

Copyright Notice

Staff and students of this University are reminded that copyright subsists in this extract and the work from which it was taken. This Digital Copy has been made under the terms of a CLA Licence which allows you to:

- Access and download a copy
- Print out a copy

This Digital Copy and any digital or printed copy supplied to or made by you under the terms of this Licence are for use in connection with this module or course of study. You may retain such copies after the end of the course, but strictly for your own personal use.

All copies (including electronic copies) shall include this Copyright Notice and shall be destroyed and/or deleted if and when required by the University.

Except as provided for by copyright law, no further copying, storage or distribution (including by e-mail) is permitted without the consent of the copyright holder.

The author (which term includes artists and other visual creators) has moral rights in the work and neither staff nor students may cause, or permit, the distortion, mutilation or other modification of the work, or any other derogatory treatment of it, which would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author.

Title of extract: **Branwen: A Reconsideration of the German and Norse Analogues**

Name of Author: **Miles, B.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable):

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable): **Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies Vol 52 Winter 2006**

Publisher: **CMCS**

Pages scanned: **13 - 48**

Course of Study (Module name and number): **Y Mabinogi CYCS7015**

Name of Designated Person

authorising scanning: *E. L. Harris*

Date authorised: 22.02.17.

Moodle/Powerpoint

Branwen: A Reconsideration of the German and Norse Analogues

Brent Miles

Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies

IN 1882 Alfred Nutt argued for the existence of numerous significant parallels between the Middle Welsh tale *Branwen Uerch Lyr* and the principal Norse and German tellings of the heroic legends of the Völsungs and the Nibelungs.¹ Nutt suggested that we account for these parallels by imagining either common 'mythic' origins or early contact between the Welsh and the Norse on the Irish Sea. Proinsias Mac Cana, in his classic study *Branwen Daughter of Llŷr*, rejected Nutt's parallels as chance, arguing that we have no evidence for any Welsh knowledge of Norse narrative whatsoever.² Yet, with his interest in learned borrowing, Mac Cana showed little interest in the oral transmission of narrative between Norse and Welsh and further ignored the implications of the Welsh presence in eleventh-century Norse Dublin. Kenneth Jackson declined to discuss Nutt's theory in *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition*, even though Jackson's discussion of the oral transmission of tales across linguistic borders would have been an obvious place to debate the theory.³ A recent resurgence of critical interest in the contacts between the Welsh and the Norse in the political world around the Irish Sea makes a reconsideration of possible literary influence timely.⁴ Alaric Hall recently reopened the discussion with a consideration of Icelandic analogues unknown to Nutt but originally

¹For *Branwen*, see *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, edited by Ifor Williams, second edition (Cardiff, 1951), pp. 29–48; Alfred Nutt, 'Mabinogion Studies', *Folk-Lore Record*, 5 (1882), 1–32. ²Proinsias Mac Cana, *Branwen Daughter of Llŷr* (Dublin, 1958), pp. 166–69; see also idem, 'The Influence of the Vikings on Celtic Literature', in *The Impact of the Scandinavian Invasions on the Celtic-Speaking Peoples c. 800–1100 A.D.: Introductory Papers read at Plenary Sessions of the International Congress of Celtic Studies held in Dublin, 6–10 July, 1959*, edited by Brian Ó Cuív (Dublin, 1975), pp. 78–118 (pp. 112–18). ³Kenneth Jackson, *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff, 1961). ⁴See below, n. 80.

discussed by Axel Olrik in 1903.⁵ Hall argued from a survey of analogous features shared by *Branwen* and various Icelandic tales for general cultural connections between medieval Wales and the Scandinavian world. The approach employed in this paper differs considerably from Hall's, as the aim here is to show that a close reading of the Continental German tales of the Nibelung cycle, as proposed by Nutt, shows them to be a crucial component to the puzzle of *Branwen*'s 'Germanic' analogues. Furthermore, the evidence does not suggest chance wandering of folkloric motifs from one culture to the other so much as calculated imitation on the part of the Welsh author of a story known to be associated with Norse and Germanic historical narratives.

THE ANALOGUE IN THE LEGEND OF THE NIBELUNGS

The Middle High German poem *Das Nibelungenlied*, composed c. 1200 in present-day Austria, tells of the destruction of the German royal house of the Nibelungs, specifically the Nibelungs' king, Gunther, and Gunther's vassal, Hagen, in a catastrophic battle against King Etzel of Hungary and Etzel's wife, Kriemhild, who was also Gunther's sister.⁶ *Þiðreks saga*, a mid-thirteenth-century Norwegian account of Continental legends of Germanic heroes, contains a version of the same tale; *Niflunga saga*, which derives from German sources ostensibly shared with the *Nibelungenlied*.⁷ The names which the Norwegian author gives the protagonists, for example, Niflungs for Nibelungs, Högni for Hagen, and Attila for Etzel, are the traditional Norse names for these legendary personages and are also encountered in the Norse versions of the Nibelung tale. The latter include the Eddic poems *Atlakviða* and *Atlamál hin grænlenzku*, and the prose *Völsunga saga*, all of which differ from the Continental version of the story in places where *Niflunga saga* is substantially in agreement with the *Nibelungenlied*.⁸

⁵Alarc Hall, 'Gwŷr y Gogledd? Some Icelandic Analogues to *Branwen Ferch Llŷr*', *CMCS*, 42 (Winter 2001), 27–50; for Olrik's discussion, see below, n. 11.

⁶*Das Nibelungenlied, nach der Ausgabe von Karl Bartsch*, edited by Helmut de Boor, twenty-second edition prepared by Roswitha Wisniewski (Wiesbaden, 1996); see also the recent students' edition by Hermann Reichert, *Das Nibelungenlied* (Berlin, 2005), whose commentary provides an excellent introduction to the text. ⁷I use the normalized text in *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, edited by Guðni Jónsson, 2 vols (Reykjavík, 1951); for a recent examination of the text's Hanseatic and courtly Norwegian environment, see Susanne Kramarz-Bein, *Die Þiðreks saga im Kontext der altnorwegischen Literatur* (Tübingen and Basel, 2002); see also below for the German sources of *Niflunga saga*. ⁸Ursula Dronke, *The Poetic Edda*, 1, *Heroic Poems* (Oxford, 1969); *Völsunga Saga: The Saga of the Volsungs*, edited and translated by R. G. Finch (London, 1965); *ö* has been

A number of specific parallels between the German account of the Nibelungs, the Norwegian version of the same story, and *Branwen* prompted Nutt's theory of shared origins. The *Nibelungenlied* tells how Kriemhild is married to King Etzel of Hungary after Hagen, with the complicity of her brother King Gunther of Burgundy, has murdered her first husband, Siegfried. Etzel invites his wife's brothers and their men to his kingdom (Adventure 24), and Kriemhild arranges to have the Nibelungs ambushed in a hall, where, after a fierce battle, they are annihilated (Adventure 33).⁹ *Niflunga saga* gives mostly the same account, though with important differences in detail, for example the claim that Högni is Grimhild's (that is, Kriemhild's) half-brother. The formal equivalence of Branwen/Kriemhild, Brân/Gunther, and Efnisien/Hagen, brothers to the heroine, and Matholwch/Etzel, foreign monarchs and husbands to the heroine, requires no comment, nor the common story, whereby the woman is wedded to a foreign king and is visited by her brothers who are killed, their destruction leading to her own death. Yet Nutt emphasized that the correspondences extend to significant details, and even to characterization. He suggested that the Welsh and the German narratives drew on a common 'mythic' root as much as on borrowing.¹⁰

HRÓLF KRAKI

A remarkable Norse analogue of *Branwen* was identified by Axel Olrik in his study of the heroic legends of Denmark.¹¹ These are the tales surrounding the historic Danish king Hrólfr Kraki which constitute episodes in the earliest of the Norse *fornaldarsögur* ('legendary sagas'), *Skjöldunga saga*. The saga's author probably used oral narratives and skaldic poetry to construct his narrative, but the written backbone of the saga is a genealogy of the descendants of Odin composed by Sæmund fróði Sigfússon sometime before 1133. *Skjöldunga saga* was probably written by 1200.¹² The saga itself no longer survives, yet we have various

substituted for Old Norse *o*-caudata throughout this paper. ⁹I cite the *Nibelungenlied* by number of 'Adventure', and additionally by stanza in quotations; *Niflunga saga* is cited by chapter number in Jónsson's edition. ¹⁰Nutt, 'Mabinogion Studies', p. 29; I omit for reasons of space Nutt's discussion of *Völsunga saga* which, however, is important for a fair reading of his argument; for an examination of Nutt's 'mythic' criticism, see J. F. Nagy, 'Folklore Studies and the Mabinogion', in *150 Jahre 'Mabinogion': Deutsch-Walisische Kulturbeziehungen*, edited by Bernhard Maier and Stefan Zimmer (Tübingen, 2001), pp. 91–100. ¹¹Axel Olrik, *Danmarks Heltedigtning: En Oldtidsstudie*, 2 vols (Copenhagen, 1903–10), 1, translated by L. M. Hollander, *The Heroic Legends of Denmark* (New York, 1919), pp. 360 and 490. ¹²See Kristen Wolf's

witnesses to what it once contained. First, we have a Latin epitome of the work, the *Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta*, written c. 1600 by the Icelandic scholar Arngrím Jónsson, but not published until 1894.¹³ Of equal importance are the witnesses to the saga provided by the Icelander Snorri Sturluson, who cites *Skjöldunga saga* as a source for Chapters 28–29 of his *Ynglinga saga*, and retells the episode of Hrólfr's expedition to Sweden in his early-thirteenth-century *Prose Edda*.¹⁴ In addition, we have another Latin version of Hrólfr's adventures from Book II of the *Gesta Danorum* by the early-thirteenth-century Danish author Saxo Grammaticus, a version for which *Skjöldunga saga* may have been a source.¹⁵ A fourth late text, the Icelandic *Hrólfs saga kraka* of c. 1400, gives by far the fullest account of Hrólfr's adventures, and may be an independent witness to the tradition which likewise informs *Skjöldunga saga*.¹⁶

Two episodes, Hrólfr's expedition to Sweden and his final battle in his royal residence at Lejre, are relevant for their analogue with *Branwen*. The story recorded in these episodes is recognizably the same in each version of the tale, though none agree in all details. In the Icelandic versions King Hrólfr of Denmark and his *comitatus* of twelve berserks journey to the court of King Aðils of Sweden, who has married Hrólfr's sister, Yrsa (*Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta*, pp. 346–47, *Prose Edda*, p. 59, *Hrólfs saga*, §§ 27–30).¹⁷ The Danes face a series of traps in Aðils's court

entry for *Skjöldunga saga* in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Phillip Pulsiano (New York and London, 1993), pp. 597–98; Bjarni Guðnason's doctoral dissertation *Um Skjöldungasögu* (Reykjavík, 1963) is the fullest critical study (English summary pp. 306–25); for Jakob Benediktsson's influential views of the saga, see his introduction to Arngrím Jónsson's *Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta*, cited below; see also idem, 'Icelandic Traditions of the Scyldings', *Saga-Book*, 15 (1957–59), 48–66; for the collected evidence for *Skjöldunga saga*, including fragments, Arngrím's Latin text, and the relevant episodes from Snorri, see *Danakonunga Sögur*, edited by Bjarni Guðnason, Íslenzk fornrit, 35 (Reykjavík, 1982).¹³ *Arngrimi Jonae Opera Latine Conscripita*, edited by Jakob Benediktsson, Bibliotheca Arnarnagana, 9 (Copenhagen, 1950).¹⁴ *Snorri Sturluson. Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, edited by Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols (London, 1998); for *Ynglinga saga*, see *Snorri Sturluson: Heimskringla*, I, edited by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, IF, 26 (Reykjavík, 1941), pp. 9–83 (p. 57).¹⁵ *Saxo Grammaticus. Gesta Danorum*, edited by J. Olrik and H. Ræder (Copenhagen, 1931).¹⁶ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, edited by D. Slay, Editiones Arnarnagana, Series B, 1 (Copenhagen, 1960); for the sources shared with *Skjöldunga saga*, see below. We can additionally note the witness offered to a longstanding narrative tradition of Hrólfr by *Beowulf*, where the hero is known under the cognate name *Hroðulf*, although he only plays a minor role, and where the personages of the Scyldings, at least, mostly match the *Skjöldungar* of later Norse sources.¹⁷ The *Fragmenta* and *Prose Edda* are cited by page number of the respective editions, *Hrólfs saga*

until there is an open battle between the two forces in which the Danes prevail and are able to escape. Saxo's version is abbreviated but is clearly an adaptation of the narrative told in the other versions (*Gesta Danorum*, II.6.5). In the second episode, Hrólfr and his berserks perish in a surprise night-time attack against the Danish royal residence at Lejre led by Hrólfr's second sister, Skuld, and her husband, Hjörvard (*Rerum Danicarum*, pp. 348–49; *Hrólfs saga*, §§ 31–34). This second episode is not told by Snorri, though elsewhere Snorri does preserve verses from the *Bjarkamál*, the celebrated tenth-century heroic poem which was said to have been recited by Hrólfr's berserks Bjarki and Hjalti as they prepared to die alongside their king in the battle.¹⁸

The tale of Hrólfr which is an analogue of *Branwen* thus exists in four versions. Snorri and Arngrím Jónsson abbreviate, at least in part, from *Skjöldunga saga* and Saxo probably does the same, although we cannot know if he also had other sources.¹⁹ As for *Hrólfs saga kraka*, Jakob Benediktsson claims that the author probably did not use *Skjöldunga saga* as a source and gives details from elsewhere in the saga where *Hrólfs saga kraka* preserves dynastic information on the *Skjöldungar* which differs from that preserved in *Skjöldunga saga* and is probably of greater antiquity. He suggests that *Skjöldunga saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka* drew on unspecified 'common sources'.²⁰ Given the existence of the *Bjarkamál*, we might suppose that a common source for the two texts would most probably have been in verse, and was perhaps orally transmitted, at least at first. Evidence for this presumed common poetic source is examined below in conjunction with the discussion of its analogue in *Branwen*. Here it is worth noting that in *Óláfs saga helga*, Snorri records that King Ólaf had the *Bjarkamál* recited before his army on the morning of his last battle at Stiklastaðir in 1030.²¹ Saxo gives what

kraka by chapter.¹⁸ For the surviving fragments of the poem, see below, n. 21. The tenth-century date is not uncontested; see Klaus von See, 'Húskaða hvöt: Nochmals zum Alter der *Bjarkamál*', in *Speculum Norrænum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, edited by Ursula Dronke and others (Odense, 1981), pp. 421–31.¹⁹ Snorri's additional sources are discussed by Faulkes, *Skáldskaparmál*, I, xxii–xxv. Guðnason, *Um Skjöldungasögu*, has argued that Arngrím Jónsson's *Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta* is in essentials a translation and not an epitome, but he allows that this is impossible to prove on an episode by episode basis; Benediktsson strongly believes that Arngrím has abbreviated his source, for which, see the notes to his edition of the text. For Saxo, see Bjarni Guðnason, 'The Icelandic Sources of Saxo Grammaticus', in *Saxo Grammaticus: A Medieval Author between Norse and Latin Culture*, edited by Karsten Friis-Jensen (Copenhagen, 1981), pp. 79–93 (pp. 88 and 91).²⁰ Benediktsson, 'Icelandic Traditions', pp. 53 and 56–57.²¹ *Snorri Sturluson: Heimskringla*, II,

he claims to be a paraphrase of the lay, accomplished in Latin hexameters (II.7.4–28). He claims that the lay was still sung in the north, and his sources at this point are presumably oral as well as written.²² We can infer that a verse narrative of Hrólfr Kraki, perhaps a cycle of lays, was known as early as our witness for the *Bjarkamál* in 1030.²³

HRÓLF, THE FALL OF THE NIBELUNGS, AND BRANWEN

We must keep a theoretical early narrative of Hrólfr in mind in the following discussion where Hrólfr's 'cycle' is compared with the Nibelung tales and *Branwen*. It is the argument of this article that the Hrólfr narrative was at least embellished, though not necessarily constructed, in imitation of an early form of the story of the Nibelungs. The Hrólfr narrative preserves motifs similarly borrowed by the author of *Branwen* from the presumed same source. The argument rests largely on the theory that traditional Germanic narrative was transmitted in memorized 'lays' and that one such lay, either with or without intermediaries, was a source of inspiration for the author of *Branwen*.²⁴ As with Nutt's argument for a connection between the Nibelung tales and *Branwen*, some affinities between the tale of Hrólfr and the tale of the Nibelungs are immediately apparent. Again, a king and a small body of vassals visit the king's sister who has married a hostile foreign monarch. The Nibelungs' annihilation at the hands of Kriemhild and Etzel is easily likened to the killing of Hrólfr and his retainers at the hands of his second sister, Skuld, and her husband, Hjörvard. Putting aside the basic shape of the stories, a convincing argument for the connection between

edited by Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, ÍF, 27 (Reykjavík, 1945), p. 361. Snorri incidentally records three stanzas from the *Bjarkamál* in his *Prose Edda*, though not within the Hrólfr narrative; Faulkes, *Skáldskaparmál*, I, xxiv and 188, supposes these stanzas are nonetheless from *Skjöldunga saga*.²² 'Hanc maxime exhortationum seriem idcirco metrica ratione compegerim, quod earundem sententiarum intellectus Danici cuiusdam carminis compendio digestus a compluribus antiquitatis peritis memoriter usurpatur' (II.8.1) ('I have composed this series of exhortations in metre because the same thoughts, arranged in the short form of a Danish song, are quoted by heart by many men learned in ancient lore'). For Saxo's sources, see Guðnason, 'Icelandic Sources'; also Karsten Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet: Studies in the Verse Passages of the Gesta Danorum* (Rome, 1987), pp. 64–101. ²³We can note the example of the several Guðrún and Sigurð lays from the *Poetic Edda*, which served to generate the extended complete prose-narrative of *Völsunga saga*, itself only slightly later than *Skjöldunga saga*; see R. G. Finch, 'Atlakviða, Atlamál, and Völsunga Saga: A Study in Combination and Integration', in *Speculum Norrenum*, edited by Dronke and others, pp. 123–38. ²⁴The lay theory is discussed further below.

these two narratives can be made through a consideration of a few remarkable details. I shall pursue a comparison of the Hrólfr and Nibelung tales concurrently with a consideration of five motifs they share with *Branwen*, the affinity of any two of the tales being more clearly seen when considered in light of the third. The motifs to be considered, in the order in which they occur in *Branwen*, are: 1. the mutilation of the horses; 2. the river-crossing; 3. the entry into the hall; 4. the killing of the sister's son; 5. the final battle and the 'cauldron of rebirth'.

The Mutilation of the Horses

Branwen relates how Efnisien, upon hearing that without his consent his half-sister Branwen has been given in marriage to the visiting Irish king Matholwch, vents his anger on the Irish king's horses, cutting off the animals' lips, ears, tails, and eyelids in the place where they have been stabled by the Britons (p. 32). The motif of the mutilation of horses is listed in Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index*, but *Hrólfs saga kraka*, significantly, is the only occurrence recorded there.²⁵ We could consider also the story from the *Vita Sancti Cadoci* of how St Cadog maims the horses of a band of robbers, and admit that the mutilation of Matholwch's horses may be a motif of common currency in medieval Wales.²⁶ However, unlike the dissimilar context of the motif in the *Vita*, the Hrólfr and Nibelung analogues continue to tell the narrative, shared with *Branwen*, of the brothers who visit their sister in a foreign kingdom, a fact which compels their close consideration.²⁷ Arngrím Jónsson's *Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta* as well as *Hrólfs saga kraka* relate how the Danes, arriving at Aðils's residence, give their horses into the care of the Swedes, requesting that special care be taken with them, as Arngrím writes:

eqvos Dani iubent Opsaolenses ita curare, ut ne caudæ quidem immunditiæ quid contrahant. (p. 346)

the Danes order the men of Uppsala to look after the horses so that not even their tails should collect any filth.

²⁵Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, 6 vols, second edition (Bloomington, 1955–58), S175. ²⁶*Vitæ Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae*, edited by A. W. Wade-Evans (Cardiff, 1944), pp. 24–140 (p. 58); see Sioned Davies, 'Horses in the *Mabinogion*', in *The Horse in Celtic Culture*, edited by Sioned Davies and Nerys Ann Jones (Cardiff, 1997), pp. 121–40 (pp. 135–36), also Hall, 'Gwŷr y Gogledd', pp. 31–32. ²⁷For the practical importance to be attached to the distinction between promiscuous motifs and the relatively stable character of tale-types, see Andrew Welsh, 'The Traditional Narrative Motifs of *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', *CMCS*, 15 (Summer, 1988), 51–62 (p. 53).

Hrólfr's hawk is likewise put into their care. Arngrím then records:

jussu Sveci eqvis caudæ excisæ sunt: et accipiter xxx accipitribus, qvos Svecus possedit, dilaniandus traditur. (p. 346)

the horses' tails were cut off on the order of Aðils, and [Hrólfr's] hawk was given over to thirty of Aðils's hawks to be torn to pieces.

In *Hrólfs saga kraka* (§27) Aðils further commands the skin on the horses' foreheads to be removed. In both the *Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta* and *Hrólfs saga kraka* this motif is reintroduced much later, for just as Hrólfr and his men are preparing their escape, they belatedly learn that their horses have been mutilated — yet Hrólfr's hawk has survived the attack and has flown back to Hrólfr to give evidence of the battle.²⁸

There are indications that a similar episode lies behind a greatly altered sequence of events in the *Nibelungenlied*. The Nibelungs arrive in Hungary at Etzel's court in Adventure 28, but we do not read that their animals are mistreated. Instead, the poet tells us that King Gunther's squires are separated from the main body of the Nibelungs at the instigation of Kriemhild, and that they are later slaughtered, although not before Gunther expresses his special concern that they be well looked after:

Dô hiez man herbergen	die Búrgonden man.
Gunthers ingesinde	daz wart gesundert dan.
daz riet diu küneginne,	diu im vil hazzes truoc.
dâ von man sît die knehte	an der herberge sluoc.
Dancwart, Hagen bruoder,	der was marschalch.
der künic im sîn gesinde	vlízeclîch bevalch,
daz er ir vil wol pflæge	und in gâbé genuoc.
der helt von Búrgonden	in allen guoten willen truoc. (§28, 1735–36)

Orders were given to lodge the Burgundian knights, but Gunther's train was at that moment separated at the instigation of the queen, who bore him great

²⁸*Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta*: 'mox Regina Yrsa interveniens . . . simulqve amanter rogat, ut consensis optimis eqvis, qvos illis sterni curaverat, illorum propriis cauda mutilatis relictis, sese Adilli imminentibus armis subducerent. Paret monenti matri et sorori Rolfo: jamqve accipitrem suum repetens, comperit illos xxx, qvi Sveci erant, ab eo interfectos' (p. 347) ('Then Queen Yrsa came forward . . . and at once lovingly asked the Danes to mount noble horses which she had ordered saddled for them because their own horses had been mutilated and their tails had been cut off, and to steal away from Aðils's gathering forces. Hrólfr heeded the advice of his mother and sister: and getting back his hawk he learned that it had killed the thirty hawks which had belonged to Aðils'); *Hrólfs saga kraka*, §29.

hatred. As a result of that, the squires were afterwards slaughtered in their quarters. Hagen's brother, Dancwart, was Marshal, and the king entrusted his train to him, urging him to look after them well and to see to their needs, the hero was so concerned for the Burgundians' [i.e. Nibelungs'] welfare.

The actual killing of the king's train does not commence until almost two hundred lines later in Adventure 32, and Dancwart alone escapes and alerts Gunther of the slaughter only in Adventure 33. Comparison of the Hrólfr tales and the *Nibelungenlied* yields a clear pattern: the ill-treatment of the king's animals/train is told in advance at the time of their initial separation, and is then related a second time after the fact. One of the train/animals escapes to bring the king news of what has happened. The complexity of this incident, which provides a frame for the whole of the king's reception which enhances the suspense of the entire sequence, goes beyond what we could explain as a 'set piece' of heroic narrative. A version of this motif is present in *Niflunga saga*: the squires are set aside to look after the Niflungs' weapons, separated from them at Grímhild's insistence (p. 377). With much difficulty Grímhild later convinces Irung to attack her brothers, but first to go apart and kill the squires (p. 378). The author subsequently fails to relate the squires' murder, perhaps a reflection of the difficulty he faced in harmonizing his various sources. The skeleton of the framing-device, however, is present.

The *Nibelungenlied* and *Niflunga saga* clearly share a source at this point, however different their subsequent interpretations of the slaughter of the king's train. This instance of the framing motif of the mistreatment of the squires is one example of the parallels and curious inconsistencies which point to the likelihood that a tale of the Nibelungs/Niflungs could still be constructed as late as 1200, and possibly even later than this, from 'fornkvæði í þýðerskri tungu' ('old songs in the German language'), as the author of *Niflunga saga* himself describes his source.²⁹ The version of this framing motif in the Hrólfr narrative, where it is the king's animals rather than his squires who are mistreated, is obviously related. Can it be determined whether one version of the motif has precedence or can be seen as the source of the other? The concern which the *Nibelungenlied*'s Gunther shows for the comfort of his squires is somewhat contrary to the heroic ethos, and the author of *Niflunga saga* has clearly downplayed the motif, perhaps not knowing what to make of it. The version of the motif from *Hrólfs saga kraka*, however, does no offence to the heroic ethos, but with its concern for status and symbols of authority, this version portrays a credible heroic arrogance, an

²⁹*Niflunga saga*, p. 394; see the discussion of these *fornkvæði* below.

arrogance which *Hrólfs saga kraka* specifies that Aðils means to punish. Additionally, the poet responsible for the version of this motif in the *Nibelungenlied* would have reason to alter the incident of the horses if it came to him from tradition, as he would want to preserve the Nibelungs' horses for the *bohort* of Adventure 31. This chivalric pageant is a transparent romance expansion to the tale which would have had no place in the Nibelung legend before the middle of the twelfth century at the earliest. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the version of the motif from the Hrólfr narrative with the horses represents an early, pre-romance version of a motif that earlier belonged to the Nibelung narrative.

It is the pre-romance version of this motif which the author of *Branwen* adapts. If strict narrative parallelism were demanded between *Branwen* and the analogues, this incident should have led to the mutilation of Brân's horses on their arrival in Ireland at the court of Matholwch. Here the Britons are to be treacherously ambushed, as are the Danes at the court of Aðils and the Nibelungs at the court of Etzel. The incident has been instead transferred to Matholwch's (ostensibly) friendly reception in Britain at the court of Brân. The rationale behind such a change is obvious, and lies not in the characterization of Brân but in that of Efnisien. Nutt observed how Efnisien corresponds to the Hagen of the Continental analogues, and we can see how Efnisien's maiming of the horses sets up this parallelism from the outset. Efnisien is established as the fierce warrior in contrast to the gentler Brân, an exact parallel to Hagen's contrast with Gunther. Efnisien's act of violence is also given as the ultimate cause of the Britons' eventual destruction, just as it is Hagen's savage murder of Siegfried which earns Kriemhild's undying hatred for her brothers and is the ultimate cause of the fall of the Nibelungs.

An equivalent to the expected mistreatment of Brân's horses at Matholwch's court might be the abuse which Branwen herself suffers at the hands of Matholwch's subjects. The popular tale of the Calumniated Wife has facilitated this substitution.³⁰ What especially links the Welsh, Norse, and German analogues at this point is the messenger who brings the king news of the abuse. In Hrólfr's tale the king's hawk returns to tell

of the Swedes' treachery, while Dancwart, like the hawk the sole survivor of the attack, performs this office in the *Nibelungenlied*. In *Branwen* the abused heroine sends Brân word by means of a starling she has taught to recognize him on sight. With consideration of the analogue, the starling cannot fail to recall Hrólfr's hawk. It is noteworthy that, contrary to the folkloric expectation that such a bird should possess speech, or should at least be understood by a protagonist with special powers, Branwen's bird neither sings nor talks, but simply carries a note attached to its leg.³¹ The fact that Branwen 'teaches it language' ('dyscu ieith'), or indeed the question of what precisely is meant by that phrase, is made irrelevant by the manner in which the bird conveys its message:

diskynnu ar e yscwyd, a garwhau y phluf, yny arganuuyt y llythyr, ac adnabot meithryn yr ederyn yg kyuanned. (p. 38)

It alighted on his shoulder, and ruffled its feathers so that they noticed the letter, and saw that the bird had been reared in dwellings.

We can compare Hrólfr's hawk from *Hrólfs saga kraka* which likewise conveys its message through gestures:

kiemur haukur Hr(olfz) k(ongz) fliugandi vr borginni, og sest áá öxl Hr(olfi) k(ongi) so látandi sem hann eigi micklum sigri ad hrosa. (§29)

King Hrólfr's hawk came flying from the citadel and settled on the king's shoulder, behaving as if it had been in a great victory to boast of.

The River-Crossing

In the *Nibelungenlied* the Nibelungs, on their way to Hungary, are impeded by the flooding of the Danube. Hagen slays a savage ferryman, initially loses and then secures again the captured boat with great annoyance, and finally single-handedly ferries the entire host across the Danube. *Niflunga saga* gives much the same story, except that the river is the Rhine, as in this text Attila's residence is located in modern-day Soest, in North Rhine-Westphalia.

The account of Brân leading his army to Ireland falls into two parts. In the first Brân is a giant wading across the Irish Sea with his company of minstrels on his back. In the second he makes himself into a bridge for his host to cross the river *Llinon*.³² In the first case, the author

³⁰See W. J. Gruffydd, *Rhiannon: An Inquiry into the Origins of the First and Third Branches of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff, 1953), p. 58, and Jackson, *International Popular Tale*, pp. 87–88. See also Juliette Wood, 'The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature', *CMCS*, 10 (Winter 1985), 25–38; for a persuasive denial that the Calumniated Wife is present in *Branwen*, see Andrew Welsh, 'Branwen, Beowulf, and the Tragic Peaceweaver Tale', *Viator*, 22 (1991), 1–13.

³¹Gruffydd, *Rhiannon*, p. 62, thought that Branwen's starling could be traced to a 'messenger bird' in the tale of the Calumniated Wife itself; however, upon brief inspection of the sources for the motif in Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale* (Helsinki, 1928), and Thompson's *Motif-Index*, the motif Gruffydd points to seems to be overwhelmingly one of a talking or singing bird.

³²Presumably the Liffey; see Rachel Bromwich's review of Mac Cana's *Branwen*

explains the miraculousness of Brân's crossing: 'nyt oed uawr y weilg yna' (p. 34) ('the sea was not wide at that time'). The following lines recount that there were originally two rivers which overflowed and submerged some unspecified kingdoms. These words have been identified as embedded glosses, and Thomas Jones argued that this flooding was a traditional Welsh tale witnessed elsewhere in a Triad.³³ If this gloss explained the origin of Brân's crossing, the episode would be an adaptation of a traditional view that the Irish Sea was once only two small rivers and we should not regard the feat as particularly fantastic. Yet it would be truer to the heroic character of the passage to suggest that Brân's crossing is an adaptation of a narrative motif in which a hero does, indeed, cross a life-imperiling stretch of water; this motif, moreover, is witnessed again later at the *Llinon*. The crossing of the *Llinon* and the crossing of the stretch of water that separates Wales and Ireland are in fact doublets. The gloss appears to be a later rationalization and, although doubtless taken from Welsh tradition, is irrelevant for explaining the genesis of the scene. I am sure that Mac Cana's view that the first crossing was inspired by Irish sources is correct, and that the doublet can be explained by the author's wanting to include this Irish-style 'watchman device' of a giant Brân crossing the sea, while keeping a more conventional episode of a river-crossing to preserve the motif in a less ambiguous form.³⁴ Yet the fact that the first crossing is a doublet of the second is not witnessed only by the assurance that the Irish Sea is, apparently, not really a sea but two rivers, but also that, in both cases, Brân carries a host on his back.

The doublets of the Welsh tale correspond to how the Nibelungs cross the Danube into Etzel's kingdom. While Hagen's ferrying of the host across the river is unlike Brân's carrying his men on his back, we can pay attention to the varying circumstances. In the German analogues the river marks a border between two kingdoms, the crossing of which is the first of many trials for the hero. In the *Nibelungenlied* the river is flooding, while in *Niflunga saga* and, incidentally, in *Atlamál hin*

in *Medium Ævum*, 28 (1959), 208; and eadem, *Tríoedd Ynys Prydein*, third edition (Cardiff, 2006), p. 290. ³³Thomas Jones, 'Triawd Lladin ar y Gorlifiadau', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 12 (1946–48), 79–83; see also Bromwich, *Tríoedd*, pp. lxxiv–lxxv; Mac Cana, *Branwen*, p. 109. ³⁴For an influential critique of Mac Cana's theory, see Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Riddling Treatment of the "Watchman Device" in *Branwen* and *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', *Studia Celtica*, 12/13 (1977–78), 83–117; for later folkloric instances of the motif, see Proinsias Mac Cana, 'Note on the Motif of the Wading Giant in Irish and Welsh', in *Northern Lights: Following Folklore in North-West Europe*, edited by Séamas Ó Catháin (Dublin, 2001), pp. 141–47.

grænlenzku and *Völsunga saga*, the heroes Högni and Gunnar have to contend with boats which break apart with the force of their rowing. In *Branwen* the *Llinon* is not described as flooding, but *mein sugyn*, 'loadstones', have been placed in the river to imperil the army's crossing. The incident thus, like the analogues, makes a heroic trial of the border crossing. Strictly speaking, no river-crossing in Ireland provides the border between the British and the Irish which the motif demands. Another reason why the author would have made of this episode a doublet, therefore, would have been to include the full import of the motif as found in the analogues which would have been otherwise impossible in the new geographical setting. Accordingly, Brân must carry a host across the Irish Sea which marks the frontier between the two nations, as well as across a river.

If only as a consequence of simple narrative realism, we do not expect the motif of an army crossing a river as such to be unusual in tales of martial expeditions.³⁵ It is, on the contrary, the ingenuity expended on retaining the motif in the new, awkward setting of the Irish Sea which draws our attention. As regards the evidential value of a motif which might be considered common, if not, indeed, obvious, we can note that neither the poem *Preiddeu Annwn* nor the prose tale *Culhwch ac Olwen*, both of which portray a sea-crossing analogous to that of *Branwen*, provide instances of a hero carrying his army, on his back or otherwise.³⁶ In *Branwen* the feat of carrying the army has been transferred from the martial hero Efnisien, Hagen/Högni of the analogues, to Brân. This transference is a significant step away from the narrative in the analogues, but is unremarkable given that this king, Brân, is a much stronger character than King Gunther.

The Entry into the Hall

Once the Britons have reached the special hall which Matholwch has had built for Brân, Efnisien enters first and scans the space looking for signs of treachery. He discovers armed Irish warriors hidden in hide-bags about the hall, and slyly kills them. Both the Hrólfr and the Nibelung

³⁵Of special interest to the present discussion is the occurrence of the motif identified by John T. Koch ('Brân, Brennos: An Instance of Early Gallo-Brittonic History and Mythology', *CMCS*, 20 (Winter, 1990), 1–20) in an historical text, namely Brennus' sending of Gauls under his command to cross the river Spercheius prior to their attack on Delphi, as recounted by Pausanias.

³⁶Marged Haycock, 'Preiddeu Annwn and the Figure of Taliesin', *SC*, 18/19 (1983–84), 52–78; *Culhwch and Olwen: An Edition and Study of the Oldest Arthurian Tale*, edited by Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans (Cardiff, 1992), p. 37.

narratives provide analogues with *Branwen*. *Hrólfs saga kraka* provides the closer of the two analogues.³⁷ Hrólfr's berserk Svipdag, suspicious of a trap, enters Aðils's hall first:

Suipd(agur) geingur nu vndan, og giatur vandliga að öllum hlutum. Sier hann mikla vmbreyting áá vjda. (§27)

Svipdag went in first and carefully examined everything, noting the many changes [which had been made in the hall].

We can compare the Welsh author's characterization of the parallel incident:

sef a wnaeth Efnysseyen dyuot ymlaen llu Ynys y Kedyrn y mywn, ac edrych golygon orwyllt anrugarawc ar hyt y ty. (p. 42)

Efnisien came in ahead of the army of the Island of the Mighty, and shot wild, ruthless glances throughout the house.

Hrólfs saga kraka continues:

Komust þeir yfir so marga öfæru sem fyrir þáá var sett, að ei er hægt að greina, og var þess erfidar sem jnnar drö j höllina. (§27)

They made their way past so many obstacles that had been set for them there that it was not easy to note them all, and that was more difficult the further they went into the hall.

The Danes then negotiate a path around a concealed pit dug in the floor, and thereafter face the further danger that *tjöld*, 'wall-hangings, tents' (plural of *tjald*), which encircle the hall have been employed to conceal armed men waiting in ambush. The motif of the booby-trapped hall is also present in Arngrím's *Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta*, where the trap is expressly a concealed pit.³⁸ Although Arngrím makes no reference to hidden warriors, the abbreviated character of his text makes it impossible to know whether his source, *Skjöldunga saga*, or any other earlier Norse tradition, had this version of the ambush which so strikingly recalls the armed Irish hidden about the hall in *Branwen*.

³⁷The analogue in the Hrólfr tale is discussed by Hall, 'Gwŷr y Gogledd', p. 33; and Olrik, *Heroic Legends*, p. 360. ³⁸'Hinc domum magnificam ingrediuntur, sed intus opertam, eo quod in pavimento medio specum subterraneum fieri Svecus curasset, in quem ingredientes incauti ruerent. Cæterum illi suspectas habentes tenebras specum, gladiis scipionum vice usi, depræhendentes transilière' (p. 346) ('Thereupon they entered a magnificent hall, but which held concealments within, as Aðils had had a pit dug into the middle of the floor in which they were meant to fall as they entered. Yet, suspicious of the darkness, they detected the trap and used their swords in the manner of poles to leap over the pit').

Adventures 29–30 of the *Nibelungenlied* describe a series of attempts on the part of Kriemhild's Huns to ambush the Nibelungs. Unfortunately, the description of these failed ambushes is not sufficiently similar to the ambushes described in the Hrólfr narrative to posit that the two narratives present independent developments of the same motif. *Niflunga saga*, however, offers a curious echo of Hrólfr's imperiled entry into Aðils's hall, in this case in the description of the arrival of the Niflungs at Attila's castle. In anticipation of the Niflungs' arrival, King Attila orders 'at hvert hús er búit, sum með tjöldum; en í sumum skal gera elda' (p. 371) ('that each house be prepared, some with wall-hangings, while in others a fire should be readied'). One can note the author's interest in the *tjöld* which Attila orders readied in the houses where the Niflungs were to be received.³⁹ The author of *Hrólfs saga kraka* may have recalled just such a passage when he suggested that *tjöld* were employed in Aðils's specially prepared hall to conceal warriors for his planned ambush of Hrólfr and his berserks.

Niflunga saga, it can be noted, makes no connection between these early preparations ordered by Attila and the assault on the Niflungs which, as in the *Nibelungenlied*, is described as commencing only on the following day and without Attila's knowledge. In the Norse version of the Niflung legend recounted in *Atlakviða* and *Atlamál hin grænlensku* Attila is the treacherous instigator of the assault on his guests, strongly reminiscent of Aðils in Hrólfr's story. We may perceive here a minor instance of the author's attempt to harmonize several conflicting sources, the most important of which, the German source shared with the *Nibelungenlied*, portrayed Attila as innocent. This is not to say that any Norse narrative that may have been known to the author of *Niflunga saga* necessarily shared the motif in *Hrólfs saga kraka* of a king ordering ambushers to be concealed behind *tjöld*. Narrative realism may account for the mention of the curtains in *Niflunga saga*, the preparations being consonant with the arrival of guests at a rich medieval court. 'Covering' seems to be the basic meaning of Norse *tjald*, preserved in its common secondary sense 'tent', but it is interesting to note that the word is cognate with Old English *teldian*, 'to set a trap'.⁴⁰

While little can be made of the coincidence of the king's *tjöld* in *Hrólfs saga kraka* and *Niflunga saga*, one analogous shared detail points more convincingly to a link between *Branwen* and *Niflunga saga*. In the Welsh tale, the treachery of the Irish is to hang *boly croyn*, 'hide-bags', in

³⁹For further consideration of these fires readied by Attila, see below. ⁴⁰See Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Leiden, 1961), s.v.

which are concealed armed warriors, from every supporting column of the hall. In *Niflunga saga*, at the commencement of the ambush on the Niflungs, Grímhild adopts a strategy which, on first consideration, makes little sense:

At ráðum Grímhildar vǫru breiddar fyrir utan garðshliðit nautahúðir hráblautar. Ok þá er Niflungar hlaupa út af garðinum, falla þeir á húðunum, ok þar ferr margr maðr svá, at hann fekk bana (p. 379)

On Grímhild's advice, raw hides were spread out before the gate to the courtyard. And when the Niflungs ran out of the courtyard, they fell on the hides, and it happened to many a man there, that he got his death.

This odd strategy is ostensibly intended to ensnare the Niflungs by making them lose their footing as they try to escape from the courtyard where they have been trapped. Yet it is not hard to see that *Hrólfs saga kraka* and *Niflunga saga* preserve two variant versions of the same motif. Grímhild's placing of raw animal hides about the enclosure was, in origin, a device to conceal warriors in ambush around the Niflungs, like the ambush of the Danes in *Hrólfs saga kraka*. The reinterpretation of this motif in the latter, in which the non-specific term *tjöld* is substituted for hides, may or may not reflect the changed material culture of the later text, but this is not crucial to the identification of the source motif. The fact that *Niflunga saga* preserves a version of this motif involving 'hides' of some sort links the German tales even more closely to the 'hide-bags' of the Welsh tale. The ingenious fusion with the Ali Baba motif, with hides — a detail pointing to the Germanic source — substituted for the jars of the eastern tale, exemplifies the Welsh author's command over the complex techniques of allusion to folktales from both near and far which permeate the Four Branches.⁴¹

The Killing of the Sister's Son

To date, critics have offered no wholly satisfactory explanation for Efnisien's cruel murder of Branwen and Matholwch's young son Gwern. Mac Cana, indeed, argued that Gwern's murder could be dismissed as a simple narrative device.⁴² Nutt thought that Efnisien's murder of Gwern was a reflection of the 'mythic' origins of the tale, and saw the same 'myth' preserved in Hagen's murder of Ortlieb, son of Kriemhild and Etzel, in the *Nibelungenlied*.⁴³ The fact that the name 'Aldrian' arbitrarily occurs in place of 'Ortlieb' in *Niflunga saga* suggests that, in the source the latter shared with the *Nibelungenlied*, this character had probably been known

⁴¹See Jackson, *International Popular Tale*, pp. 101–2. ⁴²Mac Cana, *Branwen*, p. 169. ⁴³Nutt, 'Mabinogion Studies', p. 24.

simply as 'the queen's son'. In both *Branwen* and the *Nibelung* texts, the murders of these queens' sons are the crises which trigger the final battle between the visiting brothers and the army of the queen's husband. It may be overlooked, however, that the two narratives share more than just the coincidence of the young prince's death. In *Branwen* Matholwch tries to pacify the Britons, who are marching triumphantly through his kingdom, by offering immediately to install Gwern in the kingship of Ireland (p. 41). The question of whether there are historical precedents for such a process is redundant when we consider that the offer is an empty device to advance the narrative, and comes with neither logic nor real consequences. In the *Nibelungenlied* Etzel, having received the Nibelungs in his hall in good faith, offers them Ortlieb in fosterage, in order that the boy may serve them once he has come of age (Adventure 31). The invocation of fosterage in the latter text lends this episode an historical probability that is wholly lacking in *Branwen*. One might judge that the author of the latter wished to retain an echo of the fosterage motif, but could not preserve the motif without alteration in his new narrative setting. At this point in *Branwen*, where the Britons are clearly poised to defeat Matholwch's forces, a mere offer to give his son in fosterage to the invading army might have appeared a measure decidedly not in proportion to the danger Matholwch then faced.

It was suggested above that some of Efnisien's fierceness may stem from his being modeled on Hagen. The ferocity of Efnisien's action is foreshadowed in a remarkable speech-act uttered immediately before the atrocity:

'Y Duw y dygaf uyg kyffes', heb ynteu yn y uedwl, 'ys anhebic a gyflauan gan y tylwyth y wneuthur, a wnaif i yr awr honn.' (p. 43)

'To God I make my confession', said [Efnisien] in his heart, 'it is an outrage the household would not imagine that I now will commit.'

Interestingly, the author has decided to portray this speech-act as internalized, *yn y uedwl*. Efnisien's speech-act finds a close parallel in the *Nibelungenlied*. Etzel has just assured the Nibelungs that Ortlieb, in repayment of his fosterage, will be a protection to them. Hagen replies:

'Im solden wol getrūwen	dise degene,
gewüechs er z'einem manne',	sô sprach Hagene:
'doch ist der künec junge	sô veiclich getân:
man sol mich sehen selten	ze hove nâch Ôrtlêbe gân.' (§31, 1918)

'These warriors might very well rely on him if he were to grow to be a man, but the young prince has an ill-fated look — you will not see me ride to court to wait on Ortlieb.'

The poet continues in the next two stanzas:

done wás der Hagenen wille	niht ze kurzewile guot.
Ez tet den fürsten allen	mit dem küenege wê,
daz Hâgen von sinem kinde	het gesprochen ê.
... sin' wessen niht der mære,	waz von dem recken sît geschach
	(1919d-1920a,b,d)

Hagen had not meant it as a joke. What Hagen had said about his son distressed the king as well as all his lords ... They had no notion of what Hagen was to do.

Niflunga saga at this point has a parallel speech-act from Högni, in this instance in response to Grímhild's having goaded her son to slap the hero across the face:

'Þetta hefir þú eigi gert með þínu ráði ok eigi með ráði Attila konungs, föður þíns, heldur er þetta eggjan þinnar móður, ok þess muntu nú lítt njóta þessu sinni.' (p. 379)

'You did not decide to do that on your own, nor on the advice of King Attila, your father; rather it is your mother who urged that, and you will have little good of it at this time.'

In both texts the issue is that Hagen/Högni stretches forth his sword to behead the boy.

The inexplicability of the act in the *Nibelungenlied* and *Niflunga saga* is not that it is unmotivated, but that Hagen, the principal target of Kriemhild's enmity, alone knows that the entire host is soon to die, and alone has prepared himself for enormous savagery. When we compare *Branwen*, we see that the inexplicability of Efnisien's act shares this theme of the incomprehension of the killer's companions. The self-knowing speech-act which anticipates the deed reproduces the structure of the analogues, not only in preceding the act of killing, but, I would argue, in the fact that both Hagen and Efnisien essentially tell the assembled crowd of the imminent killing of the boy. In neither narrative do any of the heroes present venture to intervene. The Welsh author's decision to have Efnisien speak 'in his heart' has obscured the parallel considerably. In this light, one can note how much this internalization has weakened the dramatic force of the speech, which relies on the contrast between the incomprehension of the auditors and the killer's prescient acceptance of the coming battle between the two armies. Hagen's subsequent beheading of Ortlieb is well-motivated, whereas Efnisien's act, formally identical with Hagen's, clearly wants motivation. The author has, in a sense, prepared for this development with his characterization of Efnisien, who throughout acts like a Hagen without any motivation for the latter's famous savagery. All the same, the author's

decision to mitigate the force of Efnisien's speech by making it internalized suggests an unsuccessful attempt to rationalize the other feasters' failure to intervene to save the boy. In the *Nibelung* narrative no rationalization is required, as dramatic irony animates the episode and makes Hagen's conduct perhaps the most psychologically convincing, if not the most easily imitable, feature of the *Nibelungenlied*.

Hrólfr's tale has no obvious parallel to the killing of Ortlieb, but comparisons with *Branwen* are again instructive. After the hall-ambush has passed, all versions of the story tell how Hrólfr endures a trial by fire in which the Swedes build up the fire in the hall beyond normal proportions, knowing that Hrólfr has vowed never to shun iron or fire. In *Hrólfs saga kraka* this test is explained as one of Aðils's ploys to flush out Hrólfr from among his companions.⁴⁴ This episode provides an exceptionally clear window on the presumed early medieval oral 'tradition' of Hrólfr Kraki drawn on by *Skjöldunga saga*, by Saxo in the *Gesta Danorum*, and, at a greater remove, by *Hrólfs saga kraka*. We can infer the content of *Skjöldunga saga* in this episode from the version which Snorri records in his *Prose Edda*, and from Arngrím Jónsson's paraphrase of *Skjöldunga saga* in his *Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta*. Arngrím has preserved in his Latin text two short fragments of Norse corresponding to Snorri's text, and translates one fragment into Latin and the other into Danish. *Hrólfs saga kraka* has the nearly identical text as Snorri for the fragments in Norse, and likewise has also the first Norse fragment for which Arngrím has only the Latin. The correspondences between the passages can be laid out as follows:

<i>Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta</i>	<i>Prose Edda</i>	<i>Hrólfs saga kraka</i>
En, inquit, incendium vobiscum augebimus (p. 347)	Aukum enn elda at Aðils húsum (p. 59)	Aukum nu elldana / ad Adilz borg (§28)
Ei flyr sa Elld, sem yffer hleypr, id est: igni non cedit, qui penetrat (ibid.)	Flyra sá elda er yfir hleypr (ibid.)	Eigi flyr sá elldinn / sem yfir hleypr (ibid.)
Nu heff eg svijnbeygt hann, sem ríkastur var med Svijum: Nu haffuer jeg ladet hannem bucke som itt svijn, den der var megtist iblant de svenske (ibid.)	Svínbeygt hefi ek nú þann er ríkastr er með Svíum (ibid.)	Suýnbeygda eg þann nu sem Suýanna er ríkastur (§30)

⁴⁴*Hrólfs saga kraka*, § 28; see also Finch, *Völsunga saga*, p. 5, for the identical vow made by King Völsung.

The first fragment, 'Let us increase the fire in Aðil's abode' in the Norse, is spoken by either Hrólfr or by one of his berserks as they throw into the fire, in the different versions, either their shields or the attendant Swedes who have been stoking the fire. The second, 'He does not flee fire who leaps over it' in the Norse, is spoken by Hrólfr as he either endures or evades the fire-test. The third fragment, 'Now I have made him who is greatest among the Swedes stoop like a pig', represents in all versions Hrólfr's exultation over Aðils after he has made the king stoop to pick up a precious ring which he has thrown down in his path. Faulkes remarks of Snorri's text that the two 'fire' utterances may be verse, though in context this is hard to demonstrate.⁴⁵ The editor of *Hrólfr's saga* has printed at least the first two fragments as verse. A verse origin to these two fragments is suggested especially by the poetic alliteration which, significantly, is shared by the third fragment as well. It is unlikely that Arngrím would have preserved fragments of Norse as he does, providing translations for his readers, if the fragments were not famous in their own right, or were not at least the sort of commemorative verses which typically adorn the prose of Norse historical narrative.⁴⁶ It is hard to escape the conclusion that these fragments represent an original verse backbone to the story, preserved as commemorative verses in *Skjöldunga saga* and clearly recognized as such later by Arngrím. Furthermore, Saxo, who has made significant changes to the details of Hrólfr's expedition, has nevertheless retained those incidents which correspond to this theoretical verse backbone. To be precise, Saxo has kept Hrólfr's trial by fire, and has preserved a clear memory of Hrólfr's derisive exultation over Aðils:

Quem [Aðils] Rolvo tollendæ pecuniæ gratia pronom demissumque conspiciens propriis prostratum muneribus risit. (II.6.7)

And when Hrólfr saw him [Aðils] stooping forward to gather the riches and humiliatingly bent over for his own ring, he laughed at him.

Saxo retains Hrólfr's derision of the king even though, in his own altered version, it is not Hrólfr who throws down the ring to humiliate Aðils, but Hrólfr's sister, Yrsa.

⁴⁵Faulkes, *Skáldskaparmál*, I, 188. ⁴⁶For the use of commemorative verses in saga, see Bjarni Einarsson, 'On the Role of Verse in Saga-Literature', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 7 (1974), 118–25, esp. p. 124 for *fornaldarsögur*. For a discussion of legendary verse in Iceland in the framework of the interaction between written and oral sources over time, see Davíð Erlingsson, 'Prose and Verse in Icelandic Legendary Fiction', in *The Heroic Process: Form, Function and Fantasy in Folk Epic*, edited by Bo Almqvist and others (Dún Laoghaire, 1987), pp. 371–93.

While the verse backbone is shared by all versions, the narrative expansion varies in each. The verses themselves are not specific as to what or who is being thrown into the fire, or by whom, nor as to who is leaping over the fire. For example, in Snorri's version the second fragment appears to be added as an afterthought to Hrólfr's leap over the flames, while in Arngrím's version it is translated using the Latin verb *penetrare*, 'to go into the interior of something', and is unambiguously interpreted as accompanying the action by which the Swedes are thrown into the fire. A connection between the verse backbone of the Hrólfr narrative and the Continental tale of the Nibelungs at this point is suggested by the coincidence that the author of *Niflunga saga* is careful to stress that Attila has ordered a hall to be prepared in anticipation of the arrival of the Niflungs in his city, with a great fire:

Attila konungr tekr vel við sínum mágum, ok er þeim fylgt í hallinnar, þær sem búna eru, ok gervir fyrir þeim eldar. (p. 373)

Attila greeted his brother-in-law, and they followed him into the hall where preparations had been made, and a fire readied for them.

Although there is no subsequent episode in this text which would recall Hrólfr's use of the fire to kill Aðils's men, *Atlakviða*, the earliest surviving Norse version of the Niflung legend, unambiguously relates that Högni throws Hunnish warriors into the fire in the middle of the hall in which the Niflungs have been attacked:

Siau hió Högni
sverði hvösso,
en enom átta
hratt hann í eld heitan.⁴⁷

Högni struck down seven with his sharp sword, and he hurled the eighth into the hot fire.

The ninth-century author of *Atlakviða* therefore knew a version of the Nibelung legend which significantly matched the Hrólfr narrative at this point. The attention paid by Attila to the preparation of a hall and a fire in *Niflunga saga* may be an echo of the version of the tale in *Atlakviða* or, perhaps, mere coincidence. Yet as the parallel of *Hrólfr's saga kraka* with the Nibelung tales is generally weak in this section, it is notable that a shared motif of a fire in a hall can be detected, especially one connected with the king's reception of his doomed guests.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, I, 7, stanza 19; for the dates and chronology of the Atla poems, see *ibid.*, pp. 42–45. ⁴⁸See also above for Attila's readying of *tjöld* in anticipation of the Niflungs' arrival.

The best parallel for the throwing of the Swedes into the fire is not, of course, found in *Niflunga saga*, but in *Branwen*: Efnisien seizes Branwen's son Gwern and throws him into the fire, an unaccountably harsh way of killing the boy. With perfect verisimilitude and in an echo of Hrólfr's talk of 'penetrating' the fire in Arngrím's text, the boy's mother tries to leap into the fire after him (p. 43). Even the observation that Brân has his shield to hand in this scene may be an echo of the Hrólfr narrative, where, according to Saxo, the king holds his shield against the fire before finally throwing it in.⁴⁹ W. J. Gruffydd thought that Gwern's being thrown into the fire was in origin a fairy-test, and Mac Cana argued that the act was a mere device to advance the narrative.⁵⁰ Yet we have no reason to disbelieve that *Branwen*'s sequence of events is not another variation on a motif familiar from its memorable occurrence in Germanic narrative. Here, as in other examples discussed above, the motif recurs in the same sequence as in the analogues. In this instance, the strictly poetic transmission of the motif in the Hrólfr narrative, evidenced in the verse fragments quoted in the above table, is particularly obvious. Moreover, these fragments self-evidently predate the written texts in which they are preserved, and are a convincing window on the oral verse traditions which are likely to be the ultimate source for the occurrence of the same motifs in *Branwen*.

The Final Battle and the 'Cauldron of Rebirth'

As in *Branwen*, the final battle in the *Nibelungenlied* and in *Niflunga saga* seamlessly follows the army's reception at the king's court, the ambushes, and the killing of the queen's son. The analogue in the Hrólfr narrative is more complex, as Hrólfr's last stand actually constitutes a separate episode, though one which immediately follows the expedition to Sweden. This final battle, described in the accounts of Arngrím, Saxo, and *Hrólfs saga kraka*, unexpectedly shows continuing connections with

⁴⁹'A chael o Uendigeiduran hi yn y neill law, a'y tarean yn y llaw arall' (p. 44) ('And Bendigeidfran held her in his one hand, and his shield in the other'); 'Qui cum igni applicaretur, parmulam parti, qua acrius urgebatur, obiecit alteroque laterum defenso reliquum munimento vacuum unico patientiae duramento firmavit. Magnam viri solertiam, leniendi ardoris praesidium a clipeo mutuantis ...' (Saxo, II.6.5) ('And when he [Hrólfr] was seated next to the fire, he protected with his shield his side which was more oppressively heated, and with the one side protected, steadied with the hardness of endurance alone his other side which lacked any defence. O the great ingenuity of the man, to employ the protection of a shield to mitigate the burning of fire!'). ⁵⁰Gruffydd, *Rhiannon*, pp. 62–63; Mac Cana, *Branwen*, p. 169.

the German tales and *Branwen*. Hrólfr's second sister, the sorceress Skuld, urges her husband King Hjörvard to refuse payment of tribute to her brother. Skuld and Hjörvard lead a night-ambush against Hrólfr's hall at Lejre while all inside are asleep. In the ensuing battle, Skuld and Hjörvard ply enchantments against the Danes, especially the resurrection of their own fallen dead. Hrólfr and all his men perish except for Vögg, who avenges the King, killing Hjörvard according to Saxo, and killing Skuld according to *Hrólfs saga kraka*. Verses from Saxo's Latin version of the *Bjarkamál* recount that Hrólfr's hall is set aflame by an unspecified hand, but with the heroes still inside.⁵¹

The corresponding narrative from the *Nibelungenlied* is the continuation of the Nibelungs' visit to Etzel's court, according to which they are attacked in their hall, the hall is burnt down around them, and they are eventually delivered to Kriemhild. *Niflunga saga* conflates two versions of the Niflungs' fall, one of which mostly matches the *Nibelungenlied*. The parallels between the Nibelung tales and Hrólfr's final battle may be to some extent situational and explicable as what happens when a king and his company are attacked in their hall. One hidden parallel is best discussed in conjunction with *Branwen*'s 'cauldron of rebirth'.

In *Branwen* a story of the reanimation of slain warriors is combined with the motif of a magic cauldron, there termed the *peir dadeni*, 'cauldron of rebirth'. The Irishman Diwrnach's magic cauldron is probably one object of Arthur's quest in the poem *Preiddeu Annwn*, and features again in an account of one of Arthur's adventures in *Culhwch ac Olwen*.⁵² These appearances of an Irish cauldron in texts generally regarded to be among the oldest in medieval Welsh might encourage the theory that a native tale of a hero's journey to the Otherworld to fetch a magic cauldron may also lie behind *Branwen*.⁵³ Mac Cana chose to focus on the resuscitation provided by the *peir dadeni* in *Branwen*, a motif wholly lacking from Diwrnach's cauldron but, in his opinion, one especially associated with Irish storytelling.⁵⁴ Mac Cana compared the

⁵¹Saxo, II.7.4–28, esp. 11–12: 7–14; for a denial that Hrólfr's hall was set on fire in the original *Bjarkamál*, see Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet*, pp. 72–73 and 93–94. ⁵²*Preiddeu Annwn*, edited and translated by Haycock, lines 13–22; *Culhwch and Olwen*, edited by Bromwich and Evans, p. 37. ⁵³See the discussion in Patrick Sims-Williams, 'The Early Welsh Arthurian Poems', in *The Arthur of the Welsh: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature*, edited by Rachel Bromwich and others (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 33–71 (pp. 54–57), also Mac Cana, *Branwen*, pp. 147–50. ⁵⁴*ibid.*, pp. 50–64. For instances of the motif in Irish literature, see T. P. Cross, *Motif-Index of Early Irish Literature* (Bloomington, IN, 1952), A162.1.0.1 and E155.1.

peir dadeni especially to the enchanted well *Sláine* in the Irish prose tale *Cath Maige Tuired*. This tale relates the battle between the Túatha Dé Danann and the Fomorians, the latter portrayed as a foreign army of occupation in Ireland. As recounted in this text, while the Fomorians suffer heavy mortalities in their battle against the Túatha Dé, the latter cast their wounded into the well *Sláine*, from which they arise whole the next morning.⁵⁵

As Mac Cana considered the link between the *peir dadeni* and the well *Sláine* to reside especially in the fact that they both portray the reanimation of dead warriors, he was led to distance both from the cauldrons of health, *coiri iocshláinte*, of Irish folktales.⁵⁶ These *coiri* are for healing sickness, and one tale even specifies that 'it cures every wound, every sickness, but cannot bring life back'.⁵⁷ Yet the well *Sláine* in *Cath Maige Tuired* may not in fact be so different from the cauldrons of health, as its name, 'Health', pointedly suggests. The adjective *athgoite*, used of the Tuatha Dé who are thrown into the well, means 'severely wounded', not 'dead', and reanimation as such need not be considered a feature of the motif in this instance.⁵⁸ The well *Sláine* incontrovertibly has in common with the *coiri iocshláinte* folktales the fact that the enchanted healing is in favour of the sympathetic protagonists, in this case in favour of the Túatha Dé against the Fomorians. Clearly, reanimation of the dead, especially employed against the sympathetic protagonists, is a feature which *Branwen* does not share with the Irish parallels cited by Mac Cana.⁵⁹

Mac Cana, following the lead of A. H. Krappe, allowed that the Irish instances of resurrected warriors may have been literary instances of the Everlasting Fight motif.⁶⁰ In the version of this motif discussed by Mac Cana, a hero notices that the ranks of the enemy do not diminish over time, in spite of the numbers of them that he kills in battle. He discovers a 'Hag of Slaughter' who is resuscitating the dead, and kills her. This

⁵⁵*Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, edited by Elizabeth A. Gray, Irish Texts Society, 52 (London, 1982), §123. ⁵⁶Mac Cana, *Branwen*, p. 52. ⁵⁷*ibid.*; see Jeremiah Curtin, *Irish Folk Tales*, edited by Séamus Ó Duilearga (Dublin, 1960), p. 99. ⁵⁸See *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, s.v. The same useful distinction between wounded and dead may be made in the *Dinnshenchas*-tale of *Ard Lemnacht*, for which, see Mac Cana, *Branwen*, p. 53. ⁵⁹Interesting in view of the contrast with *Branwen*, reanimation in favour of the protagonist is the version of the motif in the Middle Welsh tale *Peredur* as well as the allied narrative in the French *Conte du Graal*, a fact which Mac Cana sees as indicative of the folktale influence in those texts; see *Branwen*, pp. 59–60. ⁶⁰*ibid.*, pp. 58–60; A. H. Krappe, *Balor with the Evil Eye: Studies in Celtic and French Literature* (Lancaster, 1927), p. 132.

resurrection motif occurs in many literary texts from the medieval Norse-speaking world, but has been often regarded in modern criticism as an originally Celtic motif.⁶¹ The earliest recorded Northern version of the story is Snorri's account in the *Prose Edda* of the daily renewed battle of Heðin and Högni, in which Högni's daughter Hild resuscitates during the night the warriors who had been killed in that day's fighting.⁶² Bo Almqvist stresses that the Everlasting Fight motif is exceedingly widespread in Irish and Scandinavian folklore, making any pronouncements on the origin of the motif provisional until all the evidence has been examined. Michael Chesnutt has defended the view that the occurrence of the motif in both *Cath Maige Tuired* and the *Prose Edda* is the result of a hybrid Irish–Norse development.⁶³ The relationship of the Welsh occurrence of the motif in *Branwen* with the narratives of the Nibelungs and Hrólfr Kraka ventured here is intended as a contribution to the ongoing efforts to untangle the diffusion of the motif.⁶⁴

The wickedness of Hrólfr's sister Skuld is mentioned in all versions of the story, and in *Hrólfs saga kraka* she is explicitly called a sorceress. In *Arngrím's text*, corpses are seen to rise up and continue fighting against Hrólfr and his men:

conspectusque est in hostium acie ipse Odinus humana specie pugnans, conspecta item corpora exanima denuo reviviscere. (p. 349)

Odin himself was seen fighting in the ranks of the enemy, and lifeless corpses were seen to come to life again.

⁶¹See *ibid.*, p. 132, where the Celtic example of the motif is the battle of Gwyn and Gwythyr from *Culhwch ac Olwen*; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Celtic Elements in Icelandic Tradition', *Béaloideas*, 25 (1957), 3–24 (pp. 17–18); and Bo Almqvist, 'Scandinavian and Celtic Folklore Contacts in the Earldom of Orkney', in *Viking Ale: Studies on Folklore Contacts Between the Northern and Western Worlds*, edited by Éilís Ní Dhuibhne-Almqvist and Séamas Ó Catháin (Aberystwyth, 1991), pp. 1–29 (pp. 13–17). Almqvist, who would see the Hag who resuscitates the fallen as the characteristic feature of the motif, thinks the motif probably spread to the North via the mixed Norse–Gaelic culture of medieval Orkney; see also Michael Chesnutt, cited below. ⁶²Faulkes, *Skáldskaparmál*, I, 72; probably contemporary with the *Prose Edda* is the allusion to the tale in the metrical treatise *Háttalykill*, composed on Orkney; see Michael Chesnutt, 'An Unsolved Problem in Old Norse–Icelandic Literary History', *Medieval Scandinavia*, 1 (1968), 122–37 (p. 130). ⁶³Chesnutt, 'An Unsolved Problem'; see also, more recently, *idem*, 'Cath Maige Tuired — A Parable of the Battle of Clontarf', in *Northern Lights*, edited by Ó Catháin, pp. 22–33. ⁶⁴Although Latin sources are not my subject here, I will note in passing that the Thessalian witch from Statius' *Thebaid* (III.140–46) is a literary instance of the motif which was known across Europe; see also Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, VI, esp. lines 633–36.

In *Hrólfs saga kraka* this motif is preserved within the passages which, we can safely infer, reproduce the *Bjarkamál*. The berserk Bjarki notices that the numbers of the enemy fail to decrease, and complains:

‘driugt er lidid Skulldar, og grunar mig nu að þeir dauðu sueimi hier, og ríjse vpp aptur og beriest j möti oss, og mun það verða torsött að beríast við drauga.’ (§33)

‘Skuld’s troops are (ever)lasting. I suspect that the dead wander about here, and rise up and fight against us, and it shall be difficult to fight against draugar [animated corpses in Norse folklore].’

There is little question that the witch Skuld is behind the resuscitation of the corpses.

There are clues in *Niflunga saga* that Grímhild may have acted as a corpse-reviving witch in an earlier version of the tale. During the battle between the Niflungs and Attila’s men, Högni complains to Gunnar:

‘Mér lízt svá sem Hýnir ok Ömlungar muni margir fallnir vera, en svá marga húnska menn sem vér höfum drepit, þá drífa þó til hálfu fleiri af heraði, ok er þó sem vér gerim ekki.’ (p. 381)

‘It seems to me as if many Huns and Amlungs have fallen, but however many Hunnish men we have killed, twice as many come in from the surrounding country, and it is as if we accomplish nothing.’

Once the Niflungs have been overcome, Grímhild is seen to thrust a burning torch into the mouths of her fallen brothers, presumably to test whether they are dead. In disgust, Attila’s vassal Þiðrek calls Grímhild a *djöful*, ‘devil’, and slays her by cutting her in two (p. 392). Nutt compares Grímhild’s actions to a Gaelic folktale in which a hag resuscitates her fallen warriors by putting her finger in their mouths until she herself is slain by the hero.⁶⁵ Moreover, in an echo of her role as Hag of Slaughter, Kriemhild/Grímhild’s activity in inciting the Huns to battle in successive waves could not be more evident and is a constant preoccupation of both the *Nibelungenlied* and *Niflunga saga*.⁶⁶ Although the *Nibelungenlied* has nothing quite like *Niflunga saga*’s depiction of Grímhild’s preoccupation

with corpses, Dietrich (Þiðrek) and, later, Hagen accuse Kriemhild of being a *válandinne* (1748d, 2371d), ‘she-devil’, in an echo of Þiðrek’s comment from *Niflunga saga* that she is a *djöful*; in the latter instance, the insult is uttered immediately prior to the queen’s violent death, as in *Niflunga saga*.

The occurrence of *válandinne* in the *Nibelungenlied* suggests that *Niflunga saga*’s version of the queen’s demonic character and activities was a feature of the Nibelung poet’s source which was shared with *Niflunga saga*, but which was removed as the tale was worked into its extant shape as courtly epic. Recension C of the *Nibelungenlied* in fact continues this trend of removing the demonic traces of Kriemhild’s character, shifting the burden of evil onto Hagen.⁶⁷ The demonic re-generation of corpses is vouchsafed for in the tale of Hrólfr’s death especially in the passages derived from the *Bjarkamál*, giving us reason to believe that this reanimation motif was integral to the tale when it was still known in heroic Viking verse. Clerical commentary shared by both *Hrólfs saga kraka* and Arngrím’s *Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta*, for example the comment that ‘Satan’ had entered the reanimated corpses on the battlefield (*Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta*, p. 349), shows a different approach to adapting the reanimation motif than that of the Nibelung tales. However, this enchanted reanimation of the dead remained explicit at least as late as *Skjöldunga saga*, c. 1200, Arngrím’s immediate source. At any rate, the case for a link between the Hrólfr and Nibelung cycles is significantly strengthened.

An additional piece of evidence is the Faroese heroic ballad *Högnatáttur*, dating from not earlier than the fifteenth century.⁶⁸ This tells roughly the same story as that in *Niflunga saga*, namely of how the heroine (here Guðrún, as is more usual in Norse versions) destroys her brothers, with the added twist that each night she raises back to life the Huns whom Högni has killed during the day. De Boor thought that the ballad derived from *Niflunga saga* itself, and suggested further that this description of reanimation had been inspired by Högni’s brief comment

that was her activity all that day’). ⁶⁷For the relationship of Recension C to the other versions, see Joachim Heinzle, *Das Nibelungenlied: Eine Einführung* (Munich, 1987), pp. 60–64. ⁶⁸*Føroya kvæði: Corpus Carminum Faeroensium a Sv. Grundtvig et J. Bloch Comparatum*, 7 vols (Copenhagen, 1941–96), edited by C. Matras, I, Part 2 (1954), *Triðji táttur: Högni*, pp. 205–14, stanzas 167–69; see Nutt, ‘Mabinogion Studies’, pp. 22 and 29; the *Högnatáttur* is one segment of the longer *Sjúrdar kvæði*, ‘The Heroic Ballad of Sigurd’. For an overview of this ballad corpus, see Mortan Nolsøe, ‘The Heroic Ballad in Faroese Tradition’, in *Heroic Process*, edited by Almqvist, pp. 395–411.

⁶⁵Nutt, ‘Mabinogion Studies’, p. 30; see J. F. Campbell, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, 2 vols (London, 1890), no. 52, ‘The Knight of the Red Shield’ (collected in 1859), pp. 463 and 478; see also the Icelandic parallels listed in Sveinsson, ‘Celtic Elements in Icelandic Traditions’, p. 18, n. 37. ⁶⁶For example, *Niflunga saga* has: ‘En drottning Grímhildr gerir þat allan þann dag, tekr brynjur ok hjálma ok skjöldu ok sverð, er Attila konungr á, ok vápnar með þá menn, er berjast vilja . . . þetta er hennar athæfi allan þenna dag’ (p. 380) (‘Queen Grímhild spent all that day taking byrnie and helmets and shields and swords which belonged to King Attila, and armed with them the men who wanted to fight . . .

on the abundance of Grímhild's forces from *Niflunga saga* quoted above.⁶⁹ It is possible, however, that the manuscript source known to the author of the ballad was fuller than that preserved today, and that a variant of *Niflunga saga* did portray the reanimation of the dead. It is also possible — though the late date of the Faroese corpus makes this unlikely — that the ballad recalls a variant oral version of the Niflung tale which did, indeed, impute such infernal powers to Guðrún/Grímhild.⁷⁰

Against these Norse, German, and Faroese instances of the regeneration of corpses can be compared the account of the resuscitated Irish soldiers from *Branwen*. Unlike Mac Cana's Irish parallels, *Branwen* agrees with the Germanic analogues by having the reanimation as a sinister force used against the protagonists. Agreeing with the Continental tradition, *Branwen* has a hero from the besieged host overcome the sorcery, namely Efnisien who destroys the *peir dadeni*. Against the uncertainty in the Irish sources whether the tales describe the raising of the dead or simply medicinal healing, the Welsh, Norse, and German tales are unambiguously concerned with corpses. The *draugar* from the *Hrólfr* tales, as well as Grímhild's association with corpses, leave no question that the shared tradition is the raising of dead warriors, not the healing of the wounded. Reanimation is probably not the most fitting term in this context, as the raised soldiers are not fully alive, a distinction made clear in *Branwen* with the detail that men resuscitated by the *peir dadeni* lack speech.⁷¹ These speechless soldiers are more in line with the walking corpses of the Norse sources, specifically said to be possessed of Satan in Arngrím's text, than with the hearty soldiers from the Irish tales who rise from their baths apparently as the same people they were before their wounding.

To look more closely at the depiction of these corpses: *Hrólfs saga kraka* records:

blodugar hefur hann badir sijnar axlir, og hlöd valköstu alla vega j kryngum sig. (§33)

Both his shoulders were covered in blood, and corpses were piled up high all around him.

⁶⁹Helmut de Boor, *Die färöischen Lieder des Nibelungenzyklus* (Heidelberg, 1918), pp. 175–76. ⁷⁰It is self-evident that the ballad may also borrow from the story of King Högni and his daughter Hild, told by Snorri in the *Prose Edda*, which is not necessarily to be connected to the story of the Niflungs, except in the sharing of the name Högni; see above, n. 62. ⁷¹For speechlessness as a sign of death, see Kenneth Jackson, 'Some Popular Motifs in Early Welsh Tradition', *Études celtiques*, 11 (1964–65), 83–99 (pp. 95–99).

This description is inherited from the *Bjarkamál*, as witnessed in the translation of the poem by Saxo, who mentions 'lopped limbs . . . a heap of corpses'.⁷² This heap of the enemy's dead can be compared to the 'calaned y Gwydyl' (p. 44) ('corpse-heap of the Irishmen') into which Efnisien climbs when he pretends himself to be a corpse. The troublesome hapax legomenon *gwyddwig* in this same passage's phrase for the British dead, '[y]r wydwic honn o wyr' (p. 44) ('this funeral pile of men'), may represent a heightened poetic diction in this important speech, and draws special attention to the association of the motif with heroic poetry.⁷³ It is interesting to note the affinity of the opaque Welsh compound to *Hrólfr saga kraka*'s term *val-köstr*, 'corpse-pile', a well-attested idiom of Norse poetic diction which was adopted for use in prose texts.⁷⁴

The circumstances of the Welsh version of the motif match the Germanic tales in both instances, that is, a visiting king and his retinue are attacked by the army of his sister and brother-in-law who regenerate the corpses of their own fallen, the result of which sorcery is the death of the king. The only component missing from *Branwen* is the witch who, according to all versions, is slain at the end. Branwen herself is formally identical with the witches from the Germanic versions who are all, likewise, sisters of the king whose death the story recounts. Branwen dies only later in Anglesey, when she cries:

'Guae ui o'm ganedigaeth. Da a dwy ynys a diffeithwyt o'm achaws i.' (p. 45)

'Woe that I was born. Two good islands have been laid waste because of me.'

Branwen's heart, her *calon*, breaks with regret. But earlier, as a consequence of the scene involving the regeneration of corpses where, according to the analogues, we would expect the killing of a witch, it is Efnisien who dies, anticipating Branwen's own last speech:

'Guae ui uy mot yn achaws y'r wydwic honn o wyr Ynys y Kedyrn.' (p. 44)

'Woe is me that I should be the cause of this heap of the men of the Island of the Mighty.'

⁷²Quamquam adeo solus multorum funere leto / corpora tradiderim pugnans, ut imagine collis / editus e truncis excresceret artubus agger, / et speciem tumuli congesta cadavera ferrent' (II.7.22: 30–34) 'Yet I have by myself delivered in battle so many bodies to the ruin of death that a mound like a hill could be raised from their lopped limbs, and the heap of corpses would look like a burial mound'. ⁷³See *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, s.v. *gwyddwig*. ⁷⁴See Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum Antiquae Linguae Septentrionalis* (Copenhagen, 1931).

As with Branwen, Efnisien's *calon* bursts. In terms of simple narrative sequence, Efnisien is the counterpart to Skuld and Kriemhild at this moment, yet the Welsh author has clearly identified him with Branwen, who, formally speaking, we would expect to be killed at this point. Interestingly, in *Niflunga saga*, when Grímhild has just thrust the burning torches into the corpses' mouths, Attila's vassal Þiðrek, just before he sláys her, makes a speech-act similar to Efnisien's and Branwen's:

'Sé ... hversu margr maðr hefir látit sitt líf fyrir hennar sakir ok hversu mörgum góðum mönnum hún hefir spillt, Húnum ok Ömlungum ok Niflungum.' (p. 392)

'Consider how many men have lost their lives for her sake, and how many good men she has destroyed, Huns and Amlungs and Niflungs.'

HEROIC LAYS AND BRANWEN

The preceding discussion suggests that a succession of systematic parallels between the Welsh tale *Branwen* and the related Germanic narrative cycles of the Nibelungs and Hrólfr Kraki goes beyond mere coincidence. The evidence argues for the existence of versions of the tales of Hrólfr and the Nibelungs which would have significantly predated the earliest written texts which date, as far as we know, to the turn of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. The Norwegian author of *Niflunga saga* in fact recounts, in a manner eerily reminiscent of a modern collector of folktales, the sources of his story:

Hér má nú heyra frásögn þýðerskra manna, hversu farit hafa þessi tíðendi þeira nokkurra, er fæddir hafa verit í Susat, þar er þessir atburðir orðit ... Þeir menn hafa oss ok sagt í frá þessu, er fæddir hafa verit í Brimum eða Mynstrborg, ok engi þeira vissi deili á öðrum ok sögðu allir á eina leið frá, ok er þat mest eftir því, sem segja fornkvæði í þýðerskri tungu, er gert hafa fróðir menn um þau stórtíðendi, er í þessu landi hafa orðit. (p. 394)

One can hear the stories telling how these things happened from German men, those who were born in Soest where these events took place ... These things have also been told us by men who were born in Bremen and Münster, and none of them knew different versions from the others, but they all told the same story and in the same way, and that is mostly according to how they are told in old songs in the German language made by learned men about these great events which happened in that land.

Some of these 'songs' apparently bore noticeable resemblance to the northern tale of Hrólfr, and the Hrólfr narrative appears to retain features which were variants in the earlier tradition of the Nibelungs. It is evidently pre-literary variants of the Hrólfr and Nibelung tales which find their repetition in *Branwen*.

The question of the memorial transmission of traditional narrative has been a vexed issue among scholars of both Celtic and Germanic literatures. Yet the question of transmission merits the closest consideration, and can begin most usefully with the question of a common source for *Niflunga saga* and the *Nibelungenlied*. Andreas Heusler posited a lost written epic, an *Ältere Nôt*, which he claimed might have been composed in Bavaria, c. 1160.⁷⁵ This *Ältere Nôt* was both used by the Norwegian author of *Niflunga saga*, and served as the template for a later author to compose the *Nibelungenlied* in Austria around the year 1200. Heusler's theory has not escaped criticism, and his stemmatic approach, relying on the supposition and (where possible) reconstruction of non-extant texts, went out of fashion in the post-war period, with German scholars especially. In recent years, T. M. Andersson has championed the theory of short, memorized 'lays' as the traditional Germanic mode of transmission of heroic legend, the theory on which Heusler's stemmatic approach rests.⁷⁶ Andersson's most noteworthy refinement to Heusler's model has been to revive the theory of a Low German poetic source for *Niflunga saga*, and to identify corroborative evidence for such a source, namely a song of the Nibelungs mentioned by Saxo: the 'Lay of Grímhild's Perfidy'.⁷⁷ Andersson argued that this lay, known otherwise only in this passing reference by Saxo, was the Low German source for *Niflunga saga* itself.

The theory of memorized lays affords a framework in which to discuss significant parallels between texts from Scandinavia and Germany, and the striking resonances of these parallels in *Branwen*.

⁷⁵Heusler's classic exposition of his theory is found in *Nibelungensage und Nibelungenlied: Die Stoffgeschichte des deutschen Heldenepos*, sixth edition (Dortmund, 1965); for a review of the theory see W. Hoffmann, *Das Nibelungenlied*, sixth edition (Stuttgart, 1992), esp. p. 13 for Heusler's stemma, pp. 12–20 for the early critical reaction to Heusler's method, and p. 64 for more recent reassessments. ⁷⁶See T. M. Andersson, *A Preface to the Nibelungenlied* (Stanford, 1987), pp. 3–56, for the most succinct exposition and defense of the theory; see also idem, 'Die Oral-Formulaic Poetry im Germanischen', in *Heldensage und Heldendichtung im Germanischen*, edited by Heinrich Beck (Berlin, 1988), pp. 1–14, for a reply to the application of the oral-formulaic hypothesis to the *Nibelungenlied*. ⁷⁷T. M. Andersson, 'Niflunga saga in the Light of German and Danish Materials', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 7 (1974), 22–30; the theory of a Low German poetic source was first advanced by Heinrich Hempel, *Nibelungenstudien*, I, *Nibelungenlied, Thidrikssaga und Balladen* (Heidelberg, 1926), pp. 31–109; see also idem, 'Sächsische Nibelungendichtung und sächsischer Ursprung der Þiðrekssaga', in his *Kleine Schriften*, edited by H. W. Heinrichs (Heidelberg, 1966), pp. 209–25. For the 'Lay of Grímhild's Perfidy', see Saxo XIII.6.7.

Jackson stressed that the narratives which he called International Popular Tales have a definite place and time of origin, although vagaries in the collecting of tales and the rarity of early literary records mean that these can only occasionally be traced.⁷⁸ Mac Cana's argument that *Branwen* contains learned material from Ireland is consonant with Jackson's analysis, the only real doubt being whether the transmission was written. The movement of the Continental legend of the Nibelungs to Britain and the Norse world need not be questioned, as the surviving corpus of Nibelung poetry and prose in Norse witnesses that the transmission took place.⁷⁹ The form of the memorized lay through which this transmission was effected encourages the retention of the story's shape and key motifs, and it is presumably various lays representing gradual stages in the development of the story which are reflected in the written versions discussed in this article. It is this relatively stable transmission which allows us to trace the movement of the tale of the Nibelungs across northern Europe and identify the Nibelung narrative, and not unspecified prehistory or presumed British tradition, as a source for *Branwen*.

It is argued here that the story-shape and motifs of the Nibelung narrative are used in *Branwen* with the same conscious allusion to their place of origin as is the Irish material in the tale, as demonstrated by Mac Cana. The argument that the Irishness of the material identified by Mac Cana is meant to be perceived is assured by the fact that the tale is about an expedition to Ireland: the employment of Irish stories to embellish a tale about an Irish campaign is a tour-de-force of the storyteller's art. But what would be the Welsh author's aim in lacing his story with allusions to the Nibelung legend? *Branwen* has the most in common with the Continental versions of the Nibelung legend, yet the evidence is hardly strong enough to compel us to accept direct German sources, nor is there any indication that the Welsh author had any interest in the Continent. A readier explanation is the Norse presence in Ireland which, depending on the period of *Branwen*'s composition, may have represented for the Welsh as familiar a cultural face of Ireland as that of the Celtic Irish.

The Norse dominance of Dublin and their influence around the Irish Sea have been the object of a notable renewal of interest among histo-

⁷⁸Jackson, *International Popular Tale*, pp. 37–66. ⁷⁹The potential for the transmission of the Nibelung tale to the non-Norse communities in the British Isles is corroborated by echoes of *Atlakviða* in Irish folklore; see Bo Almqvist, 'The Viking Ale and the Rhine Gold', in *Viking Ale*, edited by Ní Dhuibhne-Almqvist and Ó Catháin, pp. 65–81.

rians in recent years, with the Norse influence in Wales and on Welsh politics coming especially under attention.⁸⁰ Unfortunately, the question of whether the Welsh author of *Branwen* would have been familiar with a dominantly Norse Dublin hinges on the date of the Four Branches, which is notoriously vexed. A date in the second half of the eleventh century long found many supporters, with Ifor Williams suggesting c. 1060, and T. M. Charles-Edwards settling for between 1050 and 1120.⁸¹ If this range of dates were entertained, it would bring the composition of *Branwen* well within the ambit of the continuing Norse settlement in eleventh-century Dublin. The Welsh familiarity with this Norse Dublin is amply evidenced by the medieval biographies of Gruffudd ap Cynan, namely the Middle Welsh *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan* and the Latin *Vita Griffini Filii Conani*.⁸² The biographies are mostly concerned with Gruffudd's early years and his ties to royal dynasties of both the Norse as well as the Irish. Kari Maund's claims that the *Historia*'s account of Gruffudd's ties to the Gaelic dynasties of Ireland is extremely unreliable and that the author in fact had an almost complete lack of knowledge of Irish affairs in Gruffudd's time may be overstated and has met with criticism.⁸³ Yet, while the account of Gruffudd's Irish connections are shady enough at least to rouse Maund's suspicions, his ties to the Norse ruling class through his mother, and the claim itself that he endured exile

⁸⁰See, especially, K. L. Maund, *Ireland, Wales, and England in the Eleventh Century* (Woodbridge, 1991); Seán Duffy, 'Ostmen, Irish and Welsh in the Eleventh Century', *Peritia*, 9 (1995), 379–96; Wendy Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 56–60; Colmán Etchingham, 'North Wales, Ireland and the Isles: The Insular Viking Zone', *Peritia*, 15 (2001), 145–87.

⁸¹See Williams, *Pedeir Keinc*, pp. xii–xx; T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Date of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1970, pp. 263–98, reprinted in *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays*, edited by C. W. Sullivan (New York, 1996), pp. 19–58. Patrick Sims-Williams, 'The Submission of Irish Kings in Fact and Fiction: Henry II, Bendigeidfran, and the Dating of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *CMCS*, 22 (Winter, 1991), 31–61, reviews the various attempts to establish a date for the Four Branches, and after undermining the criteria for Charles-Edwards's date, leaves the question open. For the emerging trend to assign a late date to the Four Branches, including Sims-Williams's more recent suggestions, see below. ⁸²*Historia Gruffud vab Kenan*, edited by D. S. Evans (Cardiff, 1977); *Vita Griffini Filii Conanii: The Medieval Latin Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan*, edited by Paul Russell (Cardiff, 2005); the latter was long believed to be a modern translation of the *Historia*, but Russell argues that one manuscript, the source for his edition, preserves a version of the *Vita* which was itself the medieval text of which the *Historia* is the translation; on the date of composition, see below, n. 88. ⁸³Maund, *Ireland, Wales, and England*, pp. 171–82; for the critical reaction, see, especially Duffy, 'Ostmen'.

in Dublin, have escaped serious doubt, and the *Historia*'s author appears on familiar ground in this regard. Colmán Etchingham, in giving the label 'Insular Viking Zone' to the political world in which Gruffudd lived, draws attention to the connection of north Wales especially with a Norse-dominated Dublin. All in all, we have little reason to doubt that a medieval Welsh author, one contemporary or at least with access to an historical memory of Gruffudd's times, would have known of a Dublin when it still thrived as a Norse cultural centre, rather than a town we could consider any special bastion of native Irish traditions.⁸⁴

We might recall B. G. Charles's view that Gruffudd's reign was a conduit for Scandinavian influence on the revival of Welsh culture.⁸⁵ This view, largely rejected by Mac Cana, has proven itself ripe for re-examination, as the undoubted familiarity of the Welsh with the Norse world implies at least the possibility for cultural exchange.⁸⁶ Judith Jesch identifies evidence of such an exchange in the *Historia*'s apparent confusion of Harald hárfagri, 'Fairhair', an early king of Norway, with Harald harðáði, 'the Severe', the father of Magnús berfœt.⁸⁷ This confusion is, according to Jesch, an accurate reflection of Norse traditions attributable to contemporary historical research then underway on Orkney and only just spreading to Iceland. The *Historia* and the *Vita* are at least evidence that the Welsh were not averse to borrowing from the fruits of Norse historical research. This trace of Norse learned activity in the biographies of Gruffudd ap Cynan throws further light on the continuing memory of a Norse Dublin long after Gruffudd's generation. Echoes of a Norse Ireland in *Branwen*, if such there are, need not necessarily reflect experience contemporary with the author, but may equally represent the later influence of a reservoir of inherited written sources.

Written intermediaries were probably the case with the *Vita* and the *Historia* — as intermediary sources may, in some fashion, be considered normative for historical works.⁸⁸ The case of prose fiction and its sources

⁸⁴Concerning the agency of the Norse themselves in the memory of their dominance of Dublin, we can note the likelihood that Dublin itself may have been a centre for historical writing in Norse, although only traces of this activity survive; see Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Viking Ireland — Afterthoughts', in *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, edited by H. B. Clarke and others (Dublin, 1998), pp. 421–52 (pp. 447–52). ⁸⁵B. G. Charles, *Old Norse Relations with Wales* (Cardiff, 1934), pp. 74–84. ⁸⁶For Mac Cana, see above, n. 2. ⁸⁷Judith Jesch, 'Norse Historical Traditions and the *Historia Gruffudd vab Kenan*', in *Gruffudd ap Cynan: A Collaborative Biography*, edited by K. L. Maund (Woodbridge, 1996), pp. 117–48. ⁸⁸The degree to which the *Vita* and the *Historia* depend on written intermediaries as opposed to simple memory hinges, of course, on the question of their dates. Maund, *Ireland, Wales, and*

poses problems of a different order. The steadily emerging trend to assign a later date to the Four Branches, reflective of the fact that the manuscript evidence begins only in the thirteenth century, is an inevitable recognition of the limitations of dating medieval prose narrative by criteria such as language, or putting too much faith into supposed allusions to contemporary events or cultural realities.⁸⁹ As the question of the date of the Four Branches, and *Branwen* in particular, is not likely to be settled to the satisfaction of all parties in the near future, I suggest that, at the very least, it is valuable to reassess the question of the cultural world portrayed in *Branwen* in terms of the parallel case of the biographies of Gruffudd ap Cynan. This is to say, Welsh imaginative narrative, as assuredly as Welsh historiography, of a twelfth- or thirteenth-century date could consciously retain reminiscences of an eleventh-century view of Ireland, where Norse settlement remained culturally distinct from its Irish surroundings. It is this Ireland which is reflected in *Branwen*, where the Nibelung legend, familiar in an early Norse guise and associated with Ireland as much as with the Continent, complements the dense texture of Irish allusions identified by Mac Cana.

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion was intended to demonstrate that we have grounds to believe that the author of *Branwen* was acquainted with at least some form of Germanic heroic narrative and that he evoked Germanic tales according to the same wellspring of artistic inspiration

England, pp. 172–73, dated the *Historia* to as late as the early thirteenth century, but Arthur Jones's range of dates between 1137 and 1170, defended by Duffy, 'Ostmen', pp. 388–89, and, more recently, narrowed to 1137–48 for the *Vita* by Russell, pp. 46–47, will probably prove the more enduring. ⁸⁹See Helen Fulton's cautious discussion of the date of the *Four Branches*, which she assigns to no earlier than the thirteenth century, in 'The *Mabinogi* and the Education of Princes in Medieval Wales', in *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society*, edited by Helen Fulton (Dublin, 2005), pp. 230–47 (p. 232). Patrick Sims-Williams has expressed his belief that the *Four Branches* are 'roughly twelfth-century', though he has done so in a discussion which highlights the reflection in *Branwen* of learned Welsh/Irish connections of the eleventh century; see *The Iron House in Ireland*, H. M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures, 16 (Cambridge, 2005). The inadequacy of dating from orthographic and linguistic criteria is highlighted by the doubts thrown on even so apparently certain a case as the late Old Welsh origin of *Culhwch and Olwen*; see Simon Rodway, 'The Date and Authorship of *Culhwch ac Olwen*: A Reassessment', *CMCS*, 49 (Summer 2005), 21–44. Dating the *Four Branches* is further complicated by the increasing recognition of their stylistic uniformity with the post-Norman romances, for which, see Sioned Davies, *Crefft y Cysfarwydd* (Cardiff, 1995).

which accounts for the many allusions to native Irish lore. The Germanic content seems to be structurally essential and Nutt was justified in noting long ago that the wealth of parallels shared by *Branwen* and the cycle of the Nibelungs is too great to be dismissed as coincidence. It has been seen that the tales of Hrólfr and the Nibelungs come out of a culture that was by no means adverse to translating and adapting narratives across linguistic borders. The Low German source for the Norwegian *Niflunga saga*, identified by Andersson with the 'Lay of Grímhild's Perfidy' that was sung before the Danish King Knut according to Saxo's Latin history, is a fascinating witness to the international, multilingual reception of memorized lays, and their transformation in the learned literature of the day. This same nexus of texts affords a tantalizing model for a possible similar spreading of Nibelung tales to the learned entertainment of medieval Wales.⁹⁰

⁹⁰I am grateful to David Klausner, Andy Orchard, and Ann Dooley, who read drafts of this paper and made invaluable suggestions for its improvement, as I am thankful for the Editor's guidance in preparing the final version.