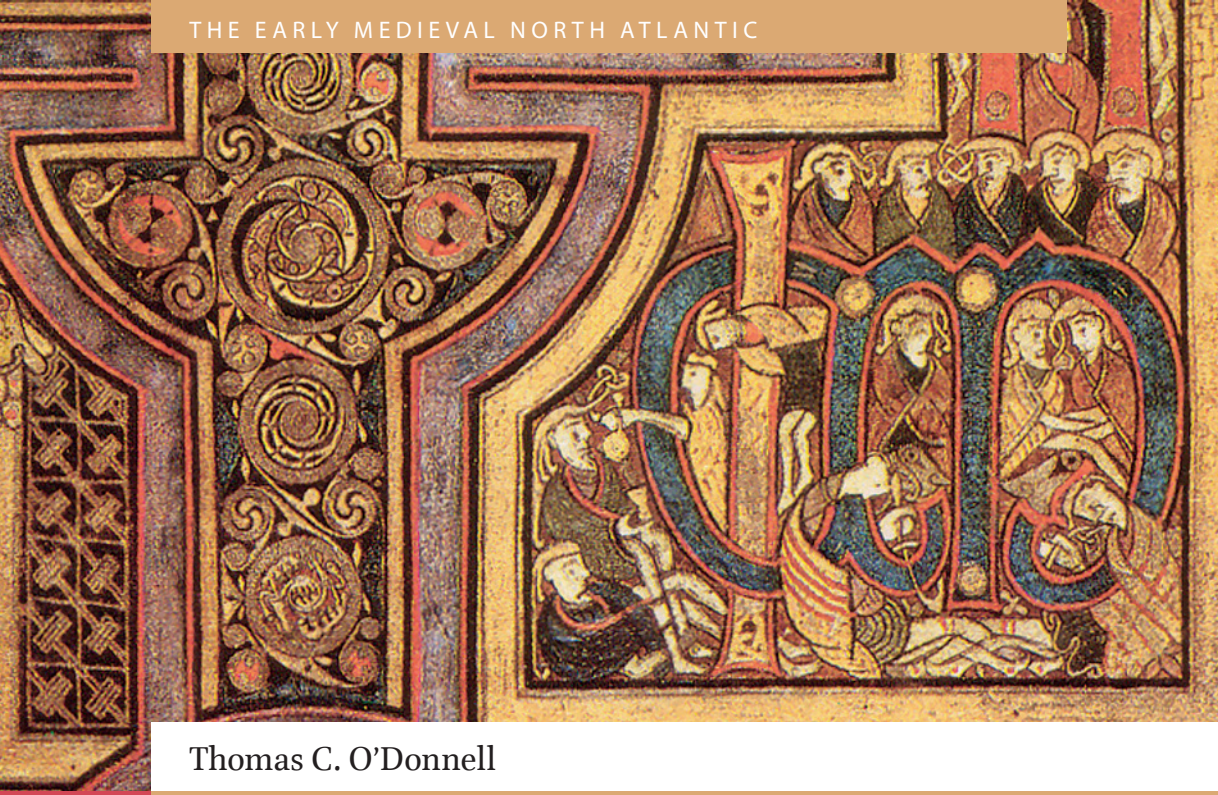


THE EARLY MEDIEVAL NORTH ATLANTIC



Thomas C. O'Donnell

Fosterage in Medieval Ireland

An Emotional History

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Fosterage in Medieval Ireland



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Tom C. O'Donnell

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For Mum, Dad and Feeb,
the emotional bedrock



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Abbreviations

- AFM** *Annala Ríoghachta Éireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1616*, ed. and trans. by John O'Donovan, 7 vols (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1848-1851)
- AnS** *Acallamh na Senórach*, ed. by Whitley Stokes, in *Irische Texte mit Wörterbuch*, ed. by Whitley Stokes and Ernst Windisch, 4 vols (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1880-1909), IV, pp. 1-438
- AU** *The Annals of Ulster*, ed. by W. M. Hennessey and B. Mac Carthy (Dublin: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1893-1895)
- BNE** *Bethada Náem nÉirenn: Lives of the Irish Saints*, ed. and trans. by Charles Plummer, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922)
- CCC** *Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories*, ed. by A. G. van Hamel (Dublin: DIAS, 1968)
- CCH** *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis – Die irische Kanonsammlung*, ed. by Hermann Wasserschleben, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1885)
- CIH** *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, ed. by Daniel A. Binchy, 7 vols (Dublin: DIAS, 1978)
- CMM** *Cath Maíge Mucrama: The Battle of Mag Mucrama*, ed. and trans. by Máirín O'Daly, Irish Texts Society 50 (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1975)
- eDIL** *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language*, based on *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, ed. by E. G. Quin et al. (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1913-1976), <http://www.dil.ie/>
- FO** *Féilire Óengusso Céili Dé: The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*, ed. and trans. by Whitley Stokes (London: Harrison and Sons, 1905)
- FTB** Kuno Meyer, 'Feis Tige Becfholtaig', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 5 (1905), pp. 500-504
- LU** Lebor na hUidre, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 E 25
- PL** *Patrologia Latina*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne, 221 vols (Paris, 1841-1855)
- TBC 1** *Táin Bó Cúailnge Recension 1*, ed. and trans. by Cecile O'Rahilly (Dublin: DIAS, 1976)
- TBC LL** *Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster*, ed. and trans. by Cecile O'Rahilly (Dublin: DIAS, 1967)
- TBDD** *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, ed. by Eleanor Knott (Dublin: DIAS, 1936)
- VSH** *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae: partim hactenus ineditae ad fidem codicum manuscriptorum recognovit prolegomenis notis indicibus instruxit*, ed. by Charles Plummer, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910)
- YBL** Yellow Book of Lecan, Trinity College Library, MS 1318



Acknowledgements

The emotional connections created through fosterage would give me a useful metaphor to express my thanks to everyone who has helped me get this book finished. But that's a bit florid, so I'll keep it classic. It is difficult to express how deep my debt of thanks is to so many people without the added complication of a historical metaphor.

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Introduction

Abstract

In this Introduction the case is made for using the narrative literature of the medieval period to access the emotional lives of foster families in medieval Ireland. Foster families in this context are those formed when freeborn families send their children – often at a very young age – to another family to be raised and educated until the child entered its late teens. The early exposure and continued association between foster parents and siblings to these children created close and lasting emotional ties. The current study will examine those emotional ties by critically engaging with the language used around fosterage and the assumptions that underpin the relationship, as expressed in narratives, to trace the emotional ties of medieval Irish fosterage.

Keywords: history of emotions; medieval Ireland; fosterage; affect; children; fictive families

The twelfth-century tale known as the *Bóroma* (The Tribute) begins by describing the ill-fated lives of the daughters of Tuathal Techtmar, high-king of Ireland. The eldest, Fithir, is described as the ‘beloved foster daughter’ (*dalta dil*), of the king of Connacht. The youngest, Dárine, was fostered by the king of the Ulaid. When they both die of grief and shame caused by the duplicitous actions of their husband, the king of Leinster, both foster fathers muster their armies, march to the border and, according to ‘the men of Connacht’, the foster fathers ‘would not go from Leinster without battle. The Ulaid said the same.’¹ This kicks off the action of the *Bóroma* itself. But what did the love that the king of Connacht expressed for his foster daughter mean? Was the anger that the two foster fathers felt on behalf of their slain foster children justified? What experience in the mind of the

1 Stokes, ‘The *Bóroma*’, pp. 36-39: ‘Iss ed trá róiáidset Connachta na gébatis o Lagnib cen chath. Iss ed cétna ro ráidsetar Ulaid.’ All translations my own, except where noted.

contemporary audience was that relationship speaking to? Was there any social reflection of these emotions within fosterage at all? These are the questions this book seeks to answer.

It is often stated that fosterage was used to create strong emotional bonds between the members of a given foster family. Such an observation is made in modern secondary literature, for example, Preston-Matto likens fosterage to marriage ties: '[F]osterage served as a way to strengthen or re-establish ties between families, or even, perhaps a way to forestall military issues between families much in the same way that marriages were meant to work.'² The same is also said in medieval sources, as the law texts tell us that family ties are brought into the full flourishing of friendship and the later glosses to *Cáin Lánamna* (The Law of Couples) explain the meaning of the word *muimme* (foster mother) as “greater-concerning him” [...] she does things concerning him sooner than every person!³ That is not to say that every foster relationship was positive. Like all emotional bonds it is prey to variation. It is classed as one of the ‘three dark things’ in *Trecheng breth Féne* (The Triads of Ireland), one of the three things with an uncertain outcome.⁴ The turbulent nature of fosterage is commented on in *Tecosca Cormaic* (The Instructions of Cormac), where it is said: ‘Everyone is tranquil until fosterage.’⁵

These assertions about the positive or negative effect of fosterage are rarely investigated further. The mechanisms by which the foster family express this level of care are not exposed. This investigation will trace those emotions, see how the bonds of fosterage were formed and how they fell apart. To get to the heart of fosterage in medieval Ireland the focus will be on how the relationships were expressed in the literature of the period, both Irish and Latin.

What is fosterage?

Before discussing the emotions within fosterage, we must define the practice. Broadly, the upper echelons of medieval Irish society were expected to send their children to another family, usually before age seven, to be raised. The

2 Preston-Matto, ‘Saints and Fosterage in Medieval Ireland’, p. 65.

3 CIH 1762.24; *Cáin Lánamna*, ed. Eska, p. 97: ‘mo-uime, mo do-ní uime [...] mucha do-ní uime “nas gac duine”’.

4 *The Triads of Ireland*, ed. Meyer, pp. 32-33.

5 *The Instructions of King Cormac mac Airt*, ed. and trans. Meyer, pp. 46-47: ‘sobraig cách co altrom’.



child would learn the skills most important to their future role in society alongside the children of their foster parents before returning to their natal family. The foster family consisted of an *oide/aite* (foster father) and a *muimme* (foster mother). They would care for their *dalta* (fosterling), of either sex, who would have one or more *comalta* (foster siblings), usually foster brothers but the term could be applied to foster sisters. These words were used in a variety of contexts to explain a variety of relationships within medieval Irish literature. The legal definition of fosterage and the roles involved will provide a starting place to understand how fosterage worked, how the terms were used, and what their emotional weight was.

Fosterage was regulated by the laws, as was almost every aspect of medieval Irish life. Medieval Irish law is justly viewed as a rich source of information on the social make-up of medieval Ireland. The corpus is large with the modern edition of the vernacular laws running to six volumes. The primary texts were written down between 650 and 750, yet they attracted a range of commentaries and glosses that date from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries.⁶ The laws are also literary products which interacted with contemporary oral practice and culture. Accessing a definitive picture of fosterage from such source materials is a challenge. Yet they do provide us with a picture of how some members of that society viewed the fosterage system. Although fragmentary, *Cáin Íarraith* (The Law of Fosterage Payments) is a legal tract specifically addressing child-rearing and fosterage. Beyond this, fosterage occurs in some other legal tracts, which allows us to reconstruct some of the assumptions around the practice, albeit with the caveats laid out above.

Previously fosterage has been analysed from this legal angle, since the law texts lay out the rights and responsibilities of all involved. While this appears to create a clear picture of fosterage, it is worth recalling the difficulty in using the evidence from law to point to social reality.⁷ The disjuncture is particularly striking in the case of fosterage as legal texts concentrate on one form of the practice to the detriment of the other: 'The laws distinguish two types of fosterage. One is fosterage for affection (*altram serce*) for which no fee is paid. The other type of fosterage is for a fee and is dealt with in the law-text *Cáin Íarraith*.⁸ *Íarraith* is the word for 'fosterage fee', whereas *serc*

6 Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish Law', I, p. 331; Breatnach, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici*.

7 Binchy, 'The Linguistic and Historical View of the Irish Law Tracts'; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 225-263; Patterson, 'Brehon Law in Late Medieval Ireland'; McLeod, 'The Concept of Law'; Charles-Edwards, *Early Medieval Gaelic Lawyer*.

8 Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 87.



means 'love', in both its sacred and profane guises. That the focus of the law is on fee rather than affection is not surprising. As Stacey has shown with regard to contracts: 'Long-term relationships like clientship, fosterage, and tutoring were generally not undertaken by the elaborate mechanisms and guarantors characteristic of the formal oral contract.'⁹ Fosterage does appear in legal texts, but they shed very little light on how it was practiced and experienced day to day.

When the fee was handed over, a series of legal obligations were created that tied the foster family together. Legal responsibility over the child was transferred from the birth family to the foster father. The foster father was entitled to a third of his fosterling's honour price if the fosterling were killed, a right which extended throughout the fosterling's life.¹⁰ If the fosterling was the one who perpetrated a crime, rather than being the victim of one, the foster father was also held responsible and had to pay fines incurred.¹¹ The power relationship is aptly illustrated in *Berrad Airechta* (Tract on Suretyship), in which three types of son of a living father are mentioned: the cold son, the warm son, and the fostered son.¹² This last was free from his father's authority because that authority had been passed onto another.¹³ Just as a fee began the fosterage, so too it was ended with a transfer of funds. This last payment was much more emotionally freighted than the first. It came at the end of fosterage, when the foster family would leave the child with a parting gift, the *sét gertha* (valuable of maintenance).¹⁴ Within the fees exchange we can see affection and warm feeling, even if this emotion has been formalised.¹⁵ Emotions play a central role in fosterage, forming another type of fosterage, distinct from contractual obligation. In order to understand fosterage, especially to understand 'fosterage of affection', we need to understand the emotions at work within foster relationships.

The laws distinguish two types of fosterage: *altram serce* (fosterage for love) and *altram iarraithe* (fosterage for a fee). In both cases the fosterling is entrusted to the care of a foster father. The authority of a foster father came with several responsibilities. The most basic of these were for food and

9 Stacey, *Dark Speech*, p. 118.

10 CIH 440.9-10.

11 CIH 440.8.

12 The cold son (*mac úar*) had not provided filial service to his father and so cannot make contracts. The warm son (*mac té*) displayed proper filial piety and so can make contracts with his father's consent. Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 80.

13 Stacey, 'Berrad Airechta', p. 215.

14 CIH 1769.26.

15 eDIL, s.v. *gertha*.

clothing. Medieval Ireland was a hierarchically bound society and the keen awareness of social status, what actions were permitted, what rights and duties were expected from each social class encompassed interactions with children as well as those between adults. The laws describe in detail what clothes are appropriate for the children of different social grades to wear, as well as what food they should be given.¹⁶ This awareness of social standing also extended to the skills each fosterling was expected to learn while they remained with their foster family. The sons of kings and nobles were taught board games, horsemanship, swimming and marksmanship, while the son of an *ócaire*, the lowest grade of freeman, learnt more pedestrian tasks, such as animal husbandry, how to chop firewood, dry corn, and comb wool. The skills taught to girls were still determined by class, although these too were gender specific: sewing and embroidery were taught to noble girls, use of the quern and kneading trough to lower classes.¹⁷ In *Berrad Airechta* fosterage is described as ‘the father leaves him with whomsoever he chooses, i.e. for the sake of [learning] a craft or farming’.¹⁸ It is surprising that the skills outlined above are rarely used in the literature as examples of what is learned during fosterage. Although education is important, it takes on a more fantastical guise in our narratives and the lessons themselves are subordinate to the emotional connection that is formed, since they are merely the means to form it.¹⁹

For all of its concern over what should be taught to the child and what he or she should wear, the laws are unclear on when this should happen, both in terms of the start and the end point of fosterage. Fosterage could begin at a very young age. In a fragment of the *Bretha for Maclechtaib* (Judgements on the Categories of Sons) preserved in O’Davoren’s glossary, it is stated that a child is ready to be fostered ‘when he recognises his own mug from other mugs’.²⁰ This suggests that fosterage was considered appropriate for a child younger than seven. Kelly points out that it could coincide with wet-nursing, as hinted at by references to nursing clothes in the equipment needed by a foster mother.²¹ Ní Chonaill has commented on how this early start to fosterage goes some way to creating the long-lasting affective bonds: ‘The

16 CIH 1759.37-1762.20. For a discussion of what this entailed, see Ní Chonaill, ‘Child-Centred Law’, pp. 14-15.

17 CIH 1760.21-34.

18 Stacey, ‘*Berrad Airechta*’, p. 215.

19 Hence children are not taught horsemanship but how to run as fast as the wind, how to wield a magic spear, and sometimes magic arts.

20 Breatnach, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, p. 135.

21 Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 86.



age of seven has been regarded by historians as the time when fosterage commenced. However, the legal material points to the possibility of a child entering into fosterage at any age, however young. The practice of wet-nursing as an optional first step in the overall fostering process is evident from a special, lifelong entitlement (to a particular payment) which was formed between foster and biological children who shared the same cradle and mantle in the early stages of life within a household.²² While fosterage appears as a unified practice in which children were taken into the foster family through a combination of feeding and teaching, the way it played out was much more varied. The different ages at which fosterage could begin affected how fosterage bonds could be formed and changed the nature of the bond that was formed. The flexibility of the application and understanding of fosterage allowed it to be used as a metaphor for understanding many of the complex mechanisms for creating a new family.

The indeterminacy continues throughout fosterage, as it is not clear when it should end. That it does end, as a legal bond, is made clear by the passing on of the *sét gertha*.²³ There is evidence that the end of fosterage was an emotionally fraught time, for example, later Scottish ballads mourn the end of fosterage as if it were a death.²⁴ Yet at what stage this separation was thought to usually occur is unclear. Various ages are given. In *Berrad Airechta* and *Críth Gablach* (Forked Purchase) the age at which fosterage ends is given as fourteen, whereas it is seventeen in *Bretha Crólige* (Judgements of Blood-lyings), and *Cáin Íarraith* gives fourteen as the age of completion for a girl and seventeen for a boy.²⁵

The clearest indication that foster relationships were so close is that the most common words for 'foster father' (*aite*) and 'foster mother' (*muimne*) are hypocoristic terms.²⁶ That is to say, these are the 'daddy' and 'mummy' types of words, whereas *áthair* and *máthair* are the more formal words used for 'father' and 'mother'. These are not the only terms for foster father and mother used, but the other forms still use the hypocoristic phrasing, adding diminutives: *datán* for 'foster father' and *datnat* for 'foster mother'. The traditional reading is that these words were used to describe the foster

22 Ní Chonaill, 'Child-Centred Law', p. 12.

23 *CIH* 1769.26.

24 Cathcart, *Kinship and Clientage*, pp. 80-85; Frater, 'Women of the Gaidhealtachd', pp. 74-76; Nugent, "Your louing childe and foster".

25 Stacey, '*Berrad Airechta*', p. 211; *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, p. 2; Binchy, '*Bretha Crólige*', pp. 8-9; *CIH* 901.35-36; 902.4.

26 Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 86-87; Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 81; Russell, 'Patterns of Hypocorism'.

relationship because the emotional connection between foster parents and fosterlings was established at a young age, in preference to those formed between natural parents and their children. There is much to reinforce this view in the narrative literature, even evidence of other hypocoristic naming conventions existing between foster parents and fosterlings. For example, Cú Chulainn refers to Fergus as *popa* throughout *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (The Cattle Raid of Cooley) and Mochoemóg has his name explained as a hypocoristic version of his name, given by his foster mother: 'Set hoc nomen evertit ipsa sancta Dei, vocans eum per dilectionem nomine quomodo vulgo nominatur, id est Mocoemhóg, quod latine dicitur: Meus pulcer [sic] iuvenis' 'That holy woman of God changed his name and driven by her love she called him "Mochoemóg" in Irish, which in Latin means "my beautiful boy".²⁷

Dalta, the term for 'fosterling', and *comalta*, the term for 'foster sibling', both have their root in *altram*, the term for 'fosterage' itself. *Altram*, at base, carries connotations of feeding and nurturing, just as the Latin reflections of these terms, *alumnus*, for example, does.²⁸ The terms *dalta* and *comalta* are not merely concerned with feeding, but with the wider connotations of fosterage. *Dalta* is also the typical Irish rendering of *alumnus*.²⁹ This is instructive as the term *dalta* is also used for pupils within a more formally educational, rather than strictly fosterage context. Of course, as we shall see below, education is of central importance in the fosterage bond. This has led to some blurring of the line between pupil, nursling, and fosterling. Similar shifting terminology is found among foster siblings. These are not differentiated by gender, as *comalta* can refer to either a foster sister or brother, although the evidence from the narrative sources, as we shall see, rather favours foster brothers. There has been a suggestion, by Ní Dhonnchadha, that the term for 'handmaid' (*inailt*) preserves the term for 'foster sister'.³⁰ This terminological shifting is central to the development of *Fingal Rónáin* (The Kin-Slaying of Rónán).³¹ *Dalta* is most frequently rendered as 'fosterling' in the laws of fosterage, but other terms were also used. *Gormac*, literally 'warm-son', is a term often used to describe the sister's son, and by

27 VSH, II, pp. 166-167; see also the note on Máedóc in FO, p. 169. The Latin reflections of *aite* and *muimme*, *nutritor* and *nutrix*, appear to cover the same semantic ground as the Irish terms in Latin saints' lives.

28 Bremmer, 'Avunculate and Fosterage', p. 73.

29 The association between the Irish *alt-* root and the Latin *alo* is made explicit in *Sanas Chormaic*, which glosses *altram* as follows: 'altram .i. e ab eo quod est alo .i. ón bréthir is alo ailim ata' 'altram which is from *alo*, so the word *alo* is *ailim*'. 'Sanas Cormaic', ed. Meyer, IV, p. 1.

30 Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Inailt'.

31 *Fingal Rónáin*, ed. Greene, pp. 1-15.

extension the fosterling or adopted child, since the two definitions often overlapped.³² An example of this is the character Bres from *Cath Maige Tuired* (The Battle of Mag Tuired), who is called the *gormac* of the Túatha Dé Danann when they decide to elect him their king.³³ In this case Bres is not a legitimate son of the Túatha Dé Danann so his relationship with them is based on freely chosen bonds like fosterage. However, unlike fosterage, he is not in a temporary relationship and is still raised by his mother. Jaski has discussed the difference between the terms *gormac* and *dalta* in relation to Cú Chulainn, who similarly combines ties of blood and fosterage.³⁴

The legal framework gives an outline to base an understanding of fosterage on. Yet to fully appreciate what fosterage involved attention must be given to the emotional as well as legal manifestations of the relationship. The emotional ties do not involve the exchange of goods and so are not recorded in the laws. Fosterage works on a silent framework, on bonds that are not represented legally but that have deep social impact. Indeed, their ubiquity is what makes them silent. The common and obvious (to contemporaries) ways in which fosterage bonds worked through the lives of the participants is assumed in all the narratives. By interrogating these tales for what they present to the contemporary audience, colour can be added to the sketch of fosterage left by the legal texts. At the beginning of the discussion of fosterage in the laws, I pointed out two types of fosterage described in *Cáin Íarraith*: fosterage of love and fosterage of fee. These terms highlight that tension in medieval law between law and love; between the judicial record and the conventional agreements made outside written law. Michael Clanchy has studied this tension in relation to English law and the institution of lovedays. Leaving aside the differences between the legal systems, his comments on the balance between law and love, and the undue attention the former has garnered are instructive for our own context: ‘Law [...] is easier to study than love and has traditionally been considered a more appropriate subject for a historian.’³⁵ I wish to add to our understanding of fosterage by teasing out the bonds of love that existed between fosterers and fosterlings, bonds that functioned alongside those of the law.

32 For the relationship of *gor* to ‘warm’, see Thurneysen, ‘Gubretha Caratniad’; Binchy, ‘Some Celtic Legal Terms’; Cowgill, ‘The Etymology of Irish *Guidid*’, p. 55. This view has been challenged by Schrijver, who sees *gor*, *goire* connected with ‘worth, return value, counter value’ (Schrijver, ‘Oir. *Gor* “Pious, Dutiful”’, pp. 193–204). This complicates an attempt to join Irish ideas around the *gormac* to ones expressed in Latin by *fovere* ‘warm, foster’.

33 *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed. Gray, pp. 26–27.

34 Jaski, ‘Cú Chulainn, *Gormac* and *Dalta* of the Ulstermen’.

35 Clanchy, ‘Law and Love in the Middle Ages’, p. 65.

An emotional history of fosterage

The legal texts present a partial story of how the fictive families of fosterage were created and maintained. The emotional life that sustained these families is absent from the laws and the families themselves are not fully represented as not many goods changed hands over the course of fosterage. As Charles-Edwards has said, '[F]osterage belonged more to the emotional sphere, less to the material, than did natural parenthood.'³⁶ Fosterage's position in the emotional sphere is often assumed, but it has never been fully studied. Quite what it means for fosterage to be more emotionally constituted will be addressed in this book. As we move beyond the legal definition of fosterage, we will see how its boundaries were marked, how it was constructed and how the deep love between the foster family, expressed by poets and characters in narrative literature, underpinned medieval Irish society.

I will approach the study by reconstructing the emotional community of fosterage, as it appears in the texts. Fosterage was constituted in two ways, through nutrition and education. Nutrition is most often the breast of the foster mother, offered to the children they foster. While educative fosterage can function alongside this nutritive model, it can also begin later in the child's life, after it has been weaned. I shall show that both models, and the combination of the two, are the basis of long-lasting emotional ties. I borrow from Rosenwein's approach to the history of emotions, but in an altered fashion to consider the different scope of my project and its primary sources.³⁷ One of the crucial aspects of this study will be exploring the boundaries of fosterage. We are aware of the emotional bond between foster siblings, but who counts as a foster sibling? Is the connection between a foster mother and a fosterling, really greater than that between a foster father and a fosterling?

To find the boundaries of the emotionally constituted foster family, I will analyse how emotions were expressed between the members of the foster family. The use of formulaic language points to deeply ingrained cultural expectations, which appear alongside displays of emotion which were written so as to seem spontaneous. These emotions are displayed at critical points in the foster relationship, but also at times beyond the period of fosterage that was specified in the laws. The language of fosterage also changes throughout characters' lifetimes. Defining the boundaries of

36 Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 81.

37 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*; Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*.



fosterage highlights those examples of metaphoric use of the language of fosterage and how this language was used outside the foster family. Attention to metaphors allows us to see the semantic range of fosterage, what frame of reference it occupied, and how embedded it was in society. This work sheds light back onto the foster family, illuminating the terms and phrases used within that emotional community from a different angle.

This book will recreate the emotional community of fosterage as it is depicted in medieval Irish literature. Methodologically, I will be following Rosenwein and her notion of an emotional community as ‘groups – usually but not always social groups – that have their own particular values, modes of feeling and ways to express those feelings’.³⁸ Yet my study will contrast with her work on the emotional communities of Gaul in the Early Middle Ages, in terms of scale and source material. She is concerned with the communities in a region or city, communities that can overlap, but that are large social units.³⁹ The base unit of my work is the foster family and I will investigate how emotions are represented within this smaller community. The notion of representation of emotion further distances me from Rosenwein’s approach. I examine how the emotions are presented in the literature in order to recreate the social expectations surrounding the practice. The families that form my base unit take the social expectations of fosterage present in the literature as a model for their own actions. As we have few first-hand accounts of feeling within the foster family during the Middle Ages, the picture I will recreate is one taken from literary sources. The emotional community of fosterage that this depicts is at once descriptive of those emotions felt within the foster family and prescriptive, affecting how those same emotions were expressed.

In trying to trace this larger sense of emotional expectations, a picture of fosterage will be created from a range of genres from across the Old and Middle Irish period (c. 600-c. 1200). When combined, they provide an image of the emotional community of the foster family. The picture created by drawing different representations of fosterage together creates a standard view of the emotions within fosterage which each family, in their own way, mirrors or rejects. The range of sources is from across the medieval period in Ireland so as to provide the most comprehensive view of fosterage. The practice was remarkably long-lived in Ireland and the emotions that it created would have drawn on the former expressions of those emotions since ‘emotional communities drew on older emotional

38 Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*, p. 3.

39 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, p. 57.



vocabularies and sensibilities even as they created their own emotional norms and values'.⁴⁰ That is not to say that the emotions will not change over time and the longer view will allow such shifts in force and meaning to be traced. The literary picture will not allow us to see how individuals felt in foster relationships. Even if such a project were feasible at any point in time – and there is much to suggest that it is not – my sources would not permit it. The sources are not letters, manuals of good behaviour, or diaries, but narrative. The narratives are taken from many literary genres, and some examples include the first-person voice of the poet, but, by and large, they are third-person representations. These texts are not concerned with psychological realism but with the deeds of heroes and kings. Yet these heroes and kings are placed within a relatable setting and among a series of social ties that would have had resonance with a contemporary audience. The emotions presented in these texts would also form the lens through which contemporaries would understand and formulate their own feelings. The emotional community I shall present is one that exists as a cultural expectation more than a social reality.

The picture of fosterage that will be created is not the lived reality of fosterage but the social expectations of the bond. What would have been expected and thought normal within the foster family? This sense of what fosterage would mean is based on the social logic of the texts under investigation – that is to say, the plausible background of relationships and social furniture against which implausible heroes do unbelievable things. Behind these actions is the family in which the heroes live. This approach takes its cue from Spiegel's work on the social logic of the text. If we can never access the historical reality behind the texts, we can be aware of the way that reality affected the creation of the texts and was, in turn, affected by them: 'In that sense, texts both mirror *and* generate social realities, are constituted by *and* constitute the social and discursive formations which they may sustain, resist, contest, or seek to transform, depending on the case at hand.'⁴¹ By examining the interactions of the foster family, we will see the types of emotion, how, and by whom they were expected to be expressed.

In this way this study seeks to flesh out the bones of fosterage found in the law tracts and closely examine the subtleties of the relationships. Once this is done, the idea of fosterage in eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland can be extended to examples of fosterage that are not fosterage by law. An appreciation of the emotional, nutritive, and educative way in which

40 Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*, p. 90.

41 Spiegel, 'History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text', p. 77.



fosterage bonds were created allows us to broaden the definition of fosterage. I investigate, in the final two chapters, how fosterage language was used metaphorically and how the emotional community was transposed onto other situations. Within the religious setting the fosterage metaphor is used to describe religious relationships to Christ. This metaphor was based on the ways in which young children in the monastery or within the religious family were framed and understood. The final chapter takes the metaphor outside the human family and examines how fosterage characterised human/animal relationships. The boundary between human and animal was a shifting one in this period but fosterage was seen as a clear marker of humanity.

The emotional community of fosterage has not been reconstructed before. Ó hInnse looked at 'Fosterage in Early and Medieval Ireland' in his 1943 PhD thesis, but this overview suffers from the deficiencies of age.⁴² Since then there have been many studies of individuals or texts which have taken a nuanced view of fosterage relationships, but these are always taken in isolation.⁴³ Assertions have been made about the nature of the bond, but the evidence has not been compiled in one place and put under close scrutiny, with the exception of Boll's 2003 thesis.⁴⁴ Previous work has mentioned the emotional bonds of fosterage in passing and concentrated on the picture that can be gained by studying the law texts.⁴⁵ However, there are two types of fosterage outlined in the law texts: *altram íarraith* (fosterage for a fee) and *altram serce* (fosterage for love). The law texts concentrate on the exchange of goods in *altram íarraith* and have little to say about *altram serce*. My study shows how the emotional community of fosterage underlies social connections and medieval Irish ideas of social cohesion. These larger conclusions come out of a dossier of case studies and close readings. In-depth studies allow us to speak with some measure of certainty about the emotional connections created by fosterage. In some cases, my study proves what we had previously only assumed. In others, I provide new readings and interpretations of texts, as our understanding of them is altered when read through the lens of fosterage. The foster family is a complex web of ties, both emotional and legal, that define the very basic shape of human interaction in the period. If 'sibling studies are the poor neglected stepchild of the history of the Western family', then the study of

42 Ó hInnse, 'Fosterage in Early and Medieval Ireland'.

43 Fosterage is central theme in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* as examined by O'Connor, *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel*, and its role in Cú Chulainn's life is studied in Dooley, *Playing the Hero*.

44 Boll, 'Fosterkin in Conflict'.

45 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 115-117.



fictive kin is even more neglected.⁴⁶ This is surprising given the fact that foster kin bonds are threads that run throughout almost all medieval Irish literature. Investigating this bond, as it appears in a variety of texts, will place us in a firmer position to analyse the role of fosterage within other texts, without having to rely on assumptions of secondary literature.

Methodological approach

This book is an attempt to access how people expected fosterage to work on an interpersonal level. It asks a variety of questions: What were the emotions that the institution elicited from those who participated in it? and What were the unwritten expectations that surrounded words like *oide* (foster father), *muintime* (foster mother) and *dalta* (fosterling)?⁴⁷ The principle difficulty in writing such a history of emotions comes from the sources available. I will be relying on narrative sources rather than the first-hand letters, diaries, or even charters, that other studies of emotions in history rely on. However, I will argue that narrative literature has a normative effect in creating the emotional expectations around fosterage; this prescriptive role of the literature is analysed alongside its descriptive role in reflecting social convention. In this section I will lay out my methodological approach to these two aspects of the emotional community of fosterage, as seen in medieval Irish literature.

The growth of the history of emotions in the Middle Ages is, by now, not a new phenomenon. Since the field emerged in the 1980s, many commentators have taken to extending the history of emotions into the medieval period. Rosenwein and Hanawalt have both written about the need for a history of emotions and the various methodological approach to these histories.⁴⁸ Rosenwein has called the study of 'emotional communities' a useful guide to creating a history of emotions. I will use an adapted version of her approach to emotional communities in my study of fosterage. Emotional communities often cover the same area as social communities; groups of people linked by shared lifestyles will share emotional ranges.⁴⁹ Yet Rosenwein's view is rather larger than mine, examining the sets of emotional communities formed in the seventh century across wide sections of society. In examining fosterage,

46 Larrington, *Brothers and Sisters*, p. 1.

47 I will go into more detail on the vocabulary that surrounds fosterage in the section on the legal definitions of the relationship.

48 Rosenwein, 'Problems and Methods'; Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound*.

49 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, pp. 24-25.



and the communities that it creates, I am narrowing the focus and creating smaller circles of emotions, to borrow Rosenwein's image. Yet each of these smaller circles, these fictive family units, would structure their emotional responses and actions on a socially expected model of fosterage. Each small circle will partake in a much larger circle: the normative expectations of the emotions felt within a foster family.

In this sense it may be worth briefly considering the wider concerns in the history of emotions: Are emotions fixed in the genetic make-up of humanity and thus will not significantly differ throughout time, or are they purely social constructs, each emotion a unique product of a unique time and place? The Stearns have suggested that historians study 'emotionology', that is, the collective emotional standards of society rather than the felt emotions. Their approach is useful, even if the terminology is clunky.⁵⁰ When discussing how foster families enacted the roles that were depicted as normative in the narrative literature, I think Reddy's notion of 'emotives' is a useful one.⁵¹ Reddy's view is that emotions are neither relative nor universal, but that a universal emotional state is expressed, and therefore altered by, a socially constructed vocabulary. These expressions are called 'emotives', utterances that are not 'performative' – as they are not self-referential, and do not, of themselves, alter the world – but that are neither 'descriptive' – they do not passively describe an already constituted state of affairs. In the same way, literary depictions of fosterage inhabit the middle ground between representation and performance.

The literature allows us to see the filter through which such inaccessible emotions were passed, by examining the socially constructed expectations of the foster family's emotions. Reddy based his view on first-person statements, something I have little access to in my sources. However, his argument that emotions are coloured by the tools a society has to describe them is useful for my reconstruction of the emotional community of fosterage. While we can never recreate the emotions that were felt within foster bonds in medieval Ireland, we can reconstruct the language and expectations that would have been used to understand foster relationships. In this sense, when studying emotional communities, I seek to uncover 'the emotions that [the communities] value, devalue, or ignore; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore'.⁵² This book

50 Stearns and Stearns, 'Emotionology', p. 813.

51 Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, p. 104.

52 Rosenwein, 'Problems and Methods', p. 11.



will reconstruct the emotional community that existed around fosterage in medieval Ireland. It was against these assumptions, expectations, and tropes of behaviour that the emotional lives of fosterers in this period, inaccessible in our sources, played out.

The slightly altered definition of emotional community that I propose arises as a response to the difficulties of my sources. The new definition is also central to my methodological approach. The methodology takes as its starting point the assumption that fosterage was widespread in society. Fosterage appears in many sources emerging from medieval Ireland. The proliferation implies that fosterage was commonplace, so to build up as accurate a picture as possible, I will study a wide variety of literary sources, some of which are not commonly used in the history of emotions. Where other studies of emotions in history would turn to letters, diaries, manuals of advice on how to behave and other sources which directly purport to represent the emotional expression or the emotional state of an individual, I cannot. Towards the end of the period under investigation there are some bardic poems, which have a first-person singular voice. Yet even here the conventions of the genre and the public nature of poetry prohibit a reading for insight into the mind of the author. My main sources are third-person heroic narratives, sagas, or saints' lives. Not only that but these narratives were produced in a culture in which psychological realism is often seen as absent and in which action is much preferred over thought. The sources would appear very poor ones to use for an emotional history. I will argue that they can be used, with care, because of the commonplace nature of fosterage.

Fosterage is an important feature of many narratives. It forms the emotional heart of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*,⁵³ it structures the relationships in *Fingal Rónáin*,⁵⁴ it begins the Lives of Cormac mac Airt and many saints like Ailbe and Moling.⁵⁵ But fosterage is rarely the main focus of the story. Rather, it forms part of the background, as one of the commonplaces used to will a suspension of disbelief in the action of the tale. Fosterage is so central to societal organisation that it takes the same place as sibling relationships, eating and sleeping – as a plausible background against which the heroes live. In this sense, fosterage and other elements of societal set-dressing could be said to be social equivalents of oratorical tropes. Curtius said of these oratorical tropes: '[E]very oration (including panegyric) must make some propositions

53 Edel, *Inside the Táin*, p. 101.

54 Boll, 'Seduction, Vengeance and Frustration'.

55 Hull, 'Geneamuin Chormaic'; VSH, I, pp. 46-64; *The Birth and Life of St Moling*, ed. and trans. Stokes.

or thing plausible. It must adduce in its favour arguments which address themselves to the hearer's mind or heart. Now there is a whole series of such arguments which can be used on the most diverse occasions.⁵⁶ If rhetorical tropes are used to make an argument plausible, the material tropes, the societal commonplaces, can be used to make a narrative plausible. The commonplaces, or social logic, come from addressing the hearer's mind and heart, presenting an emotional world and series of relationships with which he or she would have been familiar to better convey the narrative point or points, whatever they may be. By examining the different versions of this background, some mere asides, others more fully articulated complex relationships, I will be able to piece together a picture of the emotions and attitudes associated with fosterage. This will necessitate a close reading of the texts, a reading which seeks to identify what assumptions the texts make about fosterage.

That is not to say any one narrative will, in itself, provide an accurate portrayal of fosterage. Rather, since it is a commonplace in the literature, multiple samples need to be examined to produce a full picture. Drawing multiple samples from multiple genres also minimises the potential distortion that would arise from generic convention. For example, it is well established that saints' lives were used to promote the political ambitions of the saint's current *familia*.⁵⁷ Such power plays are often worked out through interpersonal relationships and notions of subservience and debt can be portrayed in foster relationships.⁵⁸ Placing these tales alongside other descriptions of fosterage from sagas and elsewhere, will highlight commonalities and reduce the effect of anomalous portrayals. In so doing I will address the whole institution of fosterage, beyond individual examples which can be affected by the conventions of genre. For example, the oft-stated age of seven for the beginning of fosterage is a product of an over-reliance on hagiographic sources.⁵⁹ By collapsing the generic boundaries, I hope that the picture of fosterage that emerges will be more complete.⁶⁰

56 Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, p. 70.

57 Charles-Edwards defines *familia* as 'The *familia* of a saint embraced the people belonging to his principal church, dependent churches and also dependent kindreds, while allies were perceived as independent *familiae*', *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 123.

58 Ibid.

59 See Parkes, 'Celtic Fosterage', p. 370, for a theory on the different ecclesiastical and lay versions of fosterage. Seven as the age of fosterage is quoted in Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 116.

60 For comments on genre in medieval Irish literature, see Poppe, 'Reconstructing Medieval Irish Literary Theory'; O'Connor, 'Irish Narrative Literature and the Classical Tradition'.

The final point I wish to address is how the sources have been chosen. I have not, to any great extent, analysed those texts in which fosterage does not appear. While this mirrors the nature of the sources, it would be wrong to say that fosterage *always* appears in medieval Irish narratives. The silences are important, as they can show when fosterage is not relevant, when it is not needed as a constant background presence. Furthermore, given the intertextual nature of Irish literary culture, there are some tales in which the absence of fosterage comes as a surprise. I have tried to include some in those instances when they directly reflect on the main sources used in this study. For example, when Conall Cernach is not described as Cú Chulainn's foster brother in *Fled Bricrenn* (The Feast of Bricriu), it could have ramifications for how their relationship is perceived in that text.⁶¹ However, these have not been chosen as central case studies. The case studies themselves have been taken from all the main cycles of medieval Irish literature to create a comprehensive view of the entire corpus. The system of classification represented by the cycles is, of course, a modern structural imposition.⁶² Yet it affords the researcher with a fairly representative spread of the saga literature across the centuries.

While some sources emerge from the Early Middle Ages, it must be remembered that very few of the narratives are preserved in a contemporary manuscript. Our earliest copies of these texts may be separated by many differing versions and many centuries from a supposed original. Such a distance in time and in some cases space between an original narrative and what we have surviving should be borne in mind when making claims about the society that is represented within the narrative. Mark Williams's comments about the difficulties in recovering pagan ideology from these Christian texts is apposite for my own endeavour to recover the feelings surrounding fosterage: 'Tales often only survive in manuscripts copied centuries after a given text was actually composed, and such texts are indefinitely subject to problematic variations of tonal weight and weave.'⁶³ Each narrative, and each version of each narrative, needs to be assessed in its own context before those conclusions are combined to form the composite picture of emotional life within the medieval Irish foster family.

61 *Fled Bricrenn*, ed. Henderson. Reading the silences forms part of the methodology laid out by Rosenwein. I have tried to incorporate those silences where possible.

62 Poppe, *Of Cycles and Other Critical Matters*.

63 Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, p. 27.



The chapters

As outlined earlier, the chapters move from a reconstruction of the ties that bind a foster family together to the more metaphorical uses of fosterage. The case studies that constitute this book will leave us with a picture of the emotional community of fosterage, as described in medieval Irish literature. In this section, I will give a brief outline of each chapter's structure and how the problems addressed speak with one another to outline the emotional community of fosterage in medieval Ireland. The book begins by outlining the relationships between the members of the foster family and then addresses how fosterage was used to explain and understand several different relationships beyond the foster family, among the *fian*, in the monastery and between animals and humans.

The first chapter is concerned with the relationship of foster parents to their fosterlings. This takes as its case study Cú Chulainn and the many different fosterers he is said to have had. This character, so central to our understanding of medieval Irish literature, presents a complex image of relationships with his foster father. On the one hand he is said to be fostered by Conchobur, his maternal uncle. Foster fathers are often taken from the ranks of the maternal uncle. Yet alongside this normative foster father, Cú Chulainn is also involved in a competition to foster him, which ends up with most of the nobles of Ulster acting as his foster parents. This has been used to reinforce the idea that multiple fosterage was a common practice, but I argue that his multiple fosterage is something of an anomaly. His fosterage is placed alongside other famous examples of multiple fosterage in order to interrogate the normative role that multiple fosterage had. Beyond this, however, the chapter analyses how foster fathers interact with their fosterlings. The multiple versions of Cú Chulainn's fosterage provide an insight into how that fosterage was thought about and expressed. The language of fosterage is emotional, physical and gendered. By interrogating the way fosterage was presented we can approach a deeper understanding of those relationships. Education was clearly an important facet of the relationship, since Cú Chulainn's potential foster fathers compete by making clear what they would teach him. Education formed the basis for emotional closeness. Yet, foster fathers do not only relate to their fosterlings through education – they demonstrate care and active investment in the further lives of their charges.

The second chapter shifts the focus onto the foster siblings themselves. The bond of foster siblinghood is the relationship that lasts the longest, far beyond the legal period of fosterage, but it is the bond that is the least



well-defined from a legal perspective. This chapter is an attempt to answer this question: What makes a foster sibling? We are presented with an ambiguous picture of how foster sibling bonds were described and who was included in them. Foster sibling ties relied on shared emotions and experiences created as young children under the care of the foster mother. Foster sibling relationships are then created in two ways: firstly, through the uniting figure of a foster parent, most often the foster mother. She formed the nexus that bound young children together through shared feeding and shared education. The role of the foster mother as guardian of the fosterage bond and unifier is most clearly expressed in the characters of Scáthach and Cáma. Foster siblings cannot be understood without the presence of the foster mother. Secondly, the siblings themselves could build on and nourish their connections by adding bonds of freely chosen friendship and sworn brotherhood to the fosterage tie. Such emotional connections were often called upon later in life, especially in times of conflict. While most sources present positive emotions displayed within fosterage, here we see some of the negative feelings that could be felt. Boll has examined conflict between foster relations in her 2003 thesis.⁶⁴ Although outright conflict could not always be prevented, it was always disapproved of. The conflicts in the texts often hark back to a rose-tinted view of a previously idyllic foster system – expressed either by the foster siblings themselves or through the foster mother as representative of the whole family. Such a retrospective view may have been a more common way to think about fosterage: messy at the time and then smoothed over by nostalgia.

The third chapter addresses the messiness that could come with fosterage. In a society as stratified and class-based as medieval Ireland, the supposed unity of the foster family and the combination of children from different classes within it could breed discontent. When put under pressure class difference was used as an insult, as a means to drive a wedge between the ties of foster siblinghood. *Immram Curaig Maíle Dúin* (The Voyage of Máel Dúin) and *Tochmarc Étaíne* (The Wooing of Étaín) attest to this. The logic of medieval Irish literature also makes conflict between foster siblings of different background almost inevitable. *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (The Destruction of Da Derga's hostel) is a clear example of what disasters can befall when the foster sibling bond is prized above the usual ways kings and raiders should relate to one another. Even when they were little, Conaire Mór and his foster siblings, the sons of Donn Desa, were marked as different: Conaire was their teacher and was called their 'foster father' in some

64 Boll, 'Fosterkin in Conflict'.

instances. Saints learn alongside others in their class but their status as holy elect means that they leave their fellow pupils behind very quickly. As in the secular examples, saints took on the role of foster father for their foster siblings. Chapter 1 raised the importance of vocabulary to understanding the nuances of the foster relationship. Here that understanding is put to the test. An awareness of vocabulary allows us to see what was meant when someone was called a 'foster sibling' outside the foster family. There are two groups for whom foster sibling language was used in this more metaphoric way: among monastic students and among the *fían*, the wild-living warrior-band exemplified by Finn mac Cumail. The evidence from monastic sources presents us with a picture of joint education, but one in which fosterage is surprisingly absent. The *fían* have a complex relationship to fosterage, as they interact like foster siblings, although they are too old to be in fosterage. In some cases, we see fosterage bonds from an earlier stage of life persisting and interacting with new bonds created during the time among the *fían*. But still, new relationships, created during the time in the *fían*, were characterised in fosterage terms. Sometimes members of the *fían* represent their relationships through the language of foster brotherhood and at other times through foster fatherhood. These shifts of seniority seen in foster language mirror shifts of power and authority within both monastic and *fían* groups.

Chapter 4 examines fosterage in monastic settings and religious writings, in greater detail than previous chapters. The range of source material here necessitates a sharper focus. For example, focusing on just the saints' lives, Sharpe has estimated that there are more than a hundred Latin saints' lives and over 50 Irish saints' lives composed before the end of the sixteenth century.⁶⁵ It is a common trope of hagiography that the young saint has something unusual about his childhood, either precocious religiosity or a less exalted early start of barbarism and idiocy.⁶⁶ In any case, childhoods, and the fosterage that forms such an important part of those childhoods, are prominent in our sources. That is not to mention the evidence from penitentials, martyrologies, poems, and elsewhere. In light of such a wealth of data, Chapter 4 focuses on fosterage in two related cases. Firstly, beginning with the poem *Ísucán*, it focuses on how fosterage was used to understand and represent the religious people's relationship with the divine. Secondly, if relationships are forged with the numinous through fosterage, then how clerics related to children in monasteries or within their care can also be thought of as fosterage.

65 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, pp. 5-6.

66 Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, pp. 26-28.

The rest of Chapter 4 adds to our appreciation of the remark, made by Charles-Edwards, that ‘it seems to be the importance of fosterage in Ireland and Wales which made it difficult for spiritual kinship (the artificial kinship of godparents to godchildren and of godparents to natural parents) to make much headway’.⁶⁷ The idea that fosterage occupied the space in the Irish medieval social imagination that other forms of spiritual kinship did in other cultures has implications, not only for the central position of the practice in medieval Irish culture but for how we view the Irish religious community.⁶⁸ Once again, Irish fosterage is markedly different from other examples of fosterage, as it takes such a central role in the creation of all quasi-familial emotional ties. The role of fosterage in the social imagination means that we cannot be satisfied with a definition of fosterage that relies on legal texts. The range of application of fosterage within religious texts means that each example must be viewed in its own light, either as referring to a metaphorical relationship, an actual fosterage bond, or something between the two. By bringing together many of these different case studies, I will show how fosterage coloured both medieval Irish spirituality and relationships within the religious community.

The fifth and final chapter is concerned with an even more unusual application of the fosterage relationship. If the fosterage bond was used to describe the relationship between a saint and God, Chapter 5 examines its application to relationships lower down the cosmic hierarchy: between human and animal. There are many examples of wolves nurturing abandoned children, miraculous cows and deer providing milk for young saints, and for emotional bonds to be forged between humans and animals. Once again, fosterage is the central metaphor for understanding such close ties, created through a shared nutritive bond. The approach to fosterage in these texts reinforces the image of fosterage created in the previous chapters. In this chapter’s discussion of the early Lives of Ailbe and Cormac, fosterage humanises the wild beast, rather than the expected image of animals bestialising the humans whom they raised. When relationships between humans and animals are described as fosterage – and not all of them are – the bonds that are created are those of fosterage in all its emotional range. These last two chapters demonstrate how pervasive fosterage was in medieval Irish society. Here, we see the importance of studying all references to fosterage, not just the normative examples.

67 Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 78.

68 See comments about the *anmchara* in Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church*, p. 211.



Reconstructing the emotional community of fosterage in medieval Ireland is always going to be something of an abstraction. The close reading of the early lives of characters from all genres of medieval Irish literature will provide a picture of what emotions should have been felt or were expected to exist. Fosterage created a distinct relationship within medieval Irish society. The foster family was created when a young child was taken in to be nursed and taught. The foster parents created the bond and were invested in the lives of their fosterlings, following their growth into adulthood, helping them choose a spouse and mourning them if they died. Within the foster family relationships between foster siblings may have been created by the foster parents but were maintained by the children themselves. As they grew into adulthood the ties of friendship and sworn-brotherhood were added to the fosterage tie – the relationship had to be maintained as the children grew. All these experiences were captured in the narrative literature of medieval Ireland and will be sifted for the traces of the emotional community of fosterage.

