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**Sources for the Dualistic Role and Perception of Women in Celtic
Legends**

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Contents

Introduction.....	2
Chaos and Order, Religion and Social Structure.	5
Woman as Nature	6
Woman as Goddess.....	9
Heterogeneity of Celtic Women in the World of Men.....	12
Women Within and Beyond the Binary Perspective.	19
Conclusion	26
Bibliography	28

INTRODUCTION

There are two morphological archetypes...expression of order, coherence, discipline, stability on the one hand; expression of chaos, movement, vitality, change on the other. Common to morphology of outer and inner processes, there are basic polarities recurring in physical phenomena, in the organic world and in the human experience...the dynamic substance of our universe, written in every corner of nature

G. Kepes, *The New Landscape*

When approaching the study of Celtic legends one can encounter different images of women, images that hold both cultic and symbolic significance. The significance of such representations is often reduced to personifications of a female reproductive power (King 12). Nevertheless, with the advent of Thealogy and rethinking religious traditions in the light of gynocentric concepts, mythological images of women began to be interpreted in a broader, social, cultic, and political context, thus revealing that the perception of women is strongly connected to a general system of Celtic beliefs. In legends and religion, women were seen in the perspective of a struggle between polarities of order and chaos, and all the imagery associated with women was set within this dualistic viewpoint. In addition, female images that appeared in mythology not only mirrored the actual social status of Celtic women, but also altered this status through the use of religious symbols. Apparently, mythological images pointed to female's influential role both in a ritual and social life. The traditional historical study often investigates the status of women using as a source Celtic law manuscripts and, in result, tends to neglect the religious aspect of women's role as community members. In the light of Celtic Law Tracts, women's spiritual role and cultic aspects of women's perception become marginalized. For this reason, this paper aims at revealing the connection between women's social status and cultic images in Celtic legends as well as the way in which these two entities were set in a binary perspective. Furthermore, this paper sets out to disclose the ambiguous role taken up by women in Celtic legends, who move in the binary between chaos and order, which movement affects women's perception in the historical context.

One of the most important images that affected women's life in the Celtic community was that of a goddess. The woman-goddess association occurs frequently in Celtic narratives and the goddess image was understood to bear traces of a greater celestial order in which chaos and order struggle for domination. The body of a woman was seen as a battlefield for this struggle and women were often portrayed as witches, human beings that can be paralleled with goddesses through their siding with chaos. Such beings inhabited places outside human community and, instead, preferred nature to organized settlements. On the other hand, women's familial role in Celtic community reinforced their status, allowing them to be perceived in terms of supporters of a social order. This dualistic view implies that women were forced to fit into the system of community, in which female emotionality and behaviour were reduced to a cosmological struggle of polarities. Indeed, if we analyze the manner in which women were depicted when performing roles imposed on them by men, traces of a gender conflict deriving from such a reduction can be revealed.

Nevertheless, the application of a binary chaos-order as a method of analysis in comparing Celtic mythology to social mechanisms may seem a rather odd practice. Regarding sociology, it is often a case that the establishment of classes and social hierarchy is followed by conflicts between privileged and underprivileged groups, with the latter being referred to as "evil" whenever it breaks a social norm. However, it often happens that in the analysis of such culturally remote texts as Celtic legends, our views and ideas jeopardize a clear perception of contemporary Celtic people. One must bear in mind that our reality differs considerably from the reality of Celts and, as a result, some of the ideas can no longer be grasped in the modern world. Only by reinterpreting medieval texts in the light of basic polarities can we achieve some degree of certainty. This is the reason why the perspective of this particular study is set upon the core of all oppositions, the chaos-order opposition. The question remains, however, whether even such a primeval dualism, as a way of categorizing reality, was known to Celts and, specifically, authors of legends.

There were two major influences through which the Celts could have been acquainted with this dualistic perception of the world. The first emerges from a shared Indo-European root and, as Pettersson points out in his study, all mythological cycles contain material that belongs to a common Indo-European heritage (Pettersson 8). The second influence came from Greece and there is strong evidence that dualism, such as emerged from Greek philosophy, was known to the

Celtic people. Among the Greeks, the order-chaos differentiation was long prevalent in mythology.¹ Greek philosophy, specifically in the teachings of Heraclitus, took on this idea in relation to cosmological order and humanity's place in the universe.² The Celts inhabiting Ireland are known to have been influenced by Greek thinking via their pagan priests. The druids themselves were depicted as philosophers by Greek sources (Piggot 113-115). In this respect, the Celts could have yielded to general philosophical tendencies of categorizing world, assimilating major ideas of Greek philosophy to their own religion, mythology and social structure.

Apparently, there are two main cycles of legends where Celtic religious and philosophical tendencies are traceable. The first is the *Fenian Cycle*, dealing with the adventures of a hero Finn and the *fianna*, whereas the second is the so-called *Ulster Cycle*, concerned mainly with quests of the hero CuChulain. Due to the fact that the source material for early Irish narratives survived in a dispersed form in various manuscripts (Blamires 29), the study will concern a "compiled" version of texts by Michael Foss in his *Celtic Myths and Legends*. The textual material designated for this study will consist of fragments of poems from the *Fenian Cycle*, excerpts from *The Hero-Deeds of CuChulain*, which is a part of the *Ulster Cycle*, as well as the legend *The Fate of the Children of Lir*.

Although the texts in question may be as late as the fifteenth century, they are generally believed to be a record of an oral tradition that described the events set in the third century AD (Blamires 27). Since the strong historical context is present, with the legends reflecting the actual social structures, beliefs and ideas of ancient Celts, the texts chosen for this essay will be seen as echoing some general views on women and their position in Celtic society from the period. Yet, there is a certain difficulty in the application of a dualistic perspective to the reading of Celtic legends. As is the case with all extremes, the chaos-order opposition does not embrace the whole range of transiting concepts. On the contrary, it removes fluidity of perception from the study. Still, this study aims revealing the way in which mythological images of women relate to their typical roles as community members in the binary perspective. Such holistic image can only be grasped by comparing women in the extreme roles in which they were positioned. Furthermore, one has to be aware that none of the legends investigated is an expression of some unmistakable

¹ <http://homepage.mac.com/cparada/GML/MythsCreation.html>, 26 October 2005.

² Irene Gilsenan-Nordin, *Crediting Marvels in Seamus Heaney's Seeing Things* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1999) 147.

truth about the Celts. They may, however, share some original prejudices and preferences of the indigenous society they emerged from.

Chaos and Order, Religion and Social Structure

As was mentioned previously, Celtic philosophical tendency was built upon a binary structure which, in turn, was linked to religion and mythology. Similarly, images of women appearing in Celtic mythology were built upon a dualistic core, so the actual positioning of these images in the binary can only be revealed by deciphering religious symbols together with the significance that these symbols had for the community in general. Since the historical context is crucial for both understanding images transferred through legends and revealing the social mechanisms that led to formation of these images, a brief outline of Celtic beliefs may be helpful in highlighting the difference in mentality between contemporary Celtic people and the modern reader.

The setting of a majority of legends is in the period before the advent of Christianity. At that time, Celtic society was ruled by a pagan religion, a nature-centred system of beliefs. However, Celtic paganism was not a religion in a traditional sense, but a philosophy concerned with people's place in the universe. It stressed the human bond with nature, particularly the way in which people and their environment were interconnected (Pearson 8-10). For Celts, nature was a source of primeval truth, the place people emerged from. It was seen as the beginning, the chaos, the entity close to the spiritual world inhabited not only by deities, but also by human ancestors (Piggot 113-115). The worship of Celtic deities was linked to ritual places situated in forests and lakes and, repeating after Piggot, the Celts never confined their gods to enclosed spaces of buildings (Piggot 48-51). The performance of a pagan ritual was recognized as a symbolic reconstruction of natural phenomena on a spiritual level. Such reconstruction meant that the place where the ritual was performed had to be situated in the wilderness, outside human influence. Accordingly, in the initial stage of development of Celtic religion, pagan deities were rarely portrayed in Celtic art as human beings; more likely the sacred form was projected symbolically upon trees, which later became recipients of ritual sacrifice (Blamires 16-17). The ritual pointed to the unity between humans and nature, and was a manifestation of society's link to the chaos of nature. Through its symbolic performance, the ritual strengthened the role of

symbol in daily expression and helped people understand the use of natural symbols in legends. The ritual pointed also to coexistence of the world of nature-magic along with daily reality.

Ancient paganism recognized people's departure from nature to organized society, a departure that can also be perceived in a cosmological dimension as an omnipresent movement from chaos to order. The conflict between nature and humanity took place on a mythological level and is most clearly visible in Celtic narratives. In these narratives, male heroes were depicted as defenders of community's order. In the *Fenian Cycle*, the protagonist Finn is a male champion of human society, whereas his warband, the *fianna*, is a reminiscence of an organized institution of a Celtic army, an ancient order of patriarchy. Since Finn often encounters beings of the Otherworld during his quests, the setting of the *Fenian Cycle* is *outdoors*, outside human society, on the boundary between chaos and order (Pettersson 136). Only in such a setting, the fight between forces of order, represented by Finn, and chaos can better be grasped.

Since nature can be linked with the world *outdoors*, the motif of a wilderness is a crucial aspect in the binary perspective. Yet, the natural environment should not be associated with chaos only, but it could also represent a higher, spiritual, state of being very much respected by all Celts. This points to a twofold attitude towards the world *outdoors*; on the one hand, nature was worshipped by Celtic people by means of the ritual while, on the other, it acted as a source of chaos that endangered life of the community. The Celts implemented such binary approach due to the fact that they, as most Indo-European communities, shared the cosmological myth of the end of the world where everything returns back to chaos (Piggot 118-119). Taking this into consideration, it becomes apparent that society's fight with nature, movement from chaos to order, can be seen as only one aspect in the infinite cycle where chaos is brought to order and order brought to chaos. In the perspective of this cycle, society's order and fight with nature may have been thought of as always temporary, for everything is brought back to the state of chaos and vice versa.

Woman as Nature

The worlds of nature and society coexisted in the pagan celestial order. Yet, the society, which can be associated with fixed spaces of buildings and due to that often referred to as *indoors*, was positioned on the opposite side to nature within a cosmological binary. As nature was the source

of female images; the Celtic society was male oriented, dominated by war and war inspired culture. The ethos of a warrior, the most important member of a Celtic community, subjected the whole social structure and hierarchy to men dealing with war, hence, the social structure of the Celtic group was submitted to a patriarchal rule of men (Piggot 45-46). As was mentioned previously, in legends, but also in daily life, it was a male hero who represented the community. Women, although sharing an extremely high social status in comparison to other societies of the ancient period, had to live according to values established by men. Despite the fact that males were a dominant force in the Celtic society, their authority over Celtic females was not complete. Women managed to retain a relatively autonomous position in religion, which benefited their place in the community. In addition, cultic images of women bore an extremely strong maternal link to nature that elevated women's status in the social structure. In mythology, woman was seen as an embodiment of forces of nature, which was the strongest position that one could actually partake in the divine hierarchy of paganism.

The most prevalent and important image of a woman in mythology is that of a Mother. This is an extremely strong motif, crossing the usual boundary between chaos and order. As Mother represented a greater order, beyond that of community and nature; she can be associated with both social and ritual spheres of Celtic life. The Mother was seen as the beginning, in the time before the distinction of order and chaos occurred. Only the oldest cultures bear traces of a Mother's cult and, in the case of Celtic paganism, this motif is remnant of an archaic social order under the rule of women, so-called Celtic matriarchate. In legends, the entire community is said to have derived from women and these were Banba and Eiru, after whom Ireland was named, who led Celtic invasion of the island. Furthermore, the mythical and actual role of women as mothers corresponds to them being depicted as earth-goddesses or Mother-earth. Ireland was understood to be feminine. As Pettersson points out in his study, men had to be ritually mated with earth-goddesses in order to be inaugurated into kingship (Pettersson 119).

The respect with which earth-goddesses and land were perceived passed onto women in their role as household keepers and mothers. Through this parallel between images of earth-goddess and women in their familial roles, women's transformative power was emphasized and proved them capable of imposing order, bringing the raw material of nature (barren land) to order (organized settlement). In the binary perspective, the transformational and organizational capacity of women positioned them closer to the society than chaos. Yet, if one argues that chaos

also means change, it becomes vivid that women embodied both chaos and order in one image linked with an earth-goddess. In the poem *Bruigean Atha I* “[Finn] saw the daughter of the herdsman at Dun Iascaig on the Suir washing her head. Badhamair was her name. And he took her, and she became his wife” (Pettersson 61). In the quoted fragment, Badhamair belongs to the triad and, simultaneously, represents bride, earth-goddess and a piece of land. In the *Fenian Cycle*, marriage to a woman is a metaphor to being mated with a territory. Cultivation of the barren land and making it suitable for farming is compared to a sexual intercourse during which a woman is made fertile. Seeing woman as a piece of land does not exclude the perception in a physical sense, yet, in some poems, her role as an earth-goddess seems to take over her role as a member of community “There was a woman of the Luigni sept with Find, for in every mountain and in every forest Find and his *fian* frequented there was a woman awaiting him in every district” (Pettersson 76). In the quoted fragment, though Finn is portrayed as a male champion, conqueror and a bit of a womanizer, his relationship to women rarely occurs on a physical level and, as Pettersson claims in his work, women referred to in this poem are territories, pieces of land that men are symbolically married to (Pettersson 129).

The relatively stable connection between women and chthonic deities is juxtaposed with the image associating women with water. Liquid, water and flow, all represented uncategorized aspects of the world, were grasped as entirely feminine in the Celtic world. According to Pettersson, rivers Boyne and Shannon were both regarded to be goddesses (Pettersson 134). In addition, legends often describe Finn taking drinks from women in order to gain knowledge. Women and water were both crucial for sustaining life of a society. However, the image that linked women with liquid not always symbolized life, but could also bear a nocturnal factor associated with drowning and death and, indeed, dying on the shores of Boyne is a very common theme in the Fenian tradition. “Then he went along the Boyne eastward until he reached his *Leap*. Thereupon he [Finn] fell between two rocks, so that his forehead struck against the rock and his brains were dashed about him, and he died between the two rocks. Fishermen of the Boyne found him” (Pettersson 85). In this fragment, Finn is old and has to re-establish his authority in the eyes of the *fianna* by performing a difficult task, a jump through the river Boyne. Whether he manages to complete this deed is not a matter of his own ability as a warrior, but a grace that is granted to him by the goddess river. The jump, which Finn has to perform annually, is a reminiscence of a ritual, reaffirmation of the bond between society and nature. But since the

leader of a society and male order, represented by Finn, gets old, he has to be substituted by someone younger, in order to maintain the natural cycle of life. This is the reason why the goddess Boyne takes back her favour from the champion. Finn is incapable of performing a *Leap*-ritual and, therefore, can no longer represent society. In effect, the fragment emphasizes the importance of a bond between the world *outdoors* and the Celtic society. The ritual had to be sustained at all costs, even if it meant sacrificing community's champion. In this perspective, it becomes visible that the relationship between social structures and nature was dualistic, for though the society strived to organize and dominate the wilderness, the survival of social structures was dependent upon the survival of natural cycles in the environment.

Furthermore, the journey that Finn undertakes to the shores of the Boyne can be interpreted as a search for asylum, Finn's search for a place where he could die peacefully. In this respect, the Boyne begins to take on a twofold dimension as an image. On the one hand, she is a goddess that grants her favour to the hero Finn, hence she supports the society, while, on the other, the Boyne retrieves her favour when she becomes Finn's resting place. In Pettersson's view, death and rebirth were the main attributes ascribed to the earth-goddess (Pettersson 135). These attributes contributed to the earth-goddess's perception as the beginning and the end personified in the Mother image. Likewise, the Boyne has similar duties to the ones held by the earth-goddess and, as such, can also be coupled with the Mother as a motif. Apparently, depictions of water and rivers bear a strong resemblance to woman in her motherly role. In Freudian terms, the old hero Finn, in his last moments, embarks on a journey to return to the river Boyne-mother. It is an endeavour to return to the beginning, to find a secure niche within a mother's womb. This interpretation embraces a dualistic perception of a woman, through which her image can be linked with flux of ideas, the chaos, but also with the Mother, the beginning and the social order.

Woman as Goddess

Apart from being perceived as a force of nature, women could also be seen an embodiment of a Celtic goddess. In mythology, Celtic goddesses were associated with chaos through their divine role as a nature in a human form. Yet, the goddesses should not entirely be seen as a counter force to organized community represented by Finn. On the contrary, they were often depicted as

Finn's guides in his quests to reinforce the link between community and nature by means of a ritual. The goddesses' role points to the strength of a bond between humanity and nature as well as the need for the balance between these two oppositions to be retained. Certain part of a dualistic perception of the goddesses passes upon women, for, similarly to goddesses, they partake in a religious ritual to re-establish the ancient bond with chaos, but, at the same time, women participate in life of a society and its patriarchal order.

In Celtic religion, images of the goddesses often stood for natural phenomena, knowledge or general human characteristics. In legends, they were depicted anthropomorphically, though they also had the ability to change their shape, and assumed vices and virtues of the mortals. Of course, they were still part of the world outside social order and belonged to the sphere of mystical nature. In the male dominated Celtic society, women could refer to goddesses as models for resistance and assertiveness. Celtic goddesses were seen as role models and could have functioned as archetypes for women. However, the way the goddesses were presented could also stand for the way women were expected to behave (King 14). In other words, these images were not ideals of a female part of society, but males' and females' projection of the nature of women, which was later assigned to the image of a goddess. Indeed, according to King, there is a relationship between goddesses in myth and ritual, and social roles and practices of women (King 2).

In the *Fenian Cycle*, the role of the goddesses as providers of favour to male heroes is strongly emphasized. In the myth *How Finn Obtained Knowledge and the Slaying of Culdub*, Finn chases an Otherworld being, Culdub, which leads him to the Otherworld entrance.

Finn laid hold of him as he went into the knoll, so that he fell yonder.
When he withdrew his hand, a woman met him coming out of the knoll
with a dripping vessel in her hand, having just distributed drink, and
she jammed the door against the knoll, and Finn squeezed his finger
between the door and the post. Then he put his finger into his mouth.
When he took it out again he began to chant, the *imbas* illumines him

(Pettersson 44)

The motif of the chase bears an important meaning in this legend and suggests a quest, the one in which Finn has to succeed in order to receive a divine favour. In addition, Culdub may

symbolize, concurrently, the chased Underworlder and the goddess guarding the entrance. In Celtic legends, the goddesses are famous for being polymorphic and the warriors of the *fianna* are often lured by a goddess in shape of a deer to perform some task for the Otherworld. As a prize for his pursuit, Finn receives knowledge by drinking from a vessel passed to him by a goddess. He is granted a gift of poetical rhetoric, yet, as soon as he reaches the entrance, he is denied access to the Otherworld. This may be for the fact that Finn is a representative of a human order, which makes him unfit for the chaos of the Otherworld. Still, as long as the ritual of the chase is re-enacted, the bond between humanity and nature is sustained and the goddesses remain keen on helping Finn.

Furthermore, if one applies elements of Psychoanalysis to a dualistic method of analysis, the chase may be interpreted as Finn's journey to a mother's womb, the movement during which order returns back to chaos. The chase of Culdub, a goddess in a deer form, forces Finn to assume the role of a predator. Finn allows the animal instincts of his repressed ego to take over his personality. The hero departs from a social order that he represents and yearns to return to chaos of the world of nature. In the end however, the human part of his identity takes over, denying him entrance to the Otherworld. What seems to confirm this interpretation is the very event that follows the woman's denial to grant access to Finn. Finn's finger becomes jammed between his world and the Otherworld, and only after retrieving the finger and sucking the wound does Finn experience *iambas* illumination. Psychoanalysis recognizes sucking the finger as a symptom of subconscious wish to return to a mother's womb, the state pre-dating an imposition of order by a father and his phallic symbol. Similarly, Finn's activity of sucking the finger may be a reminiscence of his desire to return to state that predates an imposition of order, the Kristevan pre-symbolic stage, as well as Finn's struggle to let his animal nature happen.

Such reading of this legend gains even more validity, when a closer analysis of the chase theme is delivered. The deer-goddess was seen as a link between the real world and the Otherworld, a boundary between the world of chaos and order. In one of the poems, the deer-goddess lures Finn to perform a task for her. He has to pursue the deer in order to be granted her favour: "She changed her shape into that of a grey deer and in that shape led Finn to a lake where she when Finn arrived had changed her shape to that of a beautiful girl" (Pettersson 126). In another poem, the deer-goddess is identified as Blai Derg, daughter of a chief mother-goddess Banba: "And Blai Derg from great Banba was mother of the strong oisin. She used to come

hither in the shape of a deer to meet the [*dibergge*] warrior band” (Pettersson 124). The deer-hunt is an extremely common theme in the *Fenian Cycle*. For Finn and the *fianna*, to engage in a deer hunt was to contact the Otherworld and nature. According to Pettersson, Finn’s repeated meetings with a deer may be a form of ritual to confirm his connection to Otherworld and keep leadership over the *fianna* (Pettersson 128). However, in the fragment quoted, Blai Derg is kin to Banba-mother Ireland and the chase after the deer may also signify the chase for kingship in Ireland. Taking this into consideration, Blai Derg the deer-goddess is a personification of Ireland, hence, seeing deer as yet another Mother motif becomes valid and reinforces the mythological strength of this symbol.

What is even more interesting is the fact that the male heroes lose their attachment to society’s order when engaged in the chase. In the poem in which Blai Derg comes to visit the warriors, the war-band is referred to as *dibergge* and not *fiana*. As Pettersson explains, *Fianas* was the general term to describe the training of young men to be warriors. Whereas the *diberga* were social outlaws, desperate men who organized themselves in groups and preyed on the society (Pettersson 31). This means that referring to *fianas* as *dibergge* may not have been accidental, but aimed at emphasizing the transformative role of the deer-chase, where hunters undergo a transformation into predators, thus departing from the world of social order to the world of nature’s chaos.

Heterogeneity of Celtic Women in the World of Men

The dualistic perception did not refer solely to the images associated with goddesses, but the perception also concerned women living in the community. The legends of the *Ulster Cycle* tend to position women within a physical sphere of life and their role is not reduced to an embodiment of a celestial image or a helper to male protagonist. Quite the opposite, in *The Hero-Deeds of CuChulain* women can be portrayed as protagonists, bearing strong position in a society. The setting of the *Ulster Cycle* is built around the community’s life. Thus, it supports the idea that in the Ulster tradition the images of women were more concerned with women’s social roles, rather than their cultic roles. In this respect, the *Ulster Cycle* is different from the *Fenian Cycle*, for the events in the latter tend to take place *outdoors*, whereas the *Ulster Cycle* is more *indoors*, in the court of Queen Meave, on a physical sphere outside the link with the Otherworld.

The events in the *Ulster Cycle* are framed within a political conflict between the four provinces of Ireland and the people of Ulster. In this cycle, the four provinces strive to conquer Ulster in order to unite Ireland. Yet, the North, represented by the hero CuChulain, opposes the conquest attempt, which signifies that the North is a separatist force striving to leave Ireland fragmented. On a symbolic level, the conflict implies a struggle between powers of a greater celestial order. In this perspective, the conflict between Queen Meave and CuChulain is a metaphor to war between the male-North and the female-South. In the political and gender conflict that unfolds in *The Hero-Deeds of CuChulain*, women, represented by Queen Meave, are depicted in the situation where they dominate Celtic social structures. In this narrative, women are portrayed in a male role as rulers of a patriarchal society. However, though they contribute to the development of a social order, they ultimately fail in their role as supporters of this order due to the fact that Queen Meave is unable to break her attachment with the realm of chaos. The dualistic perception of Meave leads to her being depicted as a wicked character and, in result, the number of her adversaries and conflicts around her gradually grows. She represents order tainted by chaos, something that was perceived as unnatural. Meave exists between chaos and order, but these categories were disallowed to intermingle and neither of them was to dominate the other. The binaries had to remain separated, which is the reason why Meave is doomed to fail in her struggles. In this respect, *The Hero-Deeds of CuChulain* holds a twofold function; on the one hand, it points to a cultic significance of a gender division while, on the other, it reveals how the movement from order to chaos progresses.

The first part of *The Hero-Deeds of CuChulain* embarks on emphasizing a high status of Queen Meave in relation to a patriarchal order. Thus, it aims at positioning the queen on the order side in the binary. The *Pillow-Talk* begins with a quarrel between King Ailill and Queen Meave. The fragment is set in a royal bedroom where the monarchs discuss the issue of primacy in kingship over the four provinces. King Ailill feels that his position as a male ruler of the South is endangered by Meave's expansionist policy. In this tale, Meave emerges as an able leader, the main decision maker in the country, whereas Ailill appears to be a puppet king subjected to the will of Queen Meave. The status that Meave holds within a patriarchal society is, indeed, very unusual. She acts quite independently from the men's will, yet, she does not depart from the social order, but functions within the set boundaries as a rightful ruler of her people. This makes

her position quite secure within the accepted norm, for she cannot be perceived as a deviant from the social order.

Queen Meave dominates the male order, but, at the same time, maintains her independent status both as woman and leader of the Celtic society. Even though Meave is a woman, she succeeds in governing within boundaries of a set patriarchal custom, which is a primary source for the dualistic perception of the queen. In a way, Meave's position is a reminiscence of matriarchy, yet, the events in *The Hero-Deeds of CuChulain* take place after matriarchate, at the time when the Celts subjected themselves to patriarchal authorities. However, Queen Meave does not attempt to resurrect the old system, but sets an example for Celtic women through her ability to dominate within the male order. Therefore, the queen cannot be banished from the community on the grounds that she acts against society, which is the reason why Ailill has to refer to customary law in order to regain his position. Yet, the king fails in his attempt to acquire authority over Meave and reinstall patriarchy in their relationship. By referring to the Celtic law, in which the status of a woman in marriage was depended on the amount of goods she contributed into a household, Ailill tries to retrieve his male domination in the relationship claiming that he contributed more than Meave. He says to the queen "you are better off today than when I married you" (Foss 103). This quote suggests that only thanks to Ailill was Meave able to gain the position that she presently holds, to which the queen replies "I had wealth enough before I married you" (Foss 103).

Since King Ailill cannot become the true leader of his people, he has to assume the subservient position, while Meave strengthens her claim even further by stating that she belongs to a royal lineage, saying that "[her] father [is] the High-king of Ireland. . .I was great-hearted and generous and bold in battle. Fifteen hundred soldiers were in my pay. . .I was my own woman" (Foss 103). In reality, Meave's position was initially stronger than that of Ailill. She belonged to the royal breed and it was due to her that Ailill elevated his social status. Meave was the one that made demands on males and not the other way round. In the eyes of law, she owned Ailill as a person. "Whoever brings shame and confusion upon you, the compensation is mine, for you are a kept man" (Foss 104). Through this fragment, it becomes clear that Ailill's status was similar to that of a slave. If he was hurt or offended, the queen was responsible for satisfaction. In result, she was the one that collected compensation for harm made to Ailill's honour.

Meave's place in the royal marriage shook not only a king's position, but also the very structures of a patriarchal order. Other Irish rulers felt anxious about Meave's status and even Ailill says that he "never heard of a province ruled by a woman except this one" (Foss 104), stating that Meave's position was not perceived as a norm. The measure of male authority and power over social structures was embodied in "the great bull Finnebennach, the White-horned" (Foss 105), which refused to subject to Queen Meave's rule. The text does not state that openly, but the bull may symbolize the capacity to organize and bring order to the society. Since men are linked with order, they possess a "natural" right to govern the community, whereas the queen is closer to nature and chaos. For this reason, Meave is forced to gain her own bull in order to authorize her rule. Otherwise, Meave's feminine link with chaos could be revealed, which, in turn, may lead to her banishment from the community. The defenders of patriarchy, including Ailill, urge Meave to prove herself and force her to go on a quest to gain "The Brown Bull of Cooley" (Foss 105), a symbol that is capable of securing Meave's rule as a woman within the patriarchal structure. Yet, it was unusual to send a woman on a quest, for conventionally, in Fenian and Ulster traditions, it was a male hero who performed such tasks. Still, carrying out quests bore symbolic-ritual significance in Celtic literature.

The quest that Meave is urged to perform is a trap, for regardless of its outcome she will be assimilated into the rule of patriarchy. Through this manipulation, Meave emerges as a tragic figure that is denied a right to a dualistic identity and is forced to fit into the symbolic order, to perform in a male role. In this quest, the Bull represents the territory of Ulster and Meave is forced to conquer Ulster for the sake of the four provinces. The quest demands Meave to assume a typically male role of an army general and lead a full scale military campaign. Meave is designated to perform a task typically reserved for men, and has to acquire qualities expected of a male champion in order to succeed in her goal. The aptitude that Meave possesses in imposing her rule inside patriarchal structures suggests that she already bears certain male qualities. Still, Meave manages to retain feminine aspects of her identity, which is visible in depicting her as an opposing force to patriarchal order of Ailill, so that Meave's heterogeneity and dualistic perception are the major sources of conflict between herself and her husband. Ailill aims at solving the problem by forcing Meave on a quest during which she will perform a constant male role, abandon her dualistic perception and fit into more homogenous identity within a social structure.

Yet, a slightly different reading of Meave's quest is also possible, one that would near the queen more to a feminine aspect of her identity. In the Fenian tradition, a bull, along with a boar and hound, is synonymous to male warrior. In Celtic legends, names of warriors often hold a prefix *Cu*, as in CuChulain, which can be translated as a hound or a bull. Hence, the Brown Bull may signify the source of men's status in the community acquired through their role as soldiers in the Celtic army. In addition, not only is the Bull a phallic symbol that accounts for males' domination over females, but it is also a marker of difference between men and women, the norm and *the Other*. Since Meave embarks on a quest to conquer the Bull, she might as well be striving to remove it. Accordingly, the removal of a difference between the sexes, symbolized by the Bull, could lead to disappearance of a division between male and female roles, thus unifying the sexes. This interpretation gains on validity, if we look at the attempts Meave makes in order to win the Bull. She offers her body to Daire, the Brown Bull's beholder, which is a metaphor to women's use of sexuality when trying to seduce men. Nevertheless, since Meave's attempt to use her body in winning the Bull ends in a failure, she has to depend on the male force represented by the army. In this respect, Meave can be perceived both as a witty leader and a protagonist who manipulates men to achieve her personal goals.

The image of the queen using men for her case resembles the images of the goddesses in the *Fenian Cycle*, particularly the images in which they are depicted as manipulators and seductresses. As a result, the initially perceived heterogeneity of Meave may only be superficial, a kind of mask that she assumes to enact upon a male order. In reality, she may be striving to revive matriarchy to its full rights. Through such an interpretation of the quest, Meave is associated with semiotics, a female order counter to a male order but, at the same time, existing within symbolic structures.

In the second part of *The Hero-Deeds of CuChulain, the Rising of the Men of Connacht*, Meave gathers her army and calls for war against Ulster. In this part, Meave no longer acts as the main character of the narrative and her role as a protagonist is taken over by CuChulain. In result, Meave becomes an antagonist fighting the hero of the cycle. She abandons her male role by invoking feminine aspects of her identity, which is visible when she attempts to reinstall her bond with nature and uses magic to foretell the outcome of the battle. She consults the druid who takes her *outdoors*, to the boundary between the Otherworld and the real world. During this trip, a dream vision unfolds in which Meave meets a young girl with a harp named Fedlem. The girl

inhabits *shee-sid*, which was the dwelling place of Otherworld beings. Fedlem foretells Meave a great loss in a battle against Ulster.

Apparently, Fedlem can be connected with a goddess in a human form and the fact she foretold Meave the defeat reveals the general attitude of the goddesses towards the queen and her goals. Earlier in the tale, Meave departs from a feminine part of her identity, which prompts the goddesses to turn their back on Meave and her struggles. Meave is torn between her performance of a male role and her primary gender, for which she is punished and loses the divine favour. In terms of a celestial order, to detach oneself from an attributed gender role and assume the opposite category was perceived as unnatural. Therefore, Meave's attempt to dissolve the sexual opposition was seen as harmful to the natural balance of binaries and had to be punished. The goddesses despise Meave's unifying capacity and choose to support a male champion so that the balance could be restored. Only when the favour of the goddesses passes upon CuChulain does he succeed in performing a symbolic ritual. "Then Cuchulain made a hoop of an oak sapling, and cut a message in Ogham on it. He forced the hoop over the pillar-stone, as a warning and challenge to the men of Ireland" (Foss 110). Cuchulainn produces a hoop for a pillar-stone and inscribes it with ogham. These activities betoken a ritual performance and the hoop is not solely an object, but to go through a hoop is an idiomatic expression of undergoing a rigorous trial or examination. CuChulain succeeds in the trial-ritual to which he is designated by the goddesses and the divine favour is his prize.

CuChulain has a twofold role in the narrative, for he represents the people of Ulster, but also the male order of the North. He refuses to subject Ulster to the will of Queen Meave and the female-South fails to unite Ireland under one system largely due to CuChulain and his anti-unification efforts. CuChulain stands for the fragmentation of categories. Since his quest protects the cosmological order, CuChulain is granted extraordinary strength to stand alone against army of the South. In *The Hero-Deeds of CuChulain*, CuChulain is depicted as a positive character and it is suggested that he symbolizes the patriarchal norm. He is also the defender of a divine order and anyone who opposes him has to die. Nevertheless, even CuChulain departs from his image as the defender of celestial order and moves towards the opposite extreme. His new goal is to enforce total male authority over females and CuChulain himself embarks on a quest to distort the balance between binaries. Thus, the goddesses lose control over CuChulain who deviates from his initial role. From that moment, CuChulain takes on negative attributes and starts to be

portrayed as a barbarian only interested in manslaughter, a character against the social order, and the divine favour has to be taken aback from him. In one of the last fragments, the *Alarms and Deadly Excursions*, Meave offers CuChulain a truce, but his demands are totally unacceptable to her. “In virtue of my power, and in the name of those I have slain, I will accept no less than every woman and every milch cow of the men of Ireland” (Foss 120). In Celtic legends, a milch cow bears resemblance to women in their maternal role and their role as providers of food, which suggests that the actual demand made by CuChulain should be interpreted as a complete patriarchal domination over women.

The goddesses notice that their efforts to restore the balance are futile, because the binary categories are already distorted. Therefore, they allow the conflict to wage on, counting on the purifying effect of the bloodshed from which a new order can emerge. This is the reason why the Bull, the source of conflict, is sent away by a war-goddess Morrigan. “So the Brown Bull went, with his fifty heifers, to Sliab Culinn in the north, though the strongest man would be hard put to catch him” (Foss 119). When the source of conflict is removed from the scene, the fighting sides forget what they were fighting about and, since the initial goal of Meave’s struggle disappears, a total chaos overwhelms both sides of the conflict.

Accordingly, from the time the Bull is removed, both Meave and CuChulain start to be portrayed as characters whose moral values deteriorate. Meave uses her own body and the body of her daughter Finnabair to seduce CuChulain’s foster brother to fight against him. Apparently, Finnabair, even though she is Meave’s daughter, is a victim of her mother’s oppressive ideology. Meave’s politics no longer serve the community, not even women’s interests, but only her own expansionist ideas. Hence, Meave acts against a celestial as well as a social order. In the same fashion, CuChulain ceases to be a divine champion and starts to represent barbaric brutality. He begins to kill for pleasure and even slays his kin Ferdiad, which is perceived as an ultimate crime against the order. The goddesses not only turn their back on CuChulain, but also fight against him. It comes to no surprise that during his struggle with a war-goddess Morrigan, CuChulain is wounded and forced to retreat from the battle.

The war between the North and the South continues and none of the sides represent what it did in the beginning. The goddesses observe the conflict and only when the Bull is killed can a new order emerge. In this new world, the binaries are returned into balance and the idea of mutual coexistence of opposite qualities is reintroduced. Meave and CuChulain agree on an

armistice between the North and the South, and Ireland is granted a new order where the binaries remain intact.

Women Within and Beyond the Binary Perspective

The Fate of Children of Lir is yet another legend in which women can be positioned in the binary perspective. It gives us an insight into the perception of women in the postwar Celtic order that emerged after the conflict between the North and the South. In this narrative, women are seen guarantors of the alliance between the two struggling sides. Such an understanding links women with peace and well-being of the community achieved through a successful marriage with a leader of the opposing side, which marriage allowed women to influence men and secure the order of a society. Furthermore, women also held a healing capacity and could bring comfort to the sorrows of their husbands. However, women's role as bringers of order contradicts their perception as a part of nature and chaos and, indeed, the image associating females with a social order is superficial, for, in reality, they act for the benefit of the community only when they submit themselves to the males' will. Thus, the women's role in securing the alliance also positions them into a subordinate role of a prize or a gift to a noble leader. Women continue to be perceived as a part of chaos, yet, they can be "saved" from this negative image whenever they submit themselves to the conditioning of the male order. In result, the first part of the narrative attempts to divulge the subservient role that each woman was conventionally expected to perform as well as the process during which this traditional role deteriorates and woman is forced to rebel against the patriarchal norm

Considering the setting of the legend, *The Fate of Children of Lir* is a counterpart of *The Hero-Deeds of CuChulain* and its content dovetails nicely with the events that take place at the court of Queen Meave. The children of King Ailill and Queen Meave appear as the main characters in the narrative. Furthermore, *The Fate of Children of Lir* is set in a postwar Ireland, where all five provinces finally become united. The past conflict, which is not closely described, can be paralleled with the war between the North and the South in *The Hero-Deeds of CuChulain*. In this respect, the historical moment of the narrative can be set in a new order that emerged after the divine balance between chaos and order is restored. In the new Celtic order that emerged, Bodb Derg arises as its leader and the nobles of five provinces choose him to

become their king. However, one of the nobles, Lir, does not seem content with this choice and Ireland is again on the brink of a new conflict. The king does not wish to risk another war and offers Lir one of his foster daughters as a wife “I have here with me the three girls of the best shape, and the best appearance, and the best name in all Ireland: that is to say my own dear foster-children Eve, Eva and Alva, the daughters of Ailill of Aran” (Foss 49). Through this offer, Lir’s claim to become a king will be partly fulfilled, for his children, linked via his wife to a dynastic lineage, will have a chance to make claims for the throne of Ireland in the future. Thus, Lir gladly accepts the offer.

Clearly, in this narrative, women are positioned in the subordinate role to men, even though they act for the benefit of the community. This positioning can also be paralleled with the role of Finnabair in the *Alarms and Deadly Excursions*. As was the case with Finnabair, the king’s daughters are denied their right to decide over their fate and are forced to submit to wishes of their father. The king’s treatment of his daughters bears traces of patronizing structures that are present in the postwar Celtic order, which structures lead to reaffirmation of a patriarchal dominance in the community. Apparently, the postwar celestial balance that is brought about in *The Fate of Children of Lir* means the revival of patriarchy and male authority. Women’s role was reduced to carrying out the wishes of patriarchal authorities, whereas the male dominated society strived to condition women to the accepted rule and assimilate them better to the governing doctrine. The first sacrifice that such social conditioning demanded from a woman was lack of one’s opinion and obedience to males’ desires, and when Lir arrives to choose his wife, he sees that “the three daughters of Ailill were sitting in the hall, as quiet as you please” (Foss 50). In this fragment, the mention of a quiet disposition of the daughters is the only comment made in reference to their virtues. No sophisticated description of the girls’ beauty appears, such as the reader might conventionally expect when a nobleman arrives to choose his wife. Instead, quietness is the quality desired by Lir and such trait betokens that a future wife will more easily yield to the husband’s dominance. Lir is not really interested in physical appearances, but in someone who “is the oldest is the noblest and the best for me” (Foss 50). Lir plans to place his wife into a subordinate position in the relationship, which is the reason why he is interested in the extent to which his future wife can agree with her familial and maternal role.

Usually, older women were seen as more reasonable and better prepared to follow imposed rules. Eve’s acquaintance with the symbolic structure and her subservience to the rule

guide Lir's choice of the eldest sister. Through his marriage with Eve, Lir re-establishes himself as a patriarch in the social structure. Hence, Lir silences his wife by forcing her into roles of both child bearer and household keeper. In the dualistic perspective, Eve can be positioned on the order side in the binary, as she represents a submissive woman that suppressed chaotic aspects lying within her and only through Eve's passivity is the security of a male position established. "In good time Eve gave birth to two children, a daughter and a son, whose names were Finnola and Aed. Then she was brought to bed again with two sons, Fichra and Conn. But she herself died in this childbirth, to the grief of Lir" (Foss 50). Eve managed to fulfil her role in securing dynastic lineage, but since she died during the delivery, the alliance between the king and Lir is shattered, an alliance which Bodb Derg wishes to reaffirm through marriage with his second daughter Eva.

Eva develops her dualistic perception that follows her rebellion against being seen as subordinate to the male rule. Eva's position in a social hierarchy is secured when she becomes Lir's second wife. She was given all the duties expected of a woman to perform. However, she was disallowed to have children with Lir, for this would open a second line in the dynastic lineage and jeopardize claims made by the children of Eve. Another civil war could not be risked and Eva had to be negated her primary role as a bearer of children. Eva rebels against the system that, unfairly, denies her the possibility to function as a rightful member of the Celtic society. Eva plans to remove Eve's children from the court and her motivation does not derive, as it is suggested in the text, from jealousy, but from her aspiration to acquire the deserved status of Lir's legitimate wife.

Eva abandons the boundaries of a social order and moves towards chaos. She sets up a conspiracy to get rid of the children. Yet, she is not prepared to take the guilt for the murder. It is up to men to carry out the physical act of killing and she urges the royal guardians to do it. "Kill now the children of Lir, who have displaced my love in their father's breast" (Foss 51). The guardians, however, reject to rebel against the system and turn against Eva and her conspiracy. Eva is left alone in her fight to regain woman's rightful position within the patriarchal structure. She decides to abandon the rules of a social order that she followed and re-establishes her link with magical forces of nature, the female part of her identity. Eva uses magic and casts a spell upon the children, turning them into swans. At the moment of casting the spell, Finnola calls Eva

a witch, which emphasizes Eva's new status as an outcast. She is cursed to live as a witch, outside the structures of community, *outdoors* within nature.

Again, as was the case in *The Hero-Deeds of CuChulain*, the gap between the genders opens and the new conflict arises. All the women in the narrative, including Finnola and Eva, move into the realm of chaos, whereas the union between men and women living under one system ceases to exist. Furthermore, turning children into swans bears a symbolic meaning that signifies Eva's activation of animal aspects of the children's nature. She petrifies her sister's children to live outside the community, which is Eva's reply to the system that had treated her unfairly. As a punishment for her crime, Bodb Derg turns Eva into wind and forces her to live as nature's elemental. This punishment reaffirms Eva's new status, for she is, both symbolically and physically, expelled from the society. Apparently, among the Celts, women were seen as the source of all problems and often acted against the order and the chaotic identity of women could only be changed through their conditioning and assimilation into the system. In *The Fate of Children of Lir*, Eva is depicted as a wicked character, a woman gone mad. Her actions are seen as irrational and bring turmoil upon community. Yet, as was mentioned previously, both her actions and her motivations can be logically explained and the fact that she is seen as irrational originates from her being perceived as a deviant from the male norm. Still, Eva is portrayed as evil and she is the antagonist in the story. Her attempt to break patriarchal structures is perceived as a crime against the community.

In reality, it was this dualistic perception that characterized the overall attitude of men towards women and the perception itself reflected the general Celtic belief in balance between chaos and order. Even at her worst time, Eva is not entirely depicted as a negative character. She does not kill children, but petrifies them. In addition, she shows mercy and grants them what was thought to distinguish humanity from animals, namely voice and reason. The children do not completely lose their link with social structures, but are given the chance to be brought back into the community. Furthermore, Eva feels guilty and pities the sorrow of her husband. "The heart of Lir, that man of many victories, is now no more than a husk of death. His groaning will be a sickness to me, though it is I who have done this treacherous act" (Foss 52). Therefore, the overall image of a woman that emerges is not homogenous, but embraces the dualistic perception.

In the second fragment of the legend, Finnola speaks with the passersby and constantly reminds the children about their human nature. Apparently, she strives to retrieve the balance between symbolic and semiotic, unite the sexes back under one system. Finnola assumes the role of a protagonist and her siblings' guide in the world of nature, where the children are forced to live as swans. Since Finnola is the only woman in the group, she is the closest to the sphere of semiotics and, therefore, bears a natural link with magic and chaos. Finnola makes use of what was left to her by Eva and utilizes her voice to lure the passersby. Through her songs, she manages to sustain her connection with society and only thanks to Finnola's voice neither of the children moves entirely to the side of chaos.

There are two images which are utilized in the person of Finnola and reveal yet another level of dualistic perception of Celtic women. While being under spell, in the world of semiotic, Finnola attempts to bring order and chaos into balance. However, she is also recognized as a Mother and a goddess, roles typically associated with women in the divine sphere of chaos. Paradoxically, through her struggle to return to human order, Finnola rediscovers the feminine part of her identity. In her role as a seductress to passersby, Finnola is a reminiscence of a goddess image from the *Fenian Cycle*, even though she does not actually manipulate men to perform tasks for her. Finnola also acts like a mother to her siblings and secures their survival in the world of nature. "Finnola, on the Rock of the Seals, waited often in fear for the calm day and rising sun to bring her dear brothers into safety, back under the feathers of her breast" (Foss 54). Thus, Finnola resembles women in their maternal role and assumes the qualities visible in the Mother image.

Finnola functions in between the binary chaos-order and manages to surpass the conventional binary division. Although the way she is presented echoes more positively than Eva's description, Finnola remains aside the male order and strives to unify the celestial categories by bringing them back to balance. Eva's revenge upon the male order was to petrify the semiotic, represented by Finnola, and to move it into the sphere of chaos. The state of being under spell signifies that the gap between symbolic and semiotic is still open. In result, traces of a gender conflict, between male and female aspects, as well as the political conflict between the North and the South can be found. These two conflicts are not necessarily two separate struggles, for, as was mentioned previously, the North is often associated with males, whereas the South with females. Before the spell is cast upon the children, Finnola asks Eva about the length of it

and Eva replies “three hundred years in the west, between Erris and the Isle of Glora-all these are to be your journeys. And your time of enchantment shall not end till the prince of the North weds the woman of the South” (Foss 51). In Celtic legends, the number three had a symbolic meaning signifying finalization of some cycle and the children are forced to wait three hundred years, the full cycle, for Ireland to be united again. When this happens, the male North (Ulster) will remarry the female South (the four provinces) and only then shall the celestial order be restored. In this respect, the union of the country is equalled to the gender union. Hence, uniting the country may be perceived symbolically as a sexual intercourse, and only by uniting male and female symbols can the new order emerge. In order to retrieve the celestial balance and end the conflict, Finnola has to abandon her unifying capacity and accept the male rule. She represses the chaotic part in her dualistic perception and submits herself to the rule of an organized structure. This is the sacrifice that Finnola has to make for the celestial order to be reinstalled. In addition, the act of sacrifice passes symbolically upon all women and forces them to re-enact it in order to remain within the social structure.

When the cycle of the spell is about to end, the children decide to fly back to their father’s home. When they arrive, it occurs to them that the conflict is still waged on, for what they saw was “a broken house, without a chief, without women, without hounds for hunting” (Foss 56). In this fragment, women, along with warriors and the leader, are enumerated as a crucial element for a house, metaphor to the community’s structure, to function properly. After seeing the house, the children embark on reintroducing union to the society, but first they have to reinstall themselves into the community and accept the order. As swans, the children were free to move from place to place and exist in nature. Yet, they decide to abandon their freedom and order a blacksmith Kemoc to chain their legs, an act that symbolizes the denial of chaos and acceptance of a social order and rules. Only when they are enchained can the children cease to represent the flux of nature. Instead, they settle down and agree to the rules society imposes upon them. In this respect, the order is re-established and the first phase of reintroducing the union is complete.

The enchainment is followed by Finnola’s song, which enchants the woman from the South, Decca, and urges her to marry the prince of the North. Through this marriage, the political and gender union is re-established, and the celestial balance is restored. Still, the new order that emerges is different from all the others that existed previously, for now it is based upon the rule

of Church and Christian doctrine. Finnola decides to submit herself to this new ideology and patriarchal structure. In addition, she is forced to abolish her connection with nature and paganism. In order for the new institution to work, she has to deny her link with semiotics as well as the images of a goddess and Mother. Still, Finnola is prepared to commit herself to the new rule as long as the conflict is avoided. Finnola becomes a martyr for the social order, the moment she sacrifices the chaotic aspect of her identity and urges to be baptized into the new system. Only when Finnola accepts the new order is she allowed to abandon her swan form and die. Therefore, though Finnola brings back the balance, acting almost like a goddess, it is the Christian faith that sets itself as a ruling force in the new Celtic community.

The image of a woman embodied by Finnola is, simultaneously, the most complex, but also the most complete one. On the one hand, it points to the natural link between women and nature, which link clearly sets women on the chaos side in the binary perspective. Yet, through the association made between women and nature, women are capable of overcoming the binary positioning. Thus, the importance of a female role in restructuring the tainted order and unifying the binary is emphasized. In this perspective, chaos equals the progressive change and normalizing tool, so whenever the balance between social order and nature's chaos is distorted, it is the realm of chaos, represented by women, that takes advantage of the situation and restores the balance. Since women can be seen as bringers of a balance or greater order, they assume the qualities associated with the Mother image and begin to represent the greater celestial order, the cosmos beyond the binary division.

In the historical context, Finnola stands for the image that fluctuates between the realms of order and chaos. She represents the everlasting movement between the binary categories, the movement that is also visible in pagan religion, which a system of beliefs that supports humanity's struggle with nature, but, at the same time, worships nature as an integral part of the social order. In this respect, women's perception in the Celtic community parallels the perception of nature. Though women were subjected to patriarchal dominance, they were never disrespected by the male authorities. Hence, they managed to retain a high degree of autonomy in social spheres not concerned with war. As was the case with Finnola, the readiness to assume a subservient role did not derive from women's weakness in coping with the oppressive ideology, but from the fact that women were prepared to sacrifice their will and follow the patriarchal doctrine for the sake of community's well-being.

CONCLUSION

In Celtic mythology, the images of women were often associated with chaos. However, women were also crucial for the order of community to prevail, so their perception had to embrace both sides of the binary. Women's simultaneous existence in the world of chaos and order contributed to their dualistic perception in the patriarchal society and, since women were seen as a part of nature, their "chaotic" intentions had to be repressed by the community. However, though Celtic culture was a male-dominated, war-oriented culture, women held a strong social position in relation to men, a position that was exceptional in comparison to other societies of the Ancient period. According to Pettersson, even Greek and Roman writers admired a considerably high status of Celtic women (Pettersson 120). The explanation for the paradox between women's high social status and their submissive position in terms of law, material culture and literature lies in the cultic significance of the image of a woman as well as the role that this image had in sustaining the ideology of the pagan Celtic community.

The analysis of the Fenian and Ulster traditions make visible that the perception of women was not homogenous. On the contrary, the qualities personified by them belonged to both spheres within chaos and order, and the images associated with women were not confined to one particular perception, but appeared in a multilayered environment of a Celtic legend. However, in Celtic philosophy, which grasped the reality as dual and categorized the world into nature and social structure, women embodied the chaotic side of the celestial binary. Both in Celtic society and mythology, the natural tendency in the perception of women was the one linking them with chaos, flux and nature, qualities that opposed the ones associated with males. Indeed, the men's role in the binary was more often linked with structuring, rules and organization.

However, men were not seen as representing the better side of a celestial order and the attributes linked with men were not the ones that contributed to the general well-being of the Celtic community. The role of men was to assume a position that was imposed on them by their gender and, since men did not influence the choice of gender, the categories positive-negative were not taken into account. As a result, the image imposed upon women was not a negative one. The understanding of women as bringers of chaos was simply seen as the other side of the celestial order, in which both parts were needed for the universal balance to last. The balance

between chaos and order was crucial for the world to prevail; the divine equilibrium never really ceased to exist. Whenever chaos or order attempted to take over the other side of binary, it was up to the goddesses to bring things back to normal. In such cases, they caused the universe to pause and used their power of a Mother to bring everything back to the beginning. In addition, if a distortion appeared in the balance between chaos and order, this distortion was deemed to end in the course of a purifying conflict between binary oppositions. Hence, the goddesses were not only part of chaos, but acted as guarantors of the balance and the greater order. Women's role as guarantors functioned not only on a mythological level. This image can also be linked with the social perception of women, exemplified by the status of Badb Derg's daughters in securing their father's alliance. As a result, the images of women indicate a heterogeneous identity, between chaos and order, as well as the dualistic perception prevalent in Celtic community.

Furthermore, woman's ability to return to the beginning was seen as a hidden link between woman and the greater order, which was expressed in a powerful image of woman as a force of nature and the Mother. Through these images, women were able to embrace the whole range of identities imposed on them by the patriarchal order and, in turn, create their own self on the basis of models present in mythology. Therefore, in their most ancient image reflected in a Mother motif, women were innately beyond the category and identity, were capable of crossing the boundary between chaos and order. The image of a Mother indicated unity of binaries as well as a unifying capacity and these qualities were passed upon women as members of the community. Women's link with the Mother motif made them being perceived aside from conventional categories, beyond ordinary dualism, and allowed them to embrace a perception that recognized women as an embodiment of the celestial balance itself.

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