

## **Oppositions and Cooperations in the Baldr Myth, with Irish and Welsh Parallels**

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The many correspondences between the stories surrounding the Norse Baldr figure and the Irish Balor figure have been described and discussed extensively in the past (Rooth 1961), and it is a comparative exploration of the death stories of these two figures which forms the basis of the ideas presented here. The initial aim was simply to compare and contrast Baldr with Balor to see whether any new light could be shed on the relationship between them, but, having embarked on this research, it soon became evident that it was necessary to go beyond the Old Norse and Irish traditions to include Danish and Welsh traditions as well in order to obtain a fuller picture.

The immediate effect of extending the field of material in this way was an increase in the complexities of the relationships, but also the realisation that it would seem rash to pretend that there should even be a comparative discussion if it did not take all of these four traditions into account. It is fully admitted that this type of discussion is in danger of dislodging the individual story from its exact context within its own tradition, but as the aim here was to consider some structural parallels, this is not regarded as a disadvantage.<sup>1</sup>

The focus of the present paper is not so much on the story material itself, the cultural and historical relationships between the traditions concerned or even on the eventual results of the research carried out. Instead, it is on a method of categorisation consisting of three cross-cutting dualities employed in order to subdivide the substantial bulk of complex material into smaller, more manageable sections.

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<sup>1</sup>An awareness of there being other and equally valid approaches to the present material should be maintained. John Lindow (1997) provides an excellent discussion of the Baldr tradition within the Icelandic context and offers a valid interpretation.

### The Material

It is not possible here to present in complete detail all of the material considered, but a schematised synopsis of the four main traditions would seem a helpful reminder to the reader (fuller summaries of all of the material can be found in the appendix).<sup>2</sup>

As the initial research focused predominantly on the death-stories, these are the narratives represented here. The birth-stories referred to in the table below, however, constitute an equally interesting set of correspondences (see Bek-Pedersen, forthcoming); these will not be discussed in detail here, but it is worth pointing out that they seem to form rather close parallels to each other and that the occurrence of the birth-story and death-story together, attached to the same set of persons, significantly strengthens the grounds for comparison.<sup>3</sup>

Iceland	Denmark	Ireland	Wales
<b>Baldr</b>	<b>Balderus</b>	<b>Balor</b>	<b>Lleu</b>
hero	villain	villain (birth)	hero birth
dreams	dreams	prophecy	
invulnerable	invulnerable	invulnerable	invulnerable
special weapon	special weapon	special weapon	special weapon
peculiar circumstances	oddly anti- climatic situation	special situation	special situation
	lightning weapon	lightning weapon	
eschatology		eschatology	
killed by brother	killed by rival	killed by grandson	killed by rival
	rival is hero	grandson is hero	

<sup>2</sup>Icelandic tradition contains two main strains, one focusing on Baldr and Höðr (*Baldrs draumar*, *Völuspá*) and one which also involves Loki (*Lokasenna*, *Gylfaginning* 49); similarly, Irish tradition presents a mythological strain (*Cath Maige Tuired*) and a folktale strain.

<sup>3</sup>It might further be said that the birth-story relates to the death-story in one of three ways: it may concern the birth of the one who kills the main character in the death story (Irish), it may concern the birth of the one who avenges him (Icelandic and Danish), or it may present the birth of the character who dies in the death-story (Welsh). The birth-stories show striking similarities to each other, Danish to the Irish folktale tradition, Welsh to *Ynglingasaga* 3.

dies	dies	dies	dies
returns			returns
name	name	name	
	water / spring	water / spring	
(birth)	(birth)		
Höðr / Loki	Hotherus	Lug	Goronwy

**Table 1**

That the four traditions mentioned in Table 1—Icelandic, Danish, Irish and Welsh—were related seemed evident, and with, to use a textile image, a red thread running through all of the material. However, once a closer and more rigorous treatment of the details of each tradition was initiated, it turned out that the red thread was less than easy to deal with as it was one of those tricky threads, which changes color along the way! It started off red, but then moved into purple, sliding into blue, then green and so forth, thereby making it possible to compare this thread to all the other threads, which were also tangled up in these stories. Thus, following the plot of any one story as though it were a thread revealed parallels to all the other plot-threads with each change of color, but as no two plot-threads followed the same pattern of color changes, it would have been arbitrary to take one thread as a standard against which to measure the others—this would not yield an objective reference frame. Motifs would re-occur across the board, but at different points in relation to the plot-thread, either in widely different contexts or attached to characters fulfilling very different roles. It remained evident that the stories were connected, but *how* they were connected would change every time the focus of attention shifted from one detail or character to another.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps Table 2 will convey some notion of the very complex correspondences encountered when it came to organising the material; the information in Table 2 is not a full representation of all the correspondences found in the material, as many of the details would call for lengthier explanations than can easily be contained in a table of this sort (Table 2).

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<sup>4</sup>This also shows in scholarship, where attention has been given variously to Baldr and Balor (Rooth 1961), Balor and Ódinn (Turville-Petre 1964:160-161), Lug and Ódinn (Davidson 1993:78-79), Lleu and Ódinn (Ross 1967:60), Baldr and Fergus MacRóich (Gísli Sigurdsson 2000:77-78), according to what has formed the focus of the research presented.

Lug	multi-skilled hero who kills Balor, shines brightly, knows magic, has spear, 'one-eyed'
Lleu	multi-skilled hero who is killed in strange situation, impossible weapon, impossible situation, eagle shape, hangs on tree, returns from the dead
Hotherus	multi-skilled hero who kills Balderus
Höðr	blind but does not miss his aim, kills his brother Baldr, very strong
Baldr	evil dreams of death, shines brightly, killed in strange situation, mistletoe, killed by his brother, eschatology, returns from the dead
Balderus	evil dreams, 'mistletoe', killed by his rival, water / spring
Balor	prophecy of death, impossible weapon, 'impossible' situation, eschatology, water / spring, 'one-eyed', powerful leader
Oðinn	'one-eyed', powerful leader, has spear, eagle shape, hangs on tree, returns from the dead, knows magic

**Table 2**

Although this is not the place to discuss all of the aspects listed in Table 2, it would seem worthwhile to go into more detail with some of them, especially ones which have not often been raised in the relevant scholarship.

One such issue is the relationship between the Irish Lug and the Danish Hotherus—who constitute in many ways a complementary pair to Balor and Balderus. In the mythological story *Cath Maige Tuired* (The Second Battle of Moytura), a description of Lug Samhildánach is given through this character's conversation with the door-keeper at Tara, when Lug arrives to join the Túatha Dé Danann:

“Question me,” he said. “I am a builder ... I am a smith  
... I am a champion ... I am a harper ... I am a warrior  
... I am a poet and a historian ... I am a sorcerer ... I am  
a physician ... I am a cupbearer ... I am a good brazier  
...” (Gray 1982:38-41).

The Túatha Dé Danann proceed to test Lug in all the arts he claims to master, finding that he is indeed worthy of his by-name Samhildánach—'the one who possesses all the arts'—as he is truly the most skilled in all the fields he has mentioned. When looking to the description given of Hotherus in Saxo's

*Gesta Danorum*, Book 3, this is the picture:

As a stripling he surpassed his foster-brothers and contemporaries in his immensely sturdy physique, not to mention his talent for a variety of skills. He was as knowledgeable and deft in swimming, archery and boxing as any youth could be, for strength and training together made him a champion. His richly endowed mind made him outstrip his unripe years. No one was a more expert harpist or lute-player, as well as which he was dexterous in the whole art of the psaltery, lyre and fiddle. By performing in different modes he could excite in men's breasts whatever emotions he wished, joy, sorrow, pity or hatred, and by delighting or dismaying their ears could capture their minds. (Davidson and Fisher 1979:69).

While this is an altogether very common type of description for a hero, there are particular facets here, which give rise to a direct comparison between Hotherus and Lug, especially their musical skills. In *Cath Maige Tuired*, Lug's skills as a harpist follow the motif of three magical strains of music:

"Let a harp be played for us" said the hosts. Then the warrior played sleep music [*suantraigi*] for the hosts and for the king on the first night, putting them all to sleep from that hour to the same time the next day. He played sorrowful music [*golltraigi*] so that they were crying and lamenting. He played joyful music [*genntraigí*] so that they were merry and rejoicing. (Gray 1982:42-43).

This same motif seems to be echoed in Saxo's description of Hotherus, although whereas the Irish tradition mentions three strains of music: sleep, sorrow and joy, the Danish mentions four: joy, sorrow, pity and hatred. It has been argued that the different strains of music correspond to the seasons of the year, and that the notion of three seasons—summer, winter and spring—is older than that of four seasons where autumn is included (Lyle 1990:26-27). By mentioning four strains of music, Saxo may be looking to the Classical tradition, probably thinking about Hotherus as a 'Danish Mercury' (Davidson and Fisher 1980:51), or he may have added a fourth strain to bring the description more into line with contemporary medieval thinking.<sup>5</sup> The significant point,

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<sup>5</sup>That the passage quoted is clearly medievalized is betrayed by the fact that

however, is that this detail is repeated in the information on both characters.

Furthermore, a detail relating to Lug's battle with Balor is also similar to one in Hotherus' battle with Balderus. The means of killing Balor is to deprive him of his 'evil eye'—an eye, which, when he opens it, burns everything it looks at as though it were a lightning bolt. Lug kills Balor by putting out his eye with a shot from his sling,<sup>6</sup> and although some versions of the story let Balor live on for a while, the loss of the eye always constitutes a crucial point in the battle between the Túatha Dé Danann and the Fomoiré, the point at which the Fomoiré lose their power over the opposing army.

This passage recalls Saxo's description of Hotherus' battle against an army of the gods wherein the crucial weapon on the part of the gods is Thor's hammer—another lightning weapon. The moment Hotherus has destroyed the hammer, the gods take flight, just as the Fomoiré flee after Balor loses his eye; without these particular weapons, the gods and the Fomoiré become vulnerable.

These two points of correspondence would seem to validate the perceived parallels between Lug and Hotherus.

Some of the parallels found seemed to share common roots, which were later taken in widely different directions by the separate traditions; some seemed to spring from later contacts and borrowings in various directions between the traditions; during both of these processes inversions seem to have occurred at various points. There was neither one system nor one general thought in operation, but multiple ones at work simultaneously; as the red thread turned purple in one direction and orange in the other, the question arose: Was it viable to consider the purple and orange bits to still be the same one thread?<sup>7</sup> Was the rainbow of colors sliding into each

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Saxo lets Hotherus pursue boxing as well as the playing of instruments such as psaltery and fiddle, activities which are unlikely to have exact equivalents in the pre-medieval period which the story concerns (Davidson and Fisher 1980:51).

<sup>6</sup>In the folktales, Lug often uses a spear, which would also seem to be an older tradition than the sling. The sling may well carry a biblical gloss, recalling David's fight with Goliath (Ó hÓgáin 1990:44).

<sup>7</sup>Needham (1980:7-8 and 46-47) discusses the idea of polythetic classification, that is: "What articulates the terms into a system is not hierarchy but a relation of analogy" (Needham 1980:46); this idea poses problems similar to the ones encountered here.

other in a specific order even following a viable or coherent system when the material under discussion was so complex?<sup>8</sup> What was really needed was a way of subdividing the material, a sensible method of grouping stories, characters or motifs together, so that an ordered discussion of the material became possible. It is clear that it would make very little sense to take one of the traditions as a standard for the others, the system used as a perceived standard measure had to be objective and operative in relation to all of the material.

### **The Triple Dualities**

Initially, two layers of categorisation were employed to analyse the stories: 1) an 'outer' layer, which focused on the plot, and which regarded the birth-story and death-story as the main constituent parts of the plot as a whole.<sup>9</sup> 2) an 'inner' layer, focusing on the characters, the types of roles they might play and the relationships between them.

In terms of the outer categorisation, the realisation that the birth-story could—or perhaps even should—be seen as part of the whole, was regarded as supportive of the notion that the separate traditions represented structural equivalents. It was striking to see just how well the Dumézilian idea of the three Indo-European functions fitted into the material surrounding the birth-story; in fact, this idea seemed even to be inherent to most of this material so that it was simply a question of drawing it out (Bek-Pedersen, forthcoming). It was possible to imagine that a system including the basic idea of three functional aspects divided out amongst three separate male characters would even have been developed from a comparison of these stories, had it not already existed as a theory. Thus, an extended and redeveloped version of the Indo-European functions based on research carried out by Emily Lyle (1990, 2003) was adopted as a method of inner categorisation for the birth-story.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>It should be remembered that such issues often do not arise until the comparative field is entered; each story might have a very different sort of meaning from the others, when considered solely in the context of its own tradition.

<sup>9</sup>However, any one story need only contain one of these in order to be included in the discussion.

<sup>10</sup>The most recent developments in Lyle's research were presented at the ISFNR congress in Tartu, Estonia, July 2005, in a paper entitled: "Narrative Form and the Structure of Myth."

Equally striking, however, was the realisation that this Dumézilian system did *not* seem to apply to the material surrounding the death-story, and that various attempts at employing the functions in relation to this part of the plot failed, as the distinctions made in the stories did not chime with those proposed by Dumézil's theory—the discussions became conjectural, hypothetical and it was necessary to use force in order to make the material comply. The attempts were therefore abandoned and the focus shifted to a search for some other type of inner categorisation: Clearly, the need was for something other than the functions.

The theme revealed at the heart of the research was *rivalry*. This was further defined as rivalry for kingship or primary leadership, which nevertheless appeared too broad as well as too narrow. Too broad, because the relationships between the rivals took many different forms, so that a much clearer definition of what constituted 'rivalry' was needed; too narrow, because the notion of kingship or leadership was not openly present in the Icelandic traditions, in which, it should be noted, the very idea of rivalry in itself appeared to be somewhat latent, as if the tradition, as we know it, actually had something else in mind.<sup>11</sup>

The fact that the portrayals of rivalry operated through several different types of relationships between the rivals, often within the one tradition, or even within the one story, remained an obstacle for a while, also owing to the fact that various other motifs and details intermingled so freely and haphazardly across the separate narratives.

Inspiration eventually came on encountering a system of several types of dualities operating simultaneously, as mentioned by Lyle:

When I was studying age-grades in East Africa, I found that Maasai men, when they meet as strangers, may ask each other: Which clan moiety do you belong to? Which of the two age-class streams do you belong to? and What location do you belong to? The chances are high that the strangers will find some common ground among their triple identities. (Lyle 2003a:87).

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<sup>11</sup>Lindow (1997) produces a strong case for revenge killing as a central theme in the Icelandic Baldr tradition. Such, however, can hardly be argued to be the case for the Danish tradition of Balderus.



This ready-made system of a triple set of dualities, each one cutting across the others, gave rise to the idea of applying something similar to the material at hand, although the Northern European traditions did not seem to show any evidence of ever having openly employed such a system. The decision was nevertheless made to explore its possibilities.

To begin with, the East African system provided three definitions of ‘rivalry’:

- Kinship opposition—the rivals belong to separate families or clans.
- Time opposition—the rivals belong to separate age groups or generations.
- Space opposition—the rivals belong to separate locations.

Developing the idea further, a set of symbols was created in order to visibly represent the affinities of any given character in terms of the three dualities. This made it possible to talk about the types of roles played by any set of corresponding characters simply by referring to the symbols, which consist of a square, containing a diamond-shape, with a round dot in the middle; each geometric shape represents one of the three definitions of rivalry (Table 3).

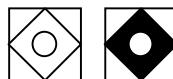


**Table 3**

The square represents the kinship opposition, so that a dark square indicates ‘them’ and a light square ‘us’. The ‘us’-family provides a good and proper king, whereas the ‘them’-family provides an evil or false king.

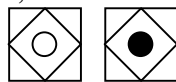


The diamond represents the time opposition, so that a dark diamond indicates ‘old’ and a light diamond ‘young’. Typically, this set of rivals consists of father and son or grandfather and grandson.



he dot represents the space opposition, so that a dark dot

indicates ‘there’ and a light dot ‘here’. The ‘here’-location can be defined variously as the land, light or the living, with the ‘there’-location as the sea, darkness or the dead.



It is noteworthy that the hero in these stories always comes out with an all-light sign:



against which his rival is defined.

The application of these triple dualities to the story material at hand seemed to work. It allowed for the various pieces of material to fall into three types of opposition: one type with two unrelated male characters, one with two males who are related but belong to separate age groups, and one with two males of the same family and the same generation, but who belong to separate locations. The tendency often was for characters to cooperate on other levels, and the opposition between them would typically operate on just one level of identity. Moreover, it seemed that a story typically focused on one type of opposition, although it may at the same time contain more—indeed, most of the stories contain two if not all three oppositions, but the prominence of one type of opposition over the other(s) allowed for categorisation according to the type perceived as the most dominant one.

It was found that the focus of attention was typically on the space- or kinship-oppositions, often with the time opposition lurking more in the background.

Once this system was employed, it became possible to discuss the relationships between the different traditions in an ordered and coherent fashion by breaking the heading of ‘rivalry’ into three sub-headings. A beginning had finally been reached—as for the outcome of the research: that is a different story, and one which has not yet come to an end. It was not my intention to delve into this very sizeable issue in the present context.

### Conclusions

It must be added that a number of shortcomings occurred in connection with the application of this system to the

material surrounding the death-story, especially in the way that a number of characters proved very difficult to place among the symbols. On giving closer attention to this problem, it was found that these were often characters whose role in the birth-story was much more clearly definable in that context, and it was found that a separate chart relating to the birth-story should be included, as this was able to show details which were difficult to show in the triple dualities. These included two male figures, relating to two of the Indo-European functions, who played no part in the death-story, and also a female figure.

A further criticism of the triple dualities might be that they—as employed here—give no attention to or even space for the female characters, who quite clearly play important roles in the stories (the three roles of mother, daughter and wife/lover may relate each to one type of opposition, but this is a question which needs much more attention and clarification).

One might further argue that the three types of opposition discussed here are very general in nature—that any story which incorporates a portrayal of rivalry is quite likely to feature one of these three types. To that one might, however, answer that this does not necessarily have an impact on the idea that the triple dualities can still be used as a method of categorisation when more than one type is present. As a tool for subdividing the heading ‘rivalry’ into smaller chunks, they work rather well. In the case of the present piece of research, this division was what was needed, and its presence may in fact be regarded as a guarantee that the idea seems to be widely applicable. Had it worked only for the present stories, but not beyond them, this would very likely have raised some concerns.

Having said this, it should be mentioned that I have not attempted to use the triple dualities in any other context, nor have the symbols developed for this research been carried beyond its parameters. In my eyes, the most striking aspect of this exercise was to find that it was possible to lift an idea from East Africa to Northern Europe and to discover that it actually fitted in with the data at hand; that, I find, is some cause for wonder.

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### *Appendix*

**Math vab Mathonwy** *Math son of Mathonwy*

Gantz, Jeffrey (1976). *Mabinogion*. London.

Math could not live unless his feet were in a virgin's lap at all times, except when there is a war. The girl's name is Goewin. Math's two nephews, Gwydyon and Gilvaethwy assist him in ruling the realm. Gilvaethwy falls in love with Goewin, and Gwydyon creates a war to distract Math's attention. In Math's absence, Gilvaethwy sleeps with Goewin. Math returns to find the girl no longer a virgin, and he sends for the girl Aranrhod, whom he thinks is a virgin. But on testing her virginity she happens to give birth to a boy and a 'small something'. The boy is Dylan, who immediately makes for the sea, becomes one with it and swims as well as any fish. The 'small something' is put into a chest but later turns into a boy. Gwydyon takes care of the boy, ensuring that he obtains all the things he needs: a name, weapons and a wife. His name is Llew Llawgyffes. Llew's wife falls in love with another man, Goronwy, and together they plot to kill Llew. But Llew is invulnerable and can only be killed with a weapon which it seems cannot be made and in a situation which it seems can never occur. When his wife finds out what the weapon and the situation are, she ensures that both come about, and Llew is killed. He lives on in the shape of an eagle whose flesh is rotting. Gwydyon is later able to restore him to life, and Llew eventually becomes the new ruler.

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**Cath Maige Tuired** *The Battle of Maige Tuired*

Gray, Elizabeth A. (1982). *Cath Maige Tuired*. Dublin.

The Túatha Dé Dannan made an alliance with the Fomoiré wherein Balor of the Fomoiré gave his daughter Ethne to Cian of the Túatha; Ethne later bore the glorious child Lug Samhildánach, who became skilled in all the arts. When Núada, king of the Túatha, is wounded in a battle, Bres of the Fomoiré is made king, following the advice of the women. Bres' rule is very hard, but when one of the Túatha composes a satire on Bres, everything begins to go wrong for him. Bres leaves, gathers a Fomorian army and forms an alliance with Balor. Lug arrives among the Túatha, and during the battle between the Fomoiré and the Túatha Dé Dannan, Lug emerges as the leader of the Túatha. Lug and Balor meet in battle. Balor has an eye which paralyses those he looks at with it, and the Fomoiré make preparations to open the eye. The eyelid is so heavy that it takes many men to lift it. But Lug puts out the eye with a shot from the sling, Balor dies and the Túatha win the battle.

**Cath Muighe Tuireadh** *The Battle of Moytura*

Ó Cuív, Brian (1945). *Cath Muighe Tuireadh—The Second Battle of Magh Tuireadh*. Dublin.

(Differs in a number of details describing the battle between Lugh and Balor.)

**Lugaid Riab nDerg** *Lugaid of the Red Stripes*

Rees, Alwyn and Brinley (1961). *Celtic Heritage*. London. p.234

The girl Clothru sleeps with all of her three brothers, Nár, Bres and Lothar, and later gives birth to a son, Lugaid. His byname 'of the red stripes' refers to a stripe around his neck and one around his waist, which divide his body into three sections, each being like one of his three fathers. His head is like that of Nár, his upper body like that of Bres, and his body from the waist down is like that of Lothar.

**Balor of the Evil Eye and Lui Lavada his Grandson**

Curtin, Jeremiah (1894). *Hero-Tales of Ireland*. London. pp.296-311.

Balor of the Lochlin gains the rule of Ireland and threatens to burn the country with his evil eye, which destroys everything it looks at. Only the son of Balor's daughter can kill him and only when Balor stands in a certain place and opens his eye. The man Cian and his brother try to stop Balor. Cian, helped by a druid, finds Balor's daughter and sleeps with her. Later he returns and takes the boy with him. The boy needs a name, and only Balor can name him. Cian tricks Balor into doing this, and the boy is named Lui Lavada. Lui kills Balor with a special spear just as the eye is about to open.

**Balor on Tory Island**

Curtin, Jeremiah (1894). *Hero-Tales of Ireland*. London. pp.283-295.

King Balor lived on Tory Island, keeping his daughter locked up in a castle with twelve other women, because he can never die unless killed by his daughter's son. Balor steals a marvellous cow from a blacksmith, but the man Fin, helped by Gial Duv, later retrieves the cow. Fin gets into the castle, sleeps with the girl and also with the other women. Later he returns to rescue the children from Balor, he sails away with them, but the twelve fall overboard and become seals. Only the remaining child survives, he is Lui Lavada. Lui later avenges his father, whom Balor killed, by putting out Balor's evil eye, which burns everything to ashes when it is uncovered. Lui cuts Balor's head off, and a lake is created where the head falls on a rock.

**Balor and Lug**

Gruffydd;W.J. (1928). *Math vab Mathonwy*. Cardiff. pp.72-74.

The robber Balor lived on Tory Island; he had one eye on his forehead and one on the back of his head. He stole a cow from three brothers on the mainland. Because it had been foretold that his grandson would kill him, Balor kept his daughter Etnea confined in a tower with twelve other women. Helped by a fairy, one of the brothers, dressed as a woman, gained access to Ethnea and slept with her. Later, she bore three sons, whom Balor drowned, but one escaped. The brothers brought up the boy to be a smith.

Balor killed the boy's father. When he had grown, the boy, Lug, killed Balor by thrusting an iron bar into his eyes.

**The Gloss Gavlen**

Larminie, William (1893). *West Irish Folk-Tales and Romances*. London. pp.1-9.

It was foretold that Balar Beimann's daughter would bear a son, who would kill him. Balar therefore kept her in prison. But the man Kian, helped by Mananaun, got into the prison and had a son with the girl. When the boy was born, Kian took him and sailed away with Mananaun. Balar pursued them, but they escaped. Mananaun predicts that the boy will be a great champion. The boy was called Dul Duana, and when he had grown he one day saw Balar on a ship. He threw a dart at Balar and killed him, not knowing it was his grandfather.

**Oidhe Chloinne Tuireann** *The Fate of the Children of Tuirenn*

Cross, Tom Peete & Clark Harris Slover (1969). *Ancient Irish Tales*. Dublin. pp.49-81.

The Fomoiré have imposed great taxes on the Túatha Dé Dannan, whose king is Nuada. Lug Lamfada arrives with an army of men while the Túatha hold an assembly. Lug shines so brightly that no one can look at him. He carries, among other things, a belt which makes him invulnerable and a special sword. When the Fomoiré arrive, Lug attacks them and kill most of them. Balor is king of the Fomoiré, his daughter is Lug's mother, and his son is Bres. Bres gathers a Fomorian army and goes to Ireland to attack Lug. Lug's father, Cian, and his two brothers are the enemies of the three sons of Tuirenn. One day the sons of Tuirenn kill Cian; then they join Lug in the battle against the Fomoiré. Lug approaches Bres' army from the west, shining so brightly that Bres asks why the sun is rising in the west. Lug wins the fight against Bres, but spares his life. Afterwards Lug demands compensation for his dead father from the sons of Tuirenn, setting them impossible tasks. The rest of the story concerns their quest for the objects requested by Lug.

**Aided Fergusa MacRóich** *The Death of Fergus MacRóich*

Meyer, Kuno (1906). *The Death Tales of the Ulster Heroes*. Dublin. pp.32-35.

Fergus is in exile in Connaught, living with Ailill and

Medb; his comrade here is his foster-brother Lugaid Dalleces, who is a brother of Ailill. One day they hold games and gatherings by a lake. Fergus goes into the lake, Medb follows him, and Fergus swims round the lake with Medb on his chest. Later Medb comes out of the water, but Ailill is very jealous. He tells Lugaid that a hart and doe are in the lake. Lugaid, who is blind yet never misses his aim, suggests they kill the animals, and Ailill gives him a lance and points him in the direction of Fergus. Lugaid throws the spear, which goes right through Fergus. Ailill says it is the end of Fergus [the word used is ‘bruinne’, which means both ‘breast’ and ‘end’]. Lugaid laments his deed. Ailill flees, but Fergus flings the spear at him. It hits a dog. Fergus dies on the shore of the lake.

**Acallam na Senórach** *The Colloquy of the Ancients*  
O’Grady, Standish (1892). *Silva Gadelica*. London and Edinburgh. p.129 in the translation.  
Cainen asks where Ferchis mac Comain, a poet, was killed. Cailte answers that Ael shot at a stag with a javelin made from hardened holly, unwittingly slaying Ferchis at the same time.

### Ynglingasaga 3

Snorri Sturluson—*Heimskringla*. ed. Erling Monsen (1932). New York.  
Óðinn had two brothers, Vé and Vili, who ruled the kingdom when he was away. Once Óðinn had been away so long that they thought he would not return. The brothers decided to divide his goods between them, both taking his wife as their spouse, but Óðinn later came back and took back his rule and wife.

### Völuspá 31-35 *The Seeress’ Prophecy*

*The Poetic Edda*. ed. Carolyne Larrington (1996). Oxford.  
The seeress knows about Baldr’s fate, although this is concealed for himself. She mentions the mistletoe, which became a missile when Höðr threw it at Baldr. She then speaks of Baldr’s brother, Váli, who will be born to avenge him. Váli will carry Höðr to the funeral pyre. She sees the bound Loki, and goes into descriptions of Ragnarök. In stanza 62 she says

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that Baldr and Höðr will return, reconciled, in the new world.

**Baldrs draumar** *Baldr's Dreams*

*The Poetic Edda*. ed. Carolyne Larrington (1996). Oxford.

Baldr has sinister dreams foreboding evil, and Óðinn goes to consult a long dead seeress in the underworld. Concealing his identity, Óðinn draws information from her; she says that Baldr will die at the hands of Höðr and that Váli, yet unborn son of Rindr and Óðinn, will avenge him. When she realises that she is talking to Óðinn, she warns him that Ragnarök is approaching and refuses to say any more.

**Lokasenna 26-28** *Loki's Flyting*

*The Poetic Edda*. ed. Carolyne Larrington (1996). Oxford.

Loki says to Frigg that he brought or will bring it about that Baldr will never again ride to the halls.

**Gylfaginning 49** *The Delusion of Gylfi*

*Edda—Snorri Sturluson*. ed. Anthony Faulkes (1987). London. pp.48-51.

Baldr, who is loved by everyone, dreams that his life is in danger, and the gods request that Baldr become immune to all dangers. Only the mistletoe does not make the promise not to harm Baldr. It becomes a sport to fling all sorts of weapons at Baldr at the assembly, but Loki is not pleased with this. Loki coaxes the information about the mistletoe out of Frigg, gets the plant and gives it to Baldr's blind half-brother Höðr, requesting him to join in with the sport. Loki guides Höðr's hand, Höðr throws the dart and Baldr falls down dead. The gods attempt unsuccessfully to retrieve Baldr from the dead. They hold a big funeral for him, and his wife Nanna dies from grief and is buried with him. The gods later capture Loki and punish him. This is followed by descriptions of Ragnarök.

**Gesta Danorum, Book 3** *History of the Danes*

*Saxo Grammaticus*. eds. H.E. Davidson & P.Fisher (1979). Cambridge. pp.69-79.

Hotherus, the multi-skilled hero, loves Nanna, but Balderus sees Nanna bathing, falls in love with her and decides to kill Hotherus. Hotherus discovers that Balderus is the son of Othinus. Hotherus goes in search of the sword, which is the only weapon that can kill Balderus. Nanna refuses to marry

Balderus. Hotherus holds a sea battle against Balderus, on whose side the gods are fighting, but Hotherus destroys Thor's hammer and wins the battle. Hotherus now becomes king of Denmark, but is driven away by Balderus. Balderus becomes plagued by dreams of Nanna and gets very ill. Eventually Hotherus manages to wound Balderus fatally in connection with a battle, and Balderus dies. Now follows the account of Othinus' journey to Russia and his deception of the girl Rinda, with whom he has the son Bous. Bous later avenges Balderus by meeting Hotherus in a battle where they are both killed.