

‘As I went up the hill of Mount Olive’ The Irish Tradition of the Three Good Brothers Charm Revisited¹

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Introduction

Throughout history, people have used a variety of recourses to battle everyday illnesses such as fevers, headaches, toothaches, bleeding and sprains, as well as minor ailments including curing hiccups or soothing a nettle sting. One such healing technique is the use of charms (*orthaí* in modern Irish, sg. *ortha*).² Here, I follow the definition used by current charm scholars such as Jonathan Roper, who defines a charm to be ‘a traditional form of words thought to have a direct effect in the world, usually of a protecting, healing kind’. In order for a charm to work, it usually needs to be performed by a ‘legitimate’ person who often uses special accompanying actions and accessories (Roper 2005, 15).

This article will focus on the Irish tradition of one of the best-known wound charms in Europe, called *Tres Boni Fratres*, or the Three Good Brothers.³ This is a very popular charm to stop bleeding, and has been documented in written and spoken sources in various languages across the European continent from the

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- 1 This article is based on two separate papers I have given on the topic of the Three Good Brothers charm: at the 15th International Congress of Celtic Studies, University of Glasgow, 13-17 July 2015; and at the 9th Conference of the International Committee for Charms, Charmers and Charming, International Society for Folk Narrative Research, 6-8 May 2016, University College Cork. I would like to express my gratitude for all the comments that helped me to improve my arguments. Specifically, I would like to thank Prof. John Carey, whose insights into the subject matter have greatly contributed to this article; Dr. Kevin Murray for his valuable suggestions throughout the writing process; and Dr. Barbara Hillers, who kindly informed me of the previous studies on the Irish versions of the Three Good Brothers charm. I would further like to thank my colleagues Ken Ó Donnchú and Cian Ó Cionnfhaoilaidh for generously helping me with the translations of the texts. Any remaining errors are, naturally, my own. Finally, I would like to thank the National Folklore Collection, UCD for granting me access to the documents in their care, and permission to publish the Three Good Brothers charms in their possession. The writing of this article was funded by the Finnish Concordia Fund.
 - 2 For the use of charms and other healing techniques in the Irish context, see Wolf 2010, 125-144 and the works he cites in his bibliography. For a variety of healing techniques in the wider European context, see, for example Wilson 2000, 311-374.
 - 3 For other types of charms focusing on wounds and bleeding, see the various contributions in Roper 2004; Roper 2009; and Kapaló, Pócs and Ryan 2013, for example. For more about the typology of charms generally, see Golopentia 2004, 145-187; Roper 2004, 128-144; Roper 2005; Agapina and Toporkov 2013, 71-100.

medieval period (Olsan 2011, 48; Cianci 2012, 55; Bozóky 2013, 103).⁴ It has been defined as a ‘*Sammelsegen*’, a collection charm, ‘on account of its richness in motifs, manuscript tradition, variants and connections to other charms and legends’ (Cianci 2013, 20).⁵

While there is a good deal of variation in the motif pattern, the basic premise of this popular narrative charm is that three brothers, described as ‘good’, are on their way to the Mount of Olives to find herbs to heal wounds. They encounter Jesus who, after a short dialogue, instructs them how to heal wounds by applying oil and wool to them and reciting a charm. Before revealing the charm, Jesus has the brothers swear that they will not keep the remedy a secret and that they will not earn any money for performing it. The oath is usually said to have been sworn on the crucifix and on Mary’s milk (Roper 2005, 127; Cianci 2012, 56; Bozóky 2013, 103).⁶ According to Roper, who has studied the English tradition of the *Tres Boni Fratres* charm, ‘the charmer would presumably be applying oil to the patient’s wounds as well as reciting the words of this charm describing the application of oil to wounds’ (2005, 127).

There are altogether twelve copies of the Three Good Brothers charm known in Ireland. The oldest comes from the later part of the 16th century, and the most recent were published in 1993. One charm is in Latin, with instructions in Irish; two are in English; and the remaining nine are in Irish. The purpose of this article is to publish all of these twelve charms together for the first time, with translations and short commentaries on each. While it is not possible to study the tradition in great detail here, I will lay special emphasis on the contextual information available for the recorded examples, and touch on the topics of the traditional rules about the transmission of charms; of the repertoire of the charmer; of the degree of variation between the surviving versions; and their interrelationships. An attempt will be made to discern what the invariant elements in the charms might be and why. By investigating the Irish tradition of the Three Good Brothers charm *in toto*, an attempt will be made to elucidate the analogues that the Irish material has with the wider magical tradition, while also highlighting the local elements in the Irish specimens.

4 For the English tradition of the Three Good Brothers, see Roper 2005, esp. pp. 127-130. For the German tradition, see Cianci 2013. Roper points out that Danish and Italian versions survive from the 14th century, similarly to French ones, which are slightly later (2005, 128). For Estonian tradition, see Roper 2009, 174-185; for a review of the scholarship on *Tres Boni Fratres*, see Cianci 2013, 16-20.

5 See also Cianci 2012, 55; Ebermann 1903, and Ebermann 1916.

6 For the historical development of the Three Good Brothers charm (esp. early Byzantine examples); the identity of the three brothers; the charm’s use among doctors and its dispersion in vernacular texts; as well as its associations with witchcraft, see Olsan 2011, 48-78.

Like most scholarship, the present study too is indebted to previous research. Two works require special acknowledgement, namely the studies by Angela Partridge and Maebhe Ní Bhroin. Angela Partridge published her article ‘Ortha an Triúr Bráithre: Traidisiún i mbéaloideas na Gaeilge’ in 1980/1981. Her publication included five Three Good Brothers charms from the Irish tradition (four in Irish, one in English), two of which had never been published before. She further gave references to eighteen medieval texts in various languages, including German, Latin, French, Italian and English, and concluded that ‘[c]omparison between the Irish and Continental versions shows the extreme conservatism of the Irish charm tradition’ (Partridge 1980/1981, 202). Maebhe Ní Bhroin’s monumental M.Litt. thesis *Orthaí Leighis na hÉireann* (1999) included all eleven of the modern versions of the Three Good Brothers charm in Ireland. Ní Bhroin’s research in the National Folklore Collection was a ground-breaking contribution to Irish charm studies, and it is a shame that her thesis is unpublished and correspondingly difficult of access.

The Oldest Three Good Brothers Charm in Ireland

The earliest instance of the Three Good Brothers charm in Ireland is found in a collection of medieval Irish charms, edited in 1952 by Richard Irvine Best from a manuscript held in Trinity College Dublin. TCD MS 1336 (shelfmark H 3.17) is ‘a miscellaneous collection of vellums of various dates’, mainly from the 15th and the 16th centuries (Best 1952, 27). The segment of interest here seems to have been written in the later 16th century and it includes a handful of charms written by the principal scribe of certain law tracts (Abbott & Gwynn 1921, 125; 139; Best 1952, 27). That we are dealing with learned magic is evident from the fact that these charms are written mainly in Latin and that some of them include words and symbols like *agla*, which is formed from the initial letters of the four Hebrew words *Athah gabor leolah Adonai*, ‘Thou art powerful and everlasting, Lord’.⁷

Professor Lea Olsan, who has studied the *Tres Boni Fratres* charm in detail, points out that it typically exhibits the following structure: title, opening narrative describing the encounter between Christ and the three brothers, dialogue consisting of a question from Christ and a reply from the brothers, and finally the instructions for the application of oil and wool and the recitation of a charm (Olsan 2011, 49).⁸

7 For *agla*, see Skemer 2006, 112; also Best 1952, 27.

8 Cianci has argued that the Three Good Brothers has a bipartite structure: the first part conveys the *historiola*, and the final part the *formula* (Cianci 2013, 151). Hampp, on the other hand, was of the opinion that the charm should be divided into three parts: introduction (the meeting), central topic (the dialogue), and conclusion – this is divided into two parts: instruction for the cure with oil and wool and the instruction for the charm itself which included either the Longinus formula or the five wounds of Christ

As can be seen, the charm in the Trinity manuscript does not include a title or heading, but apart from that, it follows the typical structure presented by Olsan. The actual charm, written in Latin, is also followed by a vernacular Irish instruction on how to use the charm. Here is a reproduction of Best's edition (1952, 29-30):

Dublin, Trinity College MS I336 (shelfmark H 3.17), 661a

Pater noster 7 aue Maria 7 credo 7 Ibant tres boni fratres ad montem Oliueti bonas herbas querentes omnia uulnera sanantes obuiauerunt domino nostro Ihesu Christo Quo tenditis uos tres boni fratres? Domine ad montem Oliueti bonas herbas querentes omnia uulnera sanantes. Reuertemini uos tres boni fratres 7 accipietis oliam oliue 7 lanam nidentis 7 consiuretis uulnera per quinqu plagas domini nostri Ihesu Christi 7 per mamillas de quibus lactatus est Ihesu quod nequi uultus⁹ doleat nequi putrescat nequi sicutriscat plusquam fecerunt uulnera domini nostri Ihesu Christi quando suspensus erat in cruce sic ita mundum sanata profundo sicut fecerunt uulnera domini nostri Ihesu Christi. I[n] nomine patris 7 filii 7 spiritus sancti. amen.
Cuic *paidrecha* 7 cuic aue Maria 7 creda ina diaid A *cur* sin i n-ola 7 i n-olaind mult gin berrad romi 7 a *cur* imon cned 7 bid slan o tiachair cach cned re *curfithir* ginmotha sicni † cliab.

Pater Noster and Ave Maria and credo.¹⁰

(And) Three good brothers were going to the Mount of Olives seeking good herbs healing all wounds. They met our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Where are you going, you three good brothers?”

“O Lord, to the Mount of Olives, seeking good herbs healing all wounds.”

“Turn back, you three good brothers, and you will take olive oil and wool of an ewe and you will conjure the wounds by the five wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the breasts from which Jesus was nursed, that the wound may neither ache, nor putrefy, nor form a scar any more than did the wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ when he was hung on the cross.”

Thus it shall heal cleanly, from the deep,¹¹ just as did the wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

motif (Hamp 1961, 198-199). Cianci further divided the charm into individual motifs, which include: the meeting (includes the three brothers), the place of the meeting, the dialogue, the oath and its objects, Jesus' instructions, the Longinus motif, and finally, optional liturgical elements and other instructions (2013, 151-152). For the structure of the charm, see also Partridge 1980/1981, 195.

9 Sic; for *uulnus*.

10 All translations, if not stated otherwise, are mine.

11 It seems clear is that *mundum* must be a form of *mundus* ‘clean’, neuter to agree with *uulnus*. Of the two English versions published by Olsan that are closest to the Irish charm, Fayreford has *sed ita munde sanet a profundo* ‘but thus he/it will heal cleanly, from the deep (i.e. from the bottom of the wound)’; while John of Grenborough,

‘Five paters and five Ave Marias and a credo after them.¹² Put that into oil and the wool of a wether which has not before been shorn, and place it about the wound, and every wound against which it is put will become free from soreness except for peritoneum or chest’ (the instruction translated by Best 1952, 30).

As has been frequently pointed out, ‘a great number of narrative charms have the general theme of an encounter’ (Bozóky 2013, 105).¹³ According to Edina Bozóky, this encounter ‘makes possible the confrontation of the supernatural helper with the sick, the healer with the patient’ (2013, 105). She notes that these encounters can happen in places ‘that have an intermediate position in space’. These places underline ‘the mediating process, the transition from illness to healing’, or ‘the mediation between two elements: [for example] the mountain, intermediary between earth and heaven’ (Bozóky 2013, 105). This is indeed well exemplified in the Three Good Brothers charm in which the encounter happens on the way to the Mount of Olives. Not only is the mountain an intermediary between heaven and earth, but, as Lea Olsan has pointed out, the Mount of Olives associates the treatment described in the charm with ‘olive oil, a common medicinal, and the sacred site where Christ was present’ (Olsan 2004, 77).¹⁴

In contrast to many other variants of the Three Good Brothers charm, the Trinity manuscript *Tres Boni Fratres* does not include an oath.¹⁵ In other versions Jesus makes the three brothers swear an oath, usually by the Cross or crucifixion and by Mary’s milk, that they would not keep the healing charm as a secret and that they would not receive payment for performing it (Olsan 2011, 55 and Cianci 2012, 56-57). In the Trinity manuscript charm, instead of an oath, we find an instruction according to which one should conjure the wounds by the five wounds of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and by the breasts from which Jesus was nursed.

Attaching the idea of the five wounds of Christ to the Three Good Brothers charm became popular during the late medieval period (Olsan 2011, 51). As Olsan has noted, ‘[d]evotional images of the passion and crucifixion were fertile sources of semantic motifs for healing wounds’ (2004, 77). She furthermore states that:

addressing the wound itself, has *sic ita munde sanes a profundo* ‘thus do you heal cleanly, from the deep’. See Appendix.

12 I would suggest translating *ina diaid* as ‘afterwards’. Best presumably took the meaning to be that one should recite five Pater Nosters and five Ave Marias and a Credo after them; I think rather that we are being told that all of these are to be recited after working the charm.

13 See also Ohrt 1936, 48-49 and Olsan 2011, 49.

14 For more on the meaning of the Mount of Olives, and especially of the connection between the olive tree, Tree of Life in Eden and the Cross, see Cianci 2013, 197-201.

15 For other, especially German versions in which the oath is not present, but instead an instruction how to perform the remedy, see the manuscripts mentioned by Cianci 2012, 57.

‘[t]o prevent wounds from becoming infected, the patient and healer invoke vivid images of the wounds inflicted on the parts of the body of Christ at crucifixion. Thus, when a specific physical symptom was felt to correspond with a religious motif that was well known in late medieval culture, the correspondence may be realized in a healing charm’ (Olsan 2009, 229).

Eleonora Cianci has shown that one of the oldest texts in which the milk of the Virgin is associated with swearing and with magical treatment against bleeding is a Latin charm from the 12th century.¹⁶ There is evidence of the importance of the emblematic power of milk in both the Old and New Testaments (Cianci 2012, 59).¹⁷ Similarly, we find that milk has traditionally been used for its therapeutic power as an ingredient in medical charms (Cianci 2012, 61).¹⁸ Furthermore, the milk of the Virgin Mary was widely used as a physical relic as well as a symbolic one by which to swear oaths. Later, Mary’s milk also came to be connected with Christ’s blood.¹⁹ As Cianci has pointed out, milk, blood and the cross are often combined together in medieval imagery; the Three Good Brothers charm is only one example of this (2012, 59-64). In the Trinity charm, the wounds of Christ, Mary’s milk and the Cross are all combined.

After the instruction that the wounds are to be conjured by the five wounds of Jesus and the breasts from which Jesus was nursed, the Trinity manuscript Three Good Brothers charm dictates that ‘nequi uultus [*sic*] doleat nequi putrescat nequi sicutriscat’, ‘this way the wound may not ache, nor putrefy, nor form a scar’ any more than the wounds of Christ did when he hung on the cross. This is actually a very popular wounds charm in its own right.²⁰ Roper has pointed out that as ‘the three brothers are being taught a charm, the charm contains a charm itself’ (2005, 128). This particular charm within a *Tres Boni Fratres* charm is called *Neque doluit neque tumuit*, also known as the ‘uncorrupted wounds’. As T.M. Smallwood has stated, ‘its essential *historiola* is simply that when Christ was wounded with spear and nails on the Cross, his wounds did not fester’ (2009, 98).

Such comparison with Christ’s wounds flourished early in the vernacular traditions and, according to Olsan, is one of the most continuously sustained features in the Three Good Brothers charm (2011, 52). First, there is the key comparison between the uncorrupt wounds of Christ, and the wounds of the patient

16 Bern, Rotulus di Moulin, lines 800-809, quoted in Cianci 2012, 57. In her article, Cianci also studied the development of the nursing mother-cult as well as the concept of the power of milk in a more detail.

17 See, for example, Genesis 49:12; Exodus 3:8.

18 See also the examples in Wilson 2000.

19 See, for example, the illustration of the 15th century in which Mary shows Christ the breast with which she nursed him and Christ shows God the wounds he received at the Crucifixion (The Holy Kindred, Köln, Wallraf-Richard Museum). Example pointed out by Cianci 2012, 59.

20 See, for example, Roper 2005, 113-115; and Smallwood 2004, 11-31.

at hand. Another key part of the charm is ‘the list of corruptions the wound is not to undergo’ (Roper 2005, 114) – in the case of the Trinity manuscript, there are three. As Olsan has pointed out, ‘[t]he incantation builds on the structure, “Just as... so also...” Just as these named symptoms did not happen in Christ’s wounds so also they will not develop in the patient’s wounds’. She has furthermore stated that ‘the enumeration of the wound symptoms medicalizes the charm by heightening the attention to the detailed characteristics of the wound. (They can be seen to describe the progress of a lesion toward serious infection)’ (2011, 52).

For the charm to work, the Irish text directs that oil and the wool of a wether be used as ingredients in the charming. In the majority of variants, the oil seems to be a constant ingredient, known for its medicinal, magical, and ritualistic attributes for thousands of years.²¹ The instruction concerning the use of wool, on the other hand, is varied and includes numerous different descriptions of the application.

Unwashed wool, *lana sucida* or *lana sudicia*, is very well known for its healing properties, because of lanolin or ‘wool wax’, ‘a natural protective grease derived from animal skin’ (Cianci 2013, 201). It was used as a cure against bleeding and wounds in Roman medicine, as mentioned by Pliny, Scribonius Largus and Celsus, as well as Marcellus Empiricus. Today, it is still a very popular ingredient in cosmetic and medical creams (Cianci 2013, 201). Other variants of the Three Good Brothers charm mention details like ‘wool taken from near the teat of a ewe’; ‘the wool of a ewe (*bidentis*)’ or ‘black wool, cut from below’ (Olsan 2011, 57-58). According to Olsan, the adjective ‘black’, which has been added in a couple of versions, indicates that the wool should be in its ‘natural state, unwashed or “dirty”’ (2011, 57). Cianci has further emphasized the difference between unwashed and treated wool, and according to her, this difference is shown in a number of instructions that tell to take the wool *from* the sheep, instead of taking the wool *of* the sheep (2013, 201-202).

How, then, did the Three Good Brothers charm end up in the Trinity manuscript in the company of a collection of charms that include, amongst others, a headache charm also found in Old Irish and Anglo-Saxon contexts, as well as an impotence charm part of which looks like it is written Old Irish?²² Because the Three Good Brothers charm has had such an extensive written tradition, it is not surprising that there are examples of the text that share close similarities with the Trinity manuscript charm. There are, however, three specific copies of the charm with

21 See, for example, Cianci 2013, 199-201; and the examples in Wilson 2000.

22 The headache charm (Dublin Trinity College 1336 (H. 3.17), col. 658 d, marg. inf.), also known as *Caput Christi*, can be found in the Book of Nunnaminster (London British Library Harley MS 2965, ff. 40v.); St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek Cod. Sang. 1395, 419; and in London British Library Additional MS 30512, f. 72. See also Tuomi 2013, 68-71. For the impotence charm (Dublin Trinity College MS H. 3.17 (1336), col. 672c), see Best 1952, 32.

which I would like to compare the Trinity text. As can be seen, these three texts are very close to our Three Good Brothers charm (see Appendix).

The first of these comparanda comes from a medical book owned by John of Grenborough (London, British Library Royal MS 12. G. IV, f. 178), a man who says he looked after the infirmary at St. Mary's Coventry for thirty years.²³ His Three Good Brothers charm 'belongs to a set of surgical instructions for extraction of a spear point or arrow head'. Grenborough's charm is followed by instructions for follow-up care for the wound and in his notes he writes that the treatment is most effective for new wounds if another medicine has not already been applied (Olsan 2011, 58).

The second text is from Thomas Fayreford's medical miscellany and commonplace book (London, British Library, Harley MS 2558, fol. 64v.). Thomas was a fifteenth-century medical practitioner who travelled in the southwest of England; he claimed that the Three Good Brothers charm was proven to work on the wounds of the poor (Olsan 2011, 57). It is noteworthy, that, like the two other English examples and our later Irish one, this version of the charm has omitted the popular Longinus-formula as well as the instruction not to take money for performing the cure. This version also comes closest to the Trinity manuscript charm in describing the wool. The Trinity charm, that, quite peculiarly, says to use *lanam nidentis*, has probably reinterpreted *lanam bidentis* – the wool of an ewe – from Thomas' charm.

Finally, the third version which is similar to the Trinity text comes from the second half of the fifteenth century and is said to work against all manner of wounds (Cambridge University Library MS Kk. 6. 33, f. 5r). As can be seen from the Appendix, all of the English versions are very close in their wording to the Trinity charm. It is, of course, impossible to know whether the charm in an Irish manuscript came from the neighboring island, but it cannot be disputed that they do share a striking number of similarities.

Lady Wilde and the Three Good Brothers

The second oldest version of the Three Good Brothers charm found in Ireland was published by Lady Wilde in her *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms and Superstitions of Ireland* in 1887. In her preface, Lady Wilde writes that it is 'in the islands and along the western coast that one gathers most of those strange legends, charms, mysteries and world-old superstitions' and that many of the texts she included

23 John's book was partly based on Gilbert the Englishman's compilation of medicine, but he also compiled his own treatments and remedies to supplement the original work (Olsan 2011, 58).

in her work ‘were narrated by the peasants, either in Irish, or in the expressive Irish-English, which still retains enough of the ancient idiom to make the language impressively touching and picturesque’ (1887, 78). One should be cautious, however, because, as we now know, a large amount of the material that Lady Wilde published was actually collected by her husband, Sir William Wilde, and she is also known to have inserted material from written sources in her collection.²⁴ Whatever the case with the Three Good Brothers charm, this is how she published it:²⁵

For a pain in the side

“God save you, my three brothers, God save you! And how far have ye to go, my three brothers?”

“To the Mount of Olivet, to bring back gold for a cup to hold the tears of Christ.”

“Go, then. Gather the gold; and may the tears of Christ fall on it, and thou will be cured, both body and soul.”

These words must be said while a drink is given to the patient.

As Angela Partridge has noted, the line that tells about the three brothers going to get gold for a cup in which to hold the tears of Christ does not agree with the usual versions of the charm. Partridge suggested that this might be because Lady Wilde was trying to understand and interpret what she heard (1980/1981, 193). This is plausible: perhaps Lady Wilde mistook either *olann*, wool, or *ola*, oil for ór, gold. It might be reasonable to presume that the version of the Three Good Brothers charm that Lady Wilde published actually comes, as she stated, from the west of Ireland. As will be seen, when we look at the other versions collected there, they are generally directed against pangs or a pain in the side – similar to the Lady Wilde’s version, ‘For a pain in the side’.²⁶ Similarly, it would seem that the charm was originally spoken in Irish, and then translated into English, as it begins with a typical Irish greeting in translation, ‘God save you’. In fact, all the Irish-language versions of the charm have this greeting. This seems to be a unique Irish feature, since I do not know any other Three Good Brothers charm in the wider European tradition that includes greetings in the opening dialogue.

24 See, for example, Partridge 1980/1981, 193 and Ó Giollain, 2000, 103.

25 Wilde 1887, 80. See also Partridge 1980/1981, 193-194. Ní Bhroin mentions the charm in her thesis, but does not cite it (1999, 183).

26 See also Partridge 1980/1981, 193.

Douglas Hyde's Three Good Brothers

The first of the Irish-language Three Good Brothers charms was published in 1906 by Douglas Hyde in *The Religious Songs of Connacht*. Hyde notes that the 'unusual' piece was found by Father O'Growney in Inishmaan, on the Aran Islands (1906, 2-3). Here is the text as published by Hyde:²⁷

An Triúr Bráthar.

“Go mbeannuighidh Dia dhaoibh a thriúir bráthar.”

“Go mbeannuighidh Dia agus Muire dhaoibh.”

“Cá bhfuil sibh ag dul anois?”

“Ag dul go Sliabh na n-Oluidheadh
baint oluidh de chroinn.”

Chuige libh a's tugaidh libh í,

An olann is fearr do gheobhaidh sibh,

An olann shlán chaorach

Corruighidh 's ná ceiligidh

'S ná iarraigidh tada [dadamh] d'á chionn.

The Three Brothers

May God bless you (pl.), o three brothers.

May God and Mary bless you (pl).

Where are you going now?

[We're] going to the Mount of the Olives

taking oil/olives from trees.

Be off with you (pl) and take it with you (pl),

The best wool which you (pl) will get,

The whole wool of a sheep

Rouse yourselves and don't hide

And don't ask for anything for it.

The charm does not include the *historiola*, but instead goes straight to the dialogue between the brothers and an unnamed person. It should perhaps be explained for the benefit of readers who do not speak Irish that the reference to Mary in the opening is purely formulaic: this is the way in which one responds to a greeting in Irish. Thus the first person says 'God bless you', to which one should answer 'God and Mary bless you'. This exchange of greetings, as mentioned already, seems to be unique to the Irish *Tres Boni Fratres*. After the dialogue, the instruction for the application of oil and wool is given, followed by the order not to keep the charm a secret, nor to ask a reward for it.

27 See also Partridge 1980/1981, 190 and Ní Bhroin 1999, 886-887.

It will become evident, when looking at the other Irish-language versions of the charm, that there is often confusion between *olann*, wool, and *ola*, oil. Hyde noted this too, and suggested that instead of ‘sound sheep’s wool’ (or, as I translated, ‘the whole wool of a sheep’), one could translate the line as ‘sound berry-clustering (*caor-ach*) olives’ (Hyde 1906, 2).²⁸ However, this conjecture is not borne out when the evidence is considered in its totality – the instruction does tend always to include oil and wool. It should also be kept in mind, as Partridge suggested, that this play on words in the Irish Three Good Brothers charms may have been deliberate (1980/1981, 203).

The Three Good Brothers gets published in *Béaloides*

The second Irish-language charm appeared in *Béaloides* in 1931, having been collected from Seán O Briain, aged 78, of Loch Con Uidhre in the parish of Cill Chiaráin, Co. Galway, on the 7th of April, 1931.²⁹ Here is the charm as it was published:

[Artha an Triúr Bráithre]

Triúr bráithre bhí a’ gul go Sliabh na Hola
a’ baint ola go chruínnte.
Casú Mac dílis Dé dhób.
“Go mbeannú Dia dhíb a thriúr bráithre!”
“Go mbeannú Dia, is Muire dhuit fhéin, a Mhac dílis Dé!”
“Cá’íl sib a’ gul anois?”
“Tá muid a’ gul go Sliabh na hOla,
a’ baint ola go chruínnte.”
“Thuga lib agus teighigí,
tugaí chugam-sa ola na n-olaí,
agus ola an thirim-chuíorach (?)
agus ná glacaí aon duais as a ucht!”

The Charm of the Three Brothers

Three brothers who were going to the Mount of Olive
taking oil/olives from trees.
God’s dear Son met them.
May God bless you (pl), o three brothers!
May God and Mary bless you yourself, o dear Son of God!
Where are you going now?
We’re going to the Mount of Olive (sg.)

28 See also Ní Bhroin 1999, 185-186.

29 Anonymous 1931, 68. See also Partridge 1980/1981, 191 and Ní Bhroin 1999, 885-886.

taking oil/olives from trees.
Off you (pl) go and away with you (pl),
And bring the oil of olives to me,
And dry sheep's wool,³⁰
And accept no reward for it!

In its published form, the charm has a title added to it. We do not know whether this was added by the collector or the editor of the journal. This is the only Irish-language charm that has a *historiola* included, but on the other hand, it does not explain how the charm is used. The *historiola* is followed by the dialogue, the instruction about the application of oil and wool, as well as the order not to accept a reward for the charm. The aforementioned confusion between *ola*, 'oil' and *olann*, 'wool' is present, but I think the best way to translate the instruction would be 'oil of olives and dry sheep's wool'.³¹

The Three Good Brothers Charms in the National Folklore Collection, UCD

The following six versions of the Three Good Brothers charm are to be found in the National Folklore Collection, UCD.³² Angela Partridge included the one collected by Foley and the one collected from Maitiú Ó Corraoin in her article (1980/1981, 191-193). Ní Bhroin mentions all six in her study, citing the five Irish language ones and part of the one in English (1999, 183; 187-189).

NFC 202: 81; Collector: Sarah Foley, Ardmore, Carna, Co. Galway, April 1933

Miss Sarah Foyle, who collected the following charm, later won an Irish Folklore competition and was awarded a prize of three pounds (NFC 202: 1).³³ In her cover letter to the editor, she noted that she collected the material – Irish songs, stories etc. – from 'the old people of the district' and that some of her 'spelling might

30 The line would literally mean 'And the oil/olives of the dry sheep', but I interpret the line as *olann thirim chaorach*, 'dry sheep's wool', based on the comparison with the other charms.

31 See also Partridge 1980/1981, 191.

32 For more about the collection of folklore in Ireland, see Mícheál Briody's monumental study of the Irish Folklore Commission (2007).

33 Foley stated that she had collected Irish folklore because she had seen a request for Irish songs, stories etc. in Moore's Almanac. NFC 202: 33.

be wrong’ because she wrote the stories down while ‘the storyteller was relating them’.³⁴ She furthermore enclosed the names of the storytellers and singers from whom she collected the material, and explained that they could not speak English, so all the work was in Irish. Finally, she ended her letter by saying that there were many more stories to be written down, but that she could not do this ‘until winter comes again’ (NFC 202: 33).

Ortha na nAireannacha

Go mbheannuigh Dia dhuit, a thrúir bráithre.
Go mbheannuigh Dia is Muire dhuit, a Mhic dilis Dé.
Cá bfuil sibh ag dul a thrúir bráithre?
Tá muid ag dul go Sliabh na hOla,
Bainnt olann do chrann,
Imthigh libh is téigh sibh ánn,
Tugaibh libh olann na nolann,
Olann ghlan chaorac, agus na hiarraidh duais dá chíonn,
Luan dhaios ainm an fhir a sháigh an tSleágh trí taubh Críost.
An té d’fhulaingh sin, agus d’fhóir,
go bhfóire sé ar anarainn.
Ortha í seo lé duine a mbeadh arainnaca air, cineál pian ghéar eicint.

The Charm of the Pangs

May God bless you (sg), o three brothers.
May God and Mary bless you, o dear Son of God.
Where are you going, o three brothers?
We’re going to Mount Olive,
taking wool from a tree.
Off with you (pl) and let you (pl) go there,
Bring with you (pl) the wool of wools,³⁵
Clean sheep’s wool, and don’t seek reward for it.
Luan d’Aois is the name of the man who thrust the spear through Christ’s side.
He who suffered that and saved,
may he save from the pang.
This is a charm for someone afflicted by pangs, some type of sharp pain.

As can be seen from the title and the description after the actual charm, the cure here is not used to stop bleeding, but instead is for treating pangs. It could be suggested that this is because of the reference to Longinus (*Luan dhaios*), the Roman centurion who pierced Christ’s side, thus afflicting sharp pain. This is the

34 Publishing these texts, I have kept the original spellings. I have added line divisions, capital letters to biblical names, and, in some cases, punctuation at the end of the lines.

35 Partridge (1980/1981, 192) suggests that there is confusion here: Instead of taking wool from a tree, *Tugaí libh olann na n-olann* the text should be emended to read ‘*Tugaí libh ola na n-oladh*, i. the oil of the olives’.

only one of the Irish Three Good Brothers charms that explicitly mentions Longinus, a feature that is very popular in the Three Good Brothers charms collected from mainland Europe.³⁶ Again, there seems to be confusion between wool and oil, since ‘wool’ appears here where ‘oil’ appears in the majority of cases. However, in areas that have sheep, the sheep’s wool can get caught in bushes and trees, and many people collect it in this manner.³⁷ Then again, the charm could also be interpreted as saying: ‘We’re going to Mount Olive, to take oil (olives?) from a tree ... Bring with you the oil of olives, clean sheep’s wool, and don’t seek reward from it’.

NFC 1273: 363; Maitiú Ó Corraoin, Ruisín na Manach, Carna, Co. Galway. Collector: Máire Ní Mhaoil Chiaráin, c. 1934

Like the previous charm, this charm is also directed against pangs.³⁸ There were altogether thirteen charms collected from Maitiú, including ones against toothache and the people of the *sídhe* (or fairy mounds), charms for hunting and love charms.³⁹

Ortha na n-Orneacha

Go mbeannuigh Dia dhíbh, a thriúr bráithre.

“Go mbeannuigh Dia is Muire dhuit,”

Cá bhfuil sibh ag dul indhiu?

“Dul go Sliabh na n-ola, ag baint ola do chrann.”

Ná dean sin ach tabhair líbh ola na n-ola

agus olann ghlann chaorach,

Is ná glac aon duais dá chionn.

36 See, for example, Roper 2005, 112-113; Olsan 2009, 218-220; Cianci 2013, 207-210; Bozóky 2013, 103-104. See also Partridge 1980/1981, 192 and Ní Bhroin 1999, 186-187. For an excellent study on the Irish presentation and legends (including charms) of Longinus, see the unpublished PhD thesis of Schneider, 2016.

37 Interestingly, early rumours about the source of silk suggested that it was from wool that grew on trees. Thus in the Book of Leinster (iii.16248-51): ‘*Isind airthersin cet gal. / atát Serdai co sirblad. / jobith atá fiabad and. / do nach ingnad inn oland.*’ See Best and O’Brien 1957. For an early translation and commentary, see Olden 1879-1888, 219-252.

38 Ní Bhroin gives the title in the form *Ortha an Triúr Bráithre*, even if this is not found in the original recording of the charm (1999, 189).

39 *Ortha in agaidh doth fiacal* (also known as *Super Petram*, see, for example Roper 2005, 122-125) NFC 1273: 361; *Ortha na bhfiacal* NFC 1273: 366. *Ortha in aghaid an t-shluagh aeraigh* NCF 1273: 362 and *Ortha i n-aghaidh an t-shluagh sídhe* NFC 1273: 367. *Ortha in aghaidh na Seilge* NFC 1273: 362-363. For all the charms collected from Maitiú Ó Corraoin, see NCF 1273: 361-367.

The Charm of the Pangs

May God bless you (pl), o three brothers.

May God and Mary bless you.

Where are you (pl) going today?

[We're] going to the Mount of the Olives, taking oil from a tree.

Don't do that, but bring with you (pl) the oil of olives

and clean sheep's wool,

And don't accept any reward for it.

NFC 481: 363; Séamus Ó Ceallaigh (54), labourer, Loch gCarman, Co. Wexford. Collector: Mícheál MacAodha, 23.2.1938.

The next charm is in English, and it was collected from Séamus Ó Ceallaigh, in Co. Wexford.

Prayer to stop bleeding.

As I went up the hill of Mount Olive,

I met Our Lord Jesus Christ coming down the hill.

He asked me where I was going.

I said I was going to the Garden to pluck a flower to heal a deadly wound.

This prayer is only to be used when anywan is in danger of bleedin' to death an' is handed down from wan person to another. A man must lave it would a woman when he's dyin' an a woman would a man.

This time the charm is called a prayer, and it is different to all the other Three Good Brothers charms in that it does not mention the three brothers at all; instead, the charm is completely in I-form (1 sg).⁴⁰ The informant has also included instructions telling how the charm is only to be used in a life-threatening situation, and that it should only be passed from man to woman and woman to man, at the end of their lives.

The same informant also knew another prayer to stop bleeding, the famous *Flum Jordan*.⁴¹ Interestingly, his directions of use for that charm are almost identical to the one he provided for the Three Good Brothers: only to be used if a person is

40 For the ambiguity between charms and prayers in the Irish context, see, for example, Wolf 2010, 128-137. For international comparisons, see, for example, Gay 2004, 32-46; Pócs 2013, 165-198; Timotin 2013, 239-256.

41 For *Flum Jordan*, see Roper 2005, 104-109; and Ilomäki 2011, 122-127.

bleeding to death, and to be passed from man to a woman and vice versa, but only at the end of their lives; otherwise the prayer will have no effect.⁴²

Contrasexual transmission is very common in charms traditions around the world.⁴³ Roper has argued that charms which have rules regarding their transmission may survive longer, ‘because practices which are rule-bound are valued more’ (Roper 2005, 81). It would also be safe to assume that there may have been a wide age-gap between the parties involved in the transmission, since the instruction mentions the charmer’s deathbed.⁴⁴ Interestingly, the scribe who wrote the charm down from Ó Ceallaigh, was a *man* called Mícheál Mac Aodha. This may be the reason why the charm is in I-form.⁴⁵ It is widely known that informants change the wording of charms, or leave passages out, or change the word order when they recite the charms to the folklore collectors.⁴⁶ The reason for this is the one mentioned in the instruction of the charm – if the transmission does not follow the rules, the charm will lose its potency.

NFC 1265: 266; Seán Briatmac (56), Co. Mayo. Collector: Maighréd Breatnach, 25.11.1939

A year later, another Irish language version of the Three Good Brothers charm was collected in Co. Mayo. It was, again, classified as a ‘prayer’. It should be noted that this version is almost identical to the one published by Hyde, even with regard to its spelling. In addition, like the charm published by Hyde, this one does not specify the illness against which it should be used.

An Triúr Bráthar

“Go mbeannuighidh Dia dhaoibh a thriúr bráthar.”

“Go mbeannuighidh Dia agus Muire dhaoibh.”

“Cá bhfuil sibh ag dul anois?”

“Ag dul go Sliabh na n-Oluidheadh,

Baint oluidh de chroinn.”

Chuige libh is tugaidh libh í,

An olann is fearr do gheobhaidh sibh,

An olann shlán chaorach,

Corruighidh ‘s na chuligheadh

42 See NFC 481: 364.

43 See Roper 2005, 80-81; Smallwood 2004, 22-23; Herjulfsdóttir 2009, 57-58.

44 For the age gap between the charmers involved in a charm’s transmission, see, for example, Roper 2005, 80-81; Wolf-Knuts 2004, 199; Herjulfsdóttir 2009, 57-58.

45 For I-form charms, see especially Ilomäki 2004, 47-58.

46 For reciting, and changing, the charms for folklore collectors, see, for example Wolf-Knuts 2004, 197-199; and Tsiklauri and Hunt 2009, 264-265.

Is na iarraighid tada dá chionn.

The Three Brothers

May God bless you (pl), o three brothers.
May God and Mary bless you (pl).
Where are you (pl) going now?
We're going to the Mount of the Olives,
To take oil from trees.
Away with you (pl), and take it with you (pl),
The best wool you (pl) can get,
The whole wool of the sheep,
Stir yourselves and don't retreat,
And don't seek anything for it.

NFC 1311: 408; Colm Ó Cuala (38), Carna, Co. Galway. Collector: Éamonn Ó Conghaile, 22.11.1952

Colm Ó Cuala, from whom the following charm was collected, also knew many other charms, including the *Super Petram*.⁴⁷ Like the other Three Good Brother charms collected in the area, this one is also directed against pangs.

Ortha na h-Arrainneacáí

“Go mbeannuighe Dia dhíbh a thriúr bráithre.”
“Go mbeannuighe Dia agus Muire dhuit, a Shlánuightheóir Íosa Críost.”
Cá bhfuil sibh ag dul inniu?
Táimid ag dul go Siorra na h-Ola
baint ollann de chaoirigh.
Tugaidh libh ola na h-olla
agus ollann ghlas chaorach
agus an té a chruthaigh agus a cheannuigh muid
go ndéanaigh sé fuairthint ar an arrainn seo.

Cuirtear an ortha seo i rúinne bealaigh agus i rúinne ollann ghlas. Cuimlíte é den taobh a mbeadh na h-arrainneacha ann, in ainm an Athar agus an Mhic agus an Spiorad Naomh, agus deartear go bhfuigheadh an t-éaganaidhe biseach leis a linn.

The Charm of the Pangs

May God bless you (pl), o three brothers.
May God and Mary bless you, o Saviour Jesus Christ.

47 NFC 1311: 407-408. For all the charms collected from Ó Cuala, see NFC 1311: 407-410.

Where are you (pl) going today?
 We're going to Siorra na hOla⁴⁸
 to take wool from sheep.
 Bring with you (pl) the oil of oil
 and grey wool of sheep,
 and he who created and redeemed us,
 may he relieve this pang.

This charm goes in a thread of greasing and a thread of grey wool. It should be rubbed on the side of the pangs, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and it is said that the sufferer would recover during that time.

The charm includes an instruction at the end, as well as an evaluation: 'the sufferer/ patient would recover during that time'. Similar instructions have been found, for example, in a late 19th-century charm from Devon, where the instruction tells that 'bits of cloth were dipped into cream and "dapped" upon the inflamed area'.⁴⁹ For the coloured wool, again English comparisons can be found; for example in a charm that instructs the user to 'take three locks of wool – one white, one grey, one black – dip them into a basin of clotted cream, and when thoroughly saturated, take each lock and rub in succession each inflected spot on the skin'.⁵⁰ Colour has always had a significance in folk medicine, with examples ranging from Pliny's *Natural History* to modern-day examples.⁵¹ However, the grey wool here may simply mean unwashed or dirty wool.

NFC 1776: 15-16; Josey Costello (67), workman, Bohermore, Co. Galway. Collector: Ciarán Bairéad, 26.8.1968

The following charm was collected from Josey Costello, who, again, also knew other charms, such as one against pain in the teeth, and for a fever.⁵² Here again the Three Good Brothers is directed against pangs and there is an indirect reference to Longinus, 'he who took the sword from Christ's side'. Costello relates that he sent the charm to his cousin, but did not like to tell this to anyone. Again, the idea of keeping the charm as a secret is present. It might be that the concept of contrasexual transmission is also at play here, for Costello's cousin was a woman.

48 This is a unique way of spelling the Mount of the Olive, perhaps a corrupted version of *sliabh*.

49 Roper 2005, 129.

50 Roper 2005, 129.

51 See, for example, Bonser 1924, 194-198.

52 *Artha na nDathacha fiacaíl*, NFC 1776: 16. *Artha na bhfiabhrais bheaga*, NFC 1776: 17-18.

The cousin also gives the charm a validation by saying that it didn't do her any harm!

Artha na n-Arraineacha:

Go mbeannaí Dia dhíb, a triúr bráithre.
Cá'il sibh a goil, a triúr bráithre?
Ta muid a' baint an olann gon chrann,
an olann gheal chaorach,
An té a bhain an claimh as taobh Chríost
Go mbainidh sé an bhrí agus an spreacadh as an arraing.'

Chuir mé go chol-ceathar `om í, ach níor mhaith liom é inseacht go aon duine. Bhí sí a' fháil arraingeacha dona ina gualainn agus leigheas sé í. Casadh orm í scatha `na dhiaidh sin, agus; 'By deaid' adeir sí, 'ní dhearna tú aon dochar dhom chaoi `r bith.' Níor scríobh mé an artha ná blas ach í thóigeál i mo cheann.

Charm of the Pangs

May God bless you (pl), o three brothers.
Where are you (pl) going, o three brothers?
We're taking wool from the tree,
the bright wool of the sheep.
He who took the sword from Christ's side
May he take the strength and vigour from the pang.

I sent it [i.e. the charm] to a cousin of mine, but I wouldn't like to tell it to anyone. She was getting bad pangs in her shoulder and it cured her. I met her a while after that and, 'By Dad', says she, 'you didn't do me any harm anyway.' I did not write the charm at all, but kept it in my head.

The Three Good Brothers charms in Léaraí Ó Finnéadha's *Ó Bhaile go Baile*

Finally, there are two charms that were published in 1993 by Léaraí Ó Finnéadha in his book on Irish (religious) poetry and folklore, *Ó Bhaile go Baile* (p. 27). Unfortunately, Ó Finnéadha does not specify where he got the charms, apart from the fact that the material seems to originate in Connemara, in the west of Ireland. The first charm reads as follows:

Ortha na nOrthaí/Ortha Fhlannáin:

Go mbeannaí Dia dhuit,
A Thiarna Íosa Críost.
“Cá bhfuil tú ag dul?”
“Táim ag dul go Sliabh na hOlna,
Ag iarraidh togha na holna,
Olan an loin dhuibh,
Agus olann an loin bháin,
Má tá sí agat, cuir í,
Agus ná ceil í,
Na glac duais dá cionn,
Go mba seacht fóirithint í faoi do scairteacha,
Áiméan.

The Charm of Charms/Flannán’s Charm

May God bless you,
O Lord Jesus Christ.
Where are you going?
I’m going to the Mount of Wool,
Seeking the best of wool,
The wool of the black bird,
And the wool of the white bird,⁵³
If you have it, put [show?] it,
And don’t hide it,
Don’t accept reward for it,
May it be seven aids/reliefs under your entrails,
Amen.

This charm is perhaps the most unusual among the specimens of the Three Good Brothers in Ireland. First of all, it is given two titles, ‘the charm of charms’, or ‘Flannán’s charm’. Flannán probably refers to a 7th-century saint, the first bishop and patron saint of Killaloe, Co. Clare.⁵⁴ The charm mentions a Mount of Wool, but again it must have originally been the Mount of Olives. As in one of the previous charms, the importance of specific colours is present, but curiously enough, this time it seems to be the wool of a blackbird and a white bird, respectively. Curiously, this charm is directed as a relief to entrails’ problems.

The second charm published by Ó Finnéadha (1993, p. 27) is much closer to the traditional Three Good Brothers charm.

53 *Lon bán* would seem like a contradiction in terms. White blackbirds are, however, to be found in Irish sources; see Grosjean’s edition of ‘The White Blackbirds of the Eastern World’, where they are called *luin geala* 1934, 120.

54 Ó Riain 2011, 341-349.

An Triúr Bráthar:

Go mbeannaí Dia dhaoibh, a thriúr Bráthar,
Go mbeannaí Dia agus Muire dhaoibh.
Cá bhfuil sibh ag dul anois?
Ag dul go Sliabh na hOlann,
Ag baint olna de chrann.
Chuirge libh agus tugaigí libh í,
An olann is fearr a gheobhfas sibh,
An olann shlán chaorach.
Corraigí agus ná ceiligí,
Agus ná hiarraigí tada dá chionn.
Bhí an bhó, an caora agus an t-asal ins an stábla inar rugadh Mac Dé.

The Three Brothers

May God bless you (pl), o three brothers.
May God and Mary bless you (pl).
Where are you (pl) going now?
[We're] going to the Mount of the Wool,
To collect wool from a tree.
Be off with you (pl) and take it with you (pl),
The best wool which you (pl) will get,
The whole wool of the sheep.
Rouse yourselves and don't hide,
And don't ask for anything because of it.
The cow, the sheep and the donkey were in the stable where the Son of God
was born.

This version is very close to the one published by Hyde and the one collected in Co. Mayo. The only major difference is the way in which the charm ends: 'The cow, the sheep and the donkey were in the stable where the Son of God was born'. As is also the case with the charms by Hyde and the one from Mayo, the manner of usage is not specified.

Conclusion

While it has not been possible here to go into each of the Three Good Brothers charms in the Irish tradition in great detail, even a preliminary study of all the surviving versions provides us with interesting information. First, it would seem that the earliest version in Latin might have travelled to Ireland from England. Curiously enough, the English language version of the Three Good Brothers is the only other one that mentions that the reason for being on the Mount of Olives is to gather a herb, or a flower, to heal wounds. This version comes from Waterford, in the south-east of Ireland. The rest of the Three Good Brothers charms seem to

derive from a different tradition of the *Tres Boni Fratres*. Their structure differs from the one presented by Olsan, in that whilst some of them do have the title or a heading designating the use of the charm as well as the dialogue between Christ and the brothers, all, apart from one, lack the opening *historiola*. In none of the modern charms in Irish are the brothers going to the Mount of Olives to gather herbs, instead, they are on their way to collect oil and wool. None of the modern versions include the conjuration of the five wounds of Christ, nor Mary's breasts or milk. Similarly, none of them include the *Neque doluit neque tumuit* formula present in the Trinity version.

Apart from the two charms that were said to heal wounds, and one that was said to heal entrails, the Irish versions of the Three Good Brothers can be divided into two groups. The first group includes the three charms – the one published by Hyde, the one from Mayo, and the one from Ó Finneadha's *Ó Bhaile go Baile* – that do not have any directions for usage and are almost identical in their wording. The second group consists of charms directed against pangs, all collected from Co. Galway. Since out of the nine modern Irish-language versions of the Three Good Brothers charm, eight were collected from Co. Galway (and one from Co. Mayo), one could be tempted to argue that it seems to have survived exclusively in the west of Ireland.⁵⁵ This might, however, be jumping into conclusions, since this area is disproportionately well represented in the Irish Folklore Commission's collections. As Venetia Newell observed in her foreword to Sean O'Sullivan's book *Folklore of Ireland*: 'When the [Irish Folklore] Commission was set up in 1935 it was noted that, for instance, the parish of Carna in West Galway had more unrecorded folktales than the whole of Europe'.⁵⁶ Perhaps the charm survived elsewhere in Ireland as well, but the collectors never went to record material in these parts of the country.

What the Galway material does seem to indicate, however, is that there was a strong regional survival of the charm in the west of Ireland and that it was introduced to the country during the time when Irish was still the primary language.⁵⁷ What also seems likely, is the fact that the charm was also, at some point, known in the English-language tradition. Obviously, the discovery of more versions of the Three Good Brothers charm, both in Irish and in English, would illuminate these matters further. An in-depth study into the texts titled as prayers in the National Folklore Collection might reveal new versions of the Three Good Brothers charm in Ireland.

55 Private communication by email, Barbara Hillers - Ilona Tuomi, 12.5.2015.

56 Venetia Newell's 'Foreword' in O'Sullivan 1974, 5.

57 I would like to thank my colleague Barbara Hillers for pointing this out. Private communication by email, Barbara Hillers - Ilona Tuomi, 12.5.2015. See also Partridge 1980/1981, 194.

That there was an awareness of the wider tradition of the Good Brothers charm is evident from the fact that two of the modern versions mention Longinus, the Roman centurion who pierced Christ's side while he was on the cross. One of the Irish texts explicitly names him as Luan d'Aois, a corrupted version of the Latin Longinus. Similarly, the majority of the Irish charms have included the instruction not to accept money for performing the cure. Thus, I hope to have shown the connections that the Irish material has with the wider Three Good Brothers tradition. It should be noted, however, that the Irish material does have unique, local features, such as the greetings exchanged between the brothers and Christ, the confusion (or word play) between oil and wool, and the charm's usage for curing pangs. Angela Partridge finished her article by writing: 'Much work remains to be done on the European analogues, medieval and modern, of traditional Irish prayers' (1980/1981). I hope that this article has, however briefly, contributed to the granting of Partridge's request.

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Appendix

This Appendix contains the three English Three Good Brothers charms that are very close in their wording to the one in the Trinity manuscript. All three, including the additional information, were printed in Olsan 2011, 65-68.

1. London, British Library MS Royal 12. G. IV, f. 178

John of Grenborough (Grandborough, E. Warwickshire), the infirmarer at St. Mary's Coventry, 14th c.

Transcription by L. Olsan

IBANT TRES BONI FRATRES AD *montem* oliueti bonas herbas querentes *et omnia* wlnera sanantes *et* obuiauerunt domino nostro Jesu christo: quo ibitis tres boni fratres? *domine* ibimus ad colligendum bonas herbas querentes *et omnia* wlnera sanantes. reuertimini tres boni fratres *et* accipite olium oliue *et* succidam lanam *et* nigram *et* ponite super plagas *et* dicatis: JN NOMINE PATRIS *et* FILII *et* SPIRITUS SANCTI Amen. COMIURO te wlnus per .v. wlnera domini nostri Jesu Christi *et* per mamillas ex quibus lactatus est Jesus quidem ut non doleas neque putrescas neque cicatrescas plus quam fecerunt wlnera domini nostri Jesu christi quando suspensus erat in cruce sic ita munde sanes a profundo sicut fecerunt wlnera domini nostri Jesu christi. In nomine patris *et* filii etc. Sicut plage domini nostri Jesu christi non putruerunt nec ranclerunt nec cancerunt nec vermes fecerunt ita wlnus istud non doleat, nec putrescat nec ranclescat non cancescat nec fetrescat nec vermes faciat sed ad sanitatem perueniat Messias + Sother + Emanuel + Sabaot + Adonay +. In nomine patris *et* filii etc. Jsta medicina valet nouiter wlneris si prius super wlnus dictis fuerit *et* emplastrum appositis quod si per[?] prius apposite ferint alie medicine non habent tantam virtutem. stringit sanguinem *et* delet ache[sic] *et* sanat wlnera.

2. London, British Library, MS Harley 2558, fol.64v

Thomas Fayreford, English physician, 15th c.

Transcription by L. Olsan

Empiricum bonum expertum in vulneribus pauperum. Ibant tres boni fratres ad montem oliueti bonas herbas quirentes omnia vulnera sanantes. obuiaverunt domino nostro Jesu christo. quo tenditis tres boni fratres? domine ad montem oliueti bonas herbas quirentes omnia vulnera sanantes. reuertimini, inquit, tres boni fratres *et* accipite olium oliue *et* lanam bidentis *et* coniurate vulnus per virtutem .5. plagarum domini nostri jesu christi quod neque vulnus doleat neque putrescat neque cicatriscat plus quam fecerunt vulnera domini nostri jesu christi. quando suspensus fu[i]t in cruce. sed ita munde sanet aprofundo sicut fecerunt vulnera domini nostri jesu christi. In nomine patris etc. *et* dic ter pater noster *et* ave maria. *et* magister dicas istud sequens: sicut christus fu[i]t fixius clave *et* lancea sic christus fu[i]t punctus clave *et* lancea. *et* sicut christus fu[i]t lanceatus clave *et* lancea *et* ritu sic fu[i]t sanatus ab ipsa puncture fixura. clauatura lanceatura per venerabilem nomen domini nostri jesu christi. sic sanetur verissime vulnus istud. fiat fiat fiat. Amen.

3. Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS Kk.6.33, f. 5r

2nd half of the 15th c. A charme for alle *manner* woundes.

Ibant tres boni fratres ad montem oliueti bonas herbas querentes omnia uulnera sanantes. obiauerunt *domino* nostro Iesu Christo qui dixit eis. quo tenditis tres boni fratres? *domine* ad montem oliueti bonas herbas querentes *omnia* vulnera sanates. reuertimini tres boni fratres *et* coniuertis vulnus *per* virtutem quinque plagas iesu christi *et per* virtutem mamillarum beate uirginis de quibus lactatus est iesus quod non amplius doleat nec putrestat nec cicatriscet plusquam fecerunt vulnera domini nostri iesu christi quando suspensus fuit in cruce. Set iste munde sanata putredine. In *nomini* patris *et* filij *et spiritus* sancti. Amen. And sey this charme thre daies ouer þe wounde blissing with wolle and oyles. And afterward put hit to the wounds til it be hole.