

Similarities in the Three Female *Aided*-tales

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Abstract: Of the many early Irish saga texts and *Táin Bó Cúailnge*-episodes designated as *aided* by title, there are only three *aided*-tales with a female protagonist: *Aided Meidbe*, *Aided Derbforgaill* and *Aided Lócha*. Similarities in (the structures of) these three texts will be considered and compared to the pattern set out by Melia for the Ulster death-tales mentioned in the Tale Lists (Melia 1977-8). While one must be careful not to read too much into the similarities discussed due to the small number of extant female *aided*-tales, it is noteworthy that all three texts contain a form of social compulsion or *geis*, but that the function of the *geis* in the female *aided*-tales is antithetical to the Taboo-revenge pattern described by Melia.

Since the meaning of the word *aided* is given in *DIL* as ‘violent death, act of killing, (unpleasant) fate, plight’, the end of a tale titled *aided* is hardly surprising: the protagonist, usually a king or important warrior, dies. The interesting part from the audience’s point of view is how the hero dies, and the journey that takes him to his end. As pointed out by Mac Cana (1980, 29), the hero (in literature at least) attains his apotheosis through death, and in a way, the death of a hero is more important than the people he has killed.

Even though the *aided* tale-type was considered by Mac Cana to be the genre most representative of Irish literature (and perhaps so common that it was unpractical to catalogue them—see Mac Cana 1980, 71), relatively little research has been done on the subject of *aided*-tales in general. The only detailed discussion on the structure of *aided*-tales has been undertaken by Daniel Melia (1977–8).

The corpus of texts examined by Melia is not exhaustive, since it focuses mainly on the extant tales mentioned in the Tale Lists; his discussion does not include many of the *aided*-tales outside the Ulster cycle, nor does it examine the episodes titled *aided* in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. In the absence of a thorough analysis of the structure of all of these texts (and indeed because it is not always clear whether a text is actually an *aided* or not, since texts can have multiple titles, for example), I will take his article as a convenient starting point for the following discussion.

According to Melia, there are two basic plotlines in the Ulster *aided*-tales:¹ Woman-revenge and Taboo-revenge. In the Woman-revenge plot, (1) someone’s wife is slept with illicitly, and (2) the injured man takes revenge by killing the culprit, often by proxy. In the Taboo-revenge scheme, (1) the hero has a taboo or

1 Melia himself pointed out that all tales he examined contain both revenge schemes to some extent (1977–8, 41–2).

social obligation; (2) he is forced to break his taboo, often by a social obligation, and (3) he dies a victim of vengeance.

Melia distills these two patterns further, and demonstrates that the elements underlying the two revenge patterns are the following: a woman and a man engage in an illicit relationship, which leads to their breaking the rules of society, and consequently their deaths. In schematic overview, Melia presents this as follows (Melia 1977–8, 48):

Woman + man
 Breaking of rules
 Death [in revenge]

These elements always occur in the same manner, and the steps (with the exception of the final one) can be repeated indefinitely (Melia 1977–8, 48). Regarding the role of women, Melia explains that while a (legally) recognized relationship between a man and a woman is fruitful and leads to offspring, an illicit relationship, engaged in as a result of personal desire rather than societal needs, leads to the opposite: death, rather than fertility. In Melia’s schematic (Melia 1977–8, 50):

Man + Woman = Fertility
 Personal Needs vs. Societal Demands = Death
 If: Man + Woman = Personal Need
 Then: Man + Woman = Death *not* Fertility.

Of all the extant tales or episodes that have been given the title *aided*, only three of them have a female protagonist (Ingridsdotter 2009, 14): *Aided Derbforgaill (AD)*,² *Aided Meidbe (AM)*³ and the extremely brief *Aided Lócha (AL)* found in *TBC* I, ll. 973–74 and *TBC-LL* 1340–8.⁵ It may be significant that a version of all of these tales occurs in the Book of Leinster,⁶ and that they belong to the Ulster cycle of tales.

2 Edited in Ingridsdotter 2009.

3 Edited in Hull 1938.

4 Edited in O’Rahilly 1976 (2003), 31 and 152.

5 Edited in O’Rahilly 1967 (1984), 37 and 175. The episode is not given a title in this version of *TBC*, and the character is named Loche rather than Lócha.

6 In the case of *AD* and *AM*, the Book of Leinster is the oldest manuscript containing the text. The dates of the texts themselves are not easy to establish; Ingridsdotter dated *AD* to the tenth century (2009, 67); Hull was doubtful about the dating of *AM*, but concluded that the extant versions of *AM* in their current transmission could hardly have been composed before the middle of the twelfth century (1938, 54). The longer version of *AL* is found in *TBC-LL*, and it is unclear at which stage the additions to the episode were made that are absent from the earlier version; in this case, the date of compilation of the Book of Leinster (i.e. the second half of the twelfth century) should be seen as the *terminus ante quem*.

In this article, I will compare these three tales in order to point out possible common elements or similarities, and to see to what extent they adhere to or differ from the structure proposed by Melia. Since there are so few *aided*-tales with a female protagonist, it should be kept in mind that the common elements might not be due to a specific underlying pattern, but rather due to chance or even intentional borrowing (although the latter seems unlikely, judging from the differences present in the texts themselves). Nonetheless, the stories themselves are worthy of investigation, and it is hoped that this discussion might make a small contribution to a larger and more general discussion of *aided*-tales as a genre. Before examining the structure of the female *aided*-tales, I will provide a synopsis of the texts for the convenience of the reader.

Aided Lócha (AL)

As this tale is very short, the longest version of the text is cited here from *TBC-LL* (1340–8) with translation:⁷

Co foítar cethri ollchóiceda Hérend i rRéde Loche i Cúalnge 7 co ragbatar dúnad 7 longphort and in n-aidchi sin. Rádis Medb fria cáeminailt comaitechta dá muntir tec[h]t ar cend usci oóil 7 innalta dochum na haba di. Loche comainm na hingene, & dotháet iarum Loche 7 coíca ban impi 7 mind n-óir na rigna ósa cind. Ocus foceird Cú Chulaind cloich assa thabaill furri co rróebriss in mind n-óir í trí 7 coro marb in n-ingin inna réid. Conid de atá Réde Loche i Cúalngiu. Ba dóig trá la Coin Culaind i n-écmais a fessa 7 a eólusa ba hí Medb boi and.

‘The men of the four great provinces of Ireland spent that night in Réde Loche in Cúailnge and pitched their camps there. Medb told a handmaid of her household to go to the river and fetch her water for drinking and washing. Loche was the maid’s name. Then Loche came, wearing the golden diadem of the queen on her

⁷ Translations are by the editors of the respective stories unless stated differently. The two versions differ. The version in *TBC I* mentions that Lócha goes to fetch water with a large number of other women, and that Cú Chulainn mistakes her for Medb. In the *TBC-LL* version, Lócha (named Loche there) is clearly deliberately disguised as Medb, as she is accompanied by fifty women and wears Medb’s diadem (for the entire episode, see below). This is similar to the episode *Comrac Con Culaind fri Findabair* (*TBC I* 1569–1609), in which Ailill sends his jester, disguised as Ailill, wearing a king’s crown, to Cú Chulainn in order to facilitate the betrothal of Ailill’s daughter Findabair to Cú Chulainn: *Táet in drúth im richt-sa, or Ailill, ‘7 mind rígfóra chind, 7 fasisidar di chéin Coin Culaind arnacha n-aithgné. Ocus téiti ind ingen leis 7 ara naiscea dó h-í, 7 tecat ass ellom fón cruth sin...Téit Cú dia saigtin. Ecmaic atgeóin-sium for erlabrai ind fir combo drúth. Srethis liic telma boi ina láim fair con sescaind ina chend co tuc a inchind ass. ‘Let the jester go disguised as me,’ said Ailill, ‘wearing a king’s crown on his head. And let him stand far away from Cú Chulainn that he may not recognize him. And the girl shall go with him and he shall betroth her to Cú Chulainn...Cú Chulainn went to meet them. But in fact he recognized by the man’s speech that he was a jester. He threw at him a sling-stone which he had in his hand and it went into the jester’s head and drove his brains out...’* (O’Rahilly 1976 (2003), 49 and 169).

head and accompanied by fifty women. And Cú Chulainn cast a stone at her from his sling and broke in three the golden diadem and killed the girl on the plain where she was. Whence is the name Réde Loche in Cúailnge. For Cú Chulainn had thought, for want of knowledge and information, that it was Medb who was there (O’Rahilly 1967 (1984), 37 and 175).

Aided Meidbe (AM)

Eochu Feidlech has three sons, Bres, Nár and Lothur, and three daughters: Eithne, Medb and Clothru. The three sons plan to overthrow their father. Clothru tries (ultimately unsuccessfully) to prevent them from doing so by having intercourse with them. She bears a son as a result of this triple union, called Lugaid Ríab nDerg, ‘Lugaid of the Red Stripes’. Afterwards, Clothru rules over Connacht and resides on Inis Clothrann in Loch Rí. Medb kills the pregnant Clothru, and her unborn son Furbaide is cut from her side. Medb becomes queen of Connacht and marries Ailill. She too resides on Inis Clothrann. It is one of Medb’s *gessa* that she has to wash herself in a well on the island every morning. One morning, a gathering is held between the men of Ulster and the men of Connacht at Loch Rí. Furbaide is present and sees Medb washing herself. When he discovers that she is the woman who killed his mother, he puts a piece of cheese in his sling and throws the cheese at her. The cheese strikes her on the crown of the head and Medb dies.⁸

Aided Derbforgaill (AD)

Derbforgaill, daughter of the king of Lochlann, has fallen in love with Cú Chulainn because of the wonderful stories that are told about him. She and her maid travel in the guise of swans connected with a golden chain to Loch Cúan, where they meet Cú Chulainn and his fosterson Lugaid Ríab nDerg. Cú Chulainn casts a stone at the swans at Lugaid’s instigation, and the stone lodges itself in Derbforgaill’s womb. She falls from the sky, changes to her human form, and Cú Chulainn sucks the stone from her side, covered in her blood.⁹ When Derbforgaill tells Cú Chulainn

8 The stories of the births of Lugaid Ríab nDerg and Furbaide found in *Aided Meidbe* have an alternate tradition attached to them. In this tradition, represented especially by the *dindshenchas* accounts of Carn Furbaide and Eithne, it is not Clothru who is pregnant and killed by Medb; rather, Eithne is pregnant and on her way to Medb when she is killed by Clothru. As pointed out by Donna Wong (1996, 237), it seems that the elements of the story were deliberately reworked in *Aided Meidbe* in order to portray Medb in a negative light (as is the case in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, see Kelly 1992, 78). The killing of Medb with a piece of cheese could then perhaps also be seen as a deliberate attempt to ridicule her (although it could also be satirical; compare Conchobar’s death by calcified brain or Lóegaire’s death by hitting his head on a door lintel). In the text *Cath Boinde*, Furbaide is cut from Eithne’s womb (O’Neill 1905, 176–7), but it is not stated who is responsible for her death.

9 This episode is also recounted in the long version of *Tochmarc Emire*, see Meyer 1901, 259, §84 and Van Hamel 1933 (1978), 62, §84.

that she has come for him, Cú Chulainn refuses her on the grounds that he has sucked her side and suggests she marry Lugaid instead. She accepts, provided that she can always see Cú Chulainn. Then one day, after a heavy snowfall, the men of Ulster make pillars of snow, and the women decide to climb onto them and hold a competition: all the women will urinate, and the woman whose urine penetrates deepest into the pillar will be considered the best match. None of the women's urine manages to reach the ground. Derbforgaill, who has not participated, is then summoned. Reluctantly, she complies and her urine does reach the ground. The Ulsterwomen, afraid that their men will love only Derbforgaill, decide to maim her by snatching out her eyes, and by cutting off her nose, ears and hair. She is tortured and taken to her house. Lugaid and Cú Chulainn, who are in an assembly with the other men of Ulster, notice that there is snow on the roof of Derbforgaill's house and immediately know she is dying. They rush to the house, only to find it locked. Derbforgaill utters a final poem; when the men break down the door, they find her dead. Lugaid dies upon seeing her and Cú Chulainn tears down the house containing the women of Ulster, killing them all. Cú Chulainn then utters a lament and buries Derbforgaill.

To what extent do these female *aided*-tales correspond to Melia's pattern? To begin with, there is no trace of the Woman-revenge scheme as laid out by Melia (this is unsurprising, of course, since the protagonists are themselves women). One might perhaps expect a role-reversal, in which an illicit relationship with a man leads to disaster, but this is not the case, at least not in *AL*, where there is no relationship. In *AM*, Medb kills Clothru before assuming the kingship of Connacht and taking 'Ailill into sovereignty with her', *Gabais ind-í Medb rige Connacht iar tain et do-bert Ailill i flaithemnas chuci / Gebais Medb ar sin rige Connacht 7 do-beir cuice Ailill a flaithemnacht* (Hull 1938: 55 and 60). There is therefore no specific mention of an illicit relationship in *AM*, even though Medb has many extra-marital affairs in other texts.¹⁰

In *AD*, an argument can be made that Derbforgaill has a sexual relationship with Cú Chulainn while being married to Lugaid. The text does not state explicitly that this is the case, but it may be inferred from the line "*Maith lim,*" *ol sí, "acht con-dot-accur do grés."* "That [= marrying Lugaid,

10 In addition to the many lovers she entertains while married to Ailill, most notably Fergus mac Roich, Medb is said to have been married first to Conchobar mac Nessa, and her abandoning him is given as the first reason for the Táin Bó Cúailnge in the text *Cath Boinde* (O'Neill 1905, see pp. 176–7 for Medb's marriage to Conchobar). Later in the same text, she marries Eochaid Dala, who then becomes king of Connacht, but she abandons him as well for Ailill. Eochaid challenges Ailill to a duel, and Eochaid is killed in the duel as a result of Medb's interference (O'Neill 1905, 183). These illicit relationships do not lead to Medb's death, but usually end badly for the suitors.

as suggested by Cú Chulainn] is fine with me” said she, “provided that I may always see you [= Cú Chulainn].” (Ingridsdotter 2009, 82–3, l. 18). It is not this relationship that leads to her ruin, however: that is caused by Derbforgaill winning the urination contest, which leads the women of Ulster to express their worries that Derbforgaill’s extra-ordinary urinary powers will mean that *all* men will desire Derbforgaill – not just Cú Chulainn (*Dia fessatar trá ind fhir so nícon grádaigfider i fail na hoínmná*, ‘If the men discover this then, no (one) will be loved in comparison with this woman.’ (Ingridsdotter 2009, 82–3, l. 26).

As far as Melia’s Taboo-revenge plotline is concerned, it can be argued that parts of it are present in all three tales. There is no mention of a taboo or *geis* in *AL*, but Lócha is under obligation to fetch water, as she has been ordered to do so by her queen. In the Book of Leinster version of *AD*, we find no explicit mention of a *geis* or social obligation, although this seems to be what underlies Derbforgaill’s decision to urinate on the snow pillar: *Con-gairther Der[b] F[h] orgaill uadib. Nirbo áill lea ór nirbo báeth. Téit ar aí forsin corthe*. ‘Derbforgaill is summoned by them [the Ulsterwomen, after they have urinated on the pillars]. She did not desire it, because she was not foolish. Nevertheless she goes on the pillar.’ (Ingridsdotter 2009, 82–3, ll.24-5). It hardly makes sense that Derbforgaill would enter the contest voluntarily, knowing full well that this spells trouble. In fact, an element of compulsion is present in two of the manuscript versions of the text, in which it is expressed that the Ulsterwomen insist she take place in the competition, and will not take no for an answer (D: *araidhe nir ghabsat uaithi cen dul*; H: *Arade nir gabsat uaithe cen dul*, ‘Nevertheless, they did not accept her not coming (= her absence)’ (Ingridsdotter 2009, 95, my translation). While this element is not a *geis*, it can certainly be seen as an example of social compulsion. A taboo is actually present in *AM*: it is Medb’s *geis* that she must wash herself in a certain well every morning on Inis Clothrann: *Et ba geis di-ssi cen a fothrucud cecha maitni assin tiprait ar dorus na indsi / 7 ba geis di-si gan a fothracad gacha maitne asin tibrat ro-bai a n-dorus na hindsí ud*, ‘And it was a taboo for her not to bathe herself every morning in the well at the entrance to the island.’ (Hull 1938, 55 and 60).

What is striking when compared to Melia’s pattern is that while the heroes in the Ulster death-tales meet their demise as a result of their breaking their *geis*, the obverse is true of the women in the female *aided*-tales: they die precisely *because* they adhere to their *geis* or social compulsion/obligation. If Medb had not kept to her *geis* and refrained from washing herself in the well, Lugaid would not have seen her, and would have been unable to throw the killer cheese at her; if Derbforgaill had not gone to the Ulsterwomen and had not urinated, she would not have been mutilated and mortally wounded, and if Lócha had not been ordered to fetch water, Cú Chulainn would not have spotted her. In a schematic:

woman has *geis*/social obligation

woman follows *geis*/social obligation, and as a result finds herself in vulnerable position

woman dies/is mortally wounded

In addition, the following common elements can be observed:

1. All three *aided*-tales involve water or liquid in some way or manifestation. Lócha is on her way to fetch water, Derbforgaill's blood clings to the stone from Cú Chulainn's sling when she is struck down next to the water; later she is mutilated after urinating on pillars of snow, and after having killed her pregnant sister Clothru next to a body of water, Medb herself is killed while bathing. The presence of and death near or in water is of course a common element in early Irish stories, and it occurs in a number of *aided*-tales.¹¹
2. In all three *aided*-tales, a sling plays an important part.¹² In *AD*, Derbforgaill in her bird-shape is brought down by Cú Chulainn, which leads him to reject her after sucking the stone from her wound; in the other two stories, the main character is killed by a shot from a sling – Lócha by Cú Chulainn's cast; Medb by Furbaide's piece of cheese.
3. All three *aided*-tales are in some way connected to Medb. Lócha is disguised as Medb when killed; Medb herself is the main character of *AM*, and Derbforgaill

11 To give a few examples: Fergus is mortally wounded while in the water in *Aided Fergusa maic Roích* (ed. Meyer 1906 (1937), 32–5, Echu drowns in *Aided Echach maic Maireda* (see Best and Bergin 1929, 95–100; a new edition by the present author is forthcoming), Lógairé is threatened with drowning and he slays thirty drowning people in *Aided Lógairi Búadaig* (ed. Meyer 1906 (1937), 22–3), Cú Chulainn kills his son with the *gáe bulga* in the water in *Aided óenfir Aife* and compare *Aided Muirchertaig maic Erca*, in which Muirchertach drowns in a vat of wine as part of a threefold death (ed. Nic Dhonnchadha 1964). Conall Cernach appears to be standing in water when he is killed in *Goire Conaill Chernaig i Crúachain ocus aided Ailella ocus Conaill Cernaig* (ed. Meyer 1897, 102–11); Mes Gegra's brain is launched into Conchobar's brain at the ford of Dáire Dá Báeth in version D of *Aided Chonchobuir* (Meyer 1906 (1937), 18–9) and Cet dies by a ford (afterwards named *Áth Ceit* 'Cet's Ford') in *Aided Cheit maic Magach* version A (Meyer 1906 (1937), 38–9).

12 I would like to thank the reviewer for pointing out to me that *Aided Lócha* forms part of a number of sling killings in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. Especially notable are the episodes *Aided in Togmaill 7 in pheta eóin* (*TBC* I 920–45 = *TBC LL* 1267–79) and *Comrac Con Culaind fri Findabair* (*TBC* I 1569–1609), since they involve Ailill and/or Medb or someone impersonating them. In *Aided in Togmaill*, Cú Chulainn threatens to throw a stone at Ailill and Medb whenever he sees them. In the episode, he succeeds in killing a pet bird and pet marten sitting on Medb's shoulders (in version I, the bird is killed while sitting on Ailill's shoulder while the marten is on Medb's shoulder). In *Comrac Con Culaind fri Findabair*, Cú Chulainn kills a jester disguised as Ailill with a sling-stone.

is married to Medb's nephew Lugaid. In *AL* and *AM*, Medb's role is decidedly negative. In *AM*, she is a killer; the fact that Lócha is deliberately made to look like Medb in *AL* seems to indicate that Medb is fully aware that the excursion she is sending Lócha on is a risky undertaking that her maid might not (or is not intended to) survive. As such, it is comparable to the risk taken by the jester dressed as Ailill in *Comrac Con Culaind*.

Further similarities can be found between *AD* and *AM*, although the differences between the two texts suggest that these similarities are not a result of direct borrowing. The theme of revenge, always present in the Ulster *aided*-tales, plays an important role in these two texts as well:¹³ Derbforgaill is maimed out of jealousy; afterwards, the women who caused her death are killed in revenge by Cú Chulainn. Medb herself is explicitly said to have been killed by Furbaide in *AM* in order to avenge his mother's death: *conid-romarb dond óen-urchur i n-digail a mathar*, 'so that he killed her by the one cast in vengeance of his mother.' (Hull 1938, 56 and 61).

In both tales, there is a display of sexuality and/or fertility.¹⁴ In *AD*, Cú Chulainn sucks the stone with which he wounded Derbforgaill in her *brú*, 'belly', also 'womb' (*DIL* s.v. 1 *brú*):

Do-lléici Cú Chulaind cloich forru co ndeachaid eter a hasna co mboi ina broind. ... Ro shúgi iarum a tóeb na hingine in cloich co mbuí ina béolu cosin loim chró ro boi impe, 'Cú Chulainn hurls a stone at them, so that it went between her ribs and was in her womb. ... Then he sucked the stone out of the side of the girl, so that it was in his mouth with the gush of blood that was around it.' (Ingridsdotter 2009, 82–3, ll. 6 and 10–11).

Later in the tale, Derbforgaill displays her sexual prowess by urinating.¹⁵ In *AM*, Clothru is in an advanced stage of pregnancy when killed, and Medb herself is bathing (and admired by the men in the assembly while doing so: '*Is alaind in delb út*, or *cách*, 'Beautiful is yonder form,' said each one [Hull 1938, 56 and 61]) when she is killed.

AM and *AD* also contain multiple deaths: Medb kills her sister before being killed in revenge by her nephew, and the Ulsterwomen maim Derbforgaill to a point where she either dies from her wounds or kills herself (this is actually unclear: the text states that Derbforgaill is dead by the time Lugaid and Cú Chulainn open the door to her house), then are killed in revenge by Cú Chulainn.

13 In *AL*, Cú Chulainn thinks he is killing Medb instead of Lócha, but this can hardly be classified as revenge.

14 There are a number of discussions on this theme; to name a few: Bowen 1975, Carey 2004, Dooley 1994, Edel 2007, Ingridsdotter 2009; Kelly 1992, 76 ff. on Medb; Ní Bhrolcháin 1994.

15 For urine connected with sexuality, see Bowen 1975, 25–8; Edel 2007, 87–8; Ingridsdotter 2009, 24–7; Dooley 1994, 132–3.

If we compare the structure of *AD* and *AM*, we see the following sequence: there is a fertile woman (A). This woman is killed by a woman or group of women (B). In vengeance, the second woman or group of women (B) is killed by a man connected with (A). In a schematic:

A = fertile

A = killed by B

B = killed in revenge by man connected with A

In *AM*, A(Clothru) is killed by B(Medb); B is then killed by A's son Furbaide; in *AD*, A(Derbforgaill) is killed by B(Ulsterwomen); B is killed by Cú Chulainn, A's lover. The main difference between *AM* and *AD* lies in the role played by the main characters: Medb is guilty of killing her sister; Derbforgaill is innocent. Derbforgaill's role is similar to that of Clothru in *AM*, while the part played by Medb corresponds to that played by the Ulsterwomen in *AD*. Clothru and Derbforgaill's deaths, both a result of cutting, are clearly acts of violence, while the deaths of Medb and the Ulsterwomen are examples of retribution. In this sense, Medb is the negative to Derbforgaill's positive character.

As stated before, one would be taking it too far to posit a general pattern for female *aided*-tales based on three tales (one of them so short one can hardly call it a tale), but there are certainly some resemblances. Of the three texts, *AD* and *AM* resemble each other most closely structurally speaking, while Lócha's deliberate disguise in *AL* could also be seen as the female equivalent of Ailill's jester in the episode *Comrac Con Culaind* (that is, Ailill and Medb send someone else disguised as them in order to fulfill a risky task). When considering the similarities between the three texts and comparing them with Melia's pattern for the male Ulster *aided*-tales, the most striking fact is that a number of the similarities form an exact opposite to that structure. In the female death-tales, the opposite gender assumes the role of the main character (obviously), and while the protagonist is under *geis* or social obligation, it has a completely different function. In the male Ulster *aided*-tales, the heroes usually die because they break their *geis*; in the female *aided*-tales, the protagonist is killed because she does *not* break her obligation, even if fulfilling it places her in a vulnerable position.

The question that remains is whether this particular use of the *geis* or social obligation was applied deliberately and consciously here in order to contrast the female with the male *aided*-tales (and should thus be seen as an integral element of the structure of these tales), or whether it should be seen in a wider context of the role played by women in early Irish saga literature in general.

Abbreviations

<i>AD</i>	<i>Aided Derbforgaill</i> (edited in Ingridsdotter 2009)
<i>AL</i>	<i>Aided Lócha</i> (found in <i>TBC I</i> , ll. 973–7 and <i>TBC-LL</i> 1340–8)
<i>DIL</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Irish Language: Based Mainly on Old and Middle Irish Materials</i> , Royal Irish Academy
<i>AM</i>	<i>Aided Meidbe</i> (edited in Hull 1938)
<i>TBC I</i>	<i>Táin Bó Cúailnge recension I</i> (edited in O’Rahilly 1976)
<i>TBC-LL</i>	<i>Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster</i> (edited in O’Rahilly 1967)

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