The Perfect Spy

Ralph O'Connor

DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199666133.003.0007

Abstract and Keywords

Most of the second half of the saga comprises an emotionally charged conversation between Ingcél and Conaire's foster-brothers about the occupants of the Hall on whom Ingcél has spied. This sequence is often dismissed as repetitive and is omitted from some translations. By explaining how it works in its own terms, the author argues that it is central to the saga's dramatic effect. Compared to other examples of the so-called 'watchman device' in Irish and other epic literatures, this sequence is not only unusually long but also unusually varied, stretching the lyric possibilities of saga-prose to their fullest extent. It also brings together and transforms the various hair-raising techniques, structural devices, and themes outlined in chapters 2–5. The role of prophecy is particularly important, providing further insights into the nature and role of the Otherworld as a repository of hidden knowledge, and illuminating the saga's meaning for its mediaeval audiences.

The Perfect Spy

Of all the visionary moments in a story rich in prophecy and omen, the one which attracted most comment from contemporary readers was not a prophecy at all, but the virtuoso act of looking undertaken by Ingcél on his spying mission. Ingcél's report on what he saw inside the Hostel forms the basis of what I have been calling the description-sequence, the large-scale set of direct-speech descriptions, predictions, and oaths which dominates the second part of the *Togail*. This amazing visual feat was described in a marginal note in the *Lebor na hUidre* text of the *Táin* as *in tres árim is glicu 7 is dolgiu dorigned i nHérind* ('one of the three cleverest and most difficult reckonings ever made in Ireland').[1] All the activity within the Hostel, representing people and stories from across Ireland, Britain, and various Otherworldly locations and embracing the whole of Conaire's realm, is simultaneously comprehended within the swift glance of a single eye (*lúathchúaird*, 'swift circuit', line 664).

Such panoramic glimpses do in fact have associations with prophecy in early mediaeval Irish religious literature. In Adomnán's *Life of Columba*, the saint is asked how his prophetic revelations manifest themselves to him, and he replies that the mind's eye is sometimes granted the power *totum totius terrae orbem, cum ambitu ociani et caeli, uno eodemque momento quasi sub uno solis radio* […] *clare et manifestissime speculentur* ('clearly and most plainly to behold the whole of the earth […] in one single moment, as if beneath a single ray of the sun').[2] The exhaustive and finely delineated descriptions found in many Irish sagas reflect a similar drive for clarity and comprehensiveness, which does not necessarily fit easily alongside the need for narrative movement. As Tomás Ó Cathasaigh has observed, 'in much of Irish narrative there is a tension between the cumulative tendency on the one hand, and linear exposition on the other'.[3]

The *Togail* takes this tension to an unprecedented extreme. It begins with an enormously detailed description of Étaín, then settles belatedly into laconic linear exposition which builds up a seemingly unstoppable sense of linear momentum in (p.154)

the first half, albeit increasingly interrupted by descriptions; the saga's second half is then taken up almost entirely with detailed ekphrastic descriptions based on a snapshot of the Hostel's interior at one point in time. How the description-sequence works in the saga's larger architecture, and how it sustains the dramatic tension, momentum, and mythological threads of meaning examined in previous chapters, will be explored in this and the next chapter. In this chapter I will attempt an overall account of how the description-sequence works at structural and stylistic levels, concluding with a more detailed consideration of the role of prophecy within the sequence. Chapter 7 will then focus on the extended central tableau of the king himself and the final scenes of the saga.

The 'Watchman Device'

The description-sequence consists of dialogue in the form of the so-called 'watchman device', of which it is easily the longest example in Irish literature. At its most basic level it presents a series of two-part tableaux. The occupant(s) of each apartment (*imdae*) in the Hostel is first described by Ingcél, then identified and enlarged upon by Fer Rogain, who also predicts each warrior's performance in the coming battle. The formal balance of this sequence allows the saga-author to lavish attention upon the various characters participating in the catastrophe—above all, Conaire at its centre. Its length and its formulaic nature have made it probably the greatest single obstacle to literary appreciation of the *Togail*. Some of the saga's most enthusiastic admirers have called this particular section 'tedious',[4] and in most translations it has been severely trimmed or otherwise doctored; in one recent translation, it has been omitted entirely.[5] Since it takes up 47 per cent of the tale, the saga's literary success stands or falls by it. To this reader it represents the heart of the saga, a narrative domain of tense order and stasis between the accelerating forward movements of Conaire's (and his foster-brothers') last journey and the chaos of the final battle.

The sense that we have moved into a new narrative world is not merely a function of our own lack of familiarity with this form of storytelling. It was shared by the scribes who wrote the extant texts of the *Togail* throughout the second half of the

Middle Ages: their texts contain clear signals that this part of the story was distinct from the rest. Giolla Íosa Mac Fhir Bhisigh, the main scribe of the Yellow Book of Lecan and the man responsible for writing down most of text Y around the turn of the fifteenth century, began this sequence on a new line and with a very large majuscule **A** filled in with red ink (for Ingcél's first *At-chonnarc*, 'I saw', line 677, Fig. 5), although elsewhere in this text he did not use such pointers

(p.155)

frequently.[6] Each new description begins in the same way, resulting in an unusual degree of visual demarcation for this saga, clearer even than that accorded to some of its verses.[7] He marked the end of the description-sequence in Y still more forcefully: immediately after Fer Rogain's final identification, Ingcél's war-cry (*Comérget súas*, 'Arise!', line 1395) occupies not only a new line but also a new column, with an elaborate majuscule **C** also filled in with red (Fig. 6).[8]
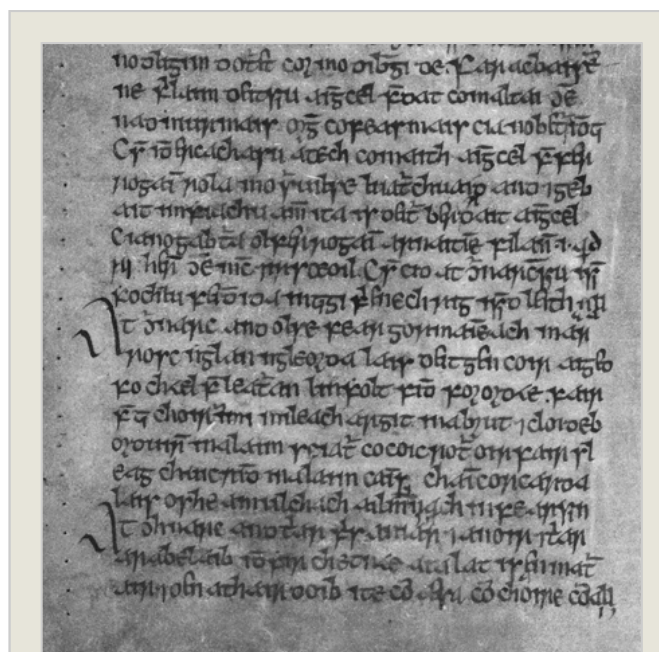

Fig. 5. The beginning of the description-sequence in text Y, in The Yellow Book of Lecan: Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1318, col. 726, detail (reproduced by permission of the Board of Trinity College Dublin). The description-sequence begins on the tenth line shown.

(p.156)

These details of manuscript-layout may tell us more about the late mediaeval scribe's attitude than that of the tenth- or eleventh-century saga-author, but they are nonetheless suggestive, and similar visual demarcations occur in other texts of the *Togail* from the eleventh or twelfth

Fig. 6. The beginning of the battle-sequence in text Y, in The Yellow Book of Lecan: Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1318, cols. 738–9, detail (reproduced by permission of the Board of Trinity College Dublin). The left-hand column shows part of the description-sequence, with each *At-chonnarc* ('I saw') marked with a majuscule **A**; the right-hand column opens with Ingcél's war-cry, *Comérget súas* ('Arise!'), with its large initial majuscule **C** filled in with red ink.

through to the fifteenth or sixteenth century. In U (Fig. 7), the description-sequence is marked out visually not only by large coloured initial **A**'s for each *At-chonnarc* (filled in with red, brown-yellow, and white in turn) and a coloured majuscule **C** for the *Comérget súas* at the end, but also (in the hand of the reviser H) by subheadings for each apartment described.[9] The author or scribe of text D inserted that text's one and only subheading to mark the end of the description-sequence: *Incipit de cath na maidne for bru[idne] da berg* ('Here begins [an extract] from the morning's battle at Da Berga's Hostel').[10] The huge initial **A** which begins this new section in D (Fig. 8) is bigger than any other initial letter in this text apart from the very first letter of the saga.[11] In text H2, as in Y, Ingcél's first *At-chonnarc* begins with a very large initial **A**, set well back into the left-hand margin (Fig. 9), and subsequent tableaux bear large initial **A**'s which, from p. 492.2 onwards, are coloured in.[12] Both visually and in terms of literary structure, then, the description-sequence is cordoned off from the rest of the saga. Yet at the same time this sequence sustains the themes and techniques developed in (p.157)
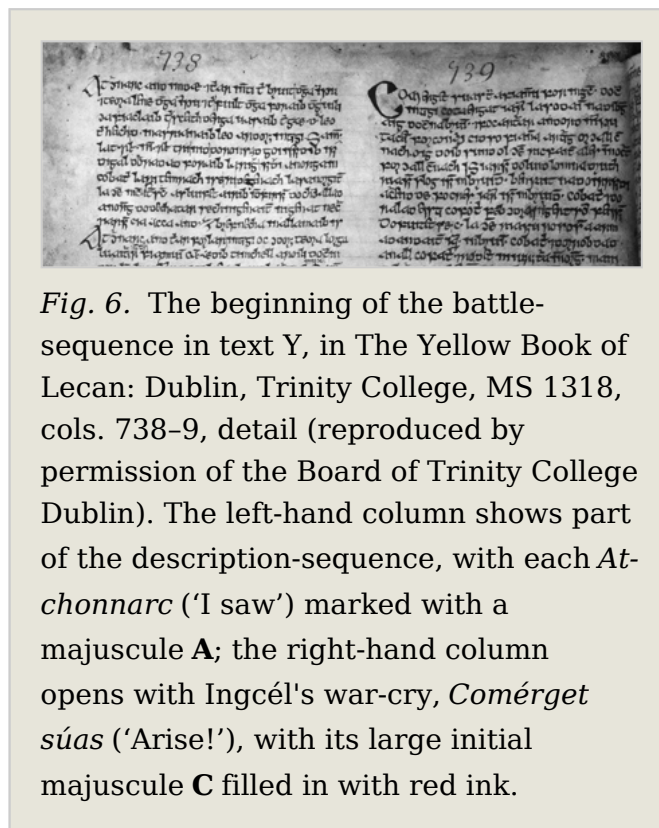
Fig. 7. A page from the description-sequence in text U, in *Lebor na hUidre*: Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 E 25, p. 88 (reproduced by permission of the Royal Irish Academy [©] RIA). This page contains part of the first tableau, tableaux 2–4, and the beginning of tableau 5, with the four initial **A**s filled in with different colours. Hand H has added subheadings for each tableau in the left margins, and part of a poem about the sons of Donn Désa at the top of the page. This page contains lines 7116–7201 of U.

the first half of the saga to such an extent that the two halves are interlocking and mutually dependent. Because the 'watchman device' is such a widespread narrative device in ancient and mediaeval literature, a brief account of its general usage is called for before examining how it manifests itself in the *Togail*. Examples may be found in epic and dramatic

Fig. 8. The last two tableaux of the description-sequence (with their initial **A**s) and the beginning of the (modernized) battle-sequence in text D, in Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS D iv 2, fol. 85r, detail (reproduced by permission of the Royal Irish Academy © RIA). Note the very large initial **A** which opens the main text of the battle-sequence (for *A haithle thuarascbala*, 'after the description') and the subheading which occupies the first line of the new section.

literature from ancient Greece and India to tenth-century Persia, as well as in the mediaeval prose narratives of Iceland, Ireland, and Wales. In its classic form it consists of a watcher describing people to a second person, who (p.159)
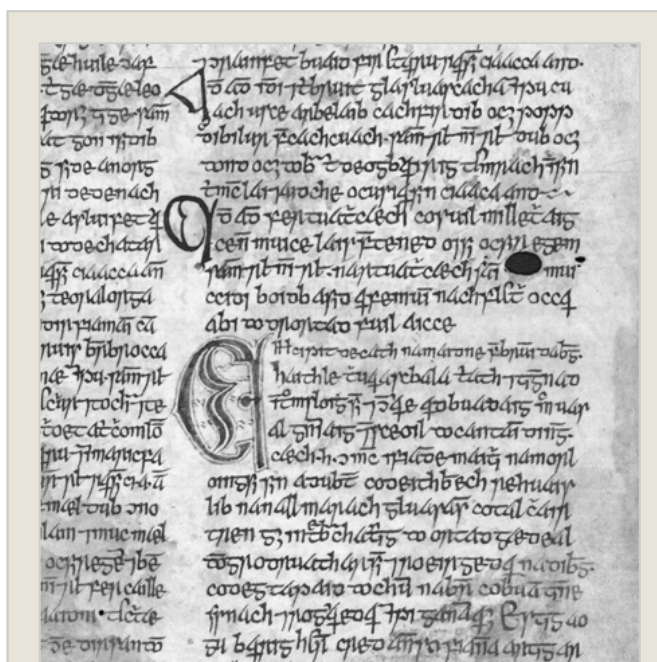
recognizes and identifies them. Conventionally, the people described are approaching enemies, against whom the watcher and/or identifier are preparing to defend themselves or engage in open war. For instance, in the *Iliad* the Trojan king Priam describes to Helen the Greek warriors besieging Troy;[13] in the Middle Persian epic, the *Shahnameh* of Firdausi, the Tartar-Iranian prince Sohrab describes the tents and entourages of the chief Iranian warriors ranged against him, while his Iranian prisoner-of-war Hajir identifies them;[14] and the shepherd in the thirteenth-century (p.160) Icelandic *Laxdæla saga* describes to Helgi Harðbeinsson the armed men who have come to take vengeance on him, while Helgi himself identifies each one.[15] When employed in literary masterpieces like these, the 'watchman device' is far from being a 'mechanism' in the pejorative sense, a mere set of pegs on which to hang information. Providing information is one important function of these passages; but in verse epics and prose sagas alike, they also perform vital dramatic functions as dialogues, helping to characterize the speakers and underline the specific tensions of the (usually climactic) situation in which they find themselves. As the next chapter will explore in more detail, such passages also enable the story's leading themes to be
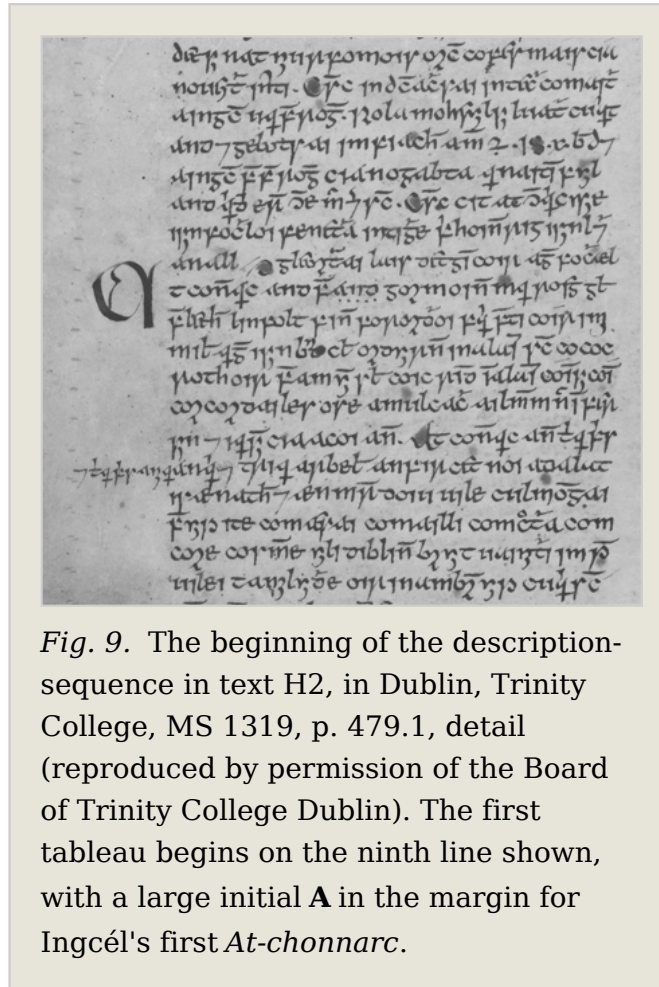

Fig. 9. The beginning of the description-sequence in text H2, in Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1319, p. 479.1, detail (reproduced by permission of the Board of Trinity College Dublin). The first tableau begins on the ninth line shown, with a large initial **A** in the margin for Ingcél's first *At-chonnarc*.

played out in a poetic manner which ordinary narrative prose does not allow.[16] In all these examples, as in the Irish ones, the descriptions themselves are executed with great care and add a strikingly musical or rhythmic dimension to the text. They thus contribute to the narrative's tone as well as its form and content. We have already seen several examples of the poetic function of enumerative techniques in the *Togail*, in the opening description of Étaín and the sinister list of names spoken by Cailb.[17] The description-sequence uses these devices on a much larger scale.

The 'watchman device' was used with particular frequency in Middle Irish saga literature, and was amenable to tragic and comic treatments alike. Its basis in description made it a kind of narrative canvas or tableau on which metaphorical or lyrical modes of presentation could be deployed. Word-play and thematic patterning could be indulged as freely as in poetry, and saga-authors often made use of riddling treatments or what Patrick Sims-Williams calls 'the erroneous watchman device', in which the watcher misidentifies the person or army as natural phenomena.[18] In short, there was a surprising range of creative possibilities within this apparently rigid formula, and a brief glance at some of the Middle Irish examples besides that in the *Togail* will help place it in perspective.

Most of these examples occupy similar positions in their own narratives to that in the *Togail*, coming immediately before a climactic conflict between two mighty (p.161) forces. The most celebrated example beyond that in the *Togail* is found near the first clash between the Ulstermen and the 'men of Ireland' in the first two recensions of the *Táin*, in an episode entitled *Tochim na mBuiden* ('The Reckoning of the Companies').[19] Ailill, king of Connaught—who, with his queen Medb, is leading the cattle-raid against the Ulstermen—sends his messenger Mac Roth to see if the Ulstermen have come to challenge them. In both recensions, the resulting sequence of descriptions and identifications falls into two parts.

The first part is a riddling 'erroneous watchman device', which is especially detailed in Recension II. Mac Roth thinks he sees

a dense, thundering mist filled with sparks and flashing colours. The exiled Ulster warrior Fergus mac Róich identifies these visions as his enraged compatriots breathing, glaring, and clattering their weapons as they move in to attack.[20] Mac Roth then has a second look while the Ulster army musters (in Recension II, after a preliminary skirmish), and an extended and more conventional 'watchman' sequence follows. This takes the following pattern: Mac Roth describes one or more companies of warriors, Ailill asks Fergus to identify each company (*Cia sin, a Ḟergais?*), and Fergus identifies them and praises their valour. Ailill's question is omitted on several occasions, but in other respects this pattern is followed throughout, with twenty-one companies being identified in all.[21] Here the descriptions themselves are fairly rigidly patterned, usually detailing the chief warrior's head (hair and/or face), then his main garment, and finally his weapons. The colours and appearances of these warriors and their accoutrements vary considerably, however. Further narrative interest is provided by occasional formal variations on the dialogue pattern set up in this sequence, maintaining the sense that this is a real conversation. In Recension I, for example, the description of the small boy Erc mac Cairpre has such an effect on Fergus that he lapses into silence before replying. In both recensions, he then goes beyond merely identifying the boy, uttering a powerful prophecy of the Ulstermen's performance in the coming battle.[22] Another deft touch occurs just before Mac Roth's last description in Recension I, when he says rather plaintively that *Is fota leam [...] bith fri haisnéis ineich adcondarc uili* ('I find it tedious to be recounting everything I saw', lines 3839–40).[23]

(p.162) Queen Medb adds dramatic interest to the 'watchman' sequence in both recensions. After the very first identification by Fergus, she attempts to join in the conversation with a rousing *Fogébad a n-acallaim sund* ('They will get their answer here'), only to be put down by Fergus. She remains silent for the rest of the conversation. Her initial intrusion has the effect of making her seem part of the subsequent discussion, even if she is not saying anything. In Recension II, indeed, she pipes up at the end as well, to be rebuked once again; this refusal to 'know her place' fits well with her overall portrayal in this

version of the saga.[24] Recension II provides one further, masterly point of variation, also at the end of the sequence. After Fergus has done his best to fill Ailill and Medb with dismay at the prowess of the Ulster warriors, Mac Roth's final description consists simply of a loud noise (*núall mór*, 'a great outcry') rather than a sight described in detail. This is the sound of the gravely wounded Cú Chulainn, the pre-eminent Ulster hero, being physically restrained from going to battle; it prepares for the next section of the *Táin* by performing an elegant shift in focus from the court of the Connaught king and queen to Cú Chulainn on his sickbed.[25]

Taken as a whole, in both these recensions of the *Táin* this two-part 'watchman' sequence serves to build up a sense of tension before the main battle while at the same time representing the martial power of Ulster in an impressive and colourful manner.[26] Subtle dramatic touches bring it and its speakers to life, and it provides an occasion for a display of verbal pyrotechnics. In Recension II in particular, Mac Roth's opening riddling description stands out as a set-piece of remarkable virtuosity, so much so that Brent Miles has suggested that it is an example of *imitatio*, a self-conscious imitation of a classical model (in this case Statius's *Thebaid*).[27] The question of classical influence will be discussed further in chapter 8; but, whether or not Miles's hypothesis is accepted, it is clear that the 'watchman device' is being used here in a way which suggests the application of considerable artistic skill, and is not a lazy plot-mechanism.

In ancient and mediaeval storytelling across Europe and the Near East, the 'watchman device' typically appears as a prelude to war, describing warriors with clearly hostile intentions, as in the *Táin*. However, this function could be subverted. Two other Middle Irish tales use the device in a manner which lightens or undermines the ominous associations of the device, building up a vivid composite (p.163) picture of an approaching army which in fact has no intention of attacking. Both these tales present the Ulstermen approaching Ailill and Medb, which leaves open the possibility that their authors were directly imitating the equivalent scenario in the *Táin* or one of its lost precursors. In *Fled*

Bricrenn ('Bricriu's Feast'), like the *Táin* a text preserving both Old and Middle Irish elements, Medb's daughter Finnabair describes the approaching warriors to her mother, who identifies each one in the customary manner.[28] Medb becomes increasingly nervous, especially once Cú Chulainn is described; but the Ulstermen have only come to Crúachu to ask Ailill and Medb to act as arbitrators in a somewhat undignified precedence-dispute between the three chief Ulster heroes.[29] The contrast between the expectations of the internal audience and those of the saga's audience, who know better, has a humorous potential which a gifted storyteller could easily have exploited.

In the second tale, *Mesca Ulad*, the device takes a more original and (in part) a more overtly comic turn. The B-recension of *Mesca Ulad* ('The Drunkenness of the Ulstermen') contains a linked pair of 'watchman devices' constructed along very similar lines to that in the first recension of the *Táin*, a riddling 'erroneous watchman device' immediately followed by a more conventional sequence.[30] The likely date of this version of the saga would not rule out influence from the *Táin*: it survives in two divergent texts which descend from an archetype probably written around 1100.[31] It is tempting to view the 'watchman' episode of *Mesca Ulad* B as an imitation of the equivalent episode in the *Táin*, rising at times to high burlesque.[32] Once again, the Ulstermen are seen approaching Ailill, Medb and company, this time at Temair Lúachra, the fortress of Cú Roí. Instead of being on a mission to repel invaders as in the *Táin*, or even on a peaceful mission as in *Fled Bricrenn*, the Ulstermen have no particular business with Ailill and Medb, or indeed with Cú Roí. They have become lost on a drunken journey to Cú Chulainn's hall, where they had intended to enjoy the second feast of the night; having discovered whose territory they have wound up in, they decide to march (p.164) boldly to Temair Lúachra for fear of being called cowardly if they simply leave. In the event, these misunderstandings do lead to a great battle—nothing less than the total destruction of Temair Lúachra, in which neither side comes out with credit—but at the point at which the

'watchman device' is employed, the Ulstermen have no intention of doing harm.

As in the *Táin*, Ailill and Medb are concerned to find out who is approaching. In the initial 'riddling' sequence, Medb's two druids are watching from the wall and argue in prose and verse about whether the approaching forms are men or natural objects:

Is and sin at-bert Crom Deróil, 'Innat-árfaid in ní tárfaid damsa?'

'Cid ní?' ar Crom Darail.

'Atar lim at ruibni rúadgascid [7 ám hám sochaide][33] at-chíu dar leittrib na hAirlúachra anair.'

'Nirb uráil lim [lom] cró 7 fola issin †bél tacras sin,' ar Crom Darail, 'úair ní slúag ná sochaide sin acht na daire romóra secha táncamar indé.'[34]

Then Crom Deróil said, 'Have you seen what I have seen?'[35]

'What is that?' said Crom Darail.

'It seems to me that red-armed armies [and the commotion of a crowd] are on the slopes of Arlúachra, coming west.'

'I would not think [a gush of] gore and blood too much in the mouth of him who claims that,' said Crom Darail, 'for that is neither an army nor a crowd, but the very large oaks we came past yesterday.'

The bickering continues until Cú Roí comes out and confirms that warriors are approaching, after which the warriors advance so quickly and furiously that the druids faint and fall off the wall in opposite directions.[36] The vindicated Crom Deróil, who has fallen within the stronghold, revives and goes inside to report to Medb, and a longer and more serious 'watchman' sequence ensues. It takes the following pattern, thirteen times. Crom Deróil describes each group of warriors,

Medb bestows an epithet on the description and Cú Roí applies it to the people described:

> 'Is barbarda 's is cauratta in tuarascbáil,' ar Medb.
> 'Is barbarda in lucht issa tuarascbáil,' bar Cú Ruí.[37]
> 'Savage and heroic is the description,' said Medb.
> 'Savage are the people in the description,' said Cú Roí.

Ailill then asks Cú Roí to identify them, and Cú Roí does so, usually adding further information to fill out the druid's description or explain why the people in question are here.[38] The episode ends with Medb sending the druid off to find out if there are any available prophecies about how to deal with the Ulstermen.

(p.165) For the descriptions of the characters, *Mesca Ulad* follows the example set by the *Táin* in the descriptions of the Ulstermen, enumerating features in a similar order (albeit less rigidly than Áine De Paor suggested) and focusing on faces, beard and hair, garments, ornaments, and weapons in a regular sequence, sometimes with their activities also described at the end.[39] The dialogue-pattern, too, is exactly the same each time. There are, however, some unorthodox features which vary the tone, one of which is the inclusion of invisible characters. Crom Deróil, being a druid, is able to see that members of the Túatha Dé Danann have mingled unseen with the Ulstermen to stir up dissension. As a result, some of the feats described are far from conventional. The invisible Dagda, for instance, amuses himself with his nine companions as follows:

> Lorg adúathmar íarnaidi 'na láim, cend anbthen fhurri 7 cend álgen. Ba sed a reba 7 abairti, fuirmid in cend n-anbthen for cendar na nónbor condas-marband raa braithiud n-óenúaire. Fuirmid in cend álgen forru condas-bethaigend issinn úair chétna.[40]

> A very dreadful iron club was in his hand, with a violent end and a gentle end. These were his feats and his

tricks: he puts the violent end on the heads of the nine men and they are killed in an instant.[41] He puts the gentle end on them and they are revived in the same moment.

This activity embodies the ability of the Túatha Dé Danann to create trouble and peace as they wish, a theme which is threaded right through this saga.[42] This ambivalence, oscillating between peace and aggression, is also found within some of the Ulstermen's own tableaux, for instance that of Dubthach Dóel Ulad:

Ell n-áilgen issin dara hóil dó, cubur fola fordeirggi issind óil aile [dó .i.][43] frecra mín munterda in dara fecht 7 frecra andíaraid in fecht aile.[44]

A gentle flush on one of his cheeks, a very red foam of blood on his other cheek; [that is,] a courteous, kindly answer at one time and an angry answer another time.

The narrator here makes the moral significance of the warrior's physical appearance explicit, and draws an implicit connection with the Otherworld's ambivalent power over the world of mortals as outlined in the saga's opening sentences. This modest narratorial gloss suggests that such descriptions in general, however formulaic, were felt by their writers (and audiences) to be more than empty verbal pyrotechnics. The content of these descriptive passages plays an integral part in the saga's structure and field of allusion, just as the formal attributes of the 'watchman device' heighten the narrative's dramatic tone.

(p.166) During the Middle Irish period the 'watchman device' became almost a trademark feature of the larger-scale Irish sagas; it was also imported into the Middle Irish adaptations of Dares Phrygius's Latin history of the Trojan War, *Togail Troí* ('The Destruction of Troy'). No such device is found in Dares's text, but the Irish translator(s) clearly felt that no story about a great battle would be complete without one. Once again, Mac Roth's riddling sequence in the *Táin* may have served as a model (although this view is disputed by Miles, as will be discussed in chapter 8). As with the *Táin*, the second recension

of *Togail Troí* offers a much more elaborate version than the first.[45]

Indeed, the Irish 'watchman device' was so flexible, so amenable to a wide range of narrative requirements, that (unlike the classical and Near-Eastern examples known to me) it could be adapted into scenarios very different from that in which the speakers are talking about an approaching army. The most striking departure from this norm is found in another part of the *Táin*, *Caladgleó Cethirn* or 'The Hard Fight of Cethern', whose 'watchman device' has no watchman and occurs immediately *after* a battle. Here the severely wounded Ulster warrior Cethern is examined by the doctor Fíngin from a safe distance (Cethern having by this stage punched fifteen other doctors to death because they had given him pessimistic prognoses). In a sequence of twelve tableaux, Fíngin 'reads' each wound and suggests what kind of warrior caused it, to which Cethern adds a description of each warrior, and Cú Chulainn identifies them by name.[46]

'Fingal étrom induthrachtach inso. Nítbérat,' ol in liaig.

'Is fír,' ol Cethernn. 'Dománic ócláech. Cromscíath co fáebar condúala fair [...] Brat donn i filliud imbi, delg n-argait n-and. Ruc fuil mbic húaim-sea.'

'Rofetar-sa,' or Cú Chulaind. 'Illand mac Fergusa meic Róig sin.'[47]

'This is a slight wound inflicted unintentionally by a kinsman. It will not be fatal to you,' said the doctor.

'It is true,' said Cethern. 'A young warrior came to me. He had a curved shield with a scalloped edge [...] A brown cloak was wrapped around him with a silver brooch in it. He got a small wound from me.'

'I know him,' said Cú Chulainn. 'That is Illann, the son of Fergus mac Róich.'

(p.167) Instead of building up dramatic tension by anticipating combats to come, this sequence looks back at combats which have already happened, and which are now described by

Cethern, his memory jogged by the doctor's diagnoses. The battle (which was not narrated earlier, only mentioned) is thus presented in charged glimpses and at one remove, just as the doctor himself has to stand at a distance from the angry invalid. It is an unusually imaginative treatment of a device which lent itself, in mediaeval Ireland, to a surprisingly wide range of forms and functions.

The Tableaux of the *Togail*

The description-sequence in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* bears clear family resemblances to those in the texts just discussed, but differs from them in several significant respects. The most obvious difference is one of scale. It is much longer in both absolute and relative terms, taking up a far greater proportion of its saga than any other (47 per cent in Y) and spanning 725 lines in Knott's edition. (The next longest example, *Tochim na mBuiden* in the *Táin*, is considerably shorter in absolute terms and is set within a far longer saga.)[48] Its unusual length required an unusually high level of narrative accomplishment to retain the audience's attention over the whole sequence, and its author had to be particularly wary of the potential for rigidity inherent in the 'watchman device'.[49] He had to take more steps to maintain variety than did the author of shorter sequences, which could keep to a prescribed pattern almost word-for-word without seeming to get stuck in a rut. In this section and the next I shall explore the different ways in which this section of the *Togail* varies the narrative landscape and sustains the dramatic tension built up in the first half.

The description-sequence in the *Togail* comprises a conversation between Ingcél and the sons of Donn Désa, containing twenty-six tableaux (forty-one in U) and describing the following people:

1. Cormac Cond Loinges, Ulster prince, with nine companions (lines 677–744)[50]
2. Three Pictish warriors (lines 745–68)
3. Nine Otherworldly pipers from the *síd*-mound of Brí Léith (lines 769–86)
4. Taidle Ulad, Conaire's steward (lines 787–805)

5. Mac Cécht, Conaire's champion (lines 806–75)

6. Three of Conaire's sons (lines 876–901)

7. Three Fomorian hostages, monstrous beings from overseas (lines 902–34)

8. Three royal warriors (lines 935–57)

9. Conall Cernach, Ulster champion (lines 958–89)

10. Conaire and two of his foster-brothers (lines 990–1106)

(p.168) 11. Conaire's twelve guards (lines 1107–17)

12. Lé Fer (or Fri) Flaith, Conaire's youngest son (lines 1118–46)

13. Conaire's six Otherworldly dispensers (lines 1147–61)

14. Taulchaine, Conaire's royal jester (lines 1162–1201)

[Fourteen additional tableaux were inserted by the H-scribe in U:[51]

a. Three swineherds (U, lines 7583–9)

b. Three chief charioteers (U, lines 7590–6)

c. Cúscraid Mend Macha, Ulster prince (U, lines 7597–7605)

d. Nine sub-charioteers (U, lines 7606–11)

e. Nine Saxons (U, lines 7612–18)

f. Three knights (U, lines 7619–24)

g. Three judges (U, lines 7625–31)

h. Nine harpers (U, lines 7632–40)

i. Three jugglers (U, lines 7641–6)

j. Three buffoons (U, lines 7647–52)[52]

k. Three Badbs, the triple war-goddess (U, lines 7653–6)

l. Three cooks (U, lines 7657–61)

m. Three poets or *fílid* (U, 7662–8)

n. Two guards (U, lines 7670–3)]

15. Nine warriors (lines 1202–12)

16. Conaire's two table-servers (lines 1213–25)

17. Sencha, Dubthach, and Goibnenn, three Ulster nobles (lines 1226–61)

18. Three Manx churls (lines 1262–99)

19. Da Derga the royal hospitaller and his two foster-sons (lines 1300–25)

20. The three red horsemen from the *síd*-mounds (lines 1326–37)

21. Conaire's three doorkeepers (lines 1338–49)

22. Fer Caille, Cichuil, and their pig (lines 1350–60)

23. Three British plunderers (lines 1361–70)[53]

24. Conaire's three fools (lines 1371–82)

25. Conaire's three cupbearers (lines 1383–8)

26. Nár Thúathcáech, Otherworldly swineherd (lines 1389–94)

Unlike the equivalent sequences in the Ulster tales, which describe only royalty and noble warriors, the retinue in the *Togail* includes a wide range of social classes and roles, with their status clearly reflected in their clothing, accoutrements, and demeanour. As in *Mesca Ulad*, warriors are accompanied by Otherworldly characters (this time perfectly visible), but the *Togail* presents a far more comprehensive conspectus of the non-martial aspects of the royal household: pipers, fools, steward, hospitaller, dispensers, doorkeepers, hostages, servers, and cupbearers (these last (p.169) two will play a crucial non-martial role in the battle itself).[54] One obvious reason for this range of personnel as compared with other 'watchman devices' is that the conventional roles of watchers and watched have been reversed. The people described are not an army on the move, but a royal assembly; the watchers are not anxiously defending their stronghold, but are aggressors viewing their prey, rootless plunderers surveying the settled (though far from inactive) society to which they once belonged.[55]

Besides this diversity of characters described, the longer descriptions make use of a wide range of literary modes. They span the gamut from prose to verse, including *rosc*, praise-poetry, and rhythmic, alliterating 'runs', and including extended passages of direct speech by the characters described. Several of these passages show signs of having been extracted from older sources and reassembled within this new and capacious matrix. In a few cases, two descriptions of the same person—sometimes even two versions

of the same description—have been brought together in the same tableau, not because of clumsiness (as some have suggested) but in order to vary the rhythm and register of this very long sequence of repeating patterns. The descriptions of Mac Cécht, the Fomorians, and the Manx churls have a bipartite prose-and-verse structure, giving similar information in two narrative modes, while Conaire's tableau comprises two very different portraits in contrasting inset verses combined with rhythmic alliterating prose as well as 'straight' descriptive prose.

Narrative interest is further enhanced by allusions to other stories. This technique recalls the 'watchman device' in Homer's *Iliad* and the very similar device in Book 7 of Statius's *Thebaid*, where the identification of a specific individual often takes the form of an anecdote about that individual.[56] In all three texts, as in the famous 'digressions' of *Beowulf*, fragments of other stories give an impression of narrative depth, of a wider web of story in which the events in the foreground are embedded.[57] We are told in tableau 18, for instance, that Cú Chulainn once besieged the Manxmen and spared three of them: *ro marbsad .l. laech oca n-anocol 77 ní ro lic Cú Chulainn a marbad ara n-ingnathaigi* ('they killed fifty warriors when they were spared, but because of their weirdness Cú Chulainn would not allow them to be killed', lines 1288–90). No further explanation is given, nor any further glimpse of Cú Chulainn.[58] Other stories alluded to are still more tantalizing since (p.170) they do not survive in fuller versions elsewhere. Mac Cécht's quest or *echtrae* to the land of the Fomorians is mentioned in tableau 7: none of that monstrous people dared face him in combat, so he brought three back as hostages (lines 916–22). Tableau 17 alludes to an origin-story about Celtchar's deadly spear, the Lúin, which was apparently found at the battle of Mag Tuired, an ancient war between the Túatha Dé Danann and the Fomorians (lines 1242–4).[59] Most mystifying of all is tableau 20, describing the three red horsemen *do-rónsad goí i ssídib* ('who acted wrongly in the *síd*-mounds', line 1331); their punishment was, we are told, *a n-orgain co ba trí la rí Temrach* ('to be slaughtered three times by the king of Tara', lines 1332–3), although they

would not be harmed in the process. Like the fragmentary narrative of Ingcél's raid in Britain, these stories remain glimpses of lost tales, so that the *Togail* as a whole appears rooted in a varied legendary landscape.

Even more than in the 'watchman devices' of the *Táin* and *Mesca Ulad*, there is an extraordinary concentration of life and movement in those of the *Togail*. As a microcosm of Conaire's realm, the Hostel is buzzing with activity:

> '.ix. claidib ina lámaib 7 .ix. scéith airgdidi 7 .ix. n-ubla óir. Fo-cherd cach hae díb in n-ardae 7 ní thuit ní díb for lár 7 ní bí acht oen díb for a bais 7 is cumma 7 timthirecht bech i llau ánli cach hae sech alaile súas.'[60]

> 'Nine swords are in his [Taulchaine's] hands with nine silver shields and nine golden apples. He throws each of them up in the air, and none of them falls on the floor, and there is only one of them on his palm. It is like bees buzzing around on a warm day, each of them going up past the other.'

The three royal warriors, too, are throwing swords and scabbards into the air in such a way that the scabbards envelop the swords before they hit the ground. Conaire's butlers are seen whipping their cloaks onto each other's shoulders so quickly that the eye can barely keep up with them; his two table-servers are scurrying rapidly back and forth between the apartments and the hearth; and his three jesters are engaged in a performance which makes everyone who looks at them laugh uncontrollably.[61] The feats entertain those in the Hostel, while their descriptions entertain the saga's audience. This sense of teeming energy is reinforced by Fer Rogain's predictions of each warrior's deeds of valour in the coming battle: entertaining feats will soon be turned to deadlier uses.

The tableaux are far from static; yet, in another sense, time has stopped moving. It is as if the forward momentum built up in the first half of the saga, placed 'on pause' by the description-sequence, spills over into the content of the descriptions themselves, bringing the Hostel to hectic life in

its last moments. We saw in chapter 4 how the saga's chronology is arranged so as to tighten around Conaire in a distinctly hostile manner: the episodes become separated by ever-decreasing gaps, with more detail being lavished upon each episode and the fateful word *innocht* ('tonight') tolling like a bell through the narrative. The description-sequence crowns this process. Not only does the word *innocht* continue to sound, but what Ingcél describes is not so much a series of episodes as a single, fragmented moment. Time may still be moving on for the plunderers in their discussion, but it has run out for Conaire and his men. An entire legendary world is about to be turned upside down (as hinted by Conaire himself in lines 501–3), and the narrative flow accordingly seizes up.[62]

The description-sequence embodies a collapsing of space as well as of time. Plunderers and king have been converging steadily ever since the British massacre, a process underscored by our increasing glimpses of the plunderers' own viewpoint. Now they are about to converge, and the description-sequence is staged so as to underline the tension and danger of this proximity. Whereas previously the plunderers had only heard noises and seen distant lights, now (through Ingcél) they view their quarry clearly and in detail:

> To-théit Ingcél do thoiscélad forsin mBruidin cosin tres[63] mac imlesan na hoensúla robuí asa étan do chommus a ruissc isa teach do aidmillead ind ríg 7 na maccaem ro bátar immi isin tig conda-dercacha tria drochu na carbat. Ro ráthaiged íarum asin tig anall Ingcél. Ta-cuirethar beadg ón tig íarna ráthugud.[64]

> Ingcél came to spy on the Hostel with one of the three pupils of the single eye which stuck out from his forehead, focusing his eye into the house to put the evil eye on the king and the young men who were around him in the house, and he watched them through the chariots' wheels. Then Ingcél was spotted from the house. He dashed away from the house after being spotted.

Ingcél's inspection of the Hostel is bad news in more than one sense. As we have seen, the description of his 'evil eye' replicates the description of Cailb's hostile gaze upon the same company.[65] Cailb had to enter the Hostel to cause one of Conaire's *gessi* to be broken, but all Ingcél has to do is to look inside, penetrating the Hostel with his gaze, thus violating the king's *geis* against being in a house whose light is visible from the outside.[66] His action allows us, too, to close in and scrutinize the company, implicating us within the hostile narrative viewpoint. Aided by the (p.172) extremely clear visual demarcation of each tableau in all the extant texts, the reader of the manuscripts is able to scan the Hostel almost as rapidly as Ingcél himself.

Looking, in this saga, is not a neutral act. This breaks yet another convention of the 'watchman device' as traditionally practised. Watchers are conventionally invisible to those being watched, but the *Togail* keeps its audience very well aware of whose eye they are looking through, rather than lulling us into a false sense of narratorial objectivity by the sheer length of this description-sequence. Indeed, Ingcél's gaze has such hostile force that it causes Taulchaine's juggling-feat to fail and crash to the floor (lines 1170–80). Conversely, just as Conaire and his men are vulnerable to Ingcél's malevolent gaze, Ingcél's own proximity to the Hostel makes him vulnerable. In tableau 12, Ingcél reports that his and his fellow-watchers' eyes were blinded by the dazzling appearance of Lé Fér Flaith (lines 1130–2); in tableau 14, Taulchaine knows exactly what has caused his feat to fail, and he informs Conaire of Ingcél's presence (lines 1175–80), a detail which fills out the information provided earlier that Ingcél was spotted and had to leap away.

It is dangerous to be this close, so the conversation in which the description-sequence is narrated takes place at a safe distance from the Hostel. Ingcél's movements maintain the sudden dartings back and forth which we have seen to be characteristic of the plunderers' overall trajectory, and which may reflect the continuing power of Conaire's kingship even in its doomed state.[67] Ingcél's nervous dash from the house, Lomna's desire to call a halt, and the plunderers' retreat over

three ridges in fear of Mac Cécht (lines 865–6)[68] are balanced by Ingcél's repeated insistence that the raid must go ahead, and the plunderers' reaffirmation of their vows. This curious oscillation marks even their final charge. Lomna is the first to reach the Hostel doors, where he is instantly decapitated: *Focres íarum isin mBruidin co ba trí 7 do-ralad eisti co fo trí, feb co ndrarngertsom feissin* ('then [his head] was thrown into the Hostel three times and thrown out three times, just as he himself had predicted it', lines 1405–6).[69]

Pattern, Variation, and Dramatic Dialogue

Both Ingcél's act of looking and the descriptions of the people he sees are vividly imagined. But the description-sequence is not a set of third-person descriptions; it is a dialogue which, as Carney put it, 'given suitable conditions, might have evolved into poetic drama'.[70] The formulaic nature of the 'watchman device', far from (p.173) compromising the saga's dramatic purpose, is used to carry out that purpose. Here, too, variety emerges as a fundamental ordering principle on several levels, combined with a sure sense of narrative pace. The basic pattern of each tableau is as follows:

> A. Ingcél describes what he saw in each chamber of the Hostel and says to Fer Rogain, *Samailte lat sin, a Ḟir Rogain* ('Identify that, Fer Rogain').
> B. Fer Rogain identifies the people described, gives further details, and predicts how they will perform in the battle.
> C. Responses by Fer Rogain's brothers and counter-responses by Ingcél, usually including (a) and (b):
>> (a) Lomna Drúth and/or other sons of Donn Désa protest that the raid ought not to go ahead and that those who carry it out are doomed. This element often includes the phrase *Mairg íuras in n-orguin* ('Woe to him who carries out the raid').
>> (b) Ingcél insists that it will go ahead, usually beginning with the phrase *Ní cumci* or *Ní cumcid* ('You [singular or plural] cannot [prevail]').

(c) Further discussion between Ingcél and the sons of Donn Désa, in which the latter admit that Ingcél is owed this raid and call down doom upon themselves; this element only appears in a few of the tableaux.

D. Someone asks Ingcél, *Íar sin cia acca and?* ('After that, whom did you see there?').

For a 'watchman device' this is a particularly complex set of narrative 'moves'. In element B, Fer Rogain not only identifies warriors but also predicts their performance; element C varies considerably from tableau to tableau, each one selecting from a broad repertoire of formulae and ranging from one to thirty-nine lines in Knott's edition. Add to this the multiplicity of form and content within the descriptions themselves (element A), and the result is that individual tableaux are subject to far greater variation in length than those of the other extant 'watchman devices', which do not stray so much from their prescribed template.

This variation in length is represented graphically in Fig. 10. Many of the tableaux are of the same length as those in the sagas examined above, ranging from 11 to 40 lines each in Knott's edition. Also as in the other sagas, there are several very short tableaux of between six and ten lines each. But towering above these are three very long and complex tableaux, those of Cormac (75 lines), Mac Cécht (70 lines), and Conaire (117 lines).[71] In Cormac's tableau, most of the extra space is taken up by the responses of Conaire's foster-brothers and counter-responses of Ingcél (element C); in Mac Cécht's case, no expense is spared on an elaborate riddling description, the explanation of individual elements within the 'riddle', and an unusually detailed set of predictions about his performance (p.174)

(elements A and B); and Conaire's tableau is dominated by two extended sets of visionary verses (element A). More importantly, the architecture of the whole sequence has been
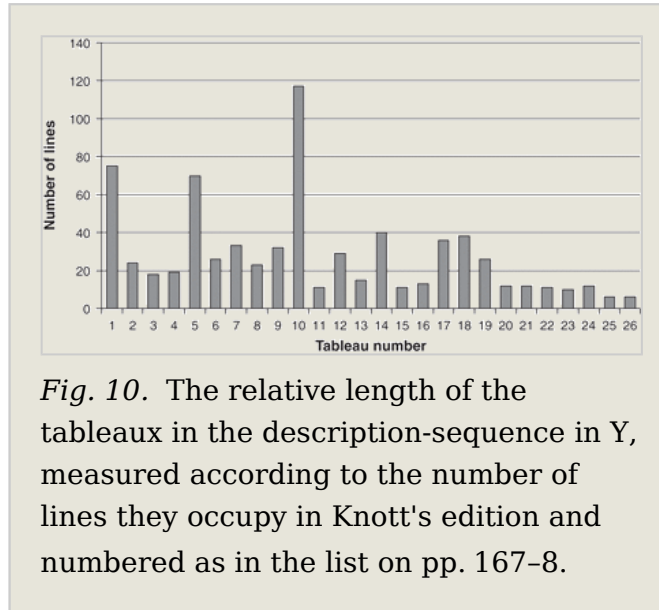
Fig. 10. The relative length of the tableaux in the description-sequence in Y, measured according to the number of lines they occupy in Knott's edition and numbered as in the list on pp. 167–8.

designed to impose a certain unity on this variety, balancing longer and shorter tableaux against each other. The longest of all is placed in the middle, with a similar number of lines both before and afterwards. The other two giant tableaux are placed at the beginning and at the quarter-point. After Conaire's, no single tableau is anywhere near as long as those dominating the first half, but focal points are provided by the 40-line tableau of the king's jester Taulchaine (no. 14), the two adjacent tableaux of the Ulster nobles and the Manx churls (nos. 17 and 18), and (especially in D and E) that of Conaire's other main champion, Conall Cernach.[72] After the churls, the length of each tableau becomes progressively shorter; the last seven are so short by comparison with the others that the overall pace quickens as a result, easing the narrative out of its accustomed stasis in preparation for action being resumed in line 1395.[73] While I would not argue for any deep numerological significance in the architecture of the description-sequence, it has clearly been designed with a sense of balance and rhythm, rather than merely 'accumulating' as some scholars have suggested.[74]

Variations in the application of the 'watchman' template to individual tableaux bring about other, more immediately obvious ways of maintaining narrative (p.175) interest. This is one manifestation of the classic technique of 'repetition with

variation' familiar in traditional narrative worldwide (both oral and written), and which Irish saga-authors deployed with particular subtlety and skill.[75] Here, familiar patterns in elements A, B, and C are adjusted from time to time for dramatic effect. For example, Ingcél interrupts his own description of Conaire to utter a praise-poem he had composed and recited while watching the king (lines 1011–44), a remarkable gesture which will be examined in more detail in the next chapter. Similarly, while most of Fer Rogain's responses begin with the conventional phrase *Ní anse damsa a ṡamail* ('It is not difficult for me to identify that'), in three cases he says that it *is* difficult (lines 752, 916, 1285–6), at one point taking time to think it over: *Sochtais Fer Rogain* ('Fer Rogain fell silent', line 1285).[76] When asked to identify Conaire's three sons, he is unable to play his designated role as 'identifier', first weeping for a third of the night, then apostrophizing the three sons as 'little ones' whom he regrets having to attack, and finally giving their names with no further information. His brothers have to take over from him to give more details and predict the sons' performance in the battle:

Ro chí Fer Rogain co mba fliuch a brat far a bélaib 7 ní ḟétas guth asa chind co trian na haidchi.

'A becco,' ol Fer Rogain, 'is deithbeir dam a ndo-gníu. Oball 7 Obléni 7 Corpre Músc,[77] trí meic ríg Hérenn.'

'Ro-mairg más ar scél,'[78] ordat meic Duind Désa, 'is maith in triar fil isinn imdae [...]'[79]

Fer Rogain wept so that his cloak was wet before him, and no words could be got out of him for a third of the night.

'O little ones,' said Fer Rogain, 'what I do is fitting.[80] [Those are] Oball, Obléni, and Coirpre Músc, three sons of the king of Ireland.'

'Woe [to us] if that is our story,' said the sons of Donn Désa. 'Those three in the chamber are good.'

Again, after hearing the description of Conaire's doomed younger son Lé Fer Flaith, Fer Rogain is able to make the

conventional response to begin with—*Ní anse lim* ('that is not difficult for me', line 1134)—only to demonstrate that it is indeed difficult for him in another sense: *Ro chích Fer Rogain co tarlaic a déra fola. 'Dirsan dó,' ol sé* ('Fer Rogain wept until he shed his tears of blood. "Alas for him!," he said', lines 1134–5).[81] This double sense of 'difficulty' is not merely a modern reader's creative interpretation. The tension between Fer Rogain's repeated opening phrase (p.176) *Ní anse* ('Not difficult') and the appalling difficulties facing him and his brothers is underlined by Lomna's grief-stricken protest that *Is annsu damsa* ('it is more difficult for me [than for Ingcél]'), uttered during the first tableau and in those of Mac Cécht and Conaire and introducing a specific prediction of Lomna's own death. This play on *anse* recalls Ingcél's earlier insistence that destroying Conaire would be easier for him (literally *ní bu ansu limsa*, 'it would not be more difficult for me', line 614) than killing his own family and king, as the sons of Donn Désa had compelled him to do in Britain. With their prophetic gifts, Fer Rogain and Lomna see much too 'easily' for comfort what is about to happen. These tensions, fully developed in the first tableau, affect each subsequent utterance of *Ní anse* by Fer Rogain, especially when he cannot bring himself to utter this phrase at all.

The *Togail* thus gives dramatic weight to one of the most conventional formulae in Irish prose. Word-play and subtle variations in the overall structure enhance the characterization of the speakers, reminding us that, however stylized the dialogue may be, it represents a real conversation between actors in the tragedy, no less than that between Homer's Priam and Helen on the walls of Troy. The *Iliad* provides an apt point for comparison in this case, since Helen's identifications of her former friends and kinsmen are shot through with regret and self-recrimination (so much so that, in Robert Fagles's modern translation, Helen is represented breaking off her speeches, unable to continue).[82] Fer Rogain, like Helen, finds himself irreversibly committed to a course of action for which he now suffers sharp remorse.

Element C, the responses of Donn Désa's sons to their brother's identifications and predictions, is the most flexible

and adaptable element in the description-sequence. Its fullest expression occurs in the first tableau, after the description of Cormac Cond Loinges. Here Lomna's initial interjection continues with an oath:

> 'Mairg íuras in n-orguin,' for Lomnae Drúth, 'cid dáig ind oenḟir sin […] Tongusa a toingthe mo thúatha,' for Lomna mac Duind Désa, 'mad meise con-ísed mo chomairle ní aidlébthai innd orguin, cid dáig ind oenḟir sin namá 7 ara léichet 7 a febas ind laích.'[83]

> 'Woe to him who carries out the raid,' said Lomna the Fool, 'even for the sake of that one man […] I swear what my people swear,' said Lomna son of Donn Désa, 'if my advice were to prevail, the raid would not be attempted, if only for the sake of that man and for his gentleness and the warrior's excellence.'

This use of the verb *con-ísed* ('were to prevail') makes sense of Ingcél's retort *Ní cumci/cumcid* ('you shall not prevail', line 711), which reappears in this abbreviated form in most subsequent tableaux. Ingcél's reply, which comprises sub-element (b), is much fuller in the first tableau. His accusation of cowardice includes pointed references to the pledge which binds the sons of Donn Désa (lines 712–13); he goes on to accuse Lomna of being a poor warrior and, in a series of rather obscure taunts, hints that Lomna will die early and quickly (lines 713–17). His speech concludes with a resounding assertion of his intention to make history by carrying out the raid (p.177) (lines 718–21). Three of Lomna's brothers then intervene (sub-element (c)), protesting that Ingcél is impugning their honour and that the raid must go ahead as agreed (lines 722–4). Lomna agrees that Ingcél is not to be blamed for the situation; he goes on to predict that Ingcél will escape victorious, but that he himself will die a violent death at the very beginning of the battle (lines 725–35). Ingcél rubs his point home by mentioning the raid he had provided for the sons of Donn Désa in Britain (lines 737–9); once again they reaffirm his right to carry out the present raid (lines 740–1), and Lomna brings the exchange to a close with a final expression of woe (line 742–3) before asking Ingcél for his next description (element D).

This whole exchange takes up more than a page in Knott's edition. Like Fer Rogain's occasional lapses from efficient explanation, it reinforces our awareness of the impossible situation faced by the sons of Donn Désa. It maintains the pattern built up in the saga's first half, by which Conaire's foster-brothers were forced to admit that they will destroy Conaire at Ingcél's behest, although they had continued to express hope that he might not come. The true hopelessness of their position is now pitilessly exposed. We saw in chapter 3 that, just as Conaire has been forced to repeat his original choice 'against' his royal obligations by being compelled to violate one *geis* after another, the sons of Donn Désa have been compelled by Ingcél to restate their agreement to attack the Hostel in a number of formal statements of intent. Having succeeded in staving off the attack for a few hours by demanding the description-sequence, the repetitive logic of this very sequence forces them to yield again to Ingcél's implacable will twenty-six times.[84]

This situation is dramatized fully in the first tableau, using no fewer than twenty-three separate formulae (each one comprising between three and twenty-seven words). Subsequent tableaux' expressions of element C sustain the drama by presenting variations on the theme, giving shorter selections from the pool of formulae set out in tableau 1 and progressively adding new formulae to the pool.[85] Throughout the description-sequence, the scribes of the extant texts often abbreviated individual formulae on their subsequent appearances, using one or two keywords followed by the Latin phrase *et reliqua*, roughly equivalent to 'et cetera' and itself abbreviated in the Celtic Insular manner as *7rl* or *7r̄* (with a horizontal stroke over the 'r'). Here is an example from tableau 11 in Y, with these kinds of abbreviations expanded in square brackets:

> 'Tongu 7rl. [= a toingthe mo thúath], bit lía a mairb 7rl. [= leó ón orguin andáta a mbí][86] 7 imma-ricfa élúd 7rl. [= doib íarum].'

> (p.178) 'Mairg íuras in orguin 7rl. [= cid dáig inna buidne sin]. Ocus íar sin cía acca ann?'[87]

> 'I swear [by what my people swears by], their dead will be more numerous [at the raid than those left alive by them], and they will manage to escape [afterwards].'

> 'Woe to him who carries out the raid, [even for the sake of that company.] And after that whom did you see there?'

Reconstructing the full formula from the abbreviated version in each text is, in almost every case, straightforward:[88] the wording sometimes varies between instances, but the meaning of each formula remains similar.

It is worth mentioning the divergences between the manuscript-texts at this point, since the description-sequence is textually the most fluid part of the *Togail*. As in the tableau just discussed, one frequently finds differences in the choice or rendering of one or two formulae, but as a rule these variations are small-scale: a slight expansion here, a minor substitution there. The only significant exceptions to this rule (apart from the extra tableaux added by the H-scribe in U) are the numerous extra formulae of doom, desperation and pledge-reaffirmation added to element C in the renditions of tableaux 5 and 9 (Mac Cécht and Conall) in the texts D, E, and H2, a move which emphasizes the terror inspired by the two most prestigious of Conaire's human champions. The sense that each manuscript-text is a separate scribal 'performance' (whether or not we would wish to see this as 'authorial') is nowhere more apparent than in the response-formulae used in the description-sequence;[89] yet at the same time, close inspection of this variation confirms a common underlying structure and dramatic effect.

By playing on the same family of phrases, the same mood is made to resonate through the whole sequence, while the variation in the selection of formulae keeps them from becoming stale as a result of excessive repetition. So, too, does the foreshortening of most of the individual tableaux by leaving out many formulae altogether, saving full treatments for the most significant tableaux. This foreshortening affects element C in particular: many later tableaux lack sub-element (c), and several lack all three sub-elements and move straight

on to the final question (D). To give a few examples from Y: three times the sons of Donn Désa express their grief without being challenged by Ingcél (tableaux 4, 11, and 22);[90] on six occasions neither the sons of Donn Désa nor Ingcél make any remarks at all (tableaux 16, 20, and 23–6).[91] Most of the characters described in these tableaux are of inferior rank, and hence perhaps less worth making a fuss about from the saga-author's point of view. The three red horsemen (tableau 20) appear to be of high status, but since Fer Rogain has just explained that they will not be harmed (p.179) and will harm nobody (line 1336), there is no need for any grief here, and none is expressed. Of the six tableaux without any interjections, five (nos. 22–6) are curtailed still more by the unusual brevity of Fer Rogain's explanations (element B). These are in fact the last five tableaux in the description-sequence; as mentioned earlier, the cumulative effect of their brevity helps to regain the momentum needed for the moment when the narrative snaps out of its freeze-frame stance and plunges into the battle itself.

The saga's nuanced, dramatic, and carefully paced deployment of its formulae has not been appreciated by its translators. When adapting Stokes's translation of U for their *Ancient Irish Tales*, Cross and Slover expunged thirteen tableaux, all embedded verses, and all utterances belonging to element C, these being 'unimportant repetitious passages'.[92] The more recent adaptation of Stokes's translation in *The Celtic Heroic Age* omits the entire description-sequence, directing the curious reader to the sequence in *Mesca Ulad* (which 'serves the same purpose') and thus giving the impression that the *Togail*'s own sequence is superfluous.[93] Jeffrey Gantz has taken an opposite but no less drastic approach in *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, imitating the mediaeval scribes' freedom to vary the formulae. He adds between 32 and 52 extra formulae to sixteen tableaux, as well as adding numerous speech-suffixes ('said Lomnae Drúth', 'said Ingcél') not present in the source-text (Knott's edition). In an otherwise lively translation, he here makes the whole description-sequence appear more plodding and mechanical than it is in the Irish text, where those formulae had (I suggest) been deliberately not included.[94] In Gantz's defence, the abbreviation-patterns for

two of the formula-types (in twenty instances) do leave some room for doubt as to whether they should be included or omitted, and Gantz has given them the benefit of that doubt despite their effect on the narrative flow;[95] but the remaining 32 extra formulae are clearly unwarranted. In the last few tableaux, for example, the same italicized exchange is added every time:

> (p.180) 'Not difficult that,' said Fer Rogain. 'Dub and Dond and Dobar they, the three cupbearers of the king of Temuir. They are the sons of Lá and Aidche.'*'Woe to him who carries out this destruction, if only because of those three,' said Lomnae Drúth. 'You do not rule me,' said Ingcél. 'Clouds of blood will come to you.'* 'After that, what did you see?' *asked Lomnae Drúth*.

> 'I saw a man who was blind in his left eye and destructive in his right,' said Ingcél. 'He was carrying a pig's head towards the fire, and it was squealing. Explain that, Fer Rogain.'

> 'Not difficult that,' said Fer Rogain. 'Nár Thúathcáech that one, the swineherd of Bodb, from Síd ar Femuin. He has never attended a feast where he did not shed blood.' *'Woe to him who carries out this destruction, if only because of those three,' said Lomnae Drúth. 'You do not rule me,' said Ingcél. 'Clouds of blood will come to you.* Rise now, fíana, and let us make for the house.' [said Ingcél][96]

Isolated in this way, the additions do not look problematic, but after reading (or hearing) twenty-four other tableaux one does miss the sense of acceleration towards the final battle which the Irish text seems designed to convey at this point, besides the dulling effect of repeating the same italicized exchange in so many adjacent tableaux. In his introduction to this tale Gantz remarks that 'some may find the catalogue section tedious', but this is not entirely the fault of the saga-author or subsequent scribes.[97]

Far from being 'repetitious and unimportant', then, the description-sequence displays a surprising degree of narrative

variety and plays a vital dramatic role in the unfolding of the story. It is an integral part of the saga, not a superfluous embellishment. As we have seen, the sons of Donn Désa have pressing reasons for wishing to delay the battle for as long as possible. The ground has been carefully prepared for the description-sequence both by their motives for delay and, on the formal level, by five analogous episodes in which something is described, its identity is questioned and explained, and its significance is commented on: the vision of the burning land (lines 236–49), Conaire's retinue travelling along the road (lines 445–73), Mac Cécht's spark pushing the ships out to sea (lines 479–95), the noise caused by the ships landing (lines 496–506), and the fire in the Hostel (lines 584–619).[98] These episodes progressively mould the linear narrative of the saga's first half into a more descriptive, lyrical form so that it can shift gear smoothly into the more spacious and stylized matrix of the description-sequence proper. Indeed, this process has been at work since the very start: in lines 1–62 King Eochaid and his men observe Étaín from a distance and, after an extremely detailed description of her appearance (which has proved much more popular among translators than the descriptions of male characters later in the saga), the king asks who she is and receives an explanation directly from her. The upshot is that the (p.181) pair sleep together. This initial episode thus contains the seeds both of Conaire himself and of the narrative strategies by which his downfall will be told.

Prophecies, Storytelling, and Otherworldly Knowledge

One last technique by which the two halves of the saga are knit together, and one which calls for especially close investigation, is prophecy. We have already examined the role of prophecies and predictions in maintaining momentum and raising tension in the saga's first half. They continue to perform this function in the description-sequence. Here is yet another feature marking out this 'watchman device' as unusual. While prophecies and 'watchman devices' often go together—recall Medb bringing the 'watchman' sequence in *Mesca Ulad* to a close by asking if there are any prophecies

about the people described[99]—the speakers of the 'watchman device' rarely dwell explicitly on the coming battle, focusing instead on the appearances, identities, and natures of the people described. Prophecies are generally relegated to separate episodes. In the *Táin*, for instance, the *Tochim na mBuiden* 'watchman device' is both preceded and followed by prophecies on either side, but the 'watchman' dialogue itself contains only one prophecy, an outburst by Fergus.[100]

By contrast, the speakers in the *Togail* issue prophecies about the coming destruction almost every time someone is described. In element B, Fer Rogain identifies Conaire's companions not only in terms of who they are, why they are there, and what they are like but (more importantly for him) in terms of how they will perform in the battle, including the exact number of plunderers each of them will kill. Of the Fomorian hostages, for example, he predicts that *Do-thoetsad sé cét*[101] *laech leó ina cétcumscliu [...] 7 ní ba mó mír*[102] *na dorn nó lau mairfes cach fear leó* ('Six hundred will fall by them in their first attack, and each man will be killed by them with no more than a bite or a punch or a kick', lines 927–9). He also makes some less precise predictions, often stiffened by oaths:

> 'Tongu a toṅgthe mo thúatha, bid sochaidi forsa ndáilfe deoga tonnaig innocht ar dorus na Bruidne ind Lúin Celtchair meic Uithechair.'[103]

> 'I swear by what my people swear by, many are those to whom the Lúin of Celtchar mac Uithechair will serve drinks of death tonight before the Hostel.'

(p.182) Element C sustains this focus on the future: here one or more of the sons of Donn Désa calls down woe upon the perpetrators of the raid. The speaker is usually Lomna the *drúth* or fool: like many fools in mediaeval Irish narrative, he is both prescient and gloomy.[104] He foretells his own violent death in the first *tableau*, hinting at it thereafter, but most of his comments take the form of outpourings of grief:

> 'Mairg no théit, mairg lasa tíagthar, mairg cusa tíagar! It troich téit, it troig cusa tíagar!'[105]

'Woe to him who goes, woe to him they go with, woe to him they go to! They are doomed who go, they are doomed to whom they go!'

Carney compared Lomna's function in these scenes to that of the chorus in Greek tragedy—'to ask the initial question, and at the end of the scene to bewail, chorus-fashion, that he who has been described is doomed to die'.[106] The comparison is apt, but incorrect in one important detail: the sons of Donn Désa predict death for only seven of the 95 people described, namely Conaire, his two fosterers, Lé Fer Flaith, two of his other sons, and his steward Taidle Ulad. Most of the rest—70 individuals in Y—are predicted to escape. The fates of eighteen individuals are left unspecified, as are those of the 150 boys said to be in Lé Fer Flaith's company but not fully described; this allows the mathematically inclined reader to accommodate the apparent discrepancy at the end of the saga, where nine people are said to have fallen around Conaire (or, in an alternative account cited in U, forty or fifty Hostel-dwellers in total).[107] By contrast, almost all of the plunderers are doomed to die. To give some idea of the discrepancy, the body-count predicted by Fer Rogain for each character or group described adds up to at least 4445 dead plunderers.[108] So the imprecations of Fer Rogain and Lomna express grief for their own fate, and their unwillingness to attack, as much as pity for those about to be attacked.

(p.183) Some of Fer Rogain's predictions render future events with uncomfortable vividness. For warriors whose body-count will be particularly high—Mac Cécht, for instance, who will 'score' six hundred—Fer Rogain does not hesitate to give the gory details:

'bit lir bomand ega 7 fér for faithchi 7 renda nime far leithchind 7 far lethchloigind 7 caíp far n-inchindi 7 far cnáimrethach 7 daise do far n-apaigib combrúthaib lais[109] íarna scaíliud dó fona fuithribi.'[110]

'because of him, as numerous as stones of hail or grasses on a green or the stars of the sky will be your cloven heads and cloven skulls, and lumps of your brains and

bones, and heaps of your crushed entrails, once he has scattered them all over the ridges.'

Many of Ingcél's descriptions employ a visually affirmative mode, enlarging on the warriors' prowess and skill, as is typical of 'watchman devices'. But the unusual prophetic element added to those in the *Togail* serves to emphasize the horrifying effects of martial heroism. Throughout the sequence, the saga-author takes away with one hand what he gives with the other, offering glittering heroic portraits within a dramatic context which undercuts any glorification of the bloodbath to come. Military achievement is caught up in a web of protest and grief, maintaining the sense of doom built up during the first half. This is, as William Sayers has put it, 'foreshadowing in its darkest sense'.[111]

Turning to the perspective of the king and his retinue, we may see similar shadows darkening the Hostel itself. Remember that the last piece of narrative told from Conaire's point of view was the disquieting episode involving Cailb: in line 579 the narrator turned decisively to the plunderers' story, leaving Conaire and his company struck by *gráin már [...] 7 míthaurassa* ('great horror and ill forebodings', lines 578–9) because of Cailb's evil prophecies.[112] In the description-sequence, the role of seer passes from Cailb (and her spectral kin) to Conaire himself and his jester Taulchaine, the opposite number to Lomna Drúth. Their prophetic utterances are very different from those of the plunderers: rather than showing specific individuals' fates in detail and with great clarity, they are as allusive and impressionistic as the prophecies of the red horseman, and with a similarly broad frame of reference. Besides reinforcing the overriding sense of catastrophe, they engage in a revealing counterpoint with other predictive utterances in this saga, and with the representation of Otherworldly power more generally. It is worth looking closely at these prophecies, to see how they begin to lay bare the secret causes of the catastrophe they predict, and how their frame of reference may even extend to the activity of the saga-author himself.[113]

(p.184) Towards the end of his own tableau, as described by Ingcél, Conaire is seen waking up from a trance-like sleep and

uttering a *laíd* ('lay') (lines 1049–66) which, in both form and content, echoes the red horseman's *rosc* verses (lines 304–32). Both poems are sets of three prophetic verses in *rosc* form, each beginning with the same two lines.[114] Both sets of verses predict the king's doom in a crescendo of military and mythological imagery. But the second set is, crucially, in the king's own words, and it is less ambiguous in its meaning than the earlier set. The best way of conveying its effect is to quote it in full:

'"Gáir Osair	'"The cry of Osar
Osar cumall[115]	Osar the hound
goin gáir ooc	wound-cry
immuallach Tuili Goissi	of Tuile Goissi's proud youths
gaeth úar tar faebur eslind	cold wind on a perilous edge
adaig do thogail ríg ind adaig se."	a night to destroy a king, this night."
'Co clos ní a rithise:	'It was heard again:
'"Gáir[116] Osair	'"The cry of Osar
Osar cumoll[117]	Osar the hound
cath ro ndlom	has announced a battle
deoórad[118] túaithi	enslavement of a people
tail[119] bruidne	a Hostel's destruction
bróncha fíanna	sorrowful *fíanna*
fir guíti	men wounded
goíth immomuin	wind of terror
imorchor sleg	hurling of spears
saeth écomlonn	suffering of unequal forces
ascur tigi	a house's downfall[120]
Temair fás	Tara deserted
forba n-aníuil	an unknown end[121]

comgne cuíniud Conaire	a history, a lament for Conaire
coll atha ṅgaland[122]	spoiling of corn, of slaughter
gáir égem	a cry of screams
orgain ríg Hérenn	destruction of Ireland's king
carbuid hi cuicligi	chariots hurtling
dochraidi ríg Temrach."	grief for Tara's king."[123]
'As-bert in tres fecht:	'The third time he said:
'"Gáir Osair	'"The cry of Osar
Osar cumoll	Osar the hound
combáig ánrad	combat of champions
óic in n-orcain	youths in the destruction
orcuin íurthar	the destruction will be wrought
orta curaid	warriors were destroyed
claentar fir[124]	men are brought low[125]
fadbaidther láith gaili	heroes are despoiled
búiread tromthresa[126]	bellowing of fierce fighting
tóigébthar gáiri.[127]	cries will be uttered.
Dom-ársad[128] imned	[I see] suffering[129]
imed síabra	spectres aplenty
slúag faen	a host laid low
fálghud námad	overthrow of foes
comroc fer	an encounter of men
for Dothra	on the Dodder
dochraidi ríg Temrach	grief for Tara's king
i n-oítid ortae."'[130]	murdered in his youth." '

(p.185) (p.186)

Like Fer Rogain's prose predictions, these verses provide us with glimpses of the approaching disaster and underline the speaker's own lucid awareness of his doom.

Their field of vision, however, is broader. In form, content, and imagery, they are akin to the trance-like prophecies of the final battle in the *Táin*, chanted either by the war-goddess or by heroes invoking her presence immediately before and after the 'watchman' episode *Tochim na mBuiden*.[131] Fer Rogain foresees the specifics of the battle, but Conaire sees what lies beyond: not only carnage and his own death, but also its political ramifications. He seems to foresee the collapse of the over-kingship of Tara and the chaos of the Pentarchy in the lines *Temair fás / forba n-aníuil* ('Tara deserted / unknown patrimony'): with his line, the Érainn, no longer in control, existing hierarchies will break down and different groups will contend for power in the land, as depicted in the *Táin* and other Ulster tales.[132] The no less ominous phrase *d[óe]rad túaithi* ('enslavement of a people') may refer to the Érainn.[133] Conaire also seems to sense who or what is executing this catastrophe. In line 1053, the phrase *bróncha fíanna* ('sorrowful *fíanna*') suggests that he perceives the torments suffered at that precise moment by his foster-brothers. He also intuits the underlying presence of a hostile Otherworld working to destroy him, stating that *imed síabra* ('spectres aplenty') are revealed to him.

The second of the two prophetic tableaux in the description-sequence is that of Taulchaine, Conaire's *rígdrúth* ('royal jester'). After describing Taulchaine's juggling-feat (quoted above), Ingcél reports:

> 'In tan ba n-ánem dó at-chonnarcsa ocon chlius 7 amal do-rrécochasa, fo-cartatar grith immi co mbátar for lár in tigi huili.

> 'Is and as-bert in flaith fil isin tig frisin clesamnach, "Cot-ráncamar ó bim[134] mac 7 ní rala[135] do chles n-airit cosinnocht."[136]

'"Uch, uch, a phopa chaín Conaire! Is deithbeir dam. Dom-récache súil ḟéig aṅdíaraid, fer co triun meic imblesan for-aicce dul noí ndrong. Ní méiti dósom a ndéicsin. Aṅdíaraid sin. Fichither catha de,"[137] orsé. "Rofeasar co dé brátha,[138] bas n-olc ar dorus na Bruidne."'[139]

(p.187) 'When he was at his most brilliant, I watched him at his feat and, as I looked, they clattered about him and they all fell onto the floor of the house.

'Then the sovereign in the house said to the jester, "We have known each other since I was a lad, and your feat never failed you[140] before tonight."

'"Alas, alas, fair friend Conaire! It is appropriate for me. A sharp, baleful eye looked at me – a man who watches the movement of groups of nine[141] with the third pupil of his eye. It is not hard for him to watch them. That [eye] is fierce. Battles will be fought because of it," he said. "It will be known until the Day of Judgement that there is[142] evil before the Hostel."'

In at least one other Middle Irish text Taulchaine is identified as Conaire's druid and a friend of the war-goddess Morrígan,[143] but this identification is not made in this recension of the *Togail*.[144] Here Taulchaine's prophecy is presented as the result not of any druidical gifts, but of the specific and adverse circumstances under which he is performing. The hostile force of Ingcél's gaze shatters the precarious balance of Taulchaine's juggling *in tan ba n-ánem dó* ('when he was at his most brilliant', line 1170). The parallels with Conaire are clear: Ingcél is about to disrupt the precarious balancing-act of Conaire's kingship, repeatedly described in this saga as the pinnacle of earthly achievement.[145] As so often in mediaeval Irish narrative, the royal jester becomes the king's *alter ego*: in Taulchaine's juggling-feat, Conaire's kingship is represented emblematically as a harmonious equilibrium of military power (swords), security (shields), and natural bounty (apples).[146] Their clattering fall recalls the no less ominous crashing

noises associated with the final approach of the plunderers, which Conaire equated with his world being turned upside down.

Under Ingcél's gaze, Taulchaine experiences a form of vision. He perceives that a spiny eye with three pupils is watching him with murderous intent, and that a great battle is about to take place.[147] Conaire's *rosc*, too, appears as an immediate reaction to Ingcél's gaze: he wakes up precisely when Ingcél is looking at him.[148] The word *rosc* is also a poetic term for 'eye' and has already been used (in line 671) to refer to the eye with which Ingcél spies on the Hostel. In this sense, Ingcél's *rosc* may be said to prompt Conaire's *rosc*. Ingcél's intentions, in the form of narrative fragments of (p.188) the near future, are picked up by the two characters on whom he gazes most intently.

The physical power of Ingcél's gaze seems to reflect his power over the course of events. Here I differ slightly from the interpretation of Nagy, who has suggested that the plunderers as a group are seen to be controlling events. He points to the earlier episode (lines 620–8) where they build a cairn to signal their intention to raid, and to the fact that the description-sequence is told from the plunderers' viewpoint: according to Nagy, the plunderers 'control the story, as if they were projections of the author internalized within the text'.[149] It seems to me that Ingcél, rather than the plunderers as a group, is the one in control. That cairn-building was just one of a series of formal statements in which Ingcél has forced the sons of Donn Désa to acknowledge that they will kill their foster-brother. He has been bending their wills to his own in order to bring about this event, acting on the principle of *lex talionis* or, as he puts it, *orcain fon orgain*, a destruction for a destruction (line 437). Until he is requited for the slaughter of his family in Britain, narrative equilibrium cannot be satisfied.

It therefore does not seem too fanciful to describe Ingcél's role in the second half of the *Togail* as 'authorial'. He takes up this role explicitly in lines 718–21 when he rebuffs his companions' pleas for a retreat, predicting instead a battle *co teinnet co dered mbetha. Ní aisnébet sin ná seanchaid dul damsa ónd*

orguin, corrom mé nosn-orr ('which they [will] recount until the end of the world. Neither elders nor historians will recount that I drew back from the destruction, and it is I who will carry it out'). Ingcél means to make history. The sons of Donn Désa, by contrast, are powerless to change the plot of the story: after hearing Conaire's three sons identified in the description-sequence they cry, *Ro-mairg más ar scél* ('Woe [to us] if [that] is our story!', line 891).[150] History, for them, is a nightmare from which they are unable to awake.

The same self-reflexive language informs the prophecies of Taulchaine and Conaire. Echoing Ingcél's assertion, Taulchaine predicts a battle which *ro-feasar co dé brátha* ('will be known until the Day of Judgement', line 1179). In his second *rosc* Conaire foresees *comgne, cuíniud Conaire* (lines 1055–6), which I have translated as 'a history, a lament for Conaire'. The word *comgne* is something of a semantic minefield, but in Middle Irish texts it is often found coupled with *scéla* ('tales'); it appears to connote historical knowledge and/or the narrative forms which such knowledge took.[151] Its juxtaposition with *cuíniud* ('a lament') calls to mind the tragic history which the *Togail* itself represents: the whole saga is both a history and a lament for its central protagonist. These metatextual resonances with the telling of the *Togail* itself are prepared for by Conaire's previous phrases in lines 1051–3, *adaig do thogail ríg* ('a night to destroy a king') and *t[og]ail bruidne* ('a Hostel's destruction'): these are the only instances of the word *togail* in the saga apart from its title. The plunderers had announced an *orgain* as the genre of their (p.189) attack, marking this with a cairn; but Conaire intuits the genre and title of the story which will be told about him in centuries to come. Conaire and his men are seen, in Nagy's words, 'encountering and reading ominous signs over which they, prisoners of the story, have no control'.[152] In the narrative stasis of the description-sequence, both Conaire and his foster-brothers are trapped in a web of prophecy, transfixed by the eye of Ingcél who is directing the course of events with his unholy power.

But there are other powers, too, operating in the universe of the *Togail*, and Ingcél's stranglehold over the story must be seen in terms of the larger retribution being exacted by the Otherworld on Conaire. I have already suggested in chapter 5 that Ingcél, who seems barely human by the time we see him in close-up, can be seen as the tool of a hostile Otherworld. Just as the vigorous campaigns of saintly heroes like Patrick are seen in their own *vitae* as the expression of God's will through human agency, so the almost mechanical energy of Ingcél's purposes appears as the expression of an Otherworldly will—a will equated with God himself by the sons of Donn Désa when they cry, *Ní tuca Día and in fer sin innocht* ('May God not bring that man here tonight', line 491). Ingcél's embodiment of the *lex talionis* thus forms part of a larger movement at work in this saga.[153] Conaire has sinned against kingship itself, and hence against his own Otherworldly kin; this sin must be purged by the Otherworldly forces which had raised him up. There is a fearful symmetry in the fact that the *togail*, the event which will complete this larger movement, will spell the deaths not only of Conaire but also of those whose crimes he originally failed to curtail.

The Otherworld's role in propelling the narrative ties in suggestively with this saga's unusually close attention to prophecy. Focusing on the ninth-century antecedents to the extant *Togail*, Charles-Edwards has linked the authors' interest in prophecy with the ancestral preoccupations of the professional tellers of tales in early mediaeval Ireland, the *fílid* or court poets. In pre-Christian times, according to texts written in the Christian period, the chief inherited function of the *fílid* was prophecy; so, as Charles-Edwards has put it, 'Irish prose tales […] began as one of the duties of a professional order which claimed other functions of greater importance.'[154] Hence, for Charles-Edwards, the apparent lack of interest in the *Togail* in simply telling a good story. Yet the author of the *Togail*, I suggest, was just as interested in storytelling as in prophecy, and the relationship between the two practices cuts both ways. The role of the *filid* as repositories of information about the past was not easily separable from their role as seers of the future, a link which recalls the Indo-European

semantic connection between concepts of 'seeing' and 'knowing'.[155] The narrative structure of the *Togail* becomes dominated by prophecies and omens; conversely, the representation of prophetic knowledge is repeatedly represented using the vocabulary of historical memory and storytelling. The word *scéla* ('tales, news') covers both past and future events: to tell is to foretell. In (p.190) the fatalistic pre-Christian world depicted by the saga-author, a life such as Conaire's is a tale which has already been told.

In the *Togail*, the Otherworld appears as the ultimate source of hidden knowledge.[156] What has attracted less comment is the specifically narrative form this knowledge takes. Near the beginning of the saga Étaín tells Eochaid that she has come to him from the Otherworld because of the *airscéla* ('great tales') about him: *atot-gén fo chétóir ar do thúarascbáil* ('I knew you at once from your description', lines 55–6), she says, anticipating the principle of visual recognition which structures the description-sequence. Later we are told that nine Otherworldly pipers have joined Conaire's company *ara airscélaib* ('because of the great tales about him') told in the *síd*-mound of Brí Léith (lines 775–7). This fund of Otherworldly narrative includes stories about the future, as seen in the red horseman's prophetic verses: each *rosc* begins, *Én a meic / mór a scél* ('Lo, lad, / great its tale'), and the third line of the first *rosc* is *scél ó Bruidin* ('tale from the Hostel', line 304). These glancing references raise a suspicion that the tale they refer to might approximate to the story we ourselves are reading, and this suspicion is strengthened when Conaire later refers to our saga's title, *t[og]ail bruidne*, in his own *rosc* (line 1053).

Implicit in the horseman's words *mór a scél* is a sense that the denizens of the Otherworld know the full story. The one-legged churl Fer Caille underlines this soon afterwards when he says to the king, *Cían ro-feas do thíachtu sund* ('long has your coming here been known', lines 359–60).[157] This hidden knowledge cannot be accessed in full by mortals, but is revealed to them only in fragments. This is reflected in the syntax of the *rosc* form, which generally lacks main verbs and

other definite time-markers, trapping past, present, and future within a timeless realm of visionary truth. The effect is heightened in Conaire's *rosc* by the fact that where main verbs do appear, as in lines 1061–3, they refuse to settle intelligibly into any single tense.[158] As in the larger structure of the description-sequence, the story shatters into freeze-frame images, enigmatic pictorial fragments which demand interpretation—both by us and by audiences within the saga.

Like the Otherworld itself, these visions exist outside normal time. Conversely, the story they point towards is time-bound: for Conaire and his foster-brothers, the minutes are ticking by. Moreover, both the content and timing of their fitful glimpses seem orchestrated to cause maximum distress to the 'seer'. The sons of Donn Désa are repeatedly compelled to tell the 'story' of their own violent deaths, while Conaire is made to narrate the ruin of his kingship and its aftermath—including, in lines 1055–6, the fact that his death will be the subject of future storytelling. He becomes his own historian; indeed, Ingcél praises him in lines 996–7 for possessing the royal quality of *comairle senchad* ('the wisdom of a historian'), although he gains it too late for it to be of any practical use.

(p.191) These connections between storytelling and the Otherworld may help to explain why Ingcél's hostile gaze should be seen to trigger a sudden access of prophecy from Conaire and his jester. As we have seen, Ingcél's physical appearance already associates him with the Otherworld, and his act of gazing with an 'evil eye' (*admilliud*) reinforces these connotations by aligning him with the most blatant manifestation of the Otherworld's displeasure, the seeress Cailb. On this level, it is the Otherworld which is glaring upon Conaire and his kingship through Ingcél's hostile eye; in so doing it reveals to him something of its hidden knowledge.

In sum, the author of the *Togail* was fascinated by the divinatory origins of his own art and found prophecy an effective technique on which to build an important layer of his saga's structure. In the saga, prophecies themselves appear as fragmentary glimpses of hidden stories deriving ultimately from the Otherworld, where they exist unbounded by time. As the saga progresses, Otherworldly commerce with humans

(partly instigated by these same stories) becomes increasingly pervasive,[159] and the mortal actors find themselves increasingly glimpsing fragments of their own story. At the same time it seems to be hinted that the saga we are reading has emerged from the secret realm of the *síd*-mounds into recorded history—in other words, into the textual world of Christian Ireland. Taulchaine and Ingcél both prophesy that the story will be remembered until the end of the world, but Taulchaine uses the words *co dé brátha* ('until the Day of Judgement', line 1179), a formulation not unknown in other Irish representations of Otherworldly or druidic knowledge.[160] The implication is that this tale of ancient times will be remembered by a specifically Christian audience, and therefore will continue to be meaningful for that audience.[161]

The metatextuality I have been trying to tease out from the *Togail* recalls the authenticating techniques of other Middle Irish sagas, many of which are ascribed some kind of Otherworldly authorship across the heathen-Christian boundary. In *Siaburcharpat Con Culainn* ('The Phantom Chariot of Cú Chulainn') and *Do Ḟallsigud Tána Bo Cúailnge* ('How *Táin Bó Cúailnge* Was Revealed'), long-dead heroes from the heathen past are resurrected in the Christian present to tell stories of their adventures—including, in the latter case, the entire *Táin*—while in *Acallam na Senórach* ('The Colloquy of the Ancients') St Patrick gains angelic authority to write down the stories he is told by the preternaturally long-lived *fían*-champions so that they will entertain and instruct future audiences.[162] In a variant (p.192) on this pattern, perhaps the author of the *Togail* appropriated the old prophetic associations of storytelling in order to demand that his saga be taken seriously not only as a record of past events, but also as the expression of timeless truths for the future (even potentially uncomfortable truths) about the theory and practice of kingship.

This may help to explain why so much space is given in this saga to narrative modes which stand outside the flux of time. The ekphrastic descriptions which constitute such a stylistic hallmark of the *Togail* represent their objects in a tense but timeless 'lyric present'. As we saw in chapter 5, important

aspects of the story—notably the changing relationship between Conaire and the Otherworld—are told not only by the plot itself but also by the shifting interplay of descriptive formulae. Much of the momentum of the first half of the saga unfolds on this plane of aesthetic and symbolic metamorphosis between descriptions, as well as by the movement from one event to the next in time; the significance of Étaín and Cailb, for example, resides as much in who they claim to be and what they look like (especially as compared with each other) as in what they actually do. In the description-sequence, this visual dimension becomes paramount, and the chains of imagery built up in the first half of the saga take on still more complex and seemingly contradictory meanings. In the next chapter, then, we take up the threads of the saga's 'movement towards myth' and trace it through the second half of the saga, paying especially close attention to the tableau which stands at the heart of the description-sequence: that of the king himself.

Notes:

(^{1}) Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, line 327 (marginal note). The other two reckonings listed are those made by Cú Chulainn at this point in the *Táin* (see Dooley, *Playing the Hero*, p. 37) and by Lug in *Cath Maige Tuired*.

(^{2}) Adomnán, *Vita Columbae*, ed. and trans. A. O. and M. O. Anderson, rev. edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 78, discussed by Carey, *A Single Ray of the Sun*, p. 34.

(^{3}) Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, '*Cath Maige Tuired* as Exemplary Myth', in Pádraig De Brún et al., eds., *Folia Gadelica: Essays Presented by Former Students to R. A. Breatnach* (Cork University Press, 1983), pp. 1–19, p. 6.

(^{4}) Knott, *Togail*, p. ix; Gantz, *Early Irish Myths*, p. 61; see also O Daly, '*Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', p. 117. Compare, however, McCone, *Pagan Past*, pp. 51–2.

(^{5}) Koch and Carey, *Celtic Heroic Age*, p. 170. Compare Gantz, *Early Irish Myths*, pp. 96 and 101–2; Cross and Slover, *Ancient Irish Tales*, p. 93.

(^{6}) Y (MS, col. 726).

(⁷) Compare, for instance, the pointing of Conaire's second and third *rosc* verses in Y, col. 733.

(⁸) Y (MS, col. 739).

(⁹) U (MS, pp. 87–97).

(¹⁰) Knott, *Togail*, p. 65, §141. As noted in chapter 1, note 23, the substitution of B for D in *Derga* is common in mediaeval references to Da Derga's Hostel.

(¹¹) D (MS, fol. 85r). The description-sequence begins in D (MS, fol. 81v) with a large initial **C** marking the beginning of Fer Rogain's question *Cest*; however, large initials at the beginnings of lines are fairly frequent in D. The same is true of the E/F text, which stops in mid-saga before the description-sequence ends.

(¹²) H2 (MS, pp. 479.1–482). Like E/F, text H2 stops before the description-sequence ends.

(¹³) Homer, *The Iliad*, ed. and trans. A. T. Murray, 2 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1924), Book III, lines 171–244. For a modern translation see Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 134–6.

(¹⁴) The best modern edition is Abu'l-Qāsem Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh (Book of Kings)*, ed. Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh et al., 8 vols. (New York: Persian Heritage Foundation, 1987–2008). For a translation of the passage cited here see Ferdowsi, *The Sháhnáma of Firdausí*, trans. Arthur George Warner and Edmond Warner, 9 vols. (London: Trübner, 1905–25), II, 152–9 (Part III, §16). The most popular recent translation—Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, trans. Dick Davis (London: Penguin, 2007)—is severely abridged.

(¹⁵) Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdœla saga* (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1934), pp. 186–9, translated by Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson, *Laxdœla saga* (London: Penguin, 1969), pp. 202–5. For other examples of the device, see Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence*, pp. 96–106.

([16]) Compare Sophia Georgacopoulou, 'Ranger/déranger: catalogues et listes de personnages dans la *Thébaide*', in Fernand Delarue et al., eds., *Epicedion: hommage à P. Papinius Statius* (Poitiers: La Licorne, 1996), pp. 93–129.

([17]) On this function, see Doris Edel, 'The Catalogues in *Culhwch ac Olwen* and Insular Celtic Learning', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 30 (1982–3), 253–67; Joan N. Radner, 'Interpreting Irony in Medieval Celtic Narrative: The Case of *Culhwch ac Olwen*', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 16 (Winter 1988), 41–59.

([18]) The classic study is Sims-Williams's 'Riddling Treatment of the "Watchman Device"', revised in his *Irish Influence*, pp. 95–133. See also Eleanor McLoughlin, 'Rhetorical Description in the Early Irish Saga *Táin Bó Cúailnge*', Ph.D. diss., Fordham University, 1969, pp. 146–52, and West, 'An Edition', pp. 83–7.

([19]) The extant Recension I is usually dated to around the same period as the *Togail*, the tenth or eleventh century, but it too contains substantial portions of older material. The extant Recension II is twelfth-century, but the lost recension on which it is largely based may predate the extant Recension I. See Uáitéar Mac Gearailt, *On the Date of the Recension II Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, University of Cambridge, 2009).

([20]) Recension I: Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, lines 3553–84. Recension II: Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster*, lines 4166–4227. In Recension I Mac Roth's description is in direct speech; in Recension II the description is framed as third-person narrative, relating what he saw rather than what he said he had seen.

([21]) Recension I: Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, lines 3585–3870. Recension II: Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster*, lines 4296–4593.

([22]) Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, lines 3825–38; Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster*, lines 4544–59.

(²³) Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, lines 3839–40. In Recension II Mac Roth does not make this complaint, perhaps because he is given less direct speech overall.

(²⁴) Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, lines 3628–30; Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster*, lines 4361–5 and 4573–86. See also her boastful speech at ibid., lines 4250–62. Áine de Paor commented on these passages' relation to Recension II's overall strategy in 'The Common Authorship of Some Book of Leinster Texts', *Ériu*, 9 (1921–3), 118–46, pp. 125–9; for closer analysis see Eamon M. Greenwood, 'Characterisation and Narrative Intent in the Book of Leinster Version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*', in Hildegard L. C. Tristram, ed., *Medieval Insular Literature between the Oral and the Written II* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1997), pp. 81–111, pp. 103–10.

(²⁵) Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster*, lines 4587–95.

(²⁶) In 'The *Táin* as Literature', pp. 92–3, Patricia Kelly has suggested that the 'watchman device' was used by the author of the *Táin* as a means of conveying a sense of the military strength of Ulster without seeming to 'glorify war' itself by indulging in 'direct description of the carnage'.

(²⁷) Brent Miles, 'The Literary Set Piece and the *Imitatio* of Latin Epic in the *Cattle Raid of Cúailnge*', in Ó hUiginn and Ó Catháin, eds., *Ulidia 2*, pp. 66–80; *idem*, *Heroic Saga and Classical Epic in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 175–93.

(²⁸) Thurneysen (*Heldensage*) dated both *Fled Bricrenn* and the *Táin* on linguistic grounds to the eighth century, but their extant texts mix both Old and Middle Irish forms. See Mac Cana, 'Notes on Structure and Syntax', pp. 88–91.

(²⁹) George Henderson, ed. and trans., *Fled Bricrend* (London, 1899), pp. 54–68. Perhaps unintentionally, Henderson's translation enhances the comic effect: 'Mother dear, I see a

chariot coming along the plain' (Henderson, *Fled Bricrend*, p. 55).

([30]) Watson, *Mesca Ulad*, lines 362–788, translated in Gantz, *Early Irish Myths*, pp. 199–211; Uáitéar Mac Gearailt, 'The Edinburgh Text of *Mesca Ulad*', *Ériu*, 37 (1986), 133–80, pp. 163–71 (lines 248–556). The equivalent passage in the older A-recension, also edited by Watson, is no longer extant.

([31]) Mac Gearailt, 'The Edinburgh Text', pp. 153–5. These two texts are in the twelfth-century Book of Leinster (the basis of Watson's edition of this part of the story) and the sixteenth-century manuscript Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS 72.1.40, whose text has been edited by Mac Gearailt; he calls their archetype Q. Mac Gearailt suggests (p. 155) that Q in turn descends from an eleventh-century *Urtext* of the B-recension. However, it is impossible to be certain that this *Urtext* deployed the watchman device in precisely the same way as that found in the extant texts of the B-recension; this deployment may have been an addition or transformation made by the author of Q.

([32]) The influence of the *Táin* on the B-recension was noted by Watson, *Mesca Ulad*, p. xx. Classical influence on both sagas' watchman devices has been briefly suggested by Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature*, pp. 313–16, and Miles, 'The Literary Set Piece', p. 79.

([33]) The phrases in square brackets are those absent from the Edinburgh text.

([34]) Watson, *Mesca Ulad*, lines 364–71.

([35]) Literally, 'Has what was revealed to me been revealed to you?'

([36]) Watson, *Mesca Ulad*, lines 450–505.

([37]) Watson, *Mesca Ulad*, lines 614–17.

([38]) Watson, *Mesca Ulad*, lines 526–783.

(^{39}) On the closeness of these descriptions to those in the *Táin*, see De Paor, 'Common Authorship', pp. 126, 138–43 (I do not accept her argument that this resemblance suggests common authorship). Not all these features are mentioned in every description, but the order is constant.

(^{40}) Watson, *Mesca Ulad*, lines 628–33. On this motif see Osborn Bergin, 'How the Dagda Got His Magic Staff', in *Medieval Studies in Memory of Gertrude Schoepperle Loomis*, ed. anon. (Paris: H. Champion, 1927), pp. 399–406.

(^{41}) Literally, 'in the moment of a single moment'.

(^{42}) It is introduced at the beginning: see Watson, *Mesca Ulad*, lines 1–20.

(^{43}) The Edinburgh text omits these words.

(^{44}) Watson, *Mesca Ulad*, lines 721–4.

(^{45}) Recension I: 'The Destruction of Troy, aus H.2.17', in Stokes and Windisch, *Irische Texte*, II part 2, 1–142, lines 846–74 and 876–911 (translation on pp. 93–6). Recension II: Whitley Stokes, ed. and trans., *Togail Troi: The Destruction of Troy* (Calcutta, 1881; reprinted Felinfach: Llanerch, 2005), lines 1358–1458. This passage and its relationship to the *Táin* are discussed by Leslie Diane Myrick, *From the De Excidio Troiae Historia to the Togail Troí: Literary-Cultural Synthesis in a Medieval Irish Adaptation of Dares' Troy Tale* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1993), pp. 132 and 136–8; Miles, *Heroic Saga*, pp. 181–92. On the dates of the two recensions see Uáitéar Mac Gearailt, '*Togail Troí*: An Example of Translating and Editing in Medieval Ireland', *Studia Hibernica*, 31 (2000–1), 71–85, pp. 77–9.

(^{46}) Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailgne: Recension I*, lines 3204–82; Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster*, lines 3664–3758. On the significance of the 'wound-reading' described here see Dooley, *Playing the Hero*, pp. 34–6, and Joseph F. Nagy, 'Heroic Recycling in Celtic Tradition', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 26 (2006), 1–36, pp. 21–5.

(⁴⁷) Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, lines 3212–17.

(⁴⁸) The longest 'watchman devices' in Recensions I and II of the *Táin* take up 318 and 428 lines respectively in O'Rahilly's editions (total lines 4160 and 4925, compared with Knott's 1539).

(⁴⁹) On the need for variety, see West, 'An Edition', pp. 83–5.

(⁵⁰) In U, the companions occupy a separate tableau (see line 7083).

(⁵¹) These extra tableaux are written on a separate leaf inserted into U. On their limited effect on the overall saga, see p. 26.

(⁵²) This translation of *tri n-anmed* was suggested by Plummer (*DIL*, s.v. *ainmed* 2).

(⁵³) In F (MS, p. 216), tableaux 22 and 23 are the other way around.

(⁵⁴) On the men's arrangement in *Mesca Ulad*, see William Sayers, 'Róimid Rígóinmit, Royal Fool: Onomastics and Cultural Valence', *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, 33 (2005), 43–51, pp. 47–8. On the use of decorative descriptors to indicate status, see Whitfield, 'Dress and Accessories'.

(⁵⁵) This reversed viewpoint was noted by Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature*, p. 316, and Mac Cana, *Branwen*, p. 28. It occurs elsewhere only in *Bruiden Da Choca*, itself modelled on the *Togail* (for its brief description-sequence see Toner, *Bruiden Da Choca*, p. 126).

(⁵⁶) For the Statian example see Statius, *Thebaid, Books 1–7*, ed. and trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 416–26 [VII.243–374]; likewise in the Irish adaptation, George Calder, ed. and trans., *Togail na Tebe: The Thebaid of Statius: The Irish Text* (Cambridge University Press, 1922), pp. 168–72.

(⁵⁷) Bibire, '*Beowulf*'.

(^{58}) A summary of this saga, *Forfess Fer Fálgae*, is edited in Rudolf Thurneysen, *Zu irischen Handschriften und Litteraturdenkmälern*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1912), I, 53–8. See Petra Hellmuth, 'Zu *Forfess Fer Fálgae*', in Erich Poppe, ed., *Keltologie heute—Themen und Fragestellungen* (Münster: Nodus, 2004), pp. 211–26.

(^{59}) This spear is not mentioned in the extant *Cath Maige Tuired*, but its properties are mentioned in *Mesca Ulad* (ed. Watson, lines 726–43).

(^{60}) Lines 1165–69. H2 (MS, p. 482) has *suas 7 anuas* ('up and down') at the end.

(^{61}) On the connections between these jesters and the prehistory of the Hamlet-legend, see L. A. Collinson, 'A New Etymology for *Hamlet*? The Names *Amlethus*, *Amloði*, and *Admlithi*', *Review of English Studies*, 62 (2011), 675–94.

(^{62}) The fatalism of this 'peculiar time factor' was remarked by Carney (*Studies in Irish Literature*, p. 316). See also Sayers, 'Charting Conceptual Space', p. 47.

(^{63}) U has Ingcél using one of seven pupils (*sechtmad*). The M-scribe adds a gloss: *no cosin tres* ('or with one of the three').

(^{64}) Lines 640–6. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 726); U, lines 7054–9; D (MS, fol. 81v); E (MS, fol. 22r; this fragment begins at the words *ráthaiged íarum*); H2 (MS, p. 479). H2 specifies twice that Ingcél was spotted from the Hostel with the additional words *on tig* ('from the house') at the end.

(^{65}) See above, pp. 146–7.

(^{66}) At least one of these prohibitions has already been violated. The prohibition against a single man or single woman may (if one stretches the evidence) have been the one understood to be violated when Fer Caille and Cichuil joined Conaire's company, and the prohibition against Conaire being in a house where firelight is visible from outside after dark was violated when the plunderers saw the Hostel from a

distance (lines 589–90). Cailb's entry and Ingcél's spying *underline* these violations.

(⁶⁷) As Jacqueline Borsje has pointed out (pers. comm.), these movements are often figured in terms of leaping or jumping, echoing the behaviour of Mac Cécht and/or his weapons, as well as otherworldly visitants like Fer Caille.

(⁶⁸) This retreat breaks the 'watchman' convention that such conversations always take place in a single location.

(⁶⁹) D's modernized retelling (§141; MS, fol. 85r) has Lomna simply decapitated on entry: here it is the plunderers who advance into the Hostel three times and are repelled (*roteilged uaithi*) three times.

(⁷⁰) Carney, 'Language and Literature to 1169', p. 483. The sequence has been compared with apocalyptic visionary texts by Mark Williams, *Fiery Shapes*, p. 16.

(⁷¹) In D, E, and H2, Mac Cécht's tableau would amount to slightly over 80 lines in Knott's typography. In D and E, Conall's tableau is also longer, amounting to what would be about 45–50 lines. Similarly, in D, E/F, and U, Conaire's tableau is lengthened by about four or five lines, and in H2 by about two lines. The overall proportions remain similar.

(⁷²) See D (MS, fol. 83r); E (MS, fol. 21r). The fuller response-formulae given here help prepare for the next tableau, Conaire's own.

(⁷³) Tableaux 22 and 24 are slightly amplified in U by the addition of one short formula in each tableau (U, lines 7811, 7833–4), but they are still noticeably shorter than the preceding tableaux.

(⁷⁴) The fourteen additional tableaux in U, in the hand of the reviser H, may be seen in a different light, however.

(⁷⁵) See Mac Cana, 'An Instance'; *idem*, 'Notes on Structure and Syntax'.

(⁷⁶) Compare Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, line 3825.

(^{77}) U has *Corpri Findmór.*

(^{78}) U, D, E, and H2 all have *ron-mairg* ('woe to us'); the pronoun is absent from Y, but this is presumably an accidental omission, since this construction always carries an infixed pronoun (*DIL*, s.v. *mairg* (f)). In U and H2 the sentence reads *Ron-mairg masa fír (in) scél* ('Woe to us if the tale be true').

(^{79}) Lines 885–92. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 730); U, lines 7255–60; D (MS, fol. 82v); E (MS, fol. 23v); H2 (MS, p. 480).

(^{80}) Fer Rogain means that his actions—planning to attack the king and his 'little ones'—are *deithbeir* ('lawful, appropriate') because of his contract with Ingcél, and presumably also because of his ancestral prerogative. He may also be suggesting that it is appropriate for him to weep.

(^{81}) Instead of tears of blood, H2 mentions ordinary weeping: *co mbo fliuch a brat ara belaib* ('so that his cloak was wet before him', p. 482).

(^{82}) Homer, *Iliad*, ed. Murray, Book III, lines 171–244; Homer, *Iliad*, trans. Fagles, pp. 134 and 136. Fagles's translation at these points is somewhat free.

(^{83}) Lines 705–10. This passage is found in texts Y, U, D, E, and H2.

(^{84}) The importance of formal announcements of intent in the description-sequence is underlined in tableau 14, where Taulchaine and/or Fer Caille describe the sons of Donn Désa announcing their decision to kill Conaire: *Dlomsaid gním nád lobor, logud Conaire [….] ó chúic comaltaib carthachaib* ('they have announced a deed that is not wavering, the handing over of Conaire […] by [his] five dear foster-brothers', lines 1188–90).

(^{85}) New formulae include lines 764–5, 869, 933, 954–6, 1100–1, 1104, 1297–8, 1322–3.

(^{86}) U has a different formula: *bát ili mairb occo immon mbrudin* ('many will be those killed by them around the

Hostel'). H2 has *bid lia mairb na horcne* ('those killed at the massacre will be more numerous').

([87]) Lines 1116–17; Y (MS, col. 734) The abbreviations are distributed differently in U (lines 7511–13), D (MS, fol. 84r), F (MS, p. 213), and H2 (MS, p. 481).

([88]) In Y the only problematic case is *Oircid 7rl.* (line 804), which has no precedent in previous tableaux. But this phrase is also not shared by any of the other texts, so it may be an error for Ingcél's *Ní cumcid* (found here in D and U, line 7189).

([89]) The role of formulae in scribal (and other) performances of Insular narrative is discussed by Sioned Davies, 'Written Text as Performance: The Implications for Middle Welsh Prose Narratives', in Huw Pryce, ed., *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 133–48.

([90]) Tableau 4: Ingcél does not challenge the sons of Donn Désa in Y or H2, but does in D, U, and E. Tableau 22: Ingcél does not challenge the sons of Donn Désa in Y or D, but does in U.

([91]) Tableau 24: no comment is made in Y or D, but in U Lomna adds a *Mairg* ('Woe') formula.

([92]) Cross and Slover, *Ancient Irish Tales*, p. 93.

([93]) Koch and Carey, *Celtic Heroic Age*, p. 170.

([94]) Gantz, *Early Irish Myths*, pp. 82, 85–6, 88–9, 93, 95–7, 100–2 (tableaux 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 14–17, 21–6).

([95]) The first of these formulae is *cidat créchtnaig* ('although they will be wounded'), which may or may not be an integral part of the preceding formula *imma-ricfa élúd doib* ('they will manage to escape'), and is supplied six times by Gantz where the Irish text has *imma-ricfa élúd 7rl.* I can find no textual justification for this expansion beyond the fact that the phrase *cidat créchtnaig* is never abbreviated using *7rl.* and thus was possibly not seen as an independent formula. That said, an unstressed word such as *cidat* is never followed by *7rl.* anyway, and several individuals in the Hostel are either stated

explicitly to be invulnerable or implied to be such by their Otherworldly nature. The other disputable formula is *néla feimmid dot-hecat* ('clouds of weakness are overcoming you'), which may or may not be an integral part of the preceding formula *Ní cumcid, for Ingcél* ('"You shall not prevail," said Ingcél'), and is supplied fourteen times by Gantz (as 'clouds of blood will come to you') where the Irish text has *Ní cumcid 7rl*. Unlike the first formula, however, *néla feimmid* frequently appears in abbreviated form as a separate formula with its own keyword (*néla 7rl*.), the sole exception in Y being tableau 18 which has *Ní cumcid, for Ingcél, 7rl*. (or, in U, tableau 17, which has the same phrase at lines 7726–7). These exceptions could be read as providing textual justification for expanding all instances of *Ní cumcid 7rl*. to include *néla feimmid*. My own view, based on the evidence for omission and abbreviation elsewhere in the sequence, is that the scribes did not mean either formula to be expanded in this way except where stated. Users of the manuscripts may not have followed their directions to the letter: there is much scope for improvisation here.

(⁹⁶) Gantz, *Early Irish Myths*, p. 102. This passage corresponds to lines 1386–96 in Knott's edition; the bracketed words 'said Ingcél' are not in Gantz's translation but are in the text he was using (*for Ingcél*, line 1395).

(⁹⁷) Gantz, *Early Irish Myths*, p. 61.

(⁹⁸) On the parallelism of these techniques, see Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature*, p. 305; Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence*, pp. 109–11.

(⁹⁹) Watson, *Mesca Ulad*, lines 789–95.

(¹⁰⁰) Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, lines 3830–8.

(¹⁰¹) D (MS, fol. 83r) has only *.ui*. ('six') warriors killed—not very impressive for Fomorians.

(¹⁰²) E (MS, fol. 23v) lacks the *mír* ('bite'). In this text the Fomorians kill three hundred at first.

(^{103}) Lines 1253–5. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 736); U, lines 7291–4; D (MS, fol. 84v); F (MS, p. 215). Natalia O'Shea has shown (Nikolaeva, 'The Drink of Death') that the phrase *deog tonnaid* ('drink of death') is an Old Irish kenning for 'blood' which has undergone redevelopment in the *Togail* by association with the concept of the 'drink of sovereignty' (on which see Máire Bhreathnach, 'The Sovereignty Goddess', p. 258).

(^{104}) Compare Conaire's jester Taulchaine in lines 1175–80. The fool's role as revealer of hidden information is also epitomized by another Lomna in *Sanas Chormaic*: see Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Fools and Adultery in Some Early Irish Texts', *Ériu*, 44 (1993), 105–24; *idem*, 'Lethal Weapon/Means of Grace: Mess Gegra's Brain in the *Death of Conchobar*', *Æstel*, 4 (1996), 87–115, pp. 96–7. Geraldine Parsons has compared the functions of the two fools named Lomna in an unpublished paper (University of Glasgow, 2009) currently being prepared for publication: I am grateful to her for sending me the text of this paper.

(^{105}) Lines 735–6. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 727); U, lines 7130–1; D (MS, fol. 82r); E (MS, fol. 22v); H2 (MS, p. 479.1). In D and E the first of the two *It troich* formulae is absent, and in Y the first of these formulae is written in the lower margin. Y's verbal forms are not correct: better forms are found in U, but Y's meaning is clear from the pronouns.

(^{106}) Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature*, p. 316. On the persistent scholarly blind spot concerning the high survival-rate of the king's men, see Introduction, note 32.

(^{107}) I take the construction *im Chonari* ('around Conaire', lines 1490–1) to mean 'in Conaire's company'; U's alternative is given at lines 7960–1. U also diverges in the number of those predicted to die: one fewer of Conaire's sons will die, while of the 65 characters also included in H, three are to be mysteriously slaughtered (the Badbs), nine will escape, and no prediction is offered for the remaining 53.

(^{108}) At the end of the saga, the number of surviving plunderers is said to be *oenchóicer namá* ('only five men', line

1494) out of a total of five thousand. According to the alternative account alluded to in U (lines 7961–2), three-quarters of the plunderers died.

([109]) E is illegible at this point and (originally) probably lacked either *combrúthaib* ('crushed') or *lais* ('because of him', translated at the start of the passage). Instead of these two words H2 has *miono mionbruidhtei*, meaning something like 'minutely pulverized'.

([110]) Lines 860–4. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 730); U, lines 7233–6; D (MS, fol. 82v); E (MS, fols. 23r–23v); H2 (MS, p. 480). The same passage is repeated with reference to Conall (line 986) and Conaire (lines 1092–3), as discussed below.

([111]) Sayers, 'Charting Conceptual Space', p. 49.

([112]) H2 (MS, p. 479) lacks this reference to fear. See p. 139 for discussion.

([113]) The rest of this section is based on research already published in my article 'Prophecy, Storytelling and the Otherworld in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', in Ritari and Bergholm, eds., *Approaches to Mythology*, pp. 54–67.

([114]) Note, however, that Conaire's *rosc* is lineated as four stanzas in Y and H2, albeit with one stanza starting with a different line.

([115]) Who or what utters this 'cry' is obscure and varies in the manuscripts. Most scholars follow the lead of the H-interpolator in U, who wrote a gloss here *.i. cu Conaire* ('i.e. Conaire's dog'). D has *chuinn* ('chief'), which could conceivably be a corrupt rendering of *cú* ('hound'). The glossed extracts from the *Togail* in Trinity College, Dublin, MS 1319 (H.3.18), p. 532, gloss *gair ossair* as *gair con mbec* ('the cry of a little dog'). I follow this line of interpretation in my translation. But *cumall* itself could mean 'serving-maid' or 'slave-girl', while (as West points out in 'An Edition', p. 790) *osair* itself could be the genitive singular of *ósar* ('young man, junior'). Osar is not mentioned as a personal name in the rest of the text.

(¹¹⁶) Developing the dog theme, another gloss was written by the H-interpolator here, *.i. messan Conairi* ('i.e. Conaire's lapdog').

(¹¹⁷) D again has *chuinn* ('chief').

(¹¹⁸) Y has *deoórad*. I read this as an error for *dóerad* ('enslavement'), present in all the other texts.

(¹¹⁹) Y, D, F, and H2 have *tail* instead of *togail* (see West, 'An Edition', p. 791); the full word *togail* appears in U (line 7443).

(¹²⁰) I here adopt West's suggestion ('An Edition', p. 792) that the word *ascur* derives from **ess-scar-* ('overthrow, fall').

(¹²¹) *forba n-aníuil* could alternatively, or simultaneously, mean 'unknown patrimony', since *orbae* is sometimes found as *forba* in Middle Irish.

(¹²²) I follow Knott (*Togail*, p. 102) and subsequent editors in reading Y's *atha* as a corruption of *etha* (preserved in U), genitive of *ith*, 'corn'. U, however, has an additional word here: it has *coll etha / lith ngaland* ('spoiling of corn / feast of slaughter'), which makes more sense of the metre; but it is impossible to tell whether this word was in the archetype or was added in U to improve the poem.

(¹²³) Or 'oppression of Tara's king'.

(¹²⁴) H2 has an extra line, *faentar fir* ('men are thrown down').

(¹²⁵) Alternatively (or simultaneously), *claentar fir* could be read as *cloentar fír*, 'truth is twisted/bent'.

(¹²⁶) Instead of this line, H2 has *gair in tresoi* ('battle-cry').

(¹²⁷) D, F, and U lack the lines from the third *Gáir Osair* to *tóigébthar gáiri*. The presence of a third *Gáir Osair* suggests to me that this part of the stanza was in the archetype, since the red horseman's threefold *rosc* begins with the same repeated phrase.

(¹²⁸) As mentioned in chapter 1 (p. 29), I read Y's unintelligible *dom-ársad* as an error for *dommarfas* ('is revealed to me') as given in the other texts. All the texts treat the following eight lines as a separate stanza, with large initial **D**.

(¹²⁹) Literally, 'suffering is revealed to me', as are the other subsequent phenomena in this part of the *rosc*.

(¹³⁰) Lines 1049–66. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 733); U, lines 7432–66; D (MS, fol. 83v); F (MS, p. 213); H2 (MS, p. 481). I have lineated these lines as verse, although in the manuscripts they are lineated as three or four prose paragraphs (including U, MS, p. 91), each beginning with *Gáir Osair* or *Dom-ársad* (or equivalent).

(¹³¹) Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, lines 3531–43, 3878–83, and 3905–44. In their breadth of vision and embrace of past and future, these prophecies bear comparison with those of Greek tragedy: see J. C. Kamerbeek, 'Prophecy and Tragedy', *Mnemosyne*, 4th series, 18 (1965), 29–40.

(¹³²) Joan N. Radner, '"Fury Destroys the World": Historical Strategy in Ireland's Ulster Epic', *Mankind Quarterly*, 23.1 (Fall 1982), 41–60, discussed in chapter 10 below.

(¹³³) West, 'An Edition', p. 792.

(¹³⁴) Y alone has a first-person form of the copula (*ó bim mac*, 'since I was a lad'). The other texts have second-person singular forms (e.g. *ó bi* in D and F), making Taulchaine the lad (West, 'An Edition', p. 800).

(¹³⁵) D and F have *raba* ('were') instead of *rala* ('put'), but both verbs combine with *airit* to imply falling and failure.

(¹³⁶) Knott (*Togail*, line 1174) spells this word *cosin-nocht*.

(¹³⁷) H2 has *ficither cath de for dorus mbruidne* ('a battle will be fought because of it, before the Hostel').

(¹³⁸) D and F have *co deired (m)bratha* ('until the end of Doom'?).

(^{139}) Lines 1170–80. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 735); U, lines 7559–67; D (MS, fol. 84r); F (MS, p. 214); H2 (MS, p. 482).

(^{140}) Literally, 'never fell before you'.

(^{141}) These are the nine swords, shields, and apples with which Taulchaine is juggling.

(^{142}) The word *bas* could be either the present subjunctive or the future of the copula ('is' or 'will be').

(^{143}) Whitley Stokes, ed. and trans., 'The Prose Tales in the Rennes *Dindṡenchas*', part 3, *Revue Celtique*, 16 (1895), 31–83, p. 62.

(^{144}) Druids are absent from Conaire's retinue and only present as evildoers on the plunderers' side. This departs from Recension Ib, where a druid issues the king with *gessi*.

(^{145}) This parallel was noted by Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Saint and Fool: The Image and Function of Cummíne Fota and Comgán Mac Da Cherda in Early Irish Literature', Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1991, p. 33. It is developed by Sayers, 'Charting Conceptual Space', p. 44; Eichhorn-Mulligan, '*Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', p. 3; Sayers, 'Deficient Royal Rule', pp. 107–8; Borjse, *The Celtic Evil Eye*, pp. 87–9.

(^{146}) On the fool as a king's *alter ego*, see Clancy, 'Saint and Fool', pp. 26–40; Clancy, 'Fools and Adultery', pp. 119–20.

(^{147}) On Ingcél's gaze see Borsje, *The Celtic Evil Eye*, pp. 87–9.

(^{148}) Sayers, 'Charting Conceptual Space', p. 47.

(^{149}) Nagy, *Conversing with Angels*, p. 294.

(^{150}) U, D, E, and H2 all have *ron-mairg* ('woe to us'): see note 78 above on the variants and interpretation. U and H2 have *Ron-mairg masa fír (in) scél* ('Woe to us if the tale be true').

(^{151}) On *comgne* see Séan Mac Airt, '*Filidecht* and *Coimgne*', *Ériu* 18 (1958), 139–52; Mac Cana, *Learned Tales*, pp. 123–7. I

am grateful to Harriet Thomsett for letting me see her research materials on this concept.

([152]) Nagy, *Conversing with Angels*, p. 294.

([153]) On the *lex talionis* and 'Fate', see Borsje, *From Chaos to Enemy*, pp. 72–3.

([154]) Charles-Edwards, '*Geis*', p. 59.

([155]) Mac Cana, *Learned Tales*, p. 17.

([156]) Bondarenko, 'Дороги и знание'; *idem*, 'Roads and Knowledge'.

([157]) On Fer Caille's foreknowledge, see Borsje, 'Approaching Danger', pp. 87–9; *eadem*, *The Celtic Evil Eye*, pp. 99–101.

([158]) Compare the very different techniques of tense-manipulation analysed by Tristram, *Tense and Time*.

([159]) See the third section of chapter 2.

([160]) Or *co deired bratha* (D and F). Compare the druids' prophecy of the Day of Judgement in §12 of Tirechán's *Collectanea*, in Ludwig Bieler, ed. and trans., *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1979), p. 132.

([161]) On its possible meanings, see chapter 10.

([162]) For the *Siaburcharpat* see Best and Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre*, lines 9221–9548; translation in Cross and Slover, *Ancient Irish Tales*, pp. 347–54. For *Do Ḟallsigud* see Best et al., *Book of Leinster*, V, lines 32879–32909; for a critical edition, see Kevin Murray, ed. and trans., 'The Finding of the *Táin*', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 41 (Summer 2001), 17–23. For the *Acallam* see Stokes, 'Acallamh na Senórach', lines 1–303; translation in Dooley and Roe, *Tales of the Elders of Ireland*, pp. 1–12. On these texts' negotiations between past and present see Joseph Falaky Nagy, 'Close Encounters of the Traditional Kind in Medieval Irish Literature', in Patrick K. Ford, ed., *Celtic Folklore and Christianity: Studies in Memory*

of William W. Heist (Santa Barbara, CA: McNally & Loftin, 1983), pp. 129–49; Nagy, *Conversing with Angels*, pp. 299–329; Geraldine Parsons, 'The Structure', pp. 28–38.