



## Cinematic Mythology in the Narrative and Design of Tomm Moore's *The Secret of Kells*

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### Abstract

This paper examines the Irish animated film *The Secret of Kells*. The conflict of the pagan world with the monotheistic world has been going on for millennia, and the reflections of these conflicts are clearly manifested both in the religious and artistic fields. In different geographies of the world, the call of mother nature still resonates in the depths of the subconscious of most people, images of pagan faith are transmitted from generation to generation and become visible in the works of artists. The life story of Brendon, the hero of the film, which is the subject of this article, makes viewers feel the sensitivity of cinematic aesthetics and folkloric narratives and mythologies through a characteristic Irish animation. The ethnic expressive style of Irish animation has been studied in detail in this article both in the sense of animated cinema and cultural studies.

**Keywords:** animation; celtic art; cinema; design; fractals; tale; christianity; visual design



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# Cinematic Mythology in the Narrative and Design of Tomm Moore's *The Secret of Kells*

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## Introduction

The animated film *The Secret of Kells* (2009) by Tomm Moore is set in an Irish monastery in the early ninth century and is a reflection of Celtic symbolism, Irish mediaeval monastic art, and Irish folklore. Due to the visual designs employed in its making, this animated film can be characterized as illuminated animation. This film, like the director's previous acolythic animated film *Song of the Sea* (2014), offers a vivid depiction of the Celtic resurgence in the cultural realm. Tomm Moore's works, in this regard, provide an inventive and cultural value to the Irish animation style. *The Secret of Kells* is an ethnographic, folkloric, mystical, and cosmological cinematic journey that provides audiences with a narrative and visual viewing experience. The film expresses the intersections and conflicts of the early periods of Christianity with pagan culture in a clear visual language through dialogues and symbols. The film compares the aesthetics of two worlds: christian religion and ancient pagan beliefs. This animated film about the young monk Brendan, the film's protagonist, is the narrative of the realisation of the enlightenment process through a mystical world. The child protagonist's epic journeys are remediated in animation to signify a metaphantasmagoric, metamedial enterprise to ardently explore the Celtic myths. (Aikhayat, 2020, 58) It is possible to find elements of both early Christian mentality and pagan culture in the film 'The Secret of Kells,' and it is easy to understand that earlier cultural elements were adapted to the monotheistic world of faith and life after the adoption of Christianity when studying Irish stories and fairy tales. Despite this, supernatural reflections of pagan culture may still be seen in Irish fairy tales and stories in a mystical form. Almost majority of the tales and stories were written by



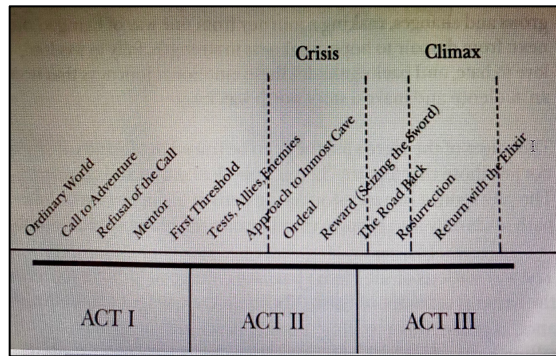
clerks in the early Christian Irish monasteries in the seventh century, and many pagan characteristics were eliminated from the narratives. According to Price (2011), it is thought that these later tales and legends descended from the same source as the myths of ancient times. The film takes the audience on a narrative and visual journey to a secret realm, complete with a magical forest, enormous oak tree, malevolent entity in a dark cave, portals that open from place to place, magical animals that change shape, and esoteric symbols. In this article, the narrative steps of 'The Hero's Journey' were modelled as Brendan's story was told, and the vestiges of Celtic mythology that influenced the film's narrative and design were analyzed. The dark-light, good-evil, real-fantastic, and divine-earthly dualisms of the film's narrative structure are based on the mythological world of ancient stories. The 'Book of Kells,' which is central to the plot, transforms darkness into light and offers people hope. Brendan, the film's protagonist, refers to the book as 'the work of angels.' This film, which depicts the story of the Christian divines and the old Celtic tradition, has symbols of magic and other realms. The conceptual imagination of a better future through the synthesis of animation and myth is an act of re-appropriating the past to reinvent Celtic topographies of romantic nostalgia. (Aikhayat; 2020:43) Animated films are one of the best visual expression means for transmitting mythological narratives and folk tales, and 'The Secret of Kells' is one of the most qualified, artistic, and competent examples of its genre in both Irish and animation cinema. From this perspective, this study is intended to communicate the meaning and significance of animated cinema in the fields of cinema and cultural studies.

### Mythological inspirations in the narrative structure of the film

The hero is the central figure in myths, legends, and fairy tales from many cultures and geographies across the world, and the action of this hero theme serves as the backbone of the narratives. The line of fate is depicted as a life sketch that the hero must pursue in all classical

narrative forms, and it has a specific formulation. While the hero is exploring the unknown world, he is truly on a journey towards his own self since the world in which the hero is involved interacts and communicates with the world in which the hero is. Since the time of the most ancient heroic stories, which date back to Babylon's foundation era, it appears to be a need for the hero to forsake his family. According to Otto Rank (2015), the child in myths is continuously seeking to get away of his parents; this is true for every child in the real world, and a similar desire arises in the child's fantasies when he is attempting to build his own personal independence. It is precisely for this reason that the child's ego behaves like the myth's hero. That is why Brendan, who has no parents and is under the protection of his uncle, a devout Christian abbot, has all the prerequisites that a hero needs to get on the road. Brendan has a strong desire to build his own perception of the world and perform the rite of passage as he wanders along the boundaries between the reality of both Christian world fiction and the obscurity of the pagan world.

Brendan is exactly like the hero of mythology, who is ready to go on the journey that Campbell refers to in his book *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. Joseph Campbell (1949) discusses the phenomenon of the hero, which he unveils through analysing different myths from all over the world. Later, influenced by Campbell's work, Christopher Vogler, a narrative and film project consultant for Hollywood companies, develops the concept "The Hero's Journey" in his book "The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers" (1998) (see figure 1) The plot of the film *The Secret of Kells* follows Vogler's Hero's Journey cycle. Each stage of this cycle reflects the celestial design of the fate line; each stage occurs in canonical order, one after the other; and there is a linear narrative based on a cause-and-effect link.



**Figure 1.** The hero’s journey model (Vogler; 1998:14)

### Brendan’s Ordinary World

The film opens at a monastery, which depicts the common (Christian) world. The Ordinary World is the context, home base, and background of the hero. The Ordinary World in one sense is the place you came from last. In life we pass through a succession of Special Worlds which slowly become ordinary as we get used to them. (Vogler, 1998, 85-86) Many Christian churches are constructed on the remains of pagan sanctuaries, and this monastery may be created in the same way. The monastic world, which is a miniature version of the Christian world, is a civilised world that has been tamed, interfered with, and has established boundaries and rules. (see figure 2) In reality, this monastery area is an extension of the tamed and Christianized forest. Furthermore, the portion of this forest that has changed shape as a result of human hegemony, has been detached from its source, modified, and domesticated. Everyday life in the monastery is organized in accordance with the orders of the abbot. The Abbot, who maintains a hierarchical order in the monastery, is privileged, as were the ancient belief’s Druid monks. Growing up in a monastery surrounded by intertwined magical trees, Brendan lives a controlled life under the protection of his uncle, a domineering figure, a hard-tempered and uncompromising abbot. Brendan's everyday existence at the monastery, from this perspective, exhibits all the characteristics of a protected-

constructed world. Brendan, who is unaware of the world beyond the monastery, seeks entertainment in the same way as the ancient king in the Irish fairy tale "King O Toole and the Goose" does, and he does it by chasing geese right and left across the monastery. The hero's problems and conflicts are already present in the Ordinary World, waiting to be activated. (Vogler; 1998:86) The same can be said for Brendan's transformation of his everyday world practise, which began as a goose chase, into a distinct world practice.

The monastery where Brendan resides has a tower in the shape of a broch, which are stone structures seen in Northern Scotland. This structure, like the ziggurats, functions as a scientific centre and acts as a connection between early Christian faith and pagan beliefs. The abbot's residence, a stone tower, is located in the heart of the monastery. This tower, which seeks its centre and primary place in the world, represents the shift from polytheistic beliefs to monotheistic faith. A great similarity is noticeable between the form of the tower and the physical appearance of the abbot. In periods of reflection and judgement, the abbot locks himself in his chamber, which is located in this tower. This facility serves as a sort of escape chamber for him. He has both celestial and worldly plans derived from cosmology. The cosmic link of the tower is represented by the scientific computations, formulae, and geometric shapes seen on the walls of the abbot's chamber. (see figure 2) The walls around the monastery are continually rising in the film due to the abbot's compulsive desire for these walls to be considerably higher and completed as soon as feasible. The height of the walls enclosing the monastery represents devotion to the Christian religion. In this sense, the high monastery walls represent the construction of a new sprouting Christianity. This Christian settlement is being established in the corporeal world, on the outskirts of a forest where pagan beliefs once flourished. According to Campbell (1988), analogous circumstances may be explained as follows: while the gods of the forest resided in caves, a deity hostile to natural culture



and attached to the temple arose. The exterior walls of the monastery in the film stretch up to the level of the forest's great trees, prohibiting people who reside inside from viewing this woodland. This wall, which acts as a spiritual veil, clearly divides the two realities. Because pagans and worshipers pose a threat to Christian civilisation.



**Figure 2.** High walls of the abbey

### Brendan is called to adventure

Every hero needs both an inner and an outer problem. In developing fairy tales for Disney Feature Animation, we often find that writers can give the heroes a good outer problem (Vogler, 1998, 87) As per this quotation, there are various problems, adventures, and challenges for the hero in mythological and ancient narratives, as well as treasures that must be found and grabbed. The first valuable item Brendan must find is an acorn. The acorn is much easier to discover and obtain than the genuine treasure, but Brendan must first pass the first threshold. The sudden arrival of Brother Aidan, who is well-known across the monastery, heralds a significant change for Brendan. From the moment Brother Aidan arrives at the monastery with his white cat Pangur Ban, the action of the film begins to climb up. Brother Aidan, who arouses curiosity and interest with his different personality, disrupts the abbot's daily life routine with the news of the Viking invasion, which disturbs the peace of the monastery, so he is declared undesirable by the abbot. Brother Aidan, on the other hand, is also a brilliant master, an excellent illuminator, and the author of the Book of Ionn. And this arrival of Aidan at the monastery with bad news, gives rise to Brendan's

eyes open to a new world. As a result of his presence in the monastery, Brendan develops a stronger urge to learn about the outside world (special world). This urge increases in parallel with the desire for knowledge, establishing a link between the outer world's curiosity and the katamathesis. Curiosity and a desire to learn drive the child's self-confidence toward his uncle, and he begins to clash with the first and only source of authority in his life.

### Refusal of the call (uncle hegemony- fear of the outer world)

Brendan's uncle ignores and disregards Brendan's wishes to leave the Abbey; on the contrary, the uncle's objection whips up the child's curiosity and desire to learn and explore. Brendan's uncle is like the Druid priests of the ancient past in that he enjoys seclusion, locks himself up in his chamber, and attempts to create a vision of the future through ideas and calculations. (see figure 3) It is quite difficult to cross his boundaries and grasp what is going on in his thoughts. He has a mystical side and is a representative of the authoritarian paternal identity. Brendan's rebellious character emerges along with his desire to travel on the road; yet, Brendan lacks the confidence to go to the forest since he believes it is a dangerous place filled with frightening creatures. In other words, the child acts as a disincentive (refusal) to his own separation feeling and desire. All of these dilemmas and internal struggles prepare Brendan for the inner potential that will propel him on his path as a hero. At this point, it is crucial to unveil the mentor who will activate the boy's inherent potential.



**Figure 3.** Abbot's room in the tower

### Mentor (the wise old man, Brother Aidan)

The relationship between hero and Mentor is one of the most common themes in mythology and one of the richest in its symbolic value (Vogler; 1998:17) Despite his uncle's objections and his negative attitude about Brother Aidan, Brendan and Aidan begin to fraternise. Abbot and Brother Aidan have quite distinct personalities and ways of thinking. Brendan is more like Brother Aidan than his uncle. As the abbot attempts to keep Brendan away from Brother Aidan, Brendan gets closer to him because Brother Aidan is like a representative of the other worlds for the child and he is the pathfinder (mentor) that will ignite the hero inside him. Aidan is an adult with an open mind, no prejudices, no restrictions, and who has not lost touch with his inner child. That's why Brendan identifies with him. Aidan gives a task to Brendan, paving the way for heroics. (see figure 4)



**Figure 4.** Brendon, Pangur Ban and Brother Aidan

### Brendan's first threshold

Crossing the threshold means entering the special world. The Abbey (ordinary world) comes to an end, and The Forest (special world) starts. The forest has two parallel realms: the realm of the visible forest and the realm of the enchanted forest. Both realms are surrounded by dark, ambiguous, and terrifying creatures, as well as sanctuaries and living creatures of pagan beliefs. Brendan feels a tremendous sensation of fear the instant he enters the first of these unknown realms. Brendan's first mission is to find the magical oak tree in order to obtain the acorns. However, there are portals between the two forest realms, and Aisling is the only living forest creature that knows about and can open these portals. The enchanted forest, which can only be accessible after passing through the visible forest, represents a sacred world filled with cosmic symbols. The enchanted forest is a miracle for Brendan and will serve as the setting for his rite of passage. According to Eliade (2012) symbols, images, people, and events from myths appear again and again in the domain of dreams. In this sense, the enchanted forest, which depicts a fantastic World, is a symbol of the other realm—the dream period.

### Oak Tree- Celtic Tree of Life

The giant oak tree is the most magnificent and majestic life form in the enchanted forest. The deepest ruby green is derived from the acorns of this oak tree and is used to make ink. The distillation of these acorns yields a type of ink, which is required for writing the holly book. In truth, this process can be called a kind of alchemy. Finding the acorn is the first task given to Brendan. In the film, this cosmic tree is located in the center of the world and connects the earth and the sky (heaven) (Eliade, 2012). In mythologies and religions, the tree symbol is associated with ideas based on periodic and everlasting renewal, re-creation, the source of life and youth,



immortality, and ultimate truth. However, the tree image cannot fully perform its task unless it explains itself in a symbolic sense, that is, with the awakening of human consciousness and its openness to the universe. (Eliade, 2012). Oak trees have an important role in the pagan celtic belief. Druids used to hold ceremonies in groves of oak trees, many of these groves are still considered sacred today. Druidism was a tree cult based on two truths. 1-Europe, including Great Britain and Ireland, was covered with vast forests with the most oak trees until the beginning of the Christian era. 2- The acorn the fruit of the oak tree, was the food of those who lived in this vast region. There was also this cult in ancient cultures. Because Zeus, “the god of the gods, was the god of oaks. (Crow, 1972) In the Celtic fairy tale "The Battle of the Birds," the girl climbs over the oak tree close to the well to sleep. It was believed that the wells had a soul and that when aid was needed, these souls would appear. But over time, wells have evolved into places that are feared and thought to be inhabited by evil entities.

### Tests, Allies, Enemies

Heroes in films may be aided in a number of different ways and styles. Allies help to develop feelings of friendship and solidarity, which will ease the hero's fear. As a result, the hero, who is already strong and prepared for the mission, becomes even stronger, exactly as in tragedies. An alliance is formed on the side of good against the evil's collective common manner of acting. In the film *The Secret of Kells* there are two allies and one enemy; allies provide physical, spiritual, and magical assistance.

### Allies 1. (Pangur Bán- The White Cat)

*Pangur Bán and I at work,  
Adepts, equals, cat and clerk:  
His whole instinct is to hunt,  
Mine to free the meaning pent  
More than loud acclaim, I love  
Books, silence, thought, my alcove.  
Happy for me, Pangur Bán  
Child-plays round some mouse's<sup>1</sup>*

Pangur Bán is an old Gaelic poem about a white cat composed by an Irish monk. It is a shapeshifter, the protector of the book, and Brother Aidan's comrade in the film. It later becomes Brendan's ally. Sometimes it helps to decipher the magic language between Aisling and Brendan. Pangur Bán is a shapeshifter between the different worlds-parallel realms (see figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Pangur Bán

In his collection 'Irish Tales,' Yeats, one of the representatives of the Celtic revival in literature, describes Irusan – 'The King of Cats.' The title of this tale, which tells that Irusan is responsible for all cats, is "The King of Cats and the Bard Seanchan." In this fairy tale, the cat is like a bull: it's wild, aggressive, and has notch ears. Apart from all these features, it is like a beast with upturned noses, pointed teeth, dashing, with pointed claws that scatter fire from his vengeful eyes (Yeats, 2013). Pangur Bán is often seen in the film as an aggressive and ferocious animal. He constantly maintains his semi-wild demeanour until he trusts Brendan. Pangur Bán, who is self-ordained and self-assured, belongs to both realms and can travel between them. Pangur Bán is a

being from another realm who has adopted the cat form as the most appropriate form for itself in the real world.

### Allies 2. (Aisling the fairy)

Various ideas might be advanced throughout the film concerning what type of non-human being Aisling is. In their first meeting, Brendan refers to Aisling as a "creature." Brendan recognises her as an entity that does not belong in this realm from the minute he first meets her. Brendan has preconceived notions about Aisling since at the monastery where he resides, entities like Aisling are referred to be uncanny and untrustworthy pagan creatures. Aisling's eyes glance around through the leaves in the film's opening scene and again in the sequences set in the forest. Depictions of the 'Green Man' are commonly used in Celtic culture (see figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Aisling and her eyes

According to Lilly the eye that glides through the air independently may be seeing other worlds. Blazing, heavenly eyes (for example, the sun, moon and stars) can envelop enemies with the magical flame of druidic power (Lilly, 2008). Faces that constantly manifest themselves in every design are prevalent in Celtic figurative art. Wherever the watchers look, they become visible. These watchers are the hidden faces of the spiritual world... Aisling appears and disappears amid the leaves, discreetly watching Brendan; in this sense, the girl may be a Green Man. It's possible that Aisling is a Dryad known as plant, tree spirits. It was thought that one of these spirits sat on each tree, was born with it, and died with it. Aisling may also be a prankish 'pixie' who enjoys

playing pranks with others. Aisling, on the other hand, might be one of the mountain nymphs known as 'Oreads' in ancient mythology, who dwell beside Artemis. If Aisling is an air spirit 'Sylphs', she is a kind of elemental-nature spirit. Sylphs are elementals, independent beings who seem to be somehow connected with the classical spirits that guard an area or a house (Crow, 1972). Another prediction that can be made for Aisling is the possibility that she is from the Tuatha Dé Danann people. Tuatha Dé Danann, (Gaelic: "People of the Goddess Danu"), in Celtic mythology, a race inhabiting Ireland before the arrival of the Milesians (the ancestors of the modern Irish). They were said to have been skilled in magic, and the earliest reference to them relates that, after they were banished from heaven because of their knowledge, they descended on Ireland in a cloud of mist. They were thought to have disappeared into the hills when overcome by the Milesians. The Leabhar Gabhála (book of invasions), a fictitious history of Ireland from the earliest times, treats them as actual people, and they were so regarded by native historians up to the 17th century. In popular legend they have become associated with the numerous fairies still supposed to inhabit the Irish landscape.<sup>2</sup> There were times when the inhabitants of Tautha De Danna were loved and respected in Ireland, according to an Irish fairy tale. The most prevalent assumption about Aisling is that she is a fairy. It is said in W.B. Yeats' Irish Fairy Tales that fairies may be classified into two types. According to the Jacobs, fairies who live in communities and fairies who live alone. Fairies who live alone tend to be cruel. Fairies who live alone are usually gloomy and scary. But there are also kindly and brave ones among them (Jacobs, 1892). When more Irish Fairy Tales are analyzed, it is said in the fairy tale "Dancing Gardens of Fairies" that anyone who leave the gardens where fairies dance alone will be wealthy. The green hills known as the pleasure meadow-*moy mell*, where the fairies reside, are referenced in the fairy tale 'Connla and the Young Fairy Girl.' Fairies that injure children may also be found in the fairy tale "Eggshell Soup."



In the film, Aisling initially does not trust Brendan and urges him to leave the forest, threatening to toss him to the wolves if he does not. Aisling, no matter what kind of creature she is, lives alone in the forest. She occasionally becomes hostile, changes form, and transforms into a wild animal, and may also take the form of salmon, wolf, and deer. In all universal narratives, wolves are the forest's guardians, while deer are the divine females. Aisling has the ability to open portals between parallel realms. She guards her forest, that is, her domain, and she wants to keep everyone out of it. She is concerned that the forest is being taken over and abused by outsiders (Christians), so she urges Brendan not to go near it again in exchange for the assistance she would provide. Aisling is only terrified of approaching Crom Cruach's cave because she knows all the passages-portals connecting the forest's parallel realms. As much as Brendan knows the rules of the visible world, Aisling knows the laws of the other worlds very well. They eventually begin to trust one another and establish an alliance to overcome challenges together as a result of the transformational force of the love that has built between them.

### Enemy 1. (Crom Cruach)

It is a Irish God. There is no known narrative regarding the activities of this deity, but he is recorded in several ancient sources as the primary god of the ancient Irish. He was worshiped, it is said, in form of stone idols to which children were sacrificed (Monaghan, 2014) The Bloody Crescent Crom Cruach is the main idol of Ireland, represented as a golden image encircled by Stones. From this perspective, 'Crom Cruach' is a symbol of the fight between light and darkness. This situation is seen in the film by the transition from the light of the forest to the darkness of the cave. Brendan encircles and imprisons Crom Cruach, who takes the appearance of a serpent or a dragon. Crom Cruach is the film's only disincentive-enemy; he is the negative entity who steals the valuable object (see figure 7).



**Figure 7.** Crom Cruach

### Approach to inmost cave (Crom Cruach's Cave)

In the Arturian stories the inmost cave is the chapel perilous, the dangerous chamber where the seeker may find the grail (Vogler, 1998, 20) According to Simon Lily, heads and head images were typically kept in sacred sites, particularly wells, springs, and lakes, which were regarded to be portals to the afterlife. Crom Cruach's cave may also be reached by passing through the real-world forest and the enchanted forest, and it has giant heads guarding the entrance (see figure 8). Trilithons, which are identical menhirs or megaliths, emerge surrounding the cave and consist of a third horizontal stone put on top of two vertical stones. Although there are many stone memorial sites in Ireland, one of these archaeological sites is the area called La Fail or the Stone of Fate, where there are 25 stone monuments. This place is also called Tara Stone. Another area is on a hill near Armagh, which is also located in Northern Ireland and is known as Navan Fort. This place is called Emain Macha in the Irish language and in the Ulster period this place is considered the seat of king Concobar, in the period of events that are said to have occurred in Tain. It is suggested that this place has symbolic significance for the transition from the realm of the living to the realm of the dead, ancestors. (Price, 2011) In some myths, Crom Cruach's cave is considered to symbolise the womb. It is a symbol of chaos, filled with nothingness, emptiness, and darkness. Outside the cave, which has no time and space, there is mother earth-Gaia. Unlike the cave, Gaia is full of life, vibrancy, colour, and love.



**Figure 8.** Entrance to Crom Cruach's cave

### Brendan's Ordeal

It is at this stage of fate that the hero's deepest fears arise, and he must unavoidably face these fears; this fate stage is the time at which the hero's physical and spiritual suffering is very intense. All intimate, individual, and collective fears pushed into the subconscious are revealed. In this case, the Crom Cruach, a feared motif in the film for Aisling and Brendan, is a universal archetype of fear. The snake or dragon form of Crom Cruach takes part in nightmares as the most feared creature in all cultures. This form-archetype is buried deep in the consciousness of mankind, it is transparent, it can change form, just like our fears, which are buried deepest. The snake represents the energy of life, which is in the realm of time and death, but will remain alive forever. The world is only its shadow-it is the skin that falls. (Campbell and Moyers, 2011) If Crom Cruach is acknowledged to be a kind of dragon; it is usually assumed that dragons protect any region's treasures and material prosperity. When they are disturbed or their treasures are stolen, they have the potential to trigger disasters that envelop labels on all sides. In Northern and Central Europe there is a Midgard snake of Viking mythology; this monster fights with Thor and keeps the world together. In some parts of Germany, the Lindwurm legend is widespread...In the Anglo-Saxon saga Beowulf, the hero encounters an unnamed dragon and defeats him; In the Germanic epic Niebelungenlied, Siegfried puts a creature that jealously guards a gold treasure under the sword. Treasure wardership is a common habit among Western dragons (Dell, 2010). Crom Cruach also

hides and protects the eye (valuable object) on his forehead. Having survived death, beaten the dragon or slain the Minotaur hero and audience have cause to celebrate (Vogler, 1998, 22) Crom Cruach, unlike the creatures in other mythical accounts, is not brutally slaughtered by Brendan, but is trapped in a circle and its eye – valuable object is taken away. The creature is locked in its own darkness and wickedness; its power to view other realms is revoked; it is confined to darkness and blindness; and it destroys itself.

### Reward (seizing the valuable object)

In his book “Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions”, Eliade states that “Teilherad talks about the spiritual power of matter and expresses a very strong affinity for everything that moves in the dark mass of matter”. (Eliade, 2012) The spiritual power of the matter is possessed by magical objects in mythological narratives. The magical object-The Eye of Colum Cille in the film is a crystal-magnifying glass. This object-eye on Crom Cruach's forehead is also a symbol of the pineal gland, or third eye. This object is a supernatural lens that allows you to look into other realms.

### The Road Back

Brendan walks on his way back after retrieving the Colum Cille buried in Crom Cruach's forehead as a consequence of a severe struggle. In the monster's cave, the hero triumphs both physically and spiritually. Brendan's fate line is the forest and the pathways that go through it. On this fate line, he experiences different timelines, spaces, and states of consciousness, as well as his own rite of passage.



## Resurrection

Before returning home, heroes in mythological narratives must undergo physical and spiritual regeneration. Brendan, the film's hero, likewise completes his inner transformation while on his journey, moving away from home, acquiring new life experiences, becoming independent of authority-his uncle- and gaining self-confidence. The boy enters the layers of consciousness of several realms, goes through his own process of enlightenment, and grows into a mature young man. The fact that he survived the cave, which represents the second mother's womb, represents his rite of passage. Because Brendan exemplifies the image of the hero who fights monsters in a cave in mythological narratives. In the cave of Crom Cruach, he engages in a grueling struggle with one of the old faith's most powerful and feared gods. As a devoted and resolute Christian, he triumphs in this battle. The conflict between them is not personal; it is a battle between the gods of the old and new worlds.

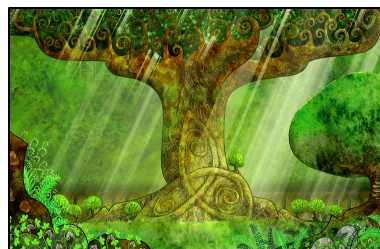
## Return with Elixir

Brendan returns to the monastery and reunites with his uncle after finishing the book of Ioanna with the help of 'the eye of Colum Cille.' In Brendan's absence, the Abbot has aged and become ill. He is, nonetheless, more innocent and understanding than previously. In the film, the elixir ingredient represents a type of life essence. This object is embedded in the story as an archetype of human assistance. Brendan gains maturity, wisdom, experience through the use of this object.

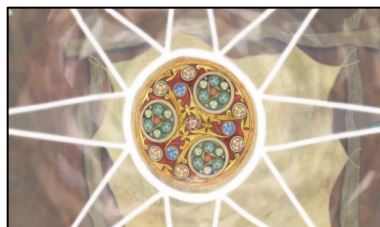
## Mythological inspiration in design aesthetics of the film

The hand drawn 2D animation technique was employed in this animated film. The other design elements are Celtic iconography, Celtic art-insular art, Coptic art, hyberno-saxon style (it

is known as Insular art). Celtic knotworks, geometric forms that generate a flow and flight effect, application of enhancing the effect of gravity-free environment, optical illusions, interlacing curves, triskele symbols, spirals, and circular forms are notable in film design. Triskele motifs, which are frequently employed in film design, are also prevalent in Celtic art. Trinity imagery, trilogies of signs and motives are unambiguous symbols of celestial or otherworldly beings. The manifestation of spiritual powers and the presence of the celestial are represented by depictions of man in the form of a plant or animal. In the magical forest, enormous triskeles stand out on the trunk of a magnificent oak tree (see figure 9). Brendan's motif is also a triskele, which represents a summary or beginning of the finished book (see figure 10). The ancient designs featured on Celtic coins may be seen in numerous moments in the film, particularly in the backgrounds. These are symbolic designs that depict the Iron Age's aesthetics and are based on pre-Christian Iron Age ideas. This kind of decoration on iron objects is known as "La Tene." It is a metalworking technique that comprises of ornamental circles and folds. These pagan motifs, which were carved on the artefacts, were subsequently replaced by Christian symbols.

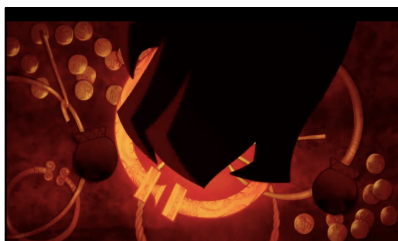


**Figure 9.** Triskele motif on the trunk of the oak tree



**Figure 10.** The eye of Colum Cille

When Vikings invaded the monastery, the red-black hue was utilised widely in depictions of conflict, murder, and brutality. After black, red was the first colour used by mankind. It appears frequently in both ancient and Christian art. In the Viking invasion and pillage scenes, red was employed to represent violence, ruthlessness, and primitivism. Typically, the use of red and black in graphics heightens tension and produces restlessness in the audience. They are described as a destructive tribe that threatens peace and tranquilly. Their forms resemble giants and are terrifying. They are seeking moveable rich goods such as gold jewelry rather than manuscripts, which are extremely valuable to Christian monks. Torques, or power rings, are one of the items sought by the Vikings in the film (see figure 11). These are the most essential components of the iron age celts, and-held torque is a ritual-specific gesture. They are precious because their end portions are composed of gold and silver. Torques are a sign of high status, a present given to the most significant and talented individuals.



**Figure 11.** The tork

The enchanted forest scenes feature transparent vistas and ether formations painted with light. On the trunks of trees and in the backgrounds, decorative natural forms and self-repeating fractals were implemented. In the Irish tale “The Suitor of Olwen”, three-leaved white clover is described, which blooms in the places where the girl walks, they are called *Olwen*. These white olwen clovers appears as frequent and recurring motifs in enchanted forest scenes. The ogham letters on the stone monuments were used by the Druids. The stylised forms of the ogham letters attract the attention

in various backgrounds. Another recurring design form is the four-armed cross in the Circle (later, the Christian Celtic cross). This cross represents the rotation of the sun, which is moving in a circular motion along the horizon, as well as the four seasons and the earth.

In the film, the triptych painting method was also used (see figure 12). These images can be found in early Christian art. The lengthening shadows on the wall are reminiscent of pictorial Caligarism in expressionist art and film. The film also makes use of dramatic lighting and the chiaroscuro technique. Aside from that, the miniature technique of Eastern traditional art was used in the film. The motifs revived in the last scene of the film illustrate this.



**Figure 12.** Triptych painting design of a scene

## Conclusion

Celtic mythology is an ancient narration that is heavily decorated with mystical elements. The Celtic resurgence, which began in the eighteenth century, has made it almost impossible to think about anything related to the Celts without fogging up the eyes and getting emotional. (Price, 2011) In this sense, *The Secret of Kells* by Tomm Moore is an example of the resurrection of Celtic culture in the art of animated film. Campbell and Moyers (2011) argue that myths are dreams of the masses. The myth of a folk is a public dream. The four basic functions of myths are mystical, sociological, cosmological and pedagogical. The film *The Secret of Kells* is also a public dream of the Irish people. This dream representation is a folk narrative that has reached our days and is sprouting in modern times. This film can be analyzed in different forms in the mystical,

cosmological, sociological and pedagogical dimension. In each dimension, there is also a hero whom the viewer identifies with and who forms the main element of the film story. Audiences love to see characters learning, growing, and dealing with the inner and outer challenges of life. (Vogler, 1998, 88) In the film, Brendon goes through all these stages that Vogler has expressed, while the viewer also witnesses these transitions of him. In this study, the mythological elements of the film were subjected to a mystical examination. Mysticism and cinema, mysticism and design are studied within the framework of the myth. *The Secret of Kells* has archetypal patterns of mythic narratives. For example, Brendon is in line with the archetype of the child who refused to grow up in the first scenes of the film. Jung and others have identified many psychological archetypes such as the ‘Duer Aeternus’ or eternal eternal boy, who can be found in myths as the ever youthful Cupid, in stories as characters such as Peter Pan and in life as men who never wants to grow up. (Vogler, 1998, 32) Another heroic motif that is often seen in Celtic myths is the noble hunter who is attracted to a deer and goes after it and goes to the forest where he has never been before. When the deer enters the forest, it changes shape and turns into the Queen of the Haunted Hills or something similar and the Hero finds himself in a completely different world. (Campbell and Moyers, 2011) Brendon also goes to the magic forest after Aisling, who lives in different forms in the forest, and finds himself in a completely different world. This state is an aestheticized form of universal knowledge that belongs to almost all cultures all over the world. Similarly, many universal aspects of mythological narratives are also present in this film. The film *The Secret of Kells* is a representative of the mythic worlds in the collective memory. In addition, one of the elements that makes Secret of Kells extremely competent and successful in the field of animated films is its technique. It is one of the most perfect examples of design and cinema. Hand drawn animation allows the Secret of Kells to adopt a highly stylised and intricate look (Burke; 2009:190) It’s artistic representation of Irish myths and folklore has historically held a distinctly

recognisable aesthetic. Insular inspired design and aesthetic is closely connected to Irish identity. In the process of learning and understanding cultural heritages, which is one of the most important conditions for ensuring intercultural dialogue, *The Secret of Kells* should be considered a cultural representative of an ethnic art form.

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## ENDNOTES:

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<sup>2</sup> Tuatha Dé Dananni Celtic Mythology, available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tuatha-De-Danann> 20.02-2022