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Title of extract: **The Ridding Treatment of the 'Watchman' device in Branwen and Togail Bruidne Da Derga**

Name of Author: **Sims-Williams, P.**

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

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

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable): **Studia Celtica Vol 12/13 1978/79**

Publisher: **University of Wales Press**

Pages scanned: **83 - 117**

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

Name of Designated Person

authorising scanning: *E.L. Ham*

Date authorised: 22.02.17.

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Riddling Treatment of the 'Watchman Device' in *Branwen and Togail Bruidne Da Derga*

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THE Middle Welsh story *Branwen Ferch Lŷr* contains a fine, elaborate example of the narrative device known to Celticists as the 'watchman device' in its account of how news of the British invasion of Ireland reached Matholwch. For the purposes of mere plot the author need have said no more than: 'Matholwch heard of that'; but the 'watchman device' enabled him to exploit the rich imaginative potential of the widespread theme, 'Giant wades the ocean',¹ and also to develop the character of Branwen:

The swineherds of Matholwch were upon the sea-shore one day, busied with their swine. And because of the sight they saw upon the sea, they came to Matholwch. 'Lord,' said they, 'greeting.' 'God prosper you,' said he, 'and you have news?' 'Lord,' said they, 'we have wondrous news: a forest have we seen upon the deep, in a place where we never saw a single tree.' 'That is a strange thing,' said he; 'could you see aught but that?' 'We could, lord,' said they; 'a big mountain close to the forest, and that moving, and a lofty ridge on the mountain, and a lake on each side of the ridge, and the forest and the mountain and all those things moving [*mynydd mawr gyr llaw y coet, a hwmw ar gerdet; ac eskeir aruchel ar y mynydd, a llynn o pop parth y'r eskeir; a'r coet, a'r mynydd, a phob peth oll o hynny ar gerdet*].' 'Why,' said he, 'there is no one here will know anything of that, except Branwen knows. Do you ask her.' Messengers went to Branwen. 'Lady,' said they, 'what thinkest thou that is?' 'Though lady I am not,' said she, 'I know what that is: the men of the Island of the Mighty on their way over, having heard of my woes and my humiliation.' 'What is the forest that was seen upon the sea?' they asked. 'The masts of ships and their yards,' said she. 'Alas,' said they, 'what was the mountain that could be seen alongside the ships?' 'Bendigeidfran, my brother, that was,' she said, 'coming by wading. There was never a ship in which he might be contained.' 'What was the lofty ridge, and the lake on each side of the ridge?' 'He,' said she, 'looking towards this island; he is angered. The two lakes on each side of the ridge are his two eyes, one on each side of his nose.' [*Beth oed yr eskeir aruchel a'r llynn o bop parth y'r eskeir?*] 'Ef,' *heb hi, 'yn edrych ar yr ynys honn, llidyawc yw. Y deu lygat ef o pop parth y drwyn yw y dwy llynn o bop parth y'r eskeir.'*²

It was first pointed out by Thurneysen that the watchman device used here was a common feature of early Irish stories.³ A well-known example is the

¹ Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, rev. ed. (Copenhagen, 1955-8), F531.3.1.

² *Pedeir Keinc Y Mabinogi*, ed. Ifor Williams, 2nd edn. (Cardiff, 1951), pp. 39-40; *The Mabinogion*, trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (London, 1949), pp. 33-4.

³ Rudolf Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage* (Halle, Saale, 1921), p. 61.

'Toichim na mBuiden' section of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, where the messenger, Mac Roth, describes each of the hostile warriors or companies of warriors in turn, and Fergus identifies them for Ailill one by one. The watchman device consists essentially of a watcher seeing at a distance persons that he does not know and describing them to another person, who recognizes and identifies them. In some examples, including those already mentioned, the knowledgeable person has to recognize them from the ignorant watcher's description alone, without seeing them for himself. These examples' greater verisimilitude does not conceal the device's basic artificiality; the descriptions are really aimed at the reader or audience, rather than at the character in the story to whom they are ostensibly given. The watchman device is a means of introducing or characterizing the actors in a story, of displaying the relationship of other characters through direct speech, and of evoking a sense of expectancy or foreboding.

Thurneysen suggested that the Irish watchman device was derived from Book III of the *Iliad*, where Priam watches the Achaeans from the walls of Troy and calls upon Helen to name them as he describes them one by one. This conclusion has been accepted by a number of Irish scholars, notably by Professor Carney in his chapter on 'the external element in Irish saga'.¹ There are, of course, a number of obvious difficulties in the way of supposing direct influence from the text of Homer. The linguistic problem appears more insuperable in the light of modern scholarship than it probably did in Thurneysen's day; knowledge of Greek seems to have been very scarce.² There is also a literary-historical problem; according to a recent survey 'no clear evidence for direct literary borrowing from Greek epic' in early Irish texts has yet been presented.³ Professor Carney avoids these difficulties over transmission by the argument that the Irish watchman device was taken from the 'mixed Christian classical culture of the early monastic period',⁴ and he substantiates this argument by a number of examples of the watchman device from this culture. The majority of these examples do not, however, exhibit all the characteristics of the watchman device, and cannot be regarded as possible intermediaries between Homer and the Irish. It depends, of course, how loosely the watchman device is defined.⁵ Yet proceeding purely empirically, it becomes

¹ James Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin, 1955), pp. 305-21.

² W. E. Stanford, 'Towards a History of Classical Influences in Ireland', *Proc. of the Royal Irish Acad.* 70 (1970), Sect. C, 22-7. Cf. M. Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 4 (1975), 67-8.

³ Stanford, p. 32.

⁴ Carney, p. 306.

⁵ Gerard Murphy has already pointed out problems of definition in connection with the passages cited from *Táin Bó Fraich*, c. 4, and *Beowulf*, vv. 229-300: 'the *Táin Bó Fraich* and *Beowulf* examples, in which Professor Carney has a special interest, belong to a sub-division in which neither the watchman, nor those to whom he reports, know the identity of the approaching stranger. This sub-division is very different from the *Iliad* version of the device and is widely spread. As well as in the Old Irish *Táin Bó Fraich* and the Old English *Beowulf*, which are mentioned by Professor Carney, it occurs in the Old Irish *Cath Maige Tuired*, the Middle Welsh *Culhwch and Olwen*, and the Old Norse *Völsunga Saga* (*Ægise*, 8 (1955-7), 157 n. 3). The device described is so widely attested in the medieval 'porter scene' that it cannot even be regarded as a subdivision of the watch-

clear that there is a much smaller common denominator between them and Homer than between Homer and the Irish watchman device. Most of the examples form a group of analogous stories, perhaps ultimately inter-related, orally or otherwise, in Notker Balbulus's ninth-century *De Carolo Magno*,¹ in the twelfth-century *Vita Kentigerni*, in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, and in Eilhart's twelfth-century *Tristan*.² These stories can be summed up as follows: 'X approaches a knowledgeable and an ignorant watcher, preceded by A and B. There is an inverse order of magnificence. The "ignorant watcher" thinks in turn that first A and then B is X, but is put right by the knowledgeable watcher, who makes the final identification.'³

man device. (Note also that the coastguard in *Beowulf* does not in fact report.) See further R. S. Loomis's review of Carney, *Medium Aevum*, 26 (1957), 197. In two late examples of the watchman device quoted by Carney, pp. 317-21, it is combined with the porter scene—*Féis Tighe Chondín*, c. 2, and Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh's poem based on *Cath Maige Tuired* (*Irish Bardic Poetry*, ed. and trans. Osborn Bergin (Dublin, 1970), no. 17).

¹ *Notkeri Balbuli Gesta Karoli Magni Imperatoris*, ed. H. F. Haefele, *Mon. Germ. Hist., Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum*, n.s. xii (Berlin, 1962); *Two Lives of Charlemagne*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1969). Carney quotes the anecdote in ii. 6, but a much closer analogue is the story of Desiderius in ii. 17, cited by Jan de Vries, *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend*, trans. B. J. Timmer (London, 1963), p. 76. De Vries doubts whether the oft-cited 'derivative' of this story in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, c. 101, is more than an analogue (*Snorri Sturlason: Heimskringla* I, ed. B. Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslenzk Fornrit* xxvi (Reykjavík, 1941), pp. 353-5 (cf. pp. cxxix-cxxx); *Snorri Sturlason: Heimskringla, Part I*, trans. S. Laing and J. Simpson (London, 1964), i. 89-90, c. 111 (sic). Miss Rosemary Graham, Trinity College Library, Cambridge, to whom I am much indebted for translating quantities of Snorri's material in Scandinavian languages, refers me to the Faroese ballad version of Snorri's story, 'Ormurin langi', *Færøsk Anthologi*, ed. V. U. Hammershaimb (Copenhagen, 1891), i, no. 35). Many writers have speculated that Notker had a popular source: see Thorpe, pp. 22, 36-7, 176-7, and 179 (cf. the bibliography of the Ogier legend given by Haefele, p. 82 nn.). An excellent example of the story is an American Negro oral sermon on the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, quoted in B. Gray, 'Repetition in Oral Literature', *Journal of American Folklore*, 84 (1971), 302. In view of what is known about the sources of the *Vita Kentigerni* (see K. Jackson in N. K. Chadwick et al., *Studies in the Early British Church* (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 273-357), one may conjecture that its author may have drawn on an oral Gaelic story similar to the story in the *Táin*, the version closest to the *Vita*'s in structure. For further Irish analogues see *Táin Bó Cúailnge Recension I*, ed. Cecile O'Rahilly (Dublin, 1976), line 9 n.

² It should be added that the story must have appeared in Eilhart's lost twelfth-century French source, as is shown by the parallel derivative in the Strassburg fragment of Thomas's *Tristan* (*Thomas: les fragments du Roman de Tristan*, ed. B. H. Wind, *Textes littéraires français* xcii (Geneva-Paris, 1960), pp. 80-3; *Gottfried von Strassburg: Tristan, with the Surviving Fragments of the Tristan of Thomas*, trans. A. T. Hatto (Harmondsworth, 1960), pp. 321-2). The concluding scene of *Lanval* is very similar (*Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. J. Rychner, *Les classiques français du moyen âge* xciii (Paris, 1966), pp. 86-92, vv. 461-632; *Lays of Marie de France*, trans. (!) E. Mason (London, 1911), pp. 72-6); some scholars hold that it derives from the lost source of Eilhart and Thomas (E. Hæpffner, *Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris, 1935), p. 65, and Rychner, p. 259; contrariwise G. Schoepperle, *Tristan and Isolte* (Frankfurt, 1913), pp. 151-2). In turn *Lanval* seems to have influenced the very similar end of the anonymous *Lai de Graelent* (*The Lays of Desiré, Graelent and Melion*, ed. E. M. Grimes, (New York, 1928), pp. 95-7, vv. 573-636; trans. (!) Mason, pp. 158-9): see Rychner, p. 253, and J. Frappier, *Romanic Philology*, 22 (1969), 607-8. Possibly the *Tristan* archetype copied Notker; note for instance that they end with a similar light image (ed. Haefele, p. 83; *Eilhart von Oberge*, ed. F. Lichtenstein, *Quellen und Forschungen zur Sprach- und Culturgeschichte*, xix (Strassburg, 1877), vv. 6512-15).

³ Carney, p. 309.

A number of scholars have accepted that these stories are versions of the watchman device.¹ It seems to me, on the other hand, that they are quite distinct and probably entirely independent: neither watcher *describes* the approaching personages to the other, and the stories' point lies in the ignorant watcher's mistaken identification of lesser personages with the important personage he expects, not in the knowledgeable watcher's identifications. Similar problems arise with the passage from Gregory of Tours which Professor Carney quotes as a 'development of the "watching from the wall" device where the element of "recognition from description without seeing" is present':²

Attila . . . came to Orleans . . . The besieged inhabitants begged their Bishop to tell them what to do . . . The Bishop said: 'Keep a watch from the city wall, to see if God in his pity is sending us help.' His hope was that, through God's compassion, Aetius might be advancing, for [he] had gone to interview that leader in Arles when he foresaw what was going to happen. They watched out from the wall, but they saw no one. 'Pray in all faith,' said [the Bishop], 'for this day the Lord will deliver you.' They continued their prayers. 'Look out a second time,' said the Bishop. They peered out, but they saw no one bringing help. The Bishop said a third time: 'If you continue to pray in faith, God will come quickly.' . . . When their prayer was finished, they were ordered by the old man to look out a third time. Far away they saw what looked like a cloud of dust rising from the ground. This they reported to the Bishop. 'It is the help sent by God,' said he . . . Aetius arrived.³

This passage has little in common with the watchman device, apart from the merely realistic 'watching from the wall', for the 'recognition from description without seeing' has little in common with the same element as it occurs in the watchman device (for instance in *Branwen*).⁴ The point of Gregory's narrative lies not in the description of the approaching army, but in the suspense concerning the outcome and in the confirmation of the Bishop's expectation in faith. It looks very much like a reminiscence of the biblical story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal, which follows a similar pattern.⁵

Professor Carney's remaining example is an undoubted watchman device: Statius's imitation of the Homeric passage in his *Thebaid* (Book VII, 243-358).⁶ Here Statius seems to have found no imitators in medieval Latin and its dependent literatures. (It is unlikely that some important

¹ De Vries, pp. 75-7; P. L. Henry, *The Early English and Celtic Lyric* (London, 1966), pp. 219-20.

² Carney, p. 310 n. 2.
³ *Gregori Episcopi Turonensis Libri Historiarum X*, ii. 7, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, *MGH Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum*, i, part 1, 2nd edn. (Hanover, 1951), p. 48; *Gregory of Tours: The History of the Franks*, trans. L. Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 116.

⁴ The cloud in Gregory (*viderunt a longe quasi nebulam de terra consurgere*) is a realistic description of an approaching army, quite different from the 'erroneous description' in *Branwen*, etc. discussed below.

⁵ 1 Kings 18:41-5 (note v. 44: *Ecce nubecula parva quasi vestigium hominis ascendebat de mari*). A similar pattern is found in 2 Samuel 13:34-6.

⁶ See p. 117 below.

Latin version of the device has perished since the early Middle Ages.) It is difficult to imagine that he would have been an effective intermediary between Homer and the Latin West, for he covers the bare bones of the Homeric device with such a wealth of elaboration that its structure is scarcely distinctive any more. It is improbable that the solitary Latin example of the watchman device in the *Thebaid* could have been the source of such a widespread feature of early Irish story, especially as there seems to be no conclusive evidence that the Latin epics, even the *Aeneid*, influenced the early Irish sagas even superficially.¹

Professor Stanford has suggested that the resemblance between the Homeric and Irish watchman devices may be coincidental: 'The incident might have been taken from life itself and could have been developed independently in each literary tradition. After all, it is a common occurrence in everyday life that one person asks another person about a number of strangers in the vicinity.'² This explanation cannot be ruled out, but I would tend to agree with Professor Carney that the Greek-Irish similarity should not be explained away in terms of 'independent origins',³ in view of the fact pointed out above that the device is artificial, and only superficially lifelike. Classicists, though unaware that the device occurs elsewhere, have in fact often noted a certain implausibility in the scene in *Iliad* iii (*teichoskopia*). Bowra comments:

It is certainly odd that the King of Troy should have waited ten years to ask the names of the chief men beleaguering his city. The scene is so simple that it may well have been part of the tradition, and this may account partly for its inclusion here. But once it was put here it served excellent purposes despite its intrinsic improbability. In the first place it presents the chief personalities on the Achaean side at close view . . . and in the second place it develops with great skill the position of Helen.⁴

Leaf and other defenders of Homer have compared his procedure to the conventions of drama: 'for the hearer this is the beginning of the war'; while Mazon, on the other hand, explains the contradiction as arising from the *Iliad*'s cyclical development.⁵ It seems probable, then, that already in the text of Homer the watchman device had a prehistory of some sort, as a narrative convention or as a traditional episode attached to the story of Troy, or both. This prehistory was, of course, oral. One may suggest, therefore, that the Irish watchman device may share a common oral origin with the Homeric one. Medievalists tend to regard Homer as standing at

¹ Murphy, p. 157 and n. 4.

² Stanford, pp. 32-3.

³ Carney, p. 307.

⁴ C. M. Bowra, *Tradition and Design in the Iliad* (Oxford, 1930), p. 112. The most sensitive analyses of the episode are: A. Parry, 'Have We Homer's *Iliad*?', *Yale Classical Studies*, 20 (1966), 197-200, and G. S. Kirk, *Homer and the Oral Tradition* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 81-4 and 142-3.

⁵ Walter Leaf, *A Companion to the Iliad* (London, 1892), p. 94, and *The Iliad*, 2nd edn. (London, 1900-2), i. 117; E. T. Owen, *The Story of the Iliad* (London, 1947), pp. 34-6; Paul Mazon, *et al.*, *Introduction à l'Iliade* (Paris, 1942), pp. 245-6; Alan J. B. Wace and Frank H. Stubbings, *A Companion to Homer* (London, 1962), pp. 51-2.

the dawn of literature, but there seems to be no stronger reason for thinking that the watchman device originated with the *Iliad*, or even in Greece. It is known that Ireland and Wales were open to international oral tales as far back as their literature is recorded and provide many early examples of migratory tale-types and motifs.¹ It seems quite likely that the manner as well as the matter of foreign story-telling should have been borrowed.² The Irish story-tellers may have borrowed the watchman device from some unknown oral source either in remote antiquity or in the early Middle Ages.

The hypothesis of oral dissemination can be supported by a number of vernacular examples of the watchman device outside Ireland. De Vries has pointed out one in Firdausi's Persian epic, the *Shahnama*, completed about 1010 in its final form.³ It is remarkably similar to Homer's *teichoskopia*, but of course independent. Suhrab, having come to his fatherland, surveys from an eminence the Iranian host marshalled against him, and questions his Iranian prisoner of war, Hajir, about them. The dialogue takes the form of long, detailed descriptions of the enemy warriors' tents and entourages by Suhrab, followed by Hajir's identifications of the warrior at the centre of each group, with a few more descriptive details. As in Homer, both characters can see what one describes; there is no 'recognition from description without seeing'. Thurneysen himself first pointed out a parallel to the Homeric and Irish watchman device in chapter 63 of *Laxdæla saga*, which was written in Iceland in the mid thirteenth century: Helgi, troubled by dreams, sends his shepherd to search the woods round the shieling where he is staying, and the boy returns with the news that he has seen some men sitting on their saddles in a circle and having breakfast. Helgi asks him to describe each in turn, and he does so, also specifying the nature of their saddles and clothing, and one by one Helgi identifies his enemies.⁴ In his edition of this saga, Kr. Kålund compared chapter 304 of *Thithriks saga*, which is generally regarded as having been written in Norway about the same time.⁵ This is also an example of the watchman device. King Isung is sitting within his castle when Sigurd enters with news: he describes some splendid tents which have been set up outside and thirteen shields in front of them. As Sigurd describes the devices on the shields one by one, those within the castle identify the warriors to whom they belong, sometimes commenting on the

¹ K. Jackson, *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff, 1961), pp. 67-8.

² P. Sims-Williams, "'Is it Fog or Smoke or Warriors Fighting?': Irish and Welsh Parallels to the *Finnsburg* Fragment", *Bull. of the Board of Celtic Studies* (forthcoming).

³ De Vries, p. 77. For those favouring an Indo-European origin for the device it may be noted that the background to the epic was Iranian rather than Islamic.

⁴ *Laxdæla saga*, ed. E. Ól. Sveinsson, *IF* v (1934), pp. 186-9; *Laxdæla Saga*, trans. M. Magnusson and H. Pálsson (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 202-5.

⁵ Kr. Kålund, *Laxdæla saga* (Copenhagen, 1889-91), p. xlii n. *Þiðriks saga af Bern*, ed. H. Bertelsen (Copenhagen, 1905-11), ii. 1-3; *Die Geschichte Thidreks von Bern*, trans. F. Erichsen, *Thule: altnordische Dichtung und Prosa*, 2nd s. xxii (Jena, 1924), pp. 243-5.

appropriateness of the device. It is obvious that both these Scandinavian authors are using the narrative technique quite self-consciously, though the author of *Laxdæla saga* covers this up somewhat with his elaborate realism. It is less easy to be certain about two passages in two other thirteenth-century Icelandic sagas.¹ In chapter 69 of *Njáls saga* a shepherd reports to Njal that he has found twenty-four men in the wood: "'They had tethered their horses and were fast asleep, and had hung their shields in the branches.'" He had observed them so closely that he could describe the weapons and clothing of all of them, and Njal could tell exactly who each one was.² This incident could have been 'taken from life itself', but it looks very much like a deliberately condensed and realistic adaptation of the Scandinavian watchman device such as we find it in *Laxdæla saga* and *Thithriks saga*. In chapter 31 of *Vatnsdæla saga* Thorstein's workmen see ten men baiting their horses in his meadow. 'They were all in coloured clothes. One was wearing an outer coat and a gown of fine cloth.' The latter nonchalantly cut off the hem of the gown, which had got dirty. It is said that the workmen told Thorstein what they had seen and heard, and showed him the hem, and that Thorstein recognized the strangers from their behaviour.³ This may also be a literary refinement of the watchman device. If so, the set descriptive element has been almost eliminated, and the direct speech entirely so. Finally, one may suggest that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* contains a possible Welsh example of the watchman device, in addition to that in *Branwen*, in the episode in which Rhonabwy questions Iddawg about the hosts mustering for the battle of Baddon:

'Iddawg,' said Rhonabwy, 'what is the pure white troop yonder?' 'Those are the men of Llychlyn, and March son of Meirchawn at their head. A first cousin of Arthur is he.' . . . 'Iddawg,' said Rhonabwy, 'what is the pure black troop yonder?' 'The men of Denmark, and Edern son of Nudd at their head.'⁴

The similarity of the circumstances of this episode—before a battle—to many examples of the watchman device encourages one to think that it is a true instance of it. If so, it is significant that it should appear in this text, which is a parody of the narrative commonplaces of early Welsh story-telling. However, it cannot be advanced more than tentatively, since the set descriptions are chiefly given to the narrator, and since some sort of dialogue between guide and hero often occurs in the dream or vision genre to which *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* belongs.⁵

¹ Miss R. Graham has kindly pointed these out to me.

² *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. E. Ól. Sveinsson, *IF* xii (1954), p. 170; *Njal's Saga*, trans. M. Magnusson and H. Pálsson (Harmondsworth, 1960), p. 158.

³ *Vatnsdæla saga*, ed. E. Ól. Sveinsson, *IF* viii (1939), pp. 84-5; *The Vatnsdalers' Saga*, trans. Gwyn Jones (Princeton, 1944), pp. 86-7. For recognition from behaviour cf. *TBC Recension I*, lines 330-72.

⁴ Ed. Melville Richards (Cardiff, 1948), pp. 9-10; trans. Jones and Jones, p. 143.

⁵ See *passim* and H. R. Patch, *The Other World According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), pp. 80-133. Cf. *Mágus saga*, ed. P. Ólason (Reykjavík, 1916), c. 41, and G. Cederschiöld, *Fornsögur Suðrlanda* (Lund, 1884), pp. 30-1.

It is most unlikely that any of these vernacular watchman devices derive from the classical tradition, though this has been argued in some cases. Old Norse scholars have often maintained that the device in *Laxdæla saga* was borrowed from outside Iceland.¹ This is no doubt true; the difficult question is when and where from. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson has discussed the possibility of the author having borrowed from *Thithriks saga*, but seems to feel that the difference between the two texts makes direct imitation unlikely, despite some affinities between the information about the heroes in both.² He observes that the two Norse passages stand in a tradition which stretches back to Homer,³ and suggests borrowing from some foreign romance, perhaps orally since the watchman device does not figure in any of the romances translated into Norse. This hypothesis is unconvincing and unnecessary. No true examples of the watchman device have been found in French romance, and it is unlikely that it once featured in it and later disappeared, considering the bulk and repetitiveness of this literature. The one passage Sveinsson cites as a possible source will not serve, for it lacks the essential dialogue pattern. (Another difference from the Norse examples and Homer, etc., is that the people described are not the speakers' opponents.) It is the passage in the 'Three Day Tournament' episode in Chrétien de Troyes's *Lancelot* where the courtiers watching the tournament talk among themselves:

'Do you see that knight yonder with a golden band across the middle of his red shield? That is Gouvernauz of Roberdic. And do you see that other one, who has an eagle and dragon painted side by side upon his shield? That is the son of the King of Aragon . . .'⁴

It might perhaps be argued that Chrétien was adapting the watchman device in Statius or in some hypothetical romance which borrowed from Statius (the relevant passage of Statius is omitted in *Le Roman de Thèbes*, the only French version of the *Thebaid* he could have known); but more probably Chrétien was merely elaborating and varying a dialogue in the 'Four Day Tournament' episode in his earlier *Cligès*, where the knights about to joust converse:⁵

'Don't you see, then, what an adversary yonder party has sent against us? Anyone who does not know should learn that he is a pillar, able to stand beside

¹ Kålund, loc. cit.; B. M. Ólsen, 'Um Sturlungu', *Safn til sögu Íslands*, 3 (1896), 427; Sveinsson, *Laxdæla*, pp. xi and xxxi; G. Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 248-9; R. Heller, 'Studien zu Aufbau und Stil der Laxdæla saga', *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi*, 75 (1960), 125 n. 5; A. M. Arent Madelung, *The Laxdæla saga: its Structural Patterns* (Chapel Hill, 1972), pp. 143 and 210 n. 9.

² Sveinsson, *Laxdæla*, p. xxxi. See also Kålund, loc. cit.

³ And on to Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (p. xi n. 1, without reference).

⁴ *Le chevalier de la charette*, ed. M. Roques, *CFMA* lxxxvi (1958), vv. 5773 ff.; *Arthurian Romances by Chrétien de Troyes*, trans. W. W. Comfort (London, 1914), pp. 343-4.

⁵ This is not to argue that the *Lancelot* tournament as a whole was modelled on that in *Cligès*. For the quotation see: *Cligès*, ed. A. Micha, *CFMA* lxxxiv (1957), vv. 4606-13 (cf. 4622-32); trans. Comfort, p. 151.

the best three in the world.' 'Who is he, then?' 'Why, don't you see? It is Sagremor the Wild.' 'Is it he?' 'It surely is.'

This is surely a simple piece of realism, unconnected with the watchman device. The hypothesis of a French literary source for the Norse watchman device must therefore be abandoned for lack of evidence. The motif in *Thithriks saga* of the shield-devices may remind one of French chivalric romances, such as *Lancelot*; but, as Svend Grundtvig pointed out in his edition of the ballad version, *Kong Diderik og hans Kæmper*, it occurs as far back as Aeschylus's *Seven Against Thebes* (vv. 375-652), in which the messenger describes to Eteocles the shield-devices (*sēmata*) of the warriors outside the seven gates of the city.¹ The description of the tents and shields in *Thithriks saga* may also be compared with the descriptions of the tents and standards in the *Shahnama* watchman device, while an Irish watchman device in chapter 74 of the *Bórama* features the banners of the men of Ireland (not described in detail, however).² Formal description is clearly part of the watchman device everywhere and not peculiarly French. It is said that the lengthy portraits in the *Laxdæla saga* example are untypical of the Icelandic sagas. Nevertheless, such descriptions do occur sometimes—the roughly contemporary description of Thorvald's sons in chapter 84 of *Íslendinga saga* has often been compared³—so their presence in the *Laxdæla saga* episode does not show that its watchman device as a whole was imitated from a foreign romance, even if it is true that the technique derives from medieval Latin rhetorical portraiture. But, again, such detailed portraiture may belong rather to the oral watchman device.

A strong reason against supposing that the Norse watchman device derives from Homer and Statius is the fact that it includes an important variation which they lack, the 'recognition from description without seeing'. This aligns it rather with the Irish and Welsh examples of the watchman device which include this variation, such as the passages in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and *Branwen* already cited.⁴ It is most unlikely on general grounds that the device entered Norse literature through Irish or Welsh literary influence;⁵ it is much more likely that the Norse authors drew on

¹ *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*, ed. S. Grundtvig et al. (Copenhagen, 1853-), i. 63 n.

² Ed. and trans. W. Stokes, *Revue celtique*, 13 (1892), 70-1.

³ *Sturlunga Saga*, trans. J. H. McGrew and R. G. Thomas (New York, 1970-4), i. 251-2. See Ólsen, pp. 427-8; Sveinsson, *Laxdæla*, pp. xxxi-xxxii; Madelung, pp. 156, 188-9, 191-2, and 234 n. 36; R. Heller, 'Laxdæla saga und Sturlunga saga', *ANF* 76 (1961), 127. On p. 131 Heller further compares the description of Orm's sons in *Svinfellinga saga*, c. 11 (trans. McGrew and Thomas, ii. 337-8).

⁴ Carney, p. 310 n. 2, followed by Proinsias Mac Cana (*Branwen Daughter of Llŷr* (Cardiff, 1958), p. 28), unwarrantably regards this variation as an Irish innovation first occurring in *Fled Bricrend* (ed. and trans. George Henderson, *Irish Texts Soc.* ii (London, 1899), cc. 44-53). Carney, p. 311, mistakenly includes *Tochmarc Emire* (*Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories*, ed. A. G. Van Hamel, *Medieval and Modern Irish Series* iii (Dublin, 1933), cc. 11-16; *Ancient Irish Tales*, trans. Tom Peete Cross and C. H. Slover, repr. (Dublin, 1969), pp. 156-7), for here Emer recognizes Cú Chulainn from his person, not from the description (c. 17).

⁵ The hypothesis of Irish literary influence on Icelandic sagas seems to have been generally abandoned. See Theodore M. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins*

a traditional story-telling device which had spread orally. The evidence is not sufficient for profitable speculation on the directions in which the device was transmitted.

In view of this other vernacular evidence, from Persia to Iceland, the possibility of the connection between Homer and the Irish watchman device being remote and non-literary has to be reconsidered, although Professor Carney has rejected it: 'If this technique were a form that was well established in Ireland in the pre-literary age it is unlikely that we would find in the manuscript versions so many signs of change and development during the period in question (c. 700–c. 1350). As it is, it seems that the various types can be stratified according to the date of the text in question.'¹ Possibly a detailed, dated list of all Irish watchmen devices would clarify its development from text to text. This evolution can hardly be straightforward, however; for instance, the watchman devices in the early recension of the *Táin* range from the simple to the complex, and *Fled Bricrend*, another early text, contains elaborate versions, while the instance at the beginning of the late *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne* is 'classical' in its simplicity.² Yet if it can be shown that the manuscript versions we have show an internal, literary development, this will not prove that the device's ultimate origin was literary rather than oral. Nor will one be able to assume that the pre-literary device would have evolved at a steady rate from the simple to the complex, so that its prehistory can be discovered by projecting the apparent evolution of the manuscript versions back into the past; it is known that tale-types can remain static over a long period of transmission and that oral transmission may, indeed, be a tightening, rigorous process³—this may also be true of the watchman device. The watchman device has an irreducible basic structure. In Homer and in some of the Irish sagas it is found in its simplest form; but this is not a sign that it is a late borrowing, or a borrowing through literary channels. Tale-types, which likewise have irreducible basic structures, can be known in the same place, at the same time, in various degrees of elaboration, without the elaborations being mistaken for the essential framework of the tale itself. It seems to me that this analogy with the oral state of tale-types applies very well to the great variety of watchman devices that we find within the *Táin*. On balance, then, the internal evidence does not affect the likelihood of the Irish watchman device having had an oral origin, and perhaps having continued to exist orally side by side with the manuscript literature which may reflect its oral state to a greater or lesser extent. Taking into account the widespread diffusion of the watchman device in

(New Haven, 1964), pp. 56–61. In view of the Germanic background of *Thithriks saga* it is not impossible that its watchman device is of continental German origin.

¹ Carney, p. 318.

² Ed. and trans. Nessa Ní Shéaghda, *ITS* xlviii (Dublin, 1967), lines 100–20 (Cross and Slover, p. 373).

³ Alan Bruford, 'Gaelic Folktales and Medieval Romances', *Béaloideas*, 34 (Dublin, 1969 for 1966), pp. 248–9.

the vernacular literatures on the one hand, and, on the other, the insuperable difficulties raised by the hypothesis of literary dissemination and the disadvantages of the 'realistic', polygenetic explanation, it is most probable that the watchman device was disseminated orally among early storytellers, Greek, Persian, Scandinavian, and Celtic.

The watchman device in *Branwen* is distinguished from those in the classical, Persian, and Norse texts by the fact that the initial description (which is also in effect an identification) is erroneous. This 'erroneous watchman device', as one may call it, occurs in a number of Irish sagas. Mac Roth's second reconnoitre in the 'Toichim na mBuiden' section of the *Táin* is a fine example of this imaginative treatment of the watchman device. I quote the fuller, *Book of Leinster* version, numbering the items to make the structure clear:

Once more Mac Roth scanned the plain. 1 He saw a great grey mist which filled the void between heaven and earth. 2 He seemed to see islands in lakes above the slopes of the mist. 3 He seemed to see yawning caverns in the forefront of the mist itself. 4 It seemed to him that pure-white linen cloths or sifted snow dropping down appeared to him through a rift in the same mist. 5 He seemed to see a flock of varied, wonderful, numerous birds, 6 or the shimmering of shining stars on a bright, frosty night, or the sparks of a blazing fire. . . He came forward to tell those tidings to where were Ailill and Medb and Fergus and the nobles of the men of Ireland. He told them these things. 'What was that, Fergus?' asked Ailill. 'Not difficult to tell,' said Fergus. 1 'The grey mist he saw which filled the void between earth and sky was the expiration of the breath of horses and heroes, and the cloud of dust from the ground and from the roads which rises above them driven by the wind so that it becomes a heavy, deep-grey mist in the clouds and in the air. 2 The islands in lakes which he saw there, and the tops of hills and mounds rising above the valleys of the mist, were the heads of the heroes and warriors above their chariots and the chariots themselves. 3 The yawning caverns he saw there in the forefront of the same mist were the mouths and nostrils of horses and heroes, exhaling and inhaling the sun and the wind with the swiftness of the host. 4 The pure-white linen cloths he saw there or the sifted snow dropping down were the foam and froth that the bits of the reins cast from the mouths of the strong, stout steeds with the fierce rush of the host. 5 The flock of varied, wonderful, numerous birds which he saw there was the dust of the ground and the surface of the earth which the horses flung up from their feet and their hooves and which rose above them with the driving of the wind. . . 6 The shimmering of shining stars on a bright night that he saw there, or the sparks of a blazing fire, were the fierce, fearsome eyes of the warriors and heroes from the beautiful, shapely, ornamented helmets, eyes full of the fury and anger with which they came . . .'¹

In this recension Mac Roth's speech is not given in direct speech; it is, however, in the earlier recension.² Another example of the erroneous

¹ *Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster [LLTBC]*, ed. and trans. C. O'Rahilly (Dublin, 1967), lines 4183–91, 4192–211, and 4218–21. I have omitted item 7, which occurs between 5 and 6 in Fergus's speech.

² *TBC Recension I*, lines 3558–79. It is noteworthy that the Stowe version of the LL

watchman device, which contains a striking parallel to *Branwen*, first observed by Loth,¹ occurs in a long series of watchman devices in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, in the episode in which Ingcél, returning to the sons of Dond Désa from spying out the hostel that they are to attack, is questioned by Fer Rogain about what he has seen in the hostel. As he describes the warriors there in groups or one by one, Fer Rogain identifies them from his descriptions. Some of the descriptions fall into two parts, according to Thurneysen because two variant versions of the saga were combined in the eleventh century.² It is in the second, prose part of the description of Mac Cécht, Conaire's champion, that the erroneous watchman device with the parallel to *Branwen* occurs:³

'I saw then an apartment and three men in it. . . I see a powerful form. Death from fright nearly overcame me at the sight of those three. Nothing could be stranger. Two bald men there by a man with hair, two loughs by a mountain, two surfaces of blue-topped water [*dá loch im slíab, dá drumchla tuindi tulguirmi*], two hides by an oak, two small boats near them full of white-thorn spines on a circular board, and there is what seems to me like a slender stream of water on which the sun is shining and its trickle descending from it, and a hide arranged behind him, and a palace housepost in the shape of a great spear above him. A good weight of a plough-yoke in the shaft that is therein. Liken (identify) that one, Fer Rogain!'—'It is not difficult for me to liken him. That is Mac Cécht son of Snaide Teichid, the champion of Conaire son of Eterscéil. A great hero is Mac Cécht. Supine he was in his apartment, asleep, when you saw him. The two bald men whom you saw by the man with hair, these are his two knees by his head. The two loughs by a mountain which you saw, these are his two eyes by his nose [*in dá loch im slíab ad-chondarcaisi, it é a dí súil ima sróin*]. The

recension also has direct speech: *The Stowe Version of Táin Bó Cuailnge*, ed. C. O'Rahilly (Dublin, 1961), lines 4089–4126. C. O'Rahilly does not accept Thurneysen's views on 'Toichim na mBuiden' (*TBC Recension I*, pp. ix n. 2, and xx).

¹ J. Loth, 'Rapprochement entre l'épopée irlandaise et les traditions galloises', *RC* 11 (1890), 345–8.

² *Heldensage*, pp. 24–7, 623–7, 645–6 and 648 n. 3; *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, ed. E. Knott, *MMIS* viii (1936), pp. x–xi and line 806 n.

³ *Ibid.*, lines 806 and 825–49; *Lebor na Huidre [LU]*, ed. R. I. Best and O. Bergin (Dublin, 1929), lines 7192 and 7207–26; trans. Cross and Slover, pp. 114–15. My translation is mostly from Mac Cana, pp. 24–5.

⁴ *Dá drumchla tuindi tulguirmi* is omitted in *LU* and another manuscript cited by Knott, pp. xii n. 1, xiv n. 1, 57 n. 828, and 86 n. 828. The *Yellow Book of Lecan* text has *do* for *dá* (but *dá* in line 851 in the identification of this item by Fer Rogain peculiar to the *Yellow Book*). P. Mac Cana ('On *Branwen*', *BBCS* 18 (1958–60), 181) suggests that the phrase gave copyists trouble, partly because of the uncertainty as to whether it is in apposition or an independent item, and partly because of the corruption *do* for *dá*, which he suggests was already present in the archetype: 'This ambiguity must have been as apparent to the author of *Branwen* as it was to later copyists of TBDD and undoubtedly caused him to linger over the words in question, as they did. But once he began to examine this and the preceding phrase in isolation he saw that they were open to translation in a way that conjured up a scene he could make use of it in his own tale. His quite literal and unforced translation was: "Two lakes about a mountain, from (*do* = *de*) the surface of the blue-topped sea (a common meaning of *tonn*)."' This ingenious theory must, of course, depend on the certainty of direct borrowing from the Irish text, and is not a piece of cumulative evidence in favour of such borrowing.

two hides by a tree which you saw, these are his two ears by his head. The two five-benched boats¹ on a circular board which you saw are his two sandals on his shield. The slender stream of water which you saw on which the sun shines and its trickle descending from it, this is the shimmering of his sword. The hide arranged behind him, that is his sword's scabbard. The palace housepost which you saw, that is his spear.'

Since this erroneous watchman device is not found, apparently, outside *Branwen* and some Irish sagas, it is clear that it is a development and sub-type of the normal 'realistic' watchman device. The authors of the Irish sagas seem to have been conscious of this, for the second reconnoitre by Mac Roth quoted above is followed by others of the normal type, and the passage from *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* occurs in the middle of a series of 'realistic' watchman devices. It might be argued that this treatment of the watchman device was a spontaneous development for which no explanation is required; however, in view of certain striking similarities, I would suggest that it was due to contamination from another narrative device, which Dr. P. L. Henry has styled the 'device of alternative explanations of some unusual phenomenon followed by the true interpretation'.² Dr. Henry has illustrated this device from Irish sagas and from the Anglo-Saxon *Finnsburg* fragment, which he thinks was influenced by Irish storytelling. However, it also occurs in early Welsh and Norse, and there is no solid basis for speculation on the directions of its dissemination.³ The most elaborate example of this 'alternatives device' is the opening of the *Finnsburg* fragment. In the lost section a watcher sees a suspicious gleam of light outside the hall at night and suggests that it is the dawn, or a fire-breathing dragon, or (as the fragment begins) that the gables are on fire; his leader rejects these explanations and gives the true interpretation:

'Neither is this dawn in the east, nor does a dragon fly here,
nor do the gables of this hall burn;
but here they bear forth (weapons), birds (of battle) sing,
the grey-coated one (wolf) howls, spear resounds,
shield answers shaft.'⁴

In view of the fairly wide distribution of this 'alternatives device', it is not likely that it is derived from the erroneous watchman device, rather than vice versa. Indeed, a device of this type is to be found in modern Slavonic oral epics. It is interesting to note that these share the motif of the repeated negatives with the *Finnsburg* alternatives device, for this is not an essential feature of that device:

It is not a cloud of dust which has gathered,
It is not a mist arising from the sea,

¹ 'Five-benched' refers back to the metrical part of the description, the two versions having become muddled here (Knott, p. 86 n. 806).

² Henry, p. 216. See also O'Rahilly, *TBC Recension I*, lines 3415–16 n.

³ See my article 'Irish and Welsh Parallels to the *Finnsburg* Fragment', cited above.

⁴ *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. F. Klaeber, 3rd edn. (Boston, 1950), p. 245; my trans.

It is geese and swans which have arisen from the sea,
Geese and swans and grey ducks.¹

What is the white on the green mountain?
Is it snow, or is it swans?
If snow, it would have melted,
Swans would have flown away.
It is not snow, it is not swans,
It is the tents of Asan-aga.²

The early Irish story-tellers were clearly aware of the affinity between the alternatives device and the erroneous watchman device. For instance, not long before the series of watchman devices *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* includes an alternatives device cast in the form of a dialogue between Ingcél and Fer Rogain which parallels the form of the watchman devices,³ and the first reconnoitre in the *Book of Leinster* version of 'Toichim na mBuiden' contains an unnoticed alternatives device, parallel to the erroneous watchman device in the second reconnoitre quoted above:

Mac Roth came forward to reconnoitre the great plain of Meath. Not long was he there when he heard a noise and a tumult and a clamour. It seemed to him almost as if the sky had fallen on to the surface of the earth, or as if the fish-abounding, blue-bordered sea had swept across the face of the world, or as if the earth had split in an earthquake, or as if the trees of the forest had all fallen into each other's forks and bifurcations and branches. . . (Mac Roth goes to report and Fergus identifies the last explanation as the correct one).⁴

The similarity between the erroneous descriptions in the erroneous watchman device and in the alternatives device is striking. There is the same use of wild, exaggerated, disparate imagery—compare, for instance, the image of the forest, mountain, and lakes moving over the sea for Bendigeidfran and his fleet with the reversals of the natural order which are likened to armies, etc., in many examples of the alternatives device; or compare the image of the sunlit stream of water for Mac Cécht's sword with the sunrise image for the glinting arms in *Finnsburg*;⁵ or compare the collocation of pure-white linen cloths and snow and comparison of flying dust and sods to birds in Mac Roth's second reconnoitre (items 4 and 5)⁶ with the Slavonic imagery for tents and for birds. Nevertheless, the two devices are clearly distinct, even when they are used side by side in 'Toichim na mBuiden'. In particular, the alternatives device depends for its effect

¹ H. M. and N. K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature* (Cambridge, 1932-40), ii. 156 (Russian *bylina*).

² De Vries, p. 130 (Serbian epic).

³ Ed. Knott, lines 479-88 (cf. 496-504); trans. Henry, p. 218; *LU*, lines 6922-9 and 6934-40; trans. Cross and Slover, p. 106.

⁴ *LLTBC*, lines 4166-82; *Stowe TBC*, lines 4074-88. In indirect speech in both texts, as in *Recension I*, which lacks the alternatives device.

⁵ D. K. Fry speculatively explains the imagery of the opening of *Finnsburg* as the result of combining two oral-formulaic themes, 'the Hero on the Beach' and 'the Beasts of Battle' ('The Hero on the Beach in *Finnsburh*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 67 (1966), 27-31).

⁶ Both items are absent from the *Recension I* version.

on the alternatives; and whereas the erroneous watchman device is strictly concerned with precise visual description (reflecting its 'realistic' prototype), it tends towards association of ideas rather than precision and is concerned with aural as well as visual description—in fact, all my examples of the alternatives device consist of aural description, with the exception of some Slavonic ones, *Finnsburg* and the Welsh *Cynddylan* cycle,¹ in all of which the visual element is only part of a complex and not very visual metaphorical effect. We cannot, then, regard the alternatives device and the erroneous watchman device as basically one and the same. Rather, I suggest, the erroneous watchman device may be regarded as the fusion of two more widely spread devices, the 'realistic' watchman device and the alternatives device. No doubt these two devices have quite independent origins; but their fusion would be helped by a number of similarities between them: for instance the common feature of the 'realistic' watchman device, that the dialogue takes place within an enclosed place such as a city, castle, or shieling, also appears in many examples of the alternatives device. It is quite possible, too, that the two types mutually influenced each other from time to time.

Most probably the erroneous watchman device was an insular Celtic innovation. The fact that there are many Irish examples of it extant and only one Welsh one (*Branwen*), might once have led one to point to Ireland specifically; but it is now generally and rightly agreed that there was a common pool of narrative motifs and tale-types and that the former tendency to assume that Welsh motifs and tale-types paralleled more fully in Irish sources must have originated in Ireland was over-influenced by the under-recording or under-preservation of early Welsh literature by comparison with Irish.² No doubt the postulated sources of the device were current in Britain as well as Ireland. The watchman device was so widespread that it was surely known in Wales, even if *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is not accepted as evidence; and the alternatives device is attested early in Welsh literature.³ It may be concluded, then, on the evidence of *Branwen* and the Irish sagas, that early Irish and Welsh story-tellers held in common the erroneous watchman device, and that it may have originated in either country.

This conclusion would, of course, be invalid if the erroneous watchman device in *Branwen* were a borrowing from Irish literature, as has been argued by many scholars, most cogently by Professor Proinsias Mac Cana,

¹ *Canu Llywarch Hen*, ed. I. Williams, 2nd edn. (Cardiff, 1953), no. xi, 90-2.

² Jackson, *International Popular Tale*, pp. 122-4 (for examples see p. 90 and idem, 'Some Popular Motifs in Early Welsh Tradition', *Études celtiques*, 10 (1964-5), 83-99); Mac Cana, review of same, *Celtica*, 7 (1966), 246; R. Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (Cardiff, 1961), p. lxxv; eadem, 'The Celtic Inheritance of Medieval Literature', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 26 (1965), 212 and 215. On the Arthurianist assumptions of Irish origin see F. L. Utley, 'Arthurian Romance and International Folktale Method', *Romance Philology*, 17 (1963-4), 596-607.

³ *The Poems of Taliesin*, ed. I. Williams and J. E. C. Williams, *Med. and Mod. Welsh Ser.* iii (Dublin, 1968), no. v, 17-19.

who argues that the Welsh author borrowed directly from the text of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, either in the conflated version that has come down to us, or in the version from which the prose description of Mac Cécht was drawn.¹ The cogency of this conclusion depends above all on the specific similarity between the erroneous description of Mac Cécht's eyes and nose as two lakes on either side of a mountain and that of Bendigeidfran's as two lakes on either side of a ridge, for we have seen that use of the erroneous watchman device need not in itself imply borrowing from Ireland. Moreover the author of *Branwen* must have known other watchman devices besides those in the Irish saga. Professor Mac Cana has already pointed out that in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* 'there is a variant peculiar to this text, for the observer and the interpreter are made to belong to the approaching group, and not, as is usual, to those waiting'.² Evidently the author of *Branwen* knew the more normal kind of watchman device. Again, although the erroneous descriptions of Mac Cécht and Bendigeidfran themselves are comparable, there is no parallel in the Irish text for erroneous description of a whole host rather than an individual; Bendigeidfran's 'forest on the water' is reminiscent rather of such a scene as the erroneous watchman device in *Mesca Ulad*, which Professor Mac Cana compares with it, in which the watcher describes an approaching army as an oak-forest.³ There is no *a priori* reason for thinking that these other watchman devices known to the author of *Branwen* were Irish rather than Welsh, except for the initial presumption inspired by the resemblance between the erroneous description for eyes and nose in the two sagas.

How significant is this resemblance? A number of explanations may be suggested as alternatives to direct borrowing from the Irish saga. First, the motif may have been a commonplace of the Irish erroneous watchman device, so that if the author of the Welsh tale *did* have an Irish source he

¹ C. O'Rahilly, *Ireland and Wales: Their Historical and Literary Relations* (London, 1924), pp. 108-11; Mac Cana, pp. 24-8; R. Bromwich, review of same, *MÆ* 28 (1959), 205-6; *Branwen Uerch Lyr*, ed. Derick S. Thomson, *MMWS* ii (1961), p. xli; Myles Dillon and Nora Chadwick, *The Celtic Realms*, 2nd edn. (London, 1972), p. 272.

² Mac Cana, p. 28; similarly Carney, p. 316.

³ Mac Cana, p. 27 n. 1. *Mesca Ulad*, ed. J. Carmichael Watson, *MMIS* xiii (1941), lines 367-71 and 420-41; trans. id. *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 5 (1938-42), 12 and 14. Cf. Carney, pp. 313-15; Henry, pp. 218-19. I have argued elsewhere that this scene contains not the alternatives device, but a development of the erroneous watchman device, apparently peculiar to Ireland, the only other example I have found being chapter 5 of 'The Tragic Death of Cúroí mac Dáirí', ed. and trans. R. I. Best, *Ériu*, 2 (1905), 22-5 (Cross and Slover, p. 330), which must be related to *Mesca Ulad* somehow, for the same stanza comes in both (Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, pp. 439-40 and 478 n. 2, and 'Die Saga von CuRoi', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 9 (1913), 213 and 221). This sub-type of the erroneous watchman device takes advantage of the fact that the erroneous description is in effect an erroneous identification to turn the normal dialogue into an extended dispute between an inaccurate and an accurate watcher over what they can see. Possibly there was influence from an ancient feature of the international dawn poem, the dispute between lovers about the signs of day-break. See 'Irish and Welsh Parallels to the *Finnsburg* Fragment'. Alternatively both the dawn poems and this erroneous watchman device with a debate may have been influenced independently by riddle-contests (cf. below), in particular in the former case by riddle-contests associated with courting and marriage.

could have got it from some other Irish saga; an example of such a commonplace is the very frequent description by watchmen of the sods thrown into the air by horses as birds—an image, incidentally, which also occurs in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, though not as part of an erroneous watchman device.¹ Second, to extend the last suggestion, the motif may have been a stock piece of erroneous description common to both Irish and Welsh watchman devices describing giant warriors, so that the author of *Branwen* (or whoever first attached it to Brân) may have known it from native examples of the watchman device. A third explanation could be that the resemblance may be mere coincidence; a number of coincidences occur in watchman devices separated far more widely in place and time. Professor Carney has pointed out that both in the *Iliad* and in the *Táin* a giant is described as head and shoulders above the warriors standing beside him; the same detail is given by Firdausi.² Again, Firdausi and the author of *Thithriks saga* both have the detail that an opponent's standard or shield bears an elephant device. As R. W. Chambers once asked: 'What limit is there to the similarities which similar situations can call forth?'³

It may be felt that the description of eyes and nose as lakes and mountain is altogether too peculiar to be explained away in any of these ways. Comparison with the content of modern oral riddles from all over the world dispels this impression. At the present time riddles are a feature of nearly every culture in the world.⁴ Like folk-tales, oral riddles have an international currency. Their distribution can be very wide, partly through polygenesis no doubt, but also because they spread from land to land, as is shown by the fact that adjacent areas (irrespective of language) tend to have especially similar riddles.⁵ Riddles of learned origin have sometimes

¹ T. P. Cross, *Motif-Index of Early Irish Literature*, Indiana University Publications, Folklore Series vii (Bloomington, 1952) cites only one example of this motif (K1872.5.1); but it is common. See *LLTBC*, lines 4189 and 4208-11 (quoted above); *Fled Bricrend*, c. 49; *Tochmarc Emire*, c. 12 (Cross and Slover, p. 156); *Siaburchapat Con Culainn* (LU, lines 9246-50; trans. Cross and Slover, p. 348); *Brislech Mór Maige Murthemni* (*The Book of Leinster*, ed. R. I. Best et al. (Dublin, 1954-), ii, lines 14121-2 and 14124-5; 'Cúchulainn's Death', ed. and trans. W. Stokes, *RC* 3 (1876-8), 183-4; Cross and Slover, p. 339); *Mesca Ulad*, lines 386-402 and 464-71 (trans. Watson, pp. 13 and 15). See also (not in erroneous watchman devices) *TBC Recension I*, line 2290 and n.; *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch*, ed. J. G. Evans, 2nd edn. (Cardiff, 1973), col. 455 (trans. Jones and Jones, p. 97). Does this explain the references to birds in the poems quoted by D. Greene, 'The Chariot as Described in Irish Literature', *The Iron Age in the Irish Sea Province*, ed. Charles Thomas, *Council for British Archaeology Research Report*, ix (London, 1972), p. 73? (But see Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (London, 1967), pp. 235 and 241.) Cf. the erroneous description of banners as flocks of birds in the *Bórama*, c. 74 (Cross K1872.5).

² *Iliad* iii. 227; *TBC Recension I*, line 1668; Carney, p. 312; *The Sháhnáma of Firdausi*, trans. Arthur G. and Edmund Warner (London, 1906), ii. 154.

³ *Beowulf: An Introduction*, 3rd edn. (Cambridge, 1959), p. 484.

⁴ J. M. Roberts and M. L. Forman, 'Riddles: Expressive Models of Interrogation', *Directions in Sociolinguistics*, ed. J. J. Gumperz and D. Hymes (New York, 1972), pp. 187-8. World-wide survey in Donn V. Hart, *Riddles in Filipino Folklore: An Anthropological Analysis* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1964).

⁵ See, e.g., Archer Taylor, *English Riddles from Oral Tradition* (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1951), p. 3; Frederick Tupper, *The Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Boston, 1910), p. xxvi;

gained currency—riddles on biblical topics, for instance¹—but the example of illiterate societies throughout the world shows that the oral tradition of riddling need not depend on literary riddles for replenishment. Nevertheless, the modern scholar is obliged to go to literary riddles for secure knowledge of the riddles current in earlier epochs. The genre of the literary riddle has enjoyed great popularity in many periods, but has never become entirely autonomous and free from popular inspiration.² Unfortunately the Celticist is less fortunate than the Anglo-Saxonist in this respect; there is nothing to compare with the extensive collections of literary riddles in Anglo-Latin and Old English, which draw on international oral riddles to some degree, as well as on the literary riddles of late antiquity.³ The earliest extant Irish collection seems to be that in the fifteenth-century *Book of Fermoy*,⁴ while the sole riddle in early Welsh (tenth-century?), the elaborate *Canu y Gwynt*, may be modelled on Latin literary riddles on the wind⁵—though it is interesting to note that it begins with the same formula

I. Schapera, 'Kxatla Riddles and their Significance', *Bantu Studies*, 6 (1932), 217; P.-D. Cole-Beuchat, 'Riddles in Bantu', *African Studies*, 16 (1957), 133 and 135-7. In 'A Collection of Welsh Riddles', *University of California Publications in Modern Philology*, 26 (1942-50), 225-325, Vernam Hull and Archer Taylor state that 'a comparison of these Welsh riddles with riddles in other Celtic languages does not disclose any significant evidence of a tradition of purely Celtic riddling' (p. 226). But it must be noted that inept calques show that some of these riddles are mere translations from English, and that the editors did not use any manuscript sources, and did not exhaust the printed riddles: see, e.g., Edward Jones, *Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards*, 2nd edn. (London, 1794), p. 76; R. M. Nance, 'A Puzzle Solved', *Old Cornwall*, 2. i (1931), 23-4; J. H. Davies, *The National Library of Wales Catalogue of Manuscripts*, i (Aberystwyth, 1921), p. 176.

¹ On which see: A. Taylor, *A Bibliography of Riddles, Folklore Fellows Communications*, cxxvi (Helsinki, 1939), pp. 105-7 and 142-5; *Clareti Enigmata: The Latin Riddles of Clareti*, ed. and trans. Frederic Peachy, *Folklore Studies*, vii (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1957), p. 3; V. Hull and A. Taylor, *A Collection of Irish Riddles*, *ibid.* vi (1955), nos. 616-25; 'Welsh Riddles', nos. 453-74. There is a collection of biblical and ecclesiastical riddles and catechetical questions in various sixteenth-century manuscripts: NLW Llanstephan 117, p. 302; 181, pp. 142-3; and Wrecsam 2 [Add. 873], pp. 139-42. Dafydd ap Gwilym seems to allude to a biblical riddle; see *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, ed. Thomas Parry, 2nd edn. (Cardiff, 1963), no. 137, vv. 45-6, and n.

² Archer Taylor, *The Literary Riddle Before 1600* (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1948). For early printed riddles, Aldo Santi, *Bibliografia della enigmistica* (Florence, 1952).

³ Tupper, introduction. The poems in the Milan Codex (W. Stokes and J. Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* (Cambridge, 1901-3), ii. 291-2) are hardly comparable to the Anglo-Saxon riddles (Carney, p. 112).

⁴ 'Irish Riddles', ed. and trans. W. Stokes, *Celtic Review*, 1 (1904-5), 132-5. See also 'Dúan in Choicat Cest', ed. K. Meyer, *ZCP* 4 (1903), 234-7.

⁵ *The Book of Taliesin*, ed. J. G. Evans (Llanbedrog, 1910), pp. 36-37, line 21. Dating by Ifor Williams, *Lectures on Early Welsh Poetry* (Dublin, 1944), p. 54. Latin influence seems more likely than the Old English influence he suggests. For Old English wind-riddles see *The Exeter Book, Part II*, ed. and trans. W. S. Mackie, *Early English Text Soc.*, ordinary ser. cxciv (London, 1934), pp. 88-95. For Latin (mostly Anglo-Latin) wind-riddles see F. Glorie, *Collectiones Aenigmatum Merovingicae Aetatis, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*, cxxxiii-cxxxiii A (Turnhout, 1968), i. 218 and 385; ii. 587; *Clareti Enigmata*, no. lxi. J. Morris-Jones, 'Taliesin', *Y Cymmrodor*, 28 (1918), 255, compares a wind-riddle in the *Bedan Flores* or *Collectanea* (J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, xciv. 542D [sic leg.]), which is probably an eighth-century Irish or Hiberno-Saxon compilation (cf. Taylor,

as some modern Welsh folk-riddles (*Dechymic* . . .).¹ The comparatively meagre corpus of modern Celtic riddles is a poor guide to the medieval situation, for it is unlikely that the repertory has remained unchanged; riddles collected in areas where riddles are in decline tend to be defective and confused compared to those from areas where riddling still flourishes, such as Russia, Mongolia, and Africa.² Moreover, within communities the stock of riddles does not remain constant, but is continually renewed by innovation or borrowing.³ One is bound to cast a wide net for parallels to the comparison of eyes and nose to lakes and a mountain for this reason.

Modern riddlers, including Irish and Welsh ones, often compare the human body or its members, or animals, to a scene or individual objects in nature.⁴ The following cat-riddle is a particularly complex example of these landscape riddles:

Icelandic: I walked in front of the opening of a cave. Inside I saw a flap, and around the flap twelve spikes. Above the opening were two bellows, and above the bellows two lakes, and above the lakes two peaks, and behind the peaks hills and lava, and down from the hills and lava, four pillars with twenty-four hard and curved things on them.⁵

We do not know how these riddles were phrased in the Middle Ages: 'the lack of old versions of these comparisons to a landscape makes it difficult, if not impossible, to discern the history and relations of the texts'.⁵ Nevertheless, some modern parallels will show how close the descriptions

Bibliography, p. 103; E. Dekkers and A. Gaar, *Clavis Patrum Latinorum*, 2nd edn. (Bruges, 1961), no. 1129). The Chadwicks compare a hymn to the wind in the *Rg-Veda*, x. 168 (*Growth*, ii. 556). L. C. Stern, *ZCP* 7 (1910), 161 and 223, and Theodor M. Chotzen, *Recherches sur la poésie de Dafydd ab Gwilym* (Amsterdam, 1927), pp. 180-1, maintain that Dafydd imitated the 'Taliesin' riddle in his own description of the wind (*Gwaith*, ed. Parry, no. 117: trans. Stern, pp. 164-6), but I am not convinced that he did not draw independently on the wind-riddle tradition. On wind-riddles in general see Taylor, *English Riddles*, p. 958, and *An Annotated Collection of Mongolian Riddles, Transactions of the American Philosophical Soc.* n.s. xlv. 3 (Philadelphia, 1954), no. 23 and n. A modern Welsh example (1908), almost identical with the Mongolian, is Hull and Taylor, 'Welsh Riddles', no. 283: 'Beth sydd heb ddwyllaw ac heb draed, heb erioed ben na chorff, er hyny [sic] gall agor lliadiart?'

¹ Morris-Jones, p. 256; Hull and Taylor, 'Welsh Riddles', nos. 131-3 and 357. The scarcity of 'Dychym(m)y, dychym(m)y' (var. 'Dyfeisiwch, dyfeisiwch') in the latter collection may be due to the fault of collectors (cf. *ibid.*, p. 228), or to the common practice of using opening formulae only at the start of riddle sessions. On the subject of these formulae see especially: L. Harries, 'The Riddle in Africa', *JAF* 84 (1971), 380-5 and 391; also D. F. Gowlett, 'Some Loki Riddles and Tongue-Twisters', *AS* 25 (1966), 141; E. A. Manuel, 'Bagobo Riddles', *Folklore Studies* (Tokyo), 21 (1962), 124; E. Königsmaranda, 'Theory and Practice of Riddle Analysis', *JAF* 84 (1971), 58.

² Taylor, *English Riddles*, p. 4. On decline in riddling see Hart, pp. 42, 43, and 45.

³ See *ibid.*, pp. 43, 45, and 46.

⁴ Taylor, *English Riddles*, pp. 155-6 and 453 ff.; Hull and Taylor, *Irish Riddles*, nos. 292 ff.; 'Welsh Riddles', nos. 225-8. See also I. Sokolov, *Le Folklore russe*, trans. G. Welter (Paris, 1945), pp. 155 and 157; Taylor, *Mongolian Riddles*, nos. 292, 663, 681 and nn.; Hart, pp. 136-55; I. Hamnett, 'Ambiguity, Classification and Change: The Function of Riddles', *Man*, n.s. 2 (1967), 389 and 391-2.

⁵ Taylor, *English Riddles*, p. 457.

of Bendigeidfran and Mac Cécht come to landscape riddling. Lakes and hill both appear in two face-riddles in a Turkic language of Siberia:

Yakut: Between two lakes there stands a hill.¹

Yakut: Between two lakes there is found a small knoll, so they say.²

The lakes are implicit in another Yakut riddle (for the eyelashes):

Yakut: Fishermen with their rods stand on both sides of the hill.³

There is a similar Indonesian face-riddle:

Malay: It is a mountain ridge, but it has two harbours.²

I do not know any exact parallels from Europe, but riddles treating the nose rather differently occur in Europe as well as Asia:

Swedish: The root up and the branches down, in between two lakes.⁴

Swedish: Root up and wings down between two lakes.⁵

Yakut: They say that between two lakes there lies an upturned larch.⁶

In a riddling game played in Madagascar 'all the different parts of an ox are described in an enigmatical way, thus: "God's pavement? *Its teeth*." "Two lakes at the foot of a tree? *Its eyes*." "Continually fighting but not separating? *Its lips*." "Blanket worn day and night and not wearing out? *Its skin*."; etc.⁷ Two nose-riddles from south India and from further west in Siberia may also be compared:

Malayalam: For only one bridge there are two wells.⁸

Tungus: Between two lakes a bridge gets rotten.⁹

The mountain or hill often occurs without the lakes, in a Tanzanian mucus-riddle, for example, and a curious nose-riddle from North Borneo:

Makua: Something descending comes from the hill.¹⁰

Tambunan Dusun: Many people on a hill, making noise, where five [*i.e. the fingers*] are blocking the way.¹¹

In particular it occurs in a widespread riddle for the eyes:

Persian: They are two people, between them is a mountain, and as much as they strive to do it, they cannot see each other.¹²

Polish: Two brothers look over a little mountain, but can never see each other.¹³

Greek: Two brothers quarreled, and a hill separated them.¹³

¹ Taylor, *English Riddles*, p. 800.

² Ibid., p. 822.

³ Ibid., p. 788.

⁴ Ibid., p. 427.

⁵ Taylor, *Mongolian Riddles*, p. 368. The wings are the nostrils.

⁶ *English Riddles*, p. 427.

⁷ Chadwick, *Growth*, iii. 408.

⁸ Taylor, *English Riddles*, p. 425 n. 1.

⁹ Ibid., p. 425 (a running nose).

¹⁰ L. Harries, 'Some Riddles of the Makua People', *AS* 1 (1942), 284.

¹¹ T. R. Williams, 'Tambunan Dusun Riddles', *JAF* 76 (1963), 160. This is significant of the universality of the comparison since most of the riddles in this collection are remote from Eurasian riddle types.

¹² Charles T. Scott, *Persian and Arabic Riddles: A Language-Centered Approach to Genre Definition* (Bloomington, 1965), p. 98.

¹³ Taylor, *English Riddles*, pp. 386 and 788.

Albanian: Two brothers are close to each other, and a mountain separates them.¹

Serbian: Two hens peep from under the hill, but one cannot see the other.²

Lithuanian: Two candles, a hill between them.³

Ainu: What are two things with a hill between them which never meet?⁴

Bagobo: There are two siblings living on each side of a mountain never seeing each other.⁵

Christian Filipino: There are two princesses who live on opposite sides of the mountain; when one cries the other also cries.⁶

This type of riddle for the eyes is not recorded in Irish or Welsh, and in the modern English version of it the nose is not denoted by a mountain;⁷ yet the eighth-century Anglo-Latin riddlist Tatwine knew it:

Nature, overseeing all law, placed us symmetrically, twins born of the same mother. We are separated by the narrow barrier of a little hill (*collis*), so that I have never seen him nor has he seen me; but he sees nothing without me, nor do I see without him.⁸

Tatwine's riddle is evidently his own elaboration of the folk-riddle.⁹

Various creatures and objects are used to denote the eyes in riddles of this last type.¹⁰ But pools and lakes are commonly used in other riddles¹¹—in the Icelandic cat-riddle, for instance, and in eyelash-riddles. This is the case in a modern Irish riddle:

Two fences of stone, two pools of water, two human graves, and two [small] bunches of rushes—The teeth, the eyes, the nostrils of the nose, and the eyebrows.¹²

The comparison is not recorded in Modern Welsh, but it is so common that it was probably known to medieval riddlists.¹³ Archer Taylor has

¹ Ibid., p. 386.

² Ibid., p. 387 (with variant).

³ Ibid., pp. 388 and 483.

⁴ Ibid., p. 388.

⁵ Manuel, no. 95b.

⁶ Hart, no. 329 (and n.).

⁷ Taylor, *English Riddles*, no. 1003.

⁸ Glorie, i. 185; my trans.

⁹ Taylor, *Literary Riddle*, p. 62. Tatwine's debt to earlier literary riddlists was slight (Tupper, pp. xxxiii–iv).

¹⁰ Taylor, *English Riddles*, pp. 387–8; *Mongolian Riddles*, p. 392.

¹¹ Taylor, *English Riddles*, pp. 388, 461, 788, 799–800, 809–11, 817, and 822; *Mongolian Riddles*, nos. 587, 660 and nn. and p. 405; Hamnett, p. 391; T. R. Williams, p. 172; Gowlett, no. 69; G. Nakene, 'Tlokwa Riddles', *AS* 2 (1943), 134; J. Blacking, 'The Social Value of Venda Riddles', *AS* 20 (1961), no. 189.

¹² Hull and Taylor, *Irish Riddles*, no. 292. E.g. Séamus Ó Duilearga, 'Tomhaiseana Gaelge', *Béaloides*, 1 (1928), 31–7, no. 36: 'Dhá chluí cloch; dhá loch uisge; dhá uaig duine agus dhá thripaill luachra. Na fiacra; na súile; pollaíocha na sróine agus na mailí.'

¹³ Dafydd ap Gwilym uses the image of springs (*ffynhonnau*) in an extended simile for a woman's eyes (*Gwaith*, ed. Parry, no. 30) but he may have been influenced here by French love poetry. Cf. Rachel Bromwich, *Tradition and Innovation in the Poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym* (Cardiff, 1967), p. 30; Alan M. F. Gunn, *The Mirror of Love* (Lubbock, 1950), p. 308; J. Frappier, 'Variations sur le thème du miroir, de Bernard de Ventadour à Maurice Scève', *Cahiers de l'association internationale des études françaises*, 11 (1959), 134–58. For the bird trapped beside the *ffynhonnau* cf. M. B. Ogle, 'The Classical Origin and Tradition of Literary Conceits', *American Journal of Philology*, 34 (1913), 129–30, and William A. Ringler, *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney* (Oxford, 1962), p. 465.

pointed out that it occurs already in the Song of Songs 7: 4.¹ One may add that, just as the comparison of the beloved's teeth to a flock of sheep echoes a universal riddle for the teeth,² so the whole of this verse echoes the eyes and nose riddle discussed above:

Your eyes are the pools in Heshbon,
beside the gate of the crowded city.
Your nose is like towering Lebanon
that looks towards Damascus.

The Vulgate has 'tower of Lebanon',³ which is the literal meaning of the Hebrew, but since Lebanon was famous as a mountain range the above New English Bible translation may capture the original intention. If so, this verse, though not itself a riddle, may witness to ancient knowledge of the modern oral riddle for the eyes and nose. It is not impossible, seeing that this was the book of the Bible 'most read, and most frequently commented in the medieval cloister',⁴ that the verse had a (very secondary) influence, perhaps subconsciously, on the author of *Branwen*. His 'Ef, heb hi, 'yn edrych ar yr ynys honn' is reminiscent of *quae respicit contra Damascus* [*yn edrych tua Damascus*, Welsh Bible], which the early medieval commentators interpret in terms of a symbolic opposition of good against evil.⁵

This example from *Branwen* and *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* is not the only piece of 'erroneous description' in the watchman devices which appears to derive from riddling. The next item in the description of Mac Cécht, the two hides by an oak, is similar to some riddles for the ears, though I have not found an exact parallel:

Bulgarian: Two fans on top of a birch.⁶
Munda: A pair of fans on the side of a hill.⁷
Mongolian: Worn-out boots at the side of a mountain.⁸
Ba-Ila: The fish-eagles that sit on one tree.⁹
Makua: A big tree (with) two leaves.¹⁰

¹ *English Riddles*, p. 822. In view of the Song of Songs' great influence on medieval love poetry (Chotzen, p. 202), this is a possible source for the image discussed in the previous note.

² Song of Songs 4: 2 and 6: 6; Taylor, *English Riddles*, p. 177.

³ 'Oculi tui sicut piscinae in Hesebon, quae sunt in porta filiae multitudinis. Nasus tuus sicut turris Libani, quae respicit contra Damascus.' *Libanus mons* is mentioned in the commentaries on this verse by Ps. Cassiodorus and Haymo (Migne, *P.L.* lxx. 1095; cxvii. 344).

⁴ Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, trans. C. Misrahi (New York, 1961), p. 90.

⁵ Ps. Cassiodorus and Haymo, loc. cit.; *P.L.* lxxxiii. 1129 (Ps. Isidore); xci. 1230 (Bede); cxv. 621 (Angelomus); *P.L. Supplementum*, ed. A. Hamman (Paris, 1958-), i. 981 (Aponius).

⁷ Ibid., p. 402 (bullock's ears).

⁸ Ibid., no. 872a.

⁹ Quoted *ibid.*, p. 404, and E. Gray, 'Some Riddles of the Nyanja People', *Bantu Studies*, 13 (1939), 278.

¹⁰ Harries, 'Riddles of the Makua People', p. 284; cf. Taylor, *Mongolian Riddles*, p. 404 (Muria).

Venda: Two little pieces of bark that cling to the mountain.¹

Mordvin: Mushrooms are fastened to the end of a stake.²

The next item, the description of Mac Cécht's shoes as boats, is identical with a riddle for the shoes current in the United States, the Philippines, Hawaii, and at one time in Iceland:

South Carolina: I saw two boats, an' only one man aboa'd.³

In the erroneous watchman device in *Mesca Ulad* the points of the weapons are described as the horns and antlers of wild beasts and deer;⁴ the comparison occurs in reverse in a modern Welsh riddle for the horns of a bullock:

Two posts on the top of the mountain, without touching the ground or the sky.⁵

An *englyn* on a stag attributed to Dafydd ap Gwilym seems to reflect a similar type of riddle:

Yesterday I saw, with a rod of horn with nine branches on it, a proud man with a harrow on his head, and a bald wife from the yellow crag.⁶

Landscape riddles often use a hill or mountain to represent the head, forehead or top of the head;⁷ similarly the erroneous watchman device in the *Táin* (item 2 in the quotation above) describes the heads of the approaching warriors and their chariots as islands in lakes and hill-tops rising above the valleys of the mist. In a widespread riddle the holes in the head are described as 'seven holes in a hill',⁸ and other riddles describe individual holes in the head in a similar way;⁹ the eyes are two jackdaws peeping from a cave in a Serbian riddle,¹⁰ the nostrils and mouth 'two little holes in the side of a hill' in a Virginian one,¹¹ the nostrils two overgrown caves in a big mountain in a Javanese riddle.¹² Such a conception seems to

¹ Blacking, no. 190.

² Taylor, *Mongolian Riddles*, p. 404.

³ Taylor, *English Riddles*, no. 1167 and n.; Hart, nos. 656-9; R. Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden* (1921), p. 434.

⁴ Ed. Watson, lines 383-5; trans. Watson, p. 13.

⁵ 'Dau bost ar ben y mynydd, heb fod yn cwrdd y llawr, na chwrdd a'r awyr.—Cyrn eidion' (*sic*), Hull and Taylor, 'Welsh Riddles', no. 226 (cf. Taylor, *English Riddles*, p. 457). With 'without touching . . .' cf. Scott, p. 100.

⁶ *Gwaith*, ed. Parry, p. 421. (For *kýd* read *kyð*??.) With horns described as trees cf. M. İlhan Başgöz, 'Riddle-Proverbs and the Related Forms in Turkish Folklore', *Proverbium*, 13 (1972), 660.

⁷ Taylor, *English Riddles*, pp. 454-61, 799, and 808-11; *Mongolian Riddles*, nos. 86, 591, 637 and n., 705, 707 and n., and p. 377; Hart, no. 347; Nakene, p. 134, no. D4; Cole-Beuchat, p. 140; Gray, no. 278; Blacking, no. 190; Hamnett, p. 391, no. 9; L. Harries, 'Makua Song-Riddles from the Initiation Rites', *AS* 1 (1942), 42; Scott, p. 82.

⁸ W. A. Kozumplik, 'Seven and Nine Holes in Man', *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 5 (1941), 1-24; Taylor, *English Riddles*, pp. 459-61 and 811; *Mongolian Riddles*, no. 707 and n. The *lorica* in which Kozumplik finds the first Christian attestation of the theme of the holes in man (pp. 4 and 13 n. 42) is probably a seventh-century Irish production: see M. Herren, *Ériu*, 24 (1973), 35-51; P. Sims-Williams, *ibid.* (forthcoming). For later Irish versions of the theme see H. Meroney, 'Lecc Thollcind and the Twelve Doors of the Soul', *SFQ* 11 (1947), 257-9.

¹⁰ Taylor, *English Riddles*, p. 387.

¹¹ Ibid., no. 1101.

¹² Ibid., p. 811.

underlie the erroneous description of the horses' and heroes' mouths and nostrils as yawning caverns (item 3). With this one may compare in particular a tongue-riddle current in Sotho, known also to a fourteenth-century literary riddlist in Bohemia:¹

Tlokwa: Mankoko cries in a cave.²

In landscape riddles the eyes are sometimes denoted by candles, lights, fires, etc.:

Arabic: Above a cave there are two caves, above the two caves there are two fires, above the two fires there is a terrace, above the terrace there is a forest, above the forest there are boars.³

Possibly such riddles lie behind the erroneous description of the warriors' eyes as stars on a bright night and sparks of a blazing fire (item 6), though such comparisons were also common in medieval rhetorical portraiture (as in the case of Chaucer's Friar whose 'eyen twynkled in his heed aryght / As doon the sterres in the frosty nyght').⁴

In the light of these examples of riddles in the erroneous watchman device, one is bound to conclude that the use of the riddle for the eyes and nose in *Branwen* may be independent of its use in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*. If the two watchman devices shared any less obviously riddling items of erroneous description, the case for literary borrowing would have been much stronger. The arguments for borrowing based on the differences between the texts do not convince. Dr. O'Rahilly argues that the 'comparative simplicity of the parallel passage in the Welsh tale' suggests that it was a reminiscence of some Irish saga.⁵ However, as Professor Mac Cana has emphasized, the author of the *Pedeir Keinc* was generally restrained compared to Irish story-tellers,⁶ and this is true of passages for which no one would suggest an Irish origin; contrast, for example, the token description of Gwawl in the first Branch with the elaborate description of a stranger at a feast which one expects in Irish sagas.⁷ Professor Mac Cana's apparently convincing argument that the description of the eyes and nose is appropriate only to a recumbent figure (Mac Cécht)⁸ is not supported by the practice of landscape riddlists, who seem either to ignore distinctions of dimension and perspective or to consider the nose as a *vertical* feature and the eyes as pools viewed sideways on. The riddles which liken the nose to a hill or to an inverted tree seem to envisage it

¹ *Clareti Enigmata*, no. cxxvii (cf. no. xxxvii).

² Nakene, no. D20; cf. D21 and Hamnett, nos. 8 and 23. Cf. Scott, p. 93.

³ Taylor, *English Riddles*, p. 810, with parallels. The boars are lice. Cf. also the Lithuanian eyes-riddle quoted above.

⁴ Ogle, pp. 130-8; Alice M. Colby, *The Portrait in Twelfth-Century French Literature* (Geneva, 1965), pp. 41, 76, 143 n. 2, and 154; Claude Luttrell, *The Creation of the First Arthurian Romance* (London, 1974), pp. 14-19. Cf. H. van der Merwe Scholtz, *The Kenning in Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Poetry* (Utrecht-Nijmegen, 1927), pp. 76 and 157.

⁵ *Ireland and Wales*, p. 109 n. 1.

⁶ Mac Cana, pp. 177-8.

⁷ PKM, p. 13; trans. Jones and Jones, p. 13.

⁸ Mac Cana, p. 26.

as a vertical feature—a conception that has troubled more than one modern editor.¹ In the Icelandic cat-riddle the eyes are called lakes even though the cat is envisaged (like Bendigeidfran) face on. We, like the modern caricaturist, are accustomed to think of the nose not as a vertical triangle or pillar, but as a horizontal protruberance, a preference which perhaps goes back to the Latin Middle Ages.² Such conceptions and their artistic representations are, however, learned, not innate.³ In fact, Celtic sculptured heads show the nose as a vertical feature with slight profile.

Professor Mac Cana argues that the inclusion of a mountain to represent the visible part of Bendigeidfran's wading body was dictated by the borrowing of a mountain ridge to represent his nose.⁴ But this may be explained differently. In many riddles it is clear that the hill or mountain represents only the head itself, or part of it (e.g. *Welsh-Gypsy*: There are ten white horses going under the hill . . . Thy teeth),⁵ but in others it is not clear that it does not represent the whole body, as in some of the riddles for the ears quoted above, the Welsh bullock-riddle, or the following Modern Irish eye-riddle:

A little well spring of water on the very top of the mountain [with] a little glass window and a small door of clay.⁶

The presence of the mountain as well as the mountain ridge in *Branwen* may be due to influence from this type of landscape riddle. The reason for having a ridge rather than the more usual hill or mountain for the nose would be dictated by this use of the mountain to represent the body.

Archer Taylor has distinguished two types of European riddles which describe a man.⁷ The first accumulates many apparently unrelated objects, often tools and utensils found near the house and barn, usually beginning

¹ Glorie would translate Tatwine's *collis* as 'protrusion' (i. 185), while an African collector would derive the upside-down tree comparison from the shape of Negro noses, an observation 'not borne out by the distribution of the riddle' (Taylor, *English Riddles*, p. 427). But for a horizontal scheme see the Mordvin riddle for the eyes: ' . . . a tree trunk has fallen between us' (*Mongolian Riddles*, p. 392)?

² Medieval rhetoricians and poets content themselves with saying that a woman's nose is well formed, well proportioned, etc., avoiding similes (sources: Colby, and D. S. Brewer, 'The Ideal of Feminine Beauty in Medieval Literature', *Modern Language Review*, 50 (1955), 257-69). They do not seem to have adopted the Song of Songs' comparison to a tower, though they use the preceding comparison of the neck to a tower of ivory, which is equally foreign to modern taste. (One can think of psychological as well as aesthetic reasons for this: cf. the interpretation of Celtic sculptured heads by Ross, pp. 92-3, and Hart, pp. 71 and 137-8, on embarrassment and nose-riddles.) Contrast Meissner, p. 132.

³ E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, 2nd edn. (London, 1962).

⁴ Mac Cana, p. 26.

⁵ R. Petsch and J. Sampson, 'Fifty Welsh-Gypsy Folk-Riddles', *Journal of the Gypsy-Lore Soc.* n.s. 5 (1911-13), 249.

⁶ Hull and Taylor, *Irish Riddles*, no. 296. E.g. Seán Ó Dálaigh, 'Tomhaiseanna Ó Dhúnchaoín', *Béalóideas*, 13 (1943), 80-101, no. 11: 'Tobairín fíor-uisce i bhfíor-bhárr an tsleibhe, / Fuinneógín ghloine leir (air) agus doraisín cré. An tSúil.'

⁷ *English Riddles*, p. 455.

at the feet and working upwards. An example of this would be a modern Welsh riddle:

Pedwar post ar gost y brenin,
Ac ar ben y pedwar post mae melin,
Ar ben y felin mae llwyn.—Dyn.¹

The second type usually restricts the comparison to objects found in nature, usually working downwards from the top of the head, and not necessarily getting further than the head. An example of this (excepting the braids) is this Bulgarian riddle:

A thick, thick forest; under the forest, braids; under the braids, wells; under the wells, hollows; under the hollows, a little hole; above the hole, a little hill.²

By and large, the watchman device in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* belongs to Taylor's first type, while that in *Branwen* belongs to his second. Each, then, may derive independently from different branches of the landscape riddling tradition.

Why should riddles have been introduced into the watchman device? A simple explanation is that there is a formal similarity between the dialogue pattern of the watchman device—description and identification—and riddling. The resemblance is especially close in the case of the erroneous watchman device, because of its metaphorical content, influenced, I have suggested, by the alternatives device; but it is interesting to note that a student of the purely 'realistic' watchman device in *Laxdæla saga*, though unaware of the 'erroneous' parallels, has already pointed out its similarity to a riddle-guessing game.³ A deeper reason for the use of riddles may be their importance in early Celtic society. In the British Isles riddling is now a minor pastime, chiefly confined to children;⁴ but it has a more important place in many other societies. An indirect indication of this is the part played by riddles in folk-tales from all over the world,⁵ such as those concerning riddle-contests between rival sages or princes and riddle-tests imposed by kings,⁶ riddle-tests for suitors in marriage,⁷ and riddle-contests in courting.⁸ These are only stories, of course, but it is noteworthy that in many lands where such stories are told riddling has an important

¹ Hull and Taylor, 'Welsh Riddles', no. 225. ('Four posts at the cost of the king, and there is a mill on top of the four posts. On top of the mill there is a shrub.—A man.') In the note Taylor says the four (usually *two*) are limbs, the mill the mouth, the shrub [or grove] the hair.

² Taylor, *English Riddles*, p. 809.

³ Madelung, pp. 71–2.

⁴ See, e.g., Myrddin Fardd, *Llên Gwerin Sir Gaernarfon* (Caernarfon, [1908]), p. 319 (with large selection of riddles); K. S. Goldstein, 'Riddling Traditions in Northeastern Scotland', *JAF* 76 (1963), 330–6; Iona and Peter Opie, *The Lore and Language of School-children* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 73–86.

⁵ Stith Thompson H530–899. For examples see Tupper, pp. xviii–xxii, and N. M. Penzer, *The Ocean of Story* (London, 1924–8), x. 283.

⁶ Chadwick, *Growth*, i. 412–14; iii. 107–8, 152–3, 172, 407–8, 559–60, 603, and 836; Melville J. and Frances S. Herskovits, *Dahomean Narrative* (Evanston, 1958), p. 54.

⁷ Chadwick, ii. 212; iii. 408 and 836.

⁸ Ibid. ii. 212; Stith Thompson H551–2; Francis B. Gummere, *The Popular Ballad* (London, 1907), p. 141.

social role, in competitions,¹ in courtship,² and at weddings.³ It may be significant, then, that similar stories occur in medieval Celtic literature. Among other contests *Tromdámh Guaire* contains a riddle-contest between a Leinster court-poet (*ollamh*) and Marbán, holy man, prophet, and poet (*fili*).⁴ Taliesin's contest with the bards in the early *Taliesin* saga seems to have been rather similar, to judge by the speeches in which he boasts: 'I know why there is an echo in a hollow; why silver gleams; why breath is black', etc.⁵ In *Tochmarc Ailbe* the hero puts the girl he is courting to a riddle-test,⁶ while in Modern Welsh there is a riddle said to have been given by a woman to her suitor.⁷ Rather more direct evidence for riddling, not far distant in date from *Branwen*, is Giraldus's reference to *famosus ille fabulator Bledhericus*, who used to propound a riddle describing the Welsh coracle as a horse partly ridden by the hunter, partly carried by him.⁸ If *fabulator* can be restricted in meaning to 'oral story-teller',⁹ this is direct evidence that riddling formed part of the repertory of story-tellers. If so, one may compare the practice of story-tellers elsewhere who begin or end their sessions with riddles.¹⁰

In modern Britain riddles tend to be jokes, but ethnologically this is the exception rather than the rule.¹¹ In Tanzania, for example, riddles are used to convey serious, arcane information in initiation ceremonies.¹² In

¹ Ibid., pp. 137–42; id., *The Beginnings of Poetry* (New York, 1901), p. 212; Chadwick, iii. 153, 188, 408, 603, and 836; Hart, pp. 43–4, 45–6, 50, 51, and 57–9; Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Paladin Press, London, 1970), pp. 127–38; Nakene, p. 126; Schapera, pp. 215–16; Cole-Beuchat, pp. 133–5; Blacking, pp. 1–9; Gowlett, p. 140; Hamnett, pp. 380–1.

² Chadwick, iii. 159 n. 1; Huizinga, pp. 104–5; E. Kōngäs Maranda, 'Structure des énigmes', *L'Homme*, 9 (1969), no. 3, p. 8; Hart, pp. 43 and 54–6.

³ Kōngäs Maranda, loc. cit.; Sokolov, p. 155; Chadwick, ii. 211–12; iii. 154 and 159; Hart, pp. 47, 53, and 56. Riddles are also told during other *rites de passage*, e.g. wakes; see *ibid.*, pp. 47–50, with Breton evidence.

⁴ *Tromdámh Guaire*, ed. Maud Joynt, *MMIS* ii (1931), lines 867–900; trans. O. Connellan, 'Imtheacht na Tromdháimhe', *Trans. of the Ossianic Soc.* 5 (1857), 93–5. For the first riddle see: *Clareti Enigmata*, no. xc, and Hull and Taylor, *Irish Riddles*, nos. 461, 463 and n., and 490.

⁵ *Book of Taliesin*, ed. Evans, pp. 20–1; Williams, *Lectures*, p. 58. Cf. T. Gwynn Jones, *Welsh Folklore and Folk-Custom* (London, 1930), pp. 25–7. The basic accuracy of the references to Taliesin's contest in the late *Hanes Taliesin* is confirmed by the early allusions in saga-poems in the *Book of Taliesin*, pp. 7–8 and 33. Compare the Tatar story, *The Two Princes*, quoted Chadwick, iii. 107–8.

⁶ 'Tochmarc Ailbe: Das Werben um Ailbe', ed. and trans. R. Thurneysen, *ZCP* 13 (1921), 270–5, c. 10. Cross H552, and Gerard Murphy (Eleanor Knott and G. Murphy, *Early Irish Literature* (London, 1966), pp. 127 and 151) compare *Tochmarc Emire*, but there the wooing is through kennings and innuendoes rather than true riddles.

⁷ 'Dychymig merch Caergai', Hull and Taylor, 'Welsh Riddles', no. 293.

⁸ *Itinerarium Cambriae*, i. 17, *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera, Rolls Series* (London, 1861–91), vi. 201–2. Giraldus elsewhere uses the phrase *qui tempora nostra paulo praevenit* to mean c. 1100–40 (R. S. Loomis, *Wales and the Arthurian Legend* (Cardiff, 1956), p. 194).

⁹ But see W. Roach *apud* W. Kellermann, 'Le problème de Breri', *Les romans du Graal aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles, Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Colloques internationaux*, iii (Paris, 1956), p. 146.

¹⁰ Herskovits, p. 55; Hart, p. 63 (and cf. p. 59).

¹¹ Hamnett, p. 382. Cf. Goldstein, p. 335 n. 4; Hart, pp. 42, 60, and 65; Sokolov, p. 154.

¹² Harries, 'Makua Song-Riddles from the Initiation Rites'. Cf. Huizinga, pp. 127–30 and 136; Hart, p. 50.

North Borneo riddles can be used aggressively to shame an enemy.¹ The solution of traditional Sesotho and Bantu riddles 'may be greeted with a laugh, but it is more the laugh that greets the successful fulfilment of a task well done than one of response to the purely comic'.² The partial interchangeability of riddles and proverbs in many cultures is an indication of their possible seriousness.³ (A medieval Christian example of this is the seed-riddle: 'While it dies it still begets' [cf. John 12: 24].)⁴ A similar inference for north-west Europe in particular may be drawn from the connection between riddles and gnomes, whose purpose was undoubtedly more than mere diversion. This connection was observed by the Chadwicks, commenting on a fragmentary Irish riddle-sequence quoted as a gloss to *Amra Choluim Chille* (whose third riddle, answer 'dew', is the first asked in *Tochmarc Ailbe*):⁵

What life is worse than death?
What empty is heavier than full?
What water is wider than any sea?⁶

The Chadwicks pointed out that the answer to such a sequence of riddles would be formally identical with a sequence of gnomes, comparing a passage from the riddle contest in *Hervarar saga*:

'What lives on high fells?
What falls in deep dales?
What lives without breath?
What is never silent?' . . .
'The raven lives ever on the high fells,
the dew falls ever in the deep dales,
the fish lives without breath,
and the rushing waterfall is never silent.'⁷

Similarly, one of the riddle-like questions Taliesin claims he can answer in his saga is 'why cow-parsley is hollow' (*pan yw keu efwr*);⁸ this is related to a gnome in the *Black Book of Carmarthen*, 'cow-parsley is hollow' (*cev*

¹ T. R. Williams, pp. 103 and 107. Cf. Chadwick, iii. 152.

² Hamnett, p. 384.

³ R. A. Georges and A. Dundes, 'Toward a Structural Definition of the Riddle', *JAF* 76 (1963), 117 n. 16; Scott, pp. 18-19; Köngäs Maranda, 'Structure des énigmes', pp. 36-8; eadem, 'The Logic of Riddles', *Structural Analysis of Oral Tradition*, ed. Pierre and E. K. Maranda (Philadelphia, 1971), p. 223; Sokolov, p. 156; Hart, p. 62; Harries, 'Riddle in Africa', p. 389; Huizinga, p. 133; Cole-Beuchat, p. 147; Hamnett, p. 385; İlhan Başgöz; and articles by divers hands in *Proverbium*, 12 (1969), 305-11; 15 (1970), 467-9 and 500-2; 20 (1972), 743-4; 24 (1974), 936-40.

⁴ *Clareti Enigmata*, no. lxii. Cf. Glorie, ii. 558.

⁵ See Taylor, *English Riddles*, p. 811, who notes that 'German hunters set this as an initiatory question'.

⁶ 'The Bodleian *Amra Choluim Chille*', ed. and trans. W. Stokes, *RC* 20 (1899), 258-9.

⁷ *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*, ed. and trans. Christopher Tolkien (London, 1960), p. 80 (cf. n. and pp. xviii-xxi); Chadwick, i. 414; ii. 213, 410, and 742; iii. 153 and 554.

⁸ *Book of Taliesin*, p. 21.

ewur).¹ This is significant, for Taliesin represents the ideal bard throughout this saga. A comparable indication of the probable importance of riddling to Irish learned men is its part in the *Colloquy of the Two Sages*.² It has, indeed, been suggested that the popularity in early Irish exegesis of riddle-like disputations is due to influence from the secular, native schools, as well as from monastic literary riddling.³

An allied reason for valuing riddles was their relationship to traditional poetic language. This is exemplified in the *Colloquy of the Two Sages* by the way in which the verbal contest hovers on the borderline between riddle and metaphor. Again, in the *Wooing of Emer*, instead of the expected riddle-contest (as in the *Wooing of Ailbe*), we find a dialogue in kennings.⁴ Many scholars have stressed what was first noted by Aristotle, that the riddle is closely connected to the metaphor 'and therefore a good riddle can furnish a good metaphor'.⁵ This is undoubtedly true of early Germanic and Celtic poetic diction; one doubts if the poets would have accepted our modern opinion that 'the language of kennings sometimes approaches that of riddles, and thus loses much of its aesthetic value'.⁶ It has indeed been argued (though not proved) that kennings partly originated in riddling and were continually renewed from riddles.⁷ Again, the *dyfalu* technique of the *cywyddwyr* is clearly related to riddling, which may have influenced it⁸—

¹ *Early Welsh Gnomic Poems*, ed. Kenneth Jackson, 2nd edn. (Cardiff, 1961), no. i. 15b (cf. ii. 9b; vi. 10b; *Canu Llywarch Hen*, vi. 28b). Plants of this type, being hollow, can be used for making whistles; cf. *The Poetry in the Red Book of Hergest*, ed. J. G. Evans (Llanbedrog, 1911), col. 1273, lines 17-18: *corn-efwr*.

² Ed. and trans. W. Stokes, *RC* 26 (1905), 4-64. Cf. J. E. Caerwyn Williams, 'The Court Poet in Medieval Ireland', *Proc. of the British Academy*, 57 (1971), 37-8; Bromwich, *Tradition and Innovation*, pp. 14-16; P. Mac Cana, 'On the "Prehistory" of *Immram Brain*', *Ériu*, 26 (1975), 45-7.

³ P. Grosjean, 'A propos du manuscrit 49 de la reine Christine', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 54 (1936), 126-7.

⁴ *Tochmarc Emire*, ed. Van Hamel, cc. 17-55. On some of these, see: E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford, 1976), p. lvi; Greene, 'The Chariot', p. 69 (see c. 27). Cf. the wooing in *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, ed. and trans. Vernam Hull (New York, repr. 1971), c. 9. See also the series of kennings in *Aislinge meic Conglinne*, ed. and trans. Kuno Meyer (London, 1892), pp. 98-101; Cross and Slover, p. 583 (Diolch i Marged Haycock am y cyfeiriad hwn).

⁵ Georges and Dundes, p. 111 and nn.; Tupper, pp. xii-xiv; Sokolov, p. 154; Scott, p. 15; Köngäs Maranda, 'The Logic of Riddles', pp. 193-4; 'Structure des énigmes', pp. 9-31 and 44; "'A Tree Grows": Transformations of a Riddle Metaphor', E. K. and P. Maranda, *Structural Models in Folklore and Transformational Essays* (The Hague, 1971), pp. 116-39, esp. p. 138. On the 'poetic' quality of riddles (too narrowly interpreted) see A. Taylor, 'Riddles and Poetry', *SFQ* 11 (1947), 245-7. On the relationship of metaphor, riddle and mythology see R. Th. Christiansen, 'Myth, Metaphor and Simile', *Myth: A Symposium*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington, repr. 1965), pp. 64-80.

⁶ Turville-Petre, *Origins*, p. 31.

⁷ Wolfgang Krause, *Die Kennung als typische Stilfigur der germanischen und keltischer Dichtersprache, Schriften der Königsberger Gelehrten-Gesellschaft*, 7. Jahr, *Geisteswissenschaftliche Klasse*, 1 (Halle, Saale, 1930), pp. 19-21.

⁸ Morris-Jones, p. 257; Thomas Parry, *A History of Welsh Literature*, trans. H. I. Bell (Oxford, 1955), pp. 34 and 112-13; D. Myrddin Lloyd, 'Estheteg yr Oesoedd Canol', *Llên Cymru*, 1 (1950-1), 164 n. 16; R. Bromwich, *Dafydd ap Gwilym* (Cardiff, 1974), pp. 54-8. In view of the paucity of evidence for literary riddling in Wales (cf. K. Jackson,

though its riddle-like character is also rooted in the earlier Welsh metaphorical tradition. I do not wish to suggest that all riddles, gnomes, and metaphors can be correlated, but only that they are often closely akin. Thus the Anglo-Saxon poet who said 'hail fell on the earth, coldest of grains' (*hægl feol on eorþan/ corna caldast*)¹ could easily have rephrased his metaphor as a riddle—"The coldest grain?"—and the answer would be a gnome, 'hail is the coldest grain', which is in fact recorded in Norse (*hagall er kaldastr korna*), and in Old English in the form 'hail is the whitest of grains' (*hægl byþ hwitust corna*).² By a similar analogy Dafydd ap Gwilym calls snow a 'chaff-heap' (*eisingrug*), a metaphor which recurs in the *Cywydd yr Eira*.³ Likewise snow is called 'flour' in the latter *cywydd* and in another by Llywelyn Goch ap Meurig Hen⁴—the same metaphor as underlies the modern oral riddles which compare snow to sifted flour and vice versa.⁵

In view of the relationships sketched above it is clear why story-tellers would have valued riddles, given the traditionalism of the early vernacular literatures. Their 'erroneous description' in the watchman device and in the alternatives device is a narrative manifestation of the analogical mode of thought which they share with the traditional poet and riddlist. Thus one may compare the analogies drawn in the *Táin* and in the Slavonic alternatives devices quoted already⁶ between white cloths and snow or between bird-flocks and dust-clouds with riddles which liken snow to a white sheet⁷ and snow, dust, smoke, sparks, etc. to birds which fly without wings.⁸ Or one may compare the analogies in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* and *Finnsburg* between a sunlit stream and a sword and between glinting arms and dawn in the east with Old English 'battle-light' (*hildelēoma*) and similar Germanic kennings for the sword⁹ and with the favourite Old Welsh metaphor for spears, 'the wings of dawn' (*esgyll gwawr*).¹⁰ The erroneous

Studies in Early Celtic Nature Poetry (Cambridge, 1935), p. 198 n. 2), oral riddling is a more likely source of influence.

¹ *The Seafarer*, ed. I. L. Gordon (London, 1960), vv. 32–3.

² *Runic and Heroic Poems*, ed. and trans. Bruce Dickins (Cambridge, 1915), pp. 14, 24, and 30. 'Ice we call the broad bridge' (p. 26) parallels a riddle (Taylor, *English Riddles*, p. 929). Cf. Chadwick, i. 415–16.

³ *Gwaith*, ed. Parry, no. 117, v. 30; *Cywyddau Dafydd ap Gwilym a'i Gyfoeswyr*, ed. Ifor Williams and Thomas Roberts (Cardiff, 1935), no. xli, v. 33. Cf. T. Parry, 'Cywydd yr Eira a Chywydd y Sêr', *LIC* 6 (1960–1), 176–7, and D. J. Bowen, 'Awduriaeth y Cywyddau i'r Eira a'r Sêr', *ibid.* 7 (1962–3), 193–202.

⁴ Williams and Roberts, no. lxxxv.

⁵ Taylor, *Mongolian Riddles*, no. 689a and n.; Köngäs Maranda, 'Structure des énigmes', pp. 14–15 and 22; 'Logic of Riddles', pp. 199–200 and 208. ⁶ Above, pp. 93 and 95–6.

⁷ Taylor, *English Riddles*, p. 948; 'Welsh Riddles', no. 19. Cf. the dead metaphor *sheet of snow*, and like comparisons in the *cywyddau* cited above.

⁸ *Clareti Enigmata*, no. xiv; Taylor, *English Riddles*, pp. 114–23 and 722–3; 'Welsh Riddles', nos. 65–6 ('ond er hyny a wisga esgidiau' (*sic*) in the dust-riddle shows it is translated from English, where *wears* is ambiguous); *Mongolian Riddles*, nos. 18–20 and nn.; 'Riddles and Poetry', p. 247. In 'Welsh Riddles', nos. 17–18, snow is described as dropped feathers; cf. the dead metaphor *phu eira*, 'snowflakes', lit. 'snow-feathers'.

⁹ Merwe Scholtz, pp. 78 and 158; J. Vendryes, *La poésie galloise des XII^e–XIII^e siècles. dans ses rapports avec la langue* (Oxford, 1930), p. 19.

¹⁰ *Poems of Taliesin*, ed. Williams, no. x. 6 and n.

description of an army as a forest in the *Mesca Ulad* watchman device may be compared with the Irish and Welsh metaphors 'yew-forest' (*éochai*),¹ 'hedge' (*gwyddfid*),² and 'trees of battle' (*gwydd gwnedd*)³ for armies, with the Old English and Norse kennings for warriors such as 'man-tree' (*werbēam*) and 'tree of battle' (*vighundr*),⁴ and, on the other hand, with the oral riddles that describe men and women as trees and vice versa.⁵ The analogy between sea and land which underlies the erroneous description of Mac Cécht's shoes as boats and Bendigeidfran's fleet as a forest on the water is found also in the numerous kennings which interchange sea and land, such as Old English and Old Norse 'sea-horse' (*brimhengest*, etc.) for a ship,⁶ Welsh 'horses of the sea' (*meirch mordwy*) and 'wooden horses' (*gwyddfeirch*) for ships,⁷ Norse 'sky of the eel' (*álhimins*) for ice, Old English 'whale-road' (*hronrād*)⁸ and Irish 'whales' sanctuary' (*nemed bled*) and 'beast-plain' (*mag mīlach*)⁹ for sea, or Welsh 'fishes' bed' (*gwely pysgod*) for a lake;¹⁰ and the same interchange occurs in riddles such as the shoes-riddle, Bledheric's coracle riddle and similar riddles describing ships as horses and the sea as a road,¹¹ the Arabic ship-riddle of the legless runner,¹² the riddle of the fish in the river as a 'guest' in a 'home',¹³ or the African and Indonesian riddles which liken an anchored sailing ship to a leafy tree with roots.¹⁴

¹ *RIA Dictionary*, s.v. *éó*. Cf. the extended simile in c. 34 of *Cath Ruis na Ríg*, ed. and trans. Edmund Hogan, *Todd Lecture Ser.* iv (Dublin, 1892), pp. 40–3 (cf. pp. 86–7). Cross puts this under K1872.1 *Army appears like forest*, but in Stith Thompson this includes ruses of the 'Birnam Wood' type, which are distinct from what is under discussion. Cf. also *Iliad* xii. 131–4.

² *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* and J. Lloyd-Jones, *Geirfa Barddoniaeth Gynnar Gymraeg*, s.v. Ifor Williams's equation with Ir. *fidba(i)d* (similarly used figuratively) is rejected by H. Wagner, *ZCP* 32 (1972), 81–5 (see also I. and J. E. C. Williams, *Poems of Taliesin*, pp. 122–3); but his interpretation 'wood-cutting' (:Ir. *bith*, *benaid*) will not suit all contexts.

³ *Canu Aneirin*, ed. I. Williams (Cardiff, 1938), vv. 777 and 785; K. Jackson, *The Gododdin* (Edinburgh, 1969), p. 113 (cf. p. 30). Differently Lloyd-Jones, s.v. *gwyth*.

⁴ Merwe Scholtz, pp. 88 and 165; Turville-Petre, *Origins*, p. 29; *Scaldic Poetry*, pp. xlvii, lii, liv, and lviii.

⁵ Taylor, *Mongolian Riddles*, pp. 397 and 405; *English Riddles*, pp. 214–16, 459, and 750; 'Riddles and Poetry', p. 246; Köngäs Maranda, 'Structure des énigmes', pp. 15–21; 'A Tree Grows'; 'Logic of Riddles', pp. 200–6 and 224; 'Theory and Practice', pp. 52 and 54–5; Schapera, nos. 19, 23, and 92–4; Blacking, nos. 107–10, 116, and 162; Harries, 'Riddles of the Makua People', p. 277; Hart, p. 73; and the ears-riddles already cited.

⁶ Merwe Scholtz, pp. 83–4, 138, and 163; Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry*, pp. xlvii and liv. ⁷ Vendryes, p. 20; *GPC* s.v. *gwyddfarch*.

⁸ Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry*, pp. xlvii and li.

⁹ *A Golden Treasury of Irish Poetry A.D. 600 to 1200*, ed. and trans. David Greene and Frank O'Connor (London, 1967), pp. 20 and 127.

¹⁰ *Gnomic Poems*, ed. Jackson, no. i, 4a: 'Oer guely pisscaud yg kisscaud iae'n', with puns on *gwely*, 'tribal territory', and on *cysgu*: *cysgod*? Cf. Merwe Scholtz, pp. 65–6 and 152–3.

¹¹ *Clareti Enigmata*, nos. xiii and cxii; Taylor, *English Riddles*, pp. 141 and 731.

¹² Scott, p. 120. Cf. Taylor, *English Riddles*, no. 372 and n.; Tupper, p. xxvii.

¹³ Glorie, ii. 633; Tupper, pp. 225–6. Cf. Taylor, *English Riddles*, no. 98.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 1036 and n. Cf. perhaps the widespread riddle (reflected already in Catullus, *Carmina*, IV?) describing how a ship began in the forest (*ibid.*, pp. 309–10, 429–31, and 770; Glorie, ii. 557, 560, and 634).

What these passages of erroneous description share with the kennings and riddles are metaphorical insights. Most of these insights can be found in non-Celtic narrative literature, no doubt; for instance the likeness of a fleet of sailing ships to a forest has often been observed.¹ But it is Welsh and Irish story-tellers above all who raise them from the level of a passing simile and integrate them into their narratives, presented with a concentration unusual in prose. This is true not only of the narratives already discussed; on examination many of the narratives most characteristic of Celtic 'natural magic'² prove to be versions of such metaphors. The 'actuality' of the narrative mode both heightens the metaphors' paradoxical quality and gives the illusion of the relativity of reality. For instance, the sea-land analogy of the riddles and kennings underlies the sea-god Manannán's speech in *Imram Brain* in which he observes that while he drives his chariot over the flowery plain that is his 'land', Bran goes over the sea in a coracle.³ A similar conception, *mutatis mutandis*, is found in the Clonmacnoise story of the ship in the air that dropped anchor above the church.⁴ Again the magical motif in Irish stories of the otherworld, that its dwellings are thatched with birds' wings or feathers embodies a metaphor similar to Dafydd ap Gwilym's 'wings of the leaves of May's mantles' (*esgyll dail mentyll Mai*), which Mr. Eurys Rowlands has aptly compared with it.⁵ Arnold's celebrated example of Celtic magic, the tree which Peredur saw blazing on one side and in green leaf on the other, seems to me to be based on an analogy between foliage and a blazing fire, an analogy also perceived by Cynddelw in his epithet for his patron, 'roar of heather in battle, in blaze' (*twryf gruc yg gotuc yg goteith*), and by Rónán in the Irish saga, describing his son as a 'tall, fair blazing yew-tree' (*éo finn fota for lassair*).⁶ It has been rightly observed by Professor Jackson that 'Celtic magic' is neither mystic nor esoteric, and differs from the supernatural in folk-tales everywhere only in that 'often the Celtic story-tellers had a vastly

¹ e.g. *Kyng Alisaunder*, ed. G. V. Smithers, *EETS*, O.S. CCXXVII (1952), p. 295, v. 5632; *The Wars of Alexander*, ed. W. Skeat, *EETS*, extra ser. XLVII (1886), vv. 69-70; *Les Chroniques de Sire Jean Froissart*, ed. J. A. C. Bouchon (Paris, 1852-3), i. 105 (l. i. 120) and ii. 498 (ll. 35). This simile is, of course, implicit in the words used in *Branwen* for masts and spars ('*gwerneenni llongeu, a hwylbrenni*'); cf. W. *gwýdd llong*, Ir. *crann, fern*, etc. Stith Thompson K1886.4 is *Travelers mistake brushwood at a distance for a ship*.

² See Rachel Bromwich, *Matthew Arnold and Celtic Literature* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 11, 15-17, and 28-9; *A Celtic Miscellany*, trans. K. Jackson, 2nd edn. (Harmondsworth, 1971), nos. 127-40.

³ *Early Irish Lyrics*, ed. and trans. G. Murphy (Oxford, 1956), no. 39; Cross D2151.1.4.

⁴ Jackson, *Miscellany*, no. 138.

⁵ *RIA Dict.* s.v. *ette*; 'The Adventures of Art son of Conn', ed. and trans. R. I. Best, *Ériu*, 3 (1907), 156 and 164 (Cross and Slover, pp. 494 and 498); *ibid.*, pp. 504-5; P. Mac Cana, *ÉC* 7 (1955-6), 392 n. 3; Cross F165.5; E. I. Rowlands, 'Cywydd Dafydd ap Gwilym i Fis Mai', *LIC* 5 (1958-9), 23; *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, ed. Parry, no. 23, v. 16. Elsewhere Dafydd calls leaves 'feathers' (*plu*): nos. 36.14; 74.30; 117.18. For a different interpretation of *mentyll Mai* see D. J. Bowen, *BBCS* 25 (1972-4), 20-1.

⁶ Jackson, *Miscellany*, no. 134; *Llawysgrif Hendregadredd*, ed. J. Morris-Jones and T. H. Parry-Williams (Cardiff, 1933), p. 118, and *Black Book of Carmarthen*, ed. J. G. Evans (Pwllheli, 1907), p. 104 [I assume that *gruc* is not **grug* 'rage' (:Ir. *fráech*?)]; *Fingal Rónán*, ed. David Greene, *MMIS* xvi (1955), line 243 (cf. p. 70).

greater power of inventiveness and imagination and description, and a much more subtle sense of the uncanny'.¹ Their pre-eminence in this respect may partly be explained by their awareness of the narrative possibilities latent in their native metaphorical resources of poetic imagery and riddles.

The impression should not be given, however, that the narrative versions of metaphors are necessarily secondary to their use in free-standing images or riddles. This is clearly not so, for instance in the case of 'mythological kennings', such as the Scaldic 'plain of Meiti' (*Meita vǫllr*) for sea or the Irish 'cattle of the plain of Tethrae' (*búar maige Tethrai*) for fish.² Yet generally it is not possible to be dogmatic, and, for example, *derive* Dafydd's *esgyll dail* from the otherworld mythology,³ and the mythology from ritual thatching:⁴ the myth may derive from the image, and the ritual (if it is at all relevant) from the myth. Similarly, who can prove which came first, the presentation of the sun as a golden chariot in mythology or in the Mongolian riddle: 'From behind the mountain a golden chariot rolls'?⁵ The mythology of creation raises many such questions of priority which are especially relevant to landscape riddling. Which came first, the myth, found in the Hellenistic *Book of the Secrets of Enoch* and enthusiastically adopted by the early Irish, that Adam was created from seven substances (his flesh from earth, his hair from grass, his eyes from the sun, his bones from stone, etc.), Greek speculation on the similarity between flesh and earth, bones and stones, hair and plant nature, etc.,⁶ or free poetic images such as Choerilus's 'bones of the earth' and 'arteries of the earth' for stones and rivers⁷ and the Scaldic kennings which Lee M. Hollander describes as involving 'interchange between the macrocosm and the microcosm, between the visible universe and the human body, as when the rocks are termed the bones, the forest, the hair, of the land'?⁸ Professor Hollander goes on to suggest that this interchange 'has found its embodiment (secondarily?) in the myth of creation' told in the

¹ *Miscellany*, pp. 141-2. For folk-tale marvels see Stith Thompson D and F.

² Turville-Petre, 'On the Poetry of the Scalds and of the Filid', *Ériu*, 22 (1971), 18; *Origins*, p. 29; *Scaldic Poetry*, pp. xlv, xlix-li, and lv-lx.

³ So Rowlands, loc. cit., quoting T. Gwynn Jones's dictum (p. 22): 'the poems attributed to Dafydd, and many others, derive much of their "natural magic" from legends, and what often passes for imagination on the part of the bards is basically the symbolism of early nature cult' (*Welsh Folklore*, p. 154). But see C. S. Lewis, 'The Anthropological Approach', *English and Medieval Studies Presented to J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. N. Davis and C. L. Wrenn (London, 1962), pp. 219-30.

⁴ Ross, p. 40.

⁵ Christiansen, p. 74; Taylor, *Mongolian Riddles*, no. 791. Christiansen's conclusion that 'riddles did not borrow from myth' (p. 78) seems over-confident.

⁶ *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, ed. R. H. Charles (Oxford, 1913), ii. 448-9 and n. 8; Robert E. McNally, *Der irische Liber de numeris* (Munich, 1957), pp. 30-2; id. 'The Imagination and Early Irish Biblical Exegesis', *Annuaire Mediaevale*, 10 (1969), 19-20; Martin McNamara, *The Apocrypha in the Irish Church* (Dublin, 1975), pp. 21-3.

⁷ Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse*, ed. Adam Parry (Oxford, 1971), p. 366.

⁸ *The Skalds* (New York, 1945), p. 14.

Edda,¹ that is the creation of mountains, stones, earth, trees, etc. from the appropriate parts of the primordial giant—a mirror image of the Adam myth. Here too must be remembered the interchange of, for example, hair and foliage in landscape riddles² and in poetic imagery everywhere.³ Another Norse scholar holds, contrariwise, that the numerous kennings calling men and women trees 'may preserve an allusion to the myth of creation', that the gods created man and woman from trees.⁴ Yet, on the face of it, it seems equally possible that this motif is secondary to the kennings (found also in Celtic, as we have seen) and the tree-man landscape riddles. The point here relevant is that there is an easily perceived kinship between the kennings, the landscape riddles and the Norse myth—and, too, the Irish and Welsh myths or stories (the distinction is here extrinsic) of the magical creation of warriors from trees⁵ and Arnold's well-known illustration of Celtic 'natural magic', the creation of Blodeuwedd from flowers.⁶ The intelligent medieval Celtic story-teller must have been aware of this kinship, and have understood, at least intuitively, the use of landscape riddles in the watchman device in terms of it.

Reidar Christiansen has argued that the origins of myth, imagery, and the riddle are to be sought in the active, creative imagination of man.⁷ Although he underestimates the probably labyrinthine inter-connections between these categories, his conclusion is a valuable corrective to those explanations which see riddles, metaphors and myths as a relic of a mythologic, pre-logical and animistic stage of primitive thought,⁸ for it points rather to their enduring imaginative value. Instead of viewing poetic imagery and riddles as the result of primitive confounding of image and object—a view which ignores their present functions—they may be seen as self-conscious experiments in manipulating analogies between categories which are fully recognized as distinct in reality.⁹ Similarly, instead of explaining 'Celtic magic' on the grounds that 'just as in the folk-tale, that distinction between natural and supernatural which is the consequence of civilized thought has not yet been clearly drawn',¹⁰ it may be understood in terms of a 'constant awareness' on the part of Celtic story-tellers 'of the

supernatural possibilities of the actual and visible world'.¹ Seen in this light, the similarity between *Branwen* and *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* is probably not an indication of literary borrowing, but a pointer to the imaginative richness of the narrative literature in and behind the Irish and Welsh manuscripts.²

¹ Bromwich, *Matthew Arnold and Celtic Literature*, p. 17.

² This conclusion partly depends on a reassessment of the Irish parallels to *Branwen* which I have not yet published. The present article's structure has been improved by the criticism of Dr. Rachel Bromwich, who kindly read a draft of it. I am also grateful to Mrs. Ursula Dronke for reading the final text, and for referring me to the kennings cited from Meissner and to the passage in *Mágus saga* (which is not in its French sources: see M. Schlauch, *Publ. of the Mod. Lang. Association*, 46 [1931], 976).

Addenda. I. Statius depended on the dramatic treatment of the *teichoskopia* in Euripides, *Phoenissae*, vv. 88–201, as well as on Homer. See David Vessey, *Statius and the Thebaid* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 205–9. Herbert Juhnke has found examples of the watchman device in Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica* v. 576–615; vi. 490–506 and 575–601 (*Homerisches in römischer Epik flavischer Zeit* (Munich, 1972), p. 117 n. 278). These are even less likely than that of Statius to have had any influence on the vernacular examples discussed above.

II. Sods thrown up by horses' hooves (p. 99; see also 'Aided Guill', *RC* 14 (1893), 416) are also described as birds in 'Cathcharpat Serda' (ed. and trans. C. O'Rahilly, *Celtica*, 11 (1976), 197 and 199) and in *Araith Wgon* (ed. D. Gwenallt Jones, *Yr Areithiau Pros* (Cardiff, 1934), p. 10). This shows that it was a narrative commonplace in both Ireland and Wales, for the former is a model Irish watchman's speech, and the latter is a parody of Welsh narrative style.

III. Hollander's hint that the myth of creation from a giant's members may be secondary to the kennings (above, pp. 115–16) cannot be correct in view of the wide distribution of such myths, as Mrs. Dronke points out to me. But it remains possible (and no more is needed for my argument) that the details of the Norse version of the myth were influenced by kennings—rather as in the corresponding Zoroastrian myth a play on words in Avestan led to mustard being derived from the lungs of the primal bull (W. B. Henning, *Selected Papers* (Tehran–Liège, 1977), ii. 606).

¹ *The Skalds* (New York, 1945), p. 14 n. 18.

² Taylor, *English Riddles*, pp. 454–9 and 808–11; *Mongolian Riddles*, nos. 637, 663, 681 and nn.

³ e.g. Bromwich, *Dafydd ap Gwilym*, p. 49; C. O'Rahilly, 'Words Descriptive of Hair in Irish', *Éigse*, 13 (1969–70), 177–80.

⁴ Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry*, p. lviii.

⁵ T. Gwynn Jones, p. 26 (cf. Cross and Slover, p. 41).

⁶ Jackson, *Miscellany*, no. 130.

⁷ 'Myth, Metaphor, and Simile'.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 66–7; Tupper, pp. xiv–xvi; Sokolov, p. 156.

⁹ Hamnett makes this point with an anthropological analogy: 'where riddles are not hedged about with taboos or rules regulating indulgence in them, it may be hazarded that this is either because, as in a scientifically sophisticated society, they pose no threat at all, or because the threat they pose is not really a serious one, but serves (as role-reversal does) rather to reinforce than to undermine the definitions and relations which they fictitiously call in question' (p. 389).

¹⁰ Jackson, *Miscellany*, p. 141.