

(Finn: Cont'd.)

warriors could not find him. When he was of age, he was sent to a certain bard to be taught the art of poetry, for this was one of the prerequisites for a leader. The bard had waited seven years for the salmon of Linn Feic, "which would bring all knowledge to him who would eat it". He bade Finn go catch it, making him promise not to eat it. When the youth returned with the fish, the poet asked him if he had eaten any of it.

"No", said the lad, "but I burned my thumb and I put it into my mouth afterwards".

"What is your name lad?" said the poet.

"Demne", said the lad.

"Finn will be your name, lad", said he, "and it is to you that it has been given to eat the salmon and you are the true Finn."

Then the lad ate the salmon and it was that which gave knowledge to Finn. This is an example of the simple credulity in which the imaginative background of Finn spun into being. The magical elements mingled with the real neither clash nor contradict one another as they exist in the story.

Because of his poetic skill, it is plausible within the cycle to have Finn create and recite his own poems. Kuno Meyer, the foremost translator of ancient Irish poetry, attempts to capture the sensitivity of a poem by the hero of the Fenian Cycle in the poem "Summer Has Come":

Summer has come, Healthy and
free,
Whence the brown wood is aslope,
The slender nimble deer leap,
And the path of seals is smooth.

In this stanza the visual senses predominate. As would be expected in translation, the rhythm is awkward since the Gaelic sounds, are

difficult to transfuse- there is no equivalent in English (with the exception of Middle English) for eclipsed and aspirated consonants, for differentiation between slender and broad vowels and unusual syllabication.

The sounds in this particular poem are reminiscent of the polyphony and the chants as opposed to musical harmony as it exists today. An example is the stanza:

A sound of playful breezes in
the tops;
Of a black oakwood is Druid
Daill,
The noble hornless herd runs,
To whom Cuan-wood is a shelter.

It is obvious that Finn did not lack concrete allusions in the composition of his poems. Nature, to him, was something that vibrated with dynamic energy, syncopated with the sounds of beast and man, and throbbed with the message of man's destiny.

The device known as the "frame story" and utilized by Chaucer, Boccaccio and the creator of the Arabian Nights is also found in the Fenian cycle. There is the famed story "The Colloquy of the Old Men" in which Cailte, a Fenian survivor, wanders over the hill and lake country of Ireland with none other than St. Patrick, and recites, to the great patron, the legends of the countryside and the mythological and historical tales. Something of the very soul of the entire cycle dawns in the conversation between the two old men.

When Patrick questions the Fenian about his leader, the subordinate answers: "Were but the brown leaf which the wood sheds from its gold- were but the white leaf silver- Finn would have given it all away". (This