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The *An Domhan* Experience: Revisiting the Irish Tale "The Tragic Death of the Children of Tuireann"

Résumé. Cet article présente le projet de recherche-création, intitulé *An Domhan*, i.e. « la Terre » en langue irlandaise, développé par Gaëtan Le Coarer, Doctorant (et à ce jour Docteur) en Arts numériques et Sciences de la Communication, en collaboration avec Noémie Beck, spécialiste des mythologies et folklores irlandaises et celtiques, à l'Université Savoie Mont Blanc (France). Alliant Réalité Virtuelle (VR) et Réalité Augmentée (AR), cette expérience immersive innovante en Réalité Mixte (X) étudie la légende irlandaise de « La Mort tragique des enfants de Tuireann » (*Oidheadh Chloinne Tuireann*), datant du XVIe ou XVIIe siècle. Dans un premier temps, nous analysons la structure et les sources de cette légende médiévale, et plus particulièrement ses origines, influences et évolutions au travers des siècles. Nous présentons, dans un deuxième temps, le dispositif immersif *An Domhan* et examinons son système narratif, son identité visuelle et son architecture avant-gardistes.

Mots-clefs. Mythologie celtique irlandaise, Irlande, les enfants de Tuireann, Lugh, recherche-création, art, réalité virtuelle (VR), réalité augmentée (AR), réalité mixte (X)

Abstract. This paper presents the research-creation project, entitled *An Domhan*, i.e. "the Earth" in the Irish language, carried out by Gaëtan Le Coarer, a PhD student (now Dr.) in Digital Arts and Communication Sciences, in association with Noémie Beck, specialising in Irish and Celtic mythologies and folklores, in the University of Savoie Mont Blanc (France). Combining Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR), this Mixed Reality (X) experience innovatively investigates the Irish legend of "The Tragic Death of the Children of Tuireann" (*Oidheadh Chloinne Tuireann*), dating from the 16th or 17th century. This article first analyses the structure and sources of the medieval legend, detailing its origin, influences and evolution throughout the centuries. It then describes the *An Domhan* immersive device and examines its ground-breaking narrative mode, visual identity and architecture in relation to the Irish tale.

Keywords. Celtic Irish mythology, Ireland, the children of Tuireann, Lugh, research-creation, art, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), mixed reality (X)

Introduction

An Domhan, the name of which means "The Earth" in the Irish language, is an interdisciplinary research-creation project that combines Irish and Celtic Studies with Digital Arts and Communication Sciences for the very first time. This project has been developed by Gaëtan Le Coarer, a PhD student in Digital Arts and Communication Sciences at the University of Savoie Mont Blanc (France), and I. The dialogue between different disciplines, three sub-teams of the LLSETI research team and two Departments of our university (Anglophone Studies and Communication Sciences) was born primarily of a desire to offer an innovative and original project in Irish mythology and folklore with the aim of opening up new research perspectives.[1] One of the main objectives was to introduce non-specialists to these fascinating myths, which remain still too little known compared to Greco-Roman or Scandinavian mythologies. I wanted to arouse interest in the subject and inspire new research, creations, and literary, artistic productions. Finally, through *An Domhan*, the idea was to test out new forms of narration and to experiment with the typical aspects of mythology and folklore, such as the re-writing, re-telling and revisitation of myths, legends and tales, may they be written or oral; the various interpretations, visions, versions and variations of a myth, the construction, destructuring, redevelopment and/or reconstruction of a story.

Le Coarer showed a deep interest in the subject, carried out research, asked substantial questions, and initiated a genuine, effective dialogue between his domain and mine. He deeply and consistently analysed the structure and the possible meanings of the legend we selected together and came up with many original ideas, e.g. an abstract world in black and white using relevant symbols directly coming from the legend. As the teaser of the project shows, *An Domhan* shakes up tradition by confronting it to modernity.[2] Gaëtan has been in charge of the scriptwriting, conception and direction of the project. As a specialist in Irish mythology and folklore, my role has been to initiate Gaëtan to these subjects, nourish his thoughts and select the themes that could be inserted in the project. *An Domhan* has become a milestone in his PhD entitled *Bande dessinée et réalité mixte, vers de nouveaux espaces de narration*, which he defended on December, 6th 2022 at the University of Savoie Mont Blanc.[3]

This paper will first examine the structure and sources of the legend entitled "The Tragic Death of the Children of Tuireann" (*Oidheadh Chloinne Tuireann*) on which the *An Domhan*

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1. LLSETI : Langages, Littératures, Sociétés, Etudes Transfrontalières et Internationales (i.e. Languages, Literatures and Societies: Transnational and International Studies), EA 3706, the University of Savoie Mont Blanc. <http://www.llseti.univ-smb.fr/>, retrieved on September, 20th 2022.
2. Teaser: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZhYiX6kq4g>, retrieved on September, 20th 2022.
3. His thesis was supervised by Ghislaine Chabert and Marc Veyrat, Department of Communication Sciences, the University of Savoie Mont Blanc, <http://transcultures.be/2022/12/02/an-domhan-gaetan-le-coarer-expo-these-galerie-espace-larith/>, retrieved on December, 12th 2022.

project is based, while the second part will describe the *An Domhan* Mixed Reality experience and analyse its narrative mode, visual identity and architecture in relation to the Irish tale.

The Structure and Content of the Story

The legend is composed of two intertwined tales. The first tale is the famous "Second Battle of Moytura" (*Cath Maige Tuired*)[4] which relates the mythical battle at Moytura (Co. Sligo) between the gods of the Tuatha De Danann ("The Tribes of the Goddess Dana"), led by the powerful Lugh Lámhfhada ("Long-Armed"),[5] and the sinister, destructive race of the Fomhóire, commanded by Lugh's grandfather, Balor of the Evil Eye.[6] Lugh eventually defeated Balor and led his tribe to victory by throwing a sling-stone into Balor's poisonous eye. The second tale recounts the murder of Cian by the three sons of Tuireann and their quest for the eight magical objects and animals to pay for their crime.

Part 1: Three Sons of Tuireann Kills Lugh's Father, Cian

The legend starts on the eve of the second battle of Moytura and recounts the preparation of the Tuatha De Danann for the battle, along the river Boyne in the Province of Lein-

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4.   There are two original independent narrative versions of the conflict, each represented by a single manuscript. The earlier full version, edited and translated by Elisabeth Gray, dates to the 11th century, but is based on earlier texts – pieces of which are found in the literature from the 8th c. onwards –, while the later version, edited by Brian Ó Cuiv, dates from about the 16th century. GRAY, Elisabeth (ed. and tr.), *Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, Irish Texts Society, Dublin, 1982; Ó CUIV, Brian (ed. and tr.), *Cath Muighe Tuireadh: The Second Battle of Magh Tuireadh*, Dublin Institute, Dublin, 1945.

5.   Lugh is portrayed as a youthful, handsome and outstanding god, for he is the *Samhildánach*, i.e. the one who possesses all the skills and arts of the other gods. He is indeed a druid, a poet, a warrior, a physician, a blacksmith, a cupbearer, a magician, a historian, etc. Cf. HILY, Gaël, *Le dieu celtique Lugus*, TIR, Rennes, 2012; Ó HÓGÁIN, Dáithí, *The Lore of Ireland, An Encyclopaedia of Myth, Legend and Romance*, The Collins Press, Cork, 2006: 311-15; MACKILLOP, James, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004: 305-7.

6.   Ó HÓGÁIN, *ibid.*: 28-30, 259-60; MACKILLOP, *ibid.*: 32-3, 239-40. The fortress of the Fomhóire is located on Tory Island, in the north of County Donegal. In the *Book of Invasions*, the Fomhóire are generally depicted as hideous, dreadful, one-eyed, one-armed, one-legged supernatural creatures who attack each of the successive invaders, notably the Partholonians and the Nemedians. In the *Second Battle of Moytura*, they have more anthropomorphic traits. Intermarriages between the Tuatha De Danann and the Fomhóire occur. In addition to the union of Lugh's father and mother, the Fomhóirian Elatha mac Delbaith marries Ériu of Tuatha De Danann, who give birth to Bres "the Beautiful". Bres is appointed king of the Tuatha De Danann – after King Nuadu lost his arm – with the hope of bringing peace between the two divine races. Unfortunately, Bres turns out to be a poor king who oppresses his people with heavy tributes, which triggers the second Battle of Moytura. Balor, the king of the Fomhóire, is a cycloptic figure: he is gigantic and has a petrifying eye which is never opened except on a battlefield. It requires four men to lift its lid. A prophecy predicted Balor would be killed by his grandson.

ster. Lugh sends Cian,[7] his father, up north to reconnoitre. In the plain of Muirthemne (Co. Louth), Cian meets the three sons of Tuireann, Brian, Iuchar, Iucharba, whom he fears because of a familial feud.[8] To escape their wrath, he magically turns into a pig and hides among a herd of swine. Brian then transforms his two brothers into hounds to hunt the pigs and isolate Cian from the rest of the herd. Cian reappears in human form and is stoned to death by the three brothers who then try to bury his body into the earth. Because it is a fratricide – the three brothers are Tuatha De Danann –, the Earth rejects Cian's body six times before they could bury him. When Lugh learns the death of his father, he sets off to look for his body and murderers. The Earth tells him where his father is buried and who the murderers are. Lugh digs his grave, sings a lament and inscribes his name in ogham[9] on the tombstone.

Part 2: Lugh Imposes an Éric on the Three Sons of Tuireann

After going back to the Hill of Tara, the siege of the High Kings of Ireland, Lugh decides not to kill them, but to sue them. He lays an éric, i.e. a "blood price", on them. In reparation for killing his father, they have to perform dangerous feats and procure eight unattainable magical objects or animals from different parts of the world; treasures, coveted by Lugh, which ultimately engender death. Clearly, Lugh is being strategic: he wants to get these objects to

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7.   Cian is the son of Cáinte and has two brothers, Cú and Cethe. He is married to Eithne, Balor's daughter. Folk versions recount that Cian seduces her to take revenge on Balor who had stolen his magical cow, the Glas Ghaibhleann. Cian has the power to transform himself into a pig when he is in a dangerous situation. This magical ability originates from his birth. Because he was born with a caul on his head, he was turned into a pig by the stroke of a druidical wand. The origin of the enmity between the three sons of Cáinte and the three sons of Tuireann is unknown. MACKILLOP, *op. cit.*: 88.

8.   The three sons of Tuireann are part of the Tuatha De Danann. Brian, who is the bravest, is the one who leads the quest for the eight objects. His brothers are almost non-existent, which suggests the possibility of a god in triple form.

9.   From the 4th c. AD, Irish and Welsh people invented and used an elaborate alphabet, called *ogam* (modern Irish, *ogham*), which was the earliest form of writing. It was composed of twenty characters, classified in four groups of five characters, which could be written vertically as well as horizontally. Approximately 400 oghamic inscriptions engraved on stone have been discovered in Ireland, Devon, South Wales, Cornwall and the Isle of Man – and possibly Scotland, but these specimens are contested. Most ogham inscriptions are situated in Ireland (350), mainly in the South-West, notably in Co. Kerry. Oghams were generally funerary inscriptions, and thus bore the name of a deceased person. Their use was however certainly not limited to a commemorative function, for Irish literature and folklore point to their powerful magical significance, particularly when carved on wooden sticks. It is a cryptographic alphabet or code writing the meaning of which is to be deciphered. This means that each alphabetical sign is to be understood to mean "synonym of". The key to the deciphering of ogham is contained in a manuscript, dating from the 14th – 15th c., entitled the *Book of Ballymote*. To facilitate its learning, a name of a tree was attached to each oghamic character. For instance, the first character of the alphabet, B, is referred to as *beith*, meaning "birch" in Irish; the second character, L, is designated by *luis* "sorb'"; F is *fearn* "alder", etc. MACALISTER, R. A. Stewart, *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum*, vol. 1, *The Ogham Inscriptions of Ireland and Britain*, Stationery Office, Dublin, 1945; MCMANUS, Damian, *A Guide to Ogam*, An Sagart, Maynooth, 1991.

win the war against the Fomhóire, as well as indirectly cause the brothers' death. Brian is also a clever strategist, for he uses one of Lugh's taboos, which is the impossibility for Lugh to refuse a second demand. Brian first asks Lugh to lend them *Énbarr*, the enchanted horse of Mananann Mac Lir (the sea-god), which can run on earth and sea. Lugh refuses. Brian then asks for *Sguaba Tuinne* ("the wave-sweeper"), the self-navigating currach of Mananann. This time, Lugh is forced to comply with the request, and the brothers set off in the magical boat.

Part 3: The Quest for the Eight Magical Objects

Thanks to their audacity, ingenuity and courage, they manage to retrieve the first seven treasures, i.e.,

1. the three inexhaustible apples of the Garden of the Hesperides which can cure any wound. The location of the garden is indeterminate. Pliny the Elder locates it in today's Morocco or Libya.[10]
2. the fabulous pigskin belonging to Tuis, king of Greece, which can turn water into wine and cure any wound or disease.
3. *Gáe Assail* ("the spear of Assal"), the magical spear belonging to Pisear, king of Persia, which never misses its target and automatically returns to the hand of the thrower.[11]
4. the two immortal steeds owned by Dobar, the king of Sicily, which can run over land and sea.
5. the seven inexhaustible pigs of Assal, king of the Golden Pillars (Strait of Gibraltar),[12] which protect against diseases and can regenerate after being eaten.
6. the invincible whelp, Failinis, owned by Ioruaidh, king of Norway.[13]
7. the cooking spit belonging to the women of Fianchair island; a submarine island probably located in the Irish or Celtic sea.

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10.   According to Pliny the Elder, the Gardens of the Hesperides were located either in the Phoenician city of Lixos, which is today's El Araiche or Larache, on the river Lucos, in Morocco, or in the region of Cyreneica, which is the eastern part of present-day Libya. BOSTOCK, John, and RILEY, H.T., *The Natural History of the Pliny*, Taylor and Francis, London: 375-76, 396-97.

11.   MACKILLOP, *op. cit.*: 245. This spear is one of the four treasures of the Tuatha De Danann and becomes the lighting spear of Lugh – with which he kills Balor at the end of the second battle of Moytura.

12.   The Golden Pillars of Heracles/Hercules are the promontories (Gibraltar in Europe and Monte Hacho in Ceuta in Africa) flanking the entrance to the Strait of Gibraltar. Hercules created them on his tenth labour, i.e. the Cattle of Geryon. Cf. GUIRAND, Félix, and SCHMIDT, Joël, *Mythes et mythologies, Histoire et dictionnaire*, Larousse, Paris, 2006: 327.

13.   MACKILLOP, *op. cit.*: 200. Failinis becomes the lapdog of Lugh.

The last quest is quite enigmatic, since the brothers have to utter three shouts upon the hill of Miodhchaoin in Lochlainn,[14] located in the north of Scandinavia. This simple task proves to be more arduous and challenging than the previous ones: the three brothers are deathly speared by Miodhchaoin and his three sons who protect the tabooed hill. Brian yet manages to kill them and to lift the heads of his two brothers so that they could produce the shouts and thus fulfil the éric imposed by Lugh before they die. Brian brings the bodies of his brothers to his father, and Tuireann begs Lugh for the healing pigskin to save Brian, but Lugh categorically refuses. Brian eventually dies of his wounds and is buried with his two brothers by his father in the same grave.

This epic quest explains how Lugh acquires his martial gear for the Battle of Moytura he is about to fight. Moreover, these fabulous objects make him almighty, allowing him to establish his sovereignty on Ireland. Indeed, thanks to their magical properties, he becomes invincible, immortal and a purveyor of fertility. This tale is thus a quest for immortality, sovereignty and fertility – three aspects which are interconnected and ensure supremacy and kingship.

A Late Transmission of an Early Tale?

"The Tragic Death of the Children of Tuireann" (*Oidheadh Chloinne Tuireann*) is often associated with two other legends of the same type in the Irish manuscripts: "The Tragic Death of the Children of Lir" (*Oidheadh Chloinne Lir*) and "The Exile of the Sons of Usnech" (*Longes Mac nUisnech*). These three legends, which respectively relate the tragic fate of three heroes, are traditionally gathered under the name of "the Three Sorrows of Storytelling" (*Tri Truaighe Scéalaigheachta*). Patrick Ford and Caerwyn Williams have propounded the possibility of a common origin for the three tales. In addition to their triadic and tragic nature, they all seem to be connected to the Mac Firbhisighes in Connacht, a family of scholars and poets who compiled significant works on Irish history and antiquities, most notably the *Book of Lecan* – which contains the oldest version of "The Tragic Death of the Sons of Tuireann".[15]

"The Tragic Death of the Children of Tuireann" is comprised in nine manuscripts, all dating from the beginning of the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th century, the versions of which are very similar.[16] Written in Early Modern Irish, the tale itself certainly dates from

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14.   *Ibid.*: 302.

15.   WILLIAMS, J. E. Caerwyn, and FORD, Patrick K., *The Irish Literary Tradition*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1992: 133-4. WOULFE, Patrick, *Sloinnte Gaedheal is Gall: Irish Names and Surnames*, M. H. Gill and Son, Dublin, 1923 which can be consulted at <https://www.libraryireland.com/names/macf/mac-firbhisigh.php>, retrieved on December, 7th 2022.

16.   D'ARBOIS DE JUBAINVILLE, Henry, *Essai d'un catalogue de la littérature épique de l'Irlande, précédé d'une étude des manuscrits en langue irlandaise conservés dans les îles britanniques et sur le continent*, Ernest Thorin,

the 16th or 17th century. The Irish text, together with an English translation, was first published in 1863 by the Irish philologist Eugene O'Curry.[17] In 1879, a popular English translation by Patrick Weston Joyce, an Irish folklorist and toponymist, was published in *Old Celtic Romances*. Joyce did not include the Irish text and took the liberty of omitting the first four paragraphs and giving the names in a more pronounceable form.[18] In 1901, Richard J. O'Duffy reedited the Irish text published by O'Curry with a new English translation.[19]

    According to French Celtic scholar Christian-Joseph Guyonvarc'h, who published a French translation of the tale in 1980 – based on the same manuscript as O'Curry –, this text is "a typical example of a very late transmission of an early tale", since "many of the archaisms go back to Middle Irish", i.e. between the 10th and 13th centuries.[20] The antiquity of this legend cannot be questioned indeed. First of all, the names of the three sons of Tuireann appear in *Cormac's Glossary* (*Sanas Chormaic*), dated *c.* 900, in which they are described as the three chiefs of the Tuatha De Danann and the sons of Dana, the land goddess *par excellence*.[21] Moreover, a poem composed of thirty-seven stanzas, written by Flann Mainistrech of Monasterboice[22] at the beginning of the 11th century, describing how the main figures of the Tuatha

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Paris, 1883: 9-10. He drew up the following list: *Egerton 106*, folio 88, The British Museum Library, London, 1715; *Egerton 188*, folio 122, The British Museum Library, London, 1720; *Egerton 164*, The British Museum Library, London, 1726 : 126; *Royal Irish Academy (R.IA.)* MS 23 M 47, Dublin, 1734: 66-97 – the text is incomplete; *R.I.A.* MS 23 C 22, Dublin, 1763: 221; *R.I.A.* MS 23 G 10, Dublin, 1808: 45-67; *R.I.A.* MS 23 E 16, Dublin, 1797: 245-287; *Egerton 208*, The British Museum Library, London, 19th c.: 46. The text also appears in Gaelic Manuscripts of Scotland, Adv. MS 72.2.6, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, 18th c.: 369–98.
17.   O'CURRY, Eugene (ed. and tr.), "The 'Trí thruaighe na scéalaigheachta' (*i.e.* the 'Three most sorrowful tales',) of Erinn. — III. 'The fate of the children of Tuireann' (*Oidhedh Chloinne Tuireann*)", in *The Atlantis*, 4, 1863: 158-227. O'Curry's translation is based on the most ancient manuscript, the *Egerton* 106 – cf. above.
18.   JOYCE, Patrick Weston, *Old Celtic Romances*, Kegan Paul and Co., London, 1879: x-xi, 37-97. He does not specify on which manuscript he based his translation. It may be the *R.I.A.* 23 E 16, Dublin, 1797: 245-87. For him, the first four paragraphs of the tale – which deal with Nuada the Silver Arm, king of the Tuatha De Danann, and his two physicians, Midac and Armedda – had no link whatsoever with the story, which is why he decided not to include them.
19.   O'DUFFY, Richard J. (ed. and tr.), *Oidhe Chloinne Tuireann: The Fate of the Children of Tuireann*, M.H. Gill and Son, Dublin, 1901.
20.   GUYONVARC'H, Christian-Joseph, *Textes mythologiques irlandais*, Ogam-Celticum, Rennes, 1980: 105: "[…] les nombreux archaïsmes remontent, presque tous, au moyen-irlandais. Nous avons là un exemple typique d'une transmission très tardive d'un récit ancien." The English translation of this quotation is the author's.
21.   *Sanas Chormaic* is an Old-Irish glossary, compiled by Cormac mac Cuilennáin (AD 831-908), prince and bishop of Cashel (Co. Tipperary), towards the end of the 9th century. It contains etymologies and explanations of Irish words and mythical names. This may be the earliest dictionary in vernacular language. O'DONOVAN, John (ed. and tr.), *Cormac's Glossary*, The Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society, Calcutta, 1868: 4: "Ana, or as she is most usually called Danann, was the mother of the three chieftains of the Tuatha dé Danann, Brian, Iuchar, and Iucharbu, who were accounted gods for their feats of necromancy."
22.   Flann Manistrech was an Irish poet and historian who died on November, 25th 1056. Some of his poems

De Danann died – by the sword or by accident –, mentions that Brian, Iucharba et Iuchair slew Cian (stanza 6) and that they were in turn killed by Lugh (stanza 18):[23]

> 6. *Cethen* and *Cu* died,[24]
> From fright of the doe;
> They killed *Cein*, far from his house;
> *Brian*, *Iuchurba*, and *Iuchair*.

> 18. *Brian*, *Iuchurba*, and *Iuchair* too,
> The three gods of the *Tuaith De Danann*,
> Were killed at *Mana*, over the silent tide,
> By the hand of *Lugh*, son of *Ethlenn*.

This 11th-century poem can be considered the earliest reference to the tale, for it gives the identity of the personages, how they are related, and in which circumstances they died. This tends to prove that the story of the related murderers of Cian and the three sons of Tuireann was well-known at the time in the literary sphere, and certainly in folklore too.

Finally, the oldest reference to "The Tragic Death of the Sons of Tuireann" in the form of a tale is comprised in the *Book of Lecan* (folio 28), compiled by the Mac Firbhisigh family around 1416 – cf. above.[25] This text, partly in prose and partly in verse, is an abridged version of the 16th/17th-century tale, for it recounts how Lugh imposed an éric ("fine, reparation of a crime") on the three sons of Tuireann for killing his father, Cian, but it does not include the story of the quest for the eight objects. While O'Curry postulates this text is a fragment or sketch of the legend, I assume this early 15th-century text is the embryo or first stage of the tale: the tale most certainly expanded through time. Indeed, the myths and legends of the Irish Celts developed through the centuries, and different versions of a same tale were written down at different times in history. The late versions are generally more developed, containing new plots, in-tales, motifs and aspects[26] which were added by the

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appear in the *Book of the Invasion of Ireland (Lebor Gabála Érenn)*. Cf. NÍ MHAONAIGH, Máire, "Flann Main- istrech", in DUFFY, Seán (ed.), *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopaedia*, Routledge, London, 2005: 303-6.

23.   O'CURRY, Eugene, "The 'Tri Thruaighe na Scéalaigheachta', (i.e., the "Three Most Sorrowful Tales") of Erin", in *The Atlantis*, 3, 1862: 394-5. Four stanzas of the Irish poem are published and translated into English by O'Curry who indicates that a copy of this poem is comprised in the *Book of Leinster* (*c.* 1130), p. 11, col. 2. See also THURNEYSEN, Rudolf, "Tuirill Bicren und seine Kinder", in *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 12, 1918: 239–50.

24.   Cú and Cethe are Cian's brothers. They are the sons of Cáinte.

25.   *R.I.A.* 23 P. 2, folio 28, col. 2, l. 38. The *Book of Lecan* was compiled between 1397 and 1418. Cf. MA- CALISTER, R. A. Stewart (ed. and trans.), *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, *The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, Part IV, Irish Texts Society, Dublin, 1941: 284-91, 339-41.

26.   One of the most striking examples is the legend of the "Second Battle of Moytura" (*Cath Maige Tuired*). As detailed above, there are two versions of the conflict, comprised in two different manuscripts: the earliest manuscript, edited by GRAY, *op. cit.*, dates from the 11th century, the later manuscript, edited by Ó CUIV, *op. cit.*, dates from about the 16th century. The latter version differs considerably from the earlier version in subject

scribes who wrote them down. Scribes were undoubtedly inspired by foreign myths as well as oral literature, which was extremely creative, evolutive and flexible, and had co-existed with written literature since the 7th century.

I believe the tale originally did not include the quest: this part was added later to explain the origin of the fabulous objects detained by Lugh and the Tuatha De Danann. This is all the more probable as the part relating the quest for the eight magical objects greatly resembles the Greco-Roman legend of "The Twelve Labours of Heracles/Hercules" in terms of structure, plot and motifs as Bernard Sergent posited in *Celtes et Grecs I* (1999).[27] Indeed, the hero Heracles, after losing his mind, killed his children and wife. In punishment for the murderers, Eurystheus, King of Tiryns and Mycenae, imposed twelve Labours or feats on him: he had to retrieve fabulous objects or animals which were virtually unattainable, for they led to certain death.[28] Sergent argues these similar Greco-Roman and Irish Celtic tales are proof of a common Indo-European heritage. While this theory cannot be brushed aside, it is more likely that the Irish scribes were inspired by the outstanding feats of the Greco-Roman heroes and deities. In *Ireland and the Classical Tradition* (1976), William Bedell Stanford has evidenced that the Classical texts were translated into the Irish language from the 10th century onwards – Virgil's *Aeneid* and Lucan's *Pharsalia* were for instance translated as soon as the 10th century.[29] At the end of the 14th century, Irish versions of almost all the Greco-Roman myths were available to the Irish scholars, such as "Jason and the Golden Fleece",[30] which also bears much resemblance to "The Tragic Death of the Sons of Tuireann".[31] The Irish scribes, fascinated by these fabulous myths, most certainly borrowed plots and motifs which they inserted in their own myths, adapting them to their environment, culture, legal system and beliefs. Another significant piece of evidence corroborating this theory is the existence of a fragmentary Latin adaptation of the tale,

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matter as well as in language: some passages have been omitted and new in-plots, elements and motifs, which are found again in folk legends or come from non-Celtic influences, have been added. See GRAY, *op. cit.*: 10; Ó CUIV, *op. cit.*: 5-8.

27.   SERGENT, Bernard, *Celtes et Grecs. I. Le livre des héros*, Payot, Paris, 1999: "chapitre II : les Travaux de Brian": 65-97.

28.   He has to slay (1) the Nemean lion, (2) the nine-headed Lernaean Hydra, to bring back (3) the Ceryneian Hind, (4) the Erymanthian Boar, (5) to clean the Augean stables in one day, (6) to kill the Stymphalian birds, to retrieve (7) the Cretan Bull, (8) the Mares of Diomedes, (9) the belt of Hippolyta, queen of the Amazon, (10) the cattle of the three-bodied giant Geryon, (11) three golden apples of the Hesperides, and (12) to kill Cerberus. Cf. GUIRAND and SCHMIDT, *op. cit.*: 225-30.

29.   STANFORD, William Bedell, "Towards a History of Classical Influences in Ireland", in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, *Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, vol. 70, 1970: 13-91.

30.   GUIRAND and SCHMIDT, *op. cit.*: 241-2.

31.   STANFORD, William Bedell, *Ireland and the Classical Tradition*, Allen Figgis, Dublin, 1976: 80.

dated *c.* 1600, comprised in the *Harleian 5280* manuscript,[32] which awkwardly combines Greco-Roman and Irish mythical elements, motifs and references.[33] Lugh, renamed "Mundulius" ("the Elegant One"), with the help of the sons of "Turnus" (i.e., Tuireann), Urore, Ore and Ochru (i.e., Brian, Iuchar, Iucharba), declares war on the Danish invaders – who replace the sinister Fomhóire. This Latin fragment includes the inset episode relating the killing of Cian by the sons of Tuireann. It contains the motifs of the transformation of Cian and Brian's brothers into a pig and hunting dogs as well as the repetitive rejection of Cian's body by the Earth. Nonetheless, Cian is not stoned but buried alive by the three brothers. This fragmentary tale is deeply embedded in Greco-Roman mythology: some of the Irish gods are given Latin names – Turnus is the name of the main enemy of Aeneas in Virgil's *Aeneid* –; Lugh's punishment on the sons of Tuireann is compared to the forceful deeds of the demi-god Aeneas during the Trojan War;[34] and the characters quote Greco-Roman references, e.g. "Urore swore by the Stygian stream", etc.[35]

From all of this, it follows that, when the *Book of Lecan* was compiled between 1397 and 1418, the Greco-Roman legends were well-known to the Irish scholars and poets. Therefore, it is highly likely that the scribes, inspired by "The Twelve Labours of Hercules" and other Greco-Roman myths, expanded the Irish tale. The motif of the *éric* (i.e. the eight magical objects to retrieve) must have been added in the early 15th century, while the quest part a couple of centuries later (18-19th centuries). In other words, the legend of "The Tragic Death of the Children of Tuireann" most certainly evolved and expanded through borrowings and additions, from the 11th century to the 18th/19th centuries.

Until now, this legend has not been extensively studied and has produced little interest in Irish and Celtic studies. The creation and development of the *An Domhan* experience, which we are going to detail in the next part, was thus an opportunity to put it back in the centre of the stage. The collaborative work with Le Coarer allowed us to revisit the potential origins and evolutions of the legend and to propose new directions for reflection – which we hope to develop in further research.

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32.   *Harleian* or *Harley 5280*, The British Museum Library, London, early 16th century.

33.   BREATHNACH, Risteard Breasalach (ed. and tr.), "*Oidheadh chloinne Tuireann*: a sixteenth-century Latin fragment", in *Éigse, A Journal of Irish Studies*, vol. 1, 1939-1940: 249-57, and vol. 2, 1940: 290 published the Latin text together with an English translation. GUYONVARC'H, *op. cit.*: 121-3 gives a French translation of the Latin text. FLOWER, Robin, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the [British Library, formerly the] British Museum*, vol. 2, British Museum, London, 1926: 300, dates this fragment of text from *c.* 1600.

34.   BREATHNACH, *op. cit.*: 250-1: "[…] Mundulius, who, in selecting strong and courageous soldiers to avenge his father's death on the sons of Turnus, took upon himself labours and responsibilities as great as those taken by Aeneas [in his campaign] against the Trojan state."

35.   *Ibid.*: 257.

From Tradition to Modernity. An Domhan*: A Mixed Reality (X) Experience*

An Domhan is a research-creation thesis or project insomuch as it "typically integrate[s] a creative process, experimental aesthetic component, [and] an artistic work as an integral part of the study".[36] Investigating the legend of the children of Tuireann, *An Domhan* is a highly innovative immersive device, for it uses and combines different modes of digital realities, i.e. Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR). In an article defining the different types of digital realities, Steve Mann and al. explain:

> VR (Virtual Reality) is a computer-generated simulation of a realistic experience. Typically, VR blocks out the real world ("Reality") and replaces it with a "Virtual" world. The virtual world may be generated by a computer, or by interactively playing back recorded media. […] AR (Augmented Reality) is a similar concept, but instead of blocking out reality, the computer-generated content is added onto, or embedded into, the real-world experience, so that both can be experienced together. It has been suggested […] that Augmented Reality exists along a continuum between the real and virtual worlds, giving rise to "mixed reality". In this context we can think of AR as a setting on a "mixer" or "fader" or "slider" that is somewhere between reality and virtuality.[37]

In addition to being a Mixed Reality experience, combining reality and virtuality, as well as VR and AR, *An Domhan* consists of two users, incarnating the two main antagonist figures of the legend, Lugh and Brian, who move about and interact in the same virtual world but through different digital realities.[38] The user personifying Brian is propelled into a 3D environment through a virtual reality headset. The controllers allow the user to move forward, grab objects and interact with other elements. The user embodying Lugh has got a smartphone which shows the same environment but in Augmented Reality (AR): the user is not propelled in a simulated environment like in VR, but interacts in an immersive environment that is both real and virtual, for it combines elements of the real world, filmed in real time, with computer-generated content, such as 3D objects.[39] As defined above, AR remodels the perception of a real environment, unlike VR which simulates and thus replaces a real-world environment. The *An Domhan* device can be set up in any location, as long as the two users can freely move about. While they walk onward in an endless virtual world, they progress in a real, delimited space, which is about 12 square metres.

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36. CHAPMAN, Owen, and SAWCHUK, Kim, "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and 'Family Resemblances'", in *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37.1, 2012: 1.

37. MANN, Steve, FURNESS, Tom, YUAN Yu, IORIO Jay, WANG, Zixin, "All Reality: Virtual, Augmented, Mixed (X), Mediated (X,Y), and Multimediated Reality", in *ArXiv,* 1804.08386 [Cs], Cornell University, 2018: 1, <http://arxiv.org/abs/1804.08386>, retrieved on April, 20th 2022.

38. The *An Domhan* experience was tested out by the participants during the international and interdisciplinary symposium "Celtic Myths and Folklores in the Anglophone World", 18-19 November 2021, at the University of Toulon, France.

39. AGAMBEN, Giorgio, *Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif ?*, Rivages, Paris, 2014.

User experience of the *An Domhan* Mixed Reality device. To the left, the Lugh user in AR with the smartphone; to the right, in the background, the Brian user in VR with VR goggles and controllers

The primary goal of Brian is to discover and catch the eight magical objects which are hidden in planet-like elements, while the aim of Lugh is to disrupt Brian's quest and to eventually steal the objects from him. Each experience is thus a race against the clock. Thanks to AR, the Lugh user has an omnipotent and omniscient position, like the god in the legend.[40] Indeed, since the Lugh user is not propelled in a simulated environment through reality virtual goggles like the Brian user is, he or she can observe the gestures, moves and actions of the Brian user in the real environment, while tracking down the Brian avatar on the smartphone at the same time. As for the Brian user, he or she knows he or she is being pursued, but he or she cannot check the advancement of the Lugh user. Like in the legend, Lugh enjoys a significant advantage and Brian is assigned an inferior position.

Narrative Deconstruction and Reconstruction

A question which aroused at the beginning of the project was: how to make it different from a video game? Indeed, in a video game, the user plays the role of a character (e.g., a hero or a god) and goes on a journey or a quest with a specific aim. Video games can tell a story, but the story structure is ultimately chronological, for the user goes from one stage to another, from one world to another world, and the game is over when the quest has been fulfilled – in this case, when all the objects have been collected. Clearly, we did not want to create a video game, for it would have resulted in a formal and illustrative restitution of the legend, which did not seem to be relevant and applicable in a research-creation project implying reflection, inventiveness, innovation, as well as technological, artistic and literary creativity. As detailed above, the legend is a combination of imbricated stories and motifs. Le Coarer figured out this peculiar narrative architecture could be adapted into an immersive and narrative experience through which

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40. Interview with Gaëtan Le Coarer on September 30th, 2022.

users could explore new narrative spaces. This explains why Le Coarer decided not to follow the linearity, chronology and structure of the medieval legend.

First, he inverted the beginning and the end of the story. In the medieval text, the legend starts with the murder of Cian and ends with the death of the three brothers. In *An Domhan*, when the users start the experience, Brian is already dead and comes back to understand why he has died.[41] The story thus starts *in medias res*, for it leaves out narrative exposition and plunges users into the middle of the plot.[42] In addition, the quest for the eight magical objects gradually reveals Lugh's strategy: the users' actions therefore fill in the narrative gaps. At the end of the experience, Brian discovers the reason of his death: he died because he had murdered Lugh's father. He paid with his life for this fratricide.

Interestingly, in the *An Domhan* experience, Brian is dead but is reincarnated in another body, i.e. that of the user, in a new world, i.e. a virtual world, at another period of time, i.e. the 21st century. This virtual metempsychosis represents the belief of the Celts in the immortality of the soul and its transmigration into another human or animal body.[43] In Irish mythology, the metempsychosis motif is for instance embodied by two immortal and eternal deities, i.e. Fintan mac Bóchra and Tuan mac Cairill, who respectively survived the flood or a plague, and lived through the ages by successively transforming themselves into animals (e.g., a stag, a boar, an eagle, a salmon) before resuming their human shape.[44]

User experience of the *An Domhan* Mixed Reality device. The Brian user with a VR headset and controllers. Pictures by Gaëtan Le Coarer, the International Design Biennial Show, Saint-Étienne, France, 2022

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41. Interview with Gaëtan Le Coarer on September 30th, 2022.
42. VAN GORP, Hendrick, DELABASTITA, Dirk, D'HULST, Lieven, GHESQUIERE, Rita, GRUTMAN, Rainier, and LEGROS, Georges, *Dictionnaire des termes littéraires*, Honoré Champion, Paris, 2005: 253; "in medias res", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/art/in-medias-res-literature>, accessed October, 13th 2022: "the practice of beginning an epic or other narrative by plunging into a crucial situation that is part of a related chain of events; the situation is an extension of previous events and will be developed in later action."
43. DOTTIN, Georges, "La Croyance à l'immortalité de l'âme chez les anciens Irlandais", in *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, vol. 14, 1886: 53-66 ; STERCKX, Claude, *Mythologie du monde celte*, Marabout, Vanves, 2014: 358-62.
44. Ó HÓGÁIN, *op. cit.*: 251-2, 478; MACKILLOP, *op. cit.*: 230, 414.

The legend has also been delinearised and deconstructed, for Brian does not need to go from Quest 1 to Quest 2 until Quest 8 in a chronological order. This would have implied to cross from one world to another, like in a video game, which we aimed to avoid. In deconstructing the plot, Le Coarer has created a new non-linear and disordered narrative mode. Indeed, the Brian user is propelled into a multi-dimensional world where the eight objects are randomly scattered, and he or she can catch the objects in any order. This implies that a new version of the legend is created each time a new user plays Brian. The deconstruction of the linearity of the medieval legend thus allows the reconstruction of the legend in different ways, through different paths, and it offers an experience of multiple storytelling, reading and interpretations. This aspect is intensified by the interaction of the two users, for their respective actions have an influence on the development of the story. With hand clicking on the touchscreen of the smartphone, the Lugh user can for instance generate and pile up "narrative cubes" – containing *i-legible*[45] fragments of the legend – to disrupt or utterly block the advancement of Brian.

This experience thus offers the possibility to re-tell and re-visit the legend in the same way a storyteller re-explores a tale each time he retells it – a storyteller can change or inset new elements, motifs, in-tales in the plot so as to develop it. As detailed above, it reflects the evolutions, distortions, additions, variations which are characteristic of Irish medieval literature and folklore. Finally, it challenges and creates new narrative modes, by using a modern medium of storytelling, through Virtual and Augmented Realities.

The Visual Identity of An Domhan

An Domhan shakes up expectations and imagination, for it offers an entirely new and extremely modern visual representation of the legend. Indeed, the graphics are not realistic or figurative as users would expect, but abstract and conceptual, which is why users are generally disconcerted when they experience it for the very first time.[46]

45.　Interview with Gaëtan Le Coarer on September 30th, 2022: "On the brink of the legible and the invisible, a piece of information appears in the depths (in darkness) of the narration" (English translation is the author's). Cf. VEYRAT, Marc, *La Société i Matériel, De l'information comme matériau artistique*, vol. 1 and 2, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2015 and 2016.
46.　Interview with Gaëtan Le Coarer on September 30th, 2022. The uses, reactions and comments of the users have been compiled and studied using "the visual method" developed by LAMBOUX-DURAND, Alain, IBANEZ-BUENO, Jacques, CHABERT, Ghislaine & WANONO, Nadine (eds.), *Applying visual methods to digital communication / Los métodos visuales aplicadas a la comunicación digital / Les méthodes visuelles appliquées à la communication numérique*, Tenerife: Sociedad Latina de Comunicación Social, 2017.

An Abstract World

There are no characters physically and figuratively represented with human traits and costumes, because the two users actually embody the two characters: they *are* the characters. In addition, the virtual world does not represent a realistic Irish landscape with green plains, hills, lakes, cliffs and the sea, but a totally abstract world in black and white. The *An Domhan* world combines ancient maps of Ireland, which are superimposed and form the ground, 3D modelling of the eight objects in the shape of planets and geometric designs such as cubes, oghamic inscriptions, quotations from the legend in the Irish, English and French languages. The choice of the abstract can be interpreted in different ways. While the aim of the figurative is to depict reality, i.e. the natural world of human beings, the abstract here stands for the un-real, i.e. the divine world. The *Sídh* or "Otherworld" is recondite by definition and thus not entirely comprehensible by human beings. The mystery of the Otherworld lies in its sacred nature which only the initiates can understand and accede. The abstract aspect of *An Domhan* therefore reflects its abstruseness. It is indeed necessary to have the key to deciphering the symbols and graphics in the interface so as to fathom the hidden meanings of the experience and accede the divine world. Le Coarer conceives this "Other-World" as another dimension or "in-between" space, with blurred, indefinite frontiers, oscillating between reality (the world of the living) and virtuality (the world of the gods and of the dead).[47]

In the foreground, one of the eight objects in the shape of a "planet" which the Brian user can grab. In the background: the cartographic design of the An Domhan environment in VR. Picture by Gaëtan Le Coarer, the International Festival of Video Art, Casablanca (Morocco), November 9th, 2022

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47. Interview with Gaëtan Le Coarer on September 30th, 2022. Cf. BRANDON, Carole, *L'Entre [corps/machine] : La Princesse et son Mac*, Thèse de Doctorat, Université Paris 1 – Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2016.

…in Black and White

A research-creation project may be "exhibited or performed as art", because it contains aesthetic elements and artistic creations.[48] In fact, the *An Domhan* device can be considered a piece of contemporary art itself, since it combines different methods, concepts and materials, e.g., literature, sketches in Indian ink, technological devices, etc.[49] In addition, the viewer-user needs to decipher the combination of its abstract concepts to understand the meanings and visions encapsulated in it. *An Domhan* has been exhibited several times in different countries, notably in the ARTour Heritage and Design Biennial Show in La Louvière (Belgium) from September to November 2021,[50] in the International Design Biennial Show, Saint-Étienne (France), in April 2022,[51] in the International Festival of Video Art in Casablanca (Morocco) in November 2022,[52] and at the Espace Larith, a contemporary art gallery, in Chambéry (France) in December 2022, where Le Coarer defended his thesis.[53]

Users can also apprehend the *An Domhan* device as an artistic experience, for they can choose to gaze upon its graphic environment and reflect upon its multiple meanings. This is enhanced by the immersion into a 3D work of art with a 360-degree perspective. Positioned within the art work, users feel they are part of the world they are looking at – a piece of art they can transform through their decisions and actions. This inner position alters their perspective, offering them a myriad of visions and interpretations.

Le Coarer has chosen not to use colours, but only black and white in reference to the "Outrenoir" paintings by French artist Pierre Soulages, because "they echo the aspect, texture and darkness of the 3D environment experienced in VR: a profundity of the Black colour where many different pieces of information are mingled".[54] Soulages reveals that the viewer

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48.   CHAPMAN and SAWCHUK, *op. cit.*: 1.
49.   SMITH, Terry, *What is Contemporary Art?*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2009.
50.   The 13th edition of "la biennale ARTour - art contemporain et patrimoine" was held in the Gilson Castle, La Louvière (Belgium), September 24th-November 28th 2021. <http://transcultures.be/2021/08/26/trans-cultures-artour-biennale-art-contemporain-et-patrimoine-2021/> ; <http://transcultures.be/2021/09/10/ article-ar-tour-2021-intermedialites-creatives-un-itineraire-de-relations-image-son-texte/>, retrieved on October, 15th 2022.
51.   *An Domhan* was exhibited at the Tarentaize library on April, 6th 2022, <https://www.biennale-design.com/saint-etienne/2022/>; <http://transcultures.be/2022/03/27/marc-veyrat-gaetan-le-coarer-biennale-interna-tionale-design-saint-etienne-2022/>, retrieved on October, 15th 2022.
52.   The "Festival International d'Art Vidéo (FIAV)" in Casablanca is the most prestigious festival of contemporary art and video art in Africa. This was the 28th edition, from November 8th-12th 2022. <https://www.fiav.ma/>, retrieved on October, 15th 2022.
53.   Espace Larith, 39 rue du Larith, 73000 Chambéry, Savoy. <https://www.larith.org/>; <https://www.face-book.com/espacelarith Chambery/>; <http://transcultures.be/2022/12/02/an-domhan-gaetan-le-coarer-expo-these-galerie-espace-larith/>, retrieved on December, 13th 2022.
54.   Interview with Gaëtan Le Coarer on September 30th, 2022 : "Les Outrenoirs de Pierre Soulages font eux-mêmes écho à l'aspect, la texture, la noirceur de l'environnement 3D expérimenté en VR : une profondeur du

needs to go beyond the surface of his paintings to "reach another country, another mental space than mere black", because black actually encapsulates and reflects light.[55] In other words, the concept of "going beyond" offers other and new spaces of reflexion and meanings. From Soulages's "Outrenoir" derives Le Coarer's "Outre-Monde", i.e. "the World Apart (from the human world)", a term he uses to refer to the Irish *Sídh* as well as this in-between real-virtual environment he has created.

These two opposite "colours" also symbolise the recurrent theme of Light and Darkness in Irish medieval literature. This ambivalence does not represent the notions of Good and Evil in the strict sense of the term – notions which are central to the Christian philosophy –, but the natural forces, such as day and night, the warm and cold seasons, and the perpetual cycle of life-creation, death-destruction, and rebirth-regeneration. These natural forces are personified by two divine races that confront one another in the "Second Battle of Moytura": the Tuatha De Danann, who symbolise brightness and life, vs. the Fomhóire, who incarnate darkness and death.[56] Interestingly, this antagonism is also found in the personality of the two main characters of the legend. Indeed, Lugh is a Tuatha De Danann through his father, Cian, as well as a Fomhóire, through his mother, Eithne.[57] In the texts, he is generally associated with light, for he is depicted as a solar god,[58] but in the "The Tragic Death of the Children of Tuireann", he turns out to be a Machiavellian, treacherous and cruel character. As for Brian, he is a traitor and murderer as he commits a fratricide, as well as a brave warrior who surmounts all the challenges and eventually fulfils the unachievable quest. The Otherworld also encapsulates this binary representation of Light and Darkness. Generally depicted as a beneficial, idyllic, bountiful place, it can suddenly turn into an inhospitable, sinister, dreadful place, notably when someone tries to enter by force or with evil intentions.[59] Some mythical heroes or kings, such Cormac Connloinges, king of Emain Macha, meet their death in dangerous, dark places known as *bruidne*, "mansions, banqueting hall or hostel" (*bruiden* in the singular).[60]

Noir où se mêle une quantité d'informations différentes" (English translation is the author's).

55. CRISTIANI, Jean-Noël, and ENCREVÉ, Pierre, *Un soir au Centre Pompidou, Soulages : le noir et la lumière*, France 5, P.O.M. Films, MFP, Centre Pompidou: 2009 : "Au-delà du noir, une lumière transmutée par le noir, et comme outre-Rhin et outre-Manche désignent un autre pays, Outrenoir désigne aussi un autre pays, un autre champ mental que celui du simple noir" (English translation is the author's); LE LANNOU, Jean-Michel, "Entretien avec Pierre Soulages", in *Philosophique*, n° 2, janvier 1999: 89-97.

56. Ó HÓGÁIN, *op. cit.*: 183, 366-7. Such a primordial battle between bright and obscure forces is found in other mythologies: the Devas and Asuras in Vedic literature, the Aesir and Vanir in Norse mythology, and between Zeus' family and the Titans in Greek mythology.

57. HILY, *op. cit.*: 111-8.

58. *Ibid.*: 104, 345-83.

59. BECK, Noémie, *Catalogue raisonné de la mythologie irlandaise*, Mémoire de D.E.A., Université Jean-Moulin Lyon 3, 2002: 76-81.

60. MACKILLOP, *op. cit.*: 61, 106. There are about 5 or 6 *bruidne* in Ireland. Cormac Connloinges's death

Oghamic inscriptions, quotations from the legend, geometric and cartographic designs forming the environment in VR. Pictures by Gaëtan Le Coarer, the International Design Biennial Show, Saint-Étienne, France, 2022

A Multi-Layered Architecture

Despite its virtuality, the *An Domhan* experience is deeply rooted in reality, symbolised by the Earth. In Irish mythology, the land, embodied by the mother-goddess, is at the origin of everything: she gives birth, purveys riches and maintains life.[61] The Earth episode in the "The Tragic Death of the Children of Tuireann" is powerful. It is the Earth who first judges the three sons for their crime as she refuses to accept Cian's body in her womb six times in a row. It is her who denounces the murderers and tells Lugh where his father is buried. The Earth thus plays a central and crucial role in the development of the story. These are the reasons why we have chosen to name this immersive experience *An Domhan* "the Earth" and to root its architectural environment in the land and geography of Ireland, may it be real or mythical.

The *Sídh* is located in many different places in and outside the natural world: under the earth, under water (lakes, pools, rivers, the sea), on far-away islands, and in a parallel, invisible world which overlays the physical world of human beings.[62] One can enter the Otherworld by diving into water, entering a cave, or meeting an unexpected mystical fog. They all work as portals to the divine world. This shows that the Otherworld is multiple and multi-faceted, working like a palimpsest. This complex mythical geography inspired the multi-dimensional and multi-layered architecture of *An Domhan*, which is composed of superimposed ancient maps of Ireland and oghamic inscriptions. The two users thus move about in a cartographic imagery.

Interestingly, in this tale, the Otherworld is made up of fictive locations (such as the submarine island in quest 7)

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is told in "The Destruction of Da Choca's Hostel" (*Togail Bruidne Da Choca*).

61. BECK, Noémie, *Goddesses in Celtic Religion: Cult and Mythology. A Comparative Study of Ancient Ireland, Britain and Gaul*, Thèse de Doctorat, University College Dublin, Université Lumière Lyon 2, 2009: 44-207.

62. BECK, *op. cit.*, 2002: 84-6.

as well as real locations which can be mapped, e.g. Spain, Greece, Persia, Sicily, Scandinavia, etc. According to Guyon-varc'h, these geographical liberties illustrate the infinity and extent of the *Sídh*.[63] In *An Domhan*, they are represented in the superimposition, fusion and confusion of the real and virtual worlds. As explained above, users progress in a real, delimited space while moving in an endless virtual world at the same time: two worlds – one mortal and delimited, the other eternal and boundless –, co-exist like the natural and supernatural worlds in Irish mythology.

Finally, *An Domhan*'s architecture englobes the spatial notions of horizontality, verticality and centrality which characterise the Irish Otherworld – notions which are epitomised by the Cosmic or World Tree.[64] Indeed, this mystical tree reunites and links the three vertical parts of the cosmos in itself. Rooted in the chthonic world, it stands out with its trunk and boughs in the terrestrial world, while its foliage spreads towards the celestial world. The tree thus represents the intermediary between the divine and human worlds and symbolizes the axis of the world from where the four cardinal directions spread. Le Coarer argues the two users share a common environment yet with different spatial perspectives: the environment of the Lugh user in AR is brighter and vertical, while the environment of the Brian user in VR is darker and horizontal. These concepts of verticality and horizontality produce an interface of imbricated spaces while recreating the structure of the Irish Otherworld.

All these geographical aspects have greatly influenced the graphic representation and the scenario of *An Domhan*, notably regarding the concepts of movement, crossing spaces and "passage" between the different locations and worlds. This multi-layered architecture amplifies the possibilities and creates new spaces: spaces of creation, analysis, interpretation and memory.

Cartographic and geometric designs forming the environment in VR. Pictures by Gaëtan Le Coarer, the International Design Biennial Show, Saint-Étienne, France, 2022

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63.   GUYONVARC'H, *op. cit.*: 138.
64.   BECK, *op. cit.*, 2009: 232-35.

The cartographic design with superimposed maps, oghamic inscriptions and quotations from the legend in VR. Picture by Gaëtan Le Coarer, the International Festival of Video Art, Casablanca (Morocco), November 9th, 2022

Conclusion

Combining virtuality and reality, myth and history, tradition and modernity, as well as different types of coexisting worlds and modes of expressions, *An Dohman* allows its users to explore the myth in various ways and through different lenses. This paper has examined how the digital device provides new literary and artistic perspectives by offering a mosaic of possibilities and interpretations. Indeed, it not only allows to visit and re-visit this famous legend which is part of the identity legacy of the Irish, it also questions the creation and re-creation of myths and legends since time immemorial. It challenges tradition as well as narrative modes, providing an immersive and interactive palimpsest of influences, dimensions and times that shakes the users' beliefs. With its multiple spaces of creativity, analysis and meaning, *An Domhan* is a piece of art as well as an object of remembrance in itself. Like a manuscript, it encapsulates the ancient beliefs, traditions, concepts and stories of the Irish Celts.

An Domhan is a *non-finito* piece of art, for it will always be a work in progress. In collaboration with Transcultures: Media Arts Center, a Belgian cultural organisation, and the artist Tommy Lawson, the sound design of *An Domhan* will be developed so as to set up a live performance of the experience.[65] Le Coarer plans to exhibit *An Domhan* in various contemporary art festivals in 2023, such as the Festival Zone Libre ("Free Zone Festival"), a sound arts festival in Bastia (Corsica, France).[66] Recreating the unfixed, evolutive and creative aspects of Irish medieval literature, *An Domhan* will thus be enhanced by new technologies, artistic elements and original ideas in the future.

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65.   <http://transcultures.be/>; <https://www.zonelibres.com/tommy-lawson>, retrieved on December, 19th 2022.
66.   <https://www.zonelibres.com/>, retrieved on December, 15th 2022.