

From Bulls to Bikes:
An Explanatory Statement of The Bicycle Made of Oly

An Interdisciplinary Studies: Folklore Terminal Project

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December 8, 1997

This project fulfills the requirements of a Master of Arts degree from The University of Oregon.

Acknowledgments

As this project moved through various stages from its inception to its finish, I received help from many people to whom I am very grateful.

First, many thanks to Dianne Dugaw for help in composing the written portions of this project throughout their many stages. I also wish to thank Carol Silverman and Dan Wojick for their insight and feedback of the later stages of this work.

For sharing their knowledge of the technical aspects of producing a video, I wish to thank Sharon Sherman, Lynette Boone, Mike Majdic, and Andy Kirkpatrick.

Many thanks to all of the artists who participated in the video.

Finally, for their support and encouragement of my work on this project, I wish to thank my parents, Marla and Kelsey Batchelder, as well as Mike Wynne, Ellen Jamison, Mike Cobb, Revell Carr, John Bauman, Rosemary Morrow, Jen Elias-Reed, and Jessica Trenholme.

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Introduction

The Bicycle Made of Oly is a video translation of the Irish myth the Tain Bo Cuailnge (also known as the Cattle Raid of Cooley or simply, the Tain). This translation attempts to fuse aspects of Celtic myth with aspects of contemporary American culture. The video is set in present day Olympia, Washington (locally known as Oly) and does not attempt to be a direct translation of the myth. Rather, the video attempts to re-create Celtic themes of sovereignty, polarities, and cosmic interplay found in the Tain.

Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend defines myth as “a story, presented as having actually occurred in a previous age, explaining the cosmological and supernatural traditions of a people, their gods, heroes, cultural traits, religious beliefs, etc.” (Leach, 778). Myth is essential to human well-being. Through myth, humans are reminded of the experience of being alive (Campbell, 5). It is this experience which allows humans to live in harmony with the world around them. The disharmonious world with which humans relate today in large part stems from a massive number of people out of touch with myth. Joseph Campbell called this world we live in a “demythologized world” (10). One reason for the existence of this demythologized world is rapid changes which have occurred in recent human history. Campbell notes that “myths offer life models. But the models have to be appropriate to the time in which [one is] living”(16). The Bicycle Made of Oly attempts to offer a modern model for an ancient story. The purpose of the video is to encourage people to embrace myth in their daily lives and to relate personal life experiences to the mythical experience of being alive.

This written explanation of the video is composed of a discussion divided into seven sections in which information about the Tain Bo Cuailnge is relayed in reference to The Bicycle Made of Oly. The first section, The Tain and American Culture, introduces the reader to the Tain. It relays historical background and a summary of the myth followed by a discussion of some problems of relating this myth to contemporary American culture. The second section, Sovereignty, Polarities, and Cosmic Interplay, defines and examines these three themes found in the Tain. This section is followed by, Medb of Connact, in which one of the Tain's main characters, Medb (pronounced mayv¹¹), is examined. The discussion then focuses upon the issue of translation as it moves through sections entitled, Three Translations of the Tain Bo Cuailnge, Kinsella's Translation, Cosmological Forces, and Re-creation of the Tain. Following these sections, a script and analysis of The Bicycle Made of Oly can be found. Hopefully, at the end of this explanation, the reader will be able to view the video with an understanding of the Tain Bo Cuailnge which he or she can then apply to The Bicycle Made of Oly for fuller comprehension of the video.

¹¹The pronunciations for most of the Celtic names have been taken from Kinsella's The Tain (263-5). The *Ch* is a guttural sound similar to that of a crow's call.

The Tain and American Culture

The story of the Tain is found in three ancient Irish manuscripts known as the *Book of the Dun Cow*, the *Yellow Book of Lecan*, and the *Book of Leinster*.

The oldest of these, manuscripts — *Lebor na hUidre*, familiarly known as the *Book of the Dun Cow* – was compiled in the monastery of Clonmacnoise in the twelfth century. It contains, in a badly flawed and mutilated text, part of the earliest known form of the Tain Bo Cuailnge. Another partial version of the same story is contained in a late fourteenth century manuscript, the *Yellow Book of Lecan* (Kinsella, 256).

The *Book of Leinster* comes from the late twelfth century and contains the only version of the Tain which tells a complete story.

The origins of the Tain are far more ancient than these manuscripts. The language of the earliest form of the story is dated to the eighth century, but some of the verse passages may be two centuries older, and it is held by most Celtic scholars that the Ulster cycle [the collection of stories in which the Tain is included], with the rest of early Irish literature, must have had a long oral existence before it received a literary shape (256).

The literary shapes which the Tain has received vary. The scribe who composed the *Book of Leinster* version of the Tain “was at pains to produce a consistent and integral narrative” (257). In the other two versions of the Tain, this was not the case. These versions consist of layers of stories—“the work of many hands” (258) and various scribes from more than one period of time.

In her book *A Woman's Words: Emer and Female Speech in the Ulster Cycle*, Joanne Findon stresses the importance of placing the medieval Irish manuscripts within an historical context (10-11). By doing this, the scribes of the manuscripts are recognized

as an important ingredient in the flavor of the manuscript's stories. Findon notes that the scribes of the manuscripts were educated in Christian monasteries and "the entire corpus of medieval Irish literature, whatever its oral or pre-Christian roots comes down to us mediated through a literate, Christian culture" (13). She also notes that the stories found in the manuscripts

were recopied and reshaped by scribes who clearly did not view them as sacrosanct, but who had their own ideas about what should or should not be included in the versions they copied. In some cases, these scribes reshaped the texts in drastic ways, erasing older versions and replacing them with different ones, even adding extra leaves to the manuscript if necessary (11).

The story of the Tain Bo Cuailnge has undergone many transformations throughout its existence. It has been transposed from an oral to a written form and then reshaped from one language into others.

The translations of the Tain reviewed prior to making The Bicycle Made of Oly referred to all three sources of this story. The video, therefore, is based upon a blend of stories and sources consistent with the dynamic aspects of folklore. Prior to engaging in further discussion of the video and the Tain, a brief summary of the Cooley cattle raid is given here for those not familiar with the story. This summary is based upon three versions of the Tain detailed by Lady Augusta Gregory, Joseph Dunn, and Thomas Kinsella. The summary begins with what is known as "The Pillow Talk" or "The Bolster Conversation," and ends with the two bulls fighting to the death.

Medb and her husband, Ailill (pronounced **al-il**), are in their royal bed discussing wealth and the reasons for which they married. This discussion leads to a disagreement

over which of them has more possessions. As a result, they compare everything they each own. They find their possessions to be equal except Ailill, has a fine bull, Finnbennach, to which Medb has no equivalent. This bull actually used to be in one of Medb's herds, but had decided that it was not seemly to be led, or owned, by a woman, and so had migrated over to Ailill's herd.

To compensate for this inequality, Medb attempts to borrow a bull for breeding purposes to increase her own herd. The bull which she wishes to borrow is also a fine bull and is known as the Brown Bull of Cuailnge. Medb sends a group of messengers to the owner of this bull, Daire, requesting permission to borrow the bull. She is willing to give many fine gifts to Daire, even offering her own "friendly thighs" in a sexual union, in return for this favor. The messengers make the request and Daire grants the favor. However, later in the evening, after having had much to drink, one of the messengers is overheard saying that if Daire hadn't granted Medb's request she would have just taken the bull anyway. When Daire was informed of this comment, he revokes the favor and the messengers go back to Medb empty handed. At this point Medb decides that, indeed, she will take the bull.

So Medb and Ailill, along with a monstrously huge army, set off for Ulster to go get the bull. In Ulster at this time, is only one man capable of defending Ulster's honor and preventing the army from taking the bull—Cuchulainn (pronounced koo-*chull*-in). All the other men in Ulster are incapacitated with child birthing pangs, brought upon by the curse of Macha (this is explained in more detail later in this paper). Cuchulainn states some rules for the war, to which Medb and her army agree. The fighting must be person to person and each day one warrior must be sent to fight Cuchulainn. As long as

Cuchulainn wins, the army can advance no further. In this way Cuchulainn hopes to buy enough time for the men of Ulster to recover from their pangs and come help him fight the army. Eventually, this is what happens, but it takes many months of one on one combat to get to this point.

At the final bloody battle, both Medb and Cuchulainn appear on the battlefield. Cuchulainn has an opportunity to kill Medb, but he does not. In the end, Ulster is victorious—Medb and her army do not get the bull. However, the Brown Bull and Finnbennach have an opportunity to meet and fight one another. The Brown Bull kills Finnbennach, but not before Finnbennach mortally wounds the Brown Bull.

The Bicycle Made of Oly varies enormously from the Tain Bo Cuailnge because many of the daily life structures found in the myth are not present in contemporary Olympia, such as cattle raids. The first step in undertaking this translation of the Tain was determining what symbol could be used in place of the bulls found in the Tain. This was essential, for the story of the Tain rests upon the shoulders of the bulls. Without these bulls, there would be no cattle raid and no story.

Contemporary American culture, as a whole, does not have a translatable symbol for cattle. Bulls and cows are long standing organic symbols within Celtic myth significant of life, well-being, and wealth, both personal and communal. Modern American culture has no equivalent. In Olympia, however, bicycles have taken on these meanings of life, well-being, and wealth, at least to some. Olympia Community Bikes is a tangible sign of this. The Bicycle Made of Oly replaces both bulls of the Tain Bo Cuailnge with one bicycle to portray the issue of individual versus communal wealth.

Olympia Community Bikes was an experimental program initiated at a grass-roots level which provided bikes for community transportation use. Bicycles used as transportation produce no pollution, provide a form of exercise, and promote a sense of self-sufficiency to riders. “Bike freaks,” or people who strongly recognize the need for sustainable living and encourage bicycle use as a means of transportation (Mike Cobb, 10/17/97), were responsible for this two year program’s existence. The program has recently come to a halt. The main reason for this is difficulties which individuals in the community had with the concept of communal wealth. Many of the bikes were “privatized,” meaning individuals did not want to share. The bikes were not stolen, for individuals cannot steal what already belongs to them (Mike Cobb). The Bicycle Made of Oly illustrates the issue of individual versus communal wealth as Medb attempts to rescue her bike from being painted pink and put out on the street for communal use. Medb’s bicycle also represents her self-sufficiency, or freedom, in meeting her transportation needs and is very much tied to the issue of sovereignty.

Sovereignty, Polarities, and Cosmic Interplay

Sovereignty is a particular aspect of Celtic myth found in The Bicycle Made of Oly as well as in the Tain. The definition of sovereignty includes: 1) having authority or power to rule as well as 2) a state of independence in relation to individuals or to nations. A sovereign nation is composed of sovereign individuals working together to achieve independence. Therefore, sovereignty starts with the self. “The foundation of Celtic religion is the sacred quality of the land, symbolized by a potent Goddess of Sovereignty.

From this primal figure, who is often associated with love, death and sexuality, all other mythical figures derive” (Stewart, 11).

In the Tain Bo Cuailnge, this goddess of sovereignty is represented in the character known as The Morrigan, a triple goddess, associated with war, who can take the form of a maiden, mother, or crone. The Morrigan is the instigator of the Cattle Raid of Cooley. She appears in the dreams of the story’s mortal characters to prepare them for an outcome of battle. It is a result of her prodding that this battle occurs.

Her name ‘Phantom Queen’ betrays her association with death and the shadowy world of the supernatural. She was a goddess of victory for whichever army she chose to support, and she was fickle and capricious in her allegiances. She was a prophet of either death or victory; an instigator of war; she interfered with combat; changed her shape; and was closely associated with destruction, fertility, and sovereignty (Green, 43).

The Morrigan is also closely associated with the goddesses Badb, Nemhain, and Macha (pronounced bive, **nev**-in, and **ma**-cha). The names Badb and Macha both mean crow or raven, while Nemhain means frenzy. These goddesses often combine and interchange with the Morrigan. “They were simultaneously one goddess and three” (Green , 41). In The Bicycle Made of Oly, the Morrigan is shown as the agent responsible for Medb’s missing bike, and hence, Medb’s questionable status as a sovereign individual.

Polarities, or oppositions, are also an essential element in Celtic myth. Throughout the story of the Tain, tensions are created and fulfilled by the existence of polarities. These can be found in reference to light and dark, male and female, and life and death. One example of polarities can be found in the Morrigan’s composition.

One of the major features of the Celtic goddesses is the fusion of fertility powers with those of war: this may seem confusing, contradictory or even barbaric to the modern reader, but we need to

examine the root of this magical and ultimately metaphysical or poetic fusion of functions and concepts. The goddesses of fertility and war, or sexuality and death, were in effect the Openers and Closers of the Way of Life: the Givers and Takers (Stewart, 74).

Through polarities, Celtic myth fuses aspects of life and death into an inseparable, never ending cycle. This cyclical fusion of opposites is referred to in the translation of the Tain's title--The Bicycle Made of Oly. Through the destruction of the bicycle at the end of the video, the possibility arises for the opposing characters to work together to build a new bicycle. It is this future act to which the title refers, thereby linking the destruction of one bike with the creation of another.

The never ending cycles of life and death are found not only in the world in which the story of the Tain occurs, but within a greater cosmological framework as well. Within Celtic mythology, references are often displayed which reveal the existence of an interplay between mythical figures and cosmic elements, such as the sun, moon, and stars. Celtic cosmology consists of not only the space in which humans participate on a daily basis, but also an upper and under world which are connected to a middle world. These three spheres together constitute the world. "The Celts considered themselves to be potentially existent in all worlds, in the sense that they related to each part of their cosmology in different, intimate ways" (Matthews, 8). The Tain can be understood as a story which relates the human world to the greater mysteries of the universe and the never ending dance which is displayed in the sky.

"The Pillow Talk," or Medb and Ailill's discussion in bed reveals the issue of sovereignty. Medb and Ailill are both attempting to establish claims of rights to rule in their discussion with each other. They state their reasons for marrying, their royal blood lines, and then compare possessions to help determine the issue of who is the "rightful"

ruler. Ailill begins this conversation when he states: “It’s true what they say, love, it is well for the wife of a wealthy man” (Kinsella, 52).²² This statement comes as a surprise to Medb.

Medb’s expression of her surprise reveals polarities in addition to the issue of sovereignty. Medb and Ailill are shown in opposition to one another as man and wife. For the moment they have forgotten that their union in marriage establishes them both as “rightful” rulers. This use of husband and wife to display polar tension is relatively common in Celtic myth. Jeanie Watson in her essay “Enid the Disobedient: The *Mabinogion’s Gereint and Enid*,” examines a husband and wife and the tensions displayed between them as a framework for thinking about marital relations in medieval society. “The tale argues for male and female equality of personhood, an equality that is carried over into marriage” (116). This argument is displayed through the actions of a disobedient wife in response to her irrational husband.

Another example of polar tension between a husband and wife is found in the story which describes the origin of the men of Ulster’s child birthing pangs. This story is one of the pre-ales to the Tain for it helps to explain some of the circumstances surrounding the cattle raid. In this story, the goddess Macha marries a man whose wife has died. As the man goes to a fair one day, Macha tells him that he should not boast at the fair. He assures her he will not, but then does. The result of his action is that Macha must race the king’s horses and beat them (as the husband boasted she was capable). She does not want to run the race for she is about to give birth, however she is told that if she

² Variants of this statement include: “It is a true saying, ‘Good is the wife of a good man’” (Gregory, 175) and “True is the saying, lady, ‘She is a well off woman that is a rich man’s wife’” (Dunn, 1).

does not, her husband will be executed. The goddess runs the race, beats the horses, gives birth, and then curses all of the men present at the fair (including future generations) to be doomed with child birthing pangs at times of crisis. In this story, the tension which begins between a husband and wife expands to one between a male population and a goddess. This tension between male and female exists prior to the start of the Tain and increases throughout the story.

In the Tain, the tension which begins between Ailill and Medb is displaced into a tension between Connacht and Ulster. The husband and wife reunite themselves and their perceived differences in their ruling statuses to go to war with Ulster. The tension between male and female moves from Ailill and Medb to Cuchulainn and Medb once the Connacht army is in Ulster. Most of the story of the Tain deals with this tension between Cuchulainn and Medb while focusing upon Cuchulainn and his feats of war.

The Bicycle Made of Oly deliberately does not focus upon Cuchulainn's war feats for they do not translate well and they are not central to the polar tensions displayed in the Tain in reference to male and female. The video seeks to show the aspects of male and female polarities from a perspective which is balanced in its focus upon both the male warrior and queen figures.

Medb of Connacht

Medb has been noted as “the instigator of the Cattle Raid of Cooley, [who] was so fearsome that she commanded a vast army of heroes and warriors, and so powerful that

her mere presence deprived her opponents of two-thirds of their courage and strength” (Stewart, 80). This description paints a powerful picture of Medb. She is strong with her words and actions. She is a queen and warrior. She is sexually strong— “mating with nine kings, and allowing no man to rule at the royal court of Tara unless he slept with her” (Green, 40). In spite of Medb’s strength, one must remember that many supernatural forces are involved in the Tain. The Morrigan for instance, plays a large role in setting the scene for the occurrence of the cattle raid. Macha also plays a role with her curse of child bearing pangs. Most of these supernatural forces, are recorded outside of the Tain in pretales, or “remscela”. These stories help to explain and describe the relationships which exist between various characters and forces involved in the Tain. Medb is not the instigator for the Tain. However, if one looks at the Tain as separate from the web of stories of which it is a part, it is possible to see Medb as an instigator.

In Celtic myth, it is rare to find a woman who is not depicted as reliant upon a man in some way. Medb receives help from many people in the story, yet it is through the strength of her own will and self-reliance. If one perceives Medb as an instigator for the cattle raid, then it becomes very easy to demonize this strength and with it the image of a powerful woman. Hence, one encounters passages such as this one from Timothy

Roberts’ The Celts in Myth and Legend:

Queen Maeve was classically evil and also a great sorceress who could change her shape to accomplish her ends. She murdered with abandon, browbeat her husband, King Ailill, whose death she finally arranged, and was killed by her nephew Furbraidhe (she had killed his mother, who was her sister), using his sling and a piece of hard cheese instead of a stone. Maeve is so evil and lustful that it is hard not to feel that her character may have been exaggerated by a celibate and no doubt repressed Christian monk anxious to prove the evil nature of women (49).

What is needed in addition to possible recognition for the actions of monks eight hundred years ago, is an understanding of Medb's character and her actions as a human being. Medb responds to the situation of the Tain as a leader and a warrior. In doing so, she shows an incredible strength and perseverance. Medb can be seen as a strong role model for Celtic women today. Although Connacht did not win the war for the bull (and although many people died in the process), in the story of the Tain, Medb achieves what she set out to do. When the two bulls kill each other, Ailill and Medb are once again equal in their possessions and claims of "rightful" rulers. The polarities have been resolved and a sense of balance restored.

Three Translations of the Tain Bo Cuailnge

Prior to writing and filming the Bicycle Made of Oly, I examined three different translations of the Tain by Lady Augusta Gregory, Joseph Dunn, and Thomas Kinsella. Each of these translators tells a slightly different story of the Tain. Variations derive from the sources used, the perceived audiences, and the scope of the story.

The first person to translate the Tain into English was Lady Gregory. She accomplished this in 1902. Her translation is based upon *The Book of the Dun Cow*, *The Book of Leinster*, and other ancient texts. In her notes at the end of her book she states, "I have had to work by comparing and piecing together various translations" (Gregory, 355). She does not, however, alert her readers of the specifics of this process. She lists but does not cite her references. Gregory has been labeled as "a proper Victorian woman" (Roberts, 49) and faulted for omitting portions of the story which she found to be lewd.

While Gregory may be ill at ease with the sexual references found throughout the Tain, she is both a scholar and an artist, with her own vision and concepts of the story.

Gregory tells the story of the Tain in the middle of a larger story of which Cuchulainn is the focus. Her audience is the people of Kiltartan, Ireland in the year 1902, not academics and scholars. Her motivations for writing the book were to bring Cuchulainn to life, for people seemed to know little about him. She states in her dedication of the book that “although you have not to go far to get stories of Finn and Goll and Oisin from any old person in the place, there is very little history of Cuchulainn and his friends left in the memory of the people, but only that they were brave men and good fighters, and that Deirdre was beautiful” (p. v).

She knew that stories about Cuchulainn existed in some of the older manuscripts, but that these were not easily accessible to everyone. She states,

When I went looking for the stories in the old writings, I found that the Irish in them is too hard for any person to read that has not made a long study of it. Some scholars have worked well at them, Irishmen and Germans and Frenchmen, but they have printed them in the old cramped Irish, with translations into German or French or English, and these are not easy for you to get, or to understand, and the stories themselves are confused, every one giving a different account from the others in some small thing, the way there is not much pleasure in reading them (v).

She concentrated on translating the stories into English in a plain language which could be easily understood. One gets the impression that Gregory put together this book out of a sense of need. Later she states, “if there was more respect for Irish things among the learned men that live in the college at Dublin, where so many of these old writings are stored, this work would not have been left to a woman of the house, that has to be

minding the place, and listening to complaints, and dividing her share of the food” (vi). Nevertheless, this work was left “to a woman of the house.”

At the time when Lady Gregory put together this book, Ireland was still under the domain of England and at the beginning of

an extraordinary national renaissance which express[ed] itself in literature, art, industry, social idealism, religious fervour and personal self-sacrifice. Deprived of the means of learning, impoverished and ground down, the Irish people for 200 years [had] not known culture or freedom, and their history for that period is gloomy reading” (MacManus, 684).

Lady Gregory’s desire for the Irish to remember Cuchulainn can be linked to the political movement at the time and Ireland’s struggle for independence from England. Cuchulainn was a mighty figure who once held off an entire army single-handedly, relying upon his wits as well as his prowess. The comparison between Cuchulainn and modern Irish “has not been lost on the Irish during their struggle for independence from the British Empire” (Roberts, 51).

Because Gregory was focusing upon Cuchulainn’s life, she approached the Tain from a very different perspective than Joseph Dunn. Dunn begins the story of the Tain with “The Pillow Talk”. Gregory, on the other hand, includes a hundred and seventy-five pages of story before she comes to this point. In these pages, she relates to her readers important facts about Cuchulainn’s life as well as some of the other major characters involved in the Tain. She describes how Cuchulainn’s best friend, Fergus, ends up in Medb’s army because of the treacherous acts performed by Conchubar (pronounced **kon-chov**-or or **kon-chor**), Cuchulainn’s (and previously Fergus’) king. She also describes the death of Medb’s son, Maine Morgor (The Very Dutiful), and Conchubar’s

role in killing Maine. In telling the story of the Tain, Gregory first introduces her readers to the characters of the story and the relationships which existed between these characters. These relationships are very much an integral part to the whole story for they help to describe the existing tensions between the royal provinces of Connacht and Ulster prior to the War for the Bull of Cuailnge.

From Gregory's perspective, the causes for the Tain stem as much from bad relationships as they do from Medb and Ailill's discussion in bed. When Gregory tells the story of Medb's son, Maine, she relates to her readers the appearance of a woman in both Conchubar's and Medb's dreams. This dream woman alerts Conchubar to a future war which will be fought over the brown bull of Cuailnge. It is this foretelling which spurs Conchubar to attack and kill Maine. The appearance of the dream woman can be linked to the Morrigan as a prophet and suggests an inevitability to the battle of Cuailnge (i.e. Medb is not the instigator).

Joseph Dunn's translation of the Tain appeared in 1914. This translation is more descriptive than the others—so much so that it is more difficult to read. Dunn includes a detailed discussion of the Tain and his translation in his preface. For his translation, Dunn relied upon one primary source found in the *Book of Leinster*. He notes that the *Book of Leinster* contains the only complete version of the Tain (xxvi). Neither the *Book of the Dun Cow* nor the *Yellow Book of Lecan*, written near the year 1391 (xxiii) is as extensive as the *Book of Leinster*. This version of the Tain from the *Book of Leinster* was written around the year 1150 (xxiv). Dunn believes this version of the Tain to be “the most uniform and consistent, the most artistically arranged, the one with the most colour

and imagination, and the one which lends itself most readily to translation” (xxvi). Dunn believes a translator should be “faithful rather than literal” (xxvii), but he also adds:

owing to the fact that so little of Celtic scholarship has filtered down even to the upper strata of the educated public and to the additional fact that the subject matter is so incongruous to English thought, the first object of the translator from the Old Irish must continue to be, for some time to come, rather exactness in rendering than elegance, even at the risk of the translation appearing laboured and puerile.

Dunn attempts to remain as true to the literary form of the original as possible. One way in which he does this is by deliberately using archaic English in his translation.

It means much to the reader of a translation of an old Irish text to have the atmosphere of the original transferred as perfectly as may be, and this end is attained by preserving its archaisms and quaintness of phrase, its repetitions and inherent crudities and even, without suppression or attenuation, the grossness of speech of our less prudish ancestors, which is also a mark of certain primitive habits of life but which an over-fastidious translator through delicacy of feeling might wish to omit (xxvii).

Dunn’s argument is persuasive for his perceived audience of 1914. However, eighty some years later, this version of the Tain is more difficult to read than other versions which do not use archaic English. His use of language makes it difficult to see the story beneath the words.

Dunn’s version of the Tain begins with “The Pillow Talk,” for this is how the story starts in the manuscript. He does not include any of the pre-tales to help readers better understand the circumstances of the Tain. By narrowing his focus to one story from one manuscript, he ignores the traditional web of stories to which the Tain is linked.

Kinsella’s version of the Tain was translated in 1969. This version is the one upon which The Bicycle Made of Oly is primarily based. The events of the Tain are very

similar in all three translations, however, the stories themselves differ. Kinsella's version seems both more stark and more graphic than the others. His use of language rings true to the art of storytelling. He also uses original artwork by Louis Le Brocqy to illustrate the myth. Brocqy's rough and splotchy black and white paintings help the reader to visualize the Tain, in all of its gruesome details. These illustrations match Kinsella's translation as combinations of both primitive and intricately complex elements. These illustrations also give visual support to the polar tensions between light and dark in the story. Like Lady Gregory, Kinsella perceives his audience as everyday people, in contrast to Dunn's more scholarly treatment. Kinsella's notes, however, are much more detailed and coherent than Gregory's.

Kinsella uses the *Yellow Book of Lecan* as the basis for his translation, supplementing missing pieces from the *Book of Leinster*. He prefers this version to the *Book of Leinster* for he feels that the compiler of the *Book of Leinster* "had, besides a care for completeness, a generally florid and adjectival style, running at times to an overblown decadence(257-8). Kinsella's translation is not literal. "Sentence structure and tense, for example have been changed without hesitation; proper names have been substituted for pronouns, and vice versa; a different range of verbs have been used; and so on" (258). Kinsella's emphasis in his translation is making the story accessible to readers of all ages and incorporating much of the magic and raw earthiness which is lost in Lady Gregory's translation. For example, Lady Gregory writes:

And now that the army was coming so near to Cualigne, the War-goddess, the Battle Crow, the Morrighu, came and sat on a pillar-stone at Teamhair, and gave a warning to the Brown Bull of Cuailnge, and it is what she said: "Have a care, and keep a good

watch, my poor bull, or the men of Ireland will come on you and will drive you away to their camp” (197-8).

Whereas Kinsella’s version runs :

Now it was that the Morrigan settled in bird shape on a standing stone in Temair Chuailnge, and said to the Brown Bull:

‘Dark one are you restless
 do you guess they gather
 to certain slaughter
 the wise raven
 groans aloud
 that enemies infest
 the fair fields
 ravaging in packs
 learn I discern
 rich plains
 softly wavelike
 baring their necks
 greenness of grass
 beauty of blossoms
 on the plains war
 grinding heroic
 hosts to dust
 cattle groans the Badb
 the raven ravenous
 among corpses of men
 affliction and outcry
 and war everlasting
 raging over Cuailnge
 death of sons
 death of kinsmen
 death death!’ (98)

Kinsella’s Translation

Kinsella is telling the story of the War for the Bull of Cualinge. However, unlike Dunn, he recognizes that readers should know some of the background to the Tain before jumping into “The Pillow Talk.” The Tain is only one story which comes from a tradition of interrelated stories. Together, these stories tell a larger story than the Tain by itself is

capable. In his translation, Kinsella includes various “remscela,” such as “The Pangs of Ulster,” “Exile of the Sons of Uisliu,” and others, which come from various ancient texts and lead up to the cattle raid. He also includes in his introduction a ninth century anecdote from the *Book of Leinster*. This is something which Dunn, tied to a single text, omitted from his translation. The anecdote describes how the Tain was found and incorporates magical motifs understood by the Irish culture of the past and present. The scene is set with poets of Ireland seeking the complete version of the Tain Bo Cuailnge. One poet, Muirgen, finds himself at the gravestone of Fergus mac Roich (friend of Cuchulainn and ally of Medb and Ailill).

A great mist suddenly formed around him—for the space of three days and three nights he could not be found. And the figure of Fergus approached him in fierce majesty, with a head of brown hair, in a green cloak and red embroidered hooded tunic, with gold-hilted sword and bronze blunt sandals. Fergus recited him the whole Tain, how everything had happened from start to finish (1-2).

By incorporating this anecdote, Kinsella draws upon the traditional motifs of the mist, the significance of the number three, and the green cloak and red hood to speak intuitively to his readers. All of these motifs in Ireland are symbolic of the Otherworld—where faeries feast and dance with gods and goddesses. Also, by including this anecdote, Kinsella draws upon the image of the bard and reminds his audience of the ancient art of spoken stories.

Kinsella includes seven remscela. Most of these are mentioned in Gregory’s work on Cuchulainn, but because she is telling a different story than Kinsella, these do not have the same emphasis in her work. One remscela which Kinsella describes, and which appears in Gregory’s work, but as an aside rather than a separate tale, is the story known

as “The Pangs of Ulster.” This is the story previously mentioned which explains why the men of Ulster are incapacitated when the Medb’s army from Connacht appears to try and take the Brown Bull. “Only three classes of people were free from the pangs of Ulster: the young boys of Ulster, the women, and Cuchulainn” (Kinsella, 8).

One remscela not mentioned at all in Gregory’s work is “The Quarrel of the Two Pig-Keepers and how the Bulls were Begotten.” This story displays cyclical polar tensions of Celtic myth—the kind that are never fully resolved and continually reappear in various forms. By including this tale in the Tain, Kinsella places more of a supernatural and cosmic emphasis upon the causes for the Tain from those described in Gregory’s work. This supernatural emphasis is found in The Bicycle Made of Oly as the Morrigan is displayed as the agent responsible for Medb’s missing bike.

The story tells of two pig-keepers who worked in different provinces of Ireland. Both pig-keepers were sorcerers and good friends. However, because they were from different provinces a sense of rivalry, created by the people from those provinces, grew and disturbed their friendship. The people from the various provinces were concerned with who was the more powerful sorcerer. The pig-keepers tested their sorcery on each other’s pigs. Their tests proved their powers to be equal, however, as a result of their tests, the pigs became lean and both pig-keepers were dismissed from their trades.

Upon their dismissals, they transformed themselves into birds of prey and spent a year in each province quarreling and making as much noise as they could. In Munster, they transformed back into their human shapes to relay a message to the people gathered: “We bring you only war-wailing and a fullness of friends’ corpses” (48). The two sorcerers then transformed into the shapes of various beings fighting with each other in

various parts of Ireland. Eventually they both become maggots—one is swallowed by the bull of Cuailnge, the other by Finnbennach, Ailill (and Medb's) bull.

Rucht and Friuch were their names when they were pig-keepers; Ingen and Eitte, Talon and Wing, when they were two birds of prey; Bled and Blod, Whale and Seabeast, when they were two undersea creatures; Rinn and Faerbur, Point and Edge, when they were two warriors; Scath and Sciath, Shadow and Shield when they were two phantoms; and Cruinniuc and Tuinniuc when they were two maggots. Finnbennach Ai, the White, and Donn Cuailnge, the Brown, were their names when they were two bulls (49).

Once again polarities become apparent in Celtic myth. The tension caused by these polarities is cyclical in that it is never resolved and continually reappears. It is this tension which is the basis for the Tain. The characters and their relationships to one another are also important, but the root of the story lies within the Celtic fascination for polarities and the cyclical nature of the world.

The story of the pig-keepers reveals not only the Celtic fascination with polarities, but also that of cosmology. This cosmology is evident as the two sorcerers shape-shift into different forms. They change from humans to birds to undersea creatures in shape as their physical presence moves from a middle world to above to below. This cyclical movement reappears as they change into warriors, phantoms, and maggots, whereupon they re-enter the middle world as bulls.

This type of repeating cyclical movement can also be found in the Tain Bo Cuailnge. This movement continues to refer to cosmological aspects of Celtic myth, while uniting these aspects through blood. Running in the background of the Tain, buried beneath tales of Cuchulainn's war feats is a bloody story of another kind. This story illustrates Medb as a representation of the moon endowed with the creative power

of menstrual blood. Medb's daughter, Finnabair (pronounced **fin**-av-ir), also symbolizes the moon as it moves through its stages of new to full to new again. This is revealed as Finnabair dies throughout the story, only to reappear in a later scene.

At various points during the conflict, Medb and Ailill offer their daughter Finnabair in marriage to a warrior capable of defeating Cuchulainn. She is first offered to specific warriors who are slain by Cuchulainn. Next she is offered to anyone capable of defeating Cuchulainn. Many warriors attempt and fail until Medb and Ailill offer her to Cuchulainn in exchange for not disturbing anymore of the Connacht army (140). The result of this is that Cuchulainn ends up killing Finnabair (141).

Finnabair's death, however, is not permanent for Medb and Ailill next offer her to Ferdia, Cuchulainn's foster-brother (169). Ferdia is slain by Cuchulainn and the next time Finnabair is mentioned is in relation to her love Rochad mac Faithemain, an ally of Cuchulainn. Finnabair reveals to Medb her love for Rochad. "If you have so much love for him,' Ailill and Medb said, 'sleep with him tonight and ask for a truce for our armies until he comes against us with Conchobor on the day of the great battle'" (215).

Finnabair does this, but when Rochad discovers that she had also been offered to the seven kings of Munster, he seeks vengeance against Ailill's sons. As a result, "seven hundred died slaughtering each other there in Glenn Domain. When Finnabair heard that seven hundred men died because of her deceit, she fell dead of shame" (215).

The next time Finnabair is mentioned is at the end of the battle, where it is noted that "Ailill and Medb made peace with Ulster and Cuchulainn. For seven years afterward none of their people was killed in Ireland. Finnabair stayed with Cuchulainn, the Connachtmen went back to their own country, and the men of Ulster went back to Emain

Macha full of their great triumph” (253). In his notes, Kinsella comments on Finnabair’s final reappearance. He states, “this is merely part of the story-teller’s final flourish. It ignores Finnabair’s death, in the episode ‘Rochad’s Bloodless Fight, and the fact that Emer was Cuchulainn’s wife” (294). Kinsella has no note for Finnabair’s reappearance between her first and her second death, however.

Cosmological Forces

Finnabair’s deaths and resurrections correspond in both Kinsella’s and Dunn’s translations. They are no mere flourishes; they illustrate the phases of the moon. In her article, “The Cattle Raid of Cooley,” Eileen Bolton examines the characters and events of the Tain in relation to the time of year in the story and the corresponding planetary movement at this time of year. She recognizes Medb as a “moon-queen” (147) and Cuchulainn as “the sun-hero” (145). Finnabair, as Medb’s daughter, also represents the moon. As the moon wanes and waxes, so does Finnabair die and return to life.

Polarities of darkness and light are also found in relation to Cuchulainn and Medb, as symbols of the sun and moon. Prior to the march of the Connacht army, the prophet, Fedelm, gives a foretelling of the battle to Medb. She states:

I see a battle: a blond man
with much blood about his belt
and a hero-halo round his head.
His brow is full of victories (Kinsella, 61).

Throughout the story of the Tain, Cuchulainn is very much associated with light. Every time he became angry enough to induce his “warp-spasm”(a term which comes from Kinsella’s translation) in which he turned into a monster capable of slaying anything in

his path, fire and mist spouted from his head and “the hero-halo rose out of his brow”

(153). In the Tain, Cuchulain takes on the role of “the son of light”:

The primal goddess of the Celts was the Mother, often dark and terrible, mysterious and severe. But of equal significance was her son, who we may call the Son of Light. This god, frequently identified with Apollo in classical and Romano-Celtic sources, had various forms (Stewart, 104) .

As the polarities align themselves in the Tain, Cuchulainn’s counterpart and opponent, Medb, represents the dark and mysterious forces of the moon.

The climax of the battle occurs when Cuchulainn has an opportunity to kill Medb while she is defenseless. The reason she is defenseless is because she is attending to her personal needs. “Medb got her gush of blood” (Kinsella, 250). This gush was so big, “it dug three great channels, each big enough to take a household” (250). The menstrual blood is one of the “lewd” parts which Lady Gregory omitted from her book, illustrating the taboo nature of this subject during the time in which she wrote. The fact that the tensions in the story of the Tain between Cuchulainn and Medb end with Medb’s menstruation, places emphasis upon this occurrence and allows one to see the story as symbolic of a menstrual cycle. This is the only place in the story where menstruation is mentioned and it is important because it reveals the cyclical nature of women as related to the cosmological force of the moon.

In their book The Great Cosmic Mother, Monica Sjoo and Barbara Mor examine ancient mythologies of the world in relation to human female biology. Their cross-cultural approach reveals that “women’s menstrual blood always was, always is of the essence of the creative power of the Great Mother” (186). It is this power on which many of the world’s mythologies are based. In examining the Tain from this perspective,

Medb and her daughter, Finnabair, act in the role of Moon Goddess as described in the chapter “Mother, Daughter, and Rebirth” (165-170). “*The moon is the Goddess who dies and rises again*. The fruit that produces itself out of itself, with the power of life over death. The moon dies, and then conquers darkness to rise again as the new moon, small at first but with energy within to recreate herself” (170). Finnabair’s deaths and rebirths are an illustration of this energy.

Medb also is linked to the moon by the timing of the march of her army. The Connacht army departed for Ulster the Monday after Samhain. Both Kinsella’s and Dunn’s translations agree upon this detail. Why Monday? It seems an unlikely detail to include unless it has significance. Robert Graves in *The White Goddess*, examines the connections between days of the week with various trees and planets. “The seven sacred trees of the Irish grove were: birch, willow, holly, hazel, oak, apple, and alder” (259).

Their corresponding days and planets are:

Sun	Sunday	Birch
Moon	Monday	Willow
Mars	Tuesday	Holly
Mercury	Wednesday	Hazel (or ash)
Jupiter	Thursday	Oak
Venus	Friday	Apple
Saturn	Saturday	Alder

(260)

Therefore, Medb begins the march of her army on the day which corresponds with the moon. This also occurs at the beginning of winter-- the Celtic holiday Samhain marks the passage of the earth as it crosses into its dying phase. The Tain then is not just a story about a war for a bull, but a description of celestial movements and a never-ending story about the powers of the universe linked with creation and destruction.

Re-creation of the Tain

The Bicycle Made of Oly attempts to call attention to the Celtic belief of creation and destruction as one force and inseparable. The title of the video refers to this belief, for through the destruction of Medb's bike, the video ends with the main characters attempting to collect parts and pieces of the old bike to rebuild a new one. To Celts who participated in the belief of the inseparability of creation and destruction, this aspect would have been an integral part of the story and would not need special emphasis. However, my audience comprises modern Americans whose understanding of the universe varies greatly from the Celts of ancient and medieval times.

In The Bicycle Made of Oly, I place emphasis upon the supernatural and virtually ignore Cuchulainn's war feats. My focus is upon Medb and the circumstances surrounding the story of the Tain. In other words, I have changed the story considerably from the versions which I encountered. However since "translation is re-creation" (Gullace, 19), these changes are justifiable in re-creating the story of the Tain for a contemporary American audience.

In his article titled "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," Roman Jakobson describes three different types of translation: intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic (145). Intralingual translation is a rewording using the same language. Interlingual translation occurs between two separate languages. Intersemiotic translation interprets a written form into a non-written one. Gregory, Dunn and Kinsella were all performing interlingual translation in that they were translating from Old Irish into English. However, all three of these translators relied upon more than one source to fill in the

“missing” parts of the story of the Tain. Gregory used the *Book of the Dun Cow* as well as the *Book of Leinster*. Dunn relied most heavily upon *The Book of Leinster*, but also referred to both the *Book of the Dun Cow* and the *Yellow Book of Lecan*. Kinsella primarily used the *Yellow Book of Lecan* but also the *Book of Leinster*. All three of these translators were also performing intralingual translation in their rearrangement of the story pieces found in the various manuscripts to assemble a larger story known as the Tain. My translation is both intralingual, through rearrangement of story pieces, as well as intersemiotic, through the translation of a written to visual form.

Jakobson also suggests that due to the nature of poetry, it is untranslatable. “Only creative transposition is possible: either intralingual transposition--from one poetic shape into another, or interlingual transposition--from one language into another, or finally intersemiotic transposition—from one system of signs into another, e.g., from verbal art into music, dance, cinema, or painting” (151). Giovanni Gullace, in his essay entitled “Translation: A Humanist’s Reflection and Experience” agrees with Jakobson on this issue when he states, “poetry is definitely untranslatable” (18). However, he adds that “what the translation can offer is a variation far removed from the original. Such a variation is a re-creation of the theme” (18). The Bicycle Made of Oly re-creates themes found in the Tain rather than attempting to translate the story scene for scene. Due to the discrepancies between ancient Irish and contemporary American cultures, this type of re-creation seemed more feasible an attempt at a direct translation. The video, therefore, can be viewed as an intersemiotic translation which attempts to re-create themes of sovereignty, polarities, and cosmic interplay found in the Tain

It is possible that this is not the first time that this story has undergone this type of re-creation. The Irish manuscripts which were compiled in medieval times were based upon stories much older—stories which were relayed orally by court poets, or *filid*, before they appeared in print. Therefore, these stories have already gone through one transposition from an oral to a written form. Henry Glassie in his introduction to Irish Folktales notes some of the problems which occur when oral stories are taken and set in print (10-26). The problems arise around the issue of motive. When storytellers relay a story, they are connecting to their audiences and to their sources from which they learned the story. In this way traditions are maintained. When an interested party steps in to record part of the storytelling experience in some way, the connections between audience and source are rearranged, and in many cases broken. Modern folklorists have developed various methods which attempt to compensate for this break in connection, however the medieval Irish scribes who recorded the stories found in the ancient manuscripts, give no indication that this was a concern for them. Modern scholars of these stories can only guess at the significance which connected ancient audiences, tellers, and sources of these stories. The story which has been called “the Irish Iliad” (Dunn, xi) is just a shell of a story experience. Every time this story was told would have been different depending upon who was telling, who was listening, the societal norms, and environmental factors.

The Bicycle Made of Oly adds yet another transposition and shape to the collection of the various forms of the Tain. By telling the story through video, the experience of the story will perhaps be closer to that of an oral story telling experience than through reading. Reading is an individual act, whereas videos are often watched collectively. Also, my own fieldwork on American recreational folklore has revealed that

people often use the time gathered to watch television and videos collectively as a time to exchange stories as well. Hence, by using video to portray my version of the Tain, it is my hope that this story format will be in harmony with other aspects of American culture.

The Bicycle Made of Oly

by Sarah Batchelder

[Based upon The Tain Bo Cuailnge]

Characters:

Medb- (pronounced mayv) A woman that don't take no jive turkey. Someone's taken her bike and she wants it back.

Milkbone- A highly skilled individual who has a tendency to take on too much and act rashly. At times, he can work himself up into quite a rage.

Fergus- friend to both Medb and Milkbone

AI III- Medb's consort/ boyfriend.

Mary Morrigan- A.K.A. The Morrigan- goddess of battle and procreation, triple goddess, often appears in raven/ battle crow form.

Condare- Milkbone's co-worker at the Olympia Bicycle Library

MR- a bike messenger, Medb's friend

The beginning of the video consists of the title, a shot of an old book of the Tain being opened, and a short montage of Olympia shots which are followed by two brief interviews.

Interview with Fergus and Milkbone

Interviewer: Before we get started with our story, let's try to get some of these relationships straight. Milkbone, how do you know Condare?

Milkbone: Well, when I first came to this town, he was basically the first person I met.

Fergus: That's not true.

Interviewer: Fergus, please. You'll get a chance to speak.

Milkbone: Okay, besides Fergus, Condare was my first friend here. We have lots of similar interests- particularly bikes.

Fergus: I don't know how you can stay friends with that lying nimwit.

Interviewer: Fergus

Milkbone: It's true he does have some bad habits, but we get along well.

Fergus: You're deluding yourself if you don't think he'd just use you to get what he wants.

Interviewer: So, Fergus can you clarify for the viewers how you feel about Condare?

Fergus: I can't stand the guy

Interviewer: But you used to be friends?

Fergus: We used to be friends before he lied to me on a certain occasion.

Interviewer: Could you elaborate?

Fergus: I don't wish to tell the whole sordid story, but I will say that as a result of his lies, some close friends of mine are now dead.

Interviewer: How do you feel about Milkbone?

Fergus: Well I wish he would get his head screwed on tighter and discontinue his friendships with dishonorable people, but I suppose everyone's got their own paths to follow.

Milkbone: That's right, so let it rest.

Fergus: But other than that, I haven't got anything against the pup.

Interview with Medb

Interviewer: So, Medb, can you tell the folks back home how you know Fergus?

Medb: I met Fergus a few years ago through Condare. That was back when Condare and I were going out.

Interviewer: Oh, you used to go out with Condare?

Medb: Yeah, that ended in disaster. He was seeing other women and lying to me about it.

Interviewer: So what happened?

Medb: I broke up with him.

Interviewer: Did you try to retain any sort of friendship?

Medb: Are you kidding? No way. And even if I had thought about it, it wasn't too much later that he lied to Fergus, so I have no interest in being friends with Condare.

Interviewer: What happened with Fergus?

Medb: Oh, it's a long story... I don't think it's quite appropriate to get into it here...

Interviewer: So you and Fergus are good friends then?

Medb: Definitely.

The interviews are followed by another montage which focuses upon the theme of water. This montage leads to a shot of the spring at 4th Ave. parking lot with Mary Morrigan seen in association with this spring. Prior to this image, spinning ravens are shown to help portray this character. The Morrigan is known for transforming herself into this bird. Mary Morrigan is then seen walking down an alley with a green bike. This scene leads into a dream sequence of Medb's and a shot of the book opening to "The Pillow Talk."

Narration: It happened one time that Medb and Al Ill awoke in their bed...

Scene 1: The Pillow Talk

Setting: Al Ill and Medb's place. It's morning and the two are just waking up. They yawn and roll over.

Al Ill: You know what they say, love barge, it's well for the woman of a wealthy man.

Medb: That's a weird thing to wake up saying, honey bucket. Who says that?

Al III: You know, it's one of those sayings... Like the pot calling the kettle black.

Medb: Huh, I never heard that one.

Al III: What? The pot

Medb: No, the other one, about the wealthy man.

Al III: The wife of the wealthy man.

Medb: What made you think of that?

Al III: I don't know. I guess it just occurred to me how much better off you are since we hooked up. I don't mean for you to take offense.

Medb: What about you? Is it well for the man of a wealthy wife?

Al III: Are you wealthy, then?

Medb: Well it depends on what you define as wealth? If wealth is waking up to birdsong next to the man I love, a man without meanness or jealousy, than I am very wealthy. But I might add that you are as well to be with me. (She tickles him).

Al III: (laughing) Yes! Yes, I agree.

Medb: But if you're talking about wealth as in cash flow, all I have to say is- not interested. I mean, I got my albums, I got my espresso maker, I got my bike. That's all I need. Money isn't as important to me as love and life. (She pauses- remembering her dream- and slowly gets out of bed.)

Al III: What's wrong?

Medb: I had a strange dream and... It's gone! My bike's gone! What the... You're not playing some weird joke on me are you? Cuz it's not funny.

Al III: I wouldn't do that (Getting up out of bed.)

Medb: Well my bike's missing, but yours isn't...

Al III: Are you sure you brought it in, maybe it's outside.

Medb: Yes, I'm sure I brought it in. I always bring it in.

Al III: So where is it?

A shot of "Who Stole my bike?" graffiti

Scene 2

Setting: Package Express (a private postal center)- Medb's place of work. Medb is in the background sorting mail. MR enters.

MR: Hey! How's it going?

Medb: (looks up from what she's doing) Hey MR.

MR: What's up? Do you have a message that needs delivering?

Medb: (walking forward with an envelope) Just this. (Handing it) It needs to go somewhere over by the courthouse.

MR: (glancing at the envelope) What? No message of love or sunshine?

Medb: Naw, I'm bumming today.

MR: How come?

Medb: My bike's missing.

MR: No way!

Medb: Yeah, It just disappeared from my house.

MR: No way, I know where your bike is.

Medb: You do? Where?

MR: It's at the bicycle library. I saw it this morning. I thought it looked a lot like your bike. I even mentioned it to Condare.

Medb: What'd he say?

MR: Umm, he was just like, yeah, it does. Like he hadn't noticed.

Medb: Did he say where it came from?

MR: I think he said some woman donated it that morning.

Medb: Who?

MR: I don't know.

Medb: And you're pretty sure it was my bike.

MR: It was green. Kinda small...

Medb: Well, I better call down there before they paint it pink and put it on the street. Do you know the # there?

MR: Yeah, it's 669-3323. Hey I'm gonna check out the candy machine next door. You want anything?

Medb: Chocolate.

MR: Any particular kind?

Medb: Nope, whatever looks good.

MR: I'll see what's there.

(exit MR for the amount of time it takes to go to the candy machine next door.

She reenters during the middle or end of Medb's conversation with Condare.)

Phone Scene (clips between Medb and Condare)

(Medb dials)

Condare: Hello, Olympia Bicycle Library

Medb: Condare?

Condare: Medb.

Medb: Yep. Hey I'm calling cuz I'm at work and I was talking to MR, and she told me that you have a bike down there that someone donated this morning that looks a lot like mine.

Condare: Yeah, actually we do. Someone dropped it off here- I found it outside this morning with a note attached to it.

Medb: What did the note say?

Condare: It said that the bike was a donation and then it gave a name and phone number.

Medb: Did you call it? Cuz my bike disappeared from my house last night and I'm not quite sure what's going on, but I'd like to get my bike back if you have it.

Condare: Yeah, you know, I didn't really realize that it looked like your bike til MR pointed it out. I called the woman, but there was no answer.

Medb: Who donated it?

Condare: The name on the note is Mary Morrigan. At least, I think that's what it says.

Medb: Don't know her

Condare: Yeah, me neither

Medb: So when can I get my bike back?

Condare: Um, I want to see if I can get a hold of her before we make arrangements

Medb: Why? I mean why not just give me my bike back?

Condare: Well, I'm curious as to what this is all about. It does seem sort of random that your bike would just show up here.

Medb: Yeah, I agree, but why do you have to have my bike to find out what's going on?

Condare: Well, I don't it's just that there is a possibility that you're not being honest with me. How do I know that this woman didn't get the bike from you legitimately?

Medb: Oh, you don't think I'm being honest? That's pretty hypocritical coming from you. So according to your master plan then, when can I get my bike back?

Condare: You don't have to get all tense- It's not going to get painted pink anytime soon- Milkbone's out of town til tomorrow. He the one that does most of the restoration and painting. I just want to call this woman and see what she has to say.

Medb: And if you can't get a hold of her?

Condare: I'll give you a call back this afternoon- whether I've talked to her or not.

Medb: I'm here til six

Condare: All right I'll talk to you later.

Medb: Yeah, don't forget.

-They hang up-

MR: So?

Medb: So, he's power trippin'

MR: Besides that.

Medb: He's gonna call me back later. He wants to try and get in touch with the woman who dropped off the bike.

MR: Why?

Medb: Cuz he's power trippin'. He says he wants to try and figure out what's going on. He thinks I'm not being honest with him.

MR: (sarcastically) Nice!

Medb: Yeah, that's what I think

MR: So what are you going to do?

Medb: I'll wait til he calls back- see what he's found out, then decide. I do know that there is no way that my bike is getting painted pink and becoming a street bike. Hey, did you get me any chocolate?

MR: No, all they had was lifesavers and potato chips. You want a life saver?
(offering one)

Medb: No thanks

MR: Well I gotta split. Call me tonight and let me know what's going on.

Medb: Okay, I will. Hey and thanks for being in the right place at the right time. I doubt he would have put two and two together and realized he had my bike. Maybe he would have, but he probably wouldn't have called me.

MR: Yeah, no problem. (She leaves).

-Later- at Package Express

-Phone rings-

Medb: Good afternoon, Package Express.

Condare: Yeah, Medb.

Medb: So what'd you find out?

Condare: Nothing. That phone #'s no good. I got one of those messages saying that the phone had been disconnected. Which is weird, cuz when I called earlier, I didn't get that message.

Medb: So is that proof enough for you that it was stolen?

Condare: Yeah, I guess

Medb: So when can I come get my bike?

Condare: I don't know when would be a good time.

Medb: I can be there around 6:30.

Condare: Yeah, that's not going to work for me. I'm going out of town for the weekend and my ride's leaving in a half hour.

Medb: You can't drop it off here?

Condare: No time, and even if there was, my friend doesn't have a rack. How bout this? You arrange with Milkbone when to get the bike. He'll be here tomorrow.

Medb: All day?

Condare: I don't know. Will you be at work all day?

Medb: Yeah

Condare: I'll tell him to call you then

Medb: Fine. Just don't forget.

Condare: I'll leave him a note right now

-They hang up-

Scene 3- The Note

Condare writes Milkbone a note:

Milkbone-

I gotta be gone for a few days. Please do me a favor and call Medb about the green bike. It's hers. I guess it was mistakenly donated here. She wants to get it ASAP and she'll be at her work- Package Express all day Friday. The number is: 352-1596.

Before you do that you might want to try calling the number taped to the bike. That's the number of the person who donated the bike. I didn't have any luck getting in touch with her. There's something pretty fishy about this whole situation. See ya later.

Condare

(shot of him writing with the note narrated in Condare's voice)

Scene 4- Next Day

(enter Milkbone. He finds and reads the note)

Milkbone: Something fishy, eh? (He finds Mary Morrigan's # and calls it. The video shows spinning ravens and a phone ringing with an answering machine with an outgoing message which says):

MR: What's up with that clown?

Medb: I don't know. But Fergus is pretty tight with him so he can't be all bad. I don't really know him, but he seems a bit thick to me. I hope he calls, tho.

MR: Yeah he is a bit of a mulehead. You'd have to be to be friends with Condare. One time I was hanging out with Kelly and we were joking around with....

(the message cuts after Kelly)

Cut back to Milkbone. The message has made him angry. He gets his warp spasm with one eye bigger than the other and his hair freaks out)

Milkbone: Thick, eh? That was MR, I swear that was her voice. She must have been talking with Medb. I'll show them thick.

Trampoline (later that day)

Medb returns from work to find her friend Fergus hanging out at her and Al Ill's place.

Medb: Hey, thanks for coming by. (She hugs him)

Fergus: No problem. You sounded a bit frazzled on the phone.

Medb: Yeah, your friend Milkbone was supposed to call me today about my missing bike, and he never did. And I tried calling him a dozen times and got no answer.

Fergus: Your bike's missing?

Medb: Yeah, it disappeared from inside the house the night before last. Then, yesterday MR was at the bike library and saw it there, so I talked to Condare. He eventually agreed to give my bike back to me.

Fergus: How did he get it?

Medb: I don't know He said he found it at the bike library with a note attached to it that said it was a donation. I don't know why someone would go to the trouble to steal it just to donate it, though.

Fergus: He probably took it himself

Medb: I've thought about that possibility, but I was trying to give him the benefit of the doubt. So anyway, he agreed to give my bike back, but then he left town in a rush and Milkbone was supposed to get in touch with me today so we could arrange when I could get it. But he never called and he hasn't been at the library, cuz I've been calling there all day.

Fergus: I can call him at his house- see what's up? I know he was out of town for a while.

Medb: Would you do that for me? Yeah, I tried looking up his #, but I couldn't find it. You could invite him over for later, for the Dark Side of the Rainbow

Fergus: Oh, you're doing that? Cool. I haven't done that yet.

Medb: It's kind of spooky.... I'm also going to make cookies later.

Fergus: MMmmmmmm... I'll go call him right now. (He goes inside)

(Medb starts jumping on the trampoline)

Medb: What'd he say?

(Fergus joins her)

Fergus: He said he'd be by sometime later. He didn't really have time to talk, I guess he had to meet with someone. I started to ask him about your bike, but he didn't seem to know what I was talking about. Hey, where's Al Ill?

Medb: He's sick.

Cookie making

Medb is making cookie dough and Fergus is helping/ socializing with her.

Medb: How did Milkbone get his name?

Fergus: Well the story goes that he was raised by a pack of feral chihuahuas in the outskirts of town.

Medb: You believe that?

Fergus: Well, I know he did have a questionable upbringing. He left home at a very young age. Yeah, I don't know about the feral chihuahuas, but I know he can do for days without eating anything, like it's no hardship. But watch out when he does sit down to eat and don't get in his way.

Medb: You know, I was at a Superbowl party a couple of years ago that he was also at. I don't think he stopped eating the entire time. He must have gone through at least five bags of potato chips by himself.

Fergus: Yeah, I believe that.

-Later (once the batter is done)-

MR: Are we going to start soon, cuz I have to leave around ten/ eleven...

Medb: Yeah, we should. (To Fergus) Did Milkbone say when he would be by?

Fergus: No, he didn't. We should just start.

Dark Side of the Rainbow

A group of people are gathered in the living room experiencing popular culture. They listen to Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon while they watch The Wizard of Oz on video.

Enter Milkbone- he arrives late and hungry and goes into the kitchen to find something to eat. The cookie batter is on the counter and he can't resist. Milkbone eats all of the batter, dipping some dog biscuits in to nibble on as well. The video will cut between the two scenes so the viewers will understand that the two scenes are simultaneous. Fergus walks in as Milkbone is licking the bowl clean. Medb walks in shortly afterwards.

Fergus: What are you doing eating all the cookie dough?

Milkbone: Well, you said there was food in here.

Medb: Yeah, there's pasta. Cookie batter isn't regular food. What? You didn't think we weren't going to try and make cookies from that? It was just sittin there? Waiting to be eaten by you? (To Fergus) Your friend needs to learn some better manners. (exits)

Fergus: What's with you man? Meet me at Mud Bay tomorrow morning. I'll teach you some manners. (exits)

Fire breathing

Milkbone goes to his place to think about the days events. His preferred mode of meditation is while breathing fire.

Big Time Mud Wrestling

A shot of the old book of the Tain open to "The Battle of Fergus and Cuchulainn"

Milkbone and Fegus are shown big time wrestling in Mud Bay, Olympia.

Persuasion

Fergus is hanging out at Medb and Al Ill's after wrestling. Milkbone knocks on the door and arrives all flustered.

Milkbone: Where's Medb?

Fergus: Why?

Milkbone: I need to find her. Her bike's disappeared from the shop.

Fergus: Oh (he's not surprised)

Milkbone: You don't seem too concerned

Fergus: I'm not

Milkbone: You wouldn't by chance know where it is?

Fergus: As a matter of fact, I do.

Milkbone: Where is it?

Fergus: Medb has it.

Milkbone: Medb? How'd she get it?

Fergus: She took it this morning. She got tired of waiting for you and Condare to get your acts together. I think she really wanted to go for a bike ride.

Milkbone: So she just took it? When? While we were wrestling?

Fergus: Yeah.

Milkbone: That's not right

Fergus: Well what would you do? Don't tell me that if your bike disappeared, you'd calmly wait for the "proper authorities" to give it back to you- you rash mutt. I know you better than that.

Milkbone: Yeah, but I was gonna give it back to her. You gotta help me find her so I can tell her I'm sorry. Do you know where she went?

Fergus: Yeah, but why don't you just wait til she gets back?

Milkbone: Didn't you just call me rash? I want to find her now.

Fergus: So go.

Milkbone: I need your help. And besides you owe me a favor.

Fergus: I do not! For what?

Milkbone: For not spreading your innards all over Mud Bay to be eaten by ravens, crows, and sea gulls.

Fergus: Bull! I'm the one that had to help you get unstuck so that the tide didn't get you.

Milkbone: I let you win

They hassle each other some before exiting in search of Medb.

The End

Cut to a shot of Medb's bike by the side of a logging road. A car pulls up. Fergus and Milkbone get out, see the bike, and start calling Medb's name.

Narration: It was at this point that Medb got her gush of blood.

Cut to a shot of blood on fingers.

Cut back to Fergus and Milkbone shouting for Medb.

The next scene is Milkbone finding Medb. Medb is behind a tree taking care of her personal needs when Milkbone finds her. She tells him to "hang on a second". When she's ready, Milkbone apologizes for his behavior.

The video cuts to a shot of spinning ravens and then to various shots of trees and the sound of wind.

Narration: Then along came a huge gust of wind which was so powerful it blew Fergus up into a tree. It also caught Medb's bike.

The video cuts to a shot of Fergus hanging from a tree. Fergus is then shown meeting Medb and Milkbone as they emerge from the woods. He tells them that the wind blew the bike over the bridge. The camera then turns a hundred and eighty degrees as it follows the three characters moving towards a train trestle.

The three are then shown looking over the edge of the trestle and searching for Medb's bike.

"Do you see it down there?"

"It's way down there- you can hardly see it."

"If we could get to it, maybe we could salvage some parts to make a new bike"

"I know of a way down."

The video shows the river far below as Medb, Milkbone, and Fergus try to find a way down to the bicycle parts.

Narration: What happens next is outside of the realms of this story.

The camera pans two hundred and seventy degrees to come full circle at the end.

The final shot is of Mary Morrigan waking down the train tracks and heading towards the woods.

Analysis of The Bicycle Made of Oly

Characters:

Significantly fewer characters appear in the The Bicycle Made of Oly than do in the Tain. I knew when I started this project, my resources would be limited and that it would be highly impracticable, if not impossible, to include all of the characters which appear in the Tain. I also knew that I wanted to focus on Medb, rather than Cuchulainn and that Cuchulainn's war-feats would not translate very well. Olympia, Washington has no modern equivalent for ancient Celtic warriors and their tribal battles. Any physical fighting portrayed in this story would have to take on a different form. For these reasons, I used as many characters as my resources would allow and which I felt were essential for portraying the supernatural and cosmic significance of the story.

Cuchulainn's name was changed to Milkbone so that the reference to dogs would remain intact (Cuhulainn's name means hound of Culann and the story of his naming is a part of the Tain). The Morrigan was given the first name of Mary in reference to the mother figure in Christianity, because this religious belief system is predominant in contemporary America. The character Condare is a combination of two characters in the Tain—Conchobar, king of Ulster and Daire, the owner of the Brown Bull of Cuailnge. MR is short for Mac Roth, the herald in the group of messengers which Medb sent to Daire to ask for the loan of the bull.

Mock Interviews:

The interviews with Medb, Fergus, and Milkbone prior to the start of the story are a way to inform the audience of the relationships which exist between four of the main characters—Fergus, Medb, Milkbone, and Condare. The lie which Fergus and Medb mention in the interviews refers to the remscela, Exile of the Sons of Uisliu, which details Conchobar’s treachery and Fergus’ reason for leaving Ulster.

The Beginning:

Prior to the interviews, the video begins with shots of Olympia to help establish a sense of location for the audience. Immediately following the interviews, these Olympia shots continue and lead into a series which is Medb’s dream sequence. In this sequence the Morrigan is seen emerging from the spring located in the parking lot on 4th Ave. In Celtic realms, springs are a connection to the Otherworld. The Morrigan’s association with the spring symbolizes her supernatural status. A shot of an image entitled “Ravens” created by a Welsh artist, Jen Delyth, is shown to alert the audience that the Morrigan is someone out of the ordinary. Also, a shot of a misty field proceeds the sequence to help symbolize supernatural elements. Mist is an indicator of the Otherworld in Celtic myth..

Narration is used at various points in the video to help with transitions between certain scenes. It also serves as a symbol of the oral roots of the Tain.

The Pillow Talk:

In the Tain, the conversation between Medb and Ailill touches on aspects of marriage, wealth, and sovereignty. In The Bicycle Made of Oly, “The Pillow Talk” focuses upon the issue of wealth, and through this, sovereignty. Medb’s idealistic nature

in the video is based upon her character in the Tain. In the myth, Medb states her reasons for marrying Ailill—"I asked a harder wedding gift than any woman ever asked before from a man in Ireland—the absence of meanness and jealousy and fear" (Kinsella, 53). This was the most important aspect of her marriage. Wealth was not a major concern. However, throughout the conversation the issue of wealth is continually referred and leads to the comparison of possessions, which reveals to Medb that Finnbenach, the bull, has joined Ailill's herd.

In the video "The Pillow Talk" leads to the discovery that Medb's bike is missing. The bicycle is a tool which promotes self-sufficiency. When Medb's bicycle is discovered missing, Medb loses her independence in coordinating her transportation needs and desires. She is no longer sovereign in this aspect of her life—not unless she wants to walk everywhere. The Morrigan is shown as the character responsible for this missing bike. This is based upon this goddess' role in the Tain as a catalyst for the cattle raid.

Scene 2 and Phone Scenes:

These scenes refer to Medb's attempts to persuade Daire to loan her the Brown Bull of Cuailnge. The role of the messenger has been altered in the video. MR relays information to Medb concerning the location of the bike, whereas in the Tain, the herald, Mac Roth, is sent to Ulster in hope of his return with the Brown Bull. The Bicycle Made of Oly portrays the telephone as the means of communication between Medb and Condare. The telephone is relied upon as a communication tool in contemporary times (much as heralds were in previous ages). When Milkbone attempts to call Mary

Morrigan for information about the donated bike, he receives a disturbing answering machine message. The telephone wires have been crossed for him to receive this message. In modern times, the Morrigan can be found in the phone system; she is the “ghost in the machine.” From my own experience as a telephone technician, I know that strange and unexplainable occurrences exist within telephone systems which can permit communication mix-ups for no apparent reason.

Warp Spasm:

The term “warp spasm” is refers to Cuchulainn’s transformation into a monstrous warrior when the occasion calls for it. Kinsella gives a vivid description of this transformation: “the hair of his head twisted like a tangle of red thornbush stuck in a gap; if a royal apple tree with all its kingly fruit were shaken above him, scarce an apple would reach the ground but each would be spiked on a bristle of his hair as it stood up on his scalp with rage” (Kinsella, 153). It painted a rather comical picture—a monstrous warrior with apples sticking out of his head. An attempt in maintaining this sense of ludicrous occurs in the video when Milkbone’s wrath is revealed while listening to Mary Morrigan’s answering machine message. In this scene, Milkbone revels in rage with the desired effect of humor.

Polarities:

The tension of oppositions is portrayed in the video in relation to the female and male characters. This begins in “The Pillow Talk” between Medb and Al Ill and is then transferred from Al Ill to Condare, and finally to Milkbone. In the Tain, this tension

moves in a similar fashion first between Medb and Ailill, then briefly between Medb and Daire, and then to Medb and Cuchulainn. Polarities can also be found in the video in the shots of the Medb and Condare on the phone. Medb is portrayed in a bright background with fluorescent lighting while Condare is seen in diffused lighting.

Trampoline:

In this scene, Medb enlists the help of Fergus in her struggle to regain her bike. The two are seen jumping on the trampoline together, while Al Ill is sick in bed. The scene refers to Medb and Fergus' sexual liaison in the Tain. It also helps to set the stage for the following scenes.

Cookie making/ Dark Side of the Rainbow:

While Medb makes cookies Fergus relays information regarding Milkbone's upbringing. This information refers to the deeds associated with Cuchulainn's naming in the Tain and the story of these deeds as told by Fergus to Medb and Ailill after the Connacht army has encountered Cuchulainn. The Celtic tendency for extreme exaggeration can be found in Milkbone's act of eating the entire bowl of cookie batter. Milkbone accomplishes this act through dipping doughnuts and dog biscuits into the batter, which he then consumes.

Fire Breathing:

Cuchulainn has been described in his warp spasm as spouting fire from his head. This "hero-halo" helps to place him in the role as "The Son of Light" in the Tain. The

video portrays Milkbone fire-breathing in reference to Cuchulainn's association with fire and light. This scene brings some of the cosmological aspects of the Tain to the video.

Bigtime Mud Wrestling:

In spite of the fact that The Bicycle Made of Oly does not focus upon Cuchulainn's war feats, it did not seem right to attempt a translation of the Tain without including some form of fighting, for the bulk of the Tain centers upon this. However, in contemporary times, warfare does not exist in the form which is described in the Tain. In the Tain, Cuchulainn and Fergus meet, but do not fight. The video is not true to the Tain in this respect for it portrays Milkbone and Fergus fighting in the form of Bigtime Wrestling. This type of wrestling, however, is recognized by most viewers of this event as a choreographed affair. Therefore, this aspect of the video both refers to the fighting in the Tain while attempting to deal with this in a modern setting—one in which Milkbone and Fergus are not exchanging wounds. Bigtime Wrestling is symbolic of both American and Celtic cultures-- it is an American phenomenon, existing for the most part in the realm of television, yet its style is reminiscent of Celtic exaggeration to the extreme and individual fighting styles displayed in Celtic warfare. This event is exaggerated and connected with the local landscape in its occurrence in Mud Bay, Olympia.

Persuasion:

The scene entitled "Persuasion" is a version of the events which occur between Fergus and Cuchulainn on the battlefield. In the Tain, when Fergus and Cuchulainn meet

but do not fight, Cuchulainn grants Fergus a favor in exchange for a future favor from Fergus. When the two friends meet on the final battlefield, Cuchulainn reminds Fergus of the favor due to him and asks of Fergus to go fight in a different location. Milkbone's plea for help from Fergus in the video refers to this favor exchange between Cuchulainn and Fergus. This scene also acts as a means to reunite these two characters with Medb for the final scene of the video. "Persuasion" ends with Fergus and Milkbone exiting in search of Medb.

The Ending:

I include references to Medb's menstruation for I feel it is symbolic of life forces present within the story of the Tain. While Medb attends to her feminine hygiene needs, a supernatural wind appears and blows her bike off of a very high train trestle. This wind is meant to represent the fight of the two bulls in the Tain, for the remscela of the pig-keepers portrays the bulls' fight as a supernatural occurrence. In the video, the destruction of the bike is attributed to Mary Morrigan through the final shots of the spinning ravens and her presence on the train tracks. Mary Morrigan represents the supernatural aspects of the Tain in this video.

Through the destruction of the bike, Medb and Milkbone resolve their differences so that it is possible for them to work together to build a new bike. The title of the story—The Bicycle Made of Oly— refers to this future act. It links the creative aspect of building a new bike with the destruction of the old bike, and thereby refers to the Celtic belief of the inseparability of creation and destruction.

Conclusion

The Bicycle Made of Oly is a video translation of the Irish myth the Tain Bo Cuailnge. This translation is aimed at a contemporary American audience and based upon Thomas Kinsella's version of the Tain. Due to the discrepancies between ancient Irish and contemporary American cultures as well as the story format from a written to visual form, The Bicycle Made of Oly differs from Kinsella's translation in many regards. It does not attempt to be a direct translation, but rather attempts to re-create themes of sovereignty, polarities, and cosmic interplay found in the Tain.

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