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**Young Adult adaptations of the *Táin*:  
An analysis of the portrayal of CúChulainn &  
Queen Maeve**

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## ABSTRACT

This B.A. thesis analyzes four adaptations of the Irish heroic tale of *Táin Bo Cuailnge* in an attempt to discern how the different authors have modified the content of the tale for a Young Adult audience. The figures of CúChulainn and Queen Maeve are closely examined to understand their portrayal and their roles in each adaptation. In order to do so, a comparative analysis between the adaptations is conducted, scrutinizing the literary structure along with themes like heroism, power or the dichotomy between good and evil.

**Keywords:** Tale, Ireland, the *Táin*, Adaptations, Young Adult

## RESUMEN

El presente trabajo lleva a cabo un análisis de cuatro adaptaciones del cuento heroico irlandés *Táin Bo Cuailnge* en un intento de discernir cómo los distintos autores han modificado el contenido del relato para un público de jóvenes adultos. Las figuras de CúChulainn y la Reina Maeve son examinadas para comprender sus roles en cada adaptación. Para ello, se realiza un análisis comparativo entre las adaptaciones, examinando la estructura literaria junto con temas como el heroísmo, el poder o la dicotomía entre el bien y el mal.

**Palabras clave:** Cuento, Irlanda, The *Táin*, Adaptaciones, Jóvenes Adultos.



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## Introduction

In the last decades, fantasy literature for Young Adults has been flourishing. Heroism, bravery, and epic battles are present in best sellers like *The Hunger Games* or *Divergent*. In Ireland, this literary genre is highly influenced by its heroic, legendary, and mythological texts, and by a certain tale in particular, the *Táin Bo Cuailnge*. One of the most rewritten tales of the Irish ancient literature. So much so, that the last adaptation of the *Táin* for Young Adult audiences has been written a year ago, in 2023. This literary work, along with other three modern versions of the *Táin*, will be analyzed in this B.A. thesis to elucidate the contrasts between the adaptations and how the authors have adapted the content of the tale for Young Adult readers. Furthermore, an attempt will be made to understand the implications behind the portrayal that the different authors give of CúChulainn and Queen Maeve in their adaptations.

Works like *Irish Children's Literature and Culture: New Perspectives on Contemporary Writing* (2011) by Keith O'Sullivan and Valerie Coghlan or *Irish Children's Literature and the Poetics of Memory* (2021) by Rebecca Long, discuss how various Irish myths and tales have been rewritten in the last century for Young Adult audiences. Both O'Sullivan and Long include some modern versions of the *Táin*, among other Irish tales, to provide a broad insight on the evolution of the Irish literature for children. It is essential to note that the current dissertation is the first work that is exclusively focused on the comparison of modern adaptations of the *Táin* for Young Adult readers.

My analysis aims to illustrate the differences between the following adaptations: *The Táin* by Liam Mac Uistin (1989), *The Táin: The Bull Raid* (2004) by Carlo Gébler, *An Táin* by Colmán Ó Raghallaigh (2006) and *The Táin: The Great Irish Battle Epic* by Alan Titley (2023). Thomas Kinsella's translation *The Táin: From the Irish Epic Táin Bó Cuailnge* (1969) will be regarded as a source version of the tale in this comparative analysis. My objectives are the discussion of formal elements in the literary works along with the analysis of the figures of CúChulainn and Queen Maeve in each adaptation. My

final objective is to demonstrate how each adaptation modifies the content of the tale in order to portray a specific image of CúChulainn and Queen Maeve.

To achieve this, firstly, I will present my source version and the four adaptations selected in terms of formal aspects. Later, I will carry out an analysis of CúChulainn's role in three different scenes in each adaptation. Finally, Queen Maeve's figure will be analyzed in one of her most iconic moments that is included in the four adaptations.

This thesis will be divided into two chapters. The first one, "Heroic Tales & The Immortal Ireland: Contrasts between modern adaptations of the *Táin*" serves as a historical contextualization on the origins of Young Adult fiction in Ireland to later introduce the four contemporary Young Adult adaptations of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, setting the bases for the following discussion. The second chapter, "Cúchulainn and Queen Maeve: sworn enemies or honorable adversaries" analyzes the portrayal of the figures of Cúchulainn and Queen Maeve given in the different versions. This chapter is divided into two sections: "Cúchulainn" which is structured into three parts, each part corresponding to a scene: "The Warp Spasm of Cúchulainn", "Cúchulainn's battle with Ferdiad", and "The Single Combat". The second section of chapter two, "Queen Maeve", only deals with one scene, "The Pillow Talk".



## **Heroic Tales & The Immortal Ireland: Contrasts between modern adaptations of the *Táin***

Some of the earliest writings of the Irish literature are preserved in the manuscripts that were compiled by the Irish monks during the early medieval ages. Contained within these manuscripts are the stories of the Ulster and Fenian Cycles, along with a collection of mythological chronicles recounting the origins of a pre-Celtic Irish race, amidst other narratives. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *The Book of the Dun Cow* is the “oldest surviving miscellaneous manuscript in Irish literature” (1998a). Compiled during the twelfth century by the monks of St. Ciarán of Clonmacnoise monastery, *The Book of the Dun Cow* was penned in Gaeilge or Irish Gaelic, as Irish monks advocated early for the incorporation of their vernacular language into their writings (Binchy 8). As asserted by Kinsella (7), this book includes the oldest version of the *Táin Bó Cuailgne*, the narrative that will be discussed in this thesis.

Following the dissolution of the monasteries, during the ruling of Henry VIII, many manuscripts disappeared for centuries. The recovery of the literary works compiled in the manuscripts did not start until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Subsequently at the turn of the twentieth century, the emergence of the ‘Celtic Revival’ led to a proliferation in the translation, adaptation and commercialization of the tales compiled within these manuscripts. As Rebecca Long argues in *Irish Children’s Literature and the Poetics of Memory*, the Celtic Revival is a movement that promotes the protection of “Ireland’s cultural traditions and ancient pasts” (17). Multiple authors like William Butler Yeats were convinced that it was imperative to recover Irish legends because they were going to have a significant impact in the forthcoming times (Khalifa 162). According to Long, Revivalists were aware that, particularly in Ireland, ancestral inheritance has a fundamental role in the construction of a national identity. Since Celtic mythology has been perpetually connected with the past, for revivalists, “looking forward was explicitly connected to the act of looking back” (28). They wanted to

achieve this cultural awakening through creativity, producing written compositions based on Ireland's ancient myths and tales, promoting the building of a common identity among the Irish.

### 1.1 Origins of Young Adult fiction in Ireland

The emergence of Young Adult literature in Ireland began during the late Enlightenment, when children and their education became a topic of discussion. The genre grew and evolved over time through authors like Maria Edgeworth with *The Parent's Assistant* (1796), her first collection of moral tales for children, or Oscar Wilde with *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888) in the late nineteenth century. Although Wilde is chronologically linked to the Celtic Revival, his stories are highly multicultural and strongly influenced not only by the Irish but by several European folklores, such as German, French or Danish (Harris 736).

Nonetheless, O'Sullivan and Coghlan state in *Irish Children's Literature and Culture: New Perspectives on Contemporary Writing* that other revivalist writers, such as W.B. Yeats or Gregory Isabella Augusta, better known as Lady Gregory, were actively constructing a bridge between the ancestral Ireland and the new generations during the Celtic Revival (24). These two revivalist authors safeguarded the country's pre-Christian culture by including Celtic folk tales into youth literature. In order to do so, both Yeats and Lady Gregory retrieved, translated and adapted a series of Irish myths and legends, frequently helping each other throughout the process (Khalifa 167). As claimed by O'Sullivan and Coghlan, Yeats and Lady Gregory laid the basis for more modern re-writings of Irish mythological fiction (24).

Several of Yeats's retellings like *Irish Folk and Fairy Tales* (1888) contain drawings, short chapters and a simple discourse, which seems to indicate that they were specifically written for a Young Adult audience. However, authors like F. Kinahan ensure that these literary works were originally aimed for the general public (255). On the contrary, according to James Doig, Lady Gregory did adapt her works with a younger audience in mind (52). The author intentionally controlled the tone of the

original texts since she perceived the reiterative presence of violence as a potential menace for the sensibility of a juvenile audience (O’Sullivan and Coghlan 8).

Among the different tales that have been adapted, the *Táin* stands as one of the most frequently rewritten myths of the Celtic literary catalogue (O’Sullivan and Coghlan 14). Lady Gregory’s work *Cuchulain of Muirthemne: The Story of the Men of the Red Branch of Ulster* (1902) is the first version of CúChulainn’s life that includes the story of the *Táin*. In twenty chapters, the literary work covers the myth of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* where the epic hero Cúchulainn protects the region of Ulster along with his charioteer from the monarchs of Connacht through a series of bloody battles. Visually speaking, unlike other of Lady Gregory’s works, such as her compilation of Irish mythological tales *Irish Myths and Legends* (1904), in *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* there is not a combination of prose and poetry. Finally, in terms of linguistic complexity, in *Cuchulain of Muirthemne: The Story of the Men of the Red Branch of Ulster* (1902), Lady Gregory uses an intermediate language with an uncomplicated vocabulary.

## 1.2 Contemporary adaptations of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* for Young Adults

The tendency initiated by Lady Gregory has been exploited in the twentieth and especially in the twenty-first century. Multiple adaptations of the *Táin* for a juvenile audience have emerged in the last decades. Aside from the new versions of the story, during the twentieth century Thomas Kinsella produced one of the most accurate and complete translations of the *Táin* (O’Malley). The Irish writer assured in his translation *The Táin: From the Irish Epic Táin Bó Cuailnge* that after fifteen years of researching and considering working on the myth, he finally translated the *Táin* because “there were plenty of retellings [...] but actual translations were actually dull” (7). For him, it was incumbent to compose a translation that left “as few obstacles as possible between the original and the reader” (7). Due to Kinsella’s influence on modern Irish literature through his translation of the *Táin*, the discussion of the modern adaptations of this heroic tale cannot ignore his work. In three hundred and twenty-four pages, Kinsella includes a general reflection on the origins of Irish literature; a list of place-names in

Gaelic along with the corresponding translations; multiple maps of Ireland's ancestral division in provinces and a brief theoretical explanation of the Irish phonetics with a list of examples. The writer dedicates forty-five pages to the contextualization of the *Táin*, dealing with the birth and early life of the hero CúChulainn. The section of the narrative that covers the plot of the *Táin* spans two hundred and nineteen pages, distributed across fourteen chapters and combines Kinsella's text with Louis le Brocquy's visual material in the form of maps and minimalist drawings illustrating determinant moments of the plot, such as great battles (Image 1) or confrontations between two characters (Image 2). Although the drawings are schematic, they portray very clearly an extreme violence through dismembered and bleeding figures (Image 3).



Image 1: le Brocquy, L. (1970). *The 15 companies of Ulster* [brush drawings]. *The Táin: Translated from the Irish Epic Tain Bo Cuailnge*, p. 236.



Image 2: Brocquy, L. (1970). *Ferdia and CúChulainn before the fight* [brush drawings]. *The Táin: Translated from the Irish Epic Tain Bo Cuailnge*, p.183.



Image 3: Brocquy, L. (1970). *The dismembered body of a chariot* [brush drawings]. *The Táin: Translated from the Irish Epic Tain Bo Cuailnge*, p.151.

Kinsella's translation has a complex rhetoric style due to the use of extensive paragraphs, especially on the detailed descriptions of characters and events like the arrival of the Ulster companies that occupies eleven pages. The Irish author employs poetic prose and Middle English words in his translation. Furthermore, the plot is extensive and dense with a permanent and unfiltered presence of violence.

After having contextualized Kinsella's work, which establishes the foundation of this thesis, four modern versions of the *Táin* will be analyzed to discuss the contrasts between them and how the tale is currently adapted for Young Adults. These adaptations will be chronologically presented —*The Táin* by Liam Mac Uistin (1989); *The Táin: The Bull Raid* (2004) by Carlo Gébler; *An Táin* by Colmán Ó Raghallaigh (2006); and *The Táin: The Great Irish Battle Epic* by Alan Titley (2023)— taking into account the following formal elements: length and disposition; visual material; rhetoric style and linguistic complexity; and adaptation of the content.

Liam Mac Uistin (1938-2018) was a worldwide celebrated Irish playwright and author. He produced numerous versions of different Irish myths and legends, both in English and Gaelic. Among his literary works we find *The Táin* (1989), his popular adaptation, for Young Adult readers, of the Celtic epic. In terms of length and disposition, this work has one hundred pages including the cover page and a brief background of the setting of the *Táin*. The remaining ninety-five pages, distributed

along fourteen chapters, are dedicated to the plot of the myth that is accompanied by multiple images. The author employs black and white drawings in thick lines with a relaxed figure drawing to illustrate his book. Violence is commonly depicted in these illustrations in a mild manner with very few explicit scenes (Image 1). Alongside, scenes of human affection (Image 2) and nature (Image 3) are also included.



Image 1: Donald Teskey. (1989). *The Boy-troop of Eman Macha* [ink drawings]. *The Táin*, p.73.



Image 2: Donald Teskey. (1989). *Cuchulainn and Emer* [ink drawings]. *The Táin*, p.33.



Image 3: Donald Teskey. (1989). *The Enchanted Land of the Shee* [ink drawings]. *The Táin*, p.41.

Concerning the rhetoric style and linguistic complexity, Mac Uistin employed a simple language with numerous dialogues and an unambiguous vocabulary throughout the different chapters. As the images above show, the content of this adaptation includes violence among other topics. Although the textual content also addresses violence, the author does not use extremely descriptive recollections of these moments. Instead he focuses on the action in a general way: “Orlam drew his sword when he saw Cuchulainn coming but Cuchulainn knocked it from his hand and cut off his head.” (50).

Carlo Gébler (1954-) is a prolific Irish philanthropist, film director and writer who has cultivated many literary genres along his career, including short stories and plays. In 2004 he published *The Bull Raid*, an adaptation that Gébler’s publishers describe as “a free version of the Irish prose epic *Táin Bó Cuailnge*” on the book cover of the 2005 edition. With regards to the length and the disposition, Gébler’s version has four hundred pages in total, including the cover page; the table of contents; the prologue; the epilogue and an extensive contextualization of CúChulainn’s early life. Gébler also incorporates a list of pronunciation of some Irish words at the end of his book. This adaptation occupies one hundred and eighty-one pages, distributed into ten chapters of plain text; there is no visual material whatsoever. Concerning the rhetoric style and the linguistic complexity, Gébler’s adaptation has a plain language with short paragraphs besides multiple dialogues. In Gébler’s version the content includes death, oftentimes in a very explicit manner, as it can be seen in the following quote: “He died a few moments later. CúChulainn cut a hole around the Gae Bolga’s neck, then tugged. As the end came out the barbs of the Bellows Spear ripped through the young child’s flesh” (220).

Continuing with Colmán Ó Raghallaigh (1957-), he is a prominent figure in the current Irish Young Adult literary panorama. The prize-winning writer has published multiple books that unveil ancestral Irish figures, both mythological and historical, to a younger audience. Among his works, stands out his highly successful series of graphic novels, entirely written in Irish. This collection includes *An Táin* (2006), his adaptation of the *Táin*. In terms of length and disposition, this version does not include a contextualization of the hero’s early life. The complete extension of the book, forty pages, are dedicated to the plot of the *Táin*. Since Ó Raghallaigh’s adaptation is a

graphic novel, it has an ongoing disposition, without chapters, and illustrations have a leading role in the book. The author uses an ‘ecocentric’ aesthetic where nature and humans coexist in a symbiotic relationship. Ó Raghallaigh systematically depicts violence through a ‘gore’ style, typical of the Japanese comic, with explicit and extreme depictions of mutilated human figures (Image 1). Apart from warriors, Ó Raghallaigh portrays several female figures throughout his book (Image 2). Animals and nature are also a recurrent presence in the comic panels reinforcing the ecocentric design (Image 3).



Image 1: Ó Raghallaigh, C. (2006). *The hero CúChulainn holding his enemies' heads* [comic drawing]. *An Táin*, p.13.



Image 2: Ó Raghallaigh, C. (2006). *Queen Maeve directing her troops* [comic drawing]. *An Táin*, p.21.



Image 3: Ó Raghallaigh, C. (2006). *A fish swimming in the lake* [comic drawing]. *An Táin*, p.16.



Ó Raghallaigh's graphic novel is entirely written in Irish. Nonetheless, an official translation into English is available in the publisher's webpage, and it has been used for the analysis of Ó Raghallaigh's adaptation in the present thesis. Ó Raghallaigh employs a clear and uncomplicated language through brief dialogues, clarifications of the scenes and onomatopoeias inside of speech balloons that accompany the drawings. Lastly, as it has been shown above, the author of this graphic novel clearly depicts violent and brutal content through modern aesthetics.

The last adaptation of the *Táin* that will be presented is very recent, it was published by Alan Titley in 2023. Therefore, we can see that the retelling of this particular myth remains a very current matter. Titley (1947-) is an awarded Irish scholar, broadcaster and writer who has nurtured multiple literary genres, from dramas to illustrated novels like the one included in the present dissertation: *The Táin: The Great Irish Battle Epic* (2023). Although Titley's version does not contain any contextualization of CúChulain's life, he dedicates the first two pages of his book to explain the origins of the *Táin* as a myth. Furthermore, after the cover page, Titley incorporates a striking and brief sequence that will appear later in the narrative. This literary strategy resembles the concept of 'spoiler' that aims to catch the reader's attention. Furthermore, the writer includes a glossary of Irish words with their corresponding pronunciation at the end of the book. The plot of the story occupies one hundred and sixty-three pages, divided into eleven chapters with multiple drawings that illustrate concrete scenes of the plot. Visually speaking, Titley adopts a very 'comic' aesthetic in the line of the 1980s North American Illustrations, such as Marvel (Image 1).



Image 1: Coveney, E. (2023). *The hero CúChulainn* [comic drawing]. *The Táin: The Great Irish Battle Epic*. Book cover

Under this style he portrays multiple female figures in his book (Image 2). He also shows violence in an innocent manner, avoiding explicitness (Image 3).



Image 2: Coveney, E. (2023). *Queen Maeve* [comic drawing]. *The Táin: The Great Irish Battle Epic*, p.25.



Image 3: Coveney, E. (2023). *The hero CúChulainn* [comic drawing]. *The Táin: The Great Irish Battle Epic*, p.118.

Titley's rhetoric combines a plain narration with dialogues and poetry. Furthermore, he employs a considerably simple language with clear vocabulary, disregarding complicated or archaic structures. Although the author limits and softens the appearance of violent content in his adaptation, as he includes humor in these scenes, Titley still relies on a very descriptive and vicious tone in his textual content: "Cúchulain picked up a stone, sharpened it with his teeth and fired it at Tamun. It went through his head and spilled his brains, which were not many, on the ground." (87).



## **Cúchulainn & Queen Maeve: Sworn Enemies or Honorable Adversaries**

Over the past few years, the retrieval and mythification of ancestral Ireland has been described as a cyclical process by authors like Rebecca Long. The writer argues that Irish mythological texts encompass a collective memory. Hence, the remembrance of these narratives is essential for maintaining a common identity in Ireland. According to Long, the process of rewriting these texts is a continuous cycle, a process of retrieval that approaches the cultural heritage to the new generations (2-30). Nonetheless, before Long explored the concept, the term ‘cycle’ had already been present in Irish literature for centuries. Traditionally, Irish epic sagas have been divided into groups of stories known as Cycles, The Mythological Cycle; the Finn Cycle; The Ulster Cycle, and The Historical Cycle.

In agreement with *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1998b), The Ulster Cycle compiles numerous tales and legends dealing with the heroic deeds of the tribes from northeast Ireland. Among the narratives of The Ulster Cycle, the tale of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* is included. This story recounts the conflict between the ancient Irish kingdoms of Ulster and Connacht. The plot begins with a dispute between Queen Medb or Maeve of Connacht and her husband King Ailill over their individual assets. Because of his white-horned bull Finnbennach, the King is currently wealthier. In order to equate Ailill’s fortune, Queen Maeve begins a quest to obtain the precious brown bull of Ulster, Donn Cuailnge. The eventual seizing of Donn Cuailnge leads to an extremely violent war between both kingdoms. During the numerous bloodbaths, the demigod Cúchulainn singlehandedly defends the region of Ulster while the Ulstermen were suffering an annual curse. Oftentimes, the hero relies upon supernatural elements like the magic spear ‘Gae Bolga’ or his unmatched fighting abilities. After Cúchulainn defeats his foster brother Ferdiad, Connacht’s ally Fergus, and many other challengers, Queen Maeve is forced to retreat. At the end of the tale, the brown bull of Ulster Donn Cuailnge

kills the white-horned bull Finnbennach, whose remains get wedged into the brown bull's horns. Before dying, Donn Cuailnge scatters the remnants of Finnbennach throughout Ireland, giving name to numerous locations throughout the island.

The epic Irish narrative the *Táin* includes numerous notable characters, such as the unfortunate Ferdiad, or the tormented Fergus. Although these figures have a significant importance for the unfolding of the story, the ferocious hero Cúchulainn undoubtedly has a leading role in the plot. He is commonly referred to as the protagonist of the *Táin* while Queen Maeve is either presented as an antagonist or misplaced heroine. The current chapter will discuss how Cúchulainn and Queen Maeve are addressed in the different adaptations of the tale.

## 2.1. Cúchulainn

The current section of this thesis focuses on the figure of the hero, his unique physical characteristics along with his psychological insight and values. Bearing these aspects in mind, the present discussion aims to elucidate how Cúchulainn is depicted in the four versions selected for this thesis. In order to achieve this objective, three of the hero's most memorable encounters in the *Táin* —The Warp Spasm, Cúchulainn's battle with Ferdiad, and The Single Combat— will be used to illustrate the aspects mentioned above. An attempt will be made to show how the different authors of the four adaptations include, exclude, or modify the content of those three scenes to create a certain image of the hero for a Young Adult audience. As it was done in the previous chapter, Kinsella's translation will be used as a reliable reference of the *Táin* and the adaptations will be addressed following a chronological order according to their publication date. Concerning the scenes, due to the absence of a common timeline among all the adaptations, the four scenes will be addressed owing to their significance in the hero's development as a character.

## The Warp Spasms of Cúchulainn

The Warp Spasms are arguably one of the most popular scenes of the *Táin*. During these sequences, the epic hero Cúchulainn undergoes a supernatural physical transformation. His body swells up turning him into a towering and raging creature, a war machine that is capable of defeating entire armies. Depending on the aims of the different authors, this scene is adapted either to convey an image of the hero as a raging monster or as a misunderstood creature.

As in our source version, in Liam Mac Uistin's *The Táin* (1989), Cúchulainn experiences The Warp Spasm—or as Mac Uistin names it, the 'battle-spasm'—on several occasions. The first one after Ferdiad's death, and another one before the Brown bull of Ulster escapes from Maeve's field before Cúchulainn defeats Queen Maeve. In the two Warp Spasms included in Mac Uistin's adaptation, Cúchulainn presents a set of unique physical transformations that "turned him into a strange distorted being that was terrifying to behold. His face and body swelled up with fury and his eyes glowed red like a blazing fire. He raised himself and shouted his loud ferocious war-cry" (74).

As the following quote shows, the descriptions of Cúchulainn's transformations in Mac Uistin's adaptation have been significantly simplified in comparison to those provided in our source version:

The Warp-Spasm overtook him: it seemed each hair was hammered into his head, [...] He squeezed one eye narrower than the eye of a needle; [...] He bared his jaws to the ear; he peeled back his lips to the eye-teeth till his gullet showed. The hero-halo rose up from the crown of his head (Kinsella 77)

It is very likely that Mac Uistin has reduced these descriptions to satisfy the necessities of his young readers. In order to make this scene more visually attractive for his target audience, the author has not only adapted the textual content, he also includes an image illustrating the moment (Image 1). It is worth noting that in this image, the author does not portray Cúchulainn as the monster that he appears to morph into during The Warp-Spasm. As a matter of fact, the horse has a more supernatural appearance than the hero

himself. It appears that Mac Uistin maintains Cúchulainn's human appearance throughout the story to enable the iconographic connection between the young readers and the hero.



Image 1: Donald Teskey. (1989). *Cúchulainn during the Warp Spasm* [ink drawings]. *The Táin*, p. 75.

Although during the battle frenzy Mac Uistin presents Cúchulainn as a monster, a raging creature and a ferocious warrior that is determined to defend his allies —“But Cuchulainn was determined not to let them escape so easily [...] Then he drove back into the middle of the camp leaving huge heaps of bodies behind him.” (74)— the author softens the brutality of the battle by omitting explicit depictions of violence during the Warp Spasms.

In Carlo Gébler's *The Bull Raid* (2004), the hero experiences the Warp Spasms on two occasions: the first one after Cúchulainn meets his father Lugh, the Celtic God of sun and light, when preparing to defeat hundreds of young Connacht soldiers; and the second one after Ferdiad and Cúchulainn's confrontation. Gébler's version, in accordance with Kinsella's translation, provides dramatic and grisly descriptions of Cúchulainn's physical transformations during the Warp Spasms. As the following quotes show, in this scene, Gébler portrays the hero as a fearsome, vicious and cruel monster that has an insatiable bloodlust:



One eye shrank and [...] the other eye popped [...] out of the socket and spread over the cheek. His mouth twisted and stretched around [...] until it met his ears [...] Those it hit first staggered as if from a blow. Then blood roared out of their ears, and their eyes popped out of their sockets [...] Then they fell dead to the ground. (290-291).

Gébler uses clear and visual descriptions that facilitate engagement between the story and younger audiences. It is interesting to note that, while the characterization of Cúchulainn during the Warp Spasms dehumanizes him, the author unveils a deeper level of the hero's torment during the battle, when Cúchulainn uses his screams of rage as a deadly weapon towards his enemies: "Cuchulainn let out a terrible cry. The cry rolled across the grass and hit the edge of the great army" (291).

Interestingly enough, in *An Táin* (2006) Colmán Ó Raghallaigh decided to completely eliminate the scenes of the Warp Spasms. In his graphic novel, Cúchulainn's physical appearance remains athletic and strictly human throughout the story. The author distances from other adaptations of the *Táin* that include Cúchulainn's supernatural, and often grotesque, transformation. Instead, Ó Raghallaigh depicts the hero with an immaculate and attractive appearance, even during the fervor of the battle. As it has been previously noted, younger readers often bond with literary works by seeking for similitudes and comparing themselves with the characters of books. Therefore, Ó Raghallaigh's decision to preserve Cúchulainn's human appearance facilitates this attachment between a younger audience and the tale of the *Táin*.

In Alan Titley's *The Táin: The Great Irish Battle Epic* (2023) the Warp Spasm occurs a single time, after Cúchulainn reunites with his father Lugh before confronting hundreds of young Connacht soldiers. In his adaptation, the author includes a very descriptive narration of the hero's supernatural transformation: "the skin of his body turned inside out [...] his face became a boiling pot of fiery liquid one eye got [...] dangled down upon his cheek his cheeks flaked back so you could see his guts" (97). Although this description can be considered visceral and macabre, thereafter Titley incorporates a quote in which the hero is ashamed of his fearsome appearance: "Then

he thought, ‘If anybody saw me with all my body distorted, with my face like an ogre, [...] I better appear before them and look my best.’ (101). Hence, Cúchulainn is aware of his unpleasant appearance during the Warp Spasm; he is portrayed as a misunderstood creature who yearns to be accepted. Titley’s desire to preserve Cúchulainn’s humanity without sacrificing the scene of The Warp Spasm can also be observed in his illustration of the transformation. As it happened in Mac Uistin’s adaptation, Coveney captures the grandiosity of The Warp Spasm without providing a horrendous and monstrous presentation of the hero; he is still the epic hero Cúchulainn, a human figure of flesh and bone (Image 1). Nonetheless, unlike Mac Uistin, Coveney depicts this transformation as an extremely painful and torturous process for the hero in which he appears to undergo an immense physical suffering.



Image 1: Coveney, E. (2023). *The Warp Spasm* [comic drawing]. *The Táin: The Great Irish Battle Epic*, p. 96.

### Cúchulainn’s battle with Ferdiad

The second sequence of the *Táin* that will be discussed is Cúchulainn’s battle with Ferdiad. This scene notably contributes to the portrayal of the hero’s character and morals. After Ferdiad is persuaded by Queen Maeve to fight Cúchulainn, a combat between the foster brothers begins. Amidst the battle, the hero displays his exceptional

fighting skills, and most importantly, he reveals an internal moral conflict when facing the dilemma of killing his lifelong companion. In this scene the four adaptations address the conflict between the hero's psychological insight and his duties as a warrior.

Regarding Mac Uistin's version, Cúchulainn and Ferdiad's battle occurs after Queen Maeve and Fergus unsuccessfully try to defeat the hero. During the battle, both warriors demonstrate their strong bond by displaying a respectful attitude towards each other, even during combat. As a consequence, the fight drags on for days until the hero finally acknowledges the cruel truth: the only way of ending the dispute is by killing Ferdiad. Mac Uistin's portrayal of this scene contrasts with our source text where Ferdiad exhibits an almost arrogant self-assurance, constantly provoking Cúchulainn —“It is I who will kill, I who will destroy, I who will drive Ulster's hero to flight before all eyes [...] Men of Ulster will cry out: Death has seized you!” (Kinsella 182)— who responds similarly: “Like a great boar before his herd, I'll overwhelm you before these armies. I'll push you and punish you to the last of your skill and then bring down havoc on your head” (Kinsella 182). Mac Uistin's adaptation prioritizes Cúchulainn and Ferdiad's moral values and friendship over their fighting abilities in the battlefield. Moreover, when the hero finally kills Ferdiad, Cúchulainn physically collapses because of the pain he is suffering after his best friend dies in his arms. The hero eagerly convinces himself that it was Ferdiad's desire of confrontation that led to his death: “You should have listened to me, Ferdiad,” he whispered. ‘Then you would still be alive.’” (Mac Uistin 84). Hence, Mac Uistin distances Cúchulainn from Ferdiad's murder. Revealing the hero's innermost thoughts facilitates the development of a bond between the young reader and the figure of the hero.

The depiction of Cúchulainn as a suffering creature is reinforced with the illustration provided in the adaptation (Image 1). In the image, the hero has a gesture of sorrow and desperation; he seems to be under a profound emotional distress while holding the corpse of his beloved friend.



Image 1: Donald Teskey.  
(1989). *Cúchulainn Holding Ferdiad* [ink drawings]. *The Táin*, p. 85.

In Gébler's adaptation, Cúchulainn confronts Ferdiad after one of the hero's supernatural transformations. In contrast to our source version, when Cúchulainn defeats Ferdiad he is no longer under a battle frenzy. As a matter of fact, the hero's fighting power seems to be evened by his friend's. After four days of battling, Cúchulainn eventually kills his foster brother. In this scene, Gébler does not present the hero's physical strength as invincible; instead, he appears to win the battle because of his legendary spear 'Gae Bolga'. The weapon 'assumes the control' to win the fight for the hero: "The spear slipped [...] and then turned and started to travel up his leg. [...] The Gae Bolga passed around his hip and pushed up through his belly until it reached his heart" (344).

Cúchulainn's lack of superhuman strength transforms him into a warrior that could be defeated and die in combat. In his adaptation, the author shows Cúchulainn's sorrow after he kills his beloved friend: "This wasn't the face of a man in the grip of despair and a deep unassailable grief. This was the face of a man who wished he was dead" (347). By revealing the hero's internal conflict, Gébler restores the humanity of the hero that was rather lost during the Warp Spasms. Here, the author stimulates the reader's compassion by exposing a milder side of Cúchulainn; the hero is no longer a soulless demi-god, now he is vulnerable being: "A great surge of anguish ran through the middle of his being and he let out a long low cry. 'He's dead,' he said again." (345).

Continuing with Colmán Ó Raghallaigh, in his graphic novel the epic hero Cúchulainn confronts Ferdiad after Queen Maeve allied with Fergus in an attempt to finally overcome the hero. Ó Raghallaigh maintains Cúchulainn’s immaculate and athletic physical appearance along with the sanguinary battles as the central theme of the plot (Image 1). In contrast with other previous adaptations, Cúchulainn is depicted as an expert and ferocious warrior who rarely falters during battle with Ferdiad. Nonetheless, Ó Raghallaigh also reveals an intimate and profound bond between the hero and Ferdiad, both in his illustrations (Image 2) and in their conversations: “–Ferdiaid: ‘we’ll try the spears today.’ –Cúchulainn: ‘as you wish comrade, but guard yourself’ [...] And again that night...They slept side by side” (32).



Image 1: Ó Raghallaigh, C. (2006). *Cúchulainn launching the Gae Bolga* [comic drawing]. *An Táin*, p.30.



Image 2: Ó Raghallaigh, C. (2006). *Cúchulainn and Ferdia after the battle* [comic drawing]. *An Táin*, p.29.

In this version, Ferdiad’s death seems to have awakened an internal dilemma in the hero’s mind towards the conflict with queen Maeve: “Go now to Eamhain Macha and tell Conchubhar Mac Neasa that I shall not be able to defend Ulster against all of Ireland for much longer” (35). Cúchulainn’s suffering after his foster-brother’s death is clearly depicted through the illustrations where the hero has a gesture of desolation while carrying Ferdiad’s corpse out of the battlefield (Image 3). Thus, it could be stated that

Cúchulainn's reflections about the war along with its consequences distance him from his divine portrayal and draw him closer to earthly woes like friendship or death.



Image 3: Ó Raghallaigh, C. (2006). *Cúchulainn carrying Ferdiad's corpse* [comic drawing]. *An Táin*, p.33-34.

Concerning Alan Titley's adaptation, the confrontation between Cúchulainn and Ferdiad occurs, like in the previous versions, after Fergus fails to defeat the hero. As opposed to our source version, Cúchulainn has a defiant attitude towards Ferdiad: "you will go down along with the sun on the western horizon [...] try something else on me, as what you have done so far is useless" (Titley 122). Nonetheless, in this version the hero *does* lament the circumstances in which he is reuniting with his foster brother: "I will bid you to well go if you did not want to kill me" (116). Although Cúchulainn eventually struggles during the battle with his foster brother, he ends up winning the combat and defeating Ferdiad. Moreover, in this adaptation, unlike Kinsella's translation, the hero experiences an extremely brief emotional conflict after killing his lifelong friend. Cúchulainn's mourning goes almost unnoticed until the end of the chapter when he says that "all the warriors I ever fought, all the battles I have won, all seemed just like some kind of sport until I faced Ferdiad?" (132). It is very significant that this quote has been directly extracted by Titley from Kinsella's translation.

However, Titley has completely omitted the monologue that accompanies this quote in our source version where Cúchulainn's sorrow is portrayed. Hence, apart from reducing the content, it is likely that the author desires to preserve the hero's grandiosity throughout the whole scene. Titley appears to present Cúchulainn as an imperturbable warrior in this scene, a stoic champion that can be easily admired by his target audience.

### The Single Combat at the Ford

Although there are various single combats between Cúchulainn and Maeve's soldiers, the last sequence that we will discuss is the single combat at the ford, after Queen Maeve has seized the Brown Bull of Ulster. During the course of various days, Cúchulainn singlehandedly confronts and defeats his opponents while the Ulstermen are healing their wounds and preparing to join him at the battlefield. In the four adaptations, the narration of this scene oscillates between the portrayal of Cúchulainn as either admirable or, conversely, questionable.

As in our source version, Mac Uistin's adaptation compiles various encounters between Cúchulainn and different Connacht warriors as Cuar Mac Daluat, Loch or Ferbet Lairine. In the line of Kinsella's translation, this version narrates how Cúchulainn consecutively defeats his challengers in an unfathomable display of his fighting abilities: "Cúchulainn ignored him and went on eating the apple. Cuar threw the spear but it missed. Cúchulainn turned slowly and flung the apple at his head. It cracked Cuar's skull and he died on the spot" (64). Mac Uistin portrays the hero's strong commitment with his duty since Cúchulainn puts himself in perilous danger by fighting until exhaustion: "When Loch saw Cúchulainn falling back he attacked him savagely, wounding him so badly that the ford was red with blood" (67). Furthermore, the hero also uncovers himself emotionally as he displays his kindness when sparing Lairine's life upon the imploration of his brother: "Don't kill Lairine and leave me brotherless," he pleaded. Cúchulainn nodded his head. 'I won't kill him', he promised" (65). In our source version, Cúchulainn also grants mercy to Lairine and lets him leave. However, in Kinsella's translation, Cúchulainn wounds Lairine severely, leaving him handicapped

for the rest of his life: “Then Cúchulainn flung him into Lugaid’s arms. Ever afterward, for as long as he lived, Larene couldn’t empty his bowels properly; [...] he couldn’t eat without groaning.” (Kinsella 132). Hence, Mac Uistin modifies this scene to present the hero as a round character, a ferocious warrior who also has a compassionate and benevolent personality.

In Gébler’s version, as opposed to Kinsella’s translation, various battles between the hero and different challengers are mentioned during the single combat —“Thereafter a great warrior was called in each night” (281)— but only the confrontations against Nadcranntail and Cur are described with detail. During the former fight, Cuchulainn kills his opponent with just a slight movement of his sword. While in the later, the hero defeats his challenger by flinging a nut to Cur’s head, mortally wounding him. Although Gébler only describes two of the numerous single combats that take place at the ford, as the quotes above show, the hero’s fighting superiority is clearly exhibited. Nonetheless, as it happened in previous adaptations, Gébler shows a defenseless side of Cuchulainn, who is blindly confronting Maeve’s warriors to the extent of risking his own life: “One reason was that Cuchulainn was extremely tired. He had not slept properly for weeks. [...] several of those who had gone against him had hurt him before he killed them. [...] They amounted to a serious catalogue of injuries” (281). Hence, the author presents Cuchulainn as the victim in this scene. While the Ulstermen are recovering, he is pushing the boundaries of prudence because of his righteousness and his elevated morals. This portrayal facilitates the awakening of the reader’s sympathy and admiration towards the character, especially among juvenile readers who tend to be more passionate.

In Colmán Ó Raghallaigh’s graphic novel, it is mentioned that the hero spends several days fighting different warriors in single combat at the ford: “It was then that the warriors came, one by one and day by day, against Cuchulainn” (25). Among these challengers the figures of giant Loch and the Morrigan stand out. During these simultaneous confrontations, Cuchulainn’s abilities as warrior are enhanced, since not even an immense creature and a goddess appear to be a contender for him: “The



following day with Cú Chulainn locked in battle against the giant Lóch [...] He took his head off!” (26) (Image 1).



Image 1: Ó Raghallaigh, C. (2006). *The hero Cúchulainn fighting giant Lóch and the Morrigan* [comic drawing]. *An Táin*, p. 24.

Nonetheless, as in Kinsella’s translation, the relationship between the Morrigan and Cúchulainn is also extremely complex due largely to the hero’s misogynous behavior towards the goddess. During the single combat with the giant, Cúchulainn despises her help with contempt. As a consequence, the Morrigan, hurt by disdain, decides to join the giant in the battle against Cúchulainn, who ends up exhausted and, ironically, needing her help to recover from the battle. By depicting the absurdity of the situation, how the hero puts himself into a convoluted situation due to his stubbornness, the author exposes the absurdity of this sexist behavior among his young audience. It is important to note that in our source version there is not a parodic depiction of the sexist conflict between the hero and the Morrigan. Although after the single combat both characters help each other to heal their wounds, Cúchulainn only participates in this reciprocal relationship because he does not know that he is helping the Morrigan: “‘You said you would never heal me’ the Morrigan said. ‘If I had known it was you I wouldn’t have done it,’ Cúchulainn said” (Kinsella 137). Hence, Ó Raghallaigh has intentionally adapted this scene to transmit a message of inclusion and respect for his young readers.

The last version of the single combat at the ford that will be discussed is the one provided in Alan Titley's adaptation, where Cúchulainn faces four warriors and the Morrigan during the course of various days. Titley recalls how the hero nimbly overcomes and kills his opponents: "lifting his sword and cleaving him from the top of his head down through to the fork of his trunk" (67). Moreover, the author shows how the hero is not an instigator of conflicts since he appears to be warning his opponent of the fatal consequences that he will face after confronting the hero: "I think you should leave now, before you say anything you won't live to regret. [...] Go away now, Cúchulainn said. I don't want to have to wash your guts from my hands and dirty the river" (66). However, as in our source version, when there is no possibility of conciliation, it is clear that Cúchulainn does not flee from confrontations. The hero does not withdraw from the battle and, most importantly, he is relentless with his opponents: "Cúchulainn answered, lifting his sword and cleaving him from the top of his head down through to the fork" (67). Therefore, the author of this adaptation clearly establishes the hero's values and principles, giving rise to a possible understanding between the hero and the reader.

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Thus far, it is apparent that the different adaptations aim to achieve a cognate purpose through different stylistic strategies: presenting Cúchulainn as an appealing figure for a Young Adult audience. As the previous discussion demonstrates, the hero is typically portrayed as a fearless and ferocious warrior who appears to be unbeatable. Additionally, Cúchulainn is often introduced as an exemplary figure who intends to be righteous and equitable. Moral and, more specifically, physical excellence are two elements that practically guarantee the interest of a juvenile reader. On certain occasions, the hero's portrayal as an admirable figure could be endangered by the numerous killings that he committed. Nonetheless, in all four adaptations, Cúchulainn undergoes either physical or psychological suffering during many of these scenes, a suffering that humanizes the hero, who oftentimes appears to be a prisoner of his duty. Cúchulainn's internal conflict between good and evil is also addressed in Kinsella's translation; however, in our source version this dualism only has a significant relevance in the scene of Ferdiad's death. It

could be stated that the authors of the adaptations appeal to the reader's compassion when portraying Cúchulainn as a tormented being, inducing an engagement between the audience and the character.

Furthermore, it has been shown that the content of these adaptations often mirrors Kinsella's translation to the extent of literally quoting him. However, the authors of the four versions usually adapt the content to transmit a series of values like friendship or gender equality.

If the four adaptations modify and adapt the textual content of the *Táin* as presented in our source text while preserving the core of the tale, structurally speaking the four versions follow a different chronology with sporadic coincidences in the timeline provided by Thomas Kinsella.

Additionally, with the exception of Gébler, the adaptations include drawings to illustrate certain scenes, as in Kinsella's translation. Nonetheless, the style of these illustrations differs between our source version and some of the adaptations. Kinsella's translation includes explicit violence and dismemberments, an aesthetic that is only followed in Ó Raghallaigh's graphic novel. The remaining versions lighten the visual content of the tale narration for the target audience.

## 2.2. Queen Maeve

As we have seen in the previous section, the presence of the hero Cúchulainn is crucial for the unfolding of the narrative in the *Táin*. Nonetheless, other characters, especially female figures, significantly contribute to the development of the tale. Either supporting or confronting Cúchulainn but always driving the plot forward. Although the different adaptations include various women, only the mighty Queen Maeve, King Aillil's and Maeve's daughter Finnabair, and the Morrigan (the goddess of war) are present in the four versions. While in our adaptations some of these female characters have rather submissive roles —like Finnabair, who is manipulated to facilitate alliances for

Connacht— others, such as the Morrigan, exhibit a resilient attitude. The figure of Queen Maeve stands out as she has a significant role in all versions of the *Táin*.

In the different adaptations, the tale opens with the scene of ‘the pillow talk’. In this sequence, Queen Maeve is confronting her husband over their personal possessions. Thanks to his white-horned bull, the King is wealthier, which angers the Queen. So as to equate her husband’s fortune, Queen Maeve decides to acquire the brown bull of Ulster by any means. She is depicted as an outspoken, powerful, and committed woman who is willing to make sacrifices in order to achieve her objectives. However, not all versions portray these characteristics as a positive aspect of Maeve’s personality. To elucidate how the different authors adapt this particular scene, this section will discuss how the figure of Queen Maeve is presented during the pillow talk. An attempt will be made to illustrate whether she is described as a heroine, a mighty woman warrior, or on the contrary, as a villain and a manipulative woman. In order to do so, Maeve’s psychological insight will be examined in each of the adaptations. As in the previous chapter, Kinsella’s translation will be considered a point of reference for the plot of the *Táin* and the adaptations will be addressed in chronological order.

### The Pillow Talk

In Mac Uistin’s adaptation, during the pillow talk Queen Maeve is described as a temperamental female who has dramatic mood swings —“QUEEN MAEVE WAS VERY ANGRY. Her eyes flashed with fury as she strode into the hall of her palace at Cruachan”— (9). Additionally, as opposed to our source version, where Maeve inherits her fortune rightfully,

with the high king of Ireland for my father, Eochaid Feidlech the steadfast, the son of Finn, the son of Finnoman [...] I outdid them in grace and giving and battle and warlike [...] My father gave me a whole province of Ireland (Kinsella 52)

in Mac Uistin’s adaptation the author presents Maeve as a stubborn and whimsical person who wants to have everything because “[f]rom the time she was a little girl she had been

used to getting her own way” (9). Mac Uistin also presents Maeve as a superficial and very emotional woman who chose Aillil as her husband because of “his good looks or his haughty bearing” (9) instead of for being a good and trustworthy ally, as in Kinsella’s translation: “So I got the kind of man I wanted: Rus Ruad’s other son —yourself, Ailill, from Leinster. You aren’t greedy or jealous or sluggish.” (Kinsella 53). The negative image that the author gives of Queen Maeve contrasts sharply with his positive depiction of Cúchulainn. Mac Uistin constructs a canonical antagonist through Queen Maeve, a character that can be easily identified as a villain by his target audience.

Gébler portrays Queen Maeve as a remarkable woman who has obtained her legacy not only by blood but by her own merits: “Maeve was one of six daughters of a high king who outdid her sisters in every respect. She was the most graceful, and the most war-like. [...] her father gave her the province of Connacht and fifteen hundred soldiers to rule with” (217). Furthermore, she is presented as a discerning woman, especially when she had to choose a husband. In accordance with Kinsella, Gébler provides a detailed recollection of Maeve’s complex line of thought for this particular matter of her life: “When pressed to explain what she meant, this was what she always said: ‘I can’t marry a mean man because I am quick to give and if my husband is not, there will be trouble. [...] In the end, she found the kind of man she wanted in Aillil, from Leinster” (217-219).

In this adaptation, as in our source version, Maeve has a persistent desire to obtain the brown bull of Ulster, Donn Cuailnge. After unsuccessfully trying to reach a middle ground with her husband and in response to Aillil’s provocations —“I was thinking how much better off you are now than when you met me.” (219)— Maeve decides to begin the search of the brown bull of Ulster to put an end to her husband’s arrogance and defend her pride. Hence Gébler presents a formidable opponent for Cúchulainn, a confident and mighty female warrior, instead of promoting a negative image of Maeve.

In accordance with Kinsella’s translation, Ó Raghallaigh presents Queen Maeve as an outspoken woman: “Listen here, Ailill. Don’t forget that it was the daughter of the High King of Ireland you married. I was a woman of wealth and means from the day I was born, and even to this day, I have more than you.” (2). Maeve also shows a defiant

attitude towards her husband when she disagrees with him: “And I’ll prove as much tomorrow.” (2) (Image 1).

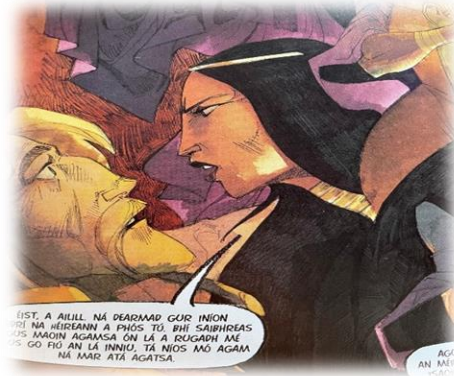


Image 1: Ó Raghallaigh, C. (2006). *Maeve confronting her husband* [comic drawing]. *An Táin*, p. 2.

Nonetheless, in Ó Raghallaigh’s graphic novel the queen does not have an arrogant attitude. Her body language portrays her as a reflective woman (Image 3). It is interesting to note that, aside from Cúchulainn, Maeve is the only character that is granted a central role, especially in the illustrations where she often has the spotlight, something unique of this adaptation. (Image 4).



Image 3: Ó Raghallaigh, C. (2006). *Maeve confronting her husband* [comic drawing]. *An Táin*, p. 2.



Image 4: Ó Raghallaigh, C. (2006). *Maeve reflecting about battle* [comic drawing]. *An Táin*, p. 18.

Finally, in Alan Tittley's adaptation, during the pillow talk Maeve is presented as an easily irritable woman who often gets involved in conflicts, while her husband is a more conciliatory and reasonable figure: "'SAY THAT again!' 'I said what I said.' 'I dare you say that again,' she said. 'Forget about it, he said.'" (11). Moreover, as opposed to Kinsella's translation, Tittley depicts Maeve as a tyrannical queen who mistreats her servants in her rage attacks: "Maeve nearly exploded. What do you mean, 'more or less'? We have or we haven't, or I have even more? Spit it out!" (14). In his illustrations, in contrast with other adaptations, Maeve clearly has a secondary role in comparison with Cúchulainn, since she is represented significantly less often than the hero. However, the author creates a contrast between the textual depiction of Maeve's inflammatory personality and a calm appearance in his drawings (Image 1).



Image 1: Coveney, E. (2023). *Queen Maeve reflecting* [comic drawing]. *The Táin: The Great Irish Battle Epic*, p. 96.

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To conclude with this section, as the previous discussion has shown, the figure of Queen Maeve varies among the adaptations. Some authors like Gébler or Ó Raghallaigh prefer to depict the queen as a formidable and admirable opponent, while others portray her as a despotic, cruel and stubborn woman. While the former strategy enlarges the hero's victories, since he has to defeat a mighty warrior, the latter offers an easier structure with

a very clear representation of good and evil for the target audience. It is interesting to note that the authors who present Maeve's strong temperament as a negative aspect—a characteristic feature of her villain role—interpreted Cúchulainn's obstinacy to fight and kill during the battle as something admirable. Therefore, it could be said that there is a double standard, a different moral is applied to judge the parallel actions of these two principal characters.



## Conclusions

The aim of this B.A. dissertation was to illustrate how the four adaptations selected adapted the content of the *Táin* for a Young Adult audience to portray a concrete image of CúChulainn and Queen Maeve.

After having discussed several formal elements in each adaptation, it seemed apparent that there were some contrasts in the approach followed by the different authors. While some prioritize the visual content as Colmán Ó Raghallaigh in *An Táin*, others like Gébler exclude illustrations from the adaptation, exclusively focusing on the textual content. Considerable differences were also found between the authors regarding the disposition of the content with a variation of hundreds of pages between Mac Uistin or Titley, for example. Nonetheless, the four adaptations were closely similar in the use of a simple language that is highly suitable for the target audience.

This thesis has also shown that there are differences among of the adaptations when introducing the figures of CúChulainn and Queen Maeve. Aside from sporadic portrayals of CúChulainn as a raging monster during The Warp Spasms (as in Géblers version), generally speaking the four adaptations project a positive depiction of the hero as a brave and mighty warrior that could be easily admired by a young reader. It has been demonstrated that the four adaptations present CúChulainn as a round character who is often conflicted between his righteousness and his duty. Furthermore, it has been shown that all the versions present the hero in an attractive and striking manner, either visually or textually; in certain cases, to the extent of eliminating scenes that may compromise this image, as in Ó Raghallaigh's adaptation, where the sequence of The Warp Spasms is eliminated.

With regards to Queen Maeve, there are two clear strategies followed by the writers of the adaptations when presenting her. On the one hand, Mac Uistin and Titley promote a negative depiction of Queen Maeve as a temperamental, whimsical and tyrannical ruler. In these adaptations, she is systematically addressed as a cruel villain, which creates a clear distinction between good (represented by CúChulainn) and evil, for the target audience. Her portrayal as CúChulainn's antagonist automatically displaces her to a secondary position, serving as a minor figure that enhances the hero's grandiosity and

goodness. On the other hand, other writers, such as Gèbler and Ó Raghallaigh prefer to portray a positive image of Queen Maeve. In these adaptations she is presented as an outspoken and intelligent woman, a powerful ruler and female warrior. Especially in Ó Raghallaigh's graphic novel, Maeve is given a crucial role in the tale, as she is illustrated as often as the hero, having a significant representation in the narrative. Both Ó Raghallaigh and Gèbler present her as a remarkable adversary that, along with CúChulainn, drives the plot of the tale forward. This positive portrayal of Maeve enlarges the grandiosity of the battle for the target audience as it is a confrontation between two formidable opponents.

Therefore, the strategies followed by the writers when presenting CúChulainn and Queen Maeve are highly influenced by the aim of the author. Either to portray a classic antagonistic relationship—a conflict between the mighty hero and the wicked queen—or an epic battle between two courageous fighters.

This thesis has successfully fulfilled its objectives as the contrasts between the four modern adaptations of The *Táin* have been unveiled and discussed, perhaps providing a possible guideline that encourages the study of other adaptations of Irish epic tales.

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