**Questions for the Celtic Myths and Legends Readings**

**Directions:** Read the posted material on Celtic Myth and Legend, including the brief background material, with the questions below in mind, and highlight/annotate the readings as you go so you will be prepared to discuss all of the questions in some detail in class. Also, choose ONE question for each story to respond to in writing. Please *type* your answers, print them out, and be ready to hand them in at the beginning of class. Note: There are many different versions of these stories, so to avoid confusion, be sure you read the versions I posted.

* The Ulster Cycle: Cú Chulainn (Coo Cullen), the Táin Bó Cúailnge (Toin bo Cooley), and Deirdre of the Sorrows
* Children of Lir (Leer)
* Tír na nÓg (Teer nah noag)

**The Ulster Cycle:** The material I’ve given you about this story comes from two different books, plus a graphic novel for some of the illustrations. One book emphasized the personal experience and exploits of the “Irish Achilles,” Cú Chulainn (pp. 8-13), and the other (pp. 5-7 & 14-15) emphasized the larger forces behind the war that brought his skills into play from the point of view of the instigators, especially Queen Maeve (or Medb—both pronounced “Mave”) and her husband, Ailill (Ay-lill). Notice as you’re reading how this shift in perspective affects your attitude about the events and characters depicted. I’ve left out the story about Cú Chulainn’s strange supernatural birth, but suffice it to say he was discovered as a foundling and raised up to serve the king of Ulster. I left in his strange training at the hands of a woman warrior, though.

1. In the description of the war’s origins, what sense do you get of this society’s values? Do you think the storytellers in this case is endorsing those values, criticizing them, or both? How can you tell? Does there seem to be a different attitude or emphasis between the part that focuses on Cú Chulainn and the part that focuses on the bigger picture? How can you tell? Be as specific as you can about which values (and maybe which characters) seem to be valorized and which held up for criticism. Try to avoid the obvious.
2. It’s hard not to notice the wide variety of women characters in this story, from the bloodthirsty Morrigan (goddess of war) to the proud and ambitious Queen Maeve to the warrior-women Scathach and Aife to the (relatively) soft and romantic Deirdre. What do you make of them? Does this make ancient Ireland seem like a particularly feminist place, or is it a more complicated picture? Defend your answer with specifics.

**Children of Lir**

1. Like many Irish stories, this one has a theme of struggles for power and forlorn exile, as well as containing an archetypal evil stepmother. What does it seem to indicate about what this society values and fears? Try to get beyond the obvious.
2. What seemed odd or unexpected in this story? Did it remind you of any similar stories? Again, try to get beyond the obvious.

**Tír na nÓg**

1. This version of the story is taken from a book written for children, but it includes some details left out of some of the adult versions, such as the princess being given a pig’s face. It is not part of the epic cycles in this little collection, but it has some of the same themes, such as the struggle for political power. How does the power theme fit with the story’s other concerns? What would you say is the overall “message”?
2. Does this story belong in a children’s world? Why or why not? How does it compare to other stories you remember from your own childhood?