

(Finn: conclusion.)

the tragic flaw of Finn breaks its shackles. It happens one day, when Diarmaid, who has been warned by the sage never to hurt a bear, for it will deal his death blow, defies the omens of the superstitious and challenges a beast that has been annoying him in his sleep. Though he eventually slays the animal, the youth has been fatally gored and Finn is the only one that can save him by bringing, cupped in his hands, springwater to the dying lad. The young maid implores her old suitor to do so. The suspense of the story heightens twice when the thought of the hurt to his pride overcomes Finn and when he is about to give the life sustaining drink to Diarmaid. He deliberately spills it. On the third trip however, Finn is ready to yield to the dying Diarmaid and give him the draught, but irony of ironies, it is too late. A comradeship has arisen and fallen. The narrator does not have the salty callousness to end there, but dashes the tale with cynicism by having Grainne later marry Finn.

Many epochs of literature have dawned on the Emerald Isle since the bards chanted the tales of the Fenian cycle. As the capricious barometer, so has been the criticism of Gaelic writings. Myles Dillon, in the conclusion of his book, Early Irish Literature, says of it:

"If there is nothing in Irish literature of the epic stature of Homer or the grandeur of Virgil, there are qualities that some Irishmen at least will hold equally precious - an incandescent vision, a wildness of imagination, sensibility to sound and color and form, sometimes perhaps perceived as signs of an ideal beauty; and human passion, love, sorrow or anger, often expressed with a sincerity and directness that can still persuade us."

The End.

A 9th Century Irish Poem:

FAND YIELDS CUCHULAIN TO EMER.

Emer, he is your man, now,
And well may you wear him.
When I can no longer hold him,
I must yield him.

Many a man has wanted me,
But I have kept my vows.
I have been an honest woman,
Under the roofs and boughs.

Pity the woman loves a man,
When no love invites her.
Better for her to fly from love
If unloved, love bites her.

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This poem of the Ulster cycle of literature, is taken from The Sick-Bed of Cuchulain, a story preserved in the Book of the Dun Cow. Fand, a woman of the other world, yields to Emer, her earthly rival, for the love of Cuchulain, the mythological Celtic warrior-here.

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