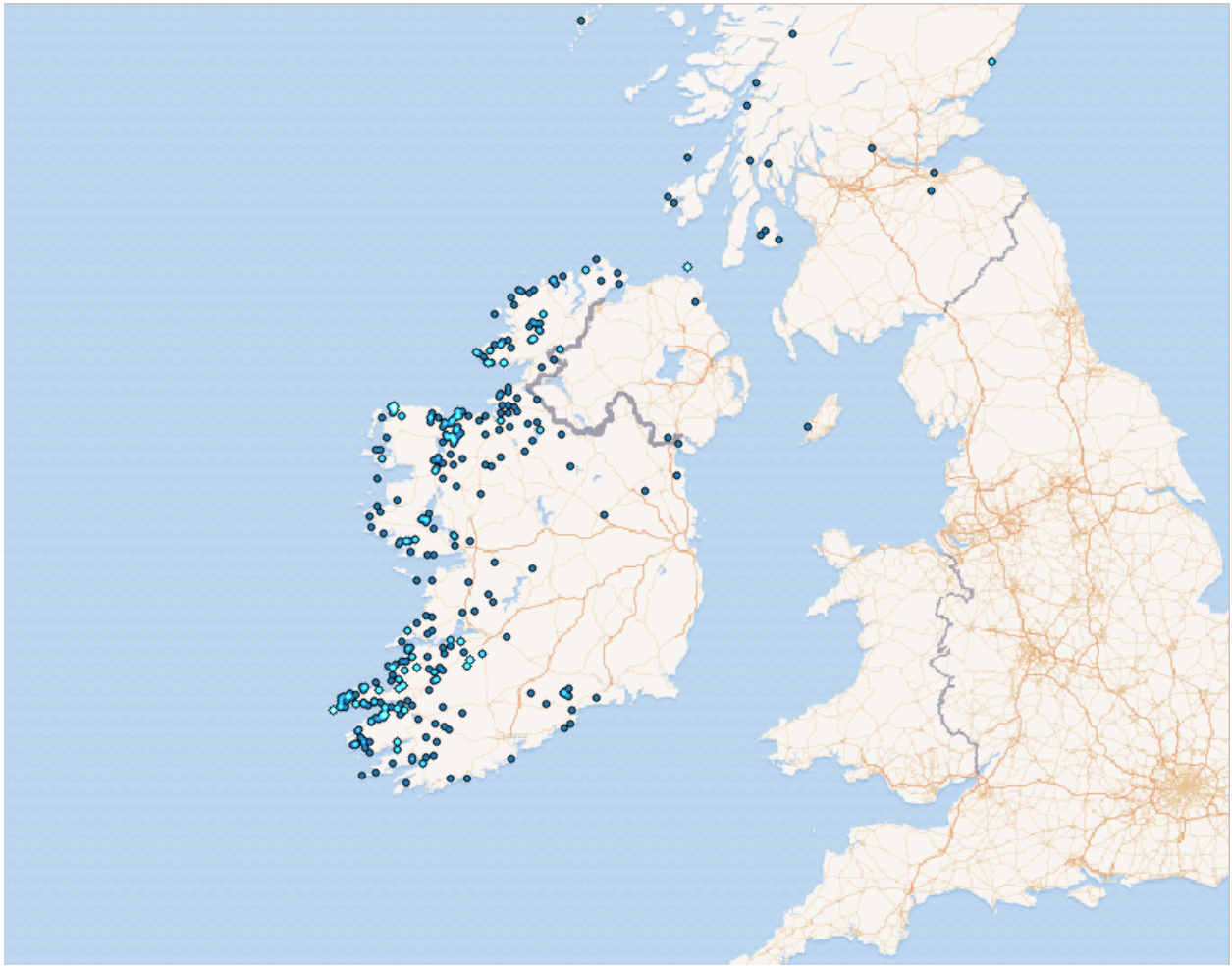
Alan Temperley, *Tales of the North Coast* (London: Research Publishing, 1977), 132-5.

### Appendix III : Maps

The maps in this appendix were generated using QGIS 2.8.6-Wien, using the unlabelled layer provided by Wikimedia Maps as a background. The feature blending mode was set to “addition” for these maps: when features (here, individual versions of the legend) overlap they produce a lighter version of the base colour. Features are set to the same size regardless of the scale of the map.

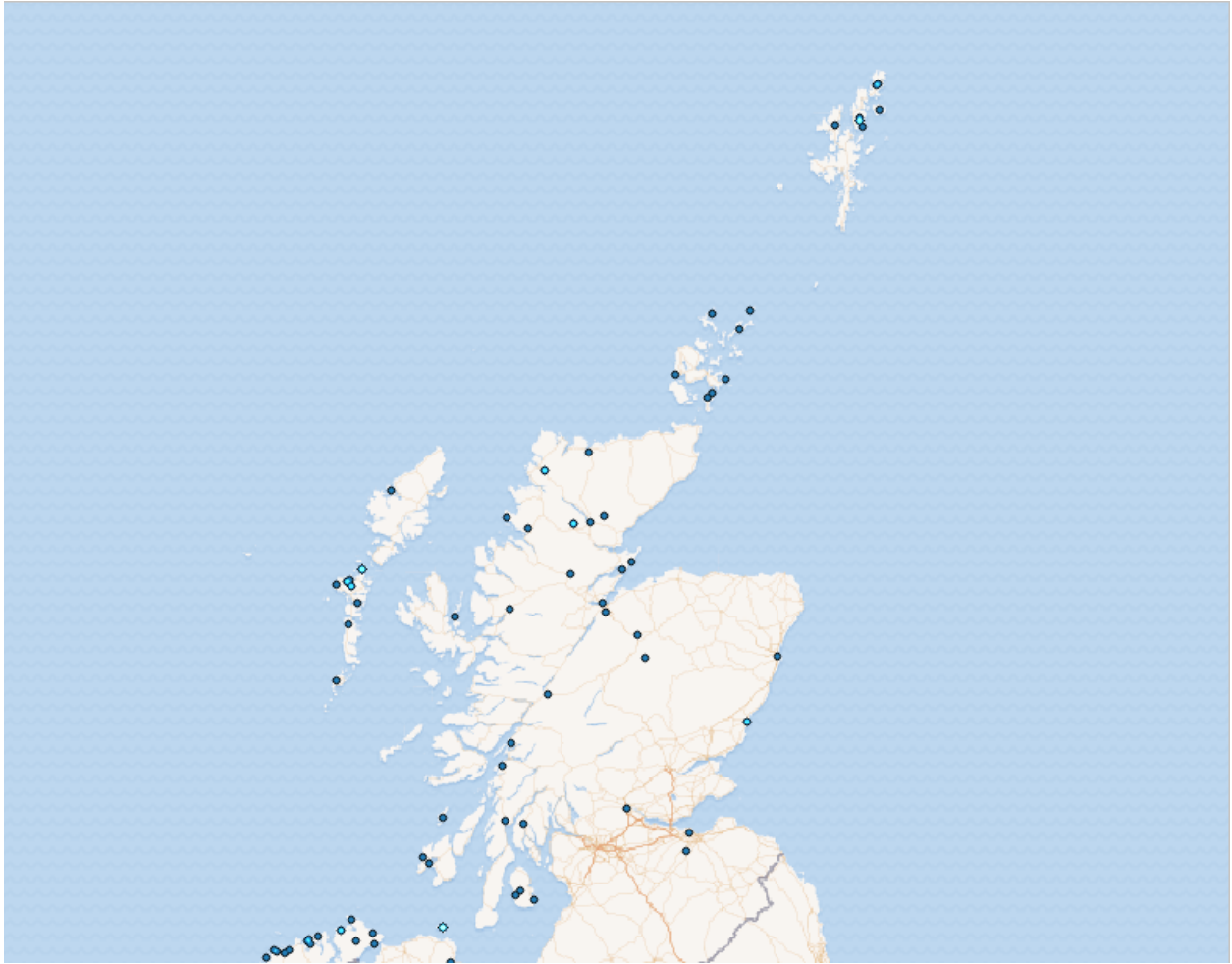


**Figure 1: All versions of the legend.**

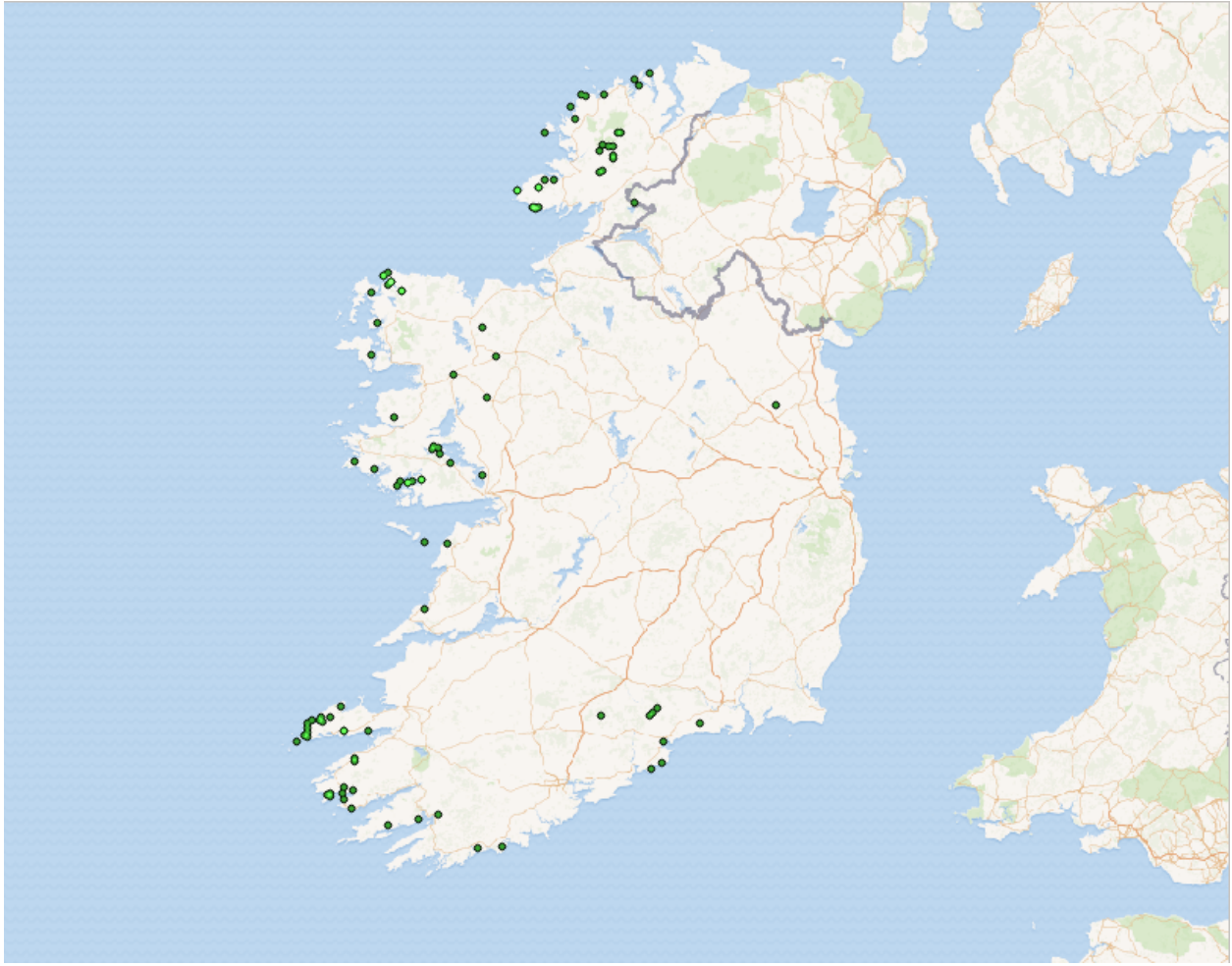


**Figure 2: All versions of the legend collected in Ireland and Man.**

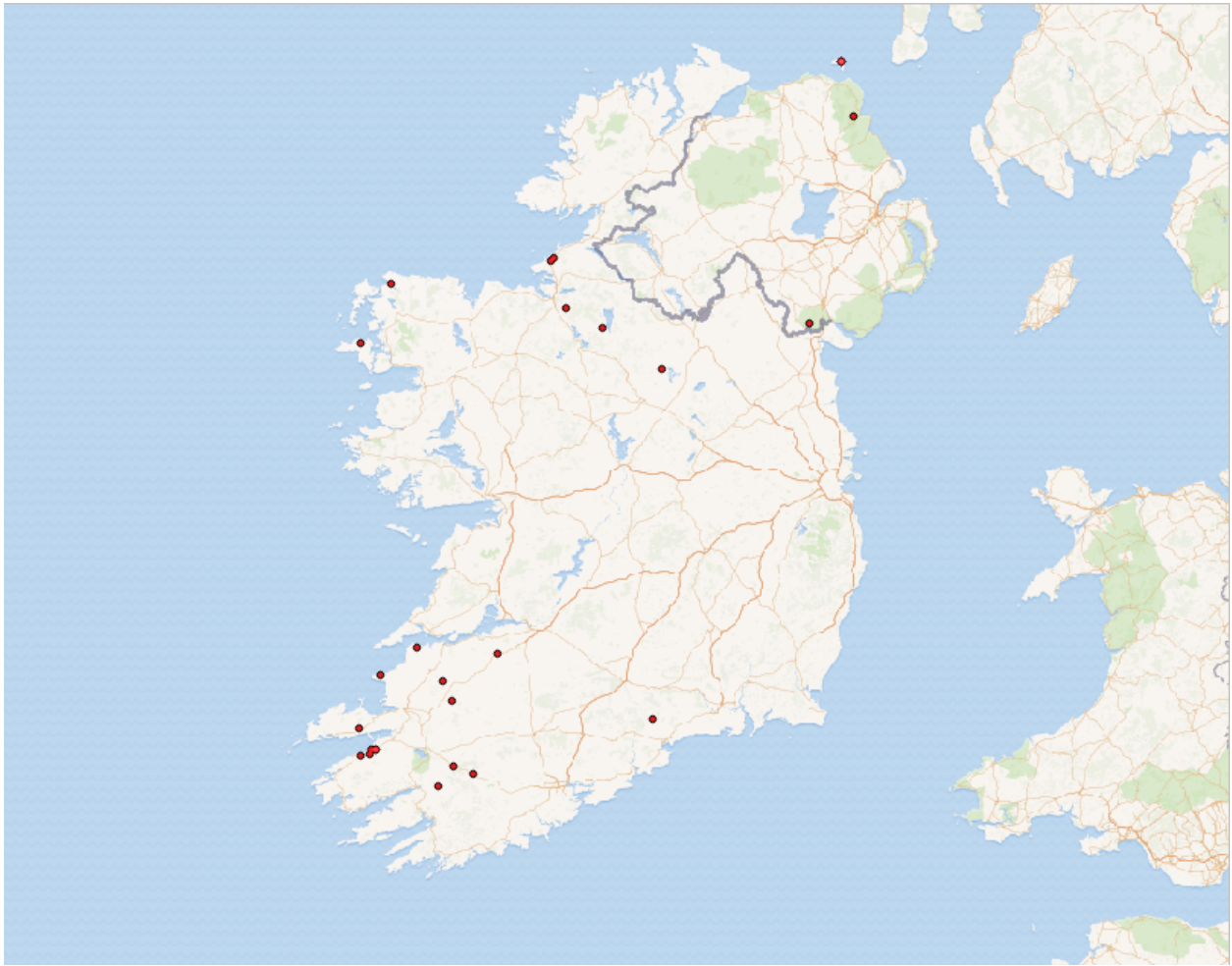




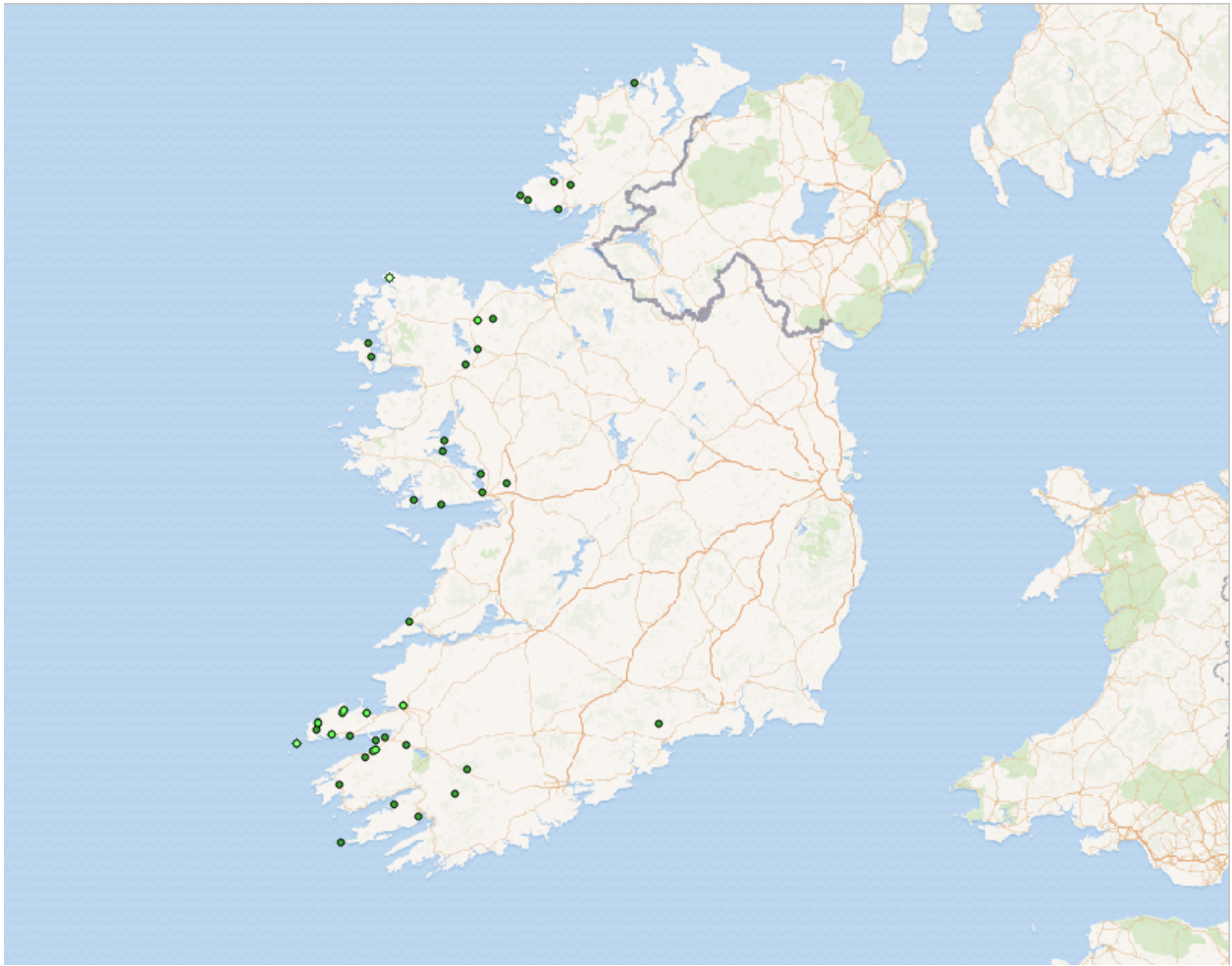
**Figure 3: All versions of the legend collected in Scotland.**



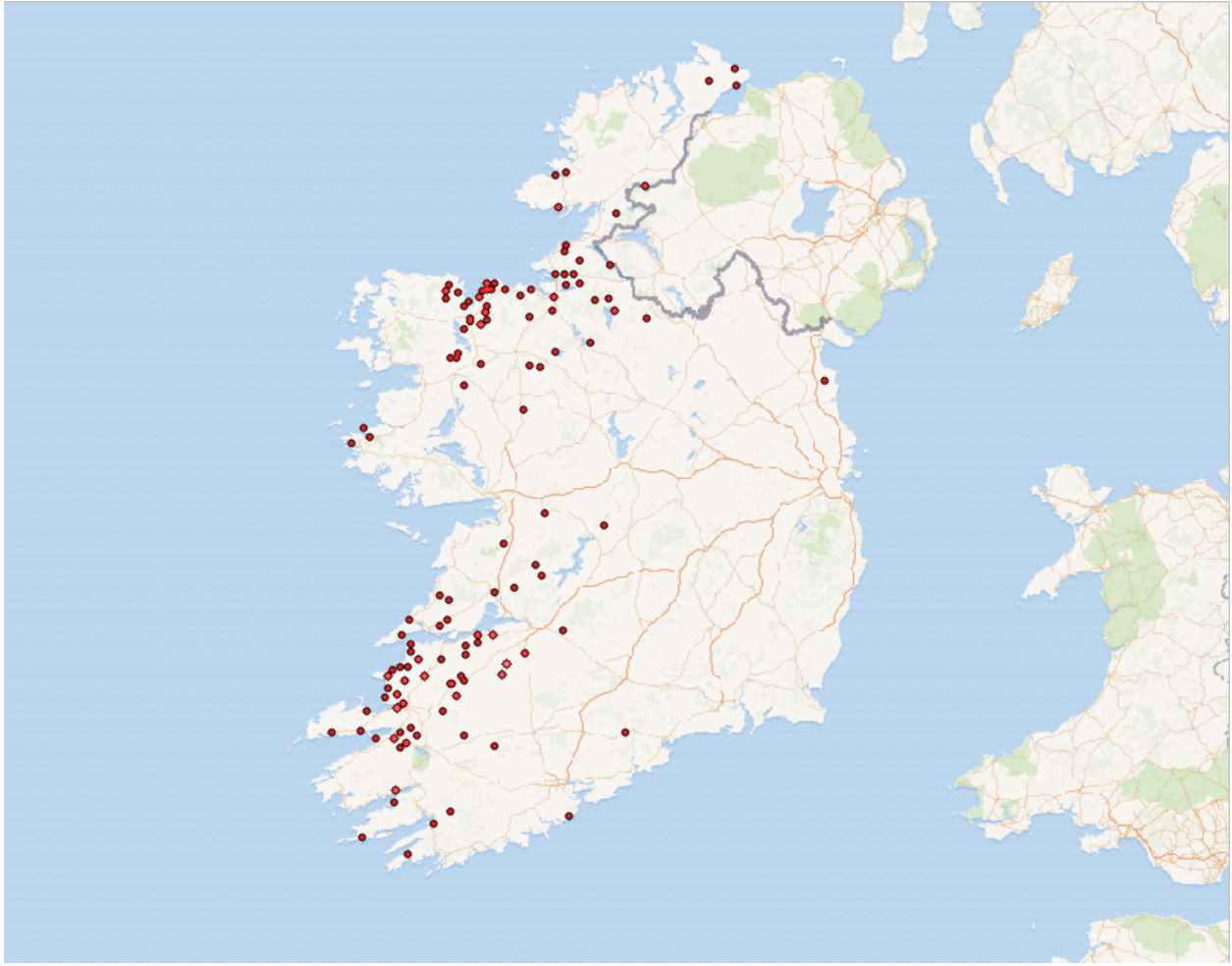
**Figure 4: Irish-language versions of the legend from the NFC Main collection.**



**Figure 5: English-language versions of the legend from the NFC Main collection.**



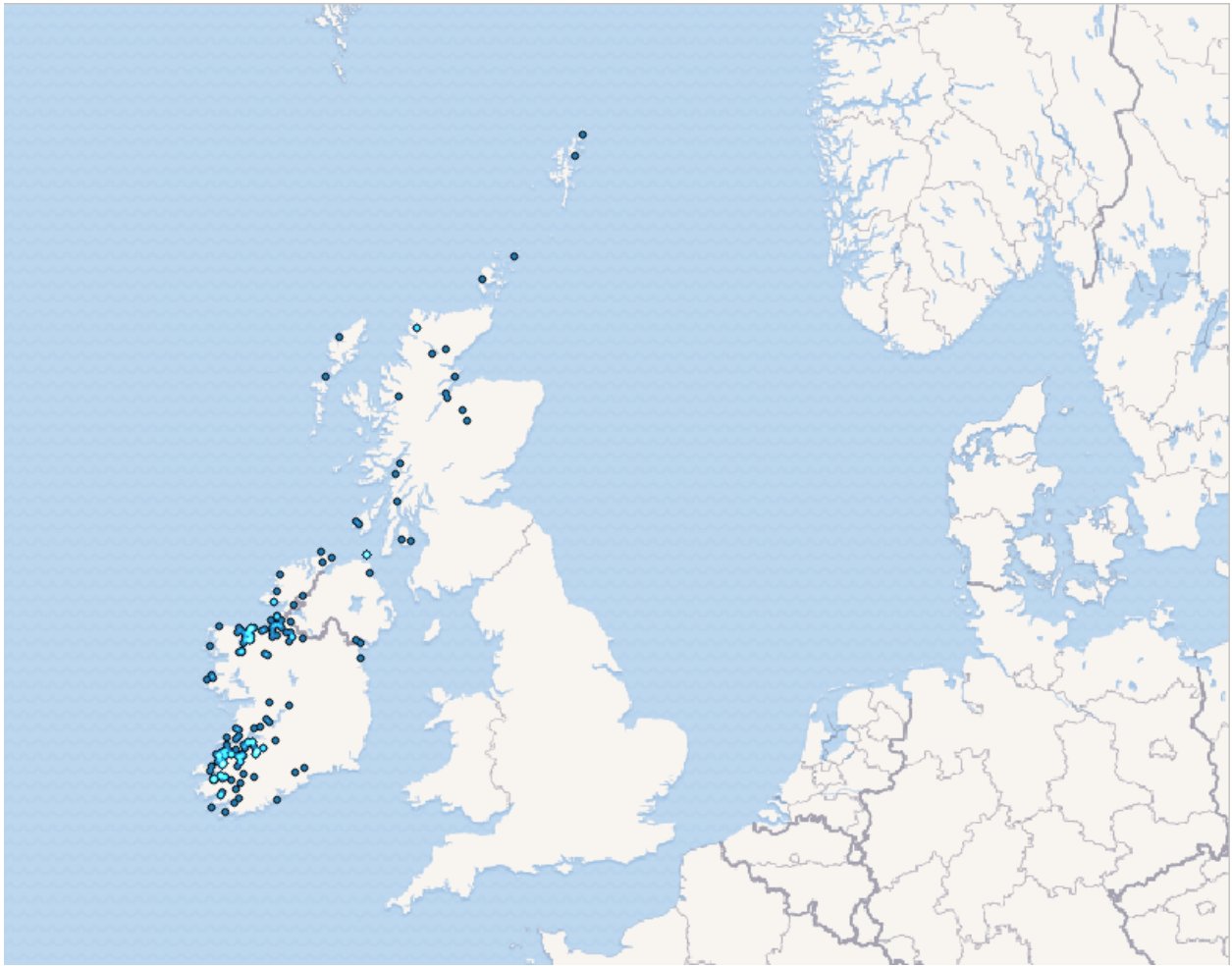
**Figure 6: Irish-language versions of the legend from the NFC Schools collection.**



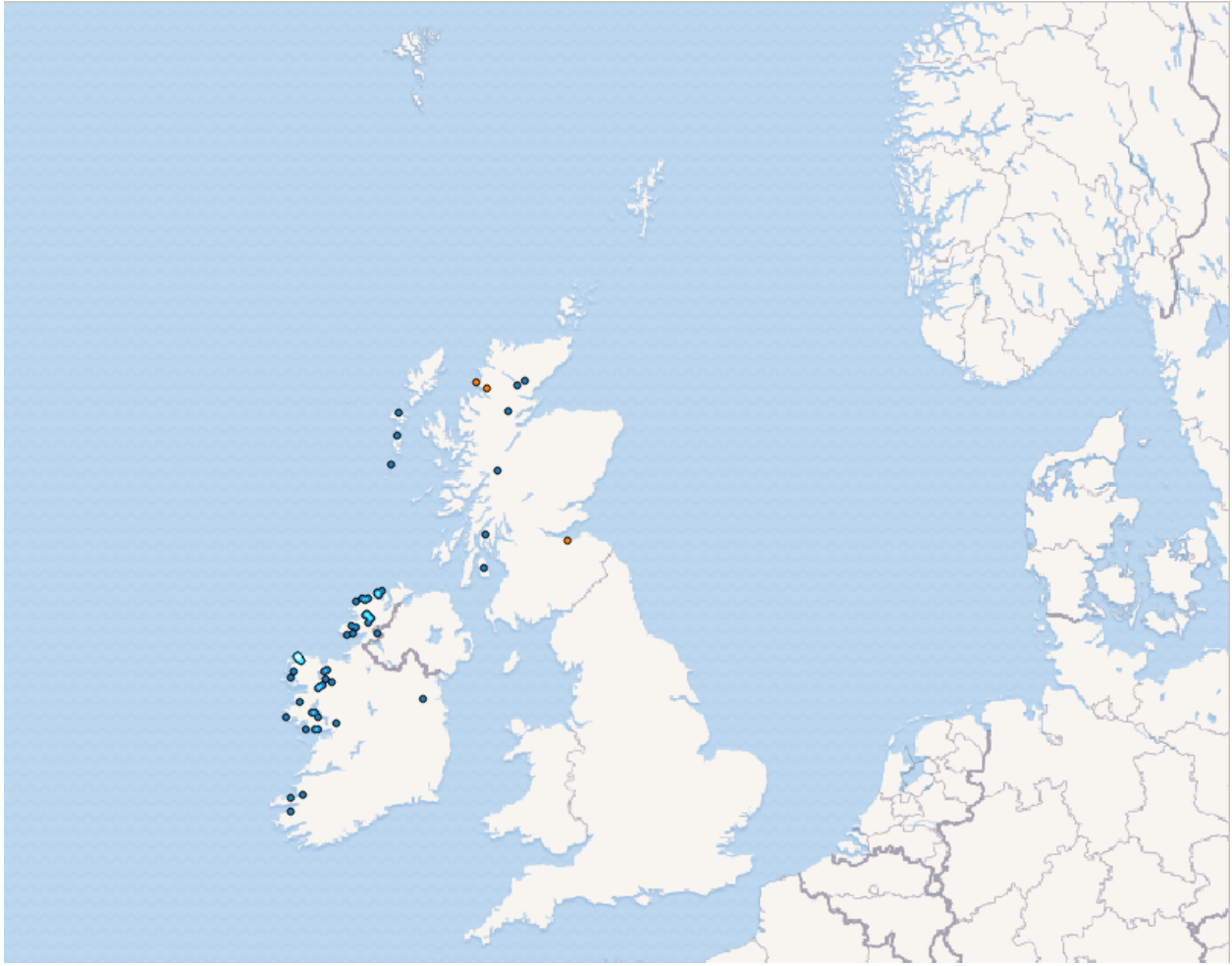
**Figure 7: English-language versions of the legend from the NFC Main collection.**



**Figure 8: Versions of the legend 800 words or longer in length.**



**Figure 9: Versions which use the word *mermaid*.**

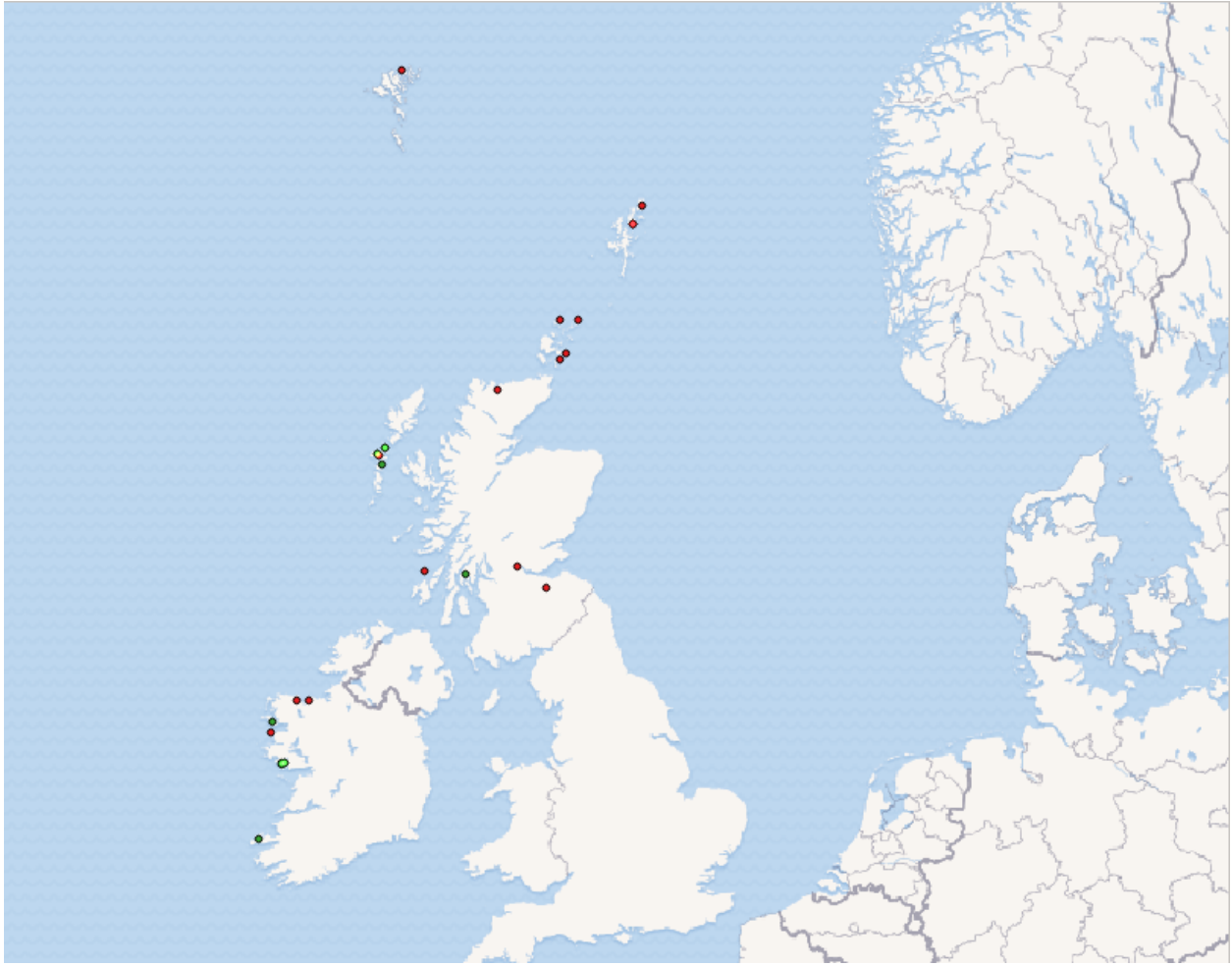


**Figure 10:** Blue dots indicate versions which use the word *maighdean mhara*, orange dots indicate those which use *maighdean chuain*.





Figure 11: Versions which use the word *murúch* and variants.



**Figure 12:** Green dots indicate a version which use the words *rón*, *ròn*, and derived terms; red dots indicate versions which use *seal*, *selkie*, and similar words.



**Figure 13:** Red dots indicate versions which use a word derived from Old Norse *selr*, green dots indicate those which use a word derived from Old Norse *kópr*.



**Figure 14: versions which describe the supernatural woman's hair.**



**Figure 15: versions which describe the supernatural woman as half-human, half-fish.**



**Figure 16: Versions recorded in Ireland and Man which describe the stolen object as a *skin*, *sloch*, *craiceann*, or similar word.**



**Figure 17: Versions of the legend recorded in Scotland which refer to the stolen object as a *bian*, *craiceann*, or *seiche*.**



**Figure 18: Versions of the legend from Scotland which refer to the stolen object as a *skin*.**



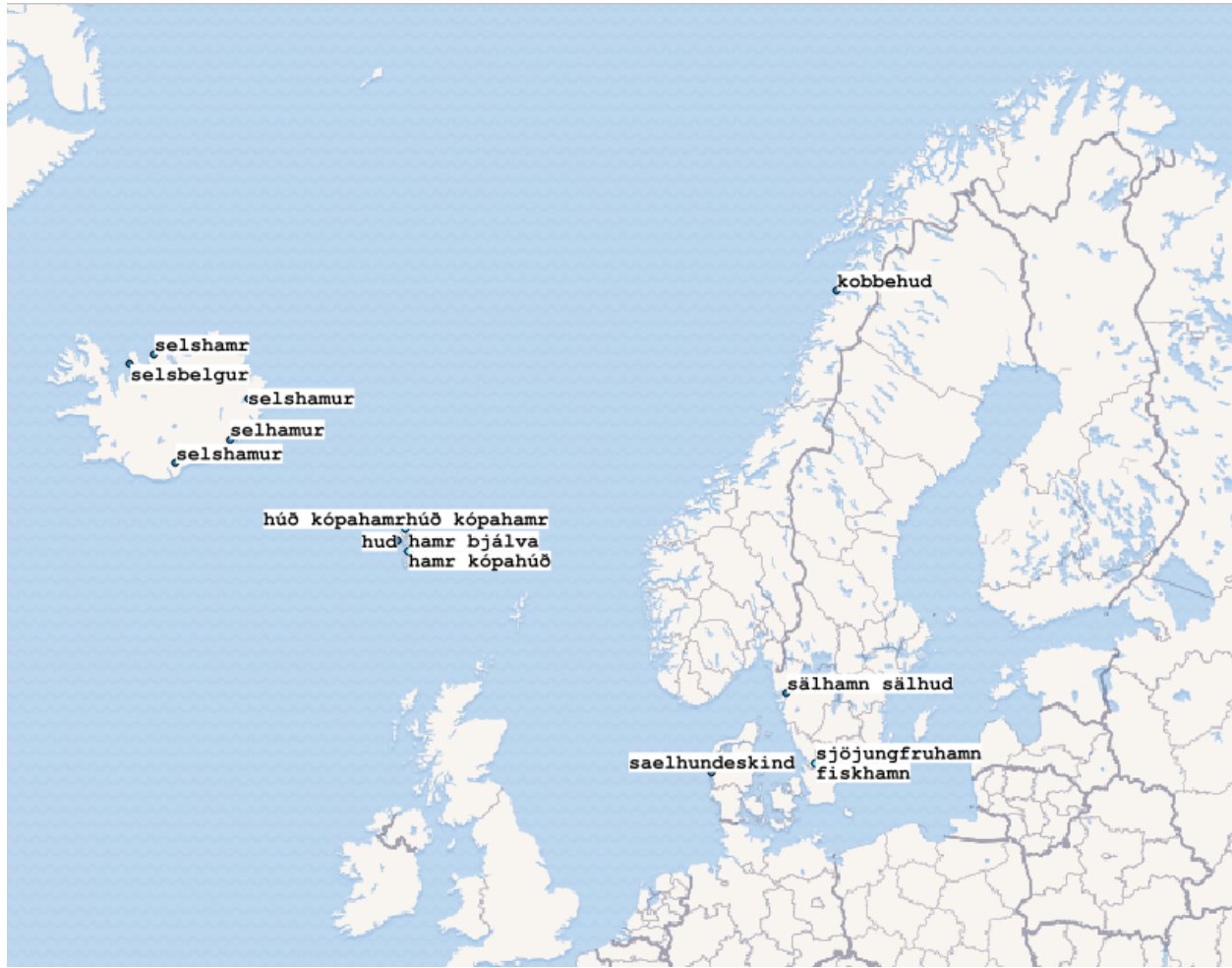
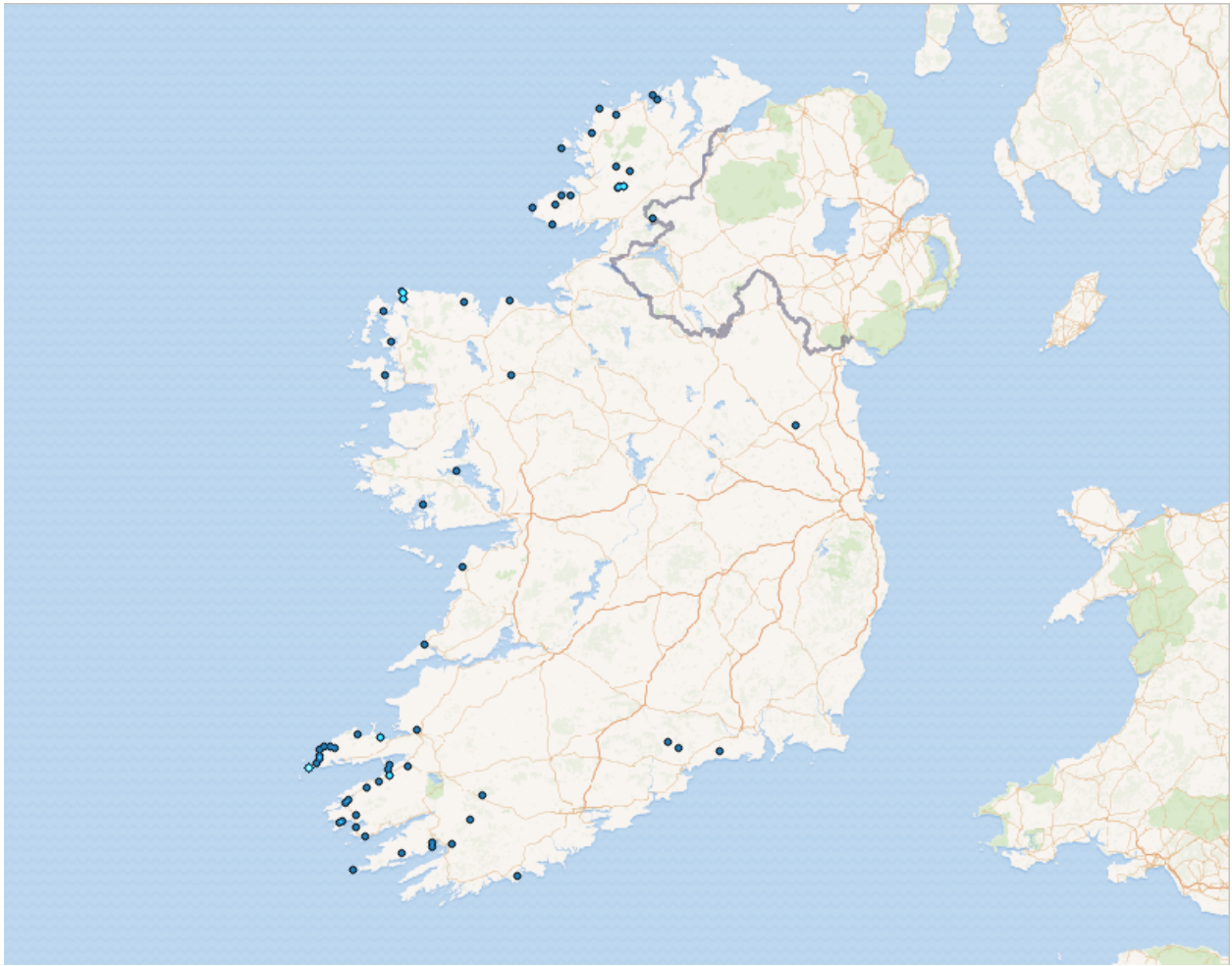


Figure 19: Versions recorded in Scandinavian languages which refer to the stolen object as a skin or hide.



**Figure 20: versions of the legend which refer to the stolen object as a *cochall*.**

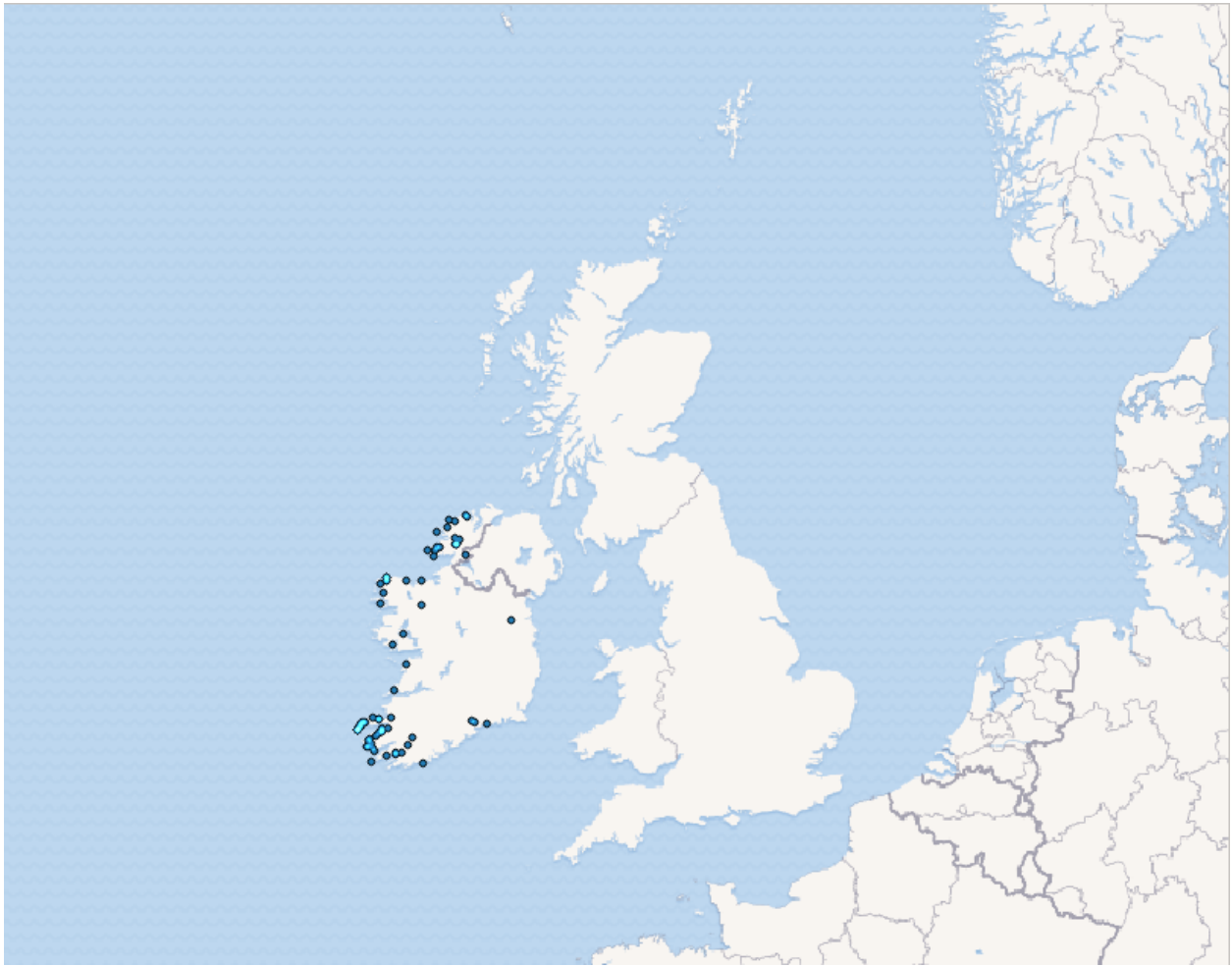


Figure 21: versions of the legend which refer to the stolen object as a *brat*.

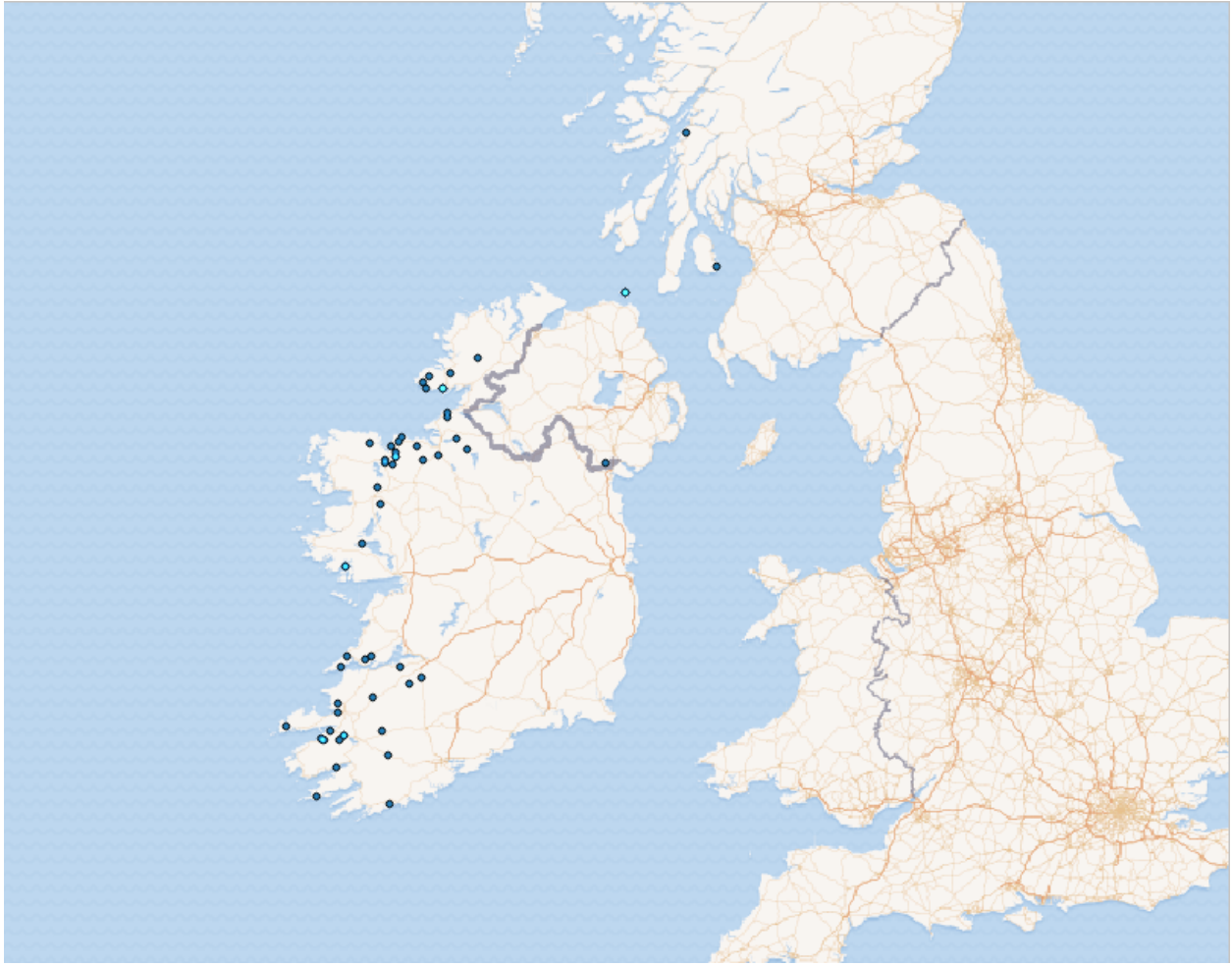
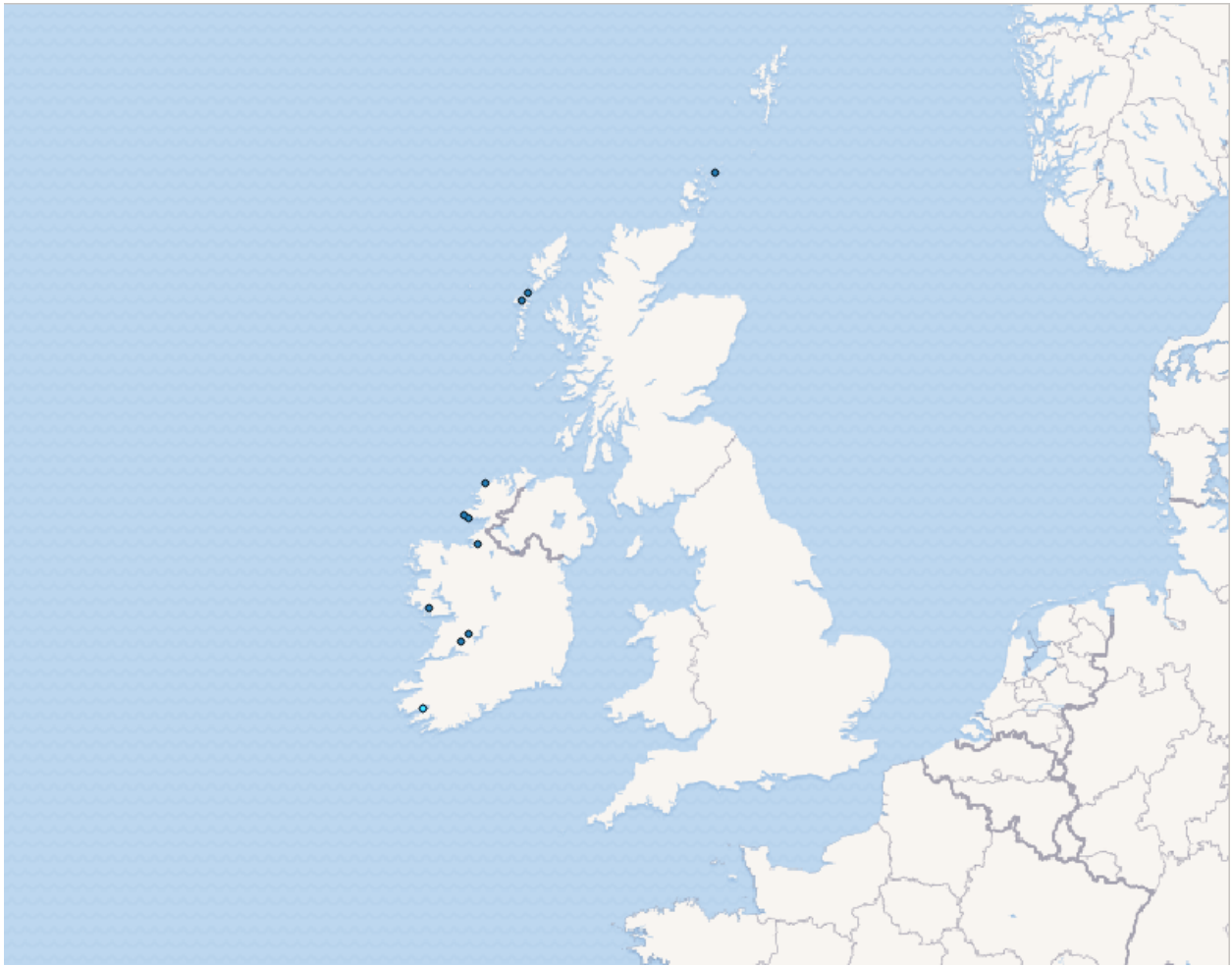


Figure 22: versions of the legend which refer to the stolen object as a *cloak* or *clóca*.



**Figure 23: versions of the legend which refer to the stolen object as a *coat* or *cóta*.**

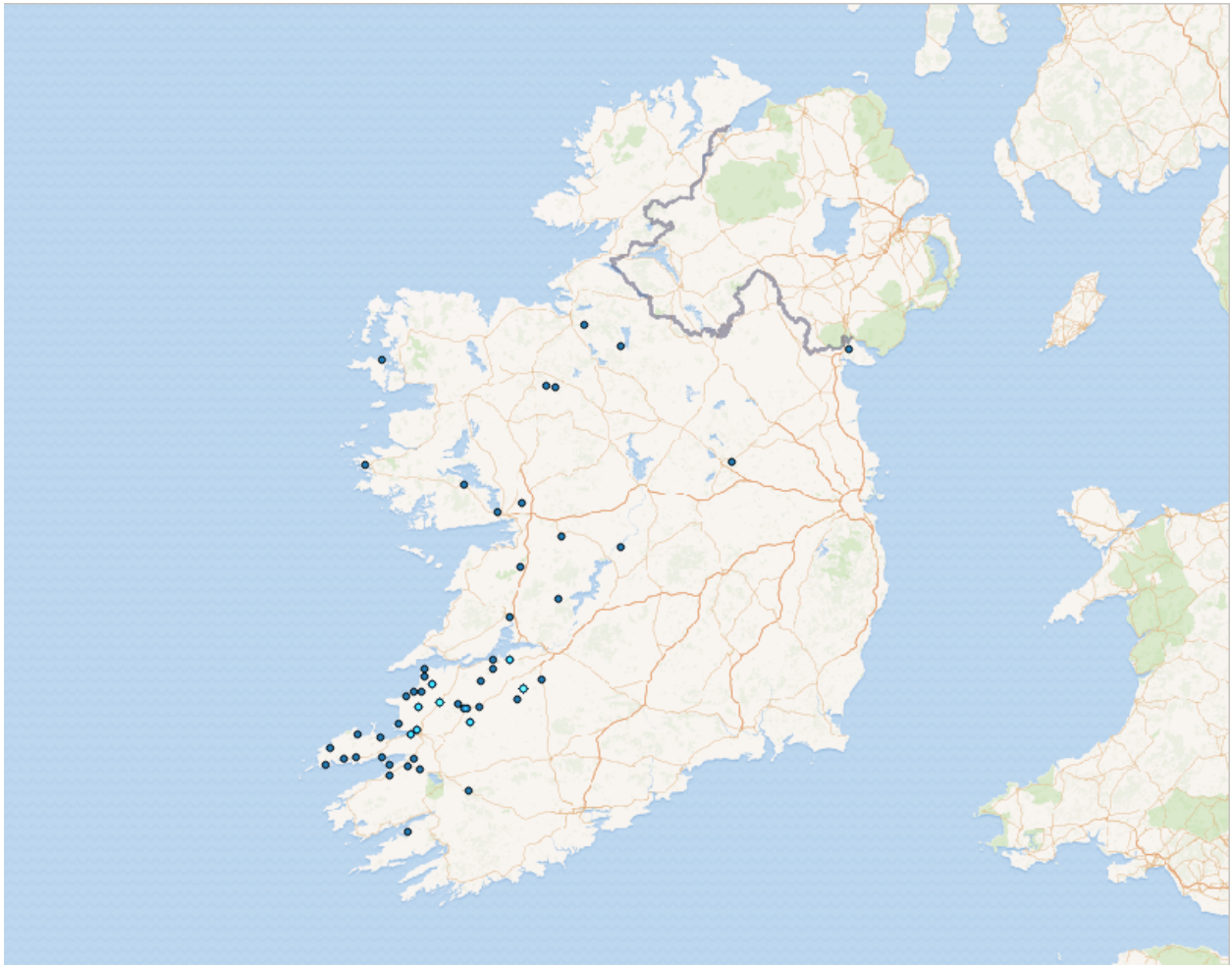
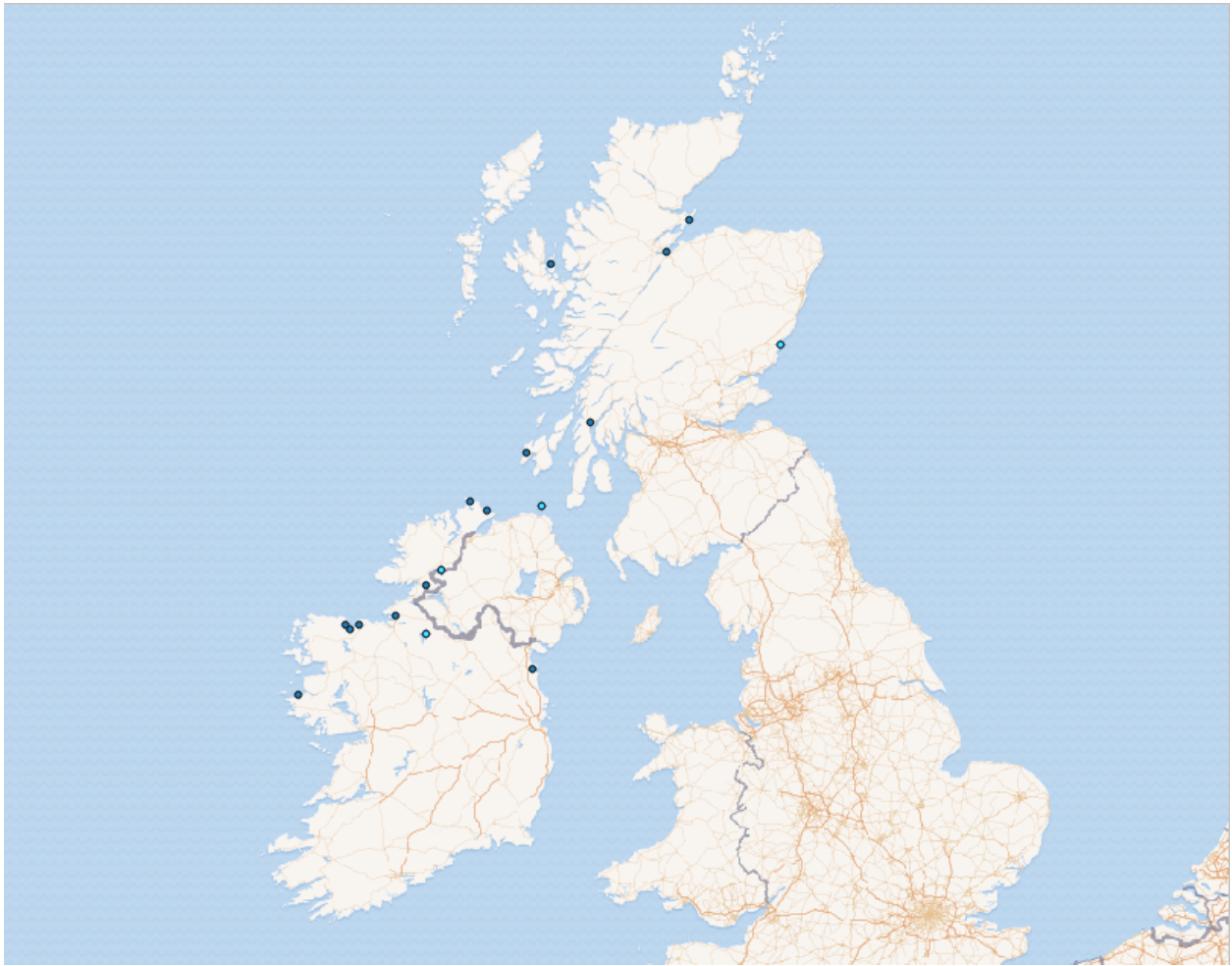
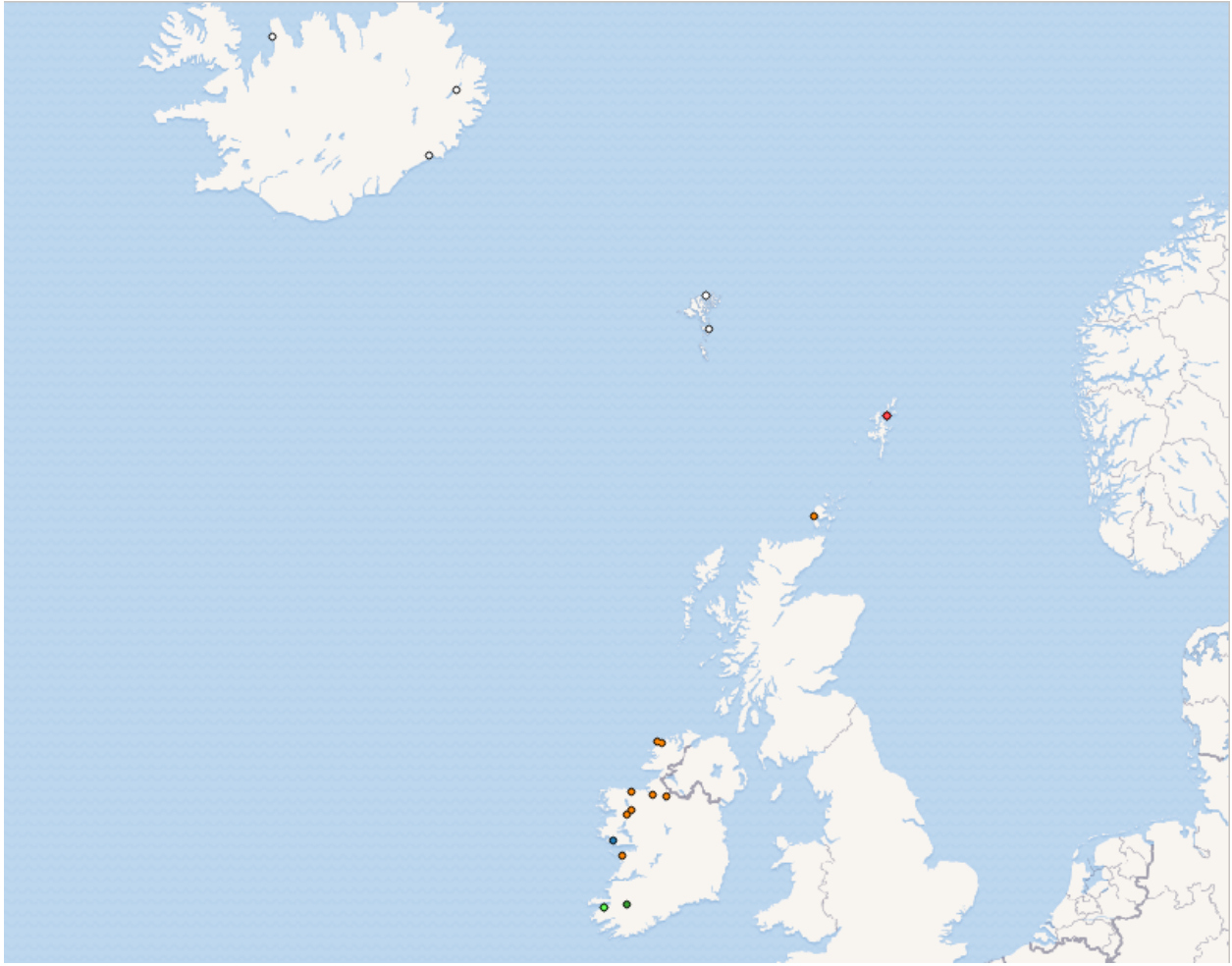


Figure 24: versions of the legend which refer to the stolen object as a *cap* or *caipín*.

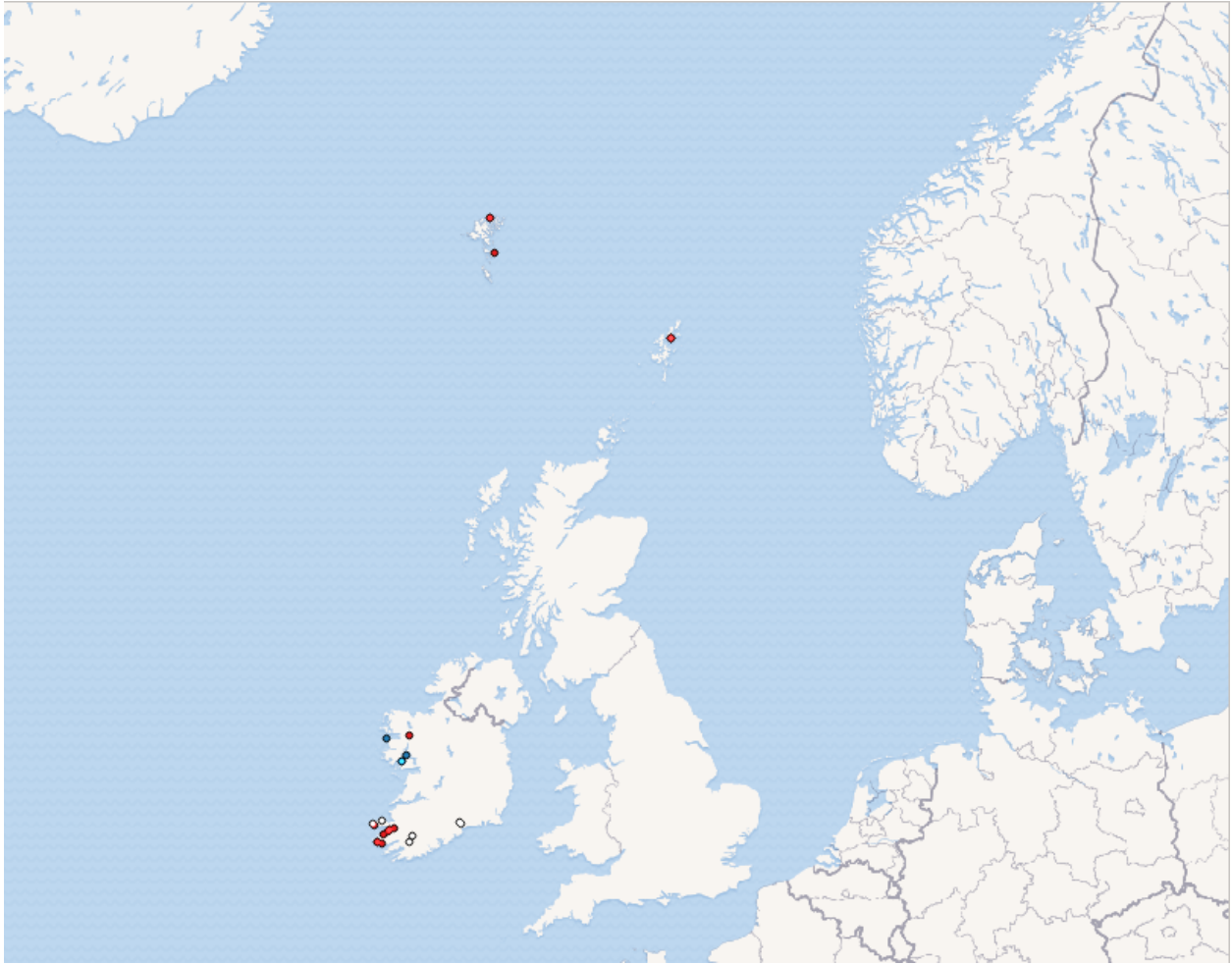


**Figure 25: versions of the legend which refer to the stolen object as a *tail*.**

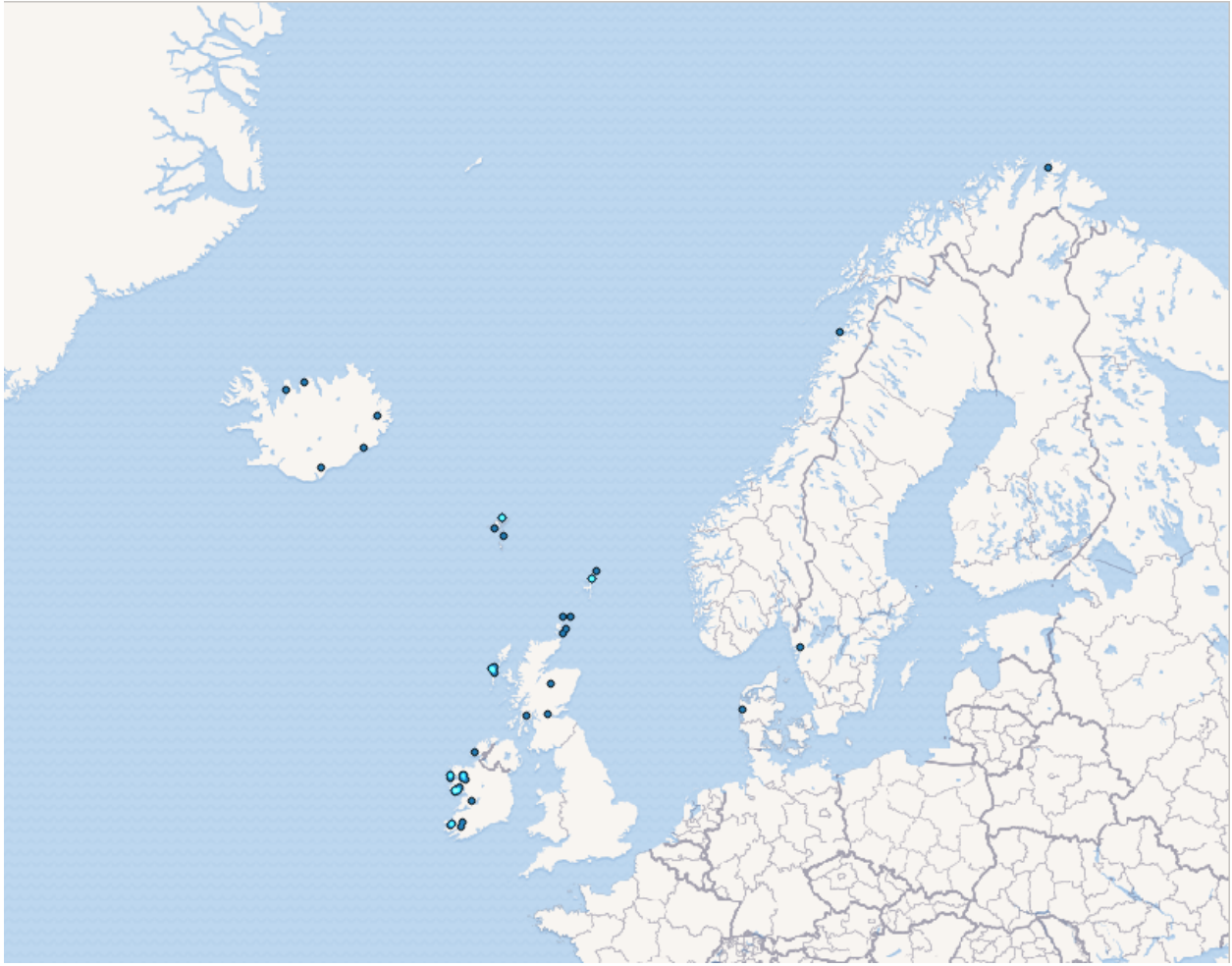


**Figure 26: orange dots indicate versions where the man encounters the supernatural woman during the summer, green dots indicate those where he encounters her in October, red dots indicate those where he encounters her at Halloween or Hallowmass, and white dots indicate those where the man encounters her during the winter.**

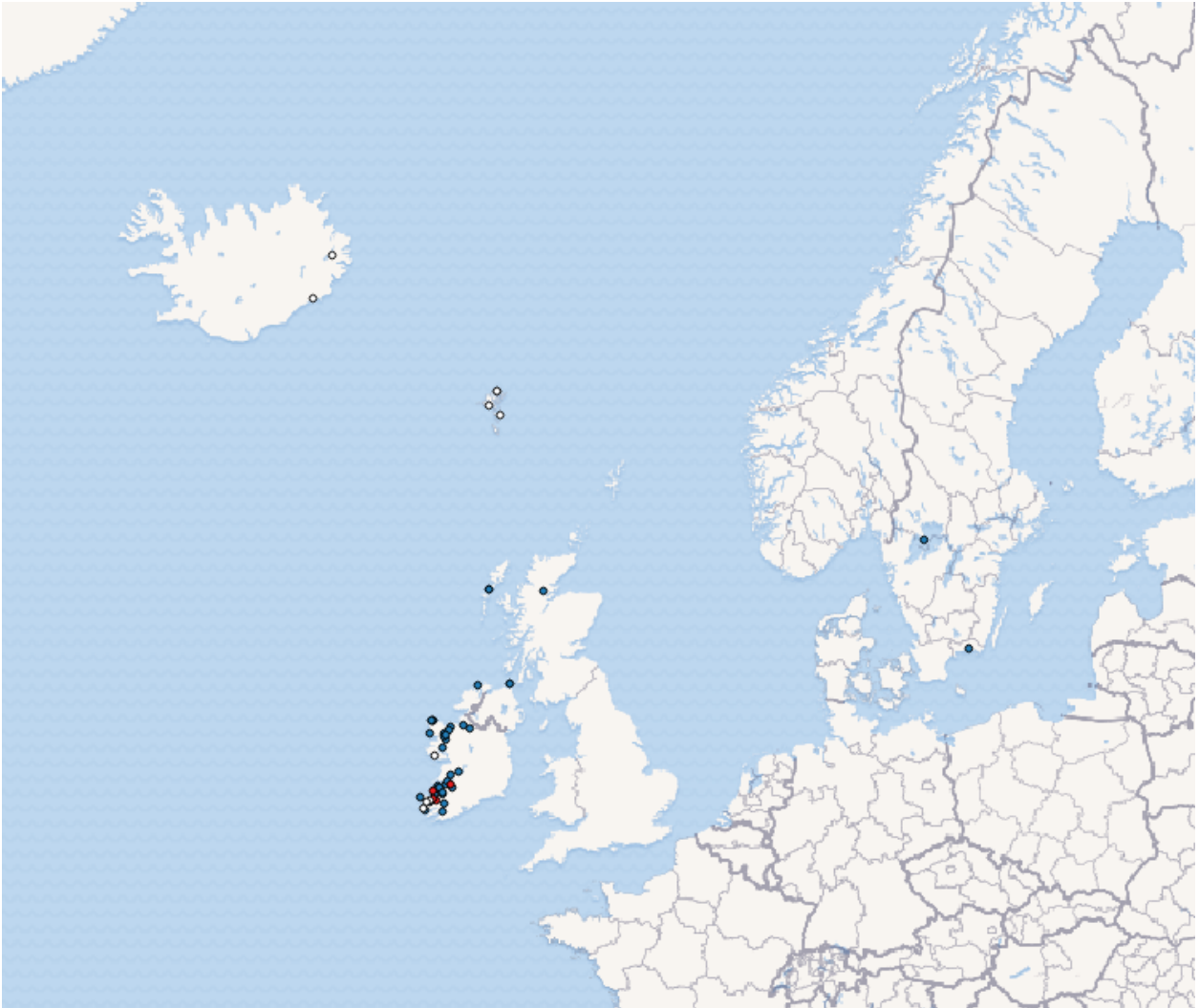




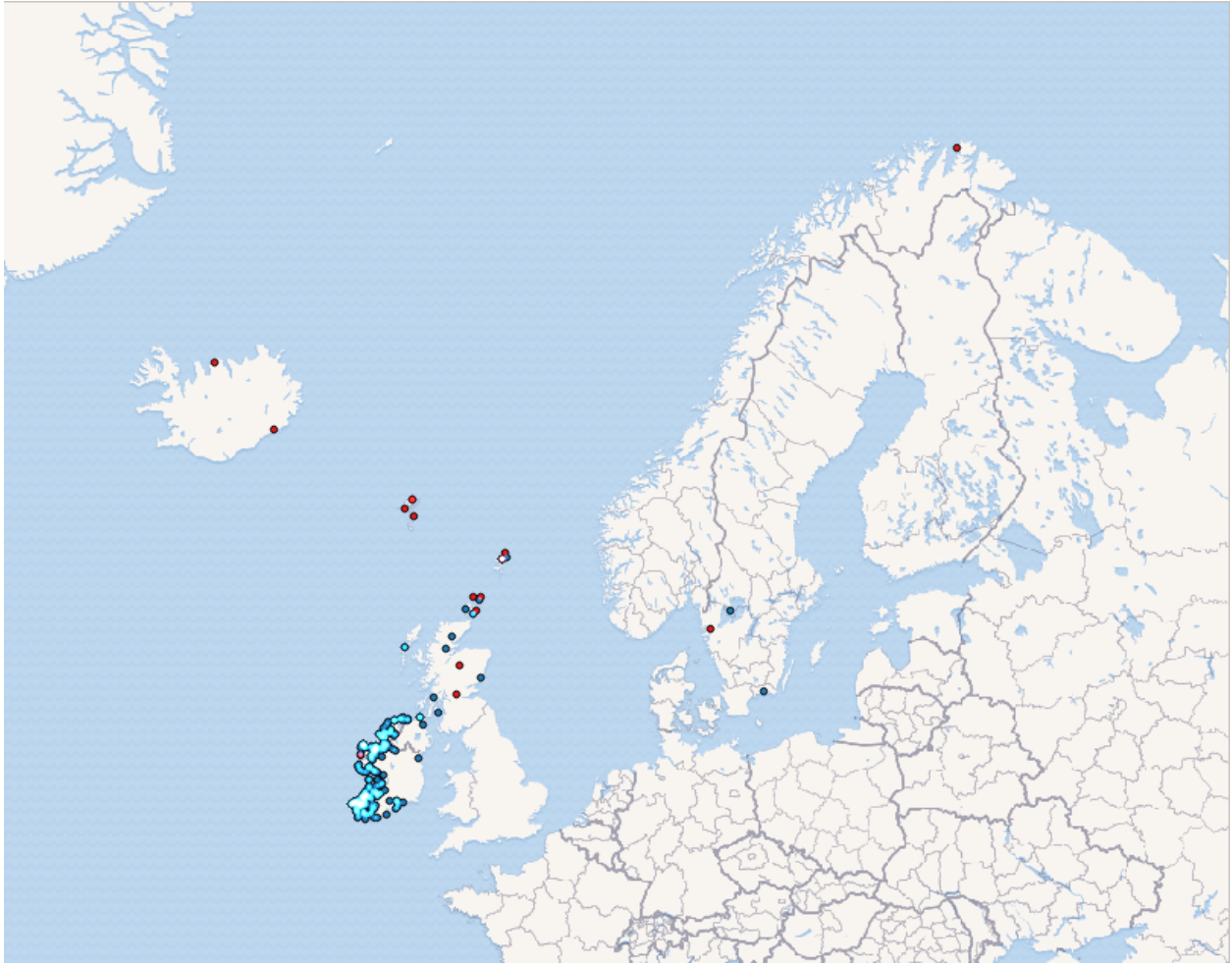
**Figure 27: red dots indicate versions where the man sets out with the intention of seeing or capturing the supernatural woman, white dots indicate those where he sets out to attend the first Mass of the day, blue dots indicate those where he shelters on an island overnight.**



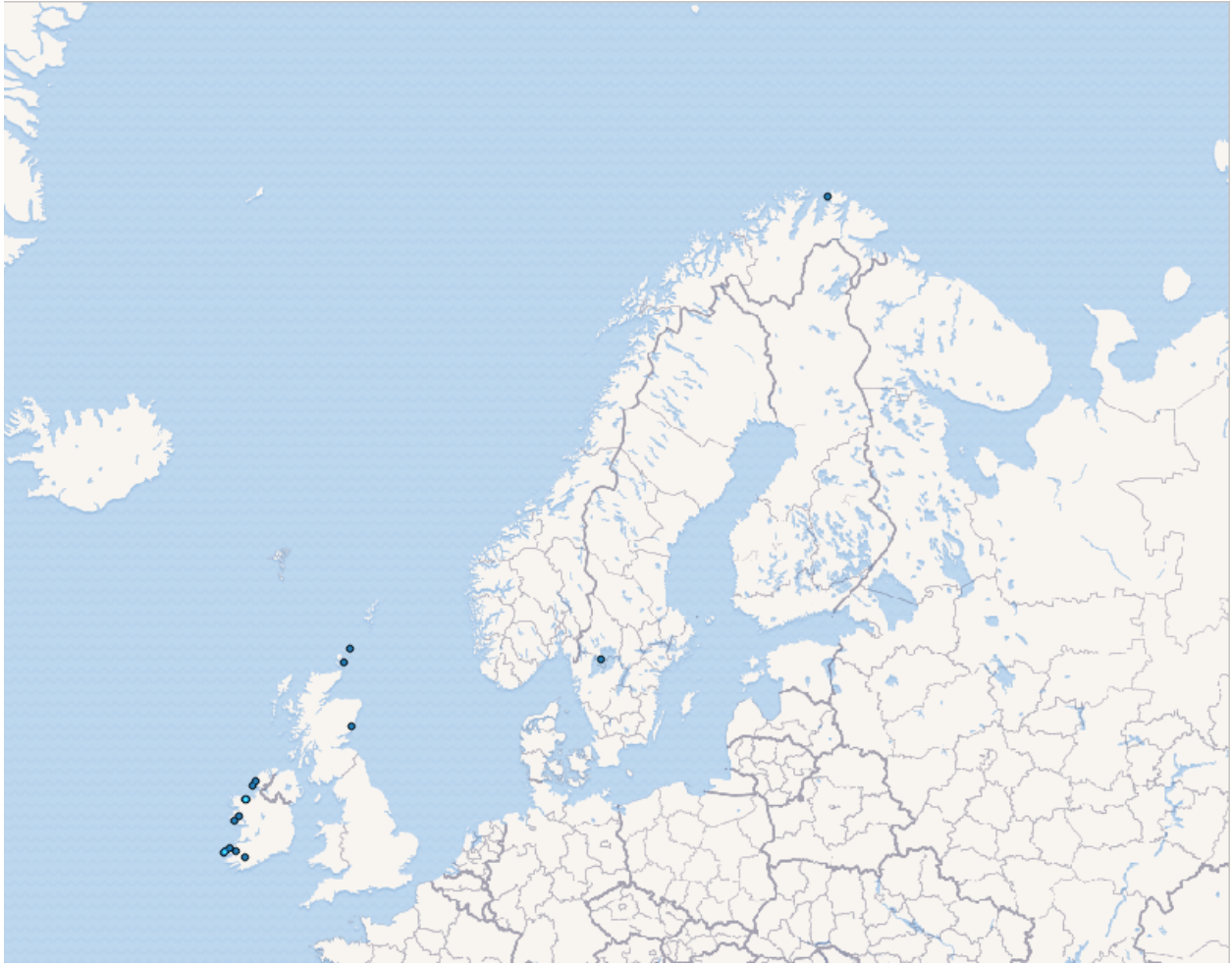
**Figure 28: versions in which the supernatural woman appears as part of a group of similar beings.**



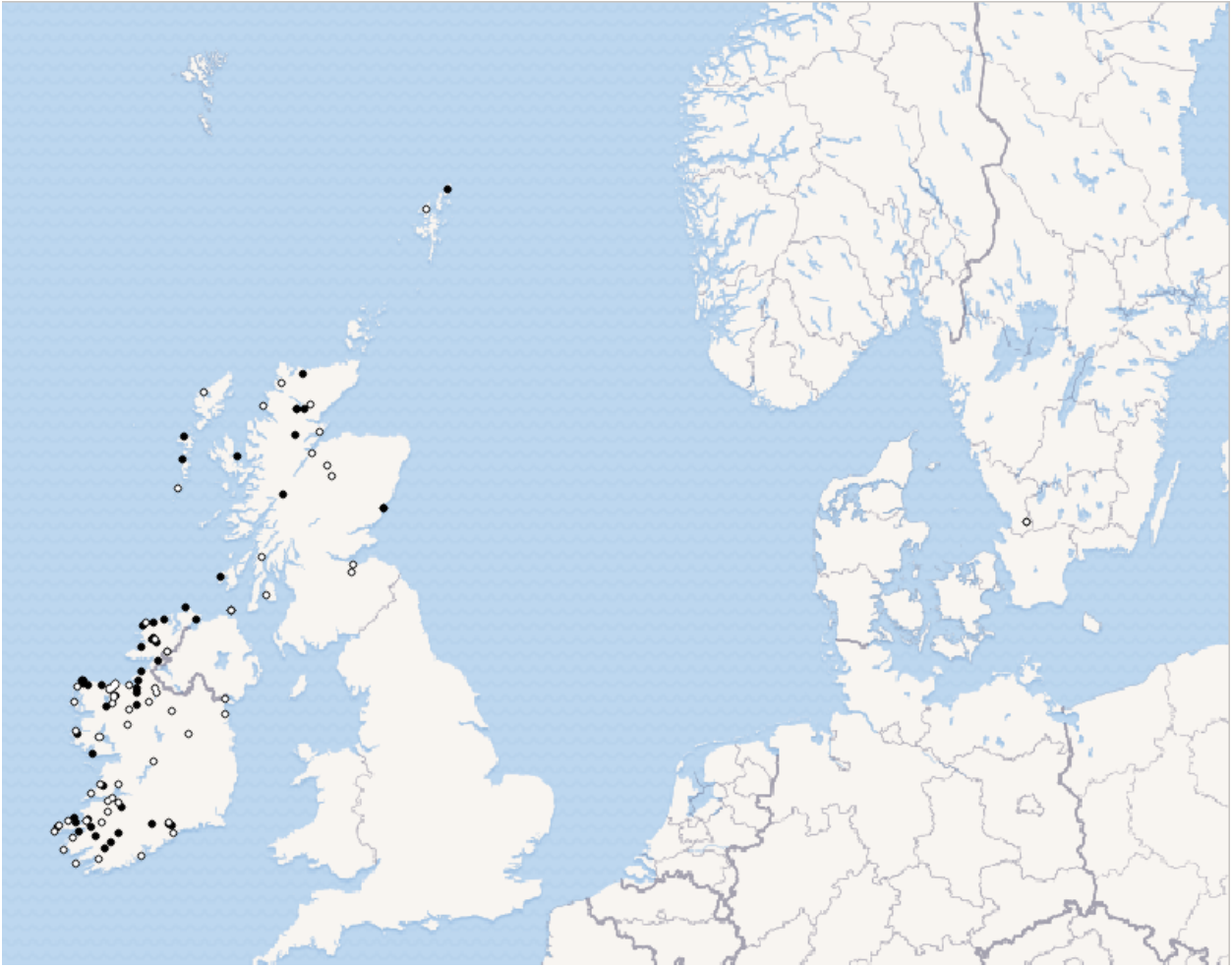
**Figure 29: blue dots indicate versions in which the woman appears at the same spot every day, white dots indicate those in which she returns the same time every year, and red dots indicate those where she returns to the same spot every seven years.**



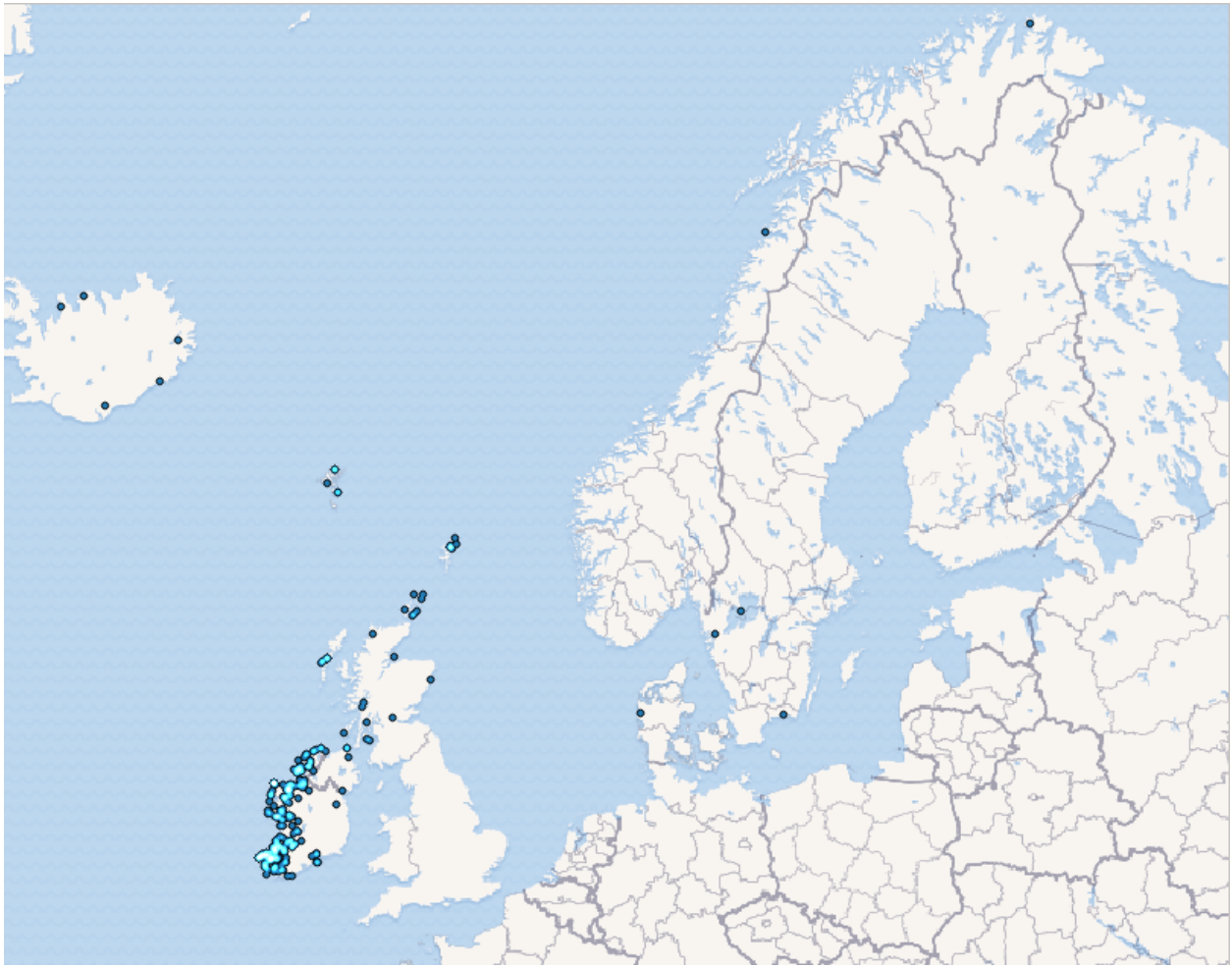
**Figure 30: blue dots indicate versions where the supernatural woman is sitting on a rock and/or combing her hair when the young man encounters her; red dots indicate those where the young woman is playing or dancing.**



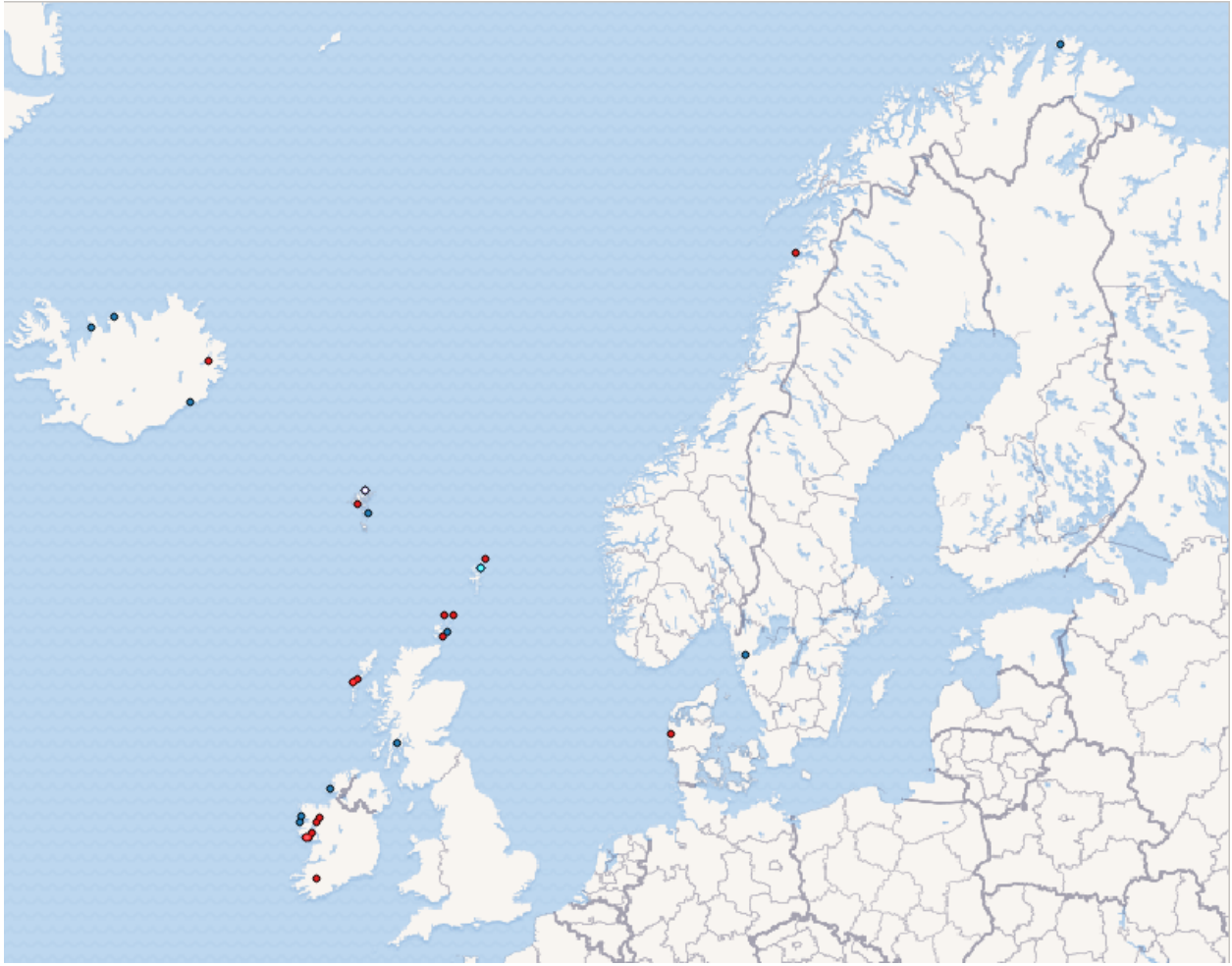
**Figure 31: versions in which the man fails to capture the supernatural woman on his first attempt.**



**Figure 32: White dots indicate versions in which the man is said to capture the supernatural woman without stealing her skin, cloak, etc.; black dots indicate versions in which he takes this object off of her after capturing her.**



**Figure 33: versions in which the man steals the magical object and the supernatural woman is compelled to remain on land or to follow him.**



**Figure 34: red dots indicate versions in which the supernatural woman's companions return to the water when they become aware of the man, blue dots indicate those in which the supernatural woman searches for her stolen object while her companions return to the water.**



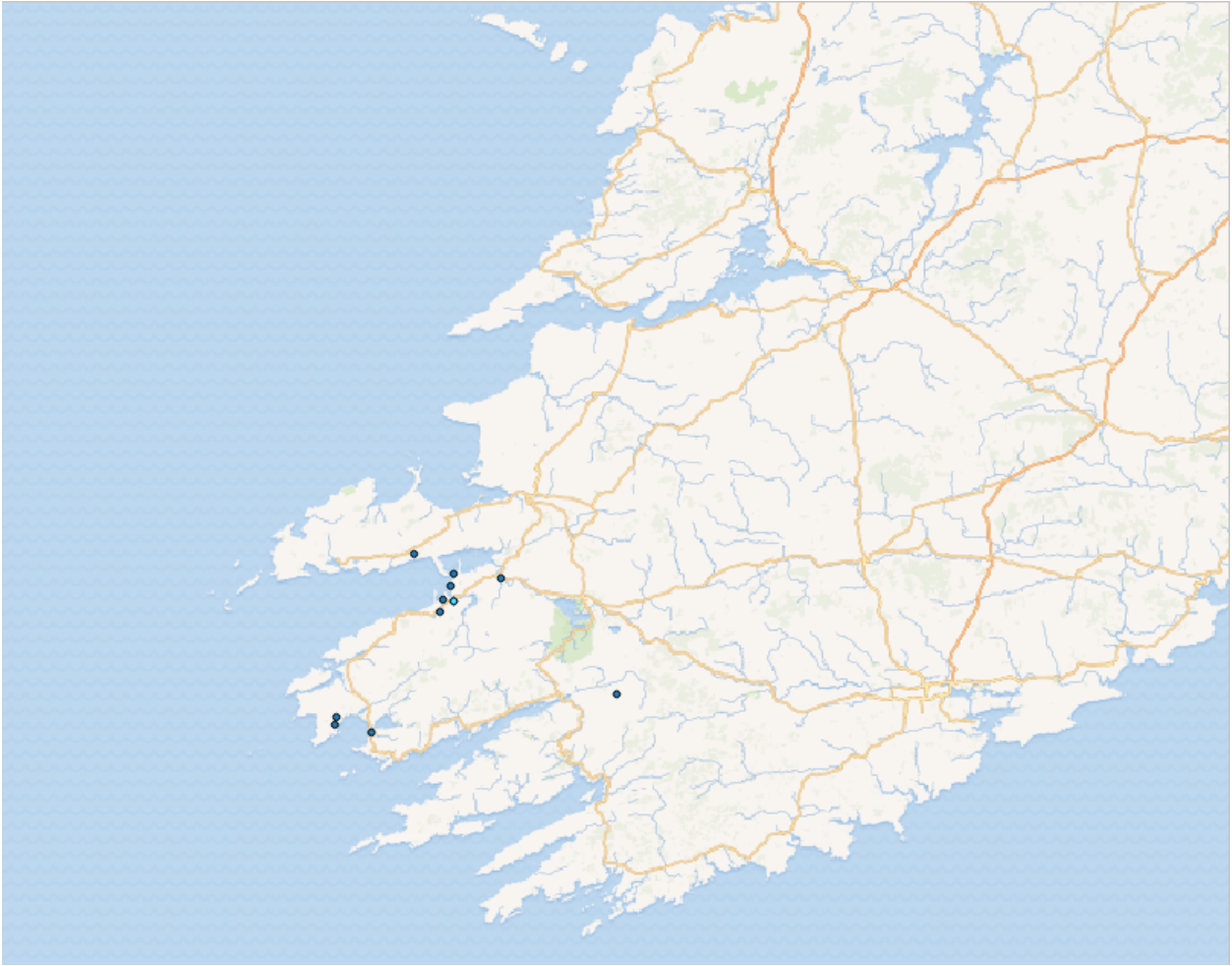
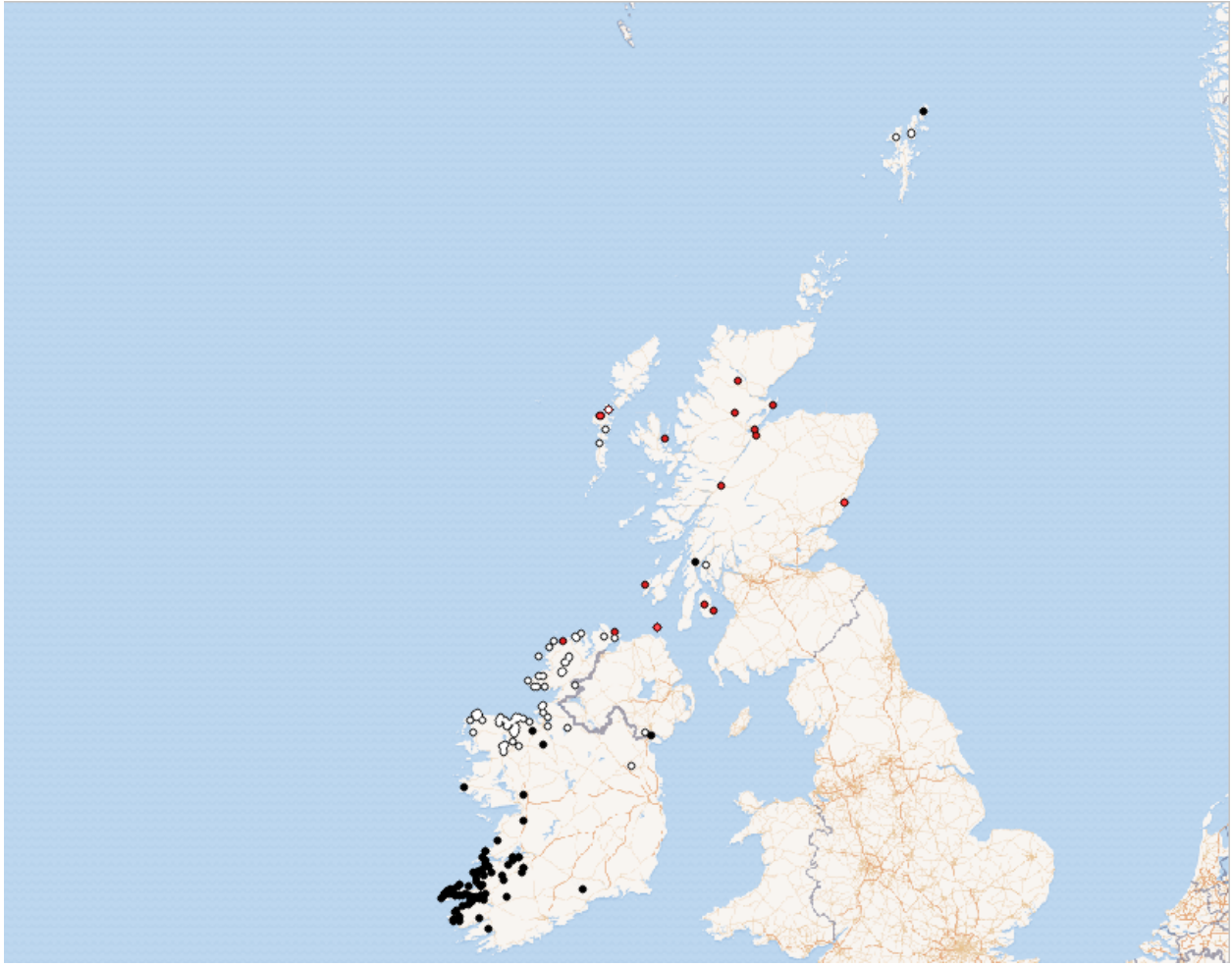


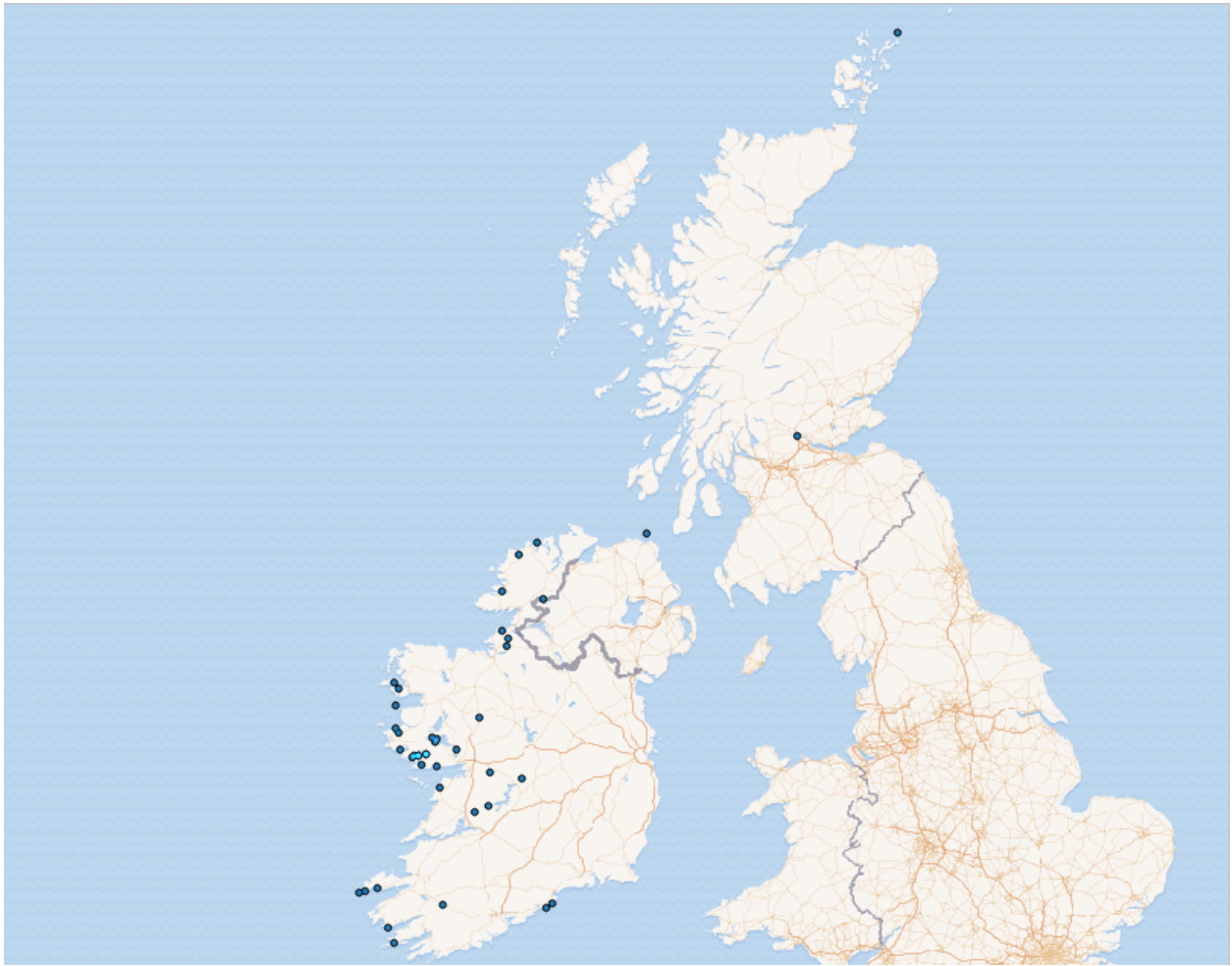
Figure 35: versions which include the *Cathair Tonn Tóime* motif and/or the wave which attempts to drown the young man.



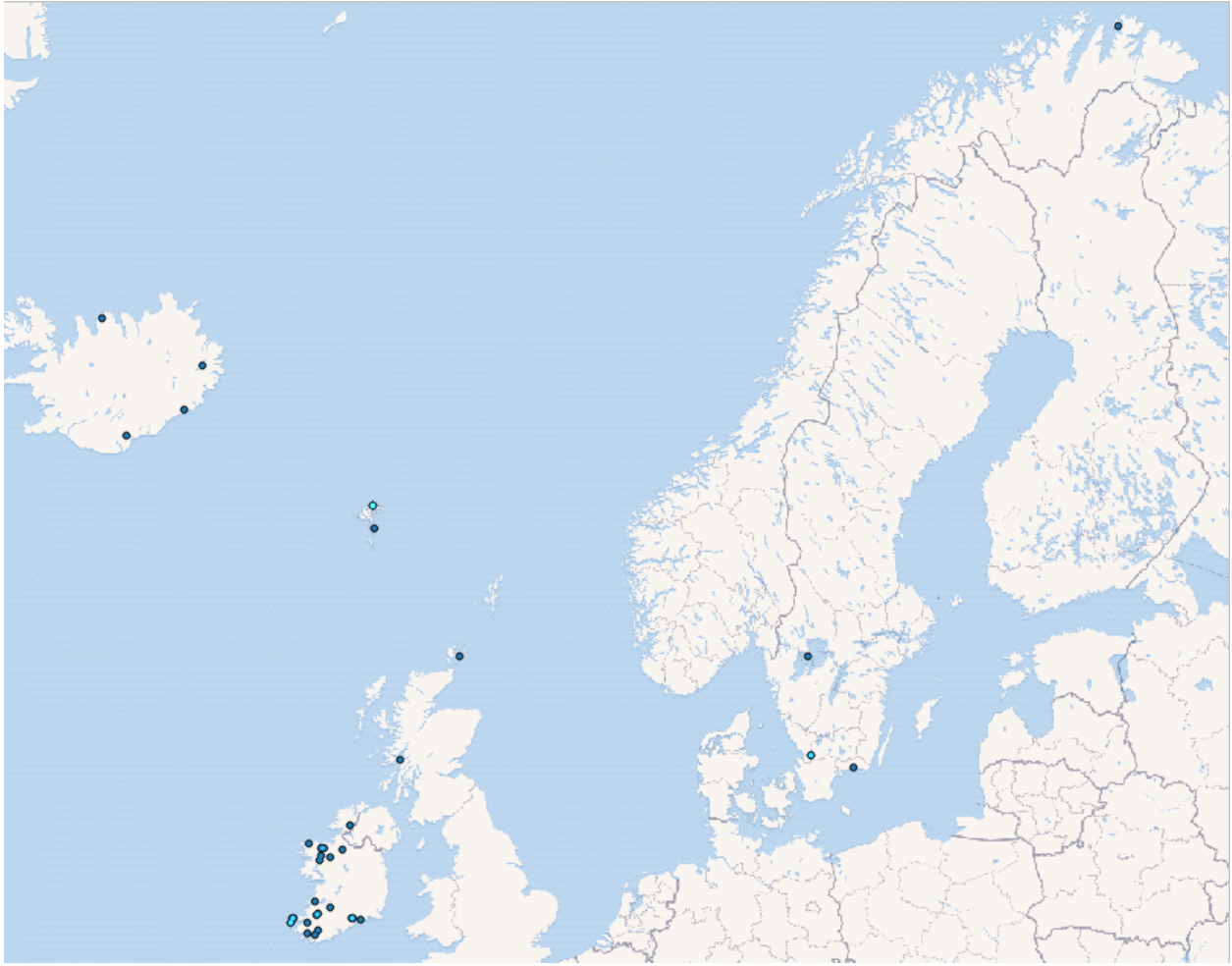
**Figure 36: versions in which the supernatural woman consents to marriage and in which her skin or garment is not stolen from her.**



**Figure 37: black dots indicate versions in which the man hides the stolen object in the loft, white dots indicate versions in which he hides the stolen object in a stack of hay or turf, and red dots indicate versions in which he hides this object in a barn or external structure.**



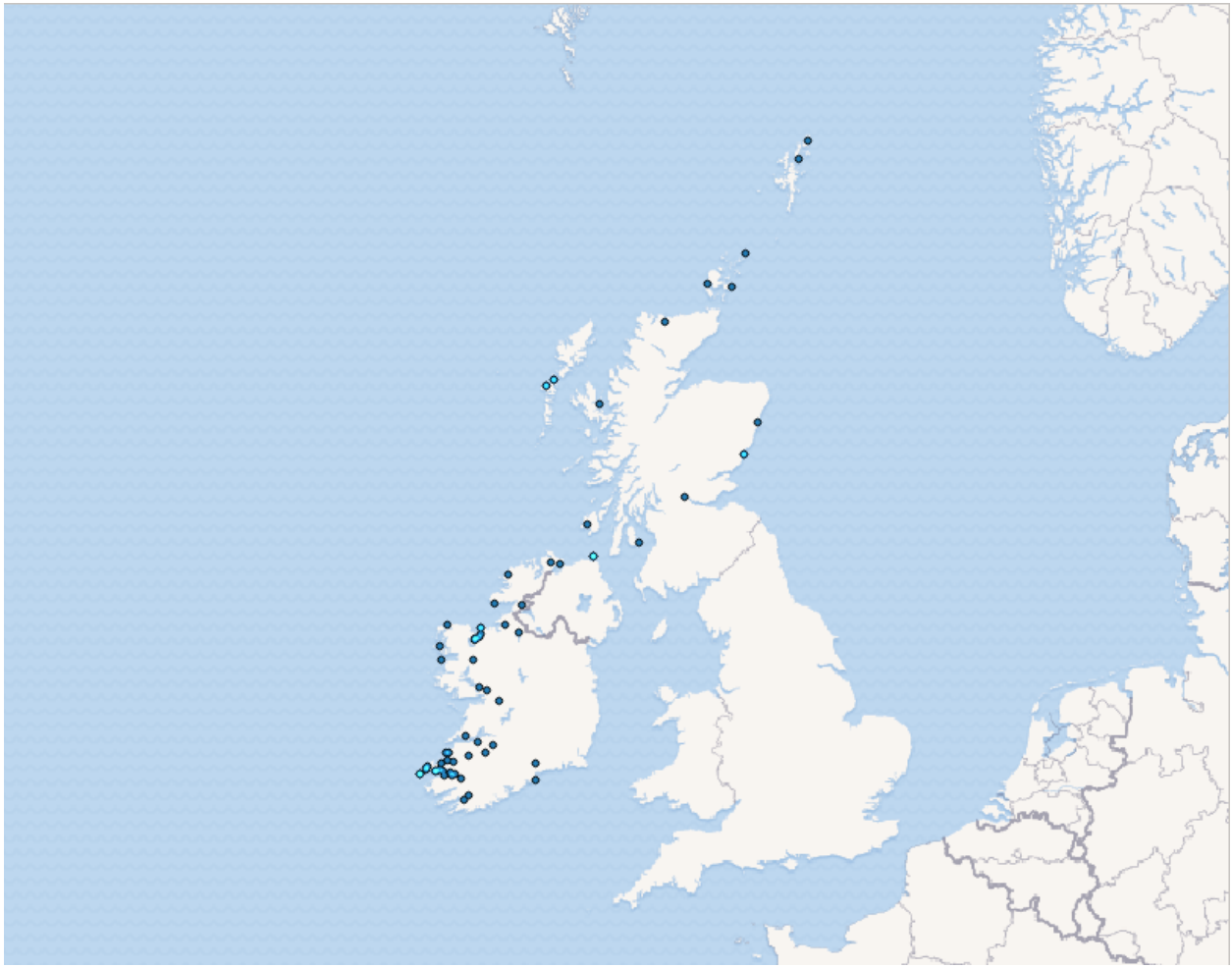
**Figure 38: versions in which the man hides the stolen object in the thatched roof.**



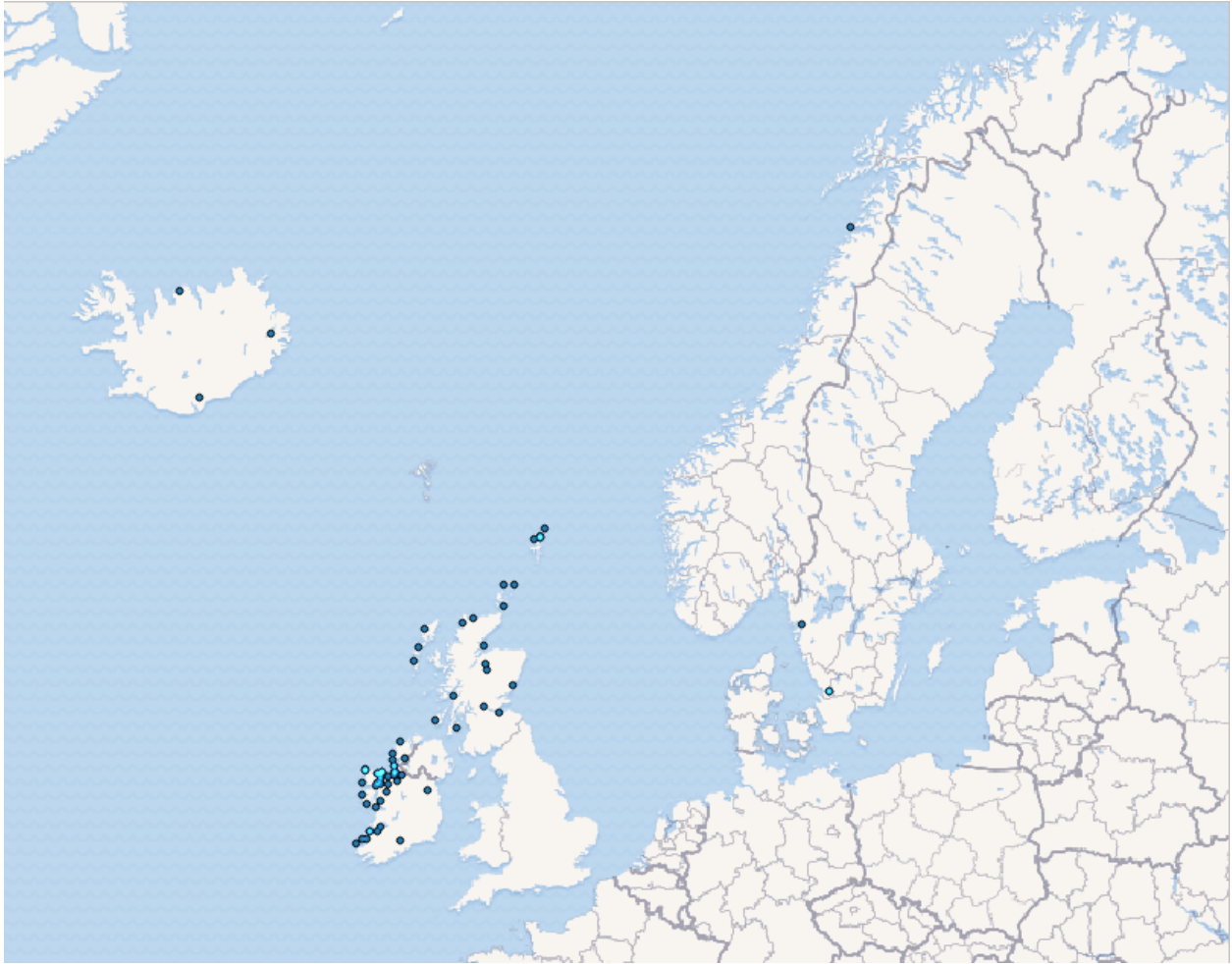
**Figure 39: versions in which the man hides the stolen object in a locked chest, box, press, etc.**



**Figure 40: versions in which the marriage is said to involve a priest.**

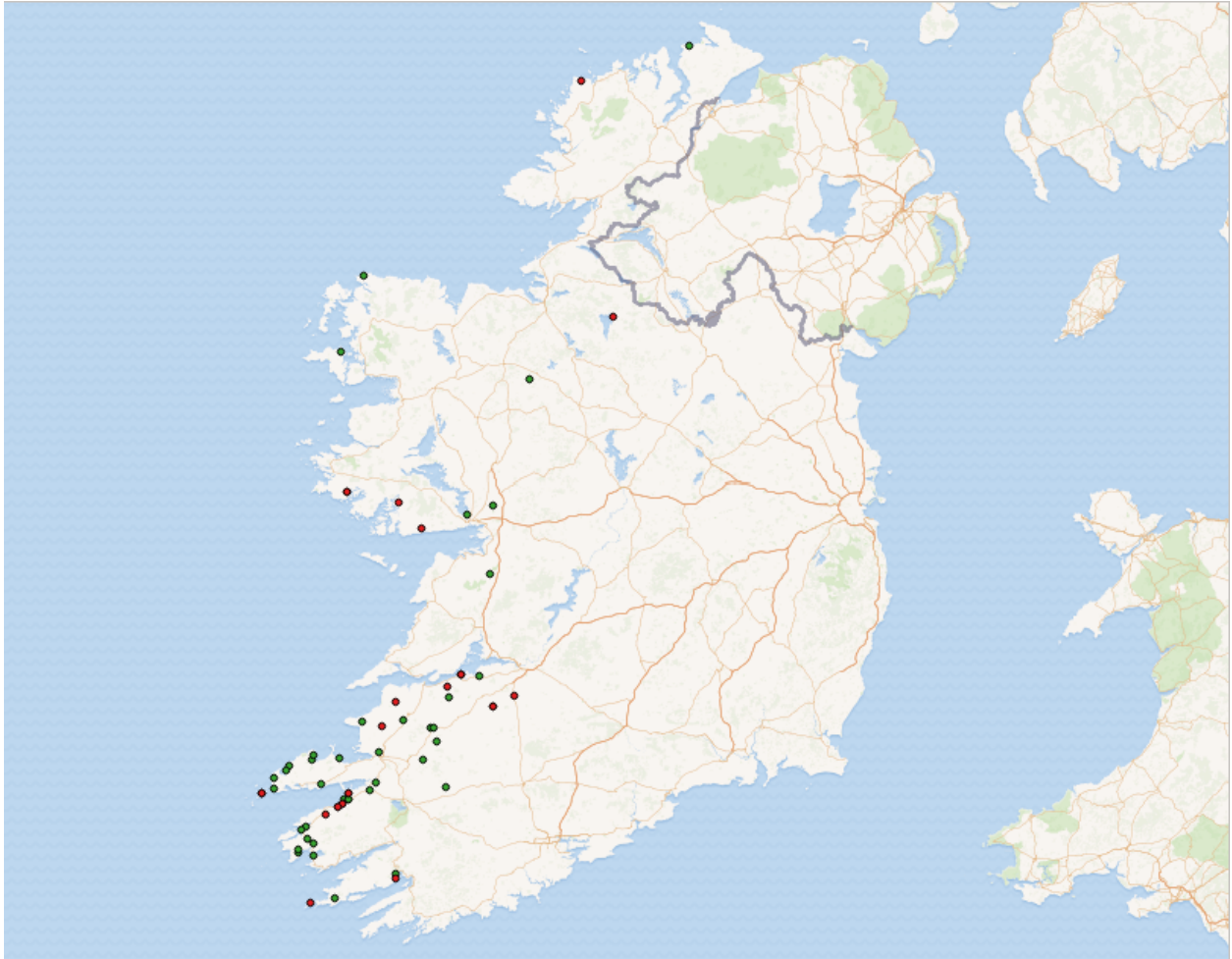


**Figure 41: versions in which the supernatural woman exhibits behaviour that suggests she is happy on land or in love with her husband.**



**Figure 42: versions in which the supernatural woman exhibits behaviour that suggests she is unhappy on land or desires to return home.**

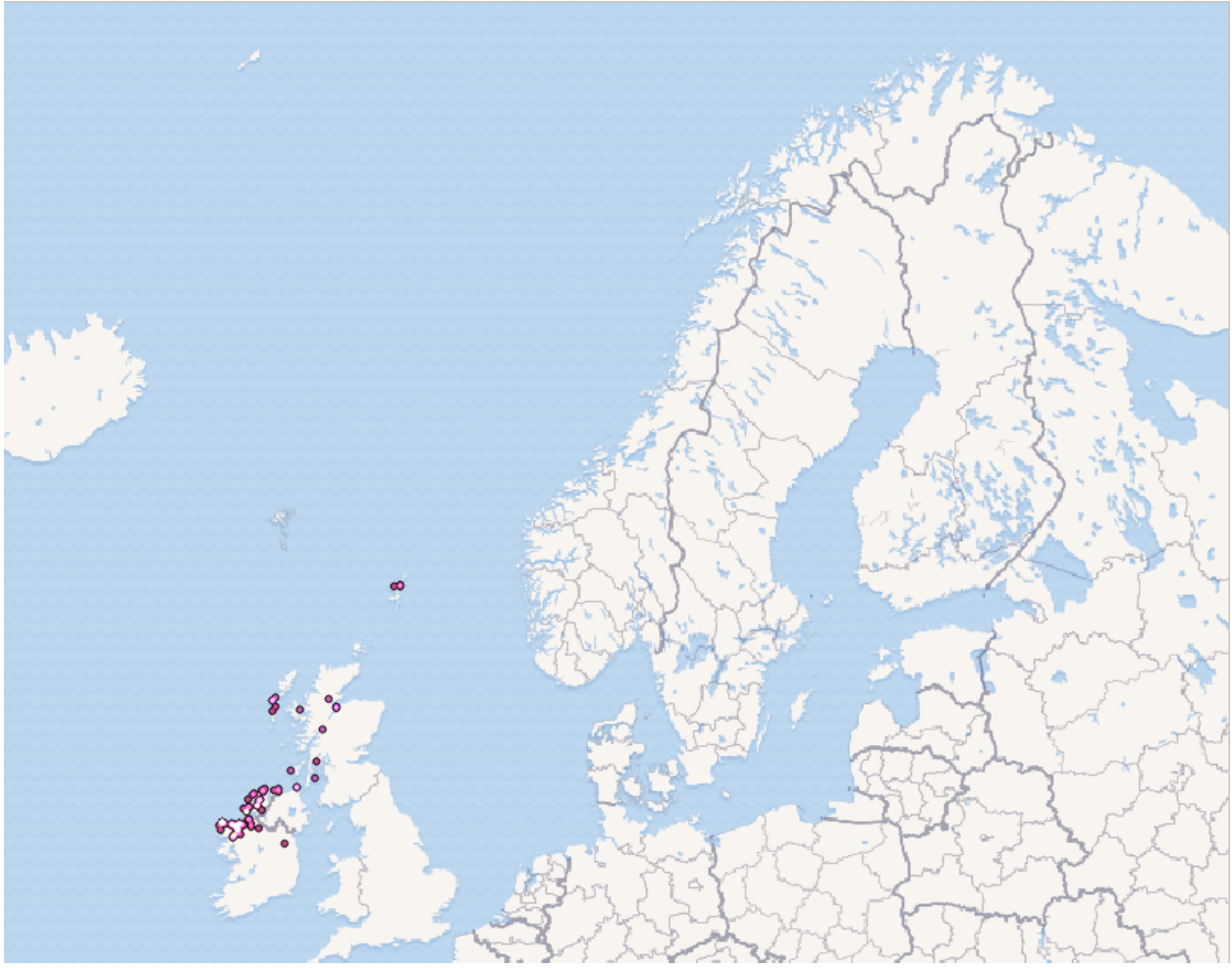




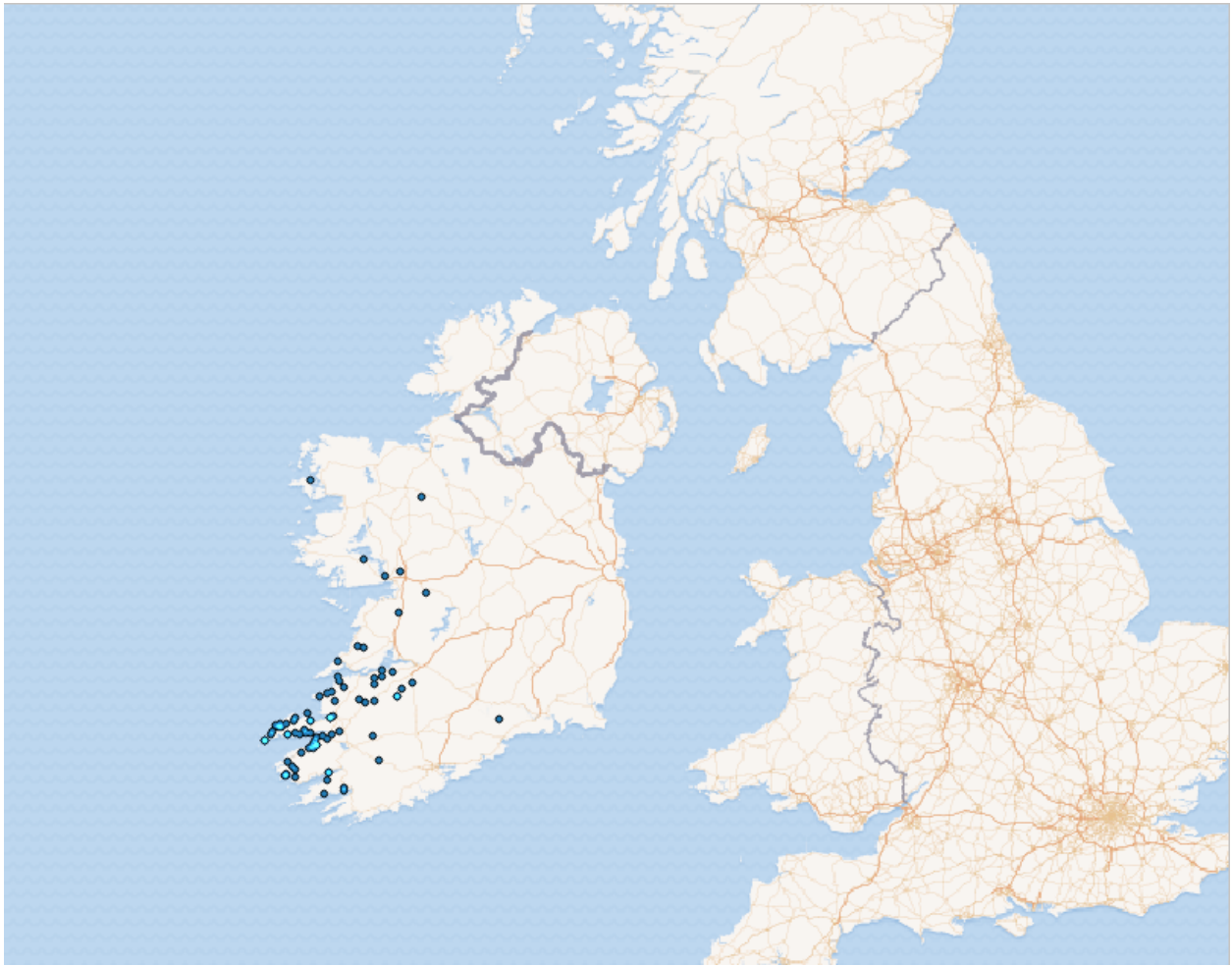
**Figure 43: Red dots indicate versions in which the supernatural woman never speaks while on land, green dots indicate those in which she does not laugh, or only laughs a certain number of times.**



**Figure 44: versions in which the children (deliberately or inadvertently) help their mother recover her stolen property.**



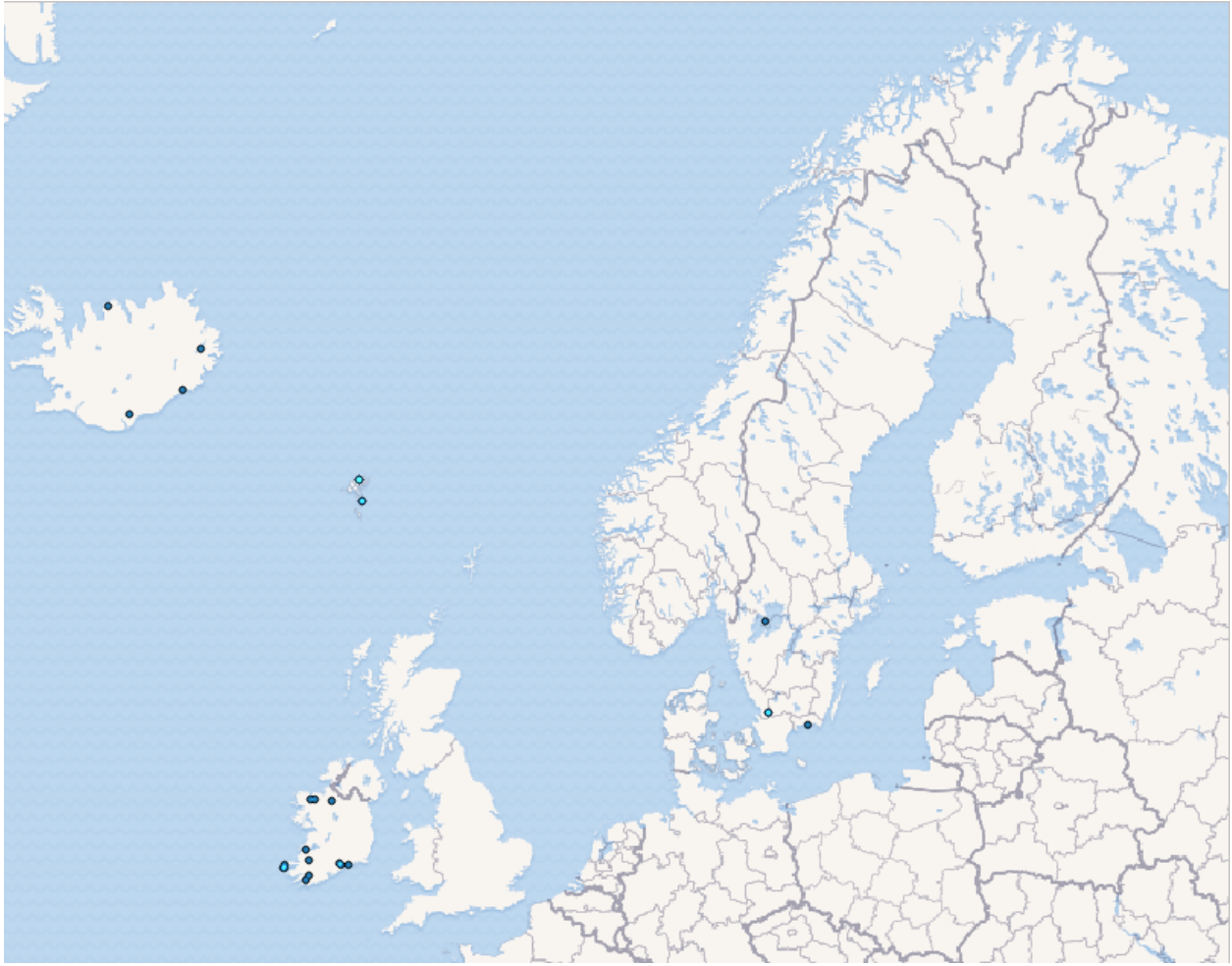
**Figure 45: versions in which the children (deliberately or inadvertently) help their mother recover her stolen property, and in which the man hid the stolen object in a stack or barn.**



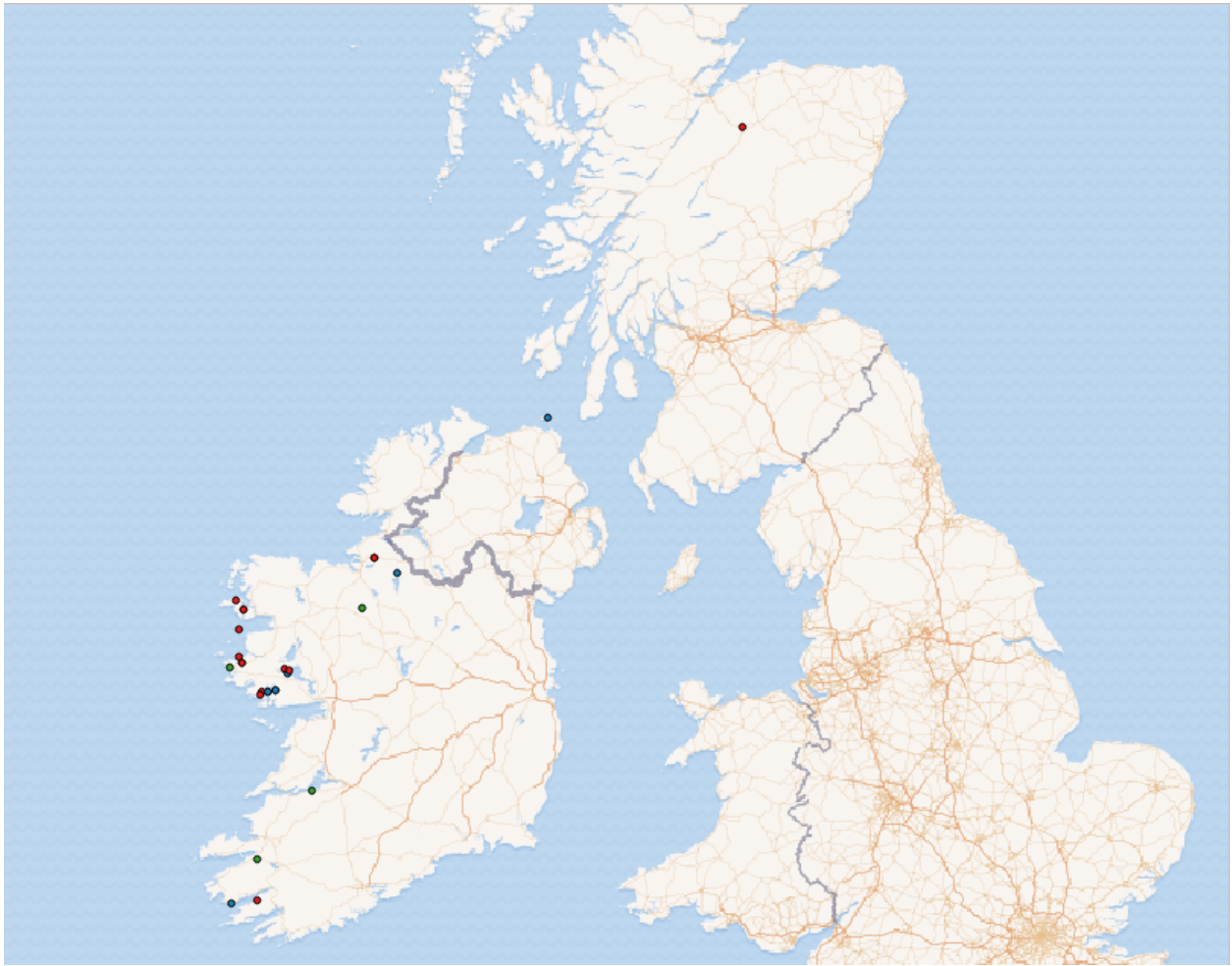
**Figure 46: versions in which the man inadvertently reveals the location of the stolen object while searching for something in the loft.**



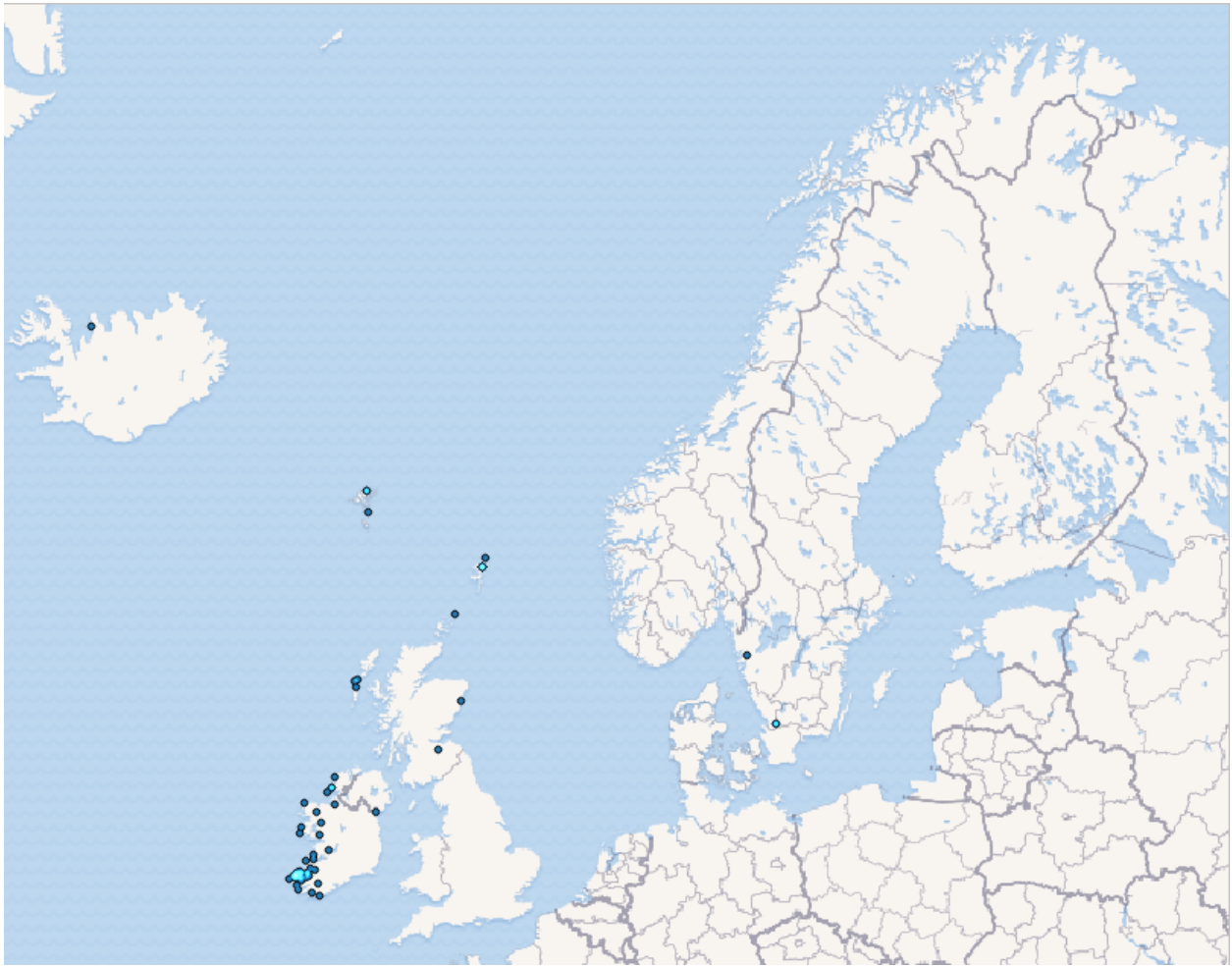
**Figure 47: Versions in which the man (or a thatcher) inadvertently reveals the location of the stolen object when replacing or repairing the roof.**



**Figure 48: versions in which the man neglects to lock the chest in which the stolen object is hidden, or in which he leaves the key in an accessible location.**



**Figure 49:** Red dots indicate versions in which the house catches fire or is set on fire, revealing the location of the stolen object; green dots indicate versions in which a storm disrupts the roof, revealing its location; and blue dots indicate versions in which the stolen object falls from its hiding place.

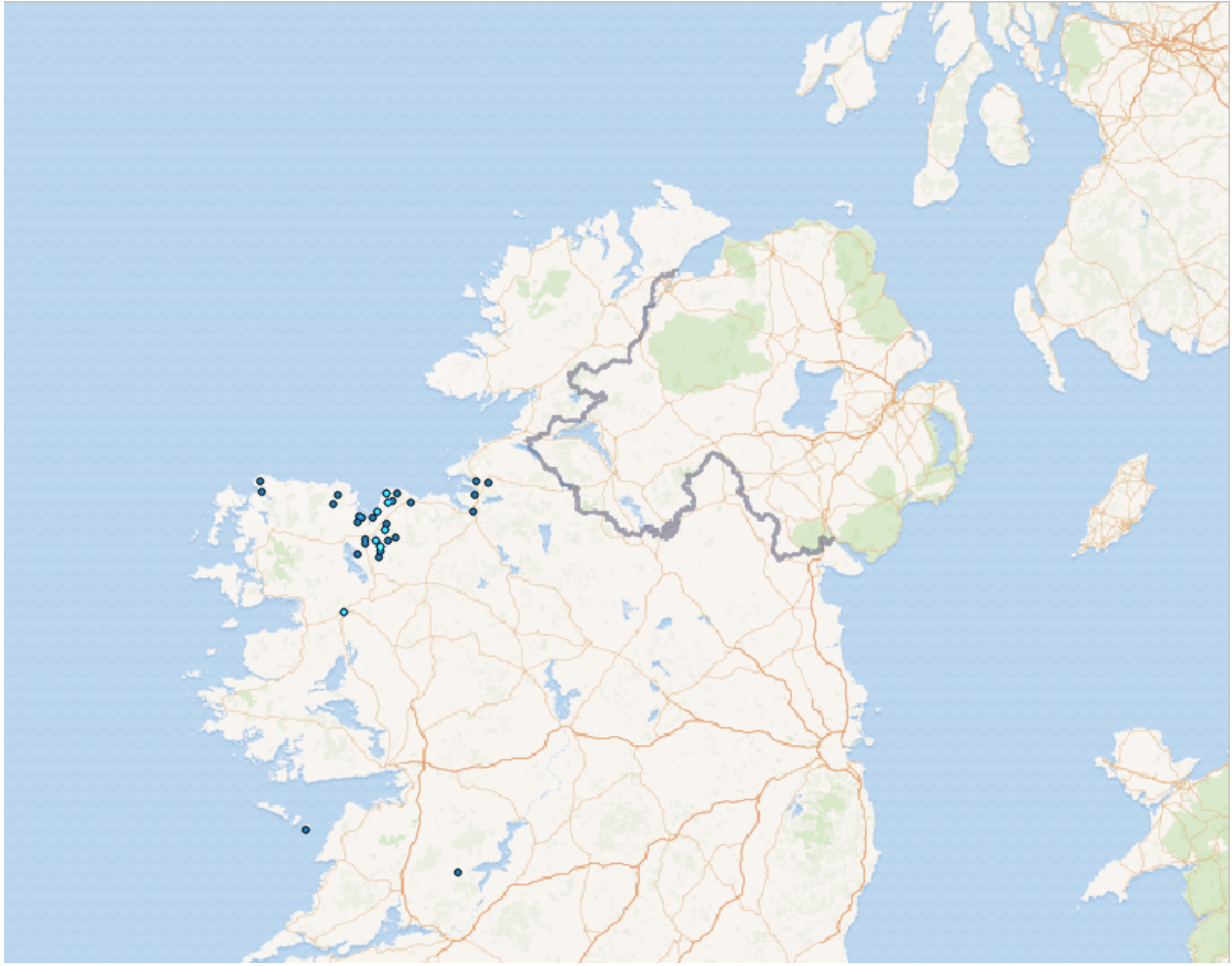


**Figure 50: versions in which the supernatural woman attends to her family before returning to the water.**





**Figure 51: versions in which the children follow their mother underwater.**



**Figure 52: versions in which the supernatural woman turns her children into stone before returning to the water.**



**Figure 53: versions in which the man follows the supernatural woman to the shore and attempts to convince her to stay on land.**



**Figure 54: versions in which the woman says that she prefers her aquatic husband to her terrestrial one, or that she preferred her life underwater to her life on land.**



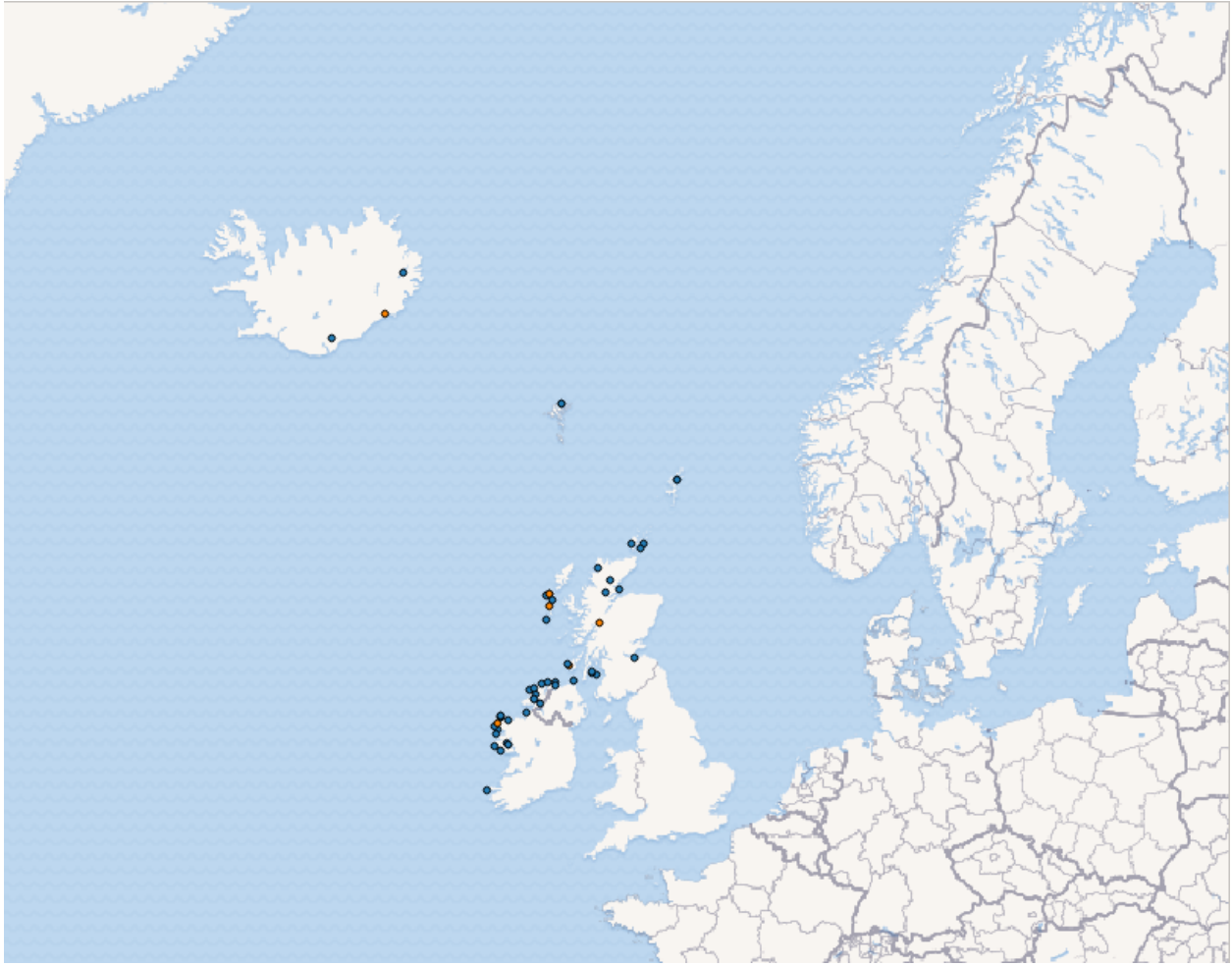
**Figure 55: blue dots indicate versions in which the supernatural woman curses her husband or her descendants, orange dots indicate those in which she blesses her husband or children, red dots indicate those in which she leaves advice, and black dots indicate those in which she pronounces some other utterance (not including those included in the previous map).**



**Figure 56: versions in which the supernatural woman meets with her aquatic husband at the shore.**



**Figure 57: versions in which the supernatural woman meets her former companions at the shore.**

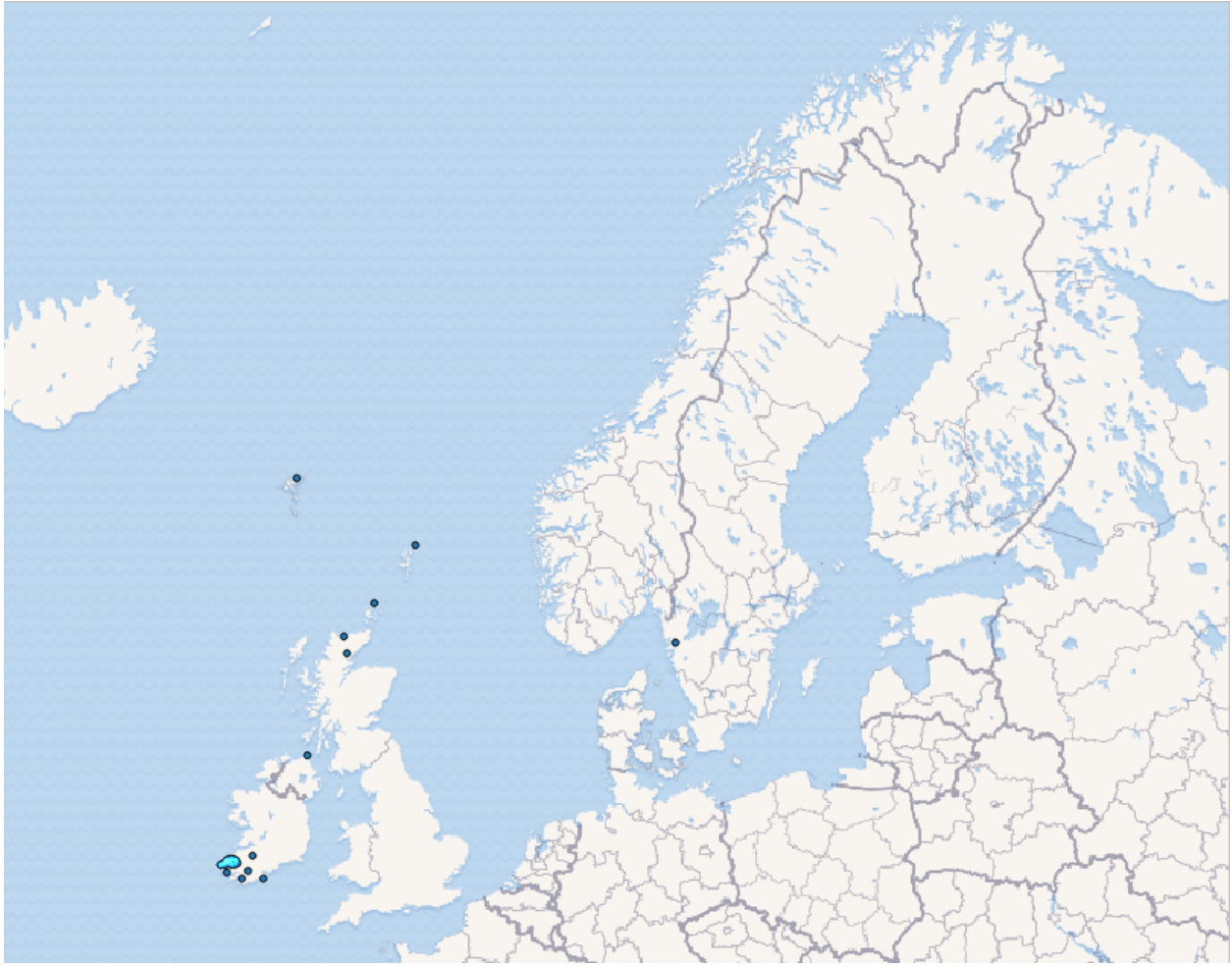


**Figure 58: blue dots indicate versions in which the supernatural woman returns to visit her children, and orange dots indicate versions in which she leaves fish for her terrestrial family.**

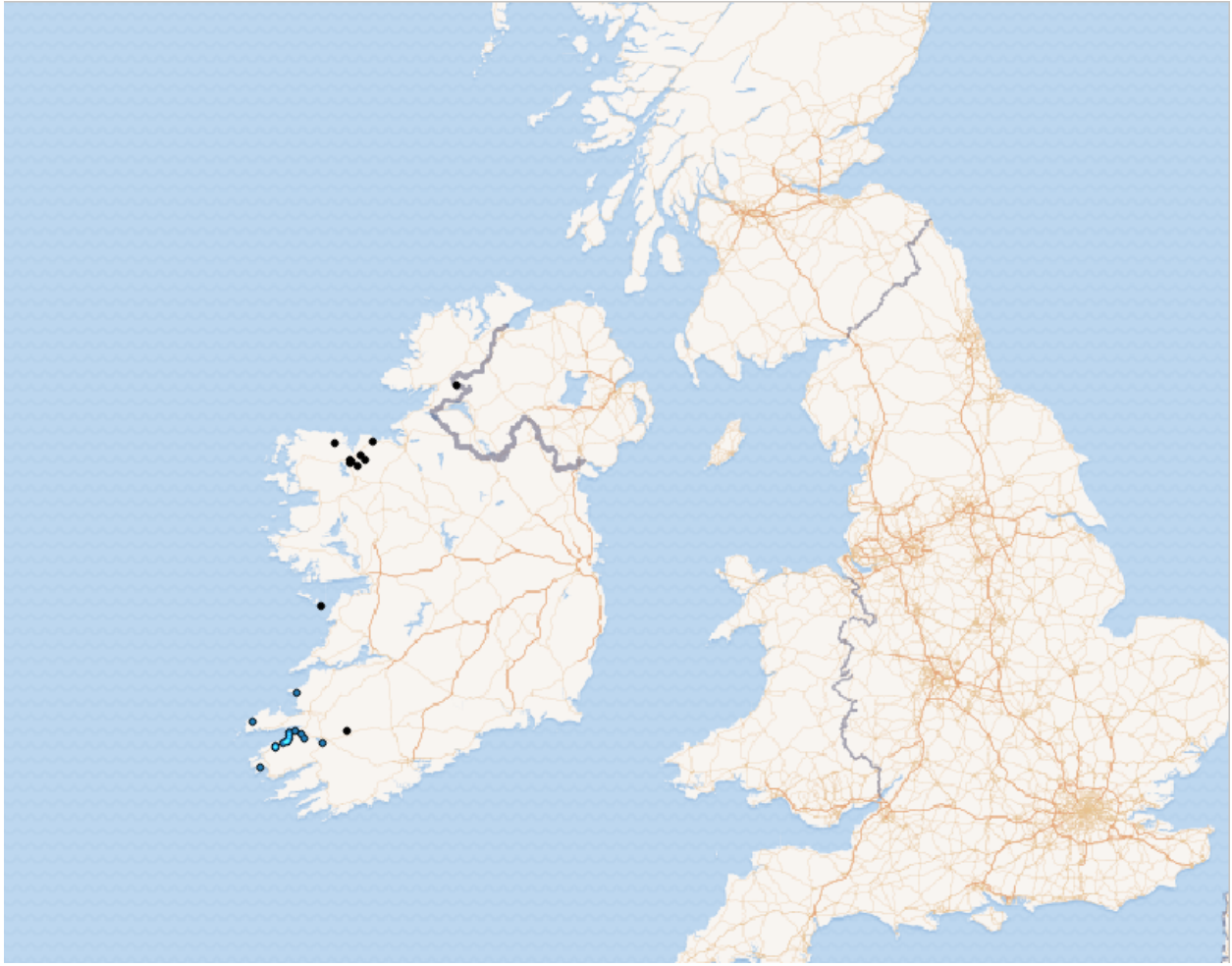




**Figure 59: blue dots indicate versions in which the man succeeds in capturing the supernatural woman again, orange dots indicate versions in which he tries but fails to do so.**



**Figure 60: versions which specify that the children or descendants of the supernatural woman have a physical deformity, commonly webbed hands or feet.**



**Figure 61: black dots indicate versions in which the family or descendants of the man are said to be cursed, blue dots indicate versions in which they are more likely to drown.**



**Figure 62: versions in which the man's descendants do not drown, or do not drown in certain bodies of water.**



**Figure 63: versions which include the “shuibhail mé an domhain” poem.**

### Appendix IV : Descendants of the mermaid or seal-woman

Table 2 indicates all versions of The Mermaid Legend consulted for this study in which the man who married the mermaid or seal woman is named or identified with a family, and/or in which his children or descendants are marked in some way.

**Table 2: Families and Descendants**

Designation	Name	Children	Descendants
Aberdeen Sound 1	Stuart (informant's family)		Good swimmers
Antrim MS-Main 1	Black		
Antrim MS-Main 2		Flat feet	
Antrim Sound 1			Yes
Argyll MS 1	Otram		
Argyll MS 3	Mac an tSlabhruidh (Mac Lavery) and Mac a' Bhicear (MacVicar)		
Argyll MS 6	McKinnon		Yes
Argyll Pub 1		Married	Yes
Argyll Pub 2	MacPhees		
Blekinge Pub 1	Mårten Kille	Green eyes, voice like sea-bird	
Bohuslän MS 1		Webbed hands	
Clare MS-Main 1	Tomás Ruiséal	Beautiful	
Clare MS-Schools 1		Beautiful, turned to stone	
Cork MS-Main 2		Webbed feet	

**Table 2: Families and Descendants (continued)**

Cork MS-Main 4	muíntir Dhuibhir	Married	Nickname: “breed na bpúice”
Cork MS-Main 5	Doncha Ó Sé	Webbed feet, “cabhail a’ chríostaí”	
Cork MS-Main 6	Do mhuíntir Dhuíbhí	Married	Yes
Cork MS-Schools 10		“sláinte an bhradáin aca go léir”	
Cork MS-Schools 11	O’Shea		Drowned (crossing Rossbeigh Bar)
Cork MS-Schools 3	Pádraig Ó Gadhra		
Cork MS-Schools 6	Glavin		Yes (married a Sullivan)
Cork MS-Schools 7	Daniel Dempsey	Webbed legs	
Donegal MS-Main 10			Yes
Donegal MS-Main 11			Yes (descendant known as itinerant labourer)
Donegal MS-Main 12	dona Gallochbharaigh	Beautiful (most beautiful in Donegal)	Yes
Donegal MS-Main 13			Yes
Donegal MS-Main 16		Beautiful	
Donegal MS-Main 18	dona Gallochbharaigh		Yes (descendant is a priest)
Donegal MS-Main 20			Beautiful
Donegal MS-Main 24	de chloinn Mhic Ghiolla Bhrighde		Beautiful, related to “Iosep Mór” in audience
Donegal MS-Main 25			Red hair

**Table 2: Families and Descendants (continued)**

Donegal MS-Main 26		Red hair	Bad luck at sea, red hair
Donegal MS-Main 27	de Chloinn Uí Ghallachubhair		Beautiful
Donegal MS-Main 28	de Dhálaig Chaisil Mhulláin	Healthy, beautiful (most beautiful ever seen)	Beautiful
Donegal MS-Main 30	Eoin Óg		
Donegal MS-Main 4			Yes
Donegal MS-Schools 12		Beautiful, good singer	
Donegal MS-Schools 15			Yes
Donegal MS-Schools 5		Large	
Donegal MS-Schools 8	de Chloinn Mhic Aoidh		Magical skill
Donegal Pub 2			Members of family suffer nose bleeds when a seal is killed
Donegal Sound 1	Gallchóireach		Yes
Donegal Sound 2		Fair hair	
Faroe Pub 1			Yes
Faroe Pub 4	Demmus		Yes
Faroe Pub 5			Webbed hands
Faroe Sound 1	Demmus		
Galway MS-Main 10	Flathartaigh		
Galway MS-Main 15		Beautiful (most beautiful ever seen)	



**Table 2: Families and Descendants (continued)**

Galway MS-Main 16	Dúdach Mór	Turned to stone	Loss of power, land
Galway MS-Main 2	Fergus		
Galway MS-Main 3	Sal Pheadair Sal ‘ac Conaola		Yes (known personally)
Galway MS-Main 5	Mac Riogh nó Flaith		
Galway MS-Main 6	Mac Uí Conaola		Yes
Galway MS-Main 8	Mac a Conuíola		Nicknames: “rúintí,” “cloigeann aníos”
Galway MS-Schools 11	Mícheal Ó Fártach		Yes (direct descendants)
Galway MS-Schools 2	Keane		
Galway MS-Schools 3	Toole		Nickname: “bunnadh na gcos fuar”
Galway MS-Schools 7	Pat Hynes		
Galway MS-Schools 8	O’Shea		
Halland MS 1		Beautiful	
Inverness MS 2		Beautiful	
Inverness MS 4	Clann Mhic Codrum		Yes (including the poet Eathain Mac Codrum)
Inverness Pub 1	Clann ‘ic Codrum nan ròn, ‘the MacCodrum of the seals,’		
Inverness Pub 3	Clan MacCodrum of the Seals		Nickname: “Children of MacCodrum of the Seals”
Inverness Sound 1		Strong	
Inverness Sound 2	an Caoidheach		

**Table 2: Families and Descendants (continued)**

Inverness Sound 3	a Chlann 'ic Odrum		
Inverness Sound 7	Mac Codrum nan Ròn		Yes
Kerry MS-Main 1		“sláinte an bhradáin aca go léir”	
Kerry MS-Main 15	de mhuintir Sheaghda		Nickname: “Muintir na Buraighe”
Kerry MS-Main 16	de mhuintir Shéaghda		Drown
Kerry MS-Main 17	Sullivans		Curse (transferred to the Keefes)
Kerry MS-Main 19	Shea		
Kerry MS-Main 20			Descendants have “smut dhá breed”
Kerry MS-Main 21	Búrcach		Good swimmers, webbed feet
Kerry MS-Main 22		Webbed feet	Six toes
Kerry MS-Main 23			Yes
Kerry MS-Main 24	do mhuintir Fhlatharta		Webbed hands
Kerry MS-Main 25			Drown
Kerry MS-Main 26		Webbed feet	
Kerry MS-Main 27	O'Shea		
Kerry MS-Main 28	O'Shea		Drown (crossing Rossbeigh Bar)
Kerry MS-Main 29	Jack Fitzgerald		
Kerry MS-Main 32	de Mhuintir Shéaghda		Drown (crossing Rossbeigh Bar)

**Table 2: Families and Descendants (continued)**

Kerry MS-Main 33	des na Máirtínig		Never drown
Kerry MS-Main 34	mhuíntir Fhlatharta		Never drown, webbed hands
Kerry MS-Main 36	de Mhuíntir Lí		Beautiful
Kerry MS-Main 37	de Mhuíntir Éiníosa		Never drown
Kerry MS-Main 6			“ínntleacht” ‘intellect,’ lucky at sea
Kerry MS-Main 7	de Mhuíntir Shéaghdha		
Kerry MS-Main 8			Webbed hands
Kerry MS-Schools 12	King Corridan		Family buried in the Shannon
Kerry MS-Schools 17	Goodwin		
Kerry MS-Schools 19			Drown
Kerry MS-Schools 24	Seán Ó Flathartaigh		
Kerry MS-Schools 25	mhuintir Shéaghdha		Drown
Kerry MS-Schools 26			Yes
Kerry MS-Schools 29			Webbed hands, feet
Kerry MS-Schools 3	Thomas Woulfe		
Kerry MS-Schools 30	Seán Ó Fhlaithbheartaig		Never drown
Kerry MS-Schools 31	O'Shea		Never drown
Kerry MS-Schools 32			Webbed hands, feet
Kerry MS-Schools 34			Webbed feet
Kerry MS-Schools 35			Webbed feet
Kerry MS-Schools 36	Ághasach		

**Table 2: Families and Descendants (continued)**

Kerry MS-Schools 39	Shea	Beautiful	
Kerry MS-Schools 40			Drown, mermaids appear when member of the family approaches the sea
Kerry MS-Schools 42	Ó Seaghdha	Webbed hands	Drown (crossing Cromán point)
Kerry MS-Schools 44	Shea		Drown (crossing Rossbeigh Bar)
Kerry MS-Schools 45			Webbed feet
Kerry MS-Schools 46			Webbed hands, feet
Kerry MS-Schools 47	O'Shea		
Kerry MS-Schools 48	Ágásach		
Kerry MS-Schools 49	Tomás Ó Mórdha		Supernatural music plays when a member of the family dies, webbed feet
Kerry MS-Schools 55	Stack		
Kerry MS-Schools 56	Mulcahys		Yes (great-grandchildren)
Kerry MS-Schools 6	O'Sullivan		
Kerry MS-Schools 60	Tom Moore		Webbed feet, hands
Kerry MS-Schools 61	O'Shea		
Kerry MS-Schools 67	Shea		Drown (crossing Rossbeigh Bar)
Kerry MS-Schools 68	de muinntir Séaghdha		
Kerry MS-Schools 69	d'muinnitir Shéaghdha		Drown

**Table 2: Families and Descendants (continued)**

Kerry MS-Schools 70	de muintir Shéaghdha		Drown
Kerry MS-Schools 71	Seán Ó Sé		
Kerry MS-Schools 72			Webbed feet
Kerry Pub 2	Tom Moore	Webbed feet, hands	Webbed feet, hands
Kerry Pub 3			Drown
Kerry Pub 4	fear de mhuintir Shéaghdha		Drown
Kerry Pub 5	Donnchadh Ó Dubhda		
Kerry Pub 6	do Mhuintir Hanuósa		Skilled fishermen
Kerry Pub 7	(Tadhg) Ua Lí		Never drown, unspecified relationship with seals
Kerry Pub 9	Seán Ó Flaitheartaigh		Yes
Kerry Sound 2	Shea		Drown (crossing Rossbeigh Bar)
Leitrim MS-Schools 10	Simpson		
Leitrim MS-Schools 4		Turned to stone	
Leitrim MS-Schools 6	Dolan		Never drown (in Lough Gill)
Leitrim MS-Schools 7	Dolan		Never drown (in Belhavel)
Leitrim MS-Schools 8	Dolan		Dreams told to members of the family come true
Leitrim MS-Schools 9	Peter Simpson		
Limerick MS-Schools 1	Culhanes		

**Table 2: Families and Descendants (continued)**

Limerick MS-Schools 10		“very cross,” webbed feet	
Limerick MS-Schools 14	Hennessy		
Limerick MS-Schools 17	Mr. Neville		Never drown (between Tarbert and Limerick)
Limerick MS-Schools 19			Never drown
Limerick MS-Schools 4	O'Shaughnessy Ballynash Foynes.		
Limerick MS-Schools 5	Neville		Never drown (in the Shannon)
Limerick MS-Schools 6			Never drown (between Kerry and Limerick)
Limerick MS-Schools 7			golden hair, blue eyes, pale face
Limerick MS-Schools 9	Moriarty		Hereditary cure for skin-disease
Mayo MS-Main 1	fear go na Cathánaig		Strength
Mayo MS-Main 10	na Dúbhdaigh	Turned to stone	“Sgeana mara” appear when a member of the family dies
Mayo MS-Main 12	an Dúdach Mór.	Turned to stone	
Mayo MS-Main 13		Turned to stone	
Mayo MS-Main 15	Na Gearras... na Berras		Yes
Mayo MS-Main 2			Strong
Mayo MS-Main 3	Séamus Ófaith' (Ófathaigh)		

**Table 2: Families and Descendants (continued)**

Mayo MS-Main 5		Strong	
Mayo MS-Main 6	ó Dúdaigh		
Mayo MS-Main 7	an Dúdach	Turned to stone	Loss of power, land, “sgeana mara” appear when a member of the family dies
Mayo MS-Main 9			Strong, tough
Mayo MS-Schools 10	Tómas o Dughda		
Mayo MS-Schools 11		Turned to stone	
Mayo MS-Schools 12	O’Dowd	Turned to stone	
Mayo MS-Schools 13	O’Dowd	Turned to stone	
Mayo MS-Schools 14	O’Dowd	Turned to stone	
Mayo MS-Schools 15	O’Dowd	Turned to stone	Loss of luck
Mayo MS-Schools 16	Fergus O’Dowd	Turned to stone	
Mayo MS-Schools 17	Na Dubhdaí	Beautiful (as beautiful as their father), turned to stone	Loss of power, land
Mayo MS-Schools 23	O’Dowd	Turned to stone	
Mayo MS-Schools 24	O’Dowd	Turned to stone	Loss of luck
Mayo MS-Schools 26	O Dowd		Yes, one descendant was 7’4”
Mayo MS-Schools 28		Turned to stone	
Mayo MS-Schools 29	Mr. O’Dowd	Turned to stone	
Mayo MS-Schools 3	Roche		Yes
Mayo MS-Schools 30	O’Dowd	Turned to stone	Loss of power, land (Ardnaree)

**Table 2: Families and Descendants (continued)**

Mayo MS-Schools 31	O'Dowd	Turned to stone	
Mayo MS-Schools 32	O'Dowd of Ardnaree.	Turned to stone	Loss of power, land (Ardnaree)
Mayo MS-Schools 33	O'Dowd	Turned to stone	
Mayo MS-Schools 34	Ó Dubhda	Turned to stone	
Mayo MS-Schools 6	Roche		
Mayo MS-Schools 7		Beautiful	
Mayo MS-Schools 8		Beautiful	
Mayo Pub 2	muinntir Dhúda		Loss of power, land
Mayo Pub 3		Turned to stone	
Mayo Pub 5		Strong	
Mayo Pub 6	O'Dowd	Turned to stone	
Mayo Pub 7		Turned to stone	
Mayo Sound 7	Dowd	Turned to stone	
Orkney MS 1		Webbed feet	Webbed feet
Orkney Pub 1		Beautiful (renowned for their beauty in Orkney)	
Orkney Pub 2	Johnie Croy	Beautiful	
Orkney Pub 3	goodman	Beautiful (most beautiful on Orkney)	
Roscommon MS-Schools 1		Long red hair	



**Table 2: Families and Descendants (continued)**

Ross and Cromarty Pub 1	Paterson		Never drown (at Kessock Ferry), blessed with good fishing
Ross and Cromarty Sound 6			Yes
Shetland Pub 1		Webbed hands	Webbed hands
Sligo MS-Main 3		Married, prosperous	
Sligo MS-Schools 10	O'Dowd	Turned to stone	
Sligo MS-Schools 11		Turned to stone	
Sligo MS-Schools 12		Turned to stone	
Sligo MS-Schools 13		Turned to stone	
Sligo MS-Schools 14	O'Dowd	Turned to stone	Loss of power, land
Sligo MS-Schools 15	O'Dowd		
Sligo MS-Schools 16	O'Dowd		
Sligo MS-Schools 18		Turned to stone	
Sligo MS-Schools 2		Turned to stone	
Sligo MS-Schools 20	McKim		
Sligo MS-Schools 4	Fergus O'Dowd	Turned to stone	
Sligo MS-Schools 5		Turned to stone	
Sligo MS-Schools 6		Turned to stone	
Sligo MS-Schools 7	Chieftain O'Dowd	Turned to stone	
Sligo MS-Schools 8	Edmund O'Dowd		
Sligo MS-Schools 9	O'Dowd	Turned to stone	
Sligo Pub 1	O'Dowd	Turned to stone	

**Table 2: Families and Descendants (continued)**

Sutherland MS 3			Large and broad hands, short stature, flat figure, nickname “sliochd an ròin”
Sutherland Pub 1			Nicknames: “Sliochd na Maighdean Chuain,” “Sliochd an Ròin”
Sutherland Pub 2			Blessed with good fishing, nickname: “children of the Mermaid”
Sutherland Sound 1			Scales like a fish, nickname: “sliochd an mhaighdean mhara”
Waterford MS-Main 2		Married, prosperous, feared, nickname ( <i>Clann na Brúch</i> ) not tolerated, tough, strong	
Waterford MS-Main 5		“sláinte an bhradáin aca go léir”	
Waterford MS-Main 8	Seán		
Waterford MS-Schools 2		“sláinte an bhradáin aca go léir”	
Westmeath Pub 1	Mahon		Yes (personally known)

Table 3 indicates how frequently family names are mentioned in versions of this legend.

**Table 3: Unique family names**

(Family) name	Number of mentions	References
Ághasach	2	Kerry MS-Schools 36, 48

**Table 3: Unique family names (continued)**

Black	1	Antrim MS-Main 1
Búrcach ‘Bourke’	1	Kerry MS-Main 21
Conneely	3	Galway MS-Main 3, 6, 8
Johnnie Croy	1	Orkney Pub 2
Culhane	1	Limerick MS-Schools 1
Dálaigh Chaisil Mhulláin ‘Daleys of Caiseal Mulláin’	1	Donegal MS-Main 28
Demmus	2	Faroe Pub 4, Sound 1
Daniel Dempsey	1	Cork MS-Schools 7
Dolan	3	Leitrim MS-Schools 6, 7, 8
Dowd	34	Galway MS-Main 16, Kerry Pub 5, Mayo MS-Main 6, 7, 10, 12, MS-Schools 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 23, 24, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, Pub 2, 6, Sound 7, Sligo MS-Schools 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, Pub 1
Dwyer	2	Cork MS-Main 4, 6
Fahey	1-2	Mayo MS-Main 3, possibly Galway MS-Schools 11 (Mícheál Ó Fártach)
Jack Fitzgerald <sup>1</sup>	1	Kerry MS-Main 29

1 The same name is given to the protagonist of Thomas Crofton Croker’s *Lady of Gollerus*, which Kerry MS-Main 29 tends to follow in other respects. This is likely a re-oralized version.

**Table 3: Unique family names (continued)**

Flaherty	6-7	Galway MS-Main 10, Kerry MS-Main 24, 34, MS-Schools 24, 30, Pub 9; possibly Galway MS-Main 5 (“Mac Ríogh nó Mac Flaith”)
Gallagher	4	Donegal MS-Main 12, 18, 27, Sound 1
Ó Gadhra	1-2	Cork MS-Schools 3, possibly Mayo MS-Main 15 (“Na Gearras... na Bearras...”)
Glavin	1	Cork MS-Schools 6
Goodwin	1	Kerry MS-Schools 17
Hennessy	3	Kerry MS-Main 37, Pub 6, Limerick MS-Schools 14
Hynes	1	Galway MS-Schools 7
Kane/Keane	2	Galway MS-Schools 2, Mayo MS-Main 1
Mårten Kille	1	Blekinge Pub 1
Lee	2	Kerry MS-Main 36, Pub 7
MacLavery and MacVicar	1	Argyll MS 3
MacCodrum	6	
Mac Giolla Bríghde	1	Donegal MS-Main 24

**Table 3: Unique family names (continued)**

MacKay	2	Donegal MS-Schools 28, Inverness Sound 2
MacPhee	1	Argyll Pub 2
Mahon	1	Westmeath Pub 1
Máirtínigh ‘Martin’	1	Kerry MS-Main 33
McKim	1	Sligo MS-Schools 20
McKinnon	1	Argyll MS 6
Tomas Moore <sup>2</sup>	3	Kerry MS-Schools 49, 60, Pub 2
Moriarty	1	Limerick MS-Schools 9
Mulcahy	1	Kerry MS-Schools 56
Neville	2	Limerick MS-Schools 5, 17
Paterson	1	Ross and Cromarty Pub 1
Roche	2	Mayo MS-Schools 3, 6
Tomás Rúiséal ‘Thomas Russel’	1	Clare MS-Main 1
O’Shaughussy Ballynash Foynes	1	Limerick MS-Schools 4

2 Both Kerry MS-Schools 49 and 60 follow Kerry Pub 2 (recorded by Jeremiah Curtin) closely, and are possibly re-oralized versions of that text, although the fact that this name is not attested outside of Kerry suggests that genuine oral transmission might be possible.

**Table 3: Unique family names (continued)**

Shea	24	Cork MS-Main 5, MS-Schools 11, Galway MS-Schools 8, Kerry MS-Main 7, 15, 16, 19, 27, 28, 32, MS-Schools 25, 31, 39, 42, 44, 47, 61, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, Pub 4, Sound 2
Simspon	2	Leitrim MS-Schools 9, 10
Stack	1	Kerry MS-Schools 55
Stuart	1	Aberdeen Sound 1
Sullivan	2	Kerry MS-Main 17, MS-Schools 6
Toole	1	Galway MS-Schools 3
Thomas Woulfe	1	Kerry MS-Schools 3

Only rarely does the teller share the same name as the family in their version of the legend, or explicitly claim to be related to the supernatural woman. In Aberdeen Sound 1 and Midlothian Sound 1, both recorded from Stanley Robertson, the woman's husband is a Stuart, and said to be an ancestor of his. Kerry MS-Schools 42, recorded from Bríghid Ní Shéaghda, states that the man's name was Ó Séaghda, and similarly Kerry MS-Schools 69, recorded from Peadar Ó Séaghda and Pádrúig de Róiste, identifies the man as "marcach d'mhunitir Shéaghda" 'a horseman of the Shea family.' In Kerry MS-Main 28, the teller, Séamas Mac Mathghamhna, says "my mother was one of them O'Sheas." In Kerry MS-Main 36, recorded from Máire Ní Dhuibhneacha, wife of Peadar Ó Lí, the mermaid's son is named "Mícheál Ó Lí."

Donegal MS-Schools 8, on the other hand, was recorded from Padraic Ó Gallochobhair, who identifies the protagonist of the legend as “de Chloinn Mhic Aoidh” ‘of the MacKay family.’ As versions which identify the man as a Gallagher are to be found in the same parish of Inis Caoil (Donegal MS-Main 12, 18), Padraic may have known about traditions connecting his family with The Mermaid Legend, but rejected them in his telling of the legend.

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