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AUDRONĖ GEDŽIŪTĖ

FEMALE PROJECTION IN THE MYTHOPOETICS OF DEATH AS
REFLECTED IN CELTIC MYTHICAL STORIES, FOLKTALES AND LATE
MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

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VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETAS

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MOTERIŠKASIS MIRTIES MITOPOETIKOS PRADAS IR JO RAIŠKA
KELTŲ MITINĖSE SAKMĖSE, PASAKOSE BEI VĒLYVŪJŲ VIDURAMŖIŲ
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INTRODUCTION

Myth is a multifaceted phenomenon that raises many scholarly debates regarding its nature, structure, functioning and interaction with other discourses. Mythical discourse may embrace various texts: mythical narratives, divine figures, superstition, rituals, etc., which are all targeted at the solution of ontological problems. Mythical perspective may enter new systems of significance when no longer religiously functional, yet this transformation affects the mythical material since new systems of significance have their own requirements for message encoding.

Folklore is considered to be the most immediate discourse to myth as both are based on oral tradition of a particular community. Nevertheless, the progress of society encourages engendering new narrative genres which, in the early stage of their development, are highly based on myth and folklore as the nourishing sources in both images and themes. Hence, the systematic study of the mythical worldview of a particular community should embrace all the types of discourse whose interaction might reveal the mentality of a certain community and the tendencies of its modifications in the course of time.

The present research focuses on the study of Celtic mythopoeics of death. The **object** of the research is the whole system of images that constitute the Celtic vision of death and afterlife as it is assumed that only a systematic approach can sufficiently reveal the Celtic mythical perspective which features high integrity of its constituent parts. Moreover, the exploration of the mythical complex helps to better illustrate its transfer into other genres and distinguish the tendencies of the transformations that occur. Therefore, it might encourage further studies of the construction of cultural texts with special regard to the mythical substratum.

The **aim** of the thesis is to estimate the degree and mode of transformation of the female element encoded in the Celtic mythopoeics of death as reflected in

the narrative discourse represented by a mythical story, folktale, and late Medieval literary genres.

For the aim of the thesis to be achieved the following **tasks** have been set out:

- to approach the structure of culture and the interaction of its constituents from the semiotic perspective;

- to discuss the semiotic processes of meaning generation and their role in the formation of various narrative texts;

- to designate the constituents of Celtic mythopoetics of death;

- to analyse the mythical stories from the mentioned perspective;

- to find out the presence/absence of the mythical models' modifications in folktales;

- to describe the similarities and differences with regard to the original Celtic mythopoetic models of death and their reflections in late Medieval literature.

The thesis demonstrates **novelty** in several aspects. First of all, it is a study which approaches the concept of liminality from the mythical perspective and thus supplements the discussion of ritual liminality with an additional dimension that may encourage further studies of other cultural systems. Secondly, the analysis is targeted at the exploration of the entire system of images forming Celtic mythopoetics of death rather than restricting the discussion to its separate part. Finally, the thesis offers a systematic study of three closely interrelated types of narrative discourse: myth, folklore and literature. Since many researchers so far have centered on the similarities and differences between mythical stories and folktales, myth and literature, folktale and literature, the given thesis is expected to provide the analysis of the mythopoetic movement from a mythical story to a folktale and to late Medieval literature. Such perspective allows to better lay down the principles that govern each genre and define the models revealing whether these principles were transferred or not into other types of narrative texts.

Moreover, the present work is a significant contribution to the field of Celtic studies in Lithuania as there has been no extensive research carried out on the mentioned subject.

The thesis relies on the following **assumptions**:

1. Every narrative text is a cultural text that has inherent cultural values thus depicting the view of a particular community. Each type of the text has its own narrative techniques that operate as accumulative mechanisms to store the common knowledge and manifest it.

2. Celtic mythical perspective holds a high degree of integrity which does not allow a separation of certain elements without distorting the entire structure. The figure of the goddess is the central axis of the Celtic mythopoeics of death which forms mythemes with other mythical elements: the horse, the bird, the male, the spirit.

3. When entering other types of narrative texts, such as folktales, the semantic nuclei that form certain mythical motifs get loose and allow the attachment of additional cultural elements.

4. In comparison with the mythical stories and folktales, late Medieval literary genres have the most flexible symbolic structure and they are most susceptible to the impact of the socio-cultural environment.

The thesis is based on the interdisciplinary approach embracing mythology, folklore and literary studies. It consists of an introduction, five chapters, conclusions, the list of sources and the list of references. The first chapter, *Theoretical Background of the Research*, surveys the research on the given perspective carried out so far both in Lithuania and worldwide. It also justifies the selection of the material for the present research and elucidates the most significant technical methodological terms applied in the paper. The second chapter, *Semiotic Perspective on Culture*, is devoted to the layout of the fundamental methodological principles that form the framework for the practical analysis. It examines the structure of culture and the interaction of its constituents

following Yuriy Lotman's ideas. The discussion of the production of cultural texts and the main organizational principles operating in the process of meaning generation are based on Algirdas Julius Greimas's method. The third chapter, *Celtic Mythopoetic Models of Death*, describes the modulations of the mythopoetic elements. The fourth chapter, *Reflections of Celtic Mythical Models of Death in Folklore*, compares the Celtic models of the mythopoetics of death established in the mythical stories and their modified or non-modified reflections in folktales. The fifth chapter, *Adaptation of the Celtic Mythopoetic Models of Death in Late Medieval Literary Tradition*, attempts to throw light on how the ancient mythemes were adapted in Medieval literature and what possible patterns might have been borrowed from the oral folk tradition.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

The idea of the research was inspired by the attempts of Algirdas Julius Greimas (1917–1992) to semiotically reconstruct some parts of Lithuanian mythical tradition in his works *Apie dievus ir žmones: lietuvių mitologijos studijos* (*Of Gods and Men: Studies in Lithuanian Mythology*) (1979), and *Tautos atminties beieškant* (*In Search of National Memory*) (1990). They encouraged to treat the folklore texts as a part of mythical thought that has already been extinct as such but preserved in the remnants that reside in folk tradition.

The examination of the structure of mythical discourse revealed the complexity of myth. Various scholars have been investigating the functions and organization of myth and thus established myth as a structure of significance that operates in nearly all the domains of human activity (cf. Liszka 1989; O'Connor 2000; Leeming 2003). The multimodality of myth immediately leads to the assumption that it interacts with other parts of culture. Therefore the semiotic framework proposed by Yuriy Lotman (1922–1993) was applied to investigate myth as a cultural construct. The theoretical framework is based on Lotman's articles devoted to the discussion of the issues of culture, myth, language and the like – the most significant ones were translated into Lithuanian and included in the collection of papers titled *Kultūros semiotika* (*Semiotics of Culture*, 2004). Lotman's *The Discrete Text and the Iconic Text: Remarks on the Structure of Narrative* (1975) laid the foundations for the understanding that his theory, though convenient for the description of culture and its constituents, does not help much in the analysis of the peculiarities of expressive devices, i.e., of these models which are considered to be the defining members of a coherent cultural construct. For this reason, the author of the thesis adopts the theory of meaning manifestation formulated by Greimas in his books *Structural Semantics. An Attempt at Method* (1966) and *On Meaning* (1970). It has been assumed that the

Greimassian approach will be beneficial in revealing these particular principles that operate within different cultural systems.

Lotman's theoretical assumptions make it clear that the mythical elements can migrate across various narrative texts. Many scholars have noticed that legends, tales and other folk genres deal with essentially the same material as myth does (Liszka 1989; Palmenfelt 1996; Palmenfelt 2008; Mees 2009). Anna-Leena Siikala writes in the same line of thought and claims that myth can easily cross the generic boundaries and does not necessarily remain encapsulated within the folk tradition (cf. Siikala 2008). Northrop Frye indicates that myth serves as a background for literary genres, whereas Edgar M. Slotkin claims that folklore and literature are strongly inter-dependent types of discourse (cf. Frye 1957, 134f; Slotkin 1983).

The peculiarities of the expression of myth and other narrative genres is based on Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1955), Paul Ricoeur's *The Symbolism of Evil* (1967), Donald Philip Verene's *The Origins of the Philosophy of Symbolic forms. Kant, Hegel, and Cassirer* (2011) and other studies that provide deep insights on symbolism as a governing organizational mechanism of myth and its modifications.

The Celtic studies have received much scholarly attention regarding various aspects. One of the most prominent students of the field is Miranda Green who applies an archeo-mythological method in her investigation. The scholar thoroughly describes the material Celtic heritage and frames its possible interpretations within the vernacular tradition. Her work *The Gods of the Celts* (2011 [1986]) discusses the peculiarities of Celtic religion, the importance of the figure of the Mother-goddess, the association of her cult with the aspects of death and fertility. Green also provides a short overview of the expressive means typical of Celtic art. Her insights on Celtic culture, in turn, are supported by Stephen J. Yeates's study *A Dreaming for the Witches. A Recreation of the Dobunni Primal Myth* (2009) which analyses the geographical directions of Celtic migration, the

possibilities for the intercultural exchange and the reliability of ancient sources about Celts. Bernard Mees's study *Celtic Curses* (2009) analyses the social structure and traditions of Celtic communities through the prism of archaeology and manuscript evidence. The scholar extends the points of cultural changes and the impact of other cultures. John Arnott MacCulloch's work *Celtic Mythology* (1918) and Proinsias MacCana's study under the same title (1968) offer the general characteristics of Celtic culture, major religious aspects and their reflection in the ancient stories found in manuscripts.

Celtic conceptualization of death is discussed in the comparative light by Gregg A. Smith's study *The Function of the Living Dead in Medieval Norse and Celtic Literature. Death and Desire* (2007) which details out the pagan perspective on the structure of the spiritual essence of a human being, and provides illustrations on the activity of the living dead in Germanic and Celtic ancient literary traditions. It should be noted, however, that the practical part of the book mainly deals with the living dead who demonstrate the preservation of the life force even after factual death. His insights are supplemented in the present work by Earl R. Anderson's account on the structure of the spirit in his *Folk-Taxonomies in Early English* (2003). Without any doubt, the validity of the ideas regarding the afterlife perspective is greatly supported by the extensive articles discussing the Celtic conceptualization of death on the basis of linguistic data, literary studies and comparative analysis of cultural information with respect to Celtic branches (Consider the Selected Papers *Представления о смерти. Локализация Иного мира у древних кельтов и германцев* (eds. Kalygin, V.P., Mikhailova, T. A., 2002).

A number of studies are devoted to the exploration of Celtic divinities and their functions. The following works were found beneficial: Marie-Louise Sjoestedt's *Celtic Gods and Heroes* (2000), R. J. Stewart's *Celtic Gods. Celtic Goddesses* (1990), Clare French's *The Celtic Goddess. Great Queen or Demon Witch* (2001), Peter O'Connor's *Beyond the Mist* (2000) and others. Sorita d'Este

and David Rankine's study *Visions of the Cailleach* (2008) is of special importance for the present research as it depicts the figure of Celtic Goddess and her functions found in different Celtic branches. The goddess figure is presented as a prototype of the folklore characters, such as witch and henwife.

Ch. W. MacQuarrie's extensive study *The Biography of the Irish God of the Sea from The Voyage of Bran (700 AD) to Finnegans Wake (1939). The Waves of Manannán* (2004) is one of the rare examples that attempt at the investigation of a diachronic portrayal of some Celtic divinity. The scholar thoroughly depicts the details constituting the picture of the god Manannan in ancient mythical stories and modern literary works. It should also be mentioned that particular elements which are found in Celtic mythopoeics, e.g., the image of the horse, the symbolical number three, the specificity of oral poetical expression, etc. gain scholarly attention, yet there is no coherent study that would embrace the mythopoeic elements representing a particular sphere, such as death, and investigate it in the diachronic light.

The perception of death as a liminal state is built upon Arnold van Gennep's fundamental study *The Rites of Passage* (1960) and his follower Victor Turner's articles *Between and Betwixt: The Liminal Period in the Rites of Passage* (1967) and *Liminality and Communitas* (1969). Both scholars focus on the ritual implementation of liminality almost ignoring the mythical framework. Nevertheless, their works lay out the important factors that should be regarded in the expression of liminality. In his paper *To Lock up Eleusis: A Question of Liminal Space* (2000), Dag Øistein Endsjø views liminality soallely in relation to location within the frame of Classical mythology which is illustrative of the general approach to the concept of liminality. Therefore the present thesis is expected to add additional interpretative lines in the context of the liminal state's perception, as it discusses various representative modes found in a wide mythical narrative heritage.

Karl S. Guthke's study *The Gender of Death. A Cultural History in Art and Literature* (1999) investigates the tendencies of depicting death in various epochs across Europe. The book gives a diachronic perspective of the perception of death: preference of certain visual features, gender, attributes, etc. The author of the book also attempts to offer explanations of the reasons which might have caused the popularity of some feature in a particular area at a particular period of time.

In Lithuania, the conceptualization of death as expressed in folklore was extensively analysed by Radvilė Racėnaitė in her study *Žmogaus likimo ir mirties samprata lietuvių folklore* (*Conception of Fate and Death in Lithuanian Folklore*, 2011). Norbertas Vėlius' study *Chtoniškasis lietuvių mitologijos pasaulis: folklorinio velnio analizė* (*The Chthonic World in Lithuanian Mythology: The Analysis of the Devil as Portrayed in Folklore*, 1987) gives a very detailed picture of the ancient Baltic perception of the chthonic world, as reflected in folktales and fables, whereas his work *Senovės baltų pasaulėžiūra : struktūros bruožai* (*The World Outlook of the Ancient Balts*, 1983) is devoted to the investigation of the ancient Baltic worldview on the grounds of folklore evidence. Vėlius' *Baltų mitologija iš sakalo skrydžio* (*Baltic Mythology from the Flight of a Falcon*, 2012) summarizes the most important aspects of Lithuanian mythology.

Bronislava Kerbelytė has published a number of collections of Lithuanian folktales. Besides, she is a devoted researcher of the poetics and structures of folktales. Her works *Tautosakos poetika* (*Poetics of Folklore*, 2005) and *Lietuvių tautosakos kūriniių prasmės* (*Meanings of Lithuanian Folklore*, 2011) give the outlines of the research of Lithuanian folklore tales and encourages extending the examination of folklore to the mythological plane.

Gintaras Beresnevičius investigated the specificity of the mythical consciousness. He also discussed ancient Celtic culture in the light of comparative religion in his works *Religijų istorijos metmenys* (*Outline of History of Religions*, 1997) and *Religijotyros įvadas* (*Introduction to Religious Studies*, 1997). In his work *Lietuvių religija ir mitologija: sisteminė studija* (*Lithuanian Religion and*

Mythology: Systematic Study, 2004) he explores the possible structure of Baltic pantheon and general beliefs of the pagan Balts.

Lilijana Astra (2012), Rolandas Kregždys (2012), Dainius Razauskas (2012) and many others explore Baltic mythopoetic world. Yet it should be admitted that Lithuanian scholars remain within the field of Baltic mythology. The thesis of Rasa Baranauskienė *Celtic and Scandinavian Language and Cultural Contacts during the Viking Age*, which attempts at finding the links between Celtic and Germanic traditions, seems to be a rare exception since it studies the cultures that are beyond the Baltic area. Therefore, the present study might expand the Lithuanian scholarly horizon by offering a new theme as well as encourage the Lithuanian researchers to enrich the analytical principles by juxtaposing myth, folklore and literature.

The empirical material for the research was chosen by following the discussed theoretical guidelines with regard to the interaction between myth, folklore and literature. It should be made distinct that the ancient stories found in the manuscripts cannot be taken as myths at face value, yet, among all the written sources they stand closest to the original Celtic mythical tradition, and therefore are considered to have retained many original mythical codes, the authenticity of which is confirmed by archeological evidence and linguistic data. In order to avoid confusion with other narrative texts, these stories are referred to as mythical stories throughout the work. The author of the thesis relies on the translations from the Old Irish into English of the mythological cycle, Ulster cycle and Fenian cycle as well as on many other ancient stories provided in the collections *The Celtic Heroic Age. Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales* (CHA), *Early Irish Myths and Sagas* (EIMS) and *Tales of the Elders of Ireland* (TEI) and the Welsh collection *The Mabinogion* (M), the latter containing both Welsh mythical stories and Welsh variants of some knightly romances. The mythical stories represent the period from the 8th to the 14th century and amount to no less than 167 stories.

The folklore data was collected from the first published collections of Celtic folktales. The Celtic renaissance that started in the 19th c. initiated great changes in the national movements when the educated prominent Irish and Scottish people became concerned with the preservation of their folklore heritage. Then the collections of the native tales started to emerge one after another. But the informants hardly knew any other tongue but their native. To some extent, it serves as a guarantee of the Celtic origins of the translated tales.

When selecting the collections of the folktales several criteria were taken into account. The most important one is that priority was given to the translated texts excluding the retold or recreated tales¹. The analysed collections are the first publications of the Celtic tales and first collections as such: the criterion of the publication date was considered in order to avoid repetitiveness, as many later collections included the same tales. Ireland has always kept a close relationship with Scotland, which is not surprising since the Scottish are essentially the progeny of the Irish who came to Scotland around the 4th c. AD and got mixed with the locals.

Due to adverse landscape and their own stubborn character, the Scottish managed to preserve their language and at least some traditions despite the very hostile policy of the English throne. The credit should also be paid to the devoted collectors of the Scottish folklore who realized relatively early that the original tales should not be adapted to the contemporary tastes but rather committed to writing just as they were told. J. F. Campbell, whose collection *Popular Tales of West Highlands* (1860) in four volumes remains without competition one of the most prominent monuments of Celtic folklore, is said to have been especially strict concerning the matter of accuracy. By all means, his demands were not

¹ It should be acknowledged, however, that there is but one exception, namely *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales* (1918) edited by W. B. Yeats. Here the talented hand of the poet-editor is evidently felt. Nevertheless, the students of Celtic folklore univocally agree that this collection is one of the most important monuments of Irish folklore. The author of the thesis also considered the fact that the collection contains both the tales and wider theoretical accounts on the mythical figures. Besides, Yeats refined the language, included his own or his friends' poems, but retained the original contents given by the tellers.

always implemented to perfection, but they definitely reduce the degree of censorship. Besides, Campbell classified the tales thoroughly, provided their different variants, commented on the problematic issues of translation, specific notions, etc. In the present work, Campbell's collections are referred to as PTWH followed by the number of the volume, the number of the tale and the page the quotation is taken from.

Another important monument of Scottish folklore is Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*, a five-volume collection of songs and beliefs published in various years. Carmichael prepared its first volumes. After his death his daughter and later on his grand-son undertook the work. In addition to the texts given in English and Gaelic, the editors provide the explanations of traditions, describe various circumstances related the collection of the songs, consider the importance of a particular motif in a wider context, etc. The significance of Campbell's and Carmichael's collections is enhanced by the fact that they provide texts in the original language thus reducing the possibility for falsification. Nevertheless, to achieve a more objective picture of the tendencies of the motif development in the folktales the later collections have also been considered. The corpus of Irish folktales is comprised of Seumas MacManus's *In Chimney Corners. Merry Tales of Irish Folk Lore*, W. B. Yeats's *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales*, Jeremiah Curtin's *Myth and Folk-lore of Ireland*, William Larminie's *West Irish Folktales and Romances* and other smaller collections. The total amount of the analysed folktales reaches not less than 215: 119 Irish tales and 96 Scottish tales.

The literary works for the analysis of the Celtic mythopoetic models of death as reflected in the literary tradition were chosen with regard to chronology and location. With her choice, the author of the thesis attempted to cover the area inhabited by the Celts in early ages and has chosen the literary works that are supposed to be influenced by Celtic oral tradition even though they were composed by individual authors. The selected literary pieces represent late Medieval literary tendencies. The majority of the works belong to the Welsh

literary heritage which has much in common with the romances of Chrétien de Troyes (1140-1200) (CRCT). For instance, *The Mabinogion* beside the Four Branches, which are the main sources of the Welsh mythology, also contains some romance-like pieces such as *Geraint Son of Erbin* which seems to be an identical story of Chrétien's *Erec and Enide*, or a version of the *Quest of the Holy Grail* (c. 1225) which in the Welsh source is titled *Peredur son of Efrog*. Chrétien's works, in their turn, evoke allusions to Beroul's *Romance of Tristan* (12th c.). Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1469) and the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (late 14th c.) (SGGK) develop the tradition of the Arthurian cycle of knightly romances. The *Life of Merlin* by Geoffrey Monmouth (1150) (LM) is included in the discussion as one of the first stories about the famous druid containing the first mentioning of Morrigan as Morgan la Fay. The analysis also includes Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (14th c.) as his works are acknowledged to have been greatly influenced by the folklore tradition which he adapted for the medieval aristocratic tastes. The intermingling motifs in different literary works suggest that the Medieval authors either relied on the same sources or borrowed from each other or both. Nevertheless, the migration of motifs shows that late Medieval literary texts are the results of active sharing of information between the oral and written sources despite geographical or mental distances.

2. SEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVE ON CULTURE

The theoretical background for the present research is drawn on the semiotic insights proposed by Yuriy Lotman, the founder and leader of the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics, and Algirdas Julius Greimas, whose works laid the foundation to formulate the structural theory of semiotics kept by the representatives of what is known as the Paris Semiotic School. Although the aim of Greimas' works, as he himself claimed, was to write a fundamental study of semiotics that would embrace all the possible aspects of semiosis, still some scholars remain unconvinced in his overall success. Daniel Patte notes that Greimas' theory of semiotics is focused exclusively on the signification systems and leaves the communicative aspect a bit aside (cf. Patte 1990, 74). H. M. Davidsen, in her turn, claims that "structural semiotics seems to have missed the realistic exploration of meaning in preference to a formal and structural investigation" (Davidsen 2007, 337). Continuing in this vein of thought, Christopher Norris in his introduction to Ronald Schleifer's work *A. J. Greimas and the Nature of Meaning* argues that "Greimas fails to take into account of the cultural codes and conventions that enable the reader not only to interpret what s/he reads, but to recognize a text in the first place as one that calls for a certain kind of interpretative reading" (Schleifer 1987, x).

In other words, Greimas is blamed not to consider the importance of the extra-textual factors which operate as crucial elements framing the otherwise endless semiosis. It appears that not only the separate parts of a text create the interpretative framework as defined by Scott Simpkins (cf. Simpkins 2001), but the cultural context cannot be ignored either. The very fact that the environment of a text is heterogeneous and dynamic raises additional problems. It becomes difficult to designate and evaluate certain influences that might affect text interpretation. For this reason, Lotman's theory of cultural semiotics focusing on the structures and processes of culture is employed in the given research to draw

the theoretical lines that would be beneficial in explaining the generation of meaning of a cultural text. Regarding the attempt of the present study to focus on myth as a cultural construct and its transformation into other culturally bounded narrative genres, the reliance on Lotman's approach in combination with the theory of meaning generation developed by Greimas is inevitable.

2.1. Structure and Processes of Culture in Lotman's View

To accumulate experience, contemplate upon it and transmit to the successors is, most probably, the main point of human existence, the manifestation of which appeared together with humanity. This immediately presupposes that human activity is inevitably related with the contribution to the benefit and development of a socium. Such collective experience is viewed as culture. Margarida Abrantes defines culture as "the cumulative aggregate of experiences and behaviours, of artifacts and manifestations that arise from the specificity of human cognition, both individual and social" (Abrantes 2010, 483). Edward B. Tylor maintains that culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and all other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, cited in Posner 2005, 307). Both definitions distinguish the material and intellectual aspects of culture thus providing leeway for the claim that culture is a heterogeneous construct containing autonomic, yet closely interrelated sign systems. Lotman was one of the first scholars to identify this peculiarity of culture. There are several factors which, according to him, define culture. Consider:

Humanity, immersed in its cultural space, always creates around itself an organized spatial sphere. This sphere includes both ideas and semiotic models and people's recreative activity (Lotman, cited in Fomin 2006, 226).

Lotman clearly defines culture as a spatially determined phenomenon resulting from human activity. The temporal aspect is not involved in the definition since Lotman views culture as an everlasting process marked by the fluctuation of values that never ceases. This observation initiated the coinage of the term ‘semiosphere’ when referring to culture as an endless continuum filled in with the semantic entities of various types and various organizational levels. To emphasize the dynamic nature of the semiosphere Lotman tends to apply the word ‘organism’ rather than ‘mechanism’ to refer to it in his article *On Semiosphere* (Lotman 2004a, 5).

One of the most important factors designating a semiosphere is the boundaries or, to use Edna Andrews’s term, binarity (cf. Andrews 2003, 33; Lotman 2004a, 5). Since the semiosphere is an abstraction, accordingly, its boundaries are not concrete – it is rather a contact region between the semiosphere and non-semiosphere, or better to say, between Semiosphere A and Semiosphere B. In other words, it is an opposition between the inner and the outer spaces of a semiosphere, hence its binary nature. It is important to emphasize that, in Lotman’s perspective, the boundary is no thick wall to separate a semiosphere from its environment; on the contrary, the scholar views it as a permeable membrane, the “sum of bilingual filters, the transition through which allows to translate a text into another language or languages existing outside a particular semiosphere”² (Lotman 2004a, 6). In this way, the values that are naturally foreign to a semiosphere may enter it and be transformed and accepted within. It comes out that the most intense reciprocation of values occurs on the periphery of a semiosphere because it both takes in the foreign values and exports the ones from the inside. Moreover, these semiotic processes may take place among several semiospheres at the same time. Thus, the boundary sphere is most intense on from the semantic point of view, it contains a great variety of values from both sides,

² Translation mine, A.G.

whereas the dynamics of the interchange reaches the highest level here in comparison with the centre or other parts of the semiosphere. Hence, this semantic area might be conceived of as a certain liminal sphere which both unites and separates two distinct semantic universes.

Another important factor of the semiosphere is its semantic discontinuity or heterogeneity (cf. Andrews 2003, 33; Lotman 2004a, 9). The semiosphere has a nuclear in the centre where its fundamental defining values are generated and concentrated. From it the values are spread to the periphery, i.e., towards the boundaries. Thus, the distribution of values within the semiosphere is not even since the ‘thickness’ of the inner semantic network near the boundaries becomes thinner than in the centre.

Lotman notices that the semiosphere may have several nuclei (Lotman 2004a, 10ff). They appear due to the multilayered structure of culture which is a large and complex system of meaning generation “manifested in forms of interactional activity within different domains of human experience” (Abrantes 2010, 480) where every domain has its own communicative tools – a specific system of encoding, i.e., language. The discussion thus approaches Lotman’s conception of culture as a textual construct so that “no cognitive aggregate can be mono-structural or mono-lingual: it must necessarily contain multi-lingual entities untranslatable into each other’s language”³ (Lotman 2004b, 26). This principle operates as the basis for communicative relations. To put it in other words, every subsystem of culture has its own specific means to describe the values and each other and in this way they contemplate culture itself and stipulate its development.

The means of communication within the subsystems of the semiosphere are organized in a structurally hierarchical order. Lotman maintains that the utterance in a natural language is historically earlier than any other utterance, whereas in order the message could acquire the ‘title’ of a text it must be encoded at least

³ Translation mine, A.G.

twice (cf. Lotman 2004c, 136; Ioffe 2012, 175). He insists that culture is essentially a polylingual construct where pure texts are rarely found. In fact, Lotman claims that purely textual messages might be created only in artificial languages as they contain no cultural information (cf. Lotman 2004d, 205f). For this reason, any ordinary text produced within a culture is a combination of at least two languages.

The fact that every subsystem of culture is designated by its own language implies that different parts of culture produce texts of various types. Lotman extends the traditional notion of the 'text' and infers that it is the axis of a communicative act, which may occur in various forms of expression, not necessarily verbal. Hence, the term 'text' overcomes the boundaries of the natural language and is treated as a cultural rather than merely linguistic product. Andrews vividly sums up Lotman's approach by stating that "culture texts include verbal texts (including aesthetic, religious, and poetic text types), but are more broadly defined to encompass a variety of non-verbal texts – visual, musical, or those based on everyday human behaviour" (Andrews 2003, 73). What is more, according to Lotman, even the worldview traditionally prescribed to the sphere of context should be regarded as text because it creates meaning and affects other texts.

The representatives of the Tartu-Moscow semiotic school claim that as a semiosphere culture consists of the hierarchically organized relatively autonomic semiotic systems that are closely interdependent (Ivanov *et al* 1998, 34-37). It should be added here that in one of his last articles on the semiosphere Lotman comes close to the notion that the term 'semiosphere' can be applied to refer to a wider range of subjects, not only cultures. The term might be used to designate any qualitatively different semantic space since the defining factor becomes the structural distribution of values, which makes one semiosphere distinct from another (cf. Lotman 2004d, 203f). It is worth noting that certain conceptual models within a culture can operate as semiospheres as well. For instance, the

wood as a dangerous place might be opposed to the city representing a cultural, hence safe, area. The values and laws that operate in one sphere stand in opposition to those of the other one, and thus two different semantic universes are created.

This leads to the conclusion that actually the term ‘semiosphere’ might embrace the following: a) ethnically, spatially or temporally⁴ determined cultures such as Celtic, Germanic or Christian ones which, though bear a distinctly different character, may interact among themselves in certain texts, for instance, texts registered in early Medieval manuscripts. The position of the nucleus in such ‘semiospheres’ is taken by, for example, the capital cities where the majority of intellectual and governmental potential is concentrated. The artifacts which have the signs indicating the amalgamation of the cultures represent the boundary zone; b) mental systems, such as the opposition between pagan and Christian perspectives. It should be stressed that the worldview builds up the distance between them. Pagan traditions, though different in certain means of manifestation, have more in common among themselves than compared with Christianity. Pagan myths and mythical stories recorded by Christian monks are, probably, the most typical examples of the sources that attest to the fusion of the two religious traditions; c) concepts or conceptual systems such as the opposition between life and death. The two spheres – the world of the living and the world of the dead – appear as structured realms where certain laws can be expected. Yet, the laws that govern each of them are very different. For this reason, a person who is used to one realm might find the other one astonishing, strange because in it the traditional order seems to be reversed. The images that represent the central points concentrating the respective values might be home, city and woods, underground or some mysterious castle on the other bank of the river. Meanwhile, the sphere in

⁴ Here, the temporal aspect concerns the period of time which is necessary for a certain system of values to be replaced by other values to such an extent that it becomes possible to assume the emergence of a new mental identity manifested in various forms (language, art, etc.)

between the worlds is found to have borrowed the features from both of them, therefore some things seem to be familiar, others – strange or even hostile.

The dialogic nature of culture, i.e., its dynamic internal structure, and its habit “to move from one sphere to another” (Ivanov *et al* 1998, 34) explains the transformational processes that occur within a culture. It should be noted here that, beside the dynamic aspect of a cultural language, Lotman also discerns the static one, which helps to classify languages into discrete and iconic ones (cf. Lotman 1975). Peter Torop has clearly defined the very essence of the two types of languages: “in discrete languages sign comes first and the meanings are created through the meanings of signs”, whereas in iconic languages “text comes first and meaning emerges through holistic text” (Torop 2005, 168). The translation from the discrete language into the iconic language is often complicated due to an entirely different structure of languages: the explanation of a certain symbol which belongs to the iconic language in the discrete natural language means its distortion, since the natural language cannot embrace the wholeness of the symbol. Nevertheless, iconic texts cannot escape being either translated into the discrete language, for example, being described in a mythical narrative, or influenced by the languages of another culture which inevitably leave their own traces.

The diachronic investigation of doubly encoded texts may indicate the changes that occur in the course of time. They may appear due to several reasons: the specific requirements of a genre; the changed tastes of the audience or the natural alteration of mentality, which affect the result of text production. Whatever the reason, the newly produced texts reflect both contemporary and past realities that might be deduced. Some of the ancient structures, such as mythemes, crumple under the influence of other cultural systems – some elements may enter such structures from another culture. It is worth mentioning here that the discrete texts are more susceptible to the impact of other languages than the iconic ones. Yet, in order to evaluate the possible effects it is necessary to carefully analyse the

structural organization of certain cultural-narrative units and designate the possible ways of modulation.

2.2. Production of Cultural Texts: Greimassian Perspective

From the semiotic perspective, culture is first of all a system of signs which are meaningful entities themselves, as their main function is to convey a message, i.e., to contain some information (Posner, 2005). Moreover, they create new meanings while interacting with each other. The interconnection of signs makes the fundamental aspect of semiosis since namely due to this complex process the identification of the peculiar characteristics of signs is possible, or, to put it in Greimas' wording, "we perceive differences and, thanks to that perception, the world 'takes shape' in front of us and for us" (Greimas, 1983, 19).

Structuralism has established that any process of the generation of meaning embraces the spheres of expression and contents, i.e., the fundamental relation between the signifier and the signified. But the issue remained no less problematic due to the variety of the devices on the expression plane, starting with the direct signification, i.e., an immediate relation between the signifier and the signified as in an index or icon (cf. Nastopka 2002, 43; Valsiner 2007, 43), the metaphorical relations where the signified is expressed by a double structure – the direct relation between the signifier and the signified organized on the basis of metonymy (cf. Brandt 2004, 15-18), or symbols where the signifier can represent several signifieds (cf. Waardenburg 1980, 42; Carey, cited in MacLeod 2012, 180). Greimas approaches the relation between the signifier and the signified from the narrative perspective, i.e., the scholar expected to work out the technique which could expose the mechanisms showing how various elements correlate on the narrative plane thus produce meaning. In other words, his project was targeted at the formulation of the narrative grammar.

Greimas introduced the terms ‘figurativity’ and ‘thematicity’ to refer to the planes of expression and contents respectively. Figurative elements are the units of significance that have a counterpart in the objective reality (cf. Nastopka 2002, 131). It might be any concrete object such as a person, thing, or feature, e.g., a complexion, height, colour, etc. Figurative elements might join each other to form a figurative path which helps to better represent the fundamental values established in a particular text. Such configurations may also include the aspects of time and place (cf. Greimas 2005, 340). Thematic elements, in their turn, are abstract notions that have no referents in the objective reality – these are the values that constitute the fundamental level of a text (cf. Nastopka 2002, 131). Thematic units may be represented by figures or even figurative paths.

The reoccurring clusters of either figurative or thematic elements constitute isotopies, that is, even larger constructions of significance: the abstract notions which constitute the deep level of any discourse create thematic isotopies, to use Greimasian terminology, whereas those that have more concrete characteristics make figurative isotopies (cf. Greimas 2005, 342). The connection between the two types of isotopies is obligatory in the process of meaning generation since, when joined together, they form a conceptual network and its visual representation simultaneously (cf. Semchynska-Uhl, 2010, 385). Actually any discourse is the establishment of a particular value, which can be manifested in various ways and for several times. Due to this, the following inter-relations between isotopies are revealed: one thematic isotopy may be expressed by several figurative isotopies that only confirm the existence and validity of the first.

Figurative elements may occur in various interrelations with thematic values: they basically follow the patterns of the signifier-signified conjunction referred to above. The inter-proximity of the possible figurative constructions is of crucial importance in the present research because various narrative elements employed in different genres seem to be constructed in a different way.

First of all, there are units of significance which show high interdependence between the figures themselves and between the figurative units and thematic values. Namely, these units are symbols. In a symbol, figures form a very rigid construction: the alternation of any detail essentially breaks the whole structure of the symbol not only on the figurative surface level but on the fundamental distribution of values as well. Thus, the modification of a symbol is hardly possible mainly due to the close relations between its constituent parts which is perfectly reflected by Ernst Cassirer who affirms that symbol is an image that “does not represent the ‘thing’, it *is*⁵ the thing” (Cassirer 1955, 38).

It should be noted here that symbolism is especially characteristic of mythical thinking as they both are related with human existence and experience (cf. Ricoeur 1967, 166; Olson 1980, 54; Verene 2011, 5). Scholars agree that myth is the nourishing source of symbols: the fundamental values being born out of myth and thus dependent on it undergo alternations if myth loses its significant position in a cultural system (cf. Golan 1991, 6). Symbols then serve as mechanisms of cultural memory⁶ which is invariant figuratively and due to this reason betrays itself when inscribed in the texts of other epochs, i.e., other cultural systems. To put it otherwise, the susceptibility of the deep structures of a symbol and its dependence on the pulsation of the cultural environment imply that the content of a symbol undergoes transformation to reflect the alteration of the context, but figurative expression as such remains unaltered.

Secondly, figures may appear as individual and independent actors, i.e., the participants of the action that carry out adequate functions. Such actors may acquire certain features which are typical exclusively of them. These features serve as the defining factors of an actor and help to designate its significance. The modification of some figures might affect the whole structure but only on the

⁵ Emphasis original.

⁶ The term used in the sense suggested by Lotman (cf. Lotman 2004e, 256)

surface level, while the overall meaning of a text still could be deduced from other configurations or figurative paths that remain unaltered.

The motifs reoccurring in mythical stories are called mythemes. The term is coined by A.G. van Hamel. According to him, such a mythical complex may move in the cultural continuum spatially and temporally. It suggests that the same mythemes can be discovered in culture synchronically – in different places at the same time; or may be found diachronically – in the same location in different epochs (cf. van Hamel 1934, 10f). Van Hamel confirms his claims by analyzing and comparing some ancient Irish texts – *The Sons of the King of Iruath*, Finn's legends, drawing some assumptions from the Gaulish material and (though not always his assumptions are convincing) from ancient Indian and Egyptian traditions⁷.

Originally, such structures of significance might be observed in mythical discourses when they are already translated from the iconic into the discrete language. In the process of translation, the increased proximity among the constituent elements provides the possibility for additional details to enter the construction. The variations of myths occur due to the incongruity of the source and target languages. Nevertheless, the core structures, i.e., mythemes, remain detectable mainly due to the close correlation of figurative values.

Finally, there are discourses which show a rather liberal internal structure regarding the interrelation among the figures. By all means, the link between the figurative and thematic planes is preserved as it is the crucial condition for a text to generate meaning. Nonetheless, every figure may operate as an independent unit irrespectively of other structures. The figures may stream into figurative

⁷ The term *mytheme* was put into wide circulation by Claude Levi-Strauss who used it in his fundamental article "The Structural Study of Myth" published in 1955, whose conception of *mytheme* is close to that of van Hamel. Levi-Strauss maintains that mytheme is a complex of interrelated units which create the meaning structure of a myth. However, Levi-Strauss' insights remain within the framework of mythology, whereas van Hamel explores the mythical structure occurring in other types of discourses, namely, literature. Due to this reason and considering the fact that van Hamel's article was published earlier, the present research relies on van Hamel's account.

clusters, or isotopies, which are unified by their common function to designate a certain thematic value, but they may well be eliminated from the text without considerable impact on the general structure.

Naturally, the figures more distanced from each other create a platform for improvisation. Since the configuration of the figurative elements is not predetermined either culturally or structurally, one may find them in unexpected junction. The texts that feature this relative 'freedom' regarding the interdependence of figurative elements are mostly products of discrete language not bounded by any other constituent of culture. Nonetheless, the possible influence of the cultural environment cannot be ignored: texts still reflect certain values circulating around them, such as the choice of a genre, theme, etc. What is more, certain remnants of the iconic language may also enter such texts.

The dispersion of figures creates favourable conditions to open new prospects for a wider scope of interpretation as some lines of significance might be alluded to, some might be drawn from the cultural, not only narrative context. Thus, it invites the problem of veridiction which is a culturally bounded category (cf. Greimas et al 1989, 651). It mainly deals with the credibility of a text and other modalities that might be appropriate for a certain community. In other words, veridiction is related with the social perception of a text. It allows the possibility that sometimes the interpretation of particular signs depends on their socio-cultural environment (ibid., 655).

The category of veridiction corresponds to the social-communicative functions of a text distinguished by Lotman, the ones embracing the addresser and the addressee, the audience and cultural tradition, the reader himself, the reader and the text, the text and the cultural context (cf. Lotman 2004c, 138). The functions are actually the conditions for a text to be meaningful and comply with adequate presuppositions and requirements that are expected from the addressees. Moreover, they encourage the perception of a text as a cultural construct which

may reflect and thus give a glimpse into the cultural systems that are already extinct.

To generalize, a cultural text of whatever the genre has its own peculiar mechanisms to generate and manifest the meaning. Typical features of mythical consciousness are high semantic concentration and stability, i.e., mythical consciousness produces iconic language that operates symbols as the means of expression. Translation from the iconic to discrete language inevitably causes certain semantic losses due to different structures of the languages. Hence, the integrity of figures and thematic condensation are reduced. It creates favourable conditions for other cultural signs to enter the structures of significance thus resulting in their change. Thus, symbols turn into mythemes in the mythical stories or motifs in folktales, whereas in literature the previously rigid structures of significance may subdue to the taste of an individual author.

3. CELTIC MYTHOPOETIC MODELS OF DEATH

One of the greatest alterations that all men must undergo is that of death. Nevertheless, the study of comparative religion has made it clear that the conception of death is a far more difficult mental structure than merely the change of the physical state. Different religious traditions inform about long journey of the soul to the afterlife realm after it leaves the body, offer various attempts at purgation until it reaches the final destination (cf. Bowker 1992; Kramer, Kenneth 2006). It leads to the assumption that, from the religious-mythological point of view, death is no momentary event but rather a continuous movement of the soul which starts in the world of the living, passes the intermediary stage and finds eternity in the world of the dead. The tripartite structure calls for the famous Arnold van Gennep's sequence regarding the rites of passage – separation, transition and incorporation (van Gennep 1969, vii)⁸. To complete the transformation the soul needs to undergo all the phases. From this it follows that a person is considered to be dead only when his/her soul reaches the realm of the dead, the phase which closes the dying process irrevocably. Until then, the seemingly dead person is in an ambiguous situation and belongs to neither the world of the living nor that of the dead.

Victor Turner, van Gennep's follower, gave special attention to the interaction of the phases distinguished by van Gennep and emphasized that “we are not dealing with structural contradictions when we discuss liminality, but with the essentially unstructured (which is at once de-structured and pre-structured) matter” (Turner 1994, 8). The statement implies that liminal sphere – whether temporal, spatial or other – takes some features from each of the opposites it unites, in the analysed case, the world of the living and the world of the dead. The

⁸ The very fact that Arnold van Gennep worked in the field of anthropology does not deprive of the possibility to apply his ideas in the study of myth since myth is the background that organizes, justifies and explains ritual (van Hamel 1934, 3; Lincoln 1989, 53).

two represent ordered spaces as their laws are clearly defined and permanent. The liminal sphere, in its turn, is absolutely unpredictable. Seemingly familiar aspects of existence are combined in unexpected and surprising clusters. It is convenient to recall Lotman's notion of the semiosphere here. Liminality perfectly illustrates the boundary where the values of two semiospheres meet in a dynamic mixture and make it complicated to discern the real meaning of the signs since there is no stable fundamental structure behind them. The mythological transfer stage of the soul seems to be exactly the case of the liminal sphere where life and death intermingle and acquire variable, sometimes grotesque means of expression.

3.1. Celtic Perception of the Liminal Sphere: The Role of the Female

Celtic tradition reveals a variety of afterlife realms: Otherworld is usually depicted as magical islands, fairy mounds known as *sidh* (or *síd*, *sidhe*, *sithe*, *síthe*) or Tech n Duinn, the House of Donn. Celtic Otherworld shows all the characteristics of the supernatural world, there is little evidence, however, to assume it to be the world of the dead. Though at times mortals visit the Otherworld and participate in fairy feasts, the occasions are too few to claim it being a tendency. The dead, instead, are supposed to go to the House of Donn (cf. Mees 2009, 52). O'Connor keeps a similar thematic approach by indicating that the mortals who visit the Otherworld are in the prime of their life – they acquire special knowledge there, i.e., undergo their initiation and are allowed to return to the human world. The situation is different in the case of the House of Donn: people approach it at the end of their lives. Thus, the invitation to the House of Donn is, to put it in O'Connor's wording, “an invitation to die, not to be reborn” (O'Connor 2000, 91).

It should be brought into focus that the above mentioned realms of the afterlife have their rulers, usually males (Rees 1996, 109; Campbell, Henderson 1995, xxxii). It is an established fact as well that the IE mythical system requires a

psychopomp which takes the soul of the deceased from the world of the living and leads it to the realm of the dead. In Celtic tradition, this function might have been allotted to the goddess as it is well attested both archeologically and in the vernacular tradition.

Marie-Louise Sjoestedt introduced the idea that Celtic goddesses bear a local character, whereas gods have tribal responsibilities (Sjoestedt 2000, 24). In other words, goddesses are related with land and nature, while gods take care of the social order of a particular community. It is possible to claim that goddesses were functionally isomorphic even though they were cherished by different Celtic tribes and bore different names. Miranda Green notices that Celts were especially concerned about fertility, and therefore the divine figure which represents this aspect of life is the Mother Goddess (or the Great Goddess) (cf. Green 2011, 69f).⁹ The divine Mother is a complex divine figure that embraces various aspects of existence: abundance, life fostering, destruction, etc. In other words, she functionally lingers between life and death.

The very idea of the Mother Goddess comes from the Proto-Indo-European (further referred to as PIE) culture. Bruce Lincoln states that Proto-Indo-Europeans personified death as a goddess who may have appeared as both a beautiful lady and a hideous hag. Herman Güntert reconstructed her name as **Kolyo* ‘the coverer’ and associated this deity with Germanic Hel, Greek Kalypso and Indian god Sarva (cf. Lincoln 1991, 78). The ancient goddess is found to treat her victims as her animals – they are dragged to the Underworld bounded and

⁹ It is worth reminding here of the aspectual integral nature of Celtic divinities which was alien to Roman understanding. That is why Roman accounts on Celtic gods may lead astray. In Sjoestedt’s way of thought, a single Roman deity may represent a number of local Celtic gods whose functions only partially coincide with those of the Roman ‘label’ god (cf. Sjoestedt 2000, 15). Green puts this idea even further when she discusses Celtic preoccupation of warfare. She thinks that Celts did not have a functional war god but what they had were tribal protectors in a war aspect (cf. Green 2011, 101). Actually, Celts had a holistic approach to their divinities – tribe protectors were to guarantee safety against the enemies, diseases, famine, etc. Romans, as strangers, witnessed only a part of this perspective and thus could be misled by that bit of information. As Romans were constantly involved in wars with Celts in Gaul, it is only natural that they witnessed much worship of the protector in war circumstances. Consequently, many Celtic gods are equated with Mars on the Continent, only their eponyms betray their Celtic origins.

snared. Thus, the PIE comprehension of death was based on the projection of a female who takes the deceased to the afterlife realm.

Celts widely developed such an approach – the majority of goddesses act in the liminal sphere between life and death and are able to evoke both. One of the earliest known Celtic goddesses is Cailleach Béara ‘The Hag of Beara’ (cf. O’Connor 2000, 61)¹⁰. The name ‘Cailleach’ refers to an old woman, a hag, a crone, even a nun or some veiled woman. Following the traditional Celtic pattern, Cailleach acquires many names (or eponyms) associated with a particular region (ibid, 25f). As her names reveal, she must have been a prominent goddess in Ireland, Manx and Scotland. Her looks and functions related with fertility and land cult clearly indicate Cailleach as a Mother Goddess figure, most probably, predating its split into a triple form.

Another example is Ceridwen – the goddess of the door hinges, a British Celtic variant of the Mother Goddess figure. She is the keeper of the cauldron of inspiration and governs birth-rebirth cycles, yet often appears as the hag of death (cf. Stewardt, Williamson 1996, 42; French 2001, 202). The Continental Epona is also associated with the afterlife journeys – she is often depicted on the funeral plaques, which is indicative of her responsibility for the safe transfer to the realm of the dead (cf. MacLeod 2012, 47). Green writes in the same line of thought and adds that the chthonic functions of Epona are evident judging from the objects that she carries, i.e., the key and the mappa (cf. Green 1997, 13). They symbolize that the goddess has the power over the transfer stage, her ability to have access to the other-dimensional realm, yet it does not indicate her reign over that realm. It should be maintained that the Irish tradition also puts goddesses in a liminal position. For instance, Medb (Mève) is associated with the goddess of dawn and dusk. Furthermore, she has strong relations with water as a transitional substance (cf. Campbell, Henderson 1995, xxxii). It is possible to assume then that the Celtic

¹⁰ The name ‘Cailleach’, however, might not be very ancient as some scholars derive it from the Latin *pallium* ‘veil, cloak’ (cf. d’Este, Rankine 2008, 22).

goddess, whatever her name, is responsible exclusively for the transfer of the soul to the Underworld and when the journey is accomplished the divine protection of the soul is undertaken by some other divinity¹¹.

The Celtic tradition structurally fits in the Indo-European¹² mythical framework of death as it has the same constituent parts and ‘slots’ of mythical positions to be filled. Yet, the role of a psychopomp governing the liminal sphere belongs to the goddess who is also responsible for other spheres of life, i.e., not restricting her functional operation to soul transferring (as, for instance, it is the case of Greek Kharon or Germanic Valkyries preoccupied exclusively with guiding the souls of warriors to the world of the dead). Since the ancient conceptualization of the world does not leave human consciousness without a trace, various modulations of mythical models of death might still be encountered. Thus even after the mythical material had lost its primary relevance, the goddess figure might have entered new narrative genres bringing in all her semantic and figurative ‘luggage’ which still informs about the role of the female in the liminal sphere between life and death.

3.2. Modes of Physical Appearance Suggestive of Liminality

The process of the introduction to the liminal sphere begins with the appearance of some divine figure who is supposed to carry to the otherworldly realm. Typically, this figure is defined as death bringer or even Death Him/Herself. The gender, character and appearance of the personified death vary cross-culturally and may depend on the tastes of the epoch (cf. Guthke 1999).

¹¹ Possibly, some male divinity whose divine nature is betrayed by the magical objects, such as the cauldron of abundance or reviving club. Nevertheless, it is not clear though if the situation was such in the PIE period. It might have well been that the goddess was the ruler of the afterlife realm as well thus providing warranty for the continual cycle of rebirth. It should be noted here that female figures whose functions extend beyond the transfer stage are not strangers in the IE mythical system. For instance, Germanic Freyja is known not only to share the power of choosing the dead together with her husband Oðin but also celebrating their afterlife in her own hall Folkvaugr (cf. Ellis 1943, 75).

¹² Further referred to as IE.

Nevertheless, some aspects, especially the grotesque physical traits, seem to resist any impact and survive despite cultural changes. Turner's insights on the revelation of the sacred by disproportion, monstrosity and mystery might explain the tendency to preserve the traditional death image (cf. Turner 1994, 12f). Marina Warner adds the capacity of shape-shifting as she considers the change of appearance to be a means of the annihilation of the self, i.e., a particular kind of death (cf. Warner 1998, 263). It should be stressed that shape-shifting is also indicative of the supernatural, divine powers. The mentioned figurative modes of mythical thought are well implanted in the narrative discourses whose study may help to establish certain Celtic peculiarities as well as evaluate how much the original mythemes deviate from the source in the course of time.

3.2.1. Misshapen Appearance as an Indicator of the Supernatural Origins

Prehistoric society is proved to have had a strong belief in the Great Goddess as the ultimate source of life that comes from land and water. Therefore the Goddess was also considered to be inseparable from the two elements (cf. Gimbutienė 2002, 19). The Great Goddess is an all-embracing divine agent that both fosters life and destroys it by controlling the processes of nature. As Lorna Stevens and Pauline Maclaran notice, Celtic culture “adapted [ancient mythical models] to its own values, but without erasing its most fundamental element, the power of Mother Nature itself” (Stevens, Maclaran 2007, 31). Miriam Robbins Dexter affirms that the functions of the Goddess coincide with her physical appearance: the benevolent Goddess is most beautiful, whereas her destructive aspect is represented by ferocious looks (cf. Dexter 2010, 30f). The scholar claims that there is a strong link between the figurative elements, such as traits of physical appearance, and the fundamental values, such as divine functions. It is logical to assume that this link between the levels of meaning generation has been retained in the Celtic vernacular tradition and has acquired an expression of a

specific Celtic taste. Another scholarly assumption to be taken into consideration is Turner's insight on the peculiarities which help to express liminality, namely, disfigurement and decomposition or, contrariwise, the composition of various features, e.g., anthropomorphic and zoomorphic, which reflect the creative potential inherent in the liminal sphere to be invested in the representatives of that sphere (cf. Turner 1994, 13).

The core motif of the Celtic perception of the world that pervaded all kinds of vernacular tradition is that of the Sovereignty Goddess and her shape-shifting from a hideous hag into a maiden of unsurpassable beauty. The predecessor of all the recorded transformation stories is *Echtra Mac nEchach* describing Niall's encounter with the Hag of Beara who guarded the well and did not let his elder brothers drink of it because they refused to kiss her. Consider the description of the hag's repulsiveness which has become a model for all other stories related with the sovereignty myth and tales which depict the hostile supernatural women:

Every joint and limb of her from top to toe as black as coal. The gray bristly hair growing through the top of her head was like the tail of a wild horse. She could cut off the green branch of an acorn-bearing oak with the sickle of green teeth that was in her head, reaching to her ear. Her eyes were black and smoky; her nose crooked and wide-nostrilled; her belly sinewy, speckled. Fluxy diseased; her shins crooked, twisted, knotty, broad as shovels; and she had big knees and gray nails (CHA, 206).

Niall, the hero, unlike his brothers, kisses her and even lies with her. When he opens his eyes, he has a good reason to be much astonished since instead of the ugly hag he finds a beautiful maiden whose

every joint from top to toe was like new-fallen snow in hollows. She had plump queenly forearms, long slender fingers, straight rosy calves, with two sandals of white metal on her gentle soft white feet and a great mantle of purple fleece upon her clasped with a brooch of white silver. She had bright pearly teeth, and large sagacious eye, and a mouth red as *partaing*¹³ (ibid.).

¹³According to Whitley Stokes, vivid red colour. The name derived from *Parthica pellis*, 'Parthian leather'

The goddess promises that Niall will become a king, he will establish a dynasty and his descendants will have kingship forever. The goddess reveals the secrets of ruling to him by explaining the meaning of her transformation:

as you have seen me at first fearsome, wolfish and terrifying, and at last beautiful, thus is the sovereignty: for it is not obtained without battle and conflicts; but at last it is fair and gracious to anyone (CHA, 207).

Niall is qualified to be a good king because he does not feel disgusted in undertaking the most unpleasant tasks if necessary and so he will support his people when in need. It is important to stress that the metaphor of sexual intercourse with an ugly old woman is employed as the vehicle to express the essence of kingship. Sexuality is inseparable from destruction (cf. Lefkowitz 1989, 591; Warner 1998, 51). It is also an acknowledged mythical axiom that sexuality represents a life-affirming aspect invested in a goddess figure (cf. Dexter 2010, 39). Niall is selected as an outstanding individual from the human community, thus somewhat higher than ordinary men; the Hag is a divine agent, and their union is a certain model of a *hierogamos*, the divine union that guarantees fertility and abundance. The mythological scheme of the Sovereign Goddess' transformation serves as a figurative manifestation of the successful agreement between the human and the divine worlds: the ugliness of the hag suggestive of danger and hostility is later on replaced by the beauty of the maiden thus showing that the supernatural powers bless the community ruled by Niall and promise overall prosperity to them.

Beside the transformational element, the supernatural origin might be suggested by some physical feature. One of the most important marks that distinguishes someone as a representative of the supernatural world is hairiness. Morrigan is said to have nine tresses waving around her body in the *Second Battle of Mag Tuired*¹⁴, which is definitely a sign of her supernatural character. The man

¹⁴ Translated by E. A. Gray. Cf. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/cmt/cmteng.htm>

accompanying the ugly woman in *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel* also has similar hair: "his hair was rough and bristling – if a sackful of wild apples were emptied over it, each apple would catch on his hair, and none would fall to the ground" (EIMS, 71). The couple foretells the forthcoming death of Conare¹⁵. The ancient Irish tradition also shows the belief that a hairy woman is an omen of death: Caílte is saved by St Patrick from nine "black and gloom-filled witches coming towards them, covered with hair from the heads of people long dead in the earth" (TEI, 190). The witches retrieved only after St Patrick sprinkled them with the blessed water. Undoubtedly, the text is partially Christianized thus depicting the superiority of the new faith over the ancient pagan one. Nonetheless, the very fact that Caílte is helpless against the witches suggests female strength over males inherent in Celtic tradition.

The vernacular Celtic tradition goes in accordance with the archeological finds and reveals the tendency to concentrate on the face, especially on the area of eyes and mouth (cf. Lysaght 1996, 135; Müller 2009, 152; Green 2011, 197). The glance of a supernatural female can be as cold as death itself. It may also penetrate other realities. For instance, the prophetess Fedelm who appears in the opening of the *Tain Bó Cuailnge (Recension I)*¹⁶ foretells the forthcoming carnage. She manages to do it because she has three pupils in each eye and is able to see more than ordinary men.

The one-eyed creatures are also popular in mythical stories. The most vivid portrait of 'incomplete' beings is, most probably, found in the episode from the saga about Cu Chulainn where the hero meets Morrígan and her companion:

¹⁵ Interestingly, the apples pined on hair contribute to the development of the death theme. In Celtic tradition (and not only), an apple represents life – the Great Goddess in her life fostering aspect is often depicted carrying apples (cf. Green 2011, 70f). Whereas bristly hair is the cause of death of many Celtic heroes, e.g., Diarmaid met his end in a boar hunt when he measured the beast against the hair and was hurt by the bristle. Thus the juxtaposition of the images of the apple and the hair in the given episode suggests taking away life.

¹⁶ Cf. <http://adminstaff.vassar.edu/sttaylor/Cooley/>

They saw before them a chariot harnessed with a chestnut horse. And this horse was a wonder, for it had one leg, and one eye, and one ear, and the pole of the chariot passed right through its body, so that the peg in front met the halter, which passed across its forehead. Within the chariot sat a fearsome woman, her eyebrows red of colour, and a crimson mantle wrapped about her (Stewart 1990, 70).

The couple foretells the fatal doom of the hero. Just before his final combat, Chu Chulainn meets three witches blind in the left eye. They cook a lap-dog and offer it to Cu Chulainn thus initiating the fall of the hero because one of his geis was never to eat dog flesh (but he could not refuse due to another geis forbidding to despise hospitality) (CHA, 136). The one-eyed creatures participate in the scheme of Chu Chulainn's gradual destruction, but they do not bring destruction by themselves, they only give a hint of the doomed future. From the structural-mythical point of view, the one-eyed creatures act in the initial phase of the death process. They emerge to announce and induce the forthcoming Chu Chulainn's separation from life.

Another model of the appearance of a dangerous or death-related supernatural female lays an emphasis on the mouth area. Most probably, it represents the destructive aspect of devouring and tearing the flesh. In the Celtic vernacular tradition, there is a great number of females with huge mouths and big teeth. For instance, an ill-favoured big mouthed woman who participates in the initiation of Conare's destruction has a lower lip extending to her knees (EIMS, 71).

The list of the physical features which signify liminality includes general deformity and shabbiness. Possibly, both representative modes express the same concept of disorder, chaos, asymmetry, the process of creation as they help to hide the true essence and shape of the creatures fixing the moment when their shape has not been completed yet. For instance, ancient Irish legends tell of an aggressive giant's daughter who looks like "a lump of a woman, bald and dark, like a rocky crag from a distance" (TEI, 58f). Her vague shape and resemblance to

the stones as an ever-lasting material clearly points to her supernatural origins with special emphasis on the chaotic primordial powers that the giantess represents.

Discolour or unnatural colour are also the figures representing liminality (cf. Turner 1994, 13). In Celtic tradition, there is a clear tendency to relate the supernatural women with the red colour. T. A. Mikhailova emphasizes that such women appear as mediating agents between the human world and the supernatural reality (cf. Mikhailova 2002c, 288). Davidson associates such figures with the terrible goddess of slaughter, for instance, Indian Kali (cf. Davidson 1998, 178). Indeed, mythical sources mentioning the goddesses stress their relation with redness.

The blood red colour as a prevailing figurative element is observed in Irish mythical tradition: blood red is the typical colour of the battle fury Badb. Furthermore, Morrigan also often appears in red, as, for instance, in the fatal encounter with Cu Chulainn where her eyebrows are red and she is wrapped in a crimson mantle (Stewart 1990, 70). The prophetess Fedelm wears a “hooded tunic with red interweaving about her”¹⁷ when she comes to foretell the slaughter. Red colour is characteristic of the *banshee*, the first allusions to which also come from ancient manuscript stories: Fin once meets a woman who weeps tears of blood and vomits blood wailing for her dead son (CHA, 197f). Sometimes the *banshee* is believed to wear a red cloak (cf. Spence 1995, 81), yet most frequently, she is depicted washing bloody clothes of the future victims like Morrigan who washes Cu Chulainn’s bloody clothes and arms before his final combat.

The mythical narrative heritage reveals that Celtic tradition employs a wide range of figurative models, i.e., configurations, regarding the physical appearance which indicate the supernatural character of some actors. They mostly concentrate on the facial area and highlight the importance of the head. Most of the vernacular

¹⁷ Cf. <http://adminstaff.vassar.edu/sttaylor/Cooley/>

data comply with the archeological findings which are the main and the most objective source informative of Celtic tastes of depiction as well as Celtic imagination of the supernatural beings.

3.2.2. The Fowl as a Transformative Zoomorphic Element Constituting the Celtic Goddess Mytheme

It must be borne in mind that physical appearance of divine or supernatural agents transgress the boundaries of anthropomorphic shape. The association of a divinity with some zoomorphic figure is well attested archeologically thus bringing no doubt. Green enumerates several modes of the employment of the zoomorphic elements in religious finds: animals may occur alone, accompanying the divinity or may be represented by a humanoid figure with some parts of animal body (cf. Green 2001, 157). Animals accompanying a divinity serve for the extension of the divine powers and exact representation of their functions. Celtic tradition shows greater dependence on the representation of the divine figures in zoomorphic forms than any other IE branch – Celtic gods and goddesses always appear with animalistic elements, unlike the divinities in Greco-Roman world (ibid, 158). In Powell's view, this dependence is an "expression of the powers of shape-shifting rather than a purely archaic concept of the supernatural in animal form" (Powell 1958, 123). This means that Celts did not cultivate a totemic approach nor took animals for mediators between the human and the supernatural worlds. Celtic belief seems to have been based on the conviction that divine agents communicate with mortals by themselves and do it in various forms, either anthropomorphic or zoomorphic, according to their will or circumstances. The faculty of shape-shifting is indicative of the possibility to be translated into another reality. Therefore, it is not surprising to witness goddesses in various forms – since they act in the liminal sphere they must be well equipped for the work in different dimensions.

One of the most popular zoomorphic figures met in the context of the Celtic goddess is that of the bird. This tradition was inherited from the Neolithic period (cf. Dexter 2010, 32). Green suggests that birds “were regarded prophetic, as having links with the otherworld, and as representatives of the spirit when freed from the body” (Green 2011, 178). Though archeologists admit that it is difficult to decide upon the species of the birds depicted together with the goddess’s figure due to the sketchy nature of Celtic art, still it is possible to assume that these are mainly water birds or birds of prey. For instance, Epona is often accompanied by a raven which symbolizes her association with the passage from life to death (cf. Green 1997, 13). Welsh goddess Rhiannon is thought to be a goddess of birds (cf. French 2001, 74); Cailleach is believed to often metamorphose into a heron (cf. d’Este, Rankine 2008, 82). The gates of the Otherworld are guarded by three females transformed into cranes (cf. O’Connor 2000, 35). Hence, fowl imagery complements to the picture of the goddess in her destructive aspect which is common in the tradition of the Insular Celts who embodied slaughter in a female figure, most evidently, in the triad of the battle furies – Morrigan, Nemain and Badb – who often acquire the shape of a crow (cf. Olmsted 1994, 285; Sjoestedt 2000, 32; O’Connor 2000, 65; Mees 2009, 146).

The isomorphism of the goddess and a bird is well reflected in mythical narrative tradition, especially in the stories about the Irish hero Cu Chulainn and Morrigan. The goddess leads the hero throughout his entire life, yet they have very strenuous relationship because Cu Chulainn neglects the superiority of Morrigan and she tries to destroy the hero whenever the opportunity occurs. This opposition might be observed in Cu Chulainn’s behaviour with the birds which also supports the parallel between the goddess figure and fowls.

It may be illustrated by the mythical story *The Boyhood Deeds of Cu Chulainn*, taming of the swans is depicted as one of the earliest and very prominent achievements of the young hero which resulted in his initiation to the warrior class. Coming back from a deer hunt, Cu Chulainn sees a flock of swans

and asks if he needs to kill or just tame them. His charioteer answers that “the bravest and most accomplished warriors bring them back alive” (EIMS, 145). Cu Chulainn fulfills the task successfully and afterwards is adorned as a warrior by the queen. Metaphorically, the taming of the swans suggests manifesting the successful adoption of warrior skills and abilities. This goes in accordance with Green’s idea that water birds are symbolically related with war activities and gain access to the afterlife realm (cf. Green 2011, 104). Taming of the birds is the last qualifying test beside head hunting and deer catching which proves the suitability of the candidate to enter the warrior class.

Nonetheless, Cu Chulainn never gains full authority over the feminine powers because even after his successful accomplishment of the initiation tasks he is embarrassed and overcome by naked women who help to take away his battle frenzy (EIMS, 146). Likewise, his encounters with the birds are not always victorious. His most famous failure in this respect is described in the story *The Wasting Sickness of Cu Chulainn & The Only Jealousy of Emer*. In the opening scene of the story, a lot of birds settle on the lake and the Ulaid women express their wish to have a pair each, therefore they ask Cu Chulainn to catch them. The hero despises such a task because he thinks that bird hunt is not a manly occupation. Consequently, he is persuaded and “deal[s] the birds such a stunning blow with his sword that claws and wings floated on the water” (EIMS, 156). Every woman is satisfied except his own wife Emer to whom he promises the most wondrous birds. However, when Cu Chulainn attacks a pair of the beautiful birds linked with a golden chain, he misses the sling shot. Due to this failure, Cu Chulainn falls into a deep sickness and afterwards comes to know that it was Fand, the Queen of the Otherworld, who appeared disguised as a bird to seduce the hero.

The encounter with the bird-like otherworldly woman deprives Cu Chulainn of all his warrior strength and ability to act. This restriction, however, is temporary because his wife asks the poets to bring him back to an active life, and

the unhappy love affair is settled without any consequence to the hero's further life. However, his final confrontation with the fowl occurs at the moment of his death. After the final combat, severely wounded Cu Chulainn ties himself to a stone so that he could die standing. His horse Liath Macha protects him against the enemies' attacks and only when a scald-crow perches on his shoulder, the warriors claim that "birds were not accustomed to light on that pillar" and Lugaid dares cut the hero's head off (CHA, 140).

It is worth noting that Cu Chulainn manages to deal successfully with either swans or other birds, whose species is not identified. When the crow appears in the narrative, it becomes an emblem of the hero's end. Having in mind the habit of Irish battle furies to acquire the shape of a crow, it is possible to assume that the goddess-crow is responsible for taking care after the warrior's soul, i.e., the driving force that holds his life together. As the described episode shows, swans indicate martial prowess, whereas the unspecified birds reflect love relations. Such taxonomy is suggested by the paradigmatic analysis of Cu Chulainn stories.

Similar figurative and thematic strains are drawn in the story about Cu Chulainn's son. In *Death of Aife's Only Son*, the boy sets out to his father and on his way is occupied with a wondrous game:

He had a heap of stones in the boat, and he placed these in his slingshot and dealt stunning blows to the birds overhead, so that the creatures were knocked unconscious; afterwards he revived them and sent them back into the air. He performed the jaw feat with his hands until his upper jaw reached his eye. After that, he modulated his voice until he had laid the birds low a second time, and he revived them a second time as well (EIMS, 148).

Though the species of the birds is not detailed, the very fact that he hunts them while in a boat implies them to be some water birds. His ability to control their life force is indicative of the boy's promising martial power. The boy is on a sea voyage, both the voyage and the sea are the archetypal elements defining liminality because they indicate the transitional state, the state "between and

betwixt” (Turner 1994; Le Goff 2003, 239). Thus the revival of the birds is a normal process in such an environment where life and death intermingle. It also proves that the boy is able to manage himself properly in the sphere governed by the Celtic Goddess.

The connection of the battle fury with a bird might be observed in the structurally identical narrative units that come from different branches of Celtic sources. For instance, some of the earliest Welsh poems about the seventh century rulers *Poems about Cadwallon and Cynddylan* often employ the image of the eagle drinking the blood of a fallen warrior or receiving the dead body as a gift (CHA, 322-355; 373; 382f). It is worth remembering the episode from its contemporary *The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, where Morrígan serves a handful of the defeated Fomorian king’s blood to the victorious Tuatha¹⁸. In this parallel between Morrígan and the eagle, the latter symbolizes death, although bringing death is the function of Morrígan. Therefore, the eagle and Morrígan might be considered as functionally isomorphic figurative elements.

Welsh mythical material extends the parallel between the goddess and birds which might be observed in *The Fourth Branch of The Mabinogi* telling the story of Llew Llaw Gyffes, supposedly a Welsh variant of the Irish god Lug. Llew Llaw Gyffes has a wife Blodeuwedd who was artificially created out of flowers. After betraying her husband and trying to kill him, Blodeuwedd is turned into an owl¹⁹: “because of the shame [she has] brought upon Llew Llaw Gyffes, [she] never dare[s] show [her] face in daylight for fear of all the birds” (M, 63). The transformation into an owl is the punishment for her crime. She is condemned to a worse torment than death: as an owl, she does not belong to the world of humans, and among the birds she is an outcast as well. Gwydion, who turns her into a bird, says: “all the birds will be hostile towards you. And it shall be their nature to

¹⁸ Cf. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/cmt/cmteng.htm> par 85.

¹⁹ Blodeuwedd means ‘an owl’ in Welsh.

strike you and molest you whenever they find you” (ibid.). Blodeuwedd is doomed to double death though retaining her life forever.

It is interesting to note that the destructive attempts of a female and a bird-shape are expressed as separate figurative elements in the Welsh story interrelated by the causative relation. In other words, the female suffers the metamorphosis into a fowl as the consequence of her evil intentions and actions. Nevertheless, the motif of transformation is clearly inscribed into the general Celtic pattern of female-bird relationship and supports the idea that the destructive element when attached to a female figure is mostly associated with the birds of prey: a crow, an eagle or an owl.

There are several other stories from ancient manuscripts which depict birds in the role adverse to life, prosperity and peace. For instance, three flocks of birds destroy all the harvest and steal infants (TEI, 176); the supernatural birds fatally devastate the land (EIMS, 131f); a bird with an iron beak and tail of fire disturbs the *sidhe* every evening – any attempt to kill it results in the injury of the people (TEI, 51). It shows that the birds often perform the deeds resembling those done by the goddess in her destructive aspect. That is to say that, even though the stories do not contain the female as an agent, the presence of the goddess is felt through implied functional isomorphism represented by the figures of the birds.

Another possible strain of interpretation might be that the bird is an agent sent by the divinity, or, in other words, operates as an extension of the goddess’s powers. Most frequently, the fowl serves as announcer of the goddess entering the scene, which is often signified by the beautiful singing of the birds. Such is the peculiarity of the birds of the goddess Rhiannon who bring an overall satisfaction and entertainment to everyone who hears their melody (M, 32). The discussed motif has many analogues on the Irish side: Úaine’s, a daughter of the minstrel from the Otherworld, has a flock of birds which produce beautiful music by their singing thus making everyone happy (TEI, 202); Créde’s house is thatched with feathers of different colours and here wondrous birds make the wounded men fall

asleep (TEI, 26f); otherworldly birds that come to a feast (EIMS, 132;157) or Lír's children turned into swans (TIBT, 12) make people calm and happy. It is important to stress that bird singing is functionally isomorphic with instrumental music which makes people fall asleep (TEI, 51ff; 105; 155; M, 114; CHA, 184; 230; EIMS, 45; 108). Here the birds serve as the instruments to implement the functions of the divine female: it is worth remembering here that the Dagda, one of the most important Celtic gods, has a harp which produces a similarly powerful effect, but the Dagda plays the instrument by himself, whereas the birds act exclusively upon the order of a female divinity.

The Welsh mythical story *The Second Branch of the Mabinogi* gives yet another variant of the female bird relationship, though it fits in the scheme of the birds as a metaphorical extension of the divine powers. The story tells that god Bendigeidfran's sister Branwen when married to an Irish king endures great hardship in Ireland since she is deprived of her royal position and is abused in the kitchen. She teaches a starling to understand human language and sends it to Wales to carry a letter to her brother who comes to rescue her (M, 28). Branwen uses the bird to perform the task which she cannot do by herself – her ability to act is restricted. Therefore, though some scholars maintain that Branwen might represent some divinity from the Celtic-Welsh pantheon, the present text does not give any additional information except the family relation with the divine Bendigeidfran or Brân. Nevertheless, Branwen's ability to find a common language with the starling and give commands to it seems to be the vestige of the divine pattern.

Sometimes just the image of the bird may allude to the supernatural origins of a woman. Such is the case in the obscure tale given in the opening scenes of *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel*, which tells about the noble king Echu Feidlech who meets a fairy woman from the Sidhe near the well in the forest and is seized by a great desire to get her. When they agree on her bridal price, the king instantly dies leaving the woman pregnant. Notably the woman possesses a golden

vessele with wondrous bird figurines (EIMS, 61f). There is little doubt as to the otherworldly nature of the mysterious woman and, notably, the bird figurines become the central point in the description which establishes her as a guest from another reality. Possibly this story is a part of another mythical narrative, *The Wooing of Etáin*, where women and birds are much closer related.

The Wooing of Etáin contains several interrelated episodes where women, clearly members of the fairy folk, are transformed into swans. One recension of the story contains *The Dream of Óengus* which tells about the love affair of the Irish god Óengus who sees a maiden in a dream and falls in love with her. When the Tuatha finally find her, it appears that her powers are greater than that of her own father because she can live as a human one year and as a swan next year. That is the reason why the father cannot wed her to anyone. She decides on her own whether to accept Óengus' proposal, or not. Cáer – such is the maiden's name – falls in love with Óengus and he, in his turn, shape-shifts into a swan every other year so that they could always be together (EIMS, 110ff).

This story is followed by another one where Mider, the lord of the Otherworld, falls in love with Etáin. His jealous wife cannot stand the competition and transforms the maiden into a pool of water. After numerous metamorphoses, Etáin finally regains the human shape and is married to Echu. But Mider finds her and abducts before the eyes of all the guests gathered at the feast – he turns her and himself into swans and the two fly away (EIMS, 57). The difference between the swan-Etáin and swan-Cáer lies in the degree of their independence. Cáer is the decision maker, she has retained more features of the goddess than Etáin who acts like an object of desire and is completely dependent on the circumstances and the actions of other characters. What is more, Cáer is able to change her shape at her own will, whereas Etáin cannot control it at all. Thus, the element of unwilling shape-shifting into a swan might be treated as the element attracting attention to the deterioration of the goddess-like women's powers as described in ancient manuscripts.

Another ancient mythical tale that later penetrated folk tradition is the *Doom of the Children of Lir*. In it, the evil step-mother Oifa turns her step-children, her late sister's offspring, into four swans who are forced to stay in such a shape and endure hardship till Christian times when a Christian hermit releases them from the pangs of Oifa's evil spell (TIBT, 10f). Here, the children are victims, similarly to Etaín: they are not allowed to choose the type of their existence, nevertheless they manage to bring joy to their surroundings when turned into birds.

It is worth noting that the swan symbolizes martial prowess whenever the story speaks about an earthly hero, but it turns into a love symbol when fairy folk or the divine Tuatha are involved. The latter group of the stories about love between the supernatural characters involves the element of direct metamorphosis, whereas in all other cases the relation between a supernatural female and the birds is implied or indirect.

3.3. Possible Accompaniers of the Celtic Goddess

The key principle governing Celtic spiritual organization is the union between the male and the female. It is obvious judging from both vernacular tradition and archeological findings. One of the most popular motives that maintains the statement is, by all means, the Sovereignty Goddess scheme, whose core is the challenge of the future king by sexual advances of an ugly hag, who, in case the challenge is dealt with successfully, transforms into a beauty. The sovereignty mytheme serves as an operational mechanism ensuring the overall prosperity, which must be implemented by a representative of the human world, i.e., the king, who has the divine approval, i.e., the consent of the Goddess. It should be stressed that all the gods known on the Continent have consorts (cf. Sjoestedt 2000, 19). Thus, the harmonization of the female and male poles is extremely important in Celtic mythical thought. Therefore it seems reasonable to

assume that this rule could have been applicable in the mythopoetics of death as well. Moreover, archeological findings make it clear that the figure of the horse is very significant in the Celtic perspective of the afterlife experience and in majority of cases some equine creatures are depicted as companions of the goddess. Drawing on these insights, the following chapter attempts at the exploration of the roles that male characters and equine creatures play in association with the supernatural woman.

3.3.1. Male Accompanier of the Supernatural Female

Since Celtic mythical thought is pervaded by the principle of harmonizing male and female poles, the examination of instances where the two appear together is of crucial importance. One of the most prominent couples related with destruction in Celtic mythology is, probably, that of the Dagda and Morrígan. A week before the *Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, the Dagda meets Morrígan and ensures that the enemy, the Fomoiré, have no chance of escaping the fatal end:

He saw the woman at the Unshin in Corann, washing, with one of her feet at Allod Echae (that is, Aghanagh) south of the water and the other at Lisconny north of the water. There were nine loosened tresses on her head. The Dagda spoke with her, and they united. "The Bed of the Couple" was the name of that place from that time on. (The woman mentioned here is the Morrigan.)

Then she told the Dagda that the Fomoiré would land at Mag Ceidne, and that he should summon the *aes dana* of Ireland to meet her at the Ford of the Unshin, and she would go into Scetne to destroy Indech mac De Domnann, the king of the Fomoiré, and would take from him the blood of his heart and the kidneys of his valor. Later she gave two handfuls of that blood to the hosts that were waiting at the Ford of the Unshin²⁰.

The two gigantic figures are not only great in their physical size but in their mythological importance as well. The Dagda, ‘the good god’, is said to be the father of the gods. However, his role does not coincide with that of Greek Cronus or Uranus. Sjoestedt defines him as the father of his people “by his knowledge”

²⁰ Translated by E. A. Gray. Text cited from <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/cmt/cmteng.htm>

(Sjoestedt 2000, 42). He is the chief magician; as the provider, he has the cauldron of abundance; as a defender, he wields a great club that kills with one end and revives with another. What is more, the Dagda is the chief poet – he possesses a magical harp, the symbol of the poetic ideal. One of its strings makes people cry, another causes laugh, whereas the third one sends sleep. Besides, the harp flows to the owner whenever ordered to do so (cf. Rutherford 1987, 34). Thus, the Dagda appears as the chief divinity not because of his power, as Zeus, but due to his skill.

Scholars agree that the Dagda belongs to the class of archaic gods (cf. French 2001, 34). His appearance is highly indicative of his ancient nature – he is usually described as ugly, wearing a short tunic, which hardly reaches his thighs and covers his phallus. The Dagda has an insatiable appetite for both food and women (ibid.). His ugliness and phallic figure suggest he must be a chthonic divinity responsible for fertility and abundance. Moreover, the Dagda summons other gods against the Fomoiré, the demons of dark powers, as described in the *Second Battle of Mag Tuired* which is suggestive of his authority among the Celtic divinities.

Morrígan is one of the best attested battle furies among the Celtic deities whose importance raises little doubt. Though she is not an official wife of the Dagda (the position being occupied by Boand), in ancient thought, sexual intercourse was equated to marriage rituals²¹. Thus, Morrígan appears as the Dagda's wife in the analysed episode and they both devise a plan of fighting with the Fomoiré. It is worth noting that Morrígan not only participates in the action of destroying the Fomorian king and thus deprives the enemies of their strength, but, actually, she is the decisive power, which determines the end of the war. The action may come to a failure unless the consent of the goddess is acquired. Morrígan's role of taking the blood of the Fomorian king is symbolical of her

²¹ The phrase 'he wedded her that night' found in both ancient stories and folktales refers to physical rather than social unity. E.g., Mider wants to wed Étain in *The Wooing of Étain* but, in fact, he sleeps with her because he already has a wife (EIMS, 43f). A similar custom is reflected in folklore tradition (PTWH I 1-6; 36).

power to deprive the enemy of strength: it is the sign of the final defeat without any hope of recovery. Naturally, if the spirit of the battle and victory, i.e., Morrigan, takes the side of the Tuatha, the Fomoiré must abandon all the hopes of escape. Morrigan's fatal power is further reflected in Cu Chulainn's tales where Cu Chulainn encounters Morrigan dressed in red robes and accompanied by an old man. She shows advances to Cu Chulainn and offers him her favour. Cu Chulainn, however, rejects the goddess and so he seals his fate – Morrigan swears to destroy him and after several attempts finally succeeds in doing it (cf. Mountain, 1998, 534).

Another instance which depicts a travelling couple foretelling the hero's death is found in *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel*. Here an ugly misshapen man named Fer Calliu and his companion hag Cichuil, equal in ugliness to him, overtake Conare and his host and offer them a pig for supper thus breaking one of Conare's *geasa*²² (EIMS, 71f). The heroes prosper as long as they keep to their personal *geasa* and whenever one of them is violated, it then leads straight to death. Therefore Conare's meeting of the strange couple is the initial stage of his fatal end. Moreover, the appearance of the attendants in the Da Derga's house where Conare is destroyed reminds of the Dagda himself:

each man had long hair to the nape of his neck and a short green mantel reaching to his buttocks; each man wore short, speckled trousers and carried a great thorn club with a band of iron round it (ibid., 76).

The final announcement of the hero's destruction is pronounced by an ugly hag who stands on the threshold of the house. In this way the two, Da Derga and the hag, stand as the agents signifying Conare's death.

Judging from the instances of the mythical material discussed so far it is possible to assume that the union of the divine or at least otherworldly couple

²² *Geis* (pl. *geasa*) is a mysterious taboo or a complex of Irish heroes the inevitable violation of which lead to the undoing of the hero (cf. Mees 2009, 143f). *Geasa* symbolize the powers beyond the control of the hero which, however, make a great part of the warrior's or king's personality (cf. O'Connor 2000, 184).

traditionally indicates the forthcoming violent death of some hero or a king. It is not so in case the couple consists of the family relatives, as it is in the ancient Welsh story *How Culhwch Won Olwen*. Here, the action turns around giant Ysbaddaden and his daughter Olwen, the bride whom Culhwch must win for himself (M, 195-200). The whole affair involves Culhwch into a great danger that threatens his own and his companions' lives, but, with the help of King Arthur and his retinue, the young hero completes the challenge successfully. Olwen undertakes a rather passive role in the given story. She does not participate in the action but serves as the object of desire that has no decisive power even over her own life – her future destiny is determined by the agreement between her father and Culhwch.

An Irish mythical story *Tales of the Elders of Ireland* tells of a daughter-giantess who is a more active agent and accompanies her aggressive father: Cailte, the last surviving member of the Fian, once meets a couple whose country is robbed by “a monster of theft” who is “the equal of four hundred men, his hound of three hundred, and his daughter of another three hundred” (TEI, 58). Next morning the fearful family and their dog come in a boat and the giant orders his daughter to let the bitch loose. Though much scared, Cailte manages to kill the beast. Next he has to deal with the giant's daughter who “gave him thirty wounds, from the tip of his great toe to the hair of his head, and Cailte gave her a blow of his sword that caused her entrails and bowels to fall from her” (ibid., 59). The combat with her father the giant requires much more effort, but Cailte ends it victoriously cutting his head off.

One of the best known divine families in Celtic perspective is Modron and her son Maonos. They are the major figures in Welsh mythology though little is known about any of them (cf. Mees 2009, 15ff). The two are depicted in the archeological data and mentioned in Medieval Welsh literature – namely in the story *How Culhwch Won Olwen* included in *The Mabinogion*. In order to win giant Ysbaddaden's daughter Olwen, Culhwch must find Mabon son of

Modron²³ “who was taken when three nights old from his mother. No one knows where he is, nor what state he is in, whether dead or alive” (M, 198). When Salmon of Llyn Lliev brings King Arthur and his companions to a wall they hear somebody lamenting and moaning – that is Mabon son of Modron imprisoned in the house of stone (ibid., 205). They set him free and carry on with their other tasks and neither Modron nor Mabon takes any more action in the narrative.

It appears that the union between male and female that brings death or involves into a dangerous affair might acquire several modes of manifestation. Though the relation between the members of the couple is rarely stated overtly it might be inferred that they are united by marital bonds in some cases. It must also be admitted that though in most cases the status of the inter-connection remains obscure, nevertheless the two seem to be of the same age and status. Another thing that should be kept in mind is that such couples invite the irrevocable fatal end. The situation is different if the female pole is represented by a younger generation, i.e. the daughter of the destructive male. Then the heroes have the chance of escaping from danger.

3.3.2. Modulations of the Celtic Perception of the Horse Figure in Relation with Death

The figure of the horse²⁴ in Celtic mythopoeics of death plays a very important role. Proofs from various fields of Celtic culture support this statement. The custom of burying a horse or the parts of its body with the dead was widespread across Europe (cf. Davis 1999, 30f; Rees 1996, 112; Ivantchik 2011, 82). In most cases the scholars agree that it was done to protect the dead from adverse supernatural powers. On the other hand, ancient people, especially Celts,

²³ I.e., the Divine Son of the Divine Mother.

²⁴ It should be noted that on the mythical plane, the figure of the horse may have several semantic allomorphs: a stag, a deer, a fawn, a mare, a colt, a foal. For this reason, these figures are treated as variants of the figure of the horse in the present research and are not classified into a separate category.

considered animals “almost an extension of themselves”, as Courtney Davis puts it (Davis 1999, 32). Therefore, the warlike tribes developed the custom to bury their warriors together with their closest companions – horses. Another possible reason for horse burials was the conviction that the dead need some help to get to the afterlife realm, and the horse was to facilitate or even perform the transfer. Green claims that “frequent discoveries of horse remains in such situations which might be described as liminal” implies that horses were believed to “straddle the two worlds” (Green 1997, 6). Mikhailova has indicated that, in Irish tradition, one of the means to get to the Otherworld was the white mare (cf. Mikhailova 2002b, 177). It leads to the assumption that the horse must have been imagined as a psychopomp which has access to the other world and could enter or leave it at will.

On the mythical plane, the figure of the horse is closely associated with water as a liminal element. One of the Celtic Deities, the sea god Manannan mac Lir, had a steed Enbarr ‘water foam’ which was actually a personification of the waves (cf. MacCulloch 2004, 128). The horse had some extraordinary powers – beside its supernatural speed, it gave protection to its rider because no one sitting on its back could be hurt. Moreover, Enbarr could easily run over both land and water (cf. O’Connor 2000, 38) – an ability which allowed the horse to carry mortals to and from the Otherworld. In Celtic tradition, the motif of the horse travelling easily whatever the element under its hooves is interacting with that of the ship, whose movement is likewise not restricted by the nature of the path – be it airy, fluid or solid (cf. Lauchlan 1862, 22). This proves that Celtic mythical consciousness employed several overlapping figurative structures to visualize the afterlife journey and the images of the horse and water play equally important roles in that vision. In other words, they might be considered to be semantic allomorphs that might be used interchangeably on the figurative level.

Among the horse-related goddesses Epona is without rivals: inherited from the nomadic stages of proto-Celtic tribal culture she was so popular that even the

Romans ‘accepted’ her in their Pantheon (cf. Stewart 1990, 24). The abundance of instances in literary sources confirms that the relation between a female and equine figure in the otherworldly context is not accidental (cf. Stewart 1990, 81; O’Connor 2000, 63f; French 2001, 74). Thus it is reasonable to assume that certain aspects affirmed in mythical tradition deduced from archeological findings might be observed in vernacular Celtic tradition. What is more, a close analysis of the narrative mythical heritage might offer new interpretative prospects of archeological data and thus give a more consolidated view of what the ancient pagan thought could have been like regarding the distribution of the roles among the divine agents.

One of the most obvious features of horses found in mythical stories is their destructiveness. It seems that an aggressive nature is an important feature determining the positive evaluation of the horse. Consider the description of Cu Chulainn’s horses:

One horse <...> is grey, broad-thighed, fierce, swift, flying, ferocious, war-leaping, long maned, noisy and thundering, curly-maned, high-headed, broad-chested; there shine the huge clods of earth that it cuts up with its very hard hooves. Its victorious stride overtakes flocks of birds; a dreadful flash its breath, a ball of flaming red fire, and the jaws of its bridle-bitted head shine. The other horse is jet black, hard-headed, compact, narrow-hooved, narrow-chested, strong swift, arrogant, braided-maned, broad backed, strong-thighed, high-spirited, fleet, fierce, long-striding, stout-blow-dealing, long-maned, long-tailed, swift at running after fighting, driving round paths and runs, scattering wastes, traversing glens and plains (EIMS, 236).

The grey horse is Líath Macha – the beloved horse of the hero. The creature has come to Cu Chulainn from the lake and they circled around Ireland in a night (ibid., 231). Líath Macha does not leave Cu Chulainn until his *lon láith* ‘hero’s light’ blazed from his eyes and ran around the stone to which Cu Chulainn had tied himself so that “fifty were slain by his teeth and thirty by each of his hooves” (CHA, 140). Another horse named Dub Sainglenn plunges into Loch nDub just when Cu Chulainn is mortally wounded (ibid.).

It is not a secret that all the prominent heroes are especially intimate with their horses as their best companions. Horses often contribute to the characterization of a warrior: a splendid horse suggests exceptional prowess of its rider and vice versa. But in this particular case, Cu Chulainn's horses seem to be extensions of the hero – Cu Chulainn undergoes gradual death, he is firstly mortally wounded so that his entrails are turned out and then his horse Dub Sainglenn leaves him. Yet the hero is not dead yet, his warrior spirit still makes him go and he is able to reach water to drink and tie himself to a stone – Cu Chulainn's pride does not allow him die lying and he is determined to defend himself against Lugaid and his army to the last. When Cu Chulainn's powers are exhausted completely, his horse (or mare, according to some sources) Líath Macha seems to undertake the role of the warrior spirit and any attempt at approaching the hero's body costs dearly to the enemy.

The same relation is observed between another Ulster hero, Conall Cernach, and his mare Derg Drúchtach. The latter is the equal in aggressiveness as insatiability to human blood to Cu Chulainn's Líath Macha. Derg Drúchtach has a hound's head and would slay men in battle and combats. When Conall fought with Lugaid to revenge Cu Chulainn's death and neither of them could get any advantage over the other, Conall just glanced at Derg Drúchtach and she came and “took a piece out of his [Lugaid's] side, so that what was in his midriff came out around his feet” (CHA, 143). Lugaid reproached Conall for the unfair fight but the latter replied: “I only granted it to you on my own account. I did not grant it to you on behalf of beasts and senseless animals” (ibid.). Conall acknowledged that his mare makes a part of him. There is little doubt in that because she obeys the glance of the hero, just as a hand obeys and implements the action planned in the mind.

The ancient mythical stories reveal that horses were conceived of as the “visit cards” for their heroes. The list of the instances discussed might be supplemented by data from *The Bricriu's Feast* where Medb identifies the

warriors approaching the castle from the description of their horses (EIMS, 235f). It is tempting to assume that the horses form the external self of the hero, a part of his fame and a part of his personality. That is the reason why the aggressiveness of the beasts acquires positive evaluation – it signifies the martial prowess of the hero who owns the horse.

An equine creature as a personification of devastation must have been a common theme in Celtic mythical thought. One of illustrative instances comes from *The Tales of the Elders of Ireland*: once Cailte's asked the Tuatha people from the *sidhe* to heal his wounds but they refused to do so because their nation was tortured by the three ravens which used to steal three boys each year, three princes who made raids against them and three does which ate all the grass not leaving a blade for the horses of the *sidhe* (TEI, 198ff). The variation of actors on the figurative level does not matter much as they all perform the same function of destruction. Yet the sequence of the destructive agents only confirms the relation between male and horses as a symbolical extension of each other. Moreover, it adds one more participant, i.e., a bird.

The relation between a horse and a bird is a common motif in the Celtic mythical tradition. The two are often compared and seem to be hardly distinguishable. For instance, when Conall chases the murderers of Cu Chulainn, Lugaid's charioteer says that the horseman is surrounded by the ravens of Ireland, while the plain in front of him is covered with snowflakes. But Lugaid knows it better that the birds are actually "clods from the hooves of the horse" and the snowflakes are but the "foam which comes from the horse's mouth and bridle-bit" (CHA, 141f). On the narrative level, such a view suggests a great danger to Lugaid for both the horse and the rider seem to be determined and overcome by battle frenzy. Symbolically, the given complex of images implies the forthcoming death because ravens circle around only when they know that a feast of human flesh will be served for them, whereas snowflakes, as the messengers of winter also foretell death.

The comparison with the bird contributes to the aggressive portrait of a war horse as it is reflected in ancient Brittonic sources:

They were swift steeds that advanced under Gereint's thigh,
long-legged, whose food was grain,
blood-splattered, swooping like grey eagles (CHA, 309).

As it was discussed above, the image of the eagle is closely related with the goddess Morrigan. The association of the steeds with the eagles in the given case adds to the assumption that symbolically the fierce, aggressive horses belong to the category of creatures associated with the battle fury. The more so that both horses and birds described in the given cases seem to be insatiable for the blood. In other words, war horses are equal members of the war goddess's army together with the war-like heroes. Drawing on the discussion of the Cu Chulainn's death scenes it is possible to infer that they are not dependent on humans but may act as independent individuals in martial affairs.

Beside war activities, horses play a significant role in kingship rituals. The importance of a horse in the royal procedures is well attested across various cultures (cf. Davis 1999, 30; Olmsted 1994, 81; Marazov 2011; 141). Inauguration was perceived as a union between the king and the land-goddess, thus the horse, or rather to say, an equine creature, since a mare was also a common participant of the ritual, appears as an intermediary part in the structure of the royal initiation serving as a representative of the divine female. Moreover, in Celtic tradition the horse is closely connected with the most outstanding heroes – Pryderi, Cu Chulainn, Osgar – who saw the light of the world together with the foals who later became their most faithful companions.

In mythical stories, male characters can acquire the equine shape either voluntarily or not. An illustrative case of involuntary transformation is that of Gwydion and Gilfaethwy, sons of Dôn, whom Math punishes for their crimes and turns into hind/stag, boar/sow and she-wolf/wolf (M, 52f). As a natural process

transformation is described in *The Conversation of Colum Cille* (Saint Columba) with a mysterious youth (possibly Mongán mac Fiachna) who metaphorically speaks of his vast age and experience. The youth has lived several lives: as a stag, salmon, seal and wolf till finally he acquired human shape (CHA, 221). Likewise, Fuán son of Caiull dreams about his life in the following sequence: as a stag, boar, hawk and salmon (CHA, 224). It should be emphasized here that, in the mentioned cases, the figure of the horse stands in a dual position: either it is a sign of the approaching phase of existence in a human shape or it belongs to the mythical time, the ideal age, when, according to the mysterious Youth “knowledge and ignorance were born and died” (CHA, 221). Hence the horse (or the stag as an untamed horse) shows up as a totemic animal uniting human existence with the transcendence.

The overview of the mythical narrative data reveals that the role of the horse as a psychopomp established on the grounds of archeological findings is a bit moderated in vernacular tradition. The horse never loses spiritual implications because it appears as an extension of war spirit governed by the battle fury and characteristic of heroes. Therefore horses described in the pieces of epic literature are ferocious, aggressive and associated with destruction. Nevertheless, mythical tradition reveals that equine creatures take important positions in the rituals of royal inauguration and might even be conceived of as totemic animals which serve as markers of the flow of the time. In any case, the figure of the horse never loses ties with the liminal situation, whether it concerns the transfer in the human or transcendental reality.

Another important correlation of the significance of the image of equine creatures is their association with females. It is interesting to note that scholarly assumptions based on the archeological findings are scarcely reflected in narrative vernacular tradition. Namely, the relation between the female figures and the horse has little connection with the role of a psychopomp. Nevertheless, women and equine creatures often appear together as closely inter-related supernatural

beings. The data informing about the relation comes from the earliest written sources to relatively late manuscripts of the fifteenth century.

One of the best known goddesses attested in ancient Irish manuscripts is the third Macha, a supernatural bride who married a mortal Crunuchú and stayed with him until he violated the taboo. Macha was challenged by the king to save her chatty husband in a horse-race which she wins despite being heavily pregnant with twins. After the race she delivers, but dies herself and curses several generations of Ulstermen to suffer the pangs of childbirth when the country is in the greatest need of them. The place where she delivered twins is called Emain Macha, literally ‘Twins of Macha’ (EIMS, 128f). It is the most important religious centre of Celts as designated in vernacular tradition (O’Connor 2000, 63).

Another ancient story, *The Wasting Sickness of Cu Chulainn*, relates about otherworldly women who appear to the hero in his dream and beat him with a horsewhip almost to death. Afterwards Cu Chulainn withdraws to live in the otherworld (EIMS, 157). In both stories, the mytheme women-horse has no direct representation as the role of the horse figure is reduced to senseless beasts or attributes. Interestingly, both narratives have to do with the explication of the male weakness, inability to perform heroic deeds. In the first case, the target of the female fury is the whole male community of Ulster, whereas in the second story, the woman uses horse related objects to take away the strength of the hero who is able to defend Ulster on his own, without any help.

In the *Tales of Elders of Ireland*, Caílte tells several stories which depict females closely associated with equine creatures. One of Fin’s wives, Oisín’s mother, is a woman transformed into a deer. The tradition of the Fian maintains that she was enchanted by an evil druid whose love she despised (TEI, 226). The noblest princes of Ireland and Scotland, as Caílte puts it, have come from the Stable of the Lamentation of Women in the South (TEI, 13). All the princes have wonderful cloaks made of the wool from the Land of Promise, they find common

language with the Tuatha and gain vast territory to rule. Both their appearance and origins signify otherworldly nature.

The horse as an otherworldly beast appears in the mythical stories from the Welsh branch. The most prominent figure is, by all means, Rhiannon who is associated with horses in the first as well as in the third branches of the *Mabinogion*. Rhiannon, who is acknowledged to be the Welsh variant of the Great Goddess, first appears to Pwyll riding a huge white horse that nobody can catch except Pwyll (M, 10f). Rhiannon then asks him to marry her and prevent her marriage with an otherworldly groom who she despised. Later on, when the newborn baby of Rhiannon is mysteriously stolen and she is blamed for killing the boy as her punishment she must relate her story to any person who wishes to hear it and carry people to the court on her back as if she were a mare (ibid., 17).

In the third branch of the *Mabinogion* which depicts deteriorated status of Celtic deities as they become subject to otherworldly adverse powers and turn to be craftsmen, Rhiannon bears collars of asses after she has been hauling hay (M, 46). Thus the link between the divine female character and a horse is never broken: she remains associated with horse-like activity which actually points to the identification of the woman and the horse despite the erasure of the divine nature of hers.

Generally speaking, mythical material provides a number of stories where females are associated with horses in the context of the otherworldly reality. They invite the heroes for the purposes of love or expose otherworldly power to humans. But they rarely acquire the shape of the horse – supernatural females either use horse-related attributes or undertake horse-like activity but not shape-shift into some equine creature the case of Oisín's mother being a single exception of rule. A horse might be also a feature which helps to prescribe a certain female character to supernatural beings as in the first branch of the *Mabinogion*. In other words, the archetypal role of a psychopomp seems to be modified in vernacular

tradition: the horse does not carry the soul to the afterlife realm, but horse-related females lure or invite the heroes to the Otherworld.

3.4. Variations of the Liminal State Initiated by Females

The understanding of death as a separation of the spiritual part from the body is only partially precise within mythical framework. The matter is essentially more complicated as the structure of the spirit is very complex according to ancient beliefs and involves many intellectual capacities as well as physical abilities. Thus one may undergo a partial death when only a part of the spiritual wholeness abandons the body. The following subchapter is devoted to the exploration of the possible liminal states caused by the divine females and their reflections in folklore. The special attention is paid to female characters as they are conceived of as the representatives of the goddess responsible for the transfer of the soul to the afterlife realm.

It is a well established fact that pagans hardly had any notion close to the contemporary understanding of the 'soul'. Gregg Smith states that the Old English word *soell* appeared only after the introduction of Christianity (cf. Smith 2007, 57). Bruce Lincoln suggests that the PIE **h₂su-* 'breath' as the seat of life-force and vitality is the closest notion to that of the 'soul' in the PIE tradition: when it departs from the body, it turns into the wind (cf. Lincoln 1991, 14). Breath is the life force that is essentially associated with movement. Aristotle's philosophical work on the conceptualization of the soul, *De Anima*, also gives an overview of the contemporary ideas regarding the subject: various philosophers offer different insights regarding the structure of the soul but many of them including Aristotle himself relate the spirituality of a man with the breath because soul, according to them is movement and respiration is a continuous movement (*De Anima*, I.2). The ancient Greek philosophy is not directly related with the Celtic mythical narratives, nevertheless the very fact that such matters were discussed illustrates

the general ancient pagan beliefs circulating around when the Celts emerged on the cultural map of Europe. It also leads to the assumption that breath was considered to be the essential principle of life.

There is no much evidence in the mythical stories relating who actually controls the breath but several assumptions might be made on the grounds of the portrait of destructive agents, especially supernatural females who attempt at the violent death of heroes. Their descriptions include the element of a huge mouth also indicative of devouring (CHA, 205), or wide nostrils (EIMS, 71), which might be associated with in-breathing the life-force. The hags can gather the life force not only by means of devouring the flesh, but by collecting other parts of the body. For instance, Caílte tells about nine witches who come covered with the hair from the heads of the people long dead. The hair, notably, is the symbol of virility and life whereas hairless beings are considered to lack the essentials of life (cf. Ungerer 1983, 103ff, Biedermann 2002, 334f). It should also be noted that they approach screaming as nobody else on earth can do which is also suggestive of huge lungs, i.e., great capacity for life force (TEI, 190). Thus the life force can be inhaled, swallowed as well as cut off. The appearance of the supernatural females indicates that they might be the collectors of the life force as they have certain ‘devices’ to perform the task.

Breath or possibility to move is the vitality itself and sometimes it can be as strong as to be retained even after the factual death. Lewis Spence has noticed a specific Celtic distinction, namely, that the Celts believed in “the immortality of the individual, and his continued identity” (Spence 1995, 112). It implies that the dead could carry out certain activities. The significance of the living dead is especially clear in the Germanic tradition – here they are depicted as malevolent, dangerous and beastly beings (cf. Smith 2007). As their mythical stories as reveal, the Celts must have been familiar with the notion of a living dead too. For instance, Cu Chulainn fights with a living dead on his way to the battle (EIMS, 138); Nera is looking for water for a hanged man (CHA, 128); Fin’s or Lomnae’s

head demands his portion of salmon (CHA, 202), let alone Bran/Bendigeidfran's head, which guides his people and accompanies them for several years after being severed from the body (M, 32ff). The characteristic feature that unites all the living dead is their stubbornness and limited reason. With the exception of Bran/Bendigeidfran, they do not seem to act but rather to operate as they cannot react to the circumstances but only insist on their single wish to get or destroy something.

Movement might be incited not only by breath but by blood. Blood is the ever-circulating liquid that ensures life, therefore its mythical significance is of no less importance. The relation between blood and life is well established in different religions including Biblical perspective according to which, the body, blood and breath constitutes the self (cf. Bowker 1991, 63). Ancient Greeks equaled blood to the soul (cf. Meletis, Konstantopoulos 2010, 3). Similar perspective is kept in Celtic myths. For instance, once Cu Chulainn's fights with the spectres at Sanera's house: they try to tear his body but he resists and gives them a proper answer so that "the air is full of their blood" (EIMS, 242). It seems so that the blood that flutters in the air is not the substance as a matter of fact but the life force, the spiritual element that incites the movement of the spectres. On the other hand, the air thickened with blood is a perfect figurative expression of an intense, inhuman fight.

Another instance comes from the *Second Battle of Mag Tuired* where Morrigan serves handfuls of the defeated Fomorian king's blood to the Tuatha. The episode might be claimed to be the earliest Celtic record of blood drinking tradition. The drinking of blood here is symbolical of the total destruction, the acquisition of the enemy's life force. On the other hand, blood sacrifice is a common element in fertility rituals, thus inseparable from the figure of the goddess in her life-fostering aspect (cf. Geyer 2007, 4). It shows that hostile chthonic creatures try to get human blood to become stronger, i.e., they need the vitality of life force which is kept in blood and enables them to act.

The removal of the source of movement, i.e. the restriction of breath or blood flow, causes paralysis and stiffness. The study of the peculiarities of the great goddesses across the Europe revealed that divine females could make people senseless, speechless as if they were made of stone (cf. Dexter 2010, 32). In Celtic ancient beliefs, stones were strongly associated with the otherworldly knowledge. The best known example illustrating the statement is, probably, the Great Fál – the stone of knowledge that shrieks under the feet of the right king (CHA, 253). According to other sources, it also changes its colour when used in trials – it turns white and red if a guiltless man stands on it; it also reacted to pregnancy (TEI, 223). Obviously, the change of the stone’s colour is a response to the forthcoming death or birth.

The durability of stone can be transferred unto other objects if appropriate rituals are performed at the right time: the Fian used to sharpen their weapons on the Rock of Weapons every Samhain – then they did not “dull in battle, skirmish or fighting” (TEI, 125). Since the stone is considered to be an ever-lasting material, it is normally associated with the eternity in mythical perspective (cf. Biedermann 2002, 19). For example, Donn, Celtic ruler of the dead, is believed to have decreed to raise a stone cairn across the sea so that people – “the hundredfold offspring” – could follow him (cf. Lincoln 1991, 34). Thus stone is thought to be the perfect marker of the burial place or the place of death.

One of the most popular extensions of the concept of death is sleep, probably, because this state is closest to that of death. T. A. Mikhailova accentuates that the relation between sleep and death, which is a common IE feature, is characteristic of the Celtic worldview too. She especially lays emphasis on the assumption that ancient Celts did not take death as dream. On the contrary, for them, sleep is a type of death – an approach that the scholar compares with the

Russian expression *спать мертвым сном* ‘sleep in a deadly sleep’ (cf. Mikhailova 2002a, 15)²⁵.

While asleep, a person gets an access to the otherworldly reality experienced as dreams which might be either inviting or dangerous. Quite often women cannot resist sleep in the period after the childbirth. For instance, all attendants were asleep on the birthday of Prydery (M, 16). As a consequence, the unprotected baby was stolen by a mysterious hand and the unhappy mother Rhiannon accused of having killed the child. Female figures might come in dreams and or control them. Fand and Lí Ban send sleep to Cu Chulainn, he dreams the two women whip him and falls sick afterwards (EIMS, 157). Thus the female characters appear as governors of dreams which, actually, contradicts the general tendency in Celtic mythology where the function of bringing sleep is more typical of men: Dagda’s harp, Aillén’s dulcimer (TEI, 51) can bring sleep on men, whereas the pipe of the sons of Iruath can do that in spite of any pain or injury (cf. van Hamel 1934, 8). In *The Adventures of Cormac Son of Art Son of Conn*, the Lord of the Otherworld gives Cormac an apple tree branch which produces sweet sounds and makes people fall asleep when shaken (CHA, 184). Yet, whatever the inducer, sleep is always related with the Otherworld. In other words, a sleeping person leaves the world of the living and transfers into another reality.

Beside the mentioned metaphorical modulations of the concept of death on the mythical plane, some other variants of a partial death might be detected. E.R. Anderson extends the list of concepts referring to the immaterial part of a human being. Having investigated the linguistic data, the scholar has come to the conclusion that spiritual entity is composed not only of ‘breath’ but of reason, intelligence, will, memory as intellectual capacities and breast/heart that stand for

²⁵ This conviction must have been so strong among the Celts, that even in modern times in Scotland, when somebody is about to die, no one is allowed to sleep (cf. Gordon 1984, 9). It is done so, most probably, to prevent death to affect others, to avoid being in the same state as the dying person and thus escape the terrible claws of death.

emotions (cf. Anderson 2003, 331f). The departure of any of these constituents of the spiritual part of a human being implies certain death because man becomes incomplete and his ability to react to the surroundings, i.e., to live, appears to be restricted.

The loss of reason is a complex process that involves several stages. First of all, a person experiences some shock which incites the madness. Then he usually withdraws to some remote place until someone, usually a female, finds him and offers a remedy. The famous Irish hero Cu Chulainn underwent all the stages. He went mad when his otherworldly lover Fand left him. Then he withdrew for a long time to the mountains without food or water, slept each night on Slige Midlúachra. But his wife Emer and king Conchubur summoned poets and druids who chanted spells and Cu Chulainn “came to his senses” (EIMS, 178). It must be mentioned that recovery from madness always has an extra-effect, namely, forgetfulness. When Cu Chulainn is restored to health he is neither conscious of his previous states nor he remembers his actions.

It might be added here that any supernatural experience never goes without consequences. People who have dealt with the Other/Underworld gain exceptional knowledge. But they rarely can share it with others because, as a rule, people with the supernatural experience become dumb. The motif of revived people that become deprived of verbal communication is ancient and, probably, a Celtic one. In the Second branch of *The Mabinogion*, in order to appease the insulted Irish, Bendigeidfran gives a cauldron to Matholwch which revives the dead warriors who can well proceed their fighting but cannot speak (M, 25)²⁶.

There was a widely spread conviction among ancient pagans that some spiritual part of a human being existed outside the body. Smith discusses Germanic notions of *hugr*, *fylgjur* and *hamingja*. The scholar draws on an

²⁶ A plate on the Gundestrupp cauldron depicts some divinity putting a warrior into a vat – possibly, it is the scene of revival in a cauldron (cf. M, notes 25). The image of the cauldron plays a significant role in Celtic religious thought. It fostered Medieval legends of the Holy Grail which basically reflects the same values as established in Celtic tradition: abundance and regeneration (cf. Stewart, Williamson 1996, 87).

extensive etymological as well as comparative study and claims that three concepts prove that “a critical human essence in each of us <...> could, in fact, separate itself from us, even while we lived” from that something which is “at once part of the individual and yet is sometimes seen as being a separate extension of the individual’s self” (Smith 2007, 8-54).

In Celtic tradition, the analogue of the *hamingja* – the guarding spirit – is the *banshee*, a supernatural woman that laments someone’s death. Usually she is heard but rarely might be seen as well. The *banshee* has close associations with rocks where she sits lamenting or rivers where she washes the clothes of the one’s to die in a short period (cf. Spence 1995, 81). What is more, the *banshee* is related with certain families, especially old and prominent ones (cf. Briggs 1971, 189). Smith generalizes that the function of the *banshee* was to warn of death and so help avoid it (cf. Smith 2007, 56). While Patricia Lysaght sees two separate types of the *banshee* to fulfill the two functions each: one is associated primarily with the death in a battle, i.e., premature death, and another related with ancestral guardian (cf. Lysaght, discussed in Davidson 1998, 179). As a part of man’s spiritual identity, it also has access to otherworldly knowledge – that is how the *banshee* predicts someone’s death²⁷.

The goddess acting like the *banshee* is commonly found in stories about Cu Chulainn. For instance, when Cu Chulainn fights with a living dead he hears the voice of Badb from among the corpses crying: “a bad warrior who lies at the feet of a spectre” (EIMS, 138). These words inspire the hero to gather his strength and overcome his rival. Here the goddess is not involved in the action directly but serves as an encouraging spirit. Yet sometimes the goddess might undertake a more active role as, for example, Morrígan, who breaks Cu Chulainn’s chariot a

²⁷ The belief that some spiritual part can function independently of the rest of a human being has been recorded in even relatively recent times. Anne Ross describes a case when a person is haunted by his own spirit and when he tries to get rid of it he is beaten severely. The story comes from the notes of Martin Morison’s (1660-1719) who was a minister at Lewis at that time (cf. Ross 1976, 46). Another story says a ghost of the mother appeared to her daughter at the moment of her death (ibid., 60).

night before his fatal battle, “for she did not wish Cu Chulainn to go to the battle, for she knew he would not come back” (CHA, 136). Soon after the hero meets Lebarcham, a slave girl who pleads him not to leave them “and the three times fifty women who were in Emain Macha said the same thing in a great voice” (ibid.). They all predicted Cu Chulainn’s destruction and try to prevent it.

The motif of women lamenting the events that cannot be changed is common in ancient Irish mythical stories. A supernatural wail and shriek of an unseen female goes north and south along the Shamón’s stream to announce the deaths of Lir’s wives (TIBT, 6); Blaí, the daughter of Derg, comes to the head of the spring “with wailing cry and lament, after the battle of Confaite”²⁸ (TEI, 6). Thus, as the records in ancient manuscripts reveal, the notion of the *banshee* has been preserved since the earliest times.

To be included in the discussion of possible death-states is the social dimension which might be manifested in two ways: either people might be unnamed or misplaced. Yuriy Lotman noticed that “for mythical consciousness, the sign is analogical to a proper noun” (Lotman 2004f, 233). That is, only these things that have names are admitted to exist. Therefore, a person who has no name is not alive from the perspective of the society, that is to say, such a person might be termed as a living dead. In the Celtic mythology, the responsibility to give the name to a child seems to have belonged to the mother: Rhiannon gives the name to her child Pryderi (M, 21) and then the story ends. Another significant mythical figure from the Welsh branch – Lley Llaw Gyffes – gets his name from his mother as one of the qualifications necessary for his successful independent life (M, 56). After he undergoes all stages of the initiation, Arianhrod never appears in the story again. It is obvious that the mother figure played an important role in the establishment of a person in a society: she participates in the introduction ritual and after the transfer is completed, she is excluded from the scene of action.

²⁸ It must be explained here that Blaí is the foster mother of Fin, whereas the battle of Confaite was the last battle of the Fian where almost all the heroes were killed.

The so-called men without a place, i.e. those that live on social boundaries might also be conceived of as 'social living dead'. Without any martial or economical role in the society, they come to represent the messengers in between the human world and the world of gods that can transgress the boundaries easier than ordinary mortals. Beggars are also believed to have special knowledge and be able to survive in the Otherworld (cf. Biedermann 2002, 107f). The episode from the *First Branch of The Mabinogion* might serve as an illustration as to the beggars abilities to act in another reality: in order to win his lady Rhiannon back from her otherworldly suitor, Pwyll must dress up in rags and act as a beggar (M, 13). When dressed so, Pwyll acquires necessary qualifications to defeat the otherworldly rival, but he does not loose his human nature either. Thus it proves that social death, or to be more precise, otherness, is also closely related with female figures because they incite, control, or remove such a state.

4. REFLECTIONS OF THE MYTHICAL MODELS OF DEATH IN CELTIC FOLKTALES

Mythical stories and folktales belong to oral tradition. The models and conceptual systems are embedded in the mythical structure and, therefore, easily transgress the boundaries of the genre and are implanted in the folklore tradition where they find a fertile land for both further development and preservation (cf. Donald, 2006, 4; Siikala 2008, 39f). In other words, one may expect either to find the obvious modulations of mythemes or mythemes transferred with only minor alternations. The search of the Celtic mythopoetic models of death in folktales may shed a light on both the degree of the transformation and the mechanisms that initiate and govern the changes.

4.1. Configurations of the Code of Appearance

As discussed in the previous chapters, the code of appearance is one of the most important factors indicating the supernatural origins of mythical characters. Celtic tradition tends to focus on the head, especially the facial area. Typically, such techniques as hyperbolisation and minimization of some parts of the body are employed. Moreover, the ability to shape-shift into some animal or bird is also indicative of the divine nature. Hence the subsequent subchapters attempt at the discussion whether the mythical patterns of misshapeness are reflected in Celtic folktales and what extrapolations of the female-bird relation might be observed in the folklore tradition.

4.1.1. Elements of Physical Appearance

The transformational anthropomorphic model which involves a supernatural female is widely spread in the folklore tradition. Yet, certain

deviations from the mythical framework of the Sovereignty Goddess are evident since not all of them have a happy end. One of the most popular stories comes from the Fian cycle. In it, an ugly hag, whose most peculiar feature is hair reaching her heels, is refused to be given warmth by all the members of the Fian with an exception of Diarmaid. When she gets under his cover, she instantaneously turns into the “most beautiful woman in the world” (PTWH III-LXXXVI, 403f). She becomes his wife, builds the castle in the place he preferred and brings overall prosperity which lasts until he breaks their agreement. Then she leaves Diarmaid but gives him a present – a love spot on his forehead: whenever a woman looked at that spot she could not help but fall in love with him. Thus ends the tale but not yet Diarmaid’s life.

Another tale tells that Fin’s fiancée Grainne falls in love with Diarmaid because of the love spot and forces him to betray his lord and elope with her. Revengeful Fin lets him die in a boar hunt by refusing to heal him (PTWH III-LX, 39-49; LXI, 50-90). The sequence of events in the analysed stories shows that, indirectly, the Sovereignty Goddess is responsible for the fatal end of the hero – it was for the love spot that Diarmaid had to lose the support and friendship of his comrades, on which he was heavily dependent, and, finally, die. On the other hand, it is obvious that the woman’s behaviour was caused by Diarmaid’s violation of their agreement which was the proof of his inappropriateness to stay together with a goddess²⁹.

Celtic mythical tradition reveals that long-haired or excessively haired women are associated with death. Folklore goes in the same semantic line

²⁹ The motif of anthropomorphic metamorphosis is found in several Celtic tales. Each case involves different models of transformation: e.g., it concerns not only a female but her family members as well (WIFR, 60f); the giant’s daughter becomes a beauty on her wedding night (PTWH I-I, 1-6); the giant’s daughter must undergo social transformation from a shabby shoemaker’s daughter or a smith to the queen (PTWH I-II) – here the transformation is carried out by changing clothes. Another possible model of anthropomorphic transformation is changing one’s sex by changing clothes (PTWH I, 49; PTWH II-XVIII, 4ff). Nevertheless, these cases have little to do with the introduction to death, but rather focus on the social transformation of the heroines, their incorporation into new societies, the motif found in Medieval romances.

regarding the symbolism of the hair. Long hair is the most distinct characteristics of the *banshee* – whenever people happen to see this supernatural creature they claim she is a “tall, thin woman, with uncovered head, and long hair that floated round her shoulders” (IFFT, 132). The hair is the first detail noticed by the man who once met the *banshee*:

The first thing I tuk notice to, Misther Harry, was her hair, that was sthreelin' down over her showldhers, an' a good yard on the ground on aich side of her. O, be the hoky farmer, but that was the hair! The likes of it I never seen on mortal woman, young or ould, before nor sense. It grew as sthrong out of her as out of e'er a young slip of a girl ye could see (IFFT, 118).

The hair of Yellow Muilearteach's who kills many warriors is of the same quality:

Upon her head gnarled brushwood.
Like the clawed old wood of the aspen root (PTWH III-LXXIII, 124)

Even in the Christian context the focus on the quality of the hair is retained: the *banshee's* hair is described as “of Iscariot's colour” (IFFT, 118) thus implicating danger for both human body and soul. The focus on the hair shows that the ancient symbolism has preserved its relevance as a figure signaling death. It is conceived of as an immediate sign of a forthcoming or possible destruction fostered or even performed by the supernatural female agents.

Extraordinary long nails make another important element in the grotesque picture of a death representative. For instance, the nails of the venomous mother of Fear Dubh are seven perches long (MFI, 228), while the nails of the hag in the cave turn about her elbows (PTWH III-LVIII, 13). It should be noted here that from the natural perspective, perpetually growing nails, as well as hair are related with the renewal of life (cf. Biedermann 2002, 334f). On the other hand, they seem to be a rather convenient tool to tear human flesh. Long hair and nails are the typical signs of evil spirits and even evil dead men who use them to drag

people to death (cf. Tokarev 2008, 620). Definitely, long nails as well as hair represent bestial uncivilized forces most frequently embodied in the females who possess them.

The mythical tendency to focus on facial area is mirrored in folklore tradition. It is especially evident in the employment of the image of the eyes as the defining figure of supernatural women. For instance, a henwife's daughter has an additional eye on the back of her head which is active and can see even if the girl is asleep (PTWH II-XLIII, 287). An excessive number of the eyes is suggestive of the prophetic capacity or extraordinary powers of to acquire knowledge: in the mythical story the power is employed to foretell the death of the warriors who participate in the cattle raid of Cooley, whereas in the folktale it is used to foster the action to cause troubles to the heroine.

The instances of one-eyed creatures in folklore reveal that they are more active agents of death or life than depicted in mythical stories. For instance, a hag who is capable of reviving dead men has "one leg out of her haunch and one eye in her forehead" (WIFR, 100). Yellow Miulearteach who kills an enormous number of warriors is one-eyed:

In her head was one deep pool-like eye,
Swifter than a star in a winter sky (PTWH III-LXXIII, 124)

Here the single-eyed females participate actively in the action of the narrative. It might be due to the deviation from the mythical material which depicted goddesses or battle-furies raging over the battlefield but never actually involved in the slaughter. Moreover, folk tradition shows that the supernatural females 'have lost' the power of the word which is more important than action in the mythical thought (cf. Ioffe 2012, 177ff). Paradoxically, the greater activity of folklore female characters proves that they are modifications of their mythical ancestors.

Another facial feature that has mythical significance and is transferred into folktales is the area of mouth. The carlin whose giant relatives were killed by the

hero opens her gab so wide that a man can jump into it (PTWH I, 97). Another giantess exposes her inner organs whenever she gapes (CDM, 55). It might be so that the image of a wide mouth is based on the visual parallel with the tomb – the burial cave seems to swallow the body of the dead which marks the physical separation of the dead person from the community.

The allusion is further supported by the image of the teeth which might be suggestive of the decomposition of the body. The Hag of Beara's green and extremely sharp teeth is but a single example found in mythical stories. All other instances come from folktales: each tooth of a woman living in a hut and possessing magical objects is "as long as a staff" (MFI, 35). Such comparison is very popular in Celtic folktales: a carlin has a tooth that she uses as a staff and a tooth to stir the fire (CDM, 55). MacDorcha, MacDoillier's mother, who has the power to revive the dead warriors has a "tooth longer than a staff in her fist, and the one that was shorter than a stocking wire in her lap" (PTWH II-LII, 448). Other hags have one upper tooth which is "as long as her leg and served in place of a crutch" (MFI, 259; 284). The hag who lives in a cave has such teeth that the least of them "would make a knitting pin in her lap, a staff in her hand, and a stirring stick for the embers" (PTWH III-LVIII, 13). On the other hand, the Hag of the Church whom Kaytuch meets after killing the Hag of Slaughter is a tall, rusty, toothless crone (WIFR, 70). She does not attack him first, but asks Kaytuch to go home. Thus the toothless mouth shows that she does not have the power to physically harm Kaytuch.

An enormous size of teeth suggests the powers of the hag to surpass ordinary women and thus points to her supernatural origins. It should be made clear that teeth are never used as an instrument to bring death or life to humans. It is only a descriptive detail of the hags which informs about their otherworldly nature and, in most of the cases discussed, indicates hostility towards the hero. Nevertheless, the comparison between the tooth and the staff is a symbolical hint of the hags' ability to control life and death because a staff is a symbol of power

and is often used as a means to transform one into a beast or a stone, i.e., to introduce one to another reality evoking partial death.

Physical deformity is a very popular leitmotif found in folklore, especially in the case of the half mythical *banshee*, the supernatural women who roam the banks of the rivers and wail for the ones doomed to die. Scholars describe her as “crooked, thatched with elf-locks, foxy grey and rough like heather, with wrinkled brow, bleared eyes and flattened blue nose” (Spence 1995, 81). Yet, the *banshee* may bear some animalistic parts which betray her otherworldly nature and point to her dwelling environment. For instance, one of the memorata type stories about the *banshee* claim that a shepherd once met a very old, coarse and dirty crippled woman at the edge of the moss. He offered to help her and carry her on his back but when he noticed her web-footed legs he had to flee for his life (PTWH II-XXXVII, 191).

Age and deformity is a popular junction of the figures shared by the *banshee* and the witches. Consider the looks of the famous crone renown for her witch-like deeds that comes to help the bewitched farmer:

She appeared of great age; her countenance was extremely ugly and repulsive; her skin was rough and deeply embrowned as if from long exposure to the effects of some tropical climate; her forehead was low, narrow, and indented with a thousand wrinkles; her long gray hair fell in matted elf-locks from beneath a white linen skull cap; her eyes were bleared, blood sotten, and obliquely set in their sockets, and her voice was croaking, tremulous, and, at times, partially inarticulate³⁰ (IFFT, 167f).

It is worth noting that the shabby appearance is found in conjunction with the young age as well. To illustrate, the henwife’s little daughters are dressed in rags and have shevelled hair (MFI, 59f). Being not dangerous themselves, they indirectly lead the young heroine to the castle where the queen keeps her husband, thus the daughters also remain associated with the Otherworld. In a Scottish

³⁰ Though the creative hand of the editor W. B. Yeates is evident in such refined phrases as “long exposure to the effects of some tropical climate”, the general structure of the hag’s portrait seems to have been preserved.

folktale, the name of the henwife's daughter who has an eye on the back of her head is Ni Mhaol Charach meaning 'Bold scabby thing' (PTWH II-XLIII, 287), thus alluding to her general physical appearance³¹. The girl is put in the adverse relationship with the heroine as she is sent to spy on her and so brings harm.

The tradition to associate red colour with the women who deal with another reality has survived throughout ages. For instance, a memorata-like story from the 19th c. records that a witch who comes to release a farmer from his neighbour's spell arrives "enveloped in an old scarlet cloak" (IFFT, 167). Though she is benevolent towards the farmer, her appearance is repulsive mainly due to blood sodden eyes. Giants' daughters are sometimes red-haired (PTWH I, 50, 56) – most probably, it is indicative of a woman living beyond the limits of the human world. One of the warriors of the Fian notices the hue of blood on the water when a washer woman washes the clothes of Osgar, which means that the hero's death is at hand (PTWH III-LXXX, 306).

Folklore tradition also associates the red colour with fire, especially when the description of a supernatural creature is focused on the eyes. For instance, the eyes of the Old Hag of the Forest, the mother of giants, are "flashing fire" (ICC, 136); in *The Spirit Horse* the hag's eyes are "deep glowing red" (Zaczek 2001, 111). It should be noted here that in these particular cases the redness of the embers and fire do not represent warmth and life. They rather stand for the raging uncontrollable elemental forces that invite a human being to get involved into the primordial chaos. The fire of the hag's eyes is scorching and dissuading life, which evaporates like water. The same theme is sometimes manifested without the figure of the fire: for instance, the step-mother in *Mac Iain Direach* has such a glance that, whenever she looks at a man, he "falls a faggot of firewood" (PTWH II-XLVI, 340) – she seems to dry out his life with her eyes. The dry stick is a

³¹ The same phrase is used to refer to people who are preternaturally sharp. Churlishness being one of the elements of the Otherworld in hostile aspect, it keeps the figure of the girl within the Celtic mythical framework.

common attribute of a woman dealing with the supernatural, e.g., the witches travel on faggots or broomsticks (IFFT, 167).

To sum up, the comparative discussion has revealed that many of the physical features, such as hairiness, deformity, shabbiness, etc., indicating the liminal nature of the Celtic goddess figure have been inherited in folktales. Notably, the figurative means have been transferred from the mythical narratives to folklore with minor distortions, if any. Nevertheless, the functional layer seems to have suffered greater alternations: in mythical stories goddesses rely on the power of the word and serve as the announcers of death, whereas in folklore the hags ‘take up’ a more active position and attempt to bring death on the heroes.

4.1.2. Extrapolations of the Female-Bird Relationship

The semantic strains laid out in the mythical stories had been well transferred into folklore tradition. Celtic tales contain various modulations of the female-bird couple, some of them seem to have been preserved precise, others altered if compared to the ancient manuscript stories. The motif of birds drinking blood is found in *The Lullaby of Snow*, which contains the following stanza:

There would come the carrion – crow and raven
At the dawn’s breaking
Would drink their fill from the pools
Brimming, blood-red (CG IV, 355).

The function of the song is not clearly defined, but it is quite possible that this lullaby is a lament dedicated to wail for a dead child because in it sleep imagery closely intermingles with death imagery: the speaker addresses a little child yet receives no response since the baby is sleeping wrapped in a shroud, its hands are cold, it does not seek milk, etc. After the indication of the miserable state and absence of any reaction on the part of the child, the speaker turns to the depiction of heavenly spheres and addresses their inhabitants who are to protect

the baby. The above given stanza concludes the song. Here, the Christian perspective of the afterlife is amalgamated with pagan cosmology. The last focus on the lullaby is the image of blood drinking birds which terminates the song and signifies the loss of any hope to recover the child. The similar cases are found with the crow signifying the death of Cu Chulainn, or blood drinking eagles that draw the life blood from the knights in the Welsh poems discussed above. By all means, the usage of the fowl imagery might be justified by the natural habits of the birds: the crow and the raven being carrion eaters, they are naturally associated with death. Nevertheless, the motif of drinking human blood seems to be closer to the goddess-related system of images which managed to resist the influence of time. Notably, this creates a deeper dramatic effect than just denoting the fact that some mother has lost her child: here a lamenting and loving mother is opposed to an implied ruler of the birds who is not seen as an actor in the song, yet might have been preserved in the cultural memory as the source of destruction, against which there is no remedy, not even the motherly love.

Curiously, the structure of ancient beliefs seems to be perfectly preserved in some mythical characters, such as Baoban Síth. It is a malignant spirit which may appear as a crow or a raven, but its most frequent shape is that of a beautiful maiden dressed in green who tries to cover her deer hooves. Such spirits offer themselves as partners to men and afterwards suck out their blood (cf. Briggs 1971, 189). The behavioural seductive model of Baoban Síth is similar to that of the Sovereignty Goddess, yet it is supplemented with the destructive elements: in her case, sexuality is accompanied by a fatal danger, and all this is found in the creature which is half human, half animal and may easily change her shape into that of a bird.

Bird imagery proves to be a very important element in Celtic mythopoeics of death. The variety of the roles of birds extends from a helper-informant to the bringer of death. If neither is implied, birds still remain associated with the supernatural powers. In folktales, birds frequently participate in such schemes of

action which, at a first sight, seem to be inherited from the mythopoetic semantic field the Celtic Goddess. For instance, hawk/falcon belongs to a triad of assistants who help to find the soul of a giant hidden in various objects (PTWH I-I; IV). Hawk/eagle/raven belong to the class of beings due to whose age the time flow is measured – actually, birds often are next to salmon, the oldest creature ever. Thus, they often talk about the distant events. The model is also retained in the Christian context: an Irish tale tells that a monk hears a bird singing the most beautiful song. It flies from tree to tree and lures the monk away from the monastery. When he comes back in the evening, he finds everything changed because 200 years have passed (IFFT, 237). Here the bird is said to be an angel sent by the Almighty, yet, the pagan belief in the bird as a mediator between the human and the supernatural worlds underlies the story. Eagles are frequent carriers of the heroes to the remote realms where the giants dwell (ICC, 274; PTWH I-IX). Sometimes they may provide much information about the past and the future, the evil queen’s deceit (PTWH II-XLIII), or give some advice how to defeat the Queen of the Otherworld (MFI, 61). Thus raven/hawk/falcon act in the supernatural spheres and employ the features usually attributed to the Goddess: they take up the liminal sphere when on the journey (either temporal or spatial), appear as exponents of wisdom and knowledge as well as experts in the laws of the Otherworld.

Folktales offer an innovative representative model of a female-bird relationship. Here, a female acts as an agent, whereas her association with the bird is more implied than manifested. Consider the role of a henwife, an archetypal malevolent character in Celtic tales. It is the woman who usually approached by the queen who wishes to get rid or otherwise to do harm to her step-children. The henwife is the first person evil step-mothers ask about an ingenious destructive plan to be invented. She is often described as “inclined to evil, wicked in nature” (PTWH I, lxxxix) since she restlessly devices the schemes how to send the unwanted heirs to the otherworldly realms to perform most dreadful ordeals (ICC, 1; MFI, 59; WIFR, 180; PTWH II-XLIII, 286; XLVI, 353). The henwife is a

skillful enchantress who not only gives advices but also employs magic powers (IFFT, 331). There is a story that tells she is a sister of a giant, the most dreadful creature of the world (WIFR, 202f). Very rarely the henwife performs a positive role. Only two stories in the explored corpus depict her as a good and loving god-mother: when she beautifully dresses a poor girl for the church to make an impression on the prince (MFI, 78) and when she gives a bird to help the young mother in indicating the father of a new born child (PTWH I, 173). But in the latter case, the henwife and the young woman in despair belong to the same sphere – they live in a wondrous castle, and the henwife seems to be the princess’s nurse. Indeed, the destructive activity is more typical of the henwife than life fostering. As a rule, the henwife is a witch-like woman who has connections with the Otherworld and implements evil intentions.

Beside the mentioned ones, the links between the henwife and the archetypal goddess are reflected in the Scottish lexeme designating the position of a fowl keeper, i.e., *cailleach*. This position has become so conventional that many story tellers do not even bother to muse upon the otherworldly nature of the henwife. Therefore the majority of the stories, which are traditional folktales, usually employ the word ‘henwife’ to designate an evil female agent. The memorata-type stories, in their turn, use the word ‘witch’. Yet the latter group of tales is closer to modern times as they deal with the real people’s personal experience of the supernatural. Hence, the figure of the henwife is met in a more ancient type of stories and represents a more ancient evil female agent able to enter into the contact with the supernatural powers.

The figurative modulation of the mythical female-bird relationship where both parts of the couple are explicated as separate yet associated actors is a popular motif in Celtic folktales. Birds appear as the obedient companions of women: for instance, a fairy woman gives a whistle to the princess, with the help of which she can invite all the birds under the sun to perform all the impossible tasks imposed on her just like a giant’s daughter who manages to complete her

father's ordeal and to thatch the roof with feathers, all of different colours (MFI, 1; PTWH I-II). In another case, a giant's daughter makes her husband remember all the favours she has done to save him by arranging a bird performance (MFI, 48). A humorous tale introduces a piper who is taken to the feast held by the *banshee* and discovers that they are served by the gander he himself has stolen from the priest (IFFT, 102). One of the tales exposes a witch who wishes to cure a sick girl as riding a black or white hen to the good people, i.e. fairies, to ask for a piece of advice (IFFT, 186).

Birds often participate in death-related actions. Interestingly, their behaviour when confronting the female figure is not consistent: sometimes they stand in opposition, sometimes collaborate with her. To illustrate, it is the bird who tells Kaytuch how to kill the Hag of the Church after several attempts have failed (WIFR, 71). Yet, in the same tale, birds show to the wife of Kaytuch how to revive her dead husband with the plant leaves (WIFR, 83). A similar episode appears in another Irish tale where the wife puts her dead husband Gilla in a box sits beside him and sets to the sea. The woman sees two sparrows carrying their dead comrade to an island where it is revived. The wife decides to do the same (MFI, 268). The examined episodes reveal that birds are hostile to violent and destructive hags but helpful in reviving the heroes: the birds seem to complement to the life-fostering aspect of the Celtic Goddess and express adversity to her hostile powers.

The pattern of shape-shifting is also found in folktales. For instance, in the tale *The Three Daughters of the King of the East and the Son of the King of Erin*, three maidens in the shape of swans come to the lake to talk to the prince. They turn into swans when they put on swan-skins – they must do so because of the enchantment of their step-mother. The prince's step-mother wishes to banish the prince and have the kingdom for her own son but interferes between the young man and the swan-maidens by making him asleep with the pin of slumber and so ruining the plan of their elopement (MFI, 129-134). In comparison with the

structure of figures in mythical stories, here the maidens are ‘distanced’ from their swan-shape because they turn into birds only when they wear swan-skins. Their bird-like nature is determined by their gowns, like those of the girls in another tale, *The Nine-legged Steed*, who have shape transforming caps (WIFR, 219). But the shape-shift of the latter is voluntary and not superimposed by anyone. The only adversary in this tale is the prince’s step-mother who tries to prevent the prince’s engagement with a swan-maiden because she is attached to him so much. Inherent in her mistrust in the swan-like maidens is the belief that they must be related with the otherworldly powers. The presence of the mysterious maidens serves as a sign that the Otherworld attempts to take the prince from his environment.

Sometimes the role of otherworldly brides might be performed by unspecified bird-maidens as it is found in a version of *The Battle of the Birds*: the king’s sons see the birds “whose like they had never seen and one especially” (PTWH I, 60). Their father explains these are Mac Samhladh Nighinn Dubh Gheal Dearg (probably ‘daughters of Black-white Red). Later on, the hero marries one of them.

It should be noted that swan-maidens do not always appear as future brides. For instance, in the tale *The Three Soldiers*, three deserted soldiers get to a wonderful castle where they find meat and beds prepared for them. One of them decides to entertain himself by shooting at the three swans swimming in the lake nearby. His plan fails when the swans turn into women when on the shore. They tell the soldiers that they may stay and enjoy food, new clothes and other presents provided they do not think about the swans. Unfortunately, one soldier violates the prohibition and they all are left in rags. Yet the swans give them three magic objects: a purse always full of gold, a knife that turns into whatever object required and a horn, which, if blown in the small end, produces a thousand of soldiers, if blown in the big end, all the soldiers disappear (PTWH I-X, 195). The three presents symbolize the three functions of the Great Goddess: abundance,

transfer (the knife is used to get to a magical island) and warfare. The motif of such peculiar gifts endows a particular Celtic flavour to a world-wide folklore motif of a swan-maiden leaving her swan skin (cf. Tokarev 2008, 579). What is more, in the analysed tale, the women are bound to their swan shape only when in contact with water; when ashore, they instantly turn into humans. Thus, the three maidens might be taken as later ‘descendants’ of the original Celtic goddess.

It follows from what has been maintained above that the representative modes of the female-bird relationship established in the mythical tradition have been successfully transferred into folklore. The Celtic mytheme may be manifested by means of direct figurativization, when both agents appear as individual yet interrelated actors; by implied isomorphism, when one part of the couple covers the semantic field usually attributed to the other, or by means of direct isomorphism, when actual metamorphosis from one shape into another takes place. In folktales, the transformation is carried out by means of some magic objects. The fact that this element is absent in mythical stories leads to the conclusion that folktales have deviated from the mythical source either by erasing or at least diminishing the importance of the supernatural powers to shape shift at one’s will. But the link between a female and a fowl should not necessarily be based on a complete transformation of shape: it can be established by means of birds’ attributes (e.g., feathers skin), may find expression in a woman’s occupation (e.g., henwives) or birds can act as her companions or messengers.

4.2. Adaptation of the Goddess-Accompanier Model

Following the mythical pattern discussed in Subchapter 3.3.1, the present section of the work is devoted to the examination of the possible modulations between the characters that act in folktales: males, females and horses. The study of the mythical material has proved that goddesses are often associated with men or divine agents-males in the context of death and destruction. Moreover, Celtic

goddesses show strong associations with the horse and other equine creatures, especially in relation with the transfer of the souls to the afterlife realm. Therefore, the following subchapters attempt to evaluate what changes affected the ancient mythical conceptions, if any.

4.2.1. Modulations of the Archetypal Female-Male Relationship

The transfer of the ancient mythical patterns with regard to the male figures into folktales has been widely discussed. Though it has long been a subject of argument, a thorough analysis carried out by Lotte Motz has finally confirmed that folklore giants are related with (or maybe even derived from) the mythical giants viewed as the predecessors of gods and humanity (cf. Motz, 1982). Although Motz's research was targeted at the juxtaposition of the giants represented in Germanic mythical tradition and English folklore giants, still, some scholars see no obstacle in applying the same approach to the Celtic data (cf. Plakhova 2012, 74). The Dagda and his-like counterparts discussed above appear as perfect candidates for the giant ancestors in Celtic tradition: their physical appearance, armour, activities, special preoccupation with fertility issues and lingering in between the realms of life and death all fit the semantic scheme of folklore giants. The very fact that giants rarely appear without a female company provokes to survey the possible remnants of the mythical current of thought preserved within folklore discourse.

In folklore tradition, the relations between a female character and the giants are modulated variously, but, actually, the associations are never neglected. The giants might be accompanied either by family relatives or some unnamed female characters, but their functions vary. Sometimes a female relative of a giant can perform both roles – that of a wife and a mother. For instance, in the tale *The Celtic Dragon Myth*, before the hero kills the dragon, he must undergo qualifying challenges with the giants: while herding the cattle in the giants' fields he kills a

seven-headed giant every day till, finally, he confronts a fearful great carlin who approaches him screaming that he must pay with his blood for having murdered her two sons and a husband (CDM, 33-55).

Similarly, in a variant of the tale *The Sea Maiden*, the fisher's son herds cows in the giants' land and is visited by bigger and bigger giants everyday whom he kills and gets as much milk as ever. Finally, on the fourth day the carlin comes reproaching the youth for having killed her husband and two sons. Interestingly enough, the fisher's son must now employ a different fighting strategy than the one he took with the giants. It should be noted that he defeated the ogres in wrestling by using his physical power, but the carlin must be cheated – the youth persuades her to open her mouth wide so that he could jump into it, but, in fact, thrusts an iron staff into her “gab” instead (PTWH I, 97). The encounter with the giants is a test of the hero's physical strength, whereas his meeting with the hag checks his intellectual skills – only when qualified in all the aspects, the hero may proceed in his further quests.

Provided the carlin and her sons giants are taken as the representatives of the otherworldly reality, they seem to embody the overall harmony of capabilities – the physical and the intellectual powers. Thus, the female character seems to stand higher on the hierarchical ladder than the male characters since her capacities are more complex. Indeed, the superiority of the females is attested in many tales. Obviously, folktales swarm with old hags who employ their sons-giants into the planned destructive activity. For instance, in *Birth of Fin MacCumhail and Origin of the Fenians of Erin*, Fin has to protect the king's den because every evening an old hag sends her sons to burn it, as it seems, just for the sake of sport (MFI, 214). Likewise, in *Fin MacCumhail and the Fenians of Erin in the Castle of Fear Dubh*, a company of the Irish heroes face the mother of Fear Dubh who is fiercer and more venomous than her son (MFI, 228). The Old Hag of the Forest is capable of turning people into stones, i.e., translating them into another reality which is traditionally conceived of as the reality of death. She is

also a mother of three giants whom the prince kills before encountering her (ICC, 136). It is interesting to note that the defeat of the mother of the giants usually requires much more effort. She is found to be more powerful, wiser, better equipped with magical wands, etc. It becomes clear that she is the true source of danger, whereas her sons-giants are of the secondary importance, just qualifying the hero's skills for the final battle³².

The Irish tale *King Manananaun* presents another possible modulation of the female-male relationship preserved in folklore. Here an old man and a woman come up to revive the dead warriors. The hero Kaytuch kills them, but before dying the woman says she is the Hag of Slaughter, while her companion is Slaughter himself (WIFR, 70). The relation of the couple is not designated exactly but judging from their name it is clear that they share the same status though the hag cause a bit more trouble for Kaytuch than the man. Here the most important point is their ability to bring back life which puts them in the liminal position between the spheres of life and death just as the Dagda and Morrigan are found in the above analysed episode from the *Second Battle of Mag Tuired*.

What concerns blood relations regarding the younger female generation, i.e., daughters of giants, the folklore data more or less does reflect the mythical tradition, as the girls usually acquire the positive roles in confronting the hero thus promising his safe conduction out of the otherworldly troubles. According to Stith Thompson's *Motif Index of Folk Literature and Myth* entries under the label *G530 Ogre's relatives help the hero*, it is a worldwide narrative habit to give to the giants' daughters the role of the helpers who cheat their fathers and guide the heroes out of the perilous realm. Celtic tradition makes no exception at this point – here young females often get worried about the male heroes' fate and find the means helping to escape the snares of the giants.

³² A similar situation is presented in the mythical Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* where the mother of the monster Grendel causes a greater trouble for Beowulf when encountered than her son did and at the same time enhances the hero's fame as a victorious warrior.

In *The Young King of Easaidh Ruadh*, Gruagach's daughter becomes the protagonist's wife after her father loses her in the game. She is the epitome of wisdom and a prototype of a seer: she knows what dangers await for her husband in case he continues playing cards with her father. Indeed, he soon gets into a big trouble, and she gives him advice how to escape the danger. Moreover, she enchants "the victory of battles on her husband" so that success would not leave her spouse (PTWH I –I, 1-6). Another tale, *The Widow's Son*, shows the female involved directly in the action. The girl agrees to help the hero only after he promises to marry her. Then she gives orders to various objects to perform the tasks imposed by her father on the young man or finds some way to do it by herself when the hero's attempts fail. She is so resolute that in their flight she throws the golden apple at her own father and kills him, meanwhile the hero seems to lack self-confidence in doing it (PTWH I, 48). The young girl from *The Battle of the Birds* (PTWH I-II) and Yellow Lilly in *The Son of the King of Erin, and the Giant of Loch Léin* (MFI 38-50) perform the tasks with a little effort added by the heroes. They also explain the laws existing in the giants' realm and foretell what men might expect. The difference between the two girls lies only in that Yellow Lilly is forced to act against her father because she promised to save the prince from the dangers in return of her clothes which he has stolen.

It appears then that the otherworldly couple united by blood bonds and paternal relations is more reflective of the regeneration myths, Sovereignty Goddess mytheme in particular. The tales involving this narrative element depict the collapse of the old system embodied in the figure of the giant and the rise of the new order established by the hero and his otherworldly bride who represents the wisdom and reconciliation of the two worlds as she employs the otherworldly wisdom to create the new world. Notably, here the female characters act as the intellectual engines of the action and sometimes even appear to be the decisive participants as in the tale *The Widow's Son* discussed above.

There are but rare cases when the daughters of giants express aggression or hostility towards the hero. Then the daughters usually share the same characteristics with their fathers: they are monstrously huge, far from the etalon of beauty, grumpy and rough, sometimes even of limited wits. Curiously, in Celtic folktales, they often appear with the attributes which are typical representations of the Great Goddess – a cauldron or some zoomorphic figure, such as a horse or a bird. For instance, in the Scottish tale *The Wizard's Gillie*, the three daughters of the Great Wizard are found to have prepared three cauldrons of water to boil the hero after he is turned into a horse (WG, 25). However, the intellectually gifted boy manages to deceive them and escape, thus showing that the girls are of limited intellectual skills.

In the Irish tale *The Three daughters of the King of the East and the Son of the King of Erin*, Gruagach and his sons are not so lucky. When chasing a hare that litters their table every evening, they get to a house in the woods where a man and his twelve daughters live. They have a huge cauldron and boil a great stork. Gruagach fails to get meat from the cauldron and is forced to fast that evening, while the man and his daughters eat the stork and throw bare bones to the faces of their guests. The jeer lasts all night long and as if that is not enough, the host kills the sons of Gruagach and throws their bodies away, then stripes the skin and flesh from the back of Gruagach and puts the black sheep's skin on it instead (MFI, 122f). In this tale, the daughters are not entrusted with any special task but follow the model worked out by their father. Even the hare, which is traditionally associated with witches, belongs to the man as his "fighting pet" (ibid., 124) although it stays tied near the daughters.

As it is seen from the given examples, the female figure in the role of a giant's daughter is a weaker agent of evil, contrary to the roles of a wife or a mother. The daughters bring the protagonists into perilous situations either directly, when they are hostile towards them and threat them face to face, or indirectly, when they become the objects of love and thus involuntarily lure the

heroes into the dangerous realms controlled by their fathers. Despite of the relatively diminished importance within the operational programmes in the narratives, the female figures seem still to remain within the mythical framework and function either as the initiators or complementary elements in the dangerous situations.

The folklore data reveals yet another role of a female which is not attested in the mythical vernacular heritage, namely, that of a captive. The captives of the giants mostly undertake a passive role, indulge themselves to the will of the hero completely and show no effort to free themselves. In other words, this class of women in the environment of a giant's castle seems to have been deprived of the competences naturally demonstrated by human beings – to reason and act according to their free will. They do not incite danger by themselves, but it cannot be left unnoticed that they do appear in the emphatically liminal situations, as, for instance, a captive girl who is ordered to kill her child and cook it for a giant to eat (PTWH I-VI). The hero finds the young woman at the desperate dramatic moment of drawing the knife nearer to and withdrawing it away from her child in indecision whether to regard her duty or motherly love. From the structural point of view, the given folktale fits in the narrative scheme laid in the Welsh story *How Culhwch Won Olwen*, namely, the episode containing the birth and abduction of Mabon, son of Modron.

It is obvious that the narrative situation in the Welsh story is similar to the one depicted in folktales as it includes the same figures: a giant, a hero and a female and her son who is in the state between life and death. Their modulations, however, differ greatly: in the manuscript text, all the participants of the action are distanced from each other in comparison with the folktales where the characters confront each other directly being in the same place at the same time. In the story about Culhwch, Ysbaddaden takes up the position of a sender, and his connection with Mabon in the narrative situation is of second-rate. Moreover, Mabon also

avoids facing the giant– he is only a performer of the task imposed by Ysbaddaden to obtain the necessary objects.

The mother of the youth Mabonos is introduced only by her name, which functions as her family status indication. It should be taken into consideration that the parentage of the hero is normally determined in patrilineal terms in Celtic mythical stories. Yet, Mabon son of Modron makes a rare exception and is the only character in the story of Culhwch with the matrilineal determination. Moreover, his state, though fundamentally the same as that of the baby in folktales, is expressed by different figurative means. After the mysterious abduction from his mother, Mabon is hidden from everyone in a stone house (the image undoubtedly echoes the House of Donn, the mythical realm of the dead, i.e., the grave). Thus, the figure of Mabonos is covered by uncertainties: although his life has been preserved, yet he is deprived of the contact with the world.

On the contrary, in the traditional Celtic folktales, the child is exposed to danger openly. His mother attempts to kill him while sitting near the giant's cave which also shares many features with the mythical House of Donn: it is a grievous place with many dead bodies or human bones around. Yet, in such tales, there is no element of uncertainty – the fate of the child is determined by the giant and it is only the mother who cannot carry out the task to the end. Thus, though alive, the baby is doomed and has hardly any chance in the world. It becomes clear that in folktales the abstract notion of being in-between life and death is expressed in more concrete terms than in the mythical stories, which adopt the abstract notions, such as absence or uncertainty.

In general, the Celtic interpretation of the mytheme female-male was adopted in folk tradition without great alternations: the couples of the same status and similar physical appearance bring destruction, while the role of the female in such cases seems to be more important – female characters show greater power than their male counterparts. Notably, female characters demonstrate more distinguished intellectual skills than male characters, although they do not appear

physically much weaker at all. Another mythical mode transferred into folktales is the giant-daughter relationship which has double modulations: just as in the mythical tradition, the daughters might be either benevolent or hostile towards the hero. It is worth noting that here figurative devices match with the functions of the female figures – good-natured females are depicted as beautiful and adoring, whereas aggressive women are misshaped and ugly. The only invention observed in folklore is the role of a female-captive which is hardly detectable in Celtic mythical stories, nevertheless, in such cases females have lost all their goddess-like impression as they have no initiative of the action but come out as the objects of value that the males compete for and thus get into dangerous situations.

4.2.2. Modification of the Role of the Horse Figure

As one of the most important figures within Celtic mythical framework, the horse plays a very complex role. On the one hand, it is closely associated with men because horse is one of the most important attributes of a warrior. As it is established in Celtic epic literature, horses even act as a part of the spiritual essence of a warrior. On the other hand, equine creatures have connections with the afterlife reality and they often appear together with goddesses thus revealing their contacts with the otherworldly reality. Due to these reasons and with regard to the substantial amount of the folklore data, the discussion of the importance of the horse as depicted in the folklore tradition is divided into two sections: one examines the roles of the horse, while the other concentrates on the inspection of the relation between the horse and the female.

4.2.2.1. General Representations of the Role of the Horse Figure

In folklore tradition, just as in mythical stories, the horses are not meek or mild creatures. On the contrary, they are often associated with violence. For

instance, the giant's horses are fed with meat, probably, carrion (PTWH I-I, 10). A lad who turns himself into a horse to participate in a race and win money for his father is so eager that he tries to kill and eat every man standing nearby (MFI, 146). Similarly, Niall, when enchanted by his own wife and turned into an old white horse, must carry stones – when he gets tired of his work he starts killing people and destroying corn every night (WIFR, 19).

The relation between a male and a horse is also commonly observed in folktales. It might be represented in several ways, for instance, by means of a horse-related attribute as in the Irish tale *The Old Hag of the Forest* where the filly's hoof-track is a sign of the hero's situation: clear water in the track indicates his well being, frothing water means that he is in the battle, bloody water signifies death or enchantment (ICC, 128). The hoof track filled with water seems to keep a direct link with the hero. In other words, it operates as the gate to the protagonist's fate, i.e., a certain extension of his personality. Another possible mode of the relation is shape-shifting which is quite numerous: an old grey man can easily shape shift into a horse or a ship (cf. Philip 2008, 200-217); the magical horse turns into a youth (IFFT, 339). Sometimes the horse shape can be the result of collective enchantment as it is in the Irish tale *The King of Erin and the Queen of the Lonesome Island* where the steed finally turns back into four princes (MFI, 107). Male-to-horse motif of shape shifting often occurs in the sequence including several transformations. For instance, an apprentice of Gruagach acquires different shapes: he metamorphoses into a horse, a hound, an eel, a whale, a swallow and may turn into inanimate objects such as a ring, a sparkle, a wheat grain (MFI, 139)³³.

³³ It should be noted here that the association of the male with the horse by means of attributes has but a single instance in the mythical tradition. An ancient Irish saga *The Kin Slaying of Rónán* tells that a lusty queen caught on the way to the lover is whipped with a horse whip. She promises to "bring a gush of blood" to the lips of Congal, her torturer (CHA, 277). Here the horse whip acquires dual signification: it alludes to the adulterous character of the queen; on the other hand, it points to the power of superiority as it is an instrument used to humiliate the queen.

The mythical role of a psychopomp in folktales is mostly related with the image of an extraordinary horse that can traverse whatever the element, land or water, equally easily. For instance, the black steed serves as Conn-eda's 'passport' in the Otherworld – nothing harms him in the hostile environment (IFFT, 341); a revived horse strikes a dolmen with his hoof and so opens the gates to the Underworld for the hero (Stewart, Williamson 1996, 79); a girl married to an otherworldly doggy-man can visit her father in the ordinary human world whenever she wants because her husband gave her a steed which carries her there in an instant (PTWH I-XII, 209); another girl to escape marriage with her own father runs away on a magical filly which comes to her after the magic bridle is shaken (PTWH I-XIV, 232); for a giant's steed "sea or shore was all one" (PTWH III-LVIII, 11); the ugly pony goes through seven miles of fire, seven miles of steel thistles and seven miles of sea (WIFR, 200); Lochlann carpenters arrive to Scotland on the wooden horses which carry them across the ocean (WG, 115); the giants' daughters flee away with their lovers with the help of the horses and so on. It seems that there is no environment that a horse cannot enter, be it the realm of the dead, the divine world or another reality.

It should be brought into focus that the horses which easily cross the boundaries have special qualities. They are self-dependent creatures able to make decisions on their own: either they know how to behave *a priori* or they have intuition and ability to read special signs. Rarely do they need any instruction from the rider. The horses that carry the heroes to the Otherworld and backward may be distinguished from the ordinary animals. Firstly, they are able to use human speech (MFI, 135; WIFR 198, 211). This category also includes the cases of transformed humans – they seem to have retained their human nature despite their equine shape. Secondly, the incredible speed is another characteristics typical of the transcendental carriers – they are often said to be the swiftest horses in the world (PTWH I-I, 3-5). The mythical tradition shows that the ability to traverse different realities is best exposed by the grey or dappled horses (TEI, 10; M, 3;

EIMS, 74). The colour of a horse is one of the chief elements indicating the creature's liminal nature – it is neither black nor white (i.e., grey) or of non-colour at all (i.e., dappled). It suggests that the colour is the reflector of the creature's liminal nature. Nevertheless, the black horses are mainly related to death.

Rachel Bromwich assumes that the image of 'the Black of the Seas' (which should not necessarily be black in colour) has deep roots in Celtic mythology (cf. Bromwich 1997, 110). It is first found in the ancient tale *The Pursuit of the Gilla Deacair and His Horse*. Here, the Fian is approached by a giant sluggish man who invites the warriors for a race. The Fian mount his horse one after another but there is still place enough for all of them because the horse stretches so that all fifteen huge men can sit on it quite comfortably. The horse follows his master despite the carried burden and takes them to the Gilla's place, an otherworldly realm (WG, 6-10). The quality of stretching until it feels the number of the victims to be satisfying is prescribed to the kelpie (cf. Mac Neill 1989, 132), one of the most notorious folkloric equine creatures that has almost all the features typical of the horses as depicted in the mythical material.

The kelpie, an evil water spirit of Scottish lochs, has counterparts in various traditions: Germanic *nykur* which is believed to be a dead man reborn (cf. Erlingsson 1996, 73), Faroese *nix* (cf. Joensen 1996, 89-93), Estonian *näkk* (cf. Valk 1996, 341ff) to mention just a few. There is a great variety of evil horse-like sprites related with the Celtic Isles registered by Katherine Briggs in the *Personnel of Fairyland* (cf. Briggs 1971, 201-222). All the spirits are unified by the following elements: equine shape, relation with water, cunning character. Their main occupation is to lure people into water and drown or devour them.

There is no common agreement as to the precise identification of the kelpie's living environment: some say it lives in salt water (cf. Williams 1991, 71), some – in fresh water fords or ponds (cf. Spence 1995, 91; Lamont-Brown 1996, 19); others claim it haunts fords of streams (cf. Leach 1972, 573). Though, usually an encounter with the kelpie is unexpected, some stories say that the spirit

could be invited by throwing a stone into its dwelling place – but it is dangerous to do so because then the kelpie releases a great amount of water and can drown the entire area (cf. Lamont-Brown 1996, 92). Some scholars assume that the kelpie is the remnant of the belief in Manannan mac Lír who had a magic steed (cf. McNeil 1989, 130). Among the attributes related with the kelpie is the magic bridle, the owner of which could control the kelpie and even force it to work (cf. Gray 1964, 129; Milne, Jack 1987, 19f).

The true shape of the kelpie is not known: it may appear as a black horse luring a weary traveler to mount its back. For women, it shows up as a handsome young lad with blue eyes and black wet hair – its true identity is betrayed by sand or weed tangled in the hair. It should be emphasized that the kelpie never incites women to sit on its back – this behavioural strategy is applied exclusively to men. Meanwhile the encounter with the women mainly evokes marriage and wooing. Another possible shape of the kelpie is a boobrie – a gigantic bird that strikes water with its tail and dives into water (Jack, Lunghi 2000, 78). The range of the shapes of the kelpie makes it difficult to decide which of them is the genuine one and which is a disguise acquired to beguile victims. Nevertheless, the wide spread of the belief in the evil water-horse shows it to be of high importance in Celtic mythical thought and hints of the horse shape as a prevailing one. What is more, the defining members constituting the essence of the kelpie myth also belong to the mythical universe of the Celtic goddess.

When in its equine shape, the kelpie appears as a “magnificent coal-black horse, saddled and bridled in silver, with sand and seaweed in his long flowing mane and tail. Up from the loch he would gallop with thunder of hoofs” (ibid.). The same motif is further detailed by a cotemporary story teller Margaret Mayo in *Sheena and the Water-horse* (cf. Mayo 1976, 42-46). The kelpie’s features are generalized by Lewis Spence who describes it as “a black horse with wild and staring eyes” (Spence 1995, 91). Raymond Lamont-Brown notices that the kelpie might also be of grey colour with its hooves pointing to the rear (cf. Lamont-

Brown 1996, 19), while Isobel F. Williams adds a beard, a big mouth and a flat nose to its portrait (cf. Williams 1991, 71). Notably, the key elements defining the appearance of the kelpie, namely, blackness, hairiness and fierce glance, match the description of the Hag of Beara who embodies danger and has become a prototype of a destructive hag in folklore. Thus the same figurative devices suggesting a deadly threat that were attached to a woman in the mythical material are “stuck” to a horse in folklore.

Sometimes the kelpie can be submitted to carry out some work: build bridges, castles, help in farmwork (cf. Spence 1995, 91; Gray 1964, 129). It happens on condition that the kelpie must be caught. Yet, on some occasions, the help is offered by an “unknown being”, as it happened with John MacInnes who was sighing for his hard labour in his farm. Someone promised him help and after several days he found a fine horse grazing in his fields. The creature appeared to be a good worker but John knew it to be of the supernatural origin so undertook certain precautions like blessing the horse every evening. Once he forgot to do that and the horse instantly “seized poor John in his teeth, galloped off with him, the two disappeared in the loch” (Macinlay 1993, 177). In this story, the initiative does not come on the kelpie’s side – it seems to be an instrument of that mysterious being who offered John help. (Traditionally, the kelpie looks like a simple horse, far from being harmful but his true nature is exposed just after a traveler mounts it. It might be so that the characteristics typical of the kelpie were split and manifested in separate figures in the course of time.)

The kelpie has strong relations with the bird. Sometimes the spirit assumes the shape of the boobrie. Though folklore students claim that the kelpie is equally found in both shapes (cf. Jack, Lunghi 2000, 78; Lamont-Brown 1996, 19), yet in all the examined collections there is not a single story about the evil spirit in the shape of boobrie attempting at the destruction or assault. All the information about its behaviour is rather ‘neutral’ regarding humans: “a giant bird appearing at night fall” (Jack, Lunghi 2000, 78) or nearly a biological description with an exact size

and length of particular parts of the boobrie's body (PTWH IV, 337). In addition, the latter source gives some interesting details in the creature's portrayal: an eagle-like beak (17 inches long), short black webbed feet with tremendous claws – so that the space of a footprint is equal to a pair of antlers. Despite its threatening appearance, the boobrie is said to feed on cattle, sheep and other creatures, but not humans (ibid.)

The motif of the equine creature and the bird originating from a single body is found in folktales: enchanted ravens that feed on a pony's or horse's blood or flesh appear to be the members of the same family (Philip 2008, 217; WIFR, 209). The devil tries to catch the boy who has stolen his red book with the accounts of souls and disguises as a horse, then a cat, a beast and, finally, a raven which must leave at sunrise (PTWH II –XXX, 88). It should be admitted that the horse-fowl relation is not very popular in Celtic vernacular tradition: just as it is slightly touched upon in the mythical stories, it has feeble reflection in folk tradition. The kelpie is, probably, the only character which manifests so strong a conjunction of the zoomorphic figures archetypically related with the Celtic Goddess.

4.2.2.2. The Traces of the Mythical Female-Horse Relationship

The female-horse relation has a rich variety of figurative representations in folklore as there are many stories which show different modulations of the relation: women can command, employ horses, shape-shift into equine beasts, etc. Yet, the majority of the tales depict females and horses as separate actors that have their individual figurative paths in the narratives but keep in accordance with the mythical substratum.

One of the best illustrative cases of the horse-female relation is that of the kelpie and girls. When the kelpie's target is a female, he usually appears as a handsome young man who woos the girl and sleeps in her lap. The girl finds sand and seaweed in his hair and realizes his true nature. Then she cuts a part of her

garment so that she could escape the wooer without awakening him. Most frequently, she is successful and manages to reach her home or cross a stream before the awoken kelpie catches her.

Sometimes the model of the kelpie-girl contains one more agent – a water bull. One story says that a farmer had a strange calf with short ears – a typical feature of the supernatural water creatures. It grew unbelievably quickly and finally saved a girl running from a water-horse: the bull and the water-horse fought fiercely and plunged into the lake. After several days, a bloody and torn body of the bull was washed ashore, but nobody knew what had happened to the water-horse, yet it was not seen ever since (Curran 2000, 98f). Sometimes the girl even manages to make the kelpie work, like the girl from Nerike who made it plough “with such a speed that soil and stones whirled in its wake, and the girl hung like a mitten from the plough”³⁴.

Not all females, however, are so lucky. Many of those dealing with the kelpie suffer fatal consequences. Even if a girl managed to slip away from the spirit, she cannot be sure that it will not come back for her as it happened to a young woman from Barra who escaped the kelpie once but was abducted afterwards and “not a trace of her was ever found but a little bit of one of her lungs on the shore of the lake”³⁵. Likewise, a girl wooed by the kelpie for a long time promised to marry him. When her relatives found it out, they tried to protect the girl, but the kelpie seized her despite the guard and disappeared in the lake with his victim. When people reached the lake, it was full of blood and shreds of her garment were floating in it³⁶. In *Sheena and the Water Horse*, Yain tamed the kelpie and kept it for a working horse, but his daughter Sheena accidentally freed the creature and it carried her to the loch. Whenever people passed the lake in winter, they noticed that the place where the kelpie plunged with the girl was

³⁴ Cited from <http://www.worldsofimagination.co.uk/monster%20Kelpie.htm>

³⁵ Cited from <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/sbc/sbc07.htm>. texts from *Survivals in Belief Among the Celts*, by George Henderson, (1911)

³⁶ Ibid.

never covered with ice and a sorrowful voice was heard there lamenting “I am cold” (Mayo 1976, 42-46).

It shows that Sheena continued her existence under water, probably, as a wife of the kelpie. The motif of a freezing mortal wife of the water horse is attested in other stories: in one of them, the kelpie even brought a smith to build a fireplace in its underwater house because its wife was reproaching constantly about feeling cold³⁷. The location of their house is indicated on the surface of the lake that never freezes— that is due to the burning furnace of the kelpie and its merry wife.

Among the Scottish stories about the kelpie there is a tale that seems to be a fusion of the kelpie myth and the tale about the Bluebeard. It tells about a grey horse that comes to a widow’s yard every day and eats hail. The widow’s three daughters, each in turn, try to flush him out and strike with their distaffs. Unluckily, the tools stick to the horse and the girls to their distaffs and so each of them is dragged to his huge house inside a green hill. The horse makes the girls his mistresses and gives them the keys of all the rooms but forbids entering one particular room. The prohibition is violated and the horrible secret of the room is exposed: it is full of gentlewomen’s dead bodies and blood to the knees. The blood sticks to the girl’s foot and cannot be washed away – that is how the horse finds out the disobedience, kills two sisters and stores their bodies in the same room, only the gentle youngest sister manages to cheat the horse and break the spell. The horse appears to be the king’s son under enchantment. (PTWH II-XLI, 265-275). Though the horse does not rush into water, it lives in another liminal sphere – inside the hill, a usual habitation of fairies, its overall behaviour reminds of the behavioural model of the kelpie.

Not only the kelpies took human girls as wives but also procured offspring. Yet it was dangerous to leave the child alone with the father. Once the kelpie’s

³⁷ Cited from <http://www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk/scotland/ross-and-cromarty/folklore/the-kelpie-of-loch-garve.html>

wife, who visited her relatives on the dry land, left her son with the husband. Her family persuaded her not to come back home to the underwater realm which greatly enraged the kelpie. He raised a great storm and in the morning people found the severed head of the baby-son thrown at their door³⁸. The wives who cannot leave their children are often heard singing lullabies from under the water (CG V, 145), or the kelpie itself sings to its children or laments the absence of the wife (Ruprecht 1857).

Another peculiarity that strikes attention in the stories about the wooing of the kelpie is the failing health of the girls. The girl who has promised to marry the kelpie in a year and a day “was observed to be fats sinking in health and losing her good colour”³⁹. Her father found out it was so because of her promise to the kelpie but he could not save her from her fiancé. Another girl who escaped the kelpie by cutting off her coat and running home was bedridden for three years due to the fright she experienced. When afterwards the kelpie visited her once again “her heart leapt from her with fear and she was dead” (CG V, 145). Strangely enough, she is said to have had a child from the evil spirit. It appears thus that the end of the earthly life does not mean the end of existence which might proceed in another reality even though the transfer moment is not manifested as entering, i.e., plunging under water, but the teller simply states the fact of her death.

The kelpie seems to have certain sovereignty over young women – whenever it chooses a victim for its bride she has little chance to avoid it. A different situation is when an old lady is involved. For instance, Cailleach Dhu, the Black Wife of Allnaig (or Alnaic), knows the nature and behaviour of the kelpie, she teaches farmer Yain how to catch one of them; another elderly woman saves a girl from the water horse directing her to the stable where the water bull is kept and telling to release it (Jack, Lunghi 2000, 79; Mayo 1976, 42-46; Curran

³⁸ Cited from <http://fantasyhorses.homestead.com/water.html>

³⁹ Cited from <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/sbc/sbc07.htm>. texts from *Survivals in Belief Among the Celts*, by George Henderson, (1911)

2000, 98f). Women who in their appearance and occupation stand close to the henwives seem to be in a master's position when dealing with the kelpie.

A close counterpart of the kelpie on the Irish side with respect to the scheme of behaviour and appearance is the Pooka. Consider its description presented below:

No horse 'ud have eyes av fire, or be breathin' flames av blue wid a shmell
o' sulfur, savin' yer presence, or a shnort like thunder, and no mortal horse 'ud
take the lapses it does, or go as fur widout getting' tired (McAnally 1993, 18).

Pooka's main occupation is to spoil blackberries after Michaelmas or offer dangerous rides to travelers (cf. Zaczek 2001, 126). The difference between the Pooka and the kelpie lies in the direction of their fatal journeys: the kelpie descends downwards to the bottomless lakes, whereas Pooka ascends reaching the mountain top as it is described in *The Spirit Horse* and disappears (ibid, 110-114). Here, the Pooka is ordered to carry out the fatal journeys by superior beings, in this particular case, an ugly hag. Another story that shows the Pooka under the commandment of an old supernatural woman is *The Piper and the Pooka of November*. Here the spirit is shown from the positive side: its master the *banshee* orders it to bring a musician to entertain their company "on the top of Crough Patrick". The beast takes a foolish piper Liam on its back and brings him to a wondrous hall richly furnished for the feast. The *banshees* were satisfied with Liam's music and gave him great presents, sense and talent, and since then Liam was the best piper in Ireland (cf. Asala 1997, 37-40).

It is not the only case when the Pooka appears as a positive agent. On Lady Wilde's account, the Pooka is a rather benevolent creature (cf. Zaczek 2001, 126). The claim is reflected in the tales: the Pooka in the shape of an ass cleans the kitchen every evening (IFFT, 112) or it is believed to "give intelligent and proper answers" concerning the future (IFFT, 100). It seems that the Pooka rarely appears on its own will, its behaviour is determined by a hag-like female who stands

behind the spirit and controls it. In other words, the Pooka seems to subdue the older women's will, just like the kelpie is often overcome by the wisdom of the so-called wise crones.

The female control over the equine creatures is further developed in various forms. Females can acquire two roles: they either send the hero to steal a horse with a hope that he will perish (PTWH I-VII, 150), or they help him in stealing it – often this is the role undertaken by the giants' daughters. Then the horse is the source of aggression: it tries to devour the hero (PTWH I-II, 50), or is impossible to catch because it “has never seen a blink of earth or air” (PTWH I, 48; 52). The girls always give a magical bridle which is the only means to control the beast. The giants' daughters are often entrusted to keep the bridle safe.

Sometimes an otherworldly woman owns a magic horse which helps her to test what men are worth. A princess from a wondrous castle is looking for a boy who has kissed her while asleep and thus impregnated her. His elder brother lies he was the hero but the lady puts him to a Pooka-like trial: he must mount her grey steed that rises into the air and dashes his brain into a rock (MFI, 110). The grey horse performs a dual function: it informs about its owners supernatural origin and serves as an instrument to fulfill her will.

A very interesting modification of the mythical material is presented in the tale *Beauty of the World*. It tells about the most beautiful princess in the world who gives the tasks for her suitors to preserve the things she gives them throughout the night. Though the task does not seem to be difficult or risky, the princess makes it complicated because she gives the suitors sleep potion, steals the things and carries them to an island where a giant dwells. The princess and the giant seem to live a marital life: she prepares him supper and they lay down to sleep on the reversed harrow covered with white mare's skin (WIFR, 160). The giant's island is a totally bare and isolated land – it is the realm of death itself and the mare's white skin functions as a shroud. The tale seems to be a narrative expression of the sovereignty divination ritual known among the ancient Celts:

whenever a new king had to be elected, a designated man slept in a bull's skin after a ritual feast and dreamed of the best candidate to take the post. The skin seems to give the access to the Otherworld and enable, by employing the otherworldly knowledge, to choose the ruler of the land. In the tale, the skin is the object that unites two otherworldly agents, the couple that designs the death of the suitors, thus it does not lose the association with the supernatural. But the very process of choosing the king for the kingdom taken as wooing of the princess acquires a very pronounced destructive aspect. What is more, the female appears as the decision maker in the present situation because she is the most active agent, whereas the giant only tries to fulfill her ordeals.

The presence of an equine creature in the given tale is confirmed by the horse-related object. The same distribution of the narrative units is presented in *The Tale of the Hoodie* which also depicts a female as an active participant of the action. Here, a woman firstly seems to be an embodiment of fragility and obedience, but when her husband turned into a hoodie leaves her, she is determined to find him and acquires special qualifications in his search: she learns the art of smith craft and makes horse-shoes for herself so that she could reach her enchanted husband over the hill of poison. After she breaks the spell, she returns home with her husband, but the tale teller especially emphasizes the leading position of the former fragile wife – she goes first and throws the horse shoes to her husband who obediently follows her (PTWH I-II, 67). The role of the husband is limited to that of an object who cannot decide whom to marry but just performs someone's orders. In fact, he remains passive till the very end of the tale. Meanwhile his wife, on the contrary, gets rid of all her weaknesses and social dependence after she makes the horse shoes. In her case, the horse shoes symbolize the power to act and freedom, whereas in her husband's case, it signifies horse-taming and dependence.

There are several other cases which describe an indirect female-horse relation. For instance, a death announcer the *banshee* might be accompanied by a

black coach driven by headless horses (IFFT, 116); a girl who tries to escape a giant runs so fast that sparks spritz from under her heels like horse's hooves (PTWH I-XVII, 261); Niall's wife turns him into an old white horse and forces to carry stones (WIFR, 19). The experience of a male transformed into a horse was registered even in a rather late period: the nineteenth century story of a farm worker Harry informs that he has been transformed by his mistress, a witch, and ridden to the otherworldly feasts (PTWH II-XXVIII, 60). It should be added here that later on he steals the magic bridle and enchants his mistress. He even manages to put horse-shoes on her feet⁴⁰.

The transformation of a female into an equine creature or vice versa is also popular in folk tradition: a magic steed appears to be a girl under a spell (PTWH III-LVIII, 16); a blue filly won by playing cards turns into the "finest woman on earth" (PTWH I-I, 19); girls might be enchanted to live in the shape of a red pony (WIFR 218) or a nine-legged steed (WIFR, 223). The looks and behaviour of the enchanted equine-girls suggest they are otherworldly creatures because they know the laws of non-human world; the enchantment is broken when the hero marries the equine-girl's sister. A deer that is actually a woman under a spell appears in the human shape when a hunter is about to fire at it (PTWH II-XLIV, 294)⁴¹.

To sum up, the figure of the horse is closely associated with the supernatural reality. Mythologically, it might be related with the spiritual part of a human, especially a warrior. Sometimes the two might be identified as one unity. The belief is retained in folklore as there are many tales about males transformed into horses the most notorious shape-shifter being the kelpie that also has a strong element of aggression constituting the creature's overall portrait. Both from the mythical and folklore perspective, the horse seems to have retained subordination to the female characters, especially when it concerns women advanced in age. It is

⁴⁰ The bridle is a common instrument used to change human shape into that of a horse – it is used in a number of tales (MFI, 104; WIFR, 13; PTWH I, 52; PTWH II-XXVIII, 60).

⁴¹ A similar motif is found in rather late mythical sources that come from the 15th century: here a fawn-girl lures the Fian to the *sidhe* and asks them to fight with the Tuatha (TEI, 142).

interesting to note, that in folktales women can command men and horses as if they are treated on equal terms. Such a power of females is implied in the mythical stories but rarely stated so obviously. Whatever the relation of the horse with other participants of the action, its ability to traverse the different worlds is undeniable and well attested. Thus it is possible to conclude that the vernacular tradition preserved the remnants of the mythical thought that perceived the horse as a psychopomp carrying the souls of the dead to the afterlife realm.

4.3. Reflections of Mythical Modulations of the Liminal State Caused by Females

Rich Celtic heritage of folktales offers a great variety of modulations of mythical mythemes discussed above. It is worth noting that females participate as active agents in the process of depriving one's life or at least a part of the spirit. An interesting illustration of the mytheme of the female related with the deprivation of breath comes from the Irish folktale *Black, Brown and Gray*. Here the three members of the Fian, Dubh, Dun and Glasán (meaning Black, Brown and Gray), keep night watch in turn and face miraculous challenges each: the first two get back the magical objects stolen from Fin ages ago, whereas the third one is involved in an affair that is more promising concerning the matters of death which may be judged from his name.⁴² Glasán visits the same place as his comrades do but instead of the feast he finds the house full of dead bodies. He decides to lie among them and see what wanders will befall. Soon a one-legged, one-armed hag with a single tooth comes:

as she went on she took two bites out of every fat corpse she met, and threw every lean one aside. She had her fill of flesh and blood before she came to Glasán; and as soon as she had that, she dropped down on the floor, lay on

⁴² Glasán, i.e., Grey, is neither black nor white. It is indicative of the marginal situation such as the process of death which begins with the moment of the separation of the soul from the body and ends when the soul reaches the afterlife realm and the body is properly interred.

her back, and went to sleep. Every breath she drew, Glasán was afraid she'd drag the roof down on top of his head, and every time she let a breath out of her he thought she'd sweep the roof off the house (MFI, 285).

The given episode might seem to be a trivial feast of an ogress if considered only within the framework of a mere representation of the monster's entertainment. The structure of the tale, however, shows it should be related with the mythical conceptualization of death as there are funeral rituals and afterlife images employed afterwards. The very fact that the action takes place just before the dawn and is witnessed by the man called Gray points to the liminal moment in human life, namely, the separation of the spirit (life force) from the body. This opens up new interpretative perspectives of the scene: the two bites that the hag takes from every body must be human life force. Having gathered enough of it she falls asleep, and this acquired life force is manifested in tremendously powerful breathing. It shows the potential of breath-life now residing in the hag. Thus, the grotesque scene acquires new shades of meaning when linked to the ancient mythical substratum – it is not the flesh that the hag needs as food but rather the spiritual life force that resides in the freshly dead bodies.

Female figures seem to have stronger associations with the dead and the living dead than males, they have more knowledge and abilities to manipulate them better. To illustrate, Ellen Leach – Gray Ellen – a cunning woman who gives advice how to get rid of a fairy changeling also knows where the dead are buried and what happened to their souls (IFFT, 51); Lady MacDougall of Donnelly seems to have an unconscious power to doom men to death: after her remarks in the church healthy young men suddenly get ill and die of a mysterious disease (WG, 35). When unfortunate Teig tries to find a place to bury a dead man flung to him by a fairy man, the female corpse seems to be the liveliest of all the corpses that he meets because she shows reaction just as some clay is removed from her grave, while males must be fully exposed or even hurt before they do it (IFFT,

26). Moreover, the supernatural females can command the dead: a hanged man with his head severed from the body obeys the Queen of Wilderness (MFI, 316).

If not under the influence of a female, the restless dead seem to be moved by some factor, such as, for instance, pre-mature death (cf. Mees 2009, 53) or inherent evil nature (cf. Smith 2007, 70-75). Some unfinished issues, e.g., debts, might be an initiating element of the afterlife activity but the figure of a woman is involved as it is told in the Scottish tale *The Tale of the Soldier*. Here, women carry and throw the body of a dead man because he took their cows when he was alive (PTWH II-XLII, 276); an Irish smith was such a merry lad that even devils could not bear him, so he was kicked out of Hell and now is wondering across the world and leading people astray (ICC, 103); people cannot rest in peace when they have some secret untold (cf. Milne 1987, 11) or due to some promise made when alive – for instance, a girl's ghost cannot find peace because she was determined to lay in rest near her lover and when the two are buried together, the ghost disappears (cf. Leodhas 1974, 21-30); the dead often come back to take care after their relatives (IFFT, 190; Leodhas 1974, 50-70; 99-105; 111-117).

Some of the living dead in folktales express a neutral character. They serve as an illustration of the possibility to linger in between life and death. For instance, John, an old soldier, revives a dead man with the warmth of his own body (PTWH II-XLII, 278); MacDonald of Keppoch sleeps so soundly that when a man wants to wake him up he tears off his hand and causes heavy bleeding, but when MacDonald awakes, he feels no discomfort at all (WG, 89); corpses do not allow a 'newcomer' to be buried near them (IFFT, 21-27). Thus, the notion of the living dead capable of moving or talking even after the factual death is well retained in Celtic folklore and females play not the least role in their afterlife activities.

The folklore tradition seems to have inherited the association between the life force, blood and stone from mythology. Though configurations of these elements do not always correspond to the models established in the mythical

stories, the fundamental distribution of values is retained. Blood is still considered to be the liquid of life, the source of vitality; it attracts hags and giants as their favourable dish beside the corpses. In one of the tales, a giant's housekeeper feeds little giants with boiling blood (WIFR, 136); in another, a hag, the giant's mother, threatens to drink the hero's blood to quench her thirst caused by the death of her sons (CDM, 33-55). When Kaytuch fights with the Hag of the Church, she "puts her nails into his blood" which means that she attempts at the core of his life – he has never been in such a grievous danger so far (WIFR, 71). The given instances reveal that in folktales blood still is the essential life force that the supernatural females crave for.

Hags, or enchantresses can diminish human life force and make them motionless. Figuratively, it is often presented as turning people into stones. For example, a hag that fights with Gruagach turns his family into stones (MFI, 257); a girl's sisters are turned into stones when they fail to watch the dead man properly and fall asleep (PTWH I-XIII, 222); whereas the hero's elder brothers undergo the same fate after the unsuccessful combat with the hag. The restriction of movement may not always be represented by an actual transformation into a stone, it may be the state of paralysis. For instance, when the heroine gets in trouble with the annoying wooers who come to her at night, she makes them stick to some objects (PTWH I-II). It should not be omitted from the discussion that animals, especially the horses, are very sensitive to the supernatural experiences, the presence of witches in particular. They become paralysed whenever they feel something unusual. For instance, the presence of the witch nearly makes a horse, "a very spirited animal, endeavouring to stop on the road" (IFFT, 161) and gaze towards the grazing cows. Suddenly, the horse tries to violently break away from the hands of his owner but when calmed "refused to move from where he was, nor could threats or entreaty induce him to proceed" (ibid.). Soon after the master saw half of a human's body trodding along the way – that was a witch stealing milk.

The state of the stone-like paralysis might be eliminated by means of sprinkling blood over the victim. The episode from the Fian's adventures reveals this striking opposition between the images of stone and blood: in Fear Dubh's realm where all the heroes are enchanted so that they cannot move, only the blood of Fear Dubh's mother can deliver them from the spell (MFI, 229). The Scottish version of the same tale says that Fin and his comrades all seem to be dead and reside in moulds, though they can communicate or even fight among themselves. The only means to revive the heroes is to sprinkle the blood of three princesses over them (PTWH II-XXXVI, 168). The White Gruagach who died because his wife fried his life-trout from under a stone was revived when sprinkled with the blood of the venomous horned beast (PTWH III-IV, 362). The blood of a hag is the only means to relieve the gnawing head of her elder son (MFI, 217). The afore given examples illustrate the mythical conception of blood as liquid of vitality and energy ensuring the ability to move which is the essential expression of life. Stone or stone-like paralysis, on the other hand, come to symbolize restricted or deprived mobility, hence, the restrained vital forces that might be restored only by means of blood⁴³.

Though being turned into a stone usually means death for mortals, the supernatural beings, on the contrary, employ the stone to protect their life. For instance, when asked about the location of his spirit, a giant lies that it resides under Bonnach Stone or threshold, but its actual place is under the flagstone under the threshold (PTWH I-I, 10) or under a grey cairn (PTWH I-I, 21). The White Gruagach, son of the King of the Light, dies when his wife takes one of the three

⁴³ There are but a few tales where blood and stone represent the opposite values than the ones discussed above: a beautiful couple drowns in the sea serpent's blood and they remain dead for two years until revived with the healing water (WIFR, 151). In one of the Scottish tales, the hero must raise a crag of stones and strike it on the chest of a sleeping youth to awake him (PTWH II-LII, 444). At the first sight it seems that the images which are supposed to symbolize life and death 'have switched over' their functional spheres and got inscribed into other structures of significance. Nevertheless, the semantic multimodality strengthens their interaction within the life-death cycle.

trouts from under a stone in a burn and puts it on fire (PTWH III-LXXXIV, 360)⁴⁴.

Another liminal state that living people undergo and which is paralleled with death in the mythical framework is that of sleep. In folklore, females often appear as controllers of sleep. For instance, a beautiful lady watches a hero sleeping on her knees – she knows how to wake him (PTWH I-LII, 443). She acts as a controller of the hero's sleep – had she not revealed the secret of his waking to his opponent he would not have awoken for ages. Women can both break and cause the state of sleep with the help of various objects, traditionally, with the drink of sleep (MFI, 60), draught of drowsiness (MFI, 98) or draught of sleep and wonderful music (MFI, 194). Another instrument to make man fall asleep is the pin of slumber, with which the evil queen step-mother lulls her step-son (MFI, 130; WIFR, 220). Sleep may be caused by eating an apple, one of the symbols of the Celtic Otherworld, as it is found in a version of *The Battle of Birds* (PTWH I-II, 56).

Notably, the role of the males to cause sleep that is attested so well in the mythical stories seems to have been eliminated in the folklore tradition: only one case was detected in the whole corpus of the tales investigated in the present

⁴⁴ It should be added here that another usual way of locating the giant's spirit is by following the inclusive principle, i.e., one object/creature containing another. The chain of the creatures includes the representatives of all three spheres of the world – earth, water, air – normally begun with some mammal, a bull, or ram, or hare, then fish and, finally, a bird which contains an egg (PTWH I-I, 10; 21; -IV, 82; 98; MFI, 74). Sometimes the spirit of a hostile supernatural female is also hidden in a similar manner (CDM, 80; MFI, 61). The specification of the initial containers varies, i.e., there is no canon of the animal species, only their structural inter-dependence on the living environment. But the last object is always an egg which is crashed either in a specific place on a giant's body (e.g., chest or mole) or against a stone. It highlights the opposition between a stone as an instrument of death and an egg as a container of life, because as soon as the egg is crashed, the giant or the supernatural female dies. The fact that the egg is the personification of the creative powers in many cultures is of no less importance (cf. Toporov 2008c, 1136). Moreover, it is namely a woman who extracts the information (or tells herself) how to find and destroy the spirit of a giant. This leads to the assumption that females have special knowledge concerning the nature of the spiritual essence.

Stone, as the object to manifest the junction of life and death, appears in another mythical configuration, namely, as a meeting place of mortals and supernatural beings. To illustrate, a princess must wait for the giant sitting on a stone (WIFR, 142); *banshee* sits on a stone on a riverbank (PTWH II-XXXVII, 191); Merrow – a sea man – who keeps human souls in cages under water is sitting on a rock and waiting for his friend – a fisher man (IFFT, 68).

research. In an Irish tale in which a malevolent captain adds sleeping drops into whiskey to make the wife of the hero fall asleep so that he could steal her ring and cheat the hero about his wife's infidelity (WIFR, 125). Male characters come into the scene when dreams are concerned. The archetypal love affair incited by the vision of a girl in a dream is recorded in the Scottish tale *The Shifty Lad* where the farmer's son sees a girl in his dream and is determined to marry none other but her (PTWH I-XVII, 289). Or the male might appear as a wise man capable of explaining the dream as in another tale *Conall* which is heavily drawn on myth. Here, a smith's daughter sleeps with the king of Eirin and sees three prophetic dreams. The king explains to her that he will die that very night but she will give a birth to their son who after many years will establish a great dynasty for nine generations (PTWH II-XXXV, 142f). The given instances allude to the changes that occurred in the folklore tradition. The functions of the males as reflected in the tales are not surprising with respect to the mythical substratum since love affairs due to dreams are common in myths, while kings were believed to have an access to the otherworldly knowledge, let alone the druids who were mainly men. Thus males predicting future on the basis of dreams is no unexpected motif within Celtic mythical framework. Nevertheless, the importance of the male in relation to the state of sleep is reduced – they tend to appear as experiencers of sleep more than inducers of it in both mythical stories and folktales.

The modulation of the partial death represented as madness has undergone a bit stronger 'censorship' if the amount of the data is considered. In the analysed corpus, there is but a single tale where a man falls out of his reason and his wife does everything to recover him. The case is described in the Scottish tale *The Chest* where the hero is cheated by the captain, loses his home and wife and finally goes mad. The wife gets dressed like a man, goes to work to the master, meets her husband there and restores him to his full senses (PTWH II-XVIII, 4f). Structurally, the scheme of the action delivered in the tale matches the operational programme proposed in the mythical stories, but here the element of the

supernatural is reduced to an allusion to mythical influences, such as the perception of crossing a lake, which is conceived of as transfer to another world in mythology, being equal to going mad as it is shown in the tale under discussion.

The folklore tradition offers a great variety of instances which confirm the ability of the female characters to restore the hero either to health or to life. The prevailing motif is the revival of the dead warriors or enchanted people by returning their life-force. It can be done with a special ointment or healing water (PTWH I-XIII, 222; PTWH II-XLIV, 294; PTWH III-LXXVI, 197; 274; MFI, 244-269; WIFR, 181). Other means include: carrying the dead husband to an island (WIFR. 67); putting the finger into the mouth of the dead (PTWH II-LII, 448) or touching people with the magical club (PTWH II-XLI, 268). Interestingly, there is no evidence as to the altered state of the revived ones. That is, the otherworldly experience of being dead seems to have had no effect on their memory or other abilities, such as speech, as it is given in the mythical narrative heritage. Moreover, the mythical stories do not detail out the function of the goddess to restore men to life: she is depicted more as the ruler of the spirits who can determine their separation from the body when she appears as a battle fury, for example, but not vice versa. In other words, she cannot bring the spirit back to the body once it has abandoned it. Thus the folklore tradition shows a considerable deviation from the roles of the supernatural females regarding this particular aspect of activity.

But it should be noted here that the element of dumbness is introduced in the folktales, yet in another light than in the mythical stories. The illustrative episodes come mainly from the fairy tales that touch upon the abduction of fairies. For instance, the woman comes from a mist to become a boggle hunter's wife – there is no work she cannot do, but she cannot speak (PTWH II-XXX, 98). Later on it appears that she was abducted by the fairies who took away the gift of speech from her. A similar conviction of the fairies' ability to 'mute' the mortals is registered in the tale *Jamie Freel and the Young Lady*. Jamie catches a lady from

the fairies' reel and does not let her go although the fairies change her shape for several times to make him let his hands loose but he never gives up his resolution. Finally, they make the lady deaf and dumb so that she could not tell about her experience in the abduction and so reveal the secrets of the fairies (IFFT, 57).

The supernatural beings, in their turn, also have the restricted abilities to articulate when they act in the human world. To illustrate, the voice of the witch who has come to break the spell is "croaking, tremulous, and, at times, partially inarticulate" (IFFT, 168); the headless apparition when approached by a priest utters nothing better than growling or "Umph" (IFFT, 161)⁴⁵. Thus, the ability to speak seems to be mythically related with the supernatural reality and communication between the world of humans and the supernatural world. This belief is well reflected in folklore.

The remnant of the ancient belief in an external spirit, the *banshee*, is a very popular character in folktales. Usually, she acts as an announcer of death wailing for someone just before the fatal moment (IFFT, 116-137). But one tale depicts the *banshee* as a lot that befalls the hero. In *The Piper and the Puca*, she endows a wretched piper with a remarkable talent and makes him a famous musician thus providing the guarantee for his status in society (IFFT, 101f). On the grounds of the folklore data it is possible to draw an assumption that as a character the *banshee* has not changed much in comparison with the mythical tradition either in her appearance or activities.

Finally, the social dimension regarding the liminal states of people is not avoided in folklore. Here, just as in the mythical stories, one of the most obvious cases of people living in 'social liminality' are youngsters before the ritual of initiation, which is typically presented in a figurative way through an acquisition of the name. For instance, Finn's muime (foster mother) incites the boy into a fight with other boys. He maims (or kills) many of them, and the local priest calls

⁴⁵ Similarly, an otherworldly hag in *Rhonabwy's Dream* does not speak to warriors but gruffs at them (M, 215).

him as “the fair haired one”, i.e. Finn, because his hair distinguished him from other boys. Just after this Finn’s muime perishes (PTWH III-LXXXII, 334). Here the role of the woman embraces two functions that point to liminality. First of all, the muime acts as an agent that enables the transfer from one stage to another which coincides with the mythical function of a psychopomp. Secondly, by arranging the acquisition of the name, Finn’s muime brings him to social life and helps the boy to establish as a member of human society. In other words, she introduces the boy to the sphere of life expressed in social terms. It might be conceived of as a variation of the motif of reviving dead warriors. In any case, the muime appears as a mediator that is able to change the boy’s state.

It should be brought into focus that Celtic folktales do not develop the topic of beggars as social outcasts. However, the theme as such is not abandoned. The class of the ‘social living dead’ includes many other folklore characters, such as the Fian who live in the wilderness and are not bound to any king but have formed their own hierarchical community, or the witches who live on the borders of villages or are often invited from other villages which signifies their social otherness. These groups of people must be distinguished from the fairies as they are clearly human beings. Their contribution to the structure of a particular community is such that they operate as boundary persons that unite the socially structured environment with the unknown one and, possibly, supernatural.

To sum up, the state as a representational element of liminality embraces various aspects of human life: physical and mental, personal and social. The overview of the peculiarities of the expression of the spiritual plane has revealed that many elements of the ancient belief that are related with the conception of the spiritual essence have been preserved in vernacular tradition. In most cases, the spirit is perceived of as a complex entity whose parts can be controlled individually. The role of the controller is usually ‘entrusted’ to a female character who goes in accordance with the fundamental ancient mythical Celtic worldview which takes the goddess as the leader of the souls to the afterlife realm. All the

aspects of death designated in the mythical stories find their reflection in folklore, though some of them do not escape alternations in the distribution of figurative elements. In other words, the folklore tradition seems to offer a greater variety of the configurations of the elements that constitute pagan mythemes.

5. ADOPTION OF THE CELTIC MYTHOPOETIC MODELS OF DEATH IN LATE MEDIEVAL LITERARY TRADITION

Celtic peculiarity of preserving their own ethnical heritage in oral form paved the way for the peculiar cultural elements to enter the literary works. Northrop Frye has rightly observed that the structural principles of literature actually reside in myth (cf. Frye 1957, 134f), whereas Edgar M. Slotkin claims that folklore and literature are strongly inter-dependent while a peculiar characteristic of Celtic literature is that “oral and written literatures are bound up together and self-reinforcing” (Slotkin 1983, 213). The following chapter is devoted to the search of the principles that used to operate in Celtic mythical framework and were transferred into medieval literary tradition. It also attempts to investigate the fundamental mechanisms that make the literature different from other discourses that belong to the Celtic vernacular heritage.

5.1. Models of Disfigurement Applied in Late Medieval Literature

The theme of anthropomorphic metamorphosis of a female entered Medieval romance, yet did not escape the modulations to fit the contemporary tastes and requirements. Due to the growth of cities the cultural forms were reorganized and the focus was brought on the social life, its structure and development (cf. Rosenthal 2009, 459). Such cultural shift was inevitably reflected in literature, which by no means could avoid the impact of vernacular tradition lying as its substratum. Nonetheless, Medieval literary tradition adapted the ancient mythical models in the production of verbal art resulting in the interactive dialogue between the written and the oral traditions.

Since Medieval culture concentrated on the benefits and structure of a Christian society, it was normally expected that literature should abandon the ancient pagan framework of the anthropomorphic metamorphosis and integrate

the mythical scheme into the social context. One of the most prominent instances illustrating such modification comes from Chrétien de Troyes's romance *Erec and Enide*. Here, Erec, a renowned young knight of bright future prospects, takes Enide, a daughter of a poor vavasor, for his wife, but only after a very complex procedure of her introduction into the aristocratic community is completed. Interestingly, Chrétien describes the transformation of her social status through the code of clothes and appearance (for a wider discussion see Le Goff 2003, 229-252).

Erec first meets his future bride in her father's house when he was in a courtly quest determined to avenge for the offence that Queen Guinevere and her maid have suffered. He instantly notices the exceptional beauty of the maiden:

More than five hundred times even Nature herself had marveled at having fashioned <...> such a beautiful creature. Since that time, despite all her possible efforts, there was no way in which she could reproduce her own model (CRCT, 6).

Her beauty as well as her noble manners and courtesy make Enide stand above all ordinary women and prove her to be a worthy bride for Erec. Nonetheless, he decides that Enide's nobility must be approved socially and, after the decision has been made to marry Enide to Erec, they set out for the court where everyone accepts the couple and their marriage is celebrated.

The discussed part of the romance deals with the alteration of Enide's social status. Its transformation includes all the necessary stages: she is separated from her father's home, travels to the court, hence appears in a liminal situation, and, finally, she is accepted by the royal community and so incorporated into the aristocracy. As le Goff rightly stresses in his article, clothes play an important role in each of the phases of Enide's transformation. When at her father's, she wears old but very clean dress: her long-sleeved white linen smock is so old that the worn out elbows shine through and the dress is "much beneath her station" (ibid., 6f). Though her father cannot afford expensive rich new clothes for his daughter,

Enide's noble nature is reflected in her tidiness which becomes her distinctive feature since she is constantly referred to as the maiden in the white smock. By all means, whiteness alludes to the maiden's purity, the more so that, taking into consideration the conditions of her life, to keep the smock so white is as hard as to maintain noble behaviour.

When Enide is about to leave her father's home, her cousin offers her fancy clothes, but Erec rejects the idea that his future bride should receive any clothes from anyone but Guinevere. The author avoids emphasizing Enide's poverty by contrasting it to courtly luxury and tends to focus on her wisdom and proper behaviour. Judging her appropriateness and considering the request of Erec, the queen happily agrees to dress the maiden and promises to "give her immediately a fine and beautiful [dress of her own], fresh and new" (ibid., 21). By this ritualistic procedure or, as le Goff termed it "an act of ordination" (Le Goff 2003, 235), Enide is brought from the margins of aristocratic society to its very center and becomes a member of the royal community. After the dressing ceremony, Enide and Erec's wedding is celebrated which marks the completion of the incorporation process.

The sequence of actions almost coincides with the scheme found in the Sovereignty Goddess myth: due to the encounter with a suitable candidate to become her husband the lady undergoes transformation from a poor maiden to a courtly lady of a high rank. It should be admitted, however, that the role of Enide is passive in comparison with her goddess-like counterparts – she does not undertake any action to change her life conditions but depends on men exclusively. Everything what she acquires is won by her inborn qualities: exceptional beauty, wisdom, inherent nobility. By all means, if Guinevere had found her inappropriate to enter the court, she would hardly have accepted the girl. From the narrative point of view, the scheme of the Sovereignty Goddess has been structurally implanted in the Medieval romance but the figurative layer has been modified as the supernatural transformation of the body and self-revelation is

substituted by the ritual shift of the code of clothes. It should also be considered that Queen Guinevere, who is also a candidate in a literary projection of the image of the goddess, acts as an instrument in the transformative process. In other words, she is an additional figure to the Sovereignty Goddess metamorphosis mytheme. Being perfect and *a priori* above all other members of King Arthur's court, Guinevere participates in the ritual of transformation as a mediator.

Another example of a female self-transformation caused by her relation with men is found in Geoffrey Chaucer's collection *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. The narrative features a frame structure: the Wife of Bath tells her tale on the pilgrimage to Canterbury as there is an agreement among the pilgrims to amuse themselves along the journey in such a way. The Wife of Bath's tale is about a knight who rapes a girl, is sentenced to death by the king, but the queen pleads her lord to have a mercy and give him to her judgment. The king grants the queen's request and she imposes the task for the knight to find out what is that women wish the most. After long journeys he finally meets a hag who tells him the correct answer and afterwards asks to marry her. Having escaped the death according to the law, the knight cannot escape his duty to honour and must marry the hag who later on transforms into a beautiful young woman. The tale is worth concerning in the present paper due to two reasons: firstly, the woman's tale is obviously based on oral tradition and echoes the Sovereignty Goddess myth though adapted to suit the teller's taste. Secondly, the urban character of the Wife of Bath depicted in the Prologue offers a novel projection of its interpretation.

The tale told by the Wife of Bath strikes with an almost exact structural correspondence to the Sovereignty Goddess myth: an ugly crone changes into a beauty. But the circumstances of their meeting differ greatly: the knight is not to be inaugurated as the king but to suffer a punishment for a grievous crime against femininity⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ It is not a rare case in romance literature that rape is used as a narrative device to reflect upon the social structure or certain qualities of individuals. According to Kathryn Gravdal, the motif of the rape is a

The female characters of the tale play the goddess-like roles: beside magical transformation of the hag, the queen and her ladies have the life of the knight at her will. Moreover, the narrative landscape is enriched by different surroundings: whenever the Sovereignty Goddess appears in ancient mythical stories or folktales she is found surrounded by nature: in some remote nooks of the forest, near a well, and the like. In *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, the reader is introduced into a social environment, the king's court where the king withdraws from the action and gives the rights to determine the knight's destiny to the queen and her ladies. Even the transformation of the hag, initially met in the forest, takes place in a courtly environment.

The ancient myth of the Sovereignty Goddess is pervaded by a particular Medieval flavour and ornamented with certain details representing Medieval life. Moreover, the confrontation and reconciliation between the male and the female has lost delicate metaphorical expression typical of myth and has been transferred in social terms leaving little space for interpretation. Moreover, the hag puts much effort in persuading the knight of what true nobility is, she relies on the most prominent Medieval authorities and concludes that birth has little impact on the noble nature of a man:

Such as descends from ancient wealth and worth,
If that's the claim you make for gentlemen
Such arrogance is hardly worth a hen.
Whoever loves to work for virtuous ends,
Public and private, and who most intends
To do what deeds of gentleness he can,
Take him to be the greatest gentleman

You are no gentleman, though duke or earl.
Vice and bad manners are what make a churl (CT, 288f).

narrative device which helps to distinguish between the noble and the churlish, good or bad people, locals or foreigners as well as to establish male identity and structure the relationship between men (cf. Gravdal 1992, 563). Yet it should be borne in mind that the male protagonist rarely acquires the role of a rapist in romance literature. On the contrary, the moral code of chivalry requires to defend women against any assaults, physical or moral, and implies faithful service and obedience.

This marks the philosophical aspect of the theme of man's destiny. In myth, man may prove worthy of the divine approval but, in fact, can do little against the divine will: if a hero is condemned he will perish⁴⁷. In the tale told by the wife of Bath, the lips of a goddess-like female encourages the man to be the smith of his own destiny and determine his life by his deeds. She even introduces the idea that the nobility might be acquired and not inherited, she highlights that inborn status is of less importance than inborn qualities. On the other hand, the hag's speech stresses the importance of the moral values which complies with the words of the Hag of Beara to Nera and the secrets of kingship.

A closer analysis of the personality of the tale teller, the Wife of Bath, reveals that both the choice of the tale's theme and its alternation are not accidental but have a very strong inter-connection. The portrait of the urban woman has strong associations with the Goddess both in appearance and character. Actually, Geoffrey Chaucer emphasizes these associations to create a comic effect, for it seems that the woman wishes to stress her superiority over others, first of all her husbands, and, judging from the general prologue of the *Canterbury Tales*, she attempts to establish her authority as insistently as possible. Whenever she had to outdo women, she tried to surpass them in her appearance:

In making cloth she showed so great and bent
She bettered those of Ypres and of Ghent.

Her kerchiefs were of finely woven ground;
I dared have sworn they weighed a good ten pound,
The ones she wore on Sunday, on her head.
Her hose were of the finest scarlet red
And gartered tight; her shoes were soft and new.
Bold was her face, handsome, and red in hue (ibid., 15).

Beside making much effort to enrich her outfit, she could hardly hide her ferocious character:

⁴⁷ The fatal conceptualization of the hero's destiny is best expressed in the Irish *geis* scheme.

In all the parish not a dame dared stir
Towards the altar steps in front of her,
And if indeed they did, so wrath was she
As to be quite put out of charity (ibid.).

Another distinguishing feature of the personality of the wife of Bath is her pronounced sexuality: she is said to have had five husbands “apart from other company in youth” (ibid.). The Prologue to her tale emphasizes female sexuality even more and makes it one of the most powerful weapons in male-female confrontation. However, the emphasis on sexual relations has no regenerating force in the wife’s case. In fact, by publicly relating her rich intimate experience the Wife of Bath reveals her vulgarity and hard character. Sexual potency is one of the most important proofs of manliness for her and she goes as far as to be proud of her prostitution in marriage:

I never would abide
In bed with them if hands began to slide
Till they had promised ransom, paid a fee:
And then I let them do their nicety (ibid., 269).

Her physical appearance bears some resemblance with the mythical Hag of Beara: her widely set teeth, large hips, sound laughter, the ability to sit comfortably on an ambling horse and other peculiarities remind of the Hag before her successful transformation. But the Wife of Bath has no hope of changing as she admits that

Age that comes to poison everything
Has taken all my beauty and my pith (ibid., 271)

It is so because in Medieval urban perspective, the Wife of Bath represents the conviction of the linear flow of time. Due to this, she has no chance for self-transformation resulting in regeneration though the choice of her tale suggests she is dreaming of it. Her wish to pose like a goddess is obvious: her behaviour and appearance betray she sees herself as a goddess-like woman, her pretensions to

stand above all as well as intentions to provoke men with her sexuality are clear. However, these are all her own inner imperatives and not qualities that would allow to see her as a representative of the goddess. Actually, the character of the Wife of Bath is but a fading echo of the divine sublimity being dispersed by the urban environment and pragmatism of the woman.

The portrait of the Wife of Bath is structured by the means of figures of both Celtic pagan mythical substratum and Medieval tradition. The main features that define her appearance follow the pagan pattern, but clothes which make an important part of the social code in Medieval society, are of no less importance regarding the overall picture of the woman. Yet the significance of the clothes differs from that discovered in the case of Enide's transformation. In urban literature they signify the Wife's riches and her lack of taste too. In other words, the figure of the clothes operates as a factor revealing the discrepancy between the supposed beauty of rich appearance and the true nature of the Wife. Yet metaphorically the clothes function as the mark of incorporation into the society. The difference between Enide's and the Wife's cases lies in the very fact that Enide wishes to be part of the society, whereas the Wife's intention is to show her supposed superiority over other members of the community.

The two aspects – the appearance and the character – create different structures of significance in Chaucer's work. In other words, the figurative and thematic isotopies which are tightly interrelated, almost metonymically identical as found in the mythical stories have lost their original connection in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. Here, a figure does not stand in immediate relation with some mythical significance; on the contrary, the figurative trajectories inherited from the mythical stories stick together and oppose the thematic trajectory which deals mainly with the dubious social affairs thus informing about the non-goddess-like nature of the Wife of Bath.

Since the tale teller in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* is deprived of the possibility to transform herself into a beauty, naturally, she does not belong to the liminal

sphere but remains within the boundaries of a human society. There are cases in romance literature, however, which indicate the otherworldness of some characters by means of their half-shaped appearance. Curiously, the modes of appearance found in fiction stress the same aspects of deformity as in the mythical stories or folktales. For instance, the particular parts of the body are emphasized, as in a Welsh romance *Peredur Son of Efrog*. A maiden depicted here has eyes curiously similar to Cu Chulainn's when he is in the state of battle frenzy –one eye sinks deeply into the face, while the other considerably protrudes forth. The ugly black maiden who arrives at King Arthur's court on a mule has "one eye mottled-green and piercing, and the other black, like jet, sunk deep in her head" (M, 94). Moreover, she has long yellow hag-like teeth. The maiden comes with harsh reproaches to Peredur for not having inquired about the strange things seen in the Fisher King's castle, since the ritual of questions and answers would have cured the king and brought prosperity to his land. After her speech, the companions of King Arthur set for the perilous quests to seek for adventures and thus gain the eternal fame. The maiden acts precisely according to the Celtic scheme related to the battle goddess – she is not involved in action, but incites the knights to seek for danger by promising an everlasting honour, possibly, only after death.

Chrétien de Troyes's romance titled *The Story of the Grail* includes a version of the above discussed episode and gives a more elaborate portrayal of the reproaching maiden. Here, the author employs the model of general deformity to indicate the otherworldly nature of the female envoy that is as foul as hell:

You have never seen iron as black as her neck and her hands, yet these, compared with her other features, were the least repulsive. Her eyes were two holes small as rat's eyes; she had the nose of a cat or monkey, and the ears of a donkey or cow. Her teeth were so yellowed that in color they resembled the yolk of an egg. She had a beard like a goat. In the middle of her chest she had a hump, and her spine was like a crook. Her shoulders and her hips were shaped well for leading a dance. With her hunched back and twisted legs moving like two branches, she was ideal for the dance (CRCT, 396).

The appearance of the maiden reminds that of the mythical Hag of Beara who also seems to be composed of various parts of different objects and animals. But the maiden in Chrétien's work does not undergo any transformation, and only her repulsiveness is an index of her belonging to an other world than King Arthur's environment and indicates hostility to it.

Chrétien seems to have been keen of employing the mode of physical deformity to inform about the closeness of danger. A very similar description is found in another romance, *The Knight with the Lion*, where one of King Arthur's knights, Calogrenant by name, tells about one of his adventures when he met a churl who guided him to the magical well. The churl was herding fierce bulls and resembled a giant:

[he] looked like a Moor, was sitting on a stump with a large club in his hand. He was exceedingly ugly and repulsive; in fact, no words could possibly describe such a hideous creature. <...> his head was larger than that of a packhorse or any other beast. His hair was in tufts, and his bare forehead was nearly two spans wide. He had big hairy ears like those of an elephant, heavy eyebrows and a flat face, the eyes of an owl and the nose of a cat, a mouth stretching wide like a wolf's, the sharp and yellowed teeth of a wild boar, and a red beard and twisted whiskers. His chin merged into his chest, and he had a large backbone, twisted and hunched. Leaning on his club, he stood there dressed in a strange cloak, made not of cotton or wool but of two hides of recently flayed bulls or oxen which hung from his neck (CRCT, 260f).

The appearance of the Moor shows he must be an otherworldly creature still in the process of being shaped⁴⁸. He looks like a construct composed of the parts of various animals. Calogrenant thinks that his intellectual abilities do not extend those of a beast and he is almost right because, even though the churl is capable to use human speech, his answers do not explain more than what is obvious. Consider the extract from their dialogue:

- What kind of man are you?
- Such as you see. I am never any different.

⁴⁸ The name 'Moor' enforces the theme of hostile otherness because the moors were chief enemies of the Christian knights – they belonged to another cultural religious system, or metaphorically, to another world and were the main target of adverse propaganda in Medieval society.

- What are you doing here?
- I am standing here tending the beasts in these woods (ibid., 261)

The simple minded and rude Moor directs Calogrenant to the spring bubbling like hot water where he can experience a marvelous adventure: if the water from the spring is taken with the lead basin hanging near and spilt on a stone slab, the greatest storm that no creature can endure raises. Obviously, Calogrenant follows the instructions of the Moor and finds everything as the giant has told. Just right after the storm, a great number of birds gather on a pine so that “not a single branch or leaf was visible since they all were covered by birds” (ibid., 262). Each bird is singing its own tune, but they all flow in such a harmony that Calogrenant literally feels out of this world. However, the joyous peace lasts shortly, because a powerful knight comes reproaching Calogrenant for the noise and commotion he has caused. The two joust and Calogrenant is shamefully defeated.

The Moor, similarly to the deformed maiden in the Grail story does not belong to the Sovereignty Goddess scheme as neither of them undergoes any metamorphosis. Nevertheless, the two characters might be viewed as distantly related to the native Celtic mythical model: they share the mode of physical deformity very similar to that of the Hag of Beara. Moreover, they both act as signposts to danger: the maiden encourages the knights to seek for the Grail and thus their physical death or spiritual transformation, whereas the Moor guides Calogrenant to the danger of losing his knightly fame which makes a great part of the knight’s personality. That is to say, the maiden and the Moor stand in the liminal position taken by the Goddess in Celtic perspective and their liminality is designated by their half shaped appearance and, in the case of the Moor, restricted speech abilities⁴⁹. It proves that the figurative models of appearance discovered in

⁴⁹ It should be noted here that both bestial-physical deformity and restricted speech are indicative of the subjects’ liminal situation (cf. Turner 1969, 366).

the mythical stories have a widened sphere of application in late Medieval literary works: they may be prescribed to males as well as females.

It is important to maintain that the portrait of a physically deformed woman has not been abandoned in later literary tradition either but here she is juxtaposed with a young and beautiful girl. Consider the comparison from the romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*:

unlike to look on were the ladies, for if the younger was fair, yellow was the other. Rich red on the one bloomed everywhere; rough wrinkled cheeks rolled on the other. The kerchiefs of the one broidered with many clear pearls, openly displayed her breast and her bright throat, which shone clearer than snow that falls on the hills. The other covered her neck with a gorget, that wrapped her black chin in milk-white pleats. Her forehead was completely enveloped in silken folds, adorned and tricked with small ornaments; and naught was bare of that lady but the black brows, the two eyes, the nose, and naked lips; and those were ugly to behold and oddly bleared. A gracious lady in her land one might call her forsooth! Her body was short and thick, her hips round and broad. More pleasant to look on was the being she led (SGGK, 20).

Disfigurement and perfection hold together in the sly scheme of Gawain's seduction – the young lady is to implement the plan devised by the old crone who functions as the intellectual engine of the action. Their interaction enforces the idea that the two women actually represent the two different sides of a goddess-figure. Wisdom and deformity being the two qualities acquired with age are unified in the character of Morgen la Fay. On the one hand, when involved in seduction, beautiful and sexual lady Bernlak seems to embody the qualities typical of the Celtic battle fury that brings premature violent death to the warriors. On the other hand, she acts to express the other aspect of the Sovereignty Goddess, namely the beautiful girl bringing prosperity. Thus physically, the two women appear as the two opposites of the Celtic Sovereignty Goddess embodied in the two characters thereby avoiding the moment of the supernatural metamorphosis. But their actions and aim seem to follow the Sovereignty Goddess scheme – by means of sexuality to evaluate the knight's valour and appropriateness. Though both women acting together (one being the instrument of the other) do not succeed

in the spiritual and physical destruction of Sir Gawain, his knightly splendour gets somewhat blemished by his fear for his life resulting in a little dishonesty which is not a small loss of ideal knightly identity.

The same operational programme with only a slight variation in figurativeness is observed in Thomas Malory's romance *Le Morte d'Arthur*. The episode from the story tells that Percival stays in a miserable state for a while – lonely, without his horse, having just escaped drowning in the river. Soon he notices a magnificent ship approaching the shore with an extraordinary speed “as all the wind of the world had driven it” (Malory, BXIV, Ch VIII-IX, 701). The ship is covered with silk “more blacker than any bear, and therein was a gentlewoman of great beauty, and she was clothed richly that none might be better” (ibid.). She addresses Percival and says she once was the richest woman in the world but because she was too proud of her beauty her Lord abandoned and disinherited her. Since then she tries to gather the best knights to revenge her former Lord and Percival is a desirable knight to join her army. The damosel offers all the comfort for the weary knight – sleep, food, bath. Thus Percival unconsciously plunges into pleasures and chafed with them asks the lady to be his. After he has promised his help in her affair against the Lord, the damosel gives her consent and the bed is prepared for them. Luckily, Percival sees the sign of the red cross on the pommel of his sword and crosses himself. At that very moment the pavilion turns into smoke forming a black cloud. The beautiful lady appears to have been sent by the fiend who attempted at the violation of Percival's chastity thereby depriving him of the possibility to approach the Holy Grail.

From the perspective of the distribution of roles in this episode, this operational programme coincides with the scheme presented in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: the fiend and Morgen la Fay act as hostile agents that attempt at the destruction of the knights. They employ beautiful women, whose main feature is sexuality, as their instruments. Similarity is also found in the appearance of the fiend and Morgen la Fay. An elaborate and extensive section G.303.4 in Stith

Thompson's *Index of Folklore Motifs* reveals that the picture of the devil as a crippled, deformed, ugly creature is deeply rooted in human consciousness. Actually, it seems that the Christian devil has inherited all the physical features possessed the destructive goddess-like characters. It is possible to claim that paradigmatically the shape of the devil perfectly resembles that of Morgen la Fay. The difference on the figurative level lies only in that the devil in Malory's work does not appear in the scene but is represented indirectly as a smoke cloud and, by all means, through the story of the maiden who is actually speaking of the Satan's expulsion from Heaven. The result of the encounter on the part of Percival is similar to Gawain's experience. The succumb to the seduction of the lady implies the spiritual death of Percival, yet he escapes it with little damage as Sir Gawain does in his adventure. For both knights, testing by seduction is a warning to always keep to their spiritual ideals and be aware of the dangers residing not in the outer environment but rather in their personalities.

To sum up, the Celtic theme of the Sovereignty Goddess might be traced in Medieval literary tradition but is never found in its full original set. In other words, different aspects of the Goddess's activity or physical appearance are reflected on the figurative level, yet the thematic values have been alternated. The possible deduced schemes of the dispersed Celtic mytheme include the transformation, deformity and testing. In literature, the transformation of a female has lost the supernatural aspect and is carried out within the social framework by means of the ritual change of clothes which is suggestive of the public approval in accepting a person into their community. The bodily deformity indicates liminality, yet without the divine aspect – the deformed creatures do not undergo transformation, they are envoys of the dangerous Otherworld and their appearance betrays their threatening and inviting mysterious potential. The testing part of the Sovereignty Goddess mytheme is employed without transformation of the female from an ugly crone into a beauty and is manifested by means of split characters. That is, the original goddess figure is split into two characters which perform

different functions: ugly creatures intend the ruin of the knights, whereas the beautiful women serve as the instruments of the former and try to seduce the knights thus luring them to destruction.

5.2. Modification of the Celtic Mytheme Female-Bird in Knightly Literature

As it might be expected, European late Medieval literary tradition adopted the modulations of native Celtic mytheme of the female-bird. There are less relational strategies implemented: no instances of direct shape-shifting are discovered and the degree of the supernatural is much lower than in folklore. Yet, more precision and variety in the description of bird species and stronger symbolic emphasis are offered. Unavoidably, the Christian context affects pagan Celtic mythemes and opens up another layer of meaning.

The romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* provides an extensive manifestation of the hostile powers traditionally embodied in a supernatural female yet expressed by means of bird imagery. While travelling in search of the Green Chapel to meet the Green Knight, Gawain goes through the forest that looks like the realm of the Underworld, though it is located on earth – hardly any sparkle of life can be witnessed here:

High hills were on each side, and woods beneath of hoar oaks full huge, a hundred together. The hazel and the hawthorn were twined all together, covered everywhere with rough ragged moss, with many unblithe birds upon bare twigs that piteously piped there for pain of the cold (SGGK, 16).

As soon as Gawain gets out of the forest, he reaches Bernlak's castle "comeliest that ever knight had" (ibid., 17). It is not a secret that Morgen la Fay lives in the castle and, in fact, rules all the surroundings. During their meeting Gawain notices that the ancient lady was "highly honoured by the knights around her" (ibid., 20). The above described forest is a figurative representation of

Morgen's destructive intentions which are openly revealed by Lord Bernlak at the very end of the romance. Though the species of the birds abounding in the forest are not specified, their lifeless state signifies that they should not be considered the birds of prey (which would explicitly suggest hostility towards the hero), but rather the birds symbolically representing life affirmation. The constrained life force of the fowl in the area governed by the goddess-like Morgen la Fay serves as a figurative element intensifying the effect of the forthcoming dangers awaiting for Gawain. Thus, the relation between Morgen le Fay and the birds is hardly deniable, yet they never appear in the same scene together. In other words, the birds perform the role of indirect announcers of the goddess-like female's presence and indirect involvement in the action.

The initiatory episode of Gawain's adventure offers a more extended relational scheme concerning Morgen le Fay and the birds. Here, the Knights of the Round Table are challenged on the New Year Eve's celebration by the Green Knight who demands to deal him a blow and receive the same favour a year afterwards. The appearance of the Green Knight is more than astonishing: his height, an unusual green colour of skin and hair, magnificent armour betray his supernatural nature. What deserves a special attention is the Green Knight's array and saddle embroidered with birds and flies (*ibid.*, 5). In fact, it is a sign revealing the Green Knight's participation in the scheme invented by Morgen la Fay. He acts as her envoy to lure Gawain into the quest and hence put him at risk. Literary critics agree that the Green Knight is a symbolical figure due to three aspects: the holy branch, his ax and the colour. The branch is the symbol of peace, whereas the ax signifies fight, they both come into opposition and – therefore the Green Knight acquires a liminal position (*cf.* Beauregard 2013, 154f). It is interesting to note that the green colour is symbolically ambiguous, as the colour of the Celtic Otherworld it is related with both life and death. To sum up, the symbolical implications invested in the figure of the Green Knight suggest that either death or life might be the final consequence of the encounter between him, as a

representative of Morgen la Fay, and Gawain. No doubt, the outcome of the clash of these two worlds depends on Gawain's behaviour and his ability to react properly to the challenges. The bird figures embroidered on the Green Knights clothes are indicative of his otherworldly nature although it is difficult to discern their exact meaning since their species are not described. On the one hand, they might symbolize life affirmation, hence salvation of Gawain. On the other hand, if these are the birds of prey, it might betray the destructive intentions underlying the challenge arrangement. The very fact that the flies are depicted together with the birds on the Green Knight's outfit adds support to the assumption that the Green Knight comes from the Otherworld and intends to take some knight's life away. Traditionally, in Celtic thought, flying creatures – birds or insects – are associated with the soul leaving the body at the moment of death (cf. Wimberley 1928, 33; MacLeod 1975, 33; Ross 1976, 113; Spence 1995, 20;).

From this point of view, the Green Knight is a true threat to Gawain. But it should be brought into attention that Gawain's armour is also adorned with the figures of birds. In the setting off episode, Gawain, leaving King Arthur's court, kisses his helm richly decorated with bird figures. The helm is

embroidered and bound with best gems on a broad silken border; and birds on the seams like painted popinjays preening themselves here and there; turtle-doves and true-loves thickly interlaced. As many birds there were as had been in town for seven winters (SGGK, 14).

Kissing the helmet shows, first of all, Gawain's devotion to martial deeds. From the Celtic perspective, he metaphorically shows that he would have no other bride but the one governing battle affairs. On the other hand, the abundance of the bird figures on his outfit suggests that he cherishes the hope to save his life. Turtle-doves, true-loves and popinjays especially are the species of birds associated with Virgin Mary in Medieval tradition (cf. Biedermann 2002, 309). Notably, Gawain's choice of Virgin Mary as his divine patroness has been widely discussed and needs no further elaboration (cf. Tracey 2007; Battles 2010;

Pearsall 2011). The mentioned motifs drawn together lead to the conclusion that divine female agents, either coming from the pagan Celtic or Christian tradition, that take important roles in the *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* are represented indirectly by the image of the birds. What is more, their representation turns to be double scaled as the birds are not independent figurative elements: they are attached to the male participants in the action. In this way, the conjunction of the figures of the birds and the knights comes to denote the sphere of martial deeds archetypically governed by the female battle fury in Celtic tradition. Yet the synergy of the pagan and Christian traditions is obvious here since Arthurian knights are Christians who are devoted warriors for the faith.

A similar mode of representation is found in Chrétien's romance *The Knight with the Lion*. Here a knight on the quest is guided to the adventure of the well where he pours water on a stone and thus invites a storm after which magnificent birds perch on the tree and sing the most beautiful song in the world. Later on, a giant black knight comes to joust with the invader because he has caused great harm to his kingdom (CRCT, 262). Interestingly, the black knight's kingdom actually belongs to his wife and he only acts as her protector. Thus, the deduced configuration of the narrative elements is similar to that of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: a female – a knight – birds. Moreover, both narratives are pervaded by a certain flavour of danger that arises from or due to the participation of a female.

In the cases of medieval romance literature discussed so far the figures of women and birds are manifested, though not synchronically as separate actors. There is but one instance, however, where the relation might be implied, or rather to say, construed on the grounds of paradigmatic analysis of the contemporary cultural background. The instance comes from the medieval legend *The Quest of the Holy Grail* where Bors, one of the three knights who deserve to reach the holly city of Sarras, dreams of two birds:

it seemed to him that two birds appeared before him, one of which was as white as a swan and about as big, and indeed resembled a swan very closely. The other bird was as black as black and of no great size at all. It seemed to Bors, as he marked it, to be very like a rook, but the jet-black plumage gave it a rare beauty. Then the white bird approached and said to him:

‘If you would serve me, I would give you all the riches in the world, and you should be as fair and white as I’<...> I am so white, so very beautiful, and yet I am lovelier still than you imagine <...>

[the black bird] spoke in turn:

‘You ought and must serve me tomorrow. Do not despise me for my blackness, but know that my black hues are better worth than others’ whiteness’ (QHG, 183f).

Bors receives many explanations of his dream from various respondents but the one that seems to satisfy the knight as correct is given by an abbot who lives in a remote monastery. He claims that

in the black bird that came to visit you we should see Holy Church who said: “I am black, but I am beautiful: you know that my black hues are better worth than others’ whiteness.” The white bird shaped like a swan denotes the enemy, and I will tell you how this is. The swan is white without and black within, it is the hypocrite, who is fair hued and pale, who gives every outward sign of being among the servants of Jesus Christ: but inwardly he is so black and hideous with the sludge of sin that he deceives the world most grossly (QHG, 198).

The abbot explains the dream within the framework of Christian theology and relates the swan with the devil. The symbolical association could have been derived from the image of Lucifer who once was the most beautiful angel, but had the inherent devilish ugly character. Moreover, the underlying semantic substratum that leads the abbot to this explanation might also have come from the classical mythology, which associates the image of the swan with treachery (cf. the myth of Zeus raping Leda when disguised in the shape of a swan, cf. Graves 2011, 206ff). The very fact that the image of the swan is inseparable from the love goddess Aphrodite should also be regarded here (cf. Biedermann 2002, 151; Toporov 2008a, 578). The parallel between a woman and guile is well developed in the Grail story – the instances of women demonstrating a treacherous character or being the instruments of the enemy, i.e., the Satan, are abundant indeed.

Scholars have already noticed that the image of the woman as a source of evil is established in the romances dealing with Perceval's adventures (cf. Gravdal 1992, 581; Le Goff 2003, 157f) and *The Quest of the Holy Grail* is one of the best known stories of this group. Thus on the paradigmatic level, the figure of the swan might be identified with the figure of a tempting maiden that tries to seduce knights and distract them from their spiritual quest.

Here, contrary to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Knight with the Lion* the bird appears as a representative of the evil powers attempting at the destruction of the knight, whereas the woman as a source of destruction as seen in other works discussed above, appears to be a semantic allomorph of the swan, that is, another figure which performs the same function in different contexts. It is curious to note that the instances of bird imagery in romance literature touched upon so far bear much resemblance with the mythical material on the account of martial test. In it, the image of the bird belongs to the scheme of the knights' testing, the difference lies only in that the real test embraces not dealing with the birds as in Celtic mythical stories, but the knights show up as the 'bearers of the bird figures'. The symbolical in *The Quest of the Holy Grail* thus reveal implied or functional isomorphism between the woman and the swan. It also alludes slightly to the mechanism of direct metamorphosis so popular in both mythical and folk traditions.

In knightly literature, birds may acquire less destructive connotations than in mythical stories, yet retain their connection with the Otherworld. An episode from Chrétien's fictionalized version of the quest of the Holy Grail may serve as a perfect illustration for the proposed idea: here Perceval observes some drops of blood on the snow left by a goose. The scene reminds him of his beloved and he plunges into deep contemplation. Perceval is so absorbed in his thoughts that he fails to notice and recognize King Arthur's knights approaching him. As a result, he conquers all the intruders, but the gentle words uttered by Gawain make him come back to reality (CRCT, 390f). Perceval's contemplative state, triggered by

the birds, is a real threat to the knight. On the other hand, his self-absorption is similar to death experience as Perceval loses his ability to react properly. In other words, the tokens left by the bird and signifying his beloved affect his normal reasoning and thus temporarily adheres him to madmen⁵⁰.

Implied isomorphism might be worked out not only by means of functional identity, but by metonymical representation as well. Yet in chivalric literature, the object representing the referent belongs not to a bird, as it is in folklore, but to a woman, yet brought by a bird. A perfect example of this mode of representation comes from one of the most poetic Medieval love stories, Beroul's *The Romance of Tristan*. Its action starts when a swallow brings a golden hair and King Mark decides not to marry any other woman but its owner, i.e. Yseut (RT, 42). Tristan is sent to find her, then the two fall in love with each other because of the love potion they drank. They must hide their feelings but cannot resist intimate relationship. The people at Mark's court spy on the couple and regard their behaviour sinful. Consequently, Yseut and Tristan are doomed to death, they go on exile and become the outcasts of the society. Only after the magic effect of the potion comes to an end, the lovers get independent of their physical closeness, but remain spiritually attached.

What concerns Yseut's relation with the birds, the swallow which brought her hair seems to be an extension of her personality, a messenger. But it should be stressed here that the bird acts independently, without Yseut's imposed will. That is, there is no information given whether the girl sent the bird by herself hence the question of the subordination remains open. Nevertheless, the swallow is the trigger of the action and makes great impact on the quality of life of both lovers.

The symbolism of the swallow is complex from the mythical point of view. This complexity is confirmed by the sequence of actions depicted in the romance. The emergence of the bird with the hair is a promise of a love story because the

⁵⁰ As a liminal state, madness is a vast topic that has strong mythical implications and deserves special attention, therefore it will be discussed in a separate chapter.

swallow is primarily associated with the love goddess Aphrodite and forthcoming spring (cf. Biedermann 2002, 209). Nevertheless, the observation that the swallow might also be linked with the journeys from the world of the living to the world of the dead and vice versa should not be omitted (cf. Toporov 2008b, 577). It puts the creature in the liminal position. Thus, the particular symbolic implications are reflected throughout the development of the action of the romance – an amorous relation is the reason why, firstly, the two lovers must abandon society, which, metaphorically, is conceived of as their death and, secondly, at the end of the story, they meet their factual death.

The theme of love related with death is encoded in the image of the swallow that goes in parallel with the character of Yseut. She is the centre of the action as the object of love. In fact, she is the reason forcing Tristan to leave his uncle's court. It is because of her that Tristan must suffer the status of a 'living dead' when an outcast and finally meets his death. Thus, the symbolic-thematic polyvalence inherent in the image of the swallow is manifested on the narrative level by Yseut as the actor. In other words, the appearance of the swallow in the beginning of the romance creates a semantic tone that underlies the whole story suggesting the interplay of life and death. It should be emphasized that the parallel between the swallow and Yseut is not figuratively direct as in mythical stories or folktales where females can shape-shift into fowl, but operates rather as an underlying structural element of the narrative technique. Figuratively, the bird is an extension of the girl, yet the deeper semantic level reveals a reversed distribution of the roles: the image of the swallow is the condensed semantic unit that offers the semantic strains to be further kept by the figure of Yseut.

Interestingly, such narrative technique is evoked by the motif of the swallow bringing Yseut's golden hair. The bird appears as an active agent which brings the character of Yseut onto the stage. At the beginning, this character appears on strongly metonymical level, a hair being the smallest element to represent personal identity. Thus the reader finds the girl's fate to be totally

dependent on the bird. What concerns the figurative level, the metonymically presented girl is shown to be dependent on the bird as a mediator. On the narrative level, Yseut's activity remains within the framework suggested by the symbolic characteristics of the swallow, whereas on the deep fundamental level, the thematic significance of the figure of the bird and the figurative path drawn by Yseut's character totally coincide.

Another story from the collection of Medieval romances bears a similar, comparatively 'slight' relation between the figure of the female and the fowl. In Chrétien's romance *Erec and Enide* there is the episode where the knights participate in a tournament, the winner of which gets a sparrow-hawk for his lady who is then acknowledged to be the most beautiful and noblest (CRCT, 8). Undoubtedly, Erec wins the competition, and Enide, who takes the position of his lady, receives all the honour and the bird as well. It should be noted that before the tournament Enide lived in poor conditions but afterwards her state and status improved considerably. The acquisition of the bird comes out to be the turning point in Enide's life: from a poor girl she becomes an admired and respected lady.

Here the sparrow-hawk becomes an emblem revealing Enide's social status. Moreover, the sparrow-hawk is Enide's only possession when she first enters King Arthur's court. The acquisition of the bird is a sign that she deserves a better state. The more so that, symbolically, the hawk has exclusively positive connotations: in Medieval thought, it was conceived of as a royal bird signifying nobility, dignity and high aspirations (cf. Biedermann 2002, 112). It goes in accordance with Enide's character, an exemplar model embodying all the mentioned qualities. Interestingly, this is the only case in the examined corpus of Medieval romances where the female figure appears with the bird figure simultaneously. The bird is an index of the woman's status which has nothing in common with the supernatural, whatsoever. Thus, an ancient mythical model is accommodated to suit in the Medieval social environment. But it has retained its certain aspects, as, for example, the association of the birds of prey with martial

activity: the sparrow-hawk is won at jousting competition. The episode of the acquisition of the sparrow-hawk in relation with the improved Enide's state illustrates the general tendency of transforming the divine element found in mythical stories into the element of social aristocracy, prevailing in late Medieval literature. In other words, the narrative structures applied to describe divinities and divine activities in Celtic mythical heritage are used within the aristocratic social framework by late Medieval authors.

As it has been already mentioned, the actual metamorphosis of a female into a bird is never found in romance literature. The closest possible variant of this mythical model might be found in similes. For instance, Guinevere is said to "lift off like a bird in flight" (CRCT, 80) to greet Erec and Enide when they approach King Arthur's pavilion. Thus, the Celtic mytheme is remodelled into a figurative device, which operates on the narrative level and is dependent on the individual author's will rather than has any impact on the evolvement of the narrative action.

Another modulation of the Celtic mytheme female-fowl found in Medieval literature contains the element of the supernatural the focus being laid on the object that enables their relationship rather than the relation itself. The instance comes from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, precisely, *The Squire's Tale*. There is the episode where the King of India and Arabia sends a magical ring to Lady Canace:

The virtue of the ring, as will appear,
Stands in this point; if she be not averse
To wear it on her thumb or in her purse,
There is no bird that flies beneath the reach
Of heavens but she will understand its speech
And know its meaning openly and plain
And in its language answer it again (CT, 393).

The influence of the folklore pattern is, by all means, deducible in the image of the magical object, which enables transgressing the boundaries of the supernatural. It distances Lady Canace as a supposed goddess-type character from

the divine ability to communicate in the language of birds inherent in the original Goddess figure. On the other hand, what concerns the narrative reality of *The Squire's Tale*, here Lady Canace is a common woman and the ring, actually, opens up the possibility to extend her abilities to those of a goddess. Hence, Chaucer seems to follow the traditional female-fowl connection as reflected in folktales.

To sum up, the literary Medieval tradition develops the themes of death and liminality by employing the ancient Celtic mytheme female-fowl and adopts representative modes found in mythical stories. It should be noted, however, that generally the mytheme has been transformed by diminishing the degree of immediacy between the constituent parts. In other words, the female and bird figures are distanced from each other not only figuratively, as they rarely appear simultaneously in the narratives, but also fundamentally, since women and birds appear as separate, individual, yet interrelated actors. Whenever the figures come closer to each other visually, it happens due to the narrative elements, such as similes, which have little to do with the plot itself but serve as poetic adornments of the text. Nonetheless, the relation between the female figure and the bird figure has been retained as they might be regarded as semantic allomorphs embodying the same values which are clearly shown in the Grail stories.

5.3. Male-Female Mytheme as Reflected in Late Medieval Literature

The Medieval literary tradition by no means escaped the exploration of the theme of male and female relations where the ancient Celtic mytheme might be detected. Nevertheless, the alteration of the social values had a significant impact on the ancient mythical structure. As it might be expected, the role of the female got diminished and the central role was taken by the figure of the king or the knight instead. However, women intervene in men's lives in one way or another

although they are not treated as independent and self-confident members of the society.

One of the most obvious instances illustrating the demand for a woman to have some man nearby as her protector comes from Chrétien's romance *The Knight with the Lion*. Here, after Yvain defeats the Black Knight and gets to his court, he falls in love with the Lady of the Castle. A maid attending the Lady tries hard to persuade her to abandon her grief for the defeated lord and find some other prominent knight. The maid reminds her that she is the true mistress of the area, whereas the knight having jousting at the well is just an adopted defender and that now she must devise a scheme of the protection of her land against King Arthur who is to arrive at the well soon (CRCT, 276).

The words of the maiden allow for the association of the Lady with the Sovereignty Goddess as both of them are preoccupied with the protection of the land but, as a fragile woman in the Medieval conception, the Lady could not be involved in martial affairs, so she 'employs' her husband – a knight. Yet, in the strictly organized hierarchy of the roles, the Lady seems to stand higher than the knight: she is the guarantor of the protection and the knight is only her instrument. When he fails, i.e., when he loses his chivalric perfection, he is replaced by Yvain, a new victorious knight, who takes up the position of her husband and the Lord of the land. In this way, the prosperity of the area is ensured and the whole process of protection is symbolically embodied in the union between the male and female characters.

Another prominent couple that might be linked with Celtic mythopoeics of death from the perspective of male and female union is that of Geraint and Enid⁵¹. The two make a perfect matrimonial match. Enid is a faithful wife who seeks only the best for her husband and, if ever disobeys him, does it only for his benefit. She

⁵¹ *Geraint Son of Erbin* is a Welsh version of Chrétien's romance *Erec and Enide*. In the present case, the author of the thesis takes illustrations from the Welsh romance since it gives a more detailed description of Geraint's character than it is depicted in Chrétien's story.

is portrayed as the ideal of the lady in both appearance and behaviour so that “no maiden in the Island of Britain was better spoke of than her” (M, 154)⁵².

Geraint, in his turn, is ideal in the performance of the knightly deeds. He manages to conquer the arrogant knight who insults Queen Gwenhwyfar and her maid and afterwards “loved tournaments and hard combat, and he would return victorious from each one. This lasted for a year and two and three, until his fame had spread over the place of the kingdom” (ibid.). Thus, both Geraint and Enid are central figures in their fields of activity. It is important to stress that Geraint’s physical appearance allows for assuming that this character is related with the giant-figures. Consider the description of the knight when he tries to overtake Gwenhwyfar on her way to the stag hunt:

As they were travelling thus they could hear a mighty, ferocious noise. They looked behind them and could see a rider on a willow-grey colt, enormous in size, a young auburn-haired, bare-legged, noble squire with a gold-hilted sword on his thigh, wearing a tunic and surcoat of brocaded silk with two low boots of Cordovan leather on his feet, and a mantle of blue purple over that with a golden apple in each corner. His horse was tall and stately, swift and lively, with a short steady step (ibid., 141).

Noise is a canonical feature announcing the emergence of a giant, while the enormous size of the knight and the stately posture of his horse leave little doubts as to the giant-like nature of Geraint. By all means, the body-frame might be indicative of the potential rider’s greatness in the knightly deeds and chivalry, but, on the other hand, it may also suggest the man being worthy of an exceptional woman, the goddess, i.e., Enid.

The role of the couple as a destructive agent is exposed to the reader much later after the introduction of the youths into the narrative scene. When, as a wedded couple, Geraint and Enid set off for a journey across the country to test

⁵² It should be borne in mind that as a character Enid has retained some mythical patterns transformed by following the requirements of the Medieval romance. Nonetheless, the defining aspects of her character find parallels in Celtic mythology. Even her name is thought to be imported from Brittany as the name of the Sovereignty Goddess (M, notes 153).

Enid's faithfulness, Geraint jousts with a number of knights, the great majority of whom are brought nearly to the point of death (ibid., 159-178). He acts as a plague embodied in a knight's shape that sows destruction wherever he goes. The couple of Geraint and Enid appear as modification of the mythical team of the Dagda and Morrigan who unite in matrimonial harmony on the plain before the battle of Mag Tuired.

The figure of the giant knight in association with the female agent is not a rare case in knightly literature. A similar scheme is presented in the Medieval English romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The action of the romance starts with the New Year's feast at King Arthur's court with the arrival of the Green Knight who firstly astonishes all the knights by his height:

there burst in at all the hall door an awesome being, in height one of the tallest men in the world; from the neck to the waist so square and thick was he, and his loins and his limbs so long and so great, that half giant I believed him to have been, or, at any rate, the largest of men, and withal the handsomest in spite of his bulk, that ever rode; fro though his back and breast were so vast, yet his belly and waist were properly slim; and all his form according, full fairly shaped. At the hue of his noble face men wondered; he carried himself in hostile fashion and was entirely green (SGGK, 4).

The narrative element of the Knight's enormous height is reiterated later when he is introduced as the master of the Green Chapel's adventure. Gawain's host at whose home he stays before his meeting with the Green Knight, says he is

a wight the worst upon the earth; for he is stiff and stern and loves to strike; and greater he is than any man in the world, and his body bigger than the four bets that are in Arthur's house, and bigger than Hector or any other (ibid., 43).

Gawain, in his turn, retorts he would never abandon his duty "though he [the opponent] be a stern champion to cope with, and around with a club" (ibid.). The remarks about the unusual colour of the skin and hair of the intruder are given at the very end of the introductory description, hence the focus is on his giant-like stature. Green, as the colour representing the Otherworld and fertility, perfectly

supports the idea that the Green Knight might be related with the class of giants. The more so that the Green Knight has no traditional knightly attributes. Consider:

He had neither helm nor hauberk, nor gorget, armour nor breastplate, nor shaft to guar or to smite; but in his one hand he had a holly twig, that is greenest when groves are bare, and an axe in his other, a huge and prodigious one, a weapon merciless almost beyond description (ibid., 5).

Such tools as an ax or club are the usual possessions of the giants and they refer to both ancient and otherworldly nature of their owners. The Knight's weapon is a piece of perfect craftsmanship: made of precious metals it also indicates the high status of the stranger. Yet, his behaviour does not conform with the ideals of courtesy. The Green Knight intrudes during a Christian feast and enters the hall on his horse. Moreover, he insults the knights around the table by claiming that they are "but beardless children about on this bench. If I were hasped in arms on a high steed there is no man here to match me, their might is so weak" (ibid., 7).

The Green Knight acts similarly to and looks like a true giant, but it is important to mention that he does it not at his own free will but is manipulated by Morgen la Fay. After all Gawain's adventures with the Green Knight are completed, Sir Bernlak, who is actually the Green Knight, confesses that the cunning scheme of luring him to the Green Chapel was devised by Morgen la Fay who aimed at the humiliation of King Arthur's court (ibid., 49f). Gawain, as a representative of perfection in the deeds of arms, naturally offered himself as the target of the hostile affair.

Morgen la Fay is a very complex character as depicted in the romance. She never appears as an active agent of the action but is introduced as the attendant of Lady Bernlak, the mistress of the house where Gawain finds rest before his final encounter with the Green Knight. She tries to seduce him while Sir Bernlak is hunting. It was mentioned in Section 3.1. that Morgen le Fay and Lady Bernlak might be conceived of as the representatives of the same mythical figure – the

Great Goddess – in her different aspects: Lady Bernlak as a manifestation of the life fostering aspect, whereas Morgen la Fay as the goddess in her destructive aspect. On the other hand, according to Mary R. Lefkowitz, “goddesses are destructive only while they are sexually active” (Lefkowitz 1989, 590). It encourages to further propose the idea that the seductive young lady and the destructive hag are more inter-related than it might seem from the first sight. The young lady is an instrument to implement Morgen la Fay’s testing plan for Gawain: though appearing as separate actors, the two women act in accordance. Thus, the presence of the divine-like nature of the women might be glimpsed throughout the narrative of the romance.

The collaboration of the giant-like Green Knight and Morgen la Fay reminds of the union between the Dagda and Morrígan before the battle of Mag Tuired, where two otherworldly characters device the fatal end of the third party. Nevertheless, they stand on different hierarchical levels: the Dagda and Morrígan are of the same status, independent divinities, whereas the Green Knight is subordinate to Morgen la Fay. Thus the domination of the female is stated in more overt figurative terms: Bernlak-Green Knight openly admits that he obeys the hag, while in the mythical narrative, Morrígan’s supremacy is taken by default. Yet, the element of the matrimonial union is found in the marriage of the Bernlaks: Sir Bernlak – the Green Knight as a giant-like figure and Lady Bernlak as an associate of the goddess-like Morgen la Fay.

The motif of lingering in between life and death makes the comparison even closer. As it is known, the Dagda wears a club that can kill men with one end and revive with another. The colour of the Green Knight is no less significant considering this aspect: in Christian perspective, it is the colour symbolising the resurrection and life (cf. Biedermann 2002, 499). On the other hand, the eternal green is associated with the Otherworld, especially in Celtic mythical thought. Thus it reveals a strong connection with death. To say more, the colour of the

Green Knight's body turns him into the figure of the liminal sphere that can bring both life and death.

It confirms that the late Medieval literary tradition has retained the conception of the female supremacy over males, even though the latter also belong to the otherworldly reality. Yet, in the cases where the degree of the supernatural is low, the situation is quite different. For instance, in Malory's *Le Morte D'Artur*, a damosel arrives at King Arthur's court and asks the knights to save her lady from the tyrant Red Knight of the Red Launds who has besieged her mistress in her own castle. No one has heard anything about such a knight except Sir Gawain who informs that

he is one of the periloust knights of the world; men say that he hath seven men's strength, and from him I escaped once full hard with my life (Malory B VII Ch II, 212)

As an ideal of the martial knighthood, Sir Gawain settles high standards of the mastership of arms. Nevertheless, he has found great difficulty in dealing with the Red Knight. Despite the fact that the description of the tyrant is skipped, his extraordinary strength equaled to that of seven men indicates his extra human nature. In other words, the Red Knight's giant-like characteristics are expressed not particularly by his height, but by his strength. The Red Knight has also retained the giant-like fierceness as he mercilessly torments people and threatens maidens. He is the evil agent that brings danger if not destruction itself. On the narrative level, all the figures constituting the picture of the knight supplement each other: his temperament, expertise in arms, physical traits and even his name suggest the peril and makes him a messenger of death.

It follows from what has been said above that the giant-like nature of the Red Knight is depicted in social rather than descriptive terms. That is to say, in literature, the giant-males act in the social environment, contrary to folktales, where the giants inhabit secluded places and avoid any human company. As a rule, such giant-males are destructive agents that bring confusion and violation of

the accepted social norms, just as Bruce Sans Pit  who occasionally appears throughout Malory's romance threatening maidens without any obvious reason but due to his own malevolent nature.

An interesting collision between male and female powers is depicted in Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. As it was mentioned above, the protagonist of the Wife's tale, the young knight rapes a maiden. His severe assault against the girl is a manifestation of the domination over the female powers. He relies on his aristocratic birth and physical power which seem sufficient for him to disregard not only the law, the Code of Chivalry, which charges the knights to protect women, but also the inherent right of the woman to have her own will. However, such an attitude goes against the native Celtic perception of the female-male relationship since it tends to concentrate on femininity in the distribution of power. Considering that the tale is based on the Sovereignty Goddess myth, the knight's punishment is expected to teach him a lesson regarding his male egocentrism. Indeed, He is forced to accept feminine power over him on several occasions and levels. Firstly, he must succumb to the will of the queen if he wishes to save his life. Secondly, he becomes dependant on the hag whom he meets in the forest since she knows the right answer. Only after he forswears all his male egotism, the happy end for him is secured.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the extrapolation of male-female configuration with regard to paternal relation is quite rare in literature, especially taking into account the popularity of this modulation in folklore. The examined corpus of the Medieval literary texts offers but a single instance illustrating the theme. It comes from the Medieval Welsh romance *Peredur Son of Efrog*: when Peredur gets into a grey huge man's castle standing on a rock, the latter's daughter falls in love with him at first sight and warns him about her father's intention to have Peredur killed by the giants. She helps the knight to get his horse ready and together with her mother tries to persuade the grey man to abandon his murderous

plans. When he refuses to do so, Peredur defeats the army of the giants and the girl must now reconcile the hero and her father (M, 82ff).

The daughter of the grey man acts as a prototypical daughter of a giant until the moment of the giants' ruler's defeat. Then the whole affair abandons the folkloric framework and turns to social customs: the daughter does not employ any drastic means in dealing with her father, such as elopement or even killing her own father, which are commonly found in folktales. She rather takes up diplomatic measures and sets out the matters in a 'politically correct' way: her father agrees to go to the King Arthur's court as it befits a defeated knight in Arthurian literature.

Interestingly, the girl appears as a messenger in between the two worlds. Since her father is the ruler of the grey giants he might be associated with the old world and customs that are not appropriate any longer in the ideal world of Arthurian chivalry. Peredur, in his turn, comes out as a representative of the new order whose centre is King Arthur's court that issues and judges upon the legal, public and other matters concerning human life. Thus, in the given episode, the two worlds clash by following the scheme of action that is structurally inherent in folktales, yet, its outcome is depicted in a purely social light – the subdue of the grey man to the rule of King Arthur on the one hand and acceptance of a new member within the community in King Arthur's court on the other.

In conclusion, the giant-like male figures depicted in Medieval knightly literature have lost the physical repulsiveness characteristic of the folklore giants but are integrated into the social sphere, they emerge as violators of the law and adopted customs of chivalry. Except for *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the general tendency in the late Medieval literature seems to design the portraits of males and females on the social grounds and transfer the supernatural modes of behaviour found in folktales or mythical stories unto the customs of the Medieval everyday life of aristocracy. In other words, the marginal locality of the folklore giants is replaced by their marginal social behaviour. Another important point to

be noted is the variety of the modulations that Medieval authors adopt regarding the relations between males and females in the context of destruction or danger. Yvain and his Lady, Geraint and Enid appear as equal partners; the Red Knight takes the lady as a captive, the Green Knight seems to be a captive of Morgen la Fay, whereas Peredur receives considerable help from the daughter of the giant ruler. Thus, the variety of the roles makes knightly romance stand closer to the folklore tradition than to the ancient pagan mythical heritage.

5.4. The Figure of the Horse and Its Role in Late Medieval Literary Tradition

The figure of the horse takes a very important position in Medieval literary tradition. Beside the natural features of the equine activity (such as carrying people from one place to another) mythical implications are also obvious since the horses described in Medieval romances often transgress the boundaries of ordinary natural reality. Horses are inseparable companions of the knights that make a considerable contribution in forming their public image. As Sarah Lindsay notices, “horse and armour symbolize knighthood and chivalry, those ideals of chivalry that go beyond the mere ability to purchase such items” (Lindsay 2011, 37). The connection between the horse and the male characters in Medieval literary works has been widely discussed in scholarly literature and needs no further elaboration in the present work (cf. Glenn 1992, Sayers 2007, Lindsay 2011). For this reason, the present research is an attempt to examine the instances illustrating other aspects of the continuity or modification of ancient Celtic mythemes.

The cases demonstrating the aggressiveness of the horse are not frequent in late Medieval literature – two instances found in the entire corpus of the romances investigated in the present research come from the Welsh manuscripts. In *Geraint son of Erbin*, a Welsh version of the romance *Erec and Enide*, the horse is described as “ground devouring” (M, 142). Though the horse does not directly

threat the people by itself, still as an extension of Geraint's powers and being an emblem of its master's martial excellence, the horse signifies danger in case of encounter and encourages to avoid opposing Geraint if possible. Here the horse is metaphorically depicted as a death bringer, for death is traditionally viewed as a devourer.

Another curious instance is recorded in the Welsh romance *Peredur Son of Efrog*. In it, Peredur has to hunt a stag-oppressor

as swift as the swiftest bird, and there is one horn in his forehead, as long as a spear-shaft, and as sharp as the sharpest thing. And he eats the tops of the tree and what grass there is in the forest. And he kills every animal he finds in the forest, and those he does not kill die of starvation. And worse than that, he comes every day and drinks the fishpond dry, and leaves the fish exposed, and most of them die before it fills again with water (M, 100f).

The episode is interesting from several perspectives. First of all, the hunt of a stag is only a second a part of the compensation process that Peredur must undergo for violating the laws of hospitality and breaking the board of the mysterious *gwyddbwyll* game. Firstly he must fight a black-haired man who devastates the land. Thus, the black-haired man and the stag are put in parallel positions in the narrative: they are oppressors that must be overcome.

From Celtic cultural perspective, the hunt of the stag always alludes to the invitation to the Otherworld or brings some supernatural experience which is conventionally associated with the goddess figure. Likewise, when Peredur cuts off the head of the beast, the empress comes reproaching for having killed her most precious jewel despite the fact that it was her maid who asked the knight to do so. It appears then that the empress is the full commander of the supernatural reality whereas the black-haired man and the stag are only her subordinates who interchangeably carry out the same function. That is, the man and the beast are functionally isomorphic figures hierarchically subordinate to the female.

The given description of the stag is very similar to that of another notoriously famous Medieval beast – a unicorn, which is typically defined as a

fierce, swift and strong animal whom no hunter can catch except for a virgin maiden: whenever a unicorn feels a virgin on his way, he meekly comes and puts his head in her lap. This is the only instance of the unicorn's vulnerability for in other circumstances the beast is extremely aggressive towards any living creatures, either his own species or other kinds of wild inhabitants as well as humans (cf. Suhr 1964, 91f)⁵³. The structural semantic analysis of the unicorn as a mythical unit exposes the elements that are typical of Celtic envision of the goddess. Namely, the equine creature related with the supernatural reality, a virgin maiden female having a mysterious power over the beast, the element of violent death associated with tearing of the body. Yet, the difference between the unicorn legend as depicted in Medieval tradition and ancient Celtic perspective lies in the transposition of the elements: in the latter case, the horse might be sometimes perceived as a functionally isomorphic figure with the destructive goddess or may embody destruction itself if associated with the warrior spirit. However, in the unicorn legend, destruction is related entirely to the figure of the unicorn, whereas the mild and gentle female agent acts as the decoy for the ferocious beast⁵⁴.

The Medieval romances and legends contain a number of episodes which depict the equine creatures under the control of females. One of the most impressive cases is found in the *Quest of the Holy Grail*, *The Peregrinations of Perceval* (also integrated into Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* BXIV, Ch V-VI). In the episode, the horse is both the instrument used by the malevolent female and a bearer of the behavioural mode typical of the kelpie met in folklore. Perceval's adventure begins at midnight, when a beautiful maiden wakes him up and promises to give him "a fine and hardy animal that would carry [him] whenever [he] wished to go". Perceval gives her "every assurance she needed" and she

⁵³ Traditionally, the unicorn is depicted as a horse, yet various sources give different visions as to how the creature looks like. Some of them even indicate that the unicorn might be a stag (cf. Suhr 1964, 96).

⁵⁴ It should also be considered that the unicorn was taken as an emblem of Christ by Medieval commentators. It was thought to represent the unity between the Father and the Son (ibid., 91).

brings him “a huge and wondrous horse, so black as to be quite remarkable” (QHG, 113). Despite the fact that the beast raised “a shudder of fear in Perceval”, the knight mounted it and the fairy journey began:

His steed swept him along so fast that in no time at all it carried him through the forest and out again and borne him thence a three day’s journey and more. He continued his headlong flight till he saw in his path a wide river rushing along a valley bottom. The horse headed straight towards it and made as though to plunge into the flood. The prospect of crossing so great a river filled Perceval with alarm, for he could see neither bridge nor planks in the darkness. So he raised his hand to his forehead and made the sign of the cross. When the enemy felt himself weighted down with the burden of the cross, which was exceedingly heavy and hateful to him, he gave a great shake, and freeing himself of Perceval, rushed into the water howling and shrieking and making yammer such as was never heard. And it came about then that bright sheaves of fire and flame shot up from the river in several places, so that the water itself appeared to burn (ibid.).

Only then did Perceval understand that the maiden was the fiend who wanted to put his body in jeopardy and thus seize his soul. The energetic, turbulent journey on the spirit horse resembles the kelpie’s riding in every single detail: its appearance, behaviour and environment point to the kelpie myth implanted in the Christian context.

The given episode is actually a part of a very complex narrative scheme, also embracing the distribution of the participating actors. In comparison with the model of the *equine creature-female-destruction* discussed above (in the Welsh romance and the legend of the unicorn), the element of aggression is figuratively attached to the figure of the horse. Nevertheless, the horse is not an independent agent but a subordinate to the evil black maiden who, in her turn, is a servant of the devil, hence lacks independence as well. However, her relation with the Fiend is implied and stated by the narrator, the narrative reality giving no space for the development of the motif. It should be reminded here that the perception of the woman as an envoy of the devil complies perfectly with the late Medieval philosophy (cf. Gravdal 1992, 581; Le Goff 2003, 157).

On the other hand, the collaboration of the female and the horse in an attempt to destroy the hero fits in the ancient Celtic mythical pattern which depicts the horse-goddess as the psychopomp, i.e., the agent that carries from this world into the realm of the dead. In analysed case of Perceval's adventure, the Christian context is added and the adventurous journey on the supernatural horse signifies the deprivation of both the earthly existence (because Perceval is to be drowned) and spiritual damnation, since Perceval's soul will perish, which will be the result of his subdue to the devilish powers. Thus, in Perceval's adventure, the woman functions as the Celtic goddess, when she tries to separate his soul from his body and make it subject to the Fiend's devilish will. However, her intention might bring eternal damnation on Perceval's soul, i.e., eternal suffering and unrest, whereas the original role of the Celtic Goddess as a psychopomp was to ensure the transfer to the afterlife realm thus guaranteeing an eternal existence in bliss.

A schematically identical situation is presented in Chrétien's *Story of the Grail*: here a beautiful maiden, the challenger of Gawain, persuades him to dismount his own horse and take her palfrey. As it appeared, the beast chooses the most perilous ways full of danger. Later on the maiden reveals that her only intention was to destroy Gawain as she has done with many knights before (CRCT, 420). In Chrétien's romance, the horse is employed as an instrument of an evil maiden and stands in opposition to the knight who is a representative of honourable martial activities. Here the palfrey does not fit into the frame of the traditional chivalric conception of the identity shared by the knight and his horse. It rather represents the close relationship between the horse and the female in the context of destruction.

The horse may undertake the role of a carrier which is a transformed function of the psychopomp. Yet it should be brought into focus that usually the episodes which describe the horse from this perspective lack the element of the supernatural, at least with respect to the creature. An illustrative instance may be taken from *The Quest of the Holy Grail* where the journey of Perceval's sister and

three knights is described. Perceval's sister and Galahad ride restlessly through valleys, forests and cities to board Solomon's ship which will carry them to the city of Sarras (QHG, 210f). Both the horse and the ship are the means to reach the ultimate destination and thus assist the characters in their spiritual endeavour. All the participants undergo death at some point of their journey: the maiden dies on the shore when the journey by horse is over and she is further transported by the ship. The two knights, Perceval and Galahad, die after the sea journey is over. Therefore, to some extent, the horse and the vessel serve to carry people to the realm of death.

Though the ship and the horse are functionally identical, i.e., they are means of transportation, their quality differs greatly since in the romance, the horse appears as an ordinary animal, whereas the ship seems to bear some supernatural characteristics. It should be stressed that the horse acts exclusively in the earthly realm, while the ship sails to the realm of the dead. It is worth mentioning here that pagan Germanic tribes used the boat as a coffin for their deceased and imagined the journey into afterlife as sailing through the sea (cf. Ellis, 1943). It is encouraging to assume then that the analysed episode from *The Quest of the Holy Grail* might actually represent the amalgamation of several traditions: Christian, pagan Celtic and pagan Germanic. Yet it must be admitted that the Celtic perspective is somewhat vague in the present case, but the juxtaposition of the horse and the ship as the means to get to the Otherworld match the IE pattern and therefore should not be ignored.

The subordination of the equine creatures to females is a far better developed theme in Medieval literature. But the degree of the supernatural element employed in the depiction of their interaction is considerably reduced in comparison either with the mythical or folklore traditions. For instance, six maidens from a splendid castle take care of the knight's horse as the best of the grooms could not do, as it is reflected in the Welsh romance *The Lady of the Well* (M, 117). In Chrétien's *The Knight of the Cart*, a lady provides the knight with the

equipment and a horse. Moreover, she can dismount her horse without any assistance – a rare thing to be done by a woman as noted in Medieval literature (CRCT, 177; 182). Women may also appear as the owners of the splendid horses, as, for instance, Enide's cousin in Chrétien's romance *Erec and Enide* who has three palfreys – one sorrel, another dappled and the third white footed. The dappled horse is an exemplary horse, it is quicker than the birds and never falters in anything (CRCT, 18). The cousin wishes to give one of them as a present to Enide on her way to King Arthur's court, but Erec objects.

The association of the equine creatures with the character of Enide is emphatic since it is expressed on several occasions beside the above mentioned case. First of all, the adventure during which Erec meets Enide begins with the scene of the hunt of the white stag, whose head should be given to the most beautiful maiden in King Arthur's court. When Erec returns to the court after the adventure and brings Enide with him, everyone agrees that she deserves to receive the head of the stag, as no one has ever seen a maiden as beautiful as she is (ibid., 23). The act of endowing the honour of the white stag to Enide concludes the process her initiation. In other words, after the ritualistic receiving of the stag's head, Enide becomes a true member of the royal community at King Arthur's court. The very fact that Enide receives the honour of the stag from King Arthur himself is a code having no less importance than the ritualistic code of dress when she is dressed up by the Queen. It signifies the royal approval that cannot be questioned by anyone. It might well be the reason why Erec objected so sternly Enide's cousin's favours and refused to take any of her horses as a gift – just as in the case with the clothing code, he wished that Enide's appropriateness should be sanctified by the highest royal representative. Following this line of interpretation, it is possible to assume that the equine creature signifies a certain degree of sovereignty within the social dimension: Enide passes from the state of non-being, which was her characteristics before since she did not belong to the community, to the state of a socially acknowledged person.

The equine elements might be the signs of a woman's status not only in social terms but as an extension of her inner world and appearance. For instance, in Chrétien's literary version of the Holy Grail story, Perceval meets a maiden whom he kissed earlier and thus brought her lover's contempt on her. He firstly notices a miserable palfrey and then the wretched maiden:

The palfrey's thin and wretched appearance made him think it had fallen into ill hands. It seemed to have been subjected to hard work and little food, like a hired horse, which has hard work by day and poor care by night. Such seemed the case with the palfrey: it was so thin that it shivered as though benumbed by cold. All its hair had been shorn, and its ears drooped. Since the palfrey had nothing but hide covering its bones, all the mastiffs and watchdogs were there expecting to make a meal of the spoils. On its back was a saddlecloth and on its head a bridle, both befitting such an animal. And riding it was a maiden, the most wretched ever seen. Still, had life been kinder to her, she would have been beautiful. But so dreadful was her life that not a palm's breadth of the dress she wore was whole, her breasts protruded through the rips, and everywhere the material was tied together with knots and coarse stitchings. Her skin was scratched as though by a lancet, for it was cracked and burned by frost, hail and snow. Her hair was not bound; she wore no cloak; and her face showed many ugly traces of the unending tears that flowed down to her bosom and over her dress (CRCT, 385).

The two seem to constitute a single creature judging from their appearance. The palfrey mirrors the state of the maiden, both physical and emotional. This double emphasis on the miserable state creates a dramatic effect emphasizing the tragedy of the maiden's life caused by the action of Perceval. It should be claimed, however, that not all the cases depicting the horses as extensions of females have negative implications.

The ability to deal with the horses successfully is reflected in the motif of the horse as a token of a female's capabilities. For instance, Enide proves to be able to control a number of horses despite her gentle nature: when Erec takes her on a trial journey, he gives her the command to handle the horses he has won in jousting. No doubt, he understands that it was "arduous work for her", but increases the number of the horses after each combat and never helps her to cope

with this task (CRCT, 37ff). Enide, in her turn, never complains about it but carries out her task patiently though with difficulty.

The degree of Enide's mastership over horses is much lower in comparison with another prominent female character in the Medieval literature, i.e., Morgan le Fay. She as malevolent agent that stands behind many evil schemes attempted at the destruction of the Round Table. But the pattern of her depiction is very peculiar: for instance, Malory does not describe her in any other circumstances but on voyage, and therefore her description is often related with the nature of the horses. Morgan le Fay demonstrates an exceptional stamina to ride – she never stops in almost a two-day journey when she rides to steal King Arthur's scabbard and is said to leave the place with forty⁵⁵ horses (Malory, BIV, Ch XIV, 123f). Her ability to deal successfully with such an enormous number of animals proves her exceptional skill or even power over the horses. Thus the figure of the horse considerably complements the portrait of Morgan le Fay as a powerful and fatal woman.

Beroul's *The Romance of Tristan* offers another instance of the female control over both horses and males, but the whole situation acquires a certain note of grotesque. Here Yseut rides Tristan disguised in a leper's outfit as she would ride a donkey to the marsh where she must vindicate herself of the charges for having committed adultery. She rides Tristan "like a boy" and speaks to him and about him in an abusive, vulgar manner, contrary to her natural habits so that all the people around are shocked (RT, 136). No doubt, the low manner of speech fits into the frame of the entire situation: the queen accused of adultery, the blissful knight dressed as a leper, the splendid steed expected in their noble status is replaced by the donkey, the magnificent royal court by the desolated marsh. The courtly environment of a chivalric romance seems to have lost its perfection due

⁵⁵ It is interesting to note that the give episode is an example of the cultural amalgamation: the motif of Morgan le Fay stealing away with the horses might be prescribed to the Celtic framework, yet the number forty has strong Christian implications as the number of infinity (cf. Lempiäinen, 2001, 294-297), while in Celtic tradition infinity is expressed by the formula 3x50.

to Yseut and Tristan's sin. But, notably, the female figure has preserved the association with the equine creature. A manifold manifestation of the relationship might be indicated here: firstly, Yseut has power over a man, i.e., Tristan who is ready to fulfill any request of hers. Secondly, the leper-Tristan-donkey acts as the psychopomp who takes the woman from the kingdom of King Mark to bring to the place of her vindication in the marsh. Metaphorically, it might be perceived of as transportation from one status, that of the accused, to another, i.e., the vindicated woman restored to the role of the lawful and faithful queen.

Moreover, the role of Tristan who imitates a donkey reminds of the case in *Peredur Son of Efrog*: just as the empress had the power over the stag and the black man in the Welsh romance, so, ironically, Yseut has the power over Tristan, the object of her passionate love. Yet, in *The Romance of Tristan*, the equine figure is not manifested, it is implied Tristan's behaviour. In other words, the technique of implied isomorphism is used to describe the relationship male-horse-female. Finally, the whole complex of images employed in the episode from Beroul's romance signifies the humiliated, inferior status of the participants. The pattern of the equine creature signifying the social status as found in *Erec and Enide* is used in *The Romance of Tristan* as well: the image of the noble animal is replaced by the image of the donkey to expose the status of Yseut which contrasts greatly with that of Enide.

To sum up, as reflected in Medieval literary tradition, the correlation between the figures of the horse, the female and the male is very flexible. The horse is a destructive and aggressive agent which complies with the mythical heritage. The figure of the horse might also serve as an extension of both males and females: in the first case, it signifies the martial perfection of the knight, in the second, it indicates the social status or an inner world of the woman. Notably, the latter function is not manifested in the mythical or folklore material. Nevertheless, females have obviously retained the superiority over the equine creatures despite their social position. Sometimes they employ the horses to gain the possession of

the knight's soul which might be a remnant of the ancient function of the soul carrier undertaken by Celtic horse-goddess. As the analysed examples show, the original mytheme female-horse found in Celtic tradition has undergone some modifications when entering the space of late Medieval literature – it has almost lost the element of the supernatural. Nonetheless, the majority of the figurative and thematic structures have been preserved.

5.5. Transformation of the Partial Death Models in Late Medieval Literary Works

As Medieval literature is heavily drawn on the oral tradition, the search of the ancient beliefs concerning the structure of the spiritual essence of a human being might appear a fruitful endeavour. A number of the ancient patterns regarding the pagan conception of the soul might still be deduced in Medieval literary works though influenced significantly by the changed customs and social norms. It might also be anticipated that due to the radical alteration of the religious system and the shift from local pagan beliefs to the more or less centralized Christianity, the understanding of the structure of the soul underwent the greatest transformation in comparison with other mythemes representing the pagan Celtic mythopoetics of death.

As it might be expected, the level of the supernatural is reduced to minimum in Medieval literature. For this reason, some parts of the ancient perception of the soul have significantly less instances in comparison with the mythical stories or folktales. One of the concepts that show decreased popularity is that of the living dead, hence, the conviction in the breath as the part of the spiritual essence. The tradition of a living dead acting in the world of humans penetrated knightly literature but with a lost supernatural aspect. For instance, the Greeks in Chrétien's *Cliges* are deceived and lament the death of Alexander while he fights in his enemy's armour (CRCT, 112), or the besieged people are equaled

to the dead because they cannot fight (CRCT, 370). Another example comes from his romance *Erec and Enide*: after a fierce combat with a giant, Erec faints and Enide thinks he is dead, hence laments him grievously. A count that passes by decides to comfort her and takes Enide and Erec to his court where prepares the bier for Erec and lays him down as a dead man. The count likes Enide and wants to marry her, therefore he forces, even threatens to abandon her grief and take some food, but Enide strictly refuses repeating constantly she will not take a morsel until her lord will rise from the bier. Indeed, Erec rises and punishes the count for his rudeness and arrogance (CRCT, 59ff). It is obvious from the given examples that the term of the living dead in the Medieval literary tradition might be applied only metaphorically to denote a person who became unrecognizable or is inevitably doomed. Another possibility brings in a rather life-like situation when a man is at a near point of death as it seems to the surrounding people.

An interesting instance comes from the spiritual fable *The Quest of the Holy Grail*: having been burnt by the Holy Grail Lancelot is lying as if he were dead and people do not recognize him (QHG, 263). Naturally, Lancelot might be considered as a living dead since his life has not abandoned his body yet, but the sins that he has committed deprived him of the possibility to share the joys of the Holy Grail. In other words, he is spiritually doomed which makes a great difference in comparison with the besieged people mentioned above whose earthly life is threatened. What concerns the conception of the living dead especially in relation with sinfulness, Medieval traditions expose a certain syncretism of metaphorical expression, namely, the juxtaposition of blood, stone and sin in the moral theological framework.

The opposition between blood as the source of life and stone as the stillness of death is widely depicted in Medieval literature. But here the emphasis is laid not on bodily stiffness but rather on the stagnation of the soul when a man lives in sin. There are numerous instances which speak about a sinner as a living dead whose body seems to be alive but the righteous spiritual life has left it. According

to the monk who explains the spiritual mysteries to Galahad after his encounter with the devil, mankind lays “dead and blind beneath the weight of the sins [men] had committed down the years” (QHG, 64). Likewise, Lancelot is conscious that sin leads to eternal death: a hermit compares his life to falling asleep in a mortal sin. But it does not deprive of the opportunity to awake in the grace of God (QHG, 88). A similar approach is kept in Beroul’s *The Romance of Tristan*: here hermit Ogrin claims that “a man who lives in sin for a long time is dead if he does not repent” (RT, 79). In Christian perspective, spiritual immobility is true death that affects a person despite the body functioning normally.

The parallel between the stone and death is developed in the prophetic serpent adventure that Lancelot must deal with at the request of people in Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*. They plead him to deliver them from a giant serpent that resides under a tomb stone. When Lancelot approaches the tomb, he sees the golden letters on the stone prophesying that the knight will beget a son who will surpass all other knights (Malory B XI, Ch I, 609f). Certainly, his son will be begotten through sin: firstly, through the original sin and, secondly, because Lancelot will be cheated and so involuntarily he will betray his Lady of the Heart, Queen Guinevere. It means that, according to the Code of Chivalry, he will sin against love.

Thus, from the narrative perspective, the episode is constructed by means of double symbolism: the serpent signifies the fall of man, whereas the tomb stone indicates death caused by the fall. On the other hand, Lancelot’s son Galahad will be ideal in both knightly courage and spiritual matters. He will be a Christ-like character who will manage to successfully meet such challenges which are unbearable to all other knights and thus wash the world of the sin, eliminate many cruel customs, e.g., those of the Castle of the Maidens. Hence, Lancelot brings a redeemer to the world: his son is the carrier of life who conquers the evil powers just as his father defeats the fire-vomiting serpent. In this episode, the symbol of

the original sin, i.e., the serpent, yet introduced as a pagan dragon, is combined with another symbol – the stone which is a traditional index of death.

In a paradoxical way, the symbolism of the tomb stone evokes the life affirming implications which are inherent in both pagan and Christian perspectives. Pagans took the stone as a hard and hence everlasting material thus relating it to eternity in afterlife, i.e. another form of existence or life continuation. In Christian view, the stone also means a new quality of life. The instances that establish this perception come, firstly, from the *Exodus* and the Tablets of Testimony that Moses receives (Exodus 31: 15-18). The Tablets of Testimony, i.e., the Laws of God carved in a special stone, signify the agreement between God and His people, in other words, the promise of the new and prosperous life provided people keep to the laws. Another instance that attests life affirming implications of the image of the stone in Christian perspective is the tomb stone of Christ which serves as the symbolical affirmation of the promise for the people that they will resurrect just as the Saviour did. The given arguments allow to assume that the stone is perceived of as a hierophanic substance, by means of which the supreme divinity communicates with the mortals and, what is of even greater importance, assures of the new eternal life.

Another instance from the Holy Grail legend employs blood and stone as the figurative elements to contemplate the issue of death. It contains the episode where Perceval's sister sacrifices her blood to heal the lady suffering from leprosy. The maiden dies, the lady is cured, but a tremendous storm arises that very evening and burns the castle to the ground leaving no one alive. Perceval and Galahad return to the place where the castle was and find a burial ground with fine tomb stones which was "such a pretty and pleasant place that it seemed as though no storm had touched it. Nor had it, for in that plot lay the bodies of the maidens [killed to cure the sick lady]" (QHG, 252f).

From the symbolical point of view, the episode is rather complex. It is worth noting that the lady has fallen ill in God's will (ibid., 247), or, to interpret it

in the Medieval metaphorical framework, she has fallen ill due to her grievous sins. Perceval's sister redeems her sins with her innocent blood or, to put it otherwise, she replaces the stone-like spiritual stiffness with the life force emanating from her sacrificial holiness and virginity, so that the "blackened and hideous look" of the flesh of the lady "recovered all its bloom" (ibid., 249). This exchange inevitably brings the maiden to physical death, but she feels she does not belong to the sinful world and therefore asks her companions to put her body into a ship which will carry it to the holy city of Sarras where the body will be interred in the spiritual place.

The destiny of other maidens who had to sacrifice their lives for the love of the lady was somewhat different: their loss of their life force is symbolically represented by the tombstones, which mark their presence. As it has been mentioned, the supernatural storm did not touch the burial places thus separating them from the lady's sinful environment. This proves that, actually, these maidens deserved blessed eternity. However, they were not ideally innocent (e.g., they could sin in their thoughts) and therefore could not redeem the sick lady. That is why they were left in the same place where they have died. The episode shows that the images of the stone and blood are closely interrelated, and the vitality of one does not stand aside from the stiffness of the other.

The seemingly pagan juxtaposition of the images of blood and stone has found their place in the Christian system of values. Astonishingly, the figurative elements have not entirely transformed their semantic structure – they still correspond to their inherently pagan fundamental values and signify life and death respectively. On the other hand, the significance of stone as a material of restricted yet not eliminated life force is closer to the conception revealed in the folklore data, whereas in ancient Celtic mythical stories stone appears as the liminal object in between the worlds of the mortals and the supernatural beings. It must also be highlighted that, in Medieval literature, the breath (life force) loses the role of an independent constituent of the soul and is closely associated with the

morality of a person: the true life force is now conceived of as the ability to enter the blessed eternity and the ones who have not deserved that are metaphorically considered to be the living dead.

As it is clear from the above discussed episodes from late Medieval literary heritage, a woman can undertake either the role of the saviour or that of an evil agent that brings on destruction. The latter conception is more popular in Christian tradition as it associates women with the devil and endows a negative role to women due to the blame for causing the Fall of man (cf. Gravdal 1992, 597; Le Goff 2003, 157). Beside this conviction female characters often appear in the narrative schemes which depict them as capable of ruling over the dead. For instance, Morgan le Fay is said to be a “great clerk of necromancy” in Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* (Malory B I, Ch II, 4), and in the *Quest of the Holy Grail*, only a maiden can remove the body of a dead king lying under the wondrous sword (QHG, 216).

The association of the females with the state of a living dead is also noticeable in the contexts where the figure of the stone is involved. To illustrate, Morgan le Fay turns herself, her horse and an accompanying man into a big marble stone to escape encounter with King Arthur (Malory BIV, Ch XIV, 124). Even Merlin cannot avoid the enchantment of a female and is turned into a stone both metaphorically and straightforwardly. He falls into a dotage on the damosel of the lake, Nimue, and cannot think about anything else but her. He does not undertake any other activity but to please her. She manages to put him under a stone and leaves him there until the powerful druid meets his death (ibid., 120f). But it should be noted that despite the fact that his body was imprisoned in the stone, he was alive spiritually and could communicate with King Arthur and explain to him that only the one who put him under the stone could set him free. Merlin’s situation indicates that his magical powers, which make a great part of his personality, are restricted. In other words, when in a stone he is undergoing a partial death. It should be considered that turning into a stone, as it is depicted in

the episodes from Malory's romance, is a rare instance where the element of the supernatural is employed. As a rule, Medieval authors use a metaphorical expression to refer to the liminal state of a person.

The physical inability to move, which is attested in folktales, is not observed in Medieval literature with an exception of the discussed cases with the image of the stone. Nevertheless, there is an instance in Chrétien's version of the Holy Grail story where a horse instantaneously reacts when confronting the supernatural experience: in his quest of the Holy Grail, Gawain meets a maiden who challenges him to jump over a rushing stream. The horse fails and falls into the water but manages to swim and jump onto the ford. However, the creature cannot move until the water is swept away and the saddle dried (CRCT, 441). Water paralyzes the animal but has no effect on Gawain. It complies with the mythical conviction that some animals, horses in particular, have a peculiar sense of the supernatural and become motionless if they feel the presence of some supernatural power.

As an allomorph of death on the mythical plane, the motif of sleep was integrated into literary tradition. In fiction, the figure of the female acquires a great variety of the representative modes regarding the state of sleep: a woman may appear as an inducer, depriver, intruder, or participant in the sleep experience. For instance, Enide acts as the guardian of Erec's sleep as she lets him have his rest, meanwhile she herself takes care of the horses all night long (CRCT, 39f). Enide's resistance to sleep appears as an extraordinary ability of a fragile woman of the Middle Ages. Love for Yseult in *The Romance of Tristan* does not allow Tristan to rest "because of her [he] cannot sleep nor even doze" (RT, 79); whereas in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, every time Gawain falls into a doze, Lady Bernlak comes to seduce him as if in a dream "he was drowsing deep, yet could hear her" (SGGK, 25, 36). From the mythical perspective, the strategy of the woman for visiting the man when he is in such a liminal state proves her to be a cunning person – she comes when she feels the success to be most credible

because, firstly, Gawain cannot reason clearly. Secondly, the liminal state is the typical sphere of the activities of the Celtic Goddess, whom Lady Bernlak distantly represents. Thus, she chooses the moment when her powers are strongest and Gawain's abilities to react reasonably limited.

The role of the sleep inducer might embrace a wider context than merely a direct influence on some male experimenter. In Chrétien's *The Knight with the Lion*, Sir Gawain reproaches Sir Yvain for a too long passive marital life by comparing it to dreaming:

You must not daydream now. You have to frequent and engage in tournaments and strike with all your force, whatever the cost. He is indeed in a dream who does not stir (CRCT, 287).

Sir Yvain is so pleased with his wife that his friend is afraid he is going to abandon knighthood and become physically weak and "less worthy". For Gawain, the martial aspect of chivalry is the true life – only the knightly prowess proved deserves honour, whereas men without achievements in the deeds of arms become despised by their own once loving wives even though they themselves are the reason causing men's softness. Sir Yvain was an outstanding courageous knight before his marriage and Sir Gawain assumes he is not completely lost, he can be awakened from the pleasures of the family life and return to experience the pleasures of knighthood. Thus, the metaphor of sleep perceived of as temporary death induced by a female is employed to reveal the true quality of life.

The importance of the visions seen in a sleep is no less significant in literature than in mythical stories. Yet their functions demonstrate a greater variety. For instance, the episode in which the Perceval's deceased mother visits him in his sleep to reproach for leaving her (QHG, 96). Here the dream functions as a meeting point of the living and the dead; in other words, it is a transitional state which allows the communication in between the two worlds. Later on Perceval has an enigmatic dream, in which he sees the fight between an old lady

with a serpent and a maiden riding a lion. He is explained that they symbolize the devil and Christ respectively (ibid., 117). In this case, the dream is an allegorical riddle that Perceval, as well as the reader, must solve. It serves as a frame for the emblematic representation of the fundamental laws that govern the Medieval thought, namely, the opposition between the devilish damnation and salvation brought by the Saviour. In the given episode, the male characters, i.e., the devil and Christ, are allegorically represented by the zoomorphic figures of the snake and the lion, whereas the women have retained their anthropomorphic shape. With regard to their age, it is possible to assume that the old lady is Eve who subdued to the serpent-devil and thus initiated the Fall that fatally affected the whole humanity. The young lady is Virgin Mary who gave birth to Christ to save the world, or, to be more precise, to bring the remedy against the original sin committed by Eve.

In his romance *Cliges*, Chrétien offers yet another interpretation of the function of the dream: when Fenice is forced to marry an old emperor, her nurse enchants him so that he is convinced he is enjoying his wife on the wedding night while he is actually soundly asleep. In this way Fenice is protected against betraying her love (CRCT, 126). Here the dream appears as the substitution of reality and, to some extent, as means of restoring the true rights of the lovers to be together since the emperor's marriage to the girl was not lawful.

In general, the state of sleep acquires the metaphorical flavour in Medieval literary works. The authors employ it as a figure to teach a moral lesson or allude to some situations when someone abandons his usual way of life. Yet, the significance of sleep never leaves the framework established in the mythical stories – it alludes to the distraction from the socially active life or enables to enter other realities so that communication with the dead is possible, or in other words, the fundamental existential knowledge becomes accessible.

The state that is similar to that of sleep is madness. It is worth noting here that it is one of the most popular motifs in late Medieval literature. Interestingly, it

has perfectly retained the structure of falling out of reason as suggested in the mythical stories. That is, the reason of the hero is affected by some disaster in the context of unhappy love affair, in the consequence of which he removes to the wilderness until some woman restores him to health. The investigated corpus of Medieval literary works gives several instances of the knights in madness. For instance, Launcelot, after Guinevere despised and rejected him for begetting Galahad, turns mad instantly, lives in the wilderness and “[running] wild wood from place to place, and [living] by fruit such as he might get, and [drinking] water two years” (Malory B XII, Ch I, 633). Galahad’s mother restores him to health and takes to the Joyous Isle because Launcelot could not bear his shame for such misbehaviour. Missing Guinevere’s love the knight becomes a physical, mental and spiritual exile. Though he is alive, he feels a stranger in an ordinary society.

An analogical situation is described in Chrétien’s romance *The Knight with the Lion*. Here Sir Yvain trespasses and breaks the promise to his wife the Lady of the Well. She refuses him as a husband and, as a result, he finds himself bereft of speech and sense and wants to go to some remote place where no one would know of him more than “he had fallen into a bottomless pit <...> he clawed his flesh and ripped his clothing; he fled across meadows and fields” so that his men could not discover where he is (CRCT, 290ff). His mind is restored only when a maiden rubs him with a special ointment.

Similarly, Lancelot, the Knight of the Cart, is stricken with love and loses his memory because all his thoughts are concentrated exclusively on his beloved (CRCT, 178f). Later on, he feels neither dead nor alive because he is scorned by Love and his Lady of the Heart and feels as if he has lost life. Consequently, he attempts at suicide but fails and this leads him to the conclusion that even Death refuses him. He says he “is killed on both sides”, i.e., life and death (ibid., 223). Perceval also falls into a deep contemplation about his beloved when he sees

drops of blood on the snow and thus ignores the surroundings despite the hard efforts of the knights to attract his attention (CRCT, 392ff).

The above discussed instances show that the conception of the female's impact on the spirit experienced alternation in Medieval literature. Here a woman does not have a direct influence on the essential life force, expressed by the images of breath or blood, but tends to affect the rational part of the spirit and achieves that effect through emotions. The importance of the female figure in the process of falling mad is even more distinct in the romance *Erec and Enide* where Erec gets into a similar situation because of Enide: she tells him that he has lost respect from others due to his remote and calm family life and Erec becomes obsessed with his pursuit of the knightly fame. He absolutely ignores everyone's advices as if fulfilling some programme set for him. Unwillingness to change his behaviour at times seems as rational disability. Thus, though involuntarily, Enide is the trigger of the action that deprives Erec of his reason, to which he returns only after being raised on a funeral bier and thus undergoing the ritual of passage in the form of funeral rites (CRCT, 59ff).

It should be added that not always madness is incurred by love. For example, Galahad is explained that people who have seen the devil in the tomb are shorn of strength and wits for a long season (QHG, 61). Hence, it comes out that both females and devils deprive men of reason. Merlin's madness in *The Life of Merlin* is a qualitatively different madness from the cases described above. He turns mad not due to some love affair but after witnessing the massacre of his men in the battlefield. Then he flees to the woods secretly⁵⁶. After some time his sister and his wife summon a musician to bring his spirits back – the sweet sounds of the cithar and the logical arguments of the musician bring Merlin back to his senses and

⁵⁶ Cited from <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/eng/vm/vmlat.htm>

So Merlin became mindful of himself, and he recalled what he used to be, and he wondered at his madness and he hated it. His former mind returned and his sense came back to him, and, moved by affection, he groaned at the names of his sister and of his wife, since his mind was now restored to him, and he asked to be led to the court of King Rhydderch⁵⁷.

But his sound reasoning did not last long: as soon as he saw the crowds of men, “he went mad again, filled anew with fury”⁵⁸. In the latter case, Merlin’s madness is his revolt, almost a conscious rejection of the society as the representation of a sick system of values. In this story, the motif of madness implies life in the otherworld because Merlin feels alienated from his community. He finds more meaning in nature than in society and thus becomes a prophet. But he is not deprived either of reason or memory any more – his withdrawal to the wilderness is his choice and not an accident.

Geoffrey off Monmouth, the supposed author of *The Life of Merlin*, presents an innovative interpretation of the image of the apple in relation with this particular liminal state. Here, the apples do not bring sleep, as it is typical in the mythical stories, but madness, and many knights go out of their mind because they taste the apples poisoned by the woman whose advances Merlin has rejected. She actually intended to bring harm on Merlin himself but the knights found the fruit first and went wild in the literal sense of the word⁵⁹. In this story, the woman appears as the inciter rather than the controller of the imposed state, but the means she adopts to achieve the aim match the model of the Celtic Goddess’s activity.

The story about Merlin reveals that the females have retained their mythologically attested role of the agents capable of bringing man’s reason back. Likewise, in the knightly romances, madness evoked by love is cured by women – they anoint the knights and apply some other means to return them to their knightly life in the full sense of the word. Yet, in such cases, the victims in their mental failure are usually deprived of their memory: the first words of Lancelot

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

after his recovery were: “O Lord Jesu, how came I here? For God’s sake, my lord, let me wit how I came here” (Malory B XII, Ch V, 640). Sir Yvain who wakes up near a well has no idea how it happened but “by some mishap [he] found [him]self in the woods” (CRCT, 293). The same consequence of madness is registered in the mythical stories.

Medievalists who discuss the phenomenon of madness in Medieval literature lay great emphasis on the stage of withdrawal. As the studies of the Medieval mentality reveal, the parallel between madness and living in the wilderness is not accidental but, on the contrary, has a very strong implicit symbolism. According to Jacques Le Goff, in Medieval literature, the forest and wilderness serve as places of spiritual purification reached by repentance. (cf. Le Goff 2003, 93ff). Such meaning arises from the opposition between the forest as wilderness (a spiritually purified place) and a socially structured environment, such as the city which is conceived of as an impure space. The wilderness as untamed nature is a modification of the Otherworld governed by different laws in comparison with the cities or courts. From this point of view it becomes clear that madness also has a dual figurative expression. A madman does not comply with the accepted social norms. He is not aware of the customs and responds inadequately - typically, he does not recognize his friends or relatives and acts as a disoriented creature. In general, the loss of the cognitive abilities of a person proves that intellect, or to be more precise, the rational part of the spirit is one of the most important faculties according to Medieval theology (cf. Boyle 2009, 223; Cross 2012, 425).

Another peculiar feature of a madman is his nakedness which puts him closer to beasts than humans (cf. Sánchez-Martí 2006, 644). Le Goff also adds a cue by stating that “clothes and memory, these are the covers for the body and spirit respectively” (Le Goff 2003, 192). A madman takes off his clothes which is metaphorically related with the loss of memory and former identity and thus

alienates himself from his previous life and experience. He neglects the very existence of the social world as it means nothing to him.

Thus madness bears multimodality which coincides with the schemes laid out in the ancient mythical stories. The change of the location, the rejection of society, the failure to react to the environmental challenges properly as well as getting rid of clothes constitute the complex which might be referred to as the mytheme of the lost rational soul in Augustinian perspective, which was an overwhelming theological tendency at the time. In the framework of pagan mythology, it would be perceived as reason. The stages constituting the structure of madness correspond to those found in funeral rites. In other words, ritually, socially and spiritually madness is conceived of as partial death.

It follows from what has been said that one could hardly expect to find any cases of direct revival in Medieval literary works, firstly, because the conception of the spiritual part of a human being has changed and, secondly, due to the shift from the supernatural to social spheres. Thus, all the recoveries mean coming back to a normal state from the society's point of view. Some of the patterns, such as madness, follow the ancient mythical schemes, others, such as a living dead mytheme, have been transformed completely. Sometimes a figurative element that is detected in the mythical stories or folktales is employed in a literary work but enters it alternated. Such is the case with the motif of dumbness.

In folklore and mythical tradition people become deprived of speech because of their otherworldly experience, whereas the authors of late Medieval fiction use a reverse scheme. Here the silence is broken to give special information, especially, regarding the future events or somebody's destiny. Consider Malory: there was a maiden in Queen Guinevere's court who spoke but once in her life: it happened when Perceval was initiated into knights. Then she took his hand and seated him on the right side of the Siege Perilous saying "take there thy siege, for that siege appertaineth to thee and to none other" (Malory BX, Ch XXIII, 476). After this she dies. The Siege Perilous must be taken by Galahad,

an ideal knight, and Perceval is to accompany him in the final journey of the quest of the Holy Grail. The dumb maiden seems to have the only purpose in her life – to indicate Perceval's future role, i.e., to share the knowledge of the divine plan. She is the instrument of God, a vessel of His wisdom, which must be open at the right time only. Thus, the literary works show that the gates of knowledge, i.e., mouth, can be not only closed to prevent the flow of information but they might also be opened on special occasions to share it.

Finally, the external part of the spiritual essence of a human being is of no less importance in Medieval literature as it is in other genres of Celtic vernacular heritage. Firstly, knightly literature focuses on the fame of a knight which makes a great part of his personality and functions as a part of his spirit. As Terence McCarthy puts it, “a fine record in arms makes a man attractive” (McCarthy 1991, 54). Perfection is what all men in arms seek for and this perfection must be acknowledged publicly.

What concerns the role of females regarding the external spirit, their functions comply with those designated in the mythical as well as folklore material. Women can indirectly bring luck to men. For instance, whenever the knights find themselves in the greatest peril and think they are near to death in jousts or combats, they think of their beloved ladies – it encourages them to move on and fight so that they should not be ashamed of having loved a worthless knight. Females may also appear as announcers of the future, which is the case with the maiden who laughs at Perceval's greeting when he comes to King Arthur's court. She functions as a representation of his future luck – she promises he will perform great deeds and earn renown despite of his naïve ignorance (CRCT, 352). The maiden has not laughed for six years, but her silence is broken at the moment Perceval appears as if her essence (knowledge) was triggered by the approach of the youth and incited her to speak.

Another function reflected in the literary works is that of protection, but here the element of the supernatural is eliminated. The instances come from

Chrétien's *Erec and Enide* as well as the Welsh version of the story *Geraint Son of Erbin*. In the former, when the spouses set off for their journey, Erec forbids his wife to speak to him but orders to ride in front of him and never turn around. The obedient wife, however, fails to fulfill the task: whenever she sees a danger lurking for Erec, she warns him of that and makes her husband angrier every time (CRCT, 36; M, 161ff). According to Medieval social standards, the wife must obey her husband at any cost, but Enide seems to have retained the 'divine patterns' in trying to protect her husband despite his own threats.

Lastly, women often mourn for the knights. For instance, in the *Quest of the Holy Grail*, Galahad meets a maiden weeping for the loss of Lancelot's good name because he failed to deal properly with the adventure of the Holy Grail and will always be known as a knight of failure (QHG, 41f). Similarly, Queen Guinevere falls into deep mourning when the knights are set off for the Quest because she sees them "dead before her eyes" (QHG, 50). Her behaviour might be justified by the understanding that, undoubtedly, many of the knights will perish in the Quest. But it also signifies the end of the merry life at court, hence, the deterioration of the Lady of the Heart's role in the knights' lives as they turn to the spiritual matters. In other words, Guinevere might be seen as lamenting over parting with her former life and the position she has had. In Chrétien's romance *Erec and Enide*, the maidens lament Erec's departure for the adventure in the Joy of the Castle for they think he would never come back (CRCT, 69).

Apparently, the functions of the women depicted in the knightly romances coincide with those of the *banshee* and may also bring luck, give a warn against approaching death and mourn for the people that they are attached to. Nevertheless, it should be maintained that the degree of the supernatural is almost eliminated from the literary narrative reality and the whole action is transferred onto the social stage. That is to say, women act in everyday situations and acquire the models of behaviour as the society expects from them. Though their activities

match the operational patterns of the goddess-like figures, they are but pale reflections of the female divinities.

To sum up, many of the structural and figurative ancient mythical patterns might be detected in late Medieval literature. Nevertheless, the change of the values that affected the mythemes sometimes is so significant that some categories well attested in the mythical tradition seem to be barely reflected if any. Such are the categories of the living dead, the external spirit that were transformed on the social basis. The shape-shifting into a stone, so popular in folklore, is almost extinct in Medieval literature. Notably, there is no specific category of the partial death from the social perspective mainly because all the aspects of the spiritual essence of a human being are discussed from the social point of view. Medieval theology, especially the Augustinian perspective of the soul inevitably left its mark in the literary works: the popularity of the motif of madness reveals that intellectual capacities are inseparable from spiritual part of a man. Thus generally it might be concluded that Medieval literature tends to replace the supernatural with the social, but does not reject the figurative elements offered in the mythical stories or observed in the folktales.

CONCLUSIONS

Any narrative verbal text based on tradition is a complex structure of significance constituted of, firstly, the natural language as a means of manifestation, and some cultural languages which operate as the organizing principles in text production. The type of cultural language that the natural language correlates with in order to construct a text determines the very nature of the text which might be distinguished by the mechanisms that serve in storing and manifesting the accumulated information. During the transformation of such texts, the mechanisms crumble and provide an opportunity for the new elements of significance to enter the semantic structures. In such a way new texts are composed.

A thorough analysis of Celtic mythopoeics of death has revealed that the elements of Celtic mythical thought are closely interrelated, whereas the central position is undoubtedly taken by the figure of the goddess. Together with other units of significance, such as a bird, a male, a horse, the spirit, the goddess figure makes a tight mythopoeic net. The appearance of the goddess is one of the most important aspects of liminality. It plays a central role in the Sovereignty Goddess myth. The modes of appearance employ the method of direct indication between the figurative and thematic values. The cases of implied isomorphism between the bird and the female are observed. The two figures appear in identical contexts but never simultaneously. The figure of the horse is more associated with the male as his companion or even spiritual part. Paradigmatic analysis revealed that horses and males have similar models of relationship with the female. It appeared that the role of the psychopomp was divided into several segments and manifested as the power of the female over the various parts of the spirit. Goddess-like women may cause different liminal states: life in death, sleep, madness, etc. The figures of blood and stone are employed in the context of death caused by females suggesting irrevocable death and gates to the Otherworld respectively.

As it might be expected, Celtic folklore has inherited a great deal of ancient mythical models whose structures either on the figurative or on the thematic level coincide. Some of them, for instance, the model of grotesque appearance indicating hostility, etc. have been transferred almost without alternation. Even complex paradigmatic structures of significance seem to be transferred from the mythical to the folklore tradition as it is in the case of implied rather functional isomorphism between the goddess and the bird figures.

It should be stressed that folktales show a tendency to greater figurativisation in comparison with the mythical stories. In folktales, the transformational acts are rarely implemented without the use of some magical object, whereas in mythical stories the power of the word is sufficient to determine one's fate or shape. Folklore characters are more inclined to undertake direct actions, while the characters of the mythical stories strongly rely on the verbalization of their wishes. The figurative set is significantly expanded if compared with the data of the mythical stories as the folklore tradition offers more social categories, such as the female captive of the giant, witch, henwife which are scarcely found in the mythical stories.

Another important factor to be considered is the modification of the goddess's portrait expressed by her diminished independence. In folktales, females rarely act as independent characters, with an exception of the witches that show a relatively high degree of their self-will. Even in those cases where women are superior to men, they are depicted in comparative terms, i.e., they are bigger, stronger, uglier, etc. than their giant- sons or husbands. Contrariwise, in the mythical stories the female figure is put into the centre of the action and it is the goddess-like female who becomes a defining member in various situations.

Late Medieval literary tradition in relation to the motif of the goddess shows a greater dispersion of the ancient mythical models. First of all, the presence of the supernatural is rarely reflected in the literary works with very rare exceptions that mainly come from the Holy Grail stories or are associated with the

character of Morgan le Fay. These stories are combinations of the pagan belief in the supernatural and the Christian belief in the miracle as the act of God's will. Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale* might be treated as an exception. It is based on oral tradition and uses precise models of the Sovereignty Goddess myth: Chaucer adopted the operational programme of the myth with certain figurative changes, i.e., the details typical of the knightly literature, but the whole narrative reveals a deconstructed image of the goddess in the urban literature which is reflected in the vulgar elderly urban lady, the teller of the tale.

The social dimension comes into focus and inevitably causes the changes on the figurative plane: the natural landscape is substituted by the courtly environment. Here the element of direct transformation is eliminated and replaced by the transformation of the social status which is manifested on the figurative level by means of changing clothes; the hostility towards harmony and order typical of folklore giants is transformed into a habitual violation of moral norms carried out by giant-like knights in chivalric literature. The changes in the socio-cultural environment caused by the Christian conception of the spiritual essence of a human being resulted in the extinction of certain concepts, such as the living dead, which might be found only on metaphorical level.

Some mythical models have been adopted in later discourses without changing them considerably. Such cases include the models of madness and external soul that fit the mythical figurative and functional schemes yet lack the element of the supernatural. Moreover, the structures of significance found in folktales, especially the ones related with the figure of the horse, are also detected in late Medieval fiction. It testifies to an obvious interaction between folklore and literary traditions. It should also be noted that some mythical models were transformed by only changing the distribution of actors: the models that employ one actor in the mythical stories are manifested by two individual actors in late Medieval literature.

The impact of the Christian worldview is a very important factor that caused the modification of Celtic mythemes. It might be claimed that almost the whole figurative set discovered in the mythical stories was transferred into a literary tradition. Contrariwise, the thematic level underwent significant alternations due to the introduction of the Christian values. New moral codes were interwoven into ancient mythical schemes. It is observed in the reverse interpretation of the figures in the context of the women's appearance: in the mythical stories and folktales female ugliness implies danger and beauty promises escape and help, whereas in fiction, beauty is often depicted as an instrument of evil attempting at the destruction of the knights.

In general, the figurative set has been found as increasing while comparing myth, folktale and literature. It might be partially explained by the different modes of veridiction that are required in different systems. The mythical tradition applies the implicit veridiction when the things said are believed to be true without any discussion. Late Medieval literature shows great reliance on details as it is thought that literature should reflect real life. Hence, the more precise the picture of the contemporary life is offered, the higher the credibility of the literary piece. It allows to claim that literary tradition complies with the requirements of veridiction based on the figurative level. Folklore, in its turn, appears as an intermediate member in the comparative chain of the analysed narrative modes. Folktales contain the elements of implicit veridiction and an inclination to detail out some narrative situations or make them closer to the world of the narrator/listener. The carried out analysis revealed that the figurative level is resistant to the influence of the socio-cultural environment, whereas the thematic structures are more susceptible its impact.

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