CELTIC STUDIES PUBLICATIONS VIII

ISBN 1–891271–11–3

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LANDSCAPE PERCEPTION IN EARLY CELTIC LITERATURE

Francesco Benozzo

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FRANCESCO BENOZZO

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ABERYSTWYTH

2004

First published 2004

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BRITISH LIBRARY CATALOGUING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA
A Catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 1–891271–11–3

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This book was funded by the Ministero Italiano dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca (MIUR).

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Typeset in the Cynrhan type family by CSP-Cymru Cyf
Cover design by CSP-Cymru Cyf

Front cover illustration: Barthélemy l'Anglais, Le Livre des Propriétés des choses, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms Fr 136, fol. 73 (15th century)

Celtic Studies Publications

for customers in North America:

Celtic Studies Publications
c/o The David Brown Book Co.
P. O. Box 511, 28 Main Street
Oakville, CT 06779
USA

editorial correspondence:

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Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies
National Library of Wales
Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 3HH
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Introduction

THIS research is an attempt to formulate a theory of landscape, starting from a phenomenological analysis of landscape perception in literature.[1] Its aim, that is to say, is not to illustrate some peculiarity of early Celtic literature, but rather to build, through it, something approaching a theory of poetry. In the book, texts have been treated as simple declarations and not as results, as precious clues to a more complex problem and not as creations of an individual creative propensity. What has interested me is the connection between layers of landscape and layers of thought, and the relationship between the external world and the word. What I have tried to understand, finally, is how the structures of physical space can affect the narrative structures (and, vice versa, how the narrative structures can affect the perception of landscapes).

The problem of space in literature is more than one field of enquiry among the other possible fields. According to many anthropologists, philosophers, geographers, epistemologists, artists and poets,[2] behind space there is nothing from which it can be

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1 The following studies that I have previously published move in the same direction: Benozzo (1997b, 1997e, 1997i, 1998a, 1998b, 1999, 2000e, 2002g).

2 I am thinking in particular, among the others, about figures like Marc Augé, Gaston Bachelard, Fernand Braudel, Ernst Cassirer, Fernand Dagognet, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, Richard Long, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Joachim Richter, Yi-Fu Tuan, Kenneth White.

derived: space is an original phenomenon that belongs to the domain of ontology. Poetry and literature, as expressions of a human perception of things and reactions to reality, are concerned primarily with space and time. As an instrument of memory, the word is the narrative location of time, the receptacle of past images, and the connecting bridge between different layers of diachrony; as an instrument of perception, it is also the location where space is turned into narrative, the means by which one dissects 'extension',[3] recognising different parts in it and reconnecting distant places to each other.

An initial problem should be underlined. As a *document* (meaning here, any sentence of everyday communication) the word is thus the location of realisation of time and space; on the other hand, as a *monument* (that is to say as a literary structured linguistic production, an aware and articulate expression of a complex vision of things)[4] the word treats space and time differently, and only rarely has the word made itself an instrument of comprehension of space in the same way that it always has been with respect to time. It is not my intention to try to understand here why this has happened; in its harshest manifestation this question would perhaps touch upon one of the crucial facts of the life of man on earth: his nostalgia for that which is not there, or is no longer there, or which could be there, countered by his fear of what is happening around him, and which, as perceived, has the form of a concrete space, of a real place, of a landscape. Time has always been considered as a possible setting for the infinite, and thus, also as the site of what is impossible, boundless and trans-

3 Following Edmund Husserl, by 'extension' I mean the perceptible space around us, which is 'named' and therefore recognized first of all by language (cf. Husserl [1934, 1983: 322–336]).

4 The distinction is in Zumthor (1973): 13–16.

cendent, while space is a site of a crystallised and certain presence, of tangible material and full of boundaries, of an interrupted memory which cannot be enlarged in resonance with possible echoes, which does not allow itself to be framed, for example, in the arbitrary categories of religious thought.[5]

Very often, referring to its presence in literary texts, the concept of landscape has been confused with the concept of nature. It is therefore important that I define the differences, so that there are no misunderstandings about the way I use the term *landscape*.[6] (1) Nature is not, anthropologically, the 'other from man'; it is not extraneousness, but rather has precedence, historical and logical *prius*, predominance; (2) Landscape is the meeting place of man and nature, the site of co-belonging; (3) As a living being, man is part of nature, but not of landscape; (4) One walks *on a* landscape or one walks *a* landscape, but one does not walk nature; (5) What we see and touch, what is within our sight and other senses, is a landscape; (6) A tree is not a landscape; a tree on a hill is a landscape: a landscape is a system of relationships; (7) The cycle of the seasons, the light of the sun, the route of stars, atmospheric phenomena are nature but they are not landscape. Each of these contrastive definitions adequately reveals aspects upon which it is not necessary for me to elaborate; it is, however, important to understand that by landscape I mean the visible 'intertwining' of shapes, duration and dynamics which make up with its system of relationships and connections that

5 Something similar seems to be expressed also by Heidegger (1949): 183–198; cf. also Heidegger (1969).

6 These definitions, which collect and elaborate remarks by authors that I will have the opportunity to quote in the following chapters, is mainly based on Benozzo–Meschiari (1997b, 1999: 7–16).

which we see around us when we are in a place that has not been urbanised.

Rarely, I said, do we come across poetry of space understood as a landscape, a literature that makes 'extension' and physical place its subject. Dealing with the relationship between space and imagination in a book on the verbalization of water and waters, the epistemologist Gaston Bachelard distinguished conveniently between the presence, in literature, of a space as (1) a *group* of images (that is a simple background, an element not necessary to the text or image produced by the mind), a space as (2) a *support* for images (that is an instrument of the creative or imaginative process), and a space as (3) *contribution* to images (that is what gives substance to the elements of imagination).[7] I would venture a fourth category: space as (4) *structurer/organiser* of images (that is the real and true agent that moulds creation, its exposed model, the category of comprehension of what is seen).

On this last aspect, space in its radical essence, that is in its being space, of landscape as landscape, there are few declarations in the history of poetry. And yet what always re-emerges, in widely separated times and places, is a view of the landscape without filters, objective, not shaped in anthropomorphic categories, with the recognition in it of an element that cannot be changed by man and at the same time that cannot be sublimated in images of a religious type, sacred, animistic: a fundamental and archetypal element through which man also sees himself, within the relationships which tie him to space, to territory. The sporadic way in which this recognition appears seems to indicate the existence of a deep layer, archetypal indeed, in manner in which man lives his relationship with the world, his being as a being in

7 Cf. Bachelard (1942): 14.

the world.

Among very isolated cases (for instance, occasional poetic compositions by authors who also write about other matters,[8] or experiments of bringing science and literature together,[9] or real and true traditions, as the Wordsworthian vein of European Romanticism,[10] the recent Geopoetics created by Kenneth White,[11] or the still more recent and radical literature of pure landscape born in Italy in the last decade),[12] more significant, on account of the fact that behind them there is no philosophical reflection on space, so that they are not the simple appendix of a historical or historical-literary imperative, or of a scientific reflection on the problem of landscape, seem to be the premodern examples made up of far-eastern medieval poetry (notably Chinese and Japanese) and the early Celtic literature. For my purposes, this latter tradition has represented an even more precious clue due to the fact that it is even less tied to implications of a religious type than the eastern one, and for this it is not constrained by factors such as the practice of meditation in natural places.[13] Therefore, the examples from Celtic literature do

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8 As in the poem of the Italian poet Ceccardo Roccatagliata Ceccardi entitled *Il macigno*, of 1898, the subject of which is the morphology and history of a stone of the Cenozoico: cf. Roccatagliata Ceccardi (1982): 112.

9 Of which, after the avantgarde experiments of Leonardo da Vinci (1991), the collections of Alexander von Humboldt *Ansichten der Natur* (Humboldt 1849) remain memorable.

10 A vein which not by chance remained without true followers; cf. Benozzo (1997i): 6–7.

11 Cf. in particular White (1994).

12 Cf. note 21.

13 In these east Asian cultures, meditation on landscapes is a required part of the general meditation, and it cannot be disregarded: nothing similar can be found in Irish and Welsh hermitic Christianity. On meditation

not seem to reflect a 'conditioned', 'canonised' or 'systemised' experience according to 'external' co-ordinates, and not even an attempt to build a cosmology.

The kind of approach and the aims expounded above should immediately avoid, among others, any misidentification with studies on the so-called 'Celtic Nature Poetry', which is on closer inspection a post-romantic invention which originated from a way of reading (and in many cases of not reading) the texts, rather than from their essence.[14]

With regard to the general question I have introduced, while it becomes superfluous to specify that I do not regard this perception of landscape in terms of an 'ethnic preconception' (i.e. regarding it as peculiar in terms of a 'Celtic peculiarity'),[15] it is also of secondary interest to ask oneself about the historical reasons that have favoured the development of a poetic tradition more attentive to the landscape than others: whether it was geographical isolation or ritual memory of a sort of Shamanic practices of the places, or the folkloric heritage, or the hermitic heritage, or the particular configuration of the landscape which created the favourable conditions for that deep and archetypal layer of which I have spoken to re-emerge to the surface and be realised just in that specific historical and geographical context, all this has truly little importance compared to the pure and simple verification that such a tradition did develop. In other words, the importance of these texts may in this sense be that of declaring, together with other artistic and poetic forms of creation, an

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and landscape, cf. Lombardi Valluri (1999).

14 Cf. Sims-Williams (1998b), and Benozzo (in press b).

15 Cf. Sims-Williams (1986): 71–96.

irrepressible need ingrained in man in his living in the world, in his gestures, in his fears, in his biological instincts: a layer of experience which precedes language and historical cultures. Finding a vein of gold is basically more important than understanding the reasons why it re-emerged in one point rather than in another.

I have analysed three texts from the Irish tradition (*Irish landscapes*) and three from the Welsh one (*Welsh landscapes*); the last two chapters (*Crossings*) are of a comparative nature. Starting from the famous remark expressed by Goethe, according to which 'we have not to look for anything behind the world's phenomena, because they are theory in themselves',[16] instead of filtering texts through external categories, I have tried to start from texts to build a theory. In this sense, being the construction *in fieri* of a theory and not the application of a methodology, theoretical implications (together with the authors who were more influential on my attempt) will be found in the analysis itself, in the course of dealing gradually with single problems. Each chapter is intended to correspond to a key-concept of a landscape theory.

Even though the analysis aims at something that is beyond the literature itself and its primary interpretation, it has inevitably led me to enter into (or interfere in) discussions related with strictly literary problems discussed by Celtic scholars as well as their methodology. I hope that this inevitable meeting or encounter of procedures, which I consider as a fundamental possibility for enriching the strategies of reading a text, will not be perceived and flattened in the sterile terms of a controversy.

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16 On its implications for the 'science of literature', cf. Raimondi (1984a) [reprinted, with a few variants, in Raimondi (1985): 159–197].

As I have said before, I have tried to orientate the analysis of texts (which can be considered as individual phenomena) towards a sort of anthropology of elemental processes of the human faculty of conceptualising and representing. Someone could object that such an approach ends by 'forcing' these texts in a predetermined direction. I consider such a risk typical of every real and 'honest' interpretation, and I would like to add that, being a reader who comes from strictly philological studies, I am strongly aware that there is always the risk of placing the horizontal reference of constants before the temporality of facts.[17] I have started in any case from facts, in order to go back to other facts, trying to combine the philological approach with what I am tempted to call an *anthropological stylistics* of literature. With regards to methodology, my intention has been to join together the study of style (intended, with Leo Spitzer, as a *Stilkritik* concentrated not only on the structures but also on the single salient facts and words),[18] with the study of the primary archetypes from which style is 'generated', trying to verify if and how this 'deep structure' coincides or is moulded by the structure of landscapes.[19] If I have not succeeded, I will console myself remembering Elias Canetti's remark that what we have to ask of the interpreter is not exactness

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17 I discussed these problems from a theoretical point of view in other contributions about medieval literatures, where I considered the problem of the possible integration between archetypes and history, between particular phenomena and models belonging to the *longue durée*: cf. for example Benozzo (1994, 1996a, 1997c, 1997d, 1997h, 1998b, 1998e, 2000b).

18 Cf. Spitzer (1929, 1948); on Spitzer's approach to style, cf. Contini (1970): 651–660.

19 In this sense, I use 'deep structure' and 'to generate' with a meaning not so different from the one proposed by Noam Chomsky in linguistics: cf. Chomsky (1957, 1968, 1977).

and totality, but gnoseological eagerness, together with a sort of courage in approaching things.

In conclusion, if it is true that reading a literary text always coincides with 'an experiment on the text which is at the same time an observation of the object and a self reflection of the experimenter',[20] I have to add that, apart from the aim of my experiment (as set out above), the self reflection (intended either as an auto reflection about myself or about contemporary times) has been in my case a decisive stimulus for the research. First of all because, from the time the poet Matteo Meschiari and I founded a pure landscape literature (*letteratura imramica*) in Italy, working for an authentic return of poetry to the earth, the theoretical problem of landscape has always informed creative writing itself;[21] and finally because I am personally convinced that landscape, in its stratified aspects and meanings, and also in its connections with medieval literatures, can represent one of those crucial possibilities that philosophers like Jürgen Habermas, Jean-François Lyotard, and Frederic Jameson are trying to identify, in order to renew and change positively the epistemological paradigms of the so-called postmodernity.[22]

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20 Benjamin (1973): 73.

21 Cf. for example Benozzo–Meschiari (1994a, 1994b, 1996a, 1996c, 1996d, 1997b); cf. also Meschiari (1999, 2001); for an almost complete bibliography of the pure landscape literature, cf. the 'Nota bio-bibliografica' at the end of Benozzo–Meschiari (1999).

22 Cf. in particular Habermas (1987), Lyotard (1979, 1984), Jameson (1991); on the connection between medieval studies and postmodernism, cf. the brilliant Patterson (1990), and Mancini (2000); cf. also Meschiari (1998).

PART ONE

Irish Landscapes

In all these choices I was trying to preserve the texture of immediate experience. I had a formula to guide me on through the thickets of difficulties I encountered: while walking this land, I am the pen on the paper; while drawing this map, my pen is myself walking the land. The purpose of this identification was to short circuit the polarities of objectivity and subjectivity, and help me keep faith with reality.

Tim Robinson, *Setting Foot on the Shores of Connemara*

CHAPTER I

The Interpenetration of Landscape Elements: An Archetypal Process of Space Perception in *Immram Brain*

THE analysis of some medieval Celtic poems indicates in many cases a sort of inclination to connect or interchange different elements of landscape. This attitude is related to a perceptive-narrative technique that is used in particular by Irish poetry, and has been resumed as follows by Patrick Sims-Williams: an 'unusual technique [...] is the transformation into a narrative mode of metaphors, similes, kennings, or riddles. In particular, one element actually seems to interchange with another: flowers become flesh; foliage becomes fire; the sea (in *The Voyage of Bran*) becomes a flowery plain'.[1] At this point I would like thus to read again the salient passage of *Immram Brain* in which the sea in a certain way 'becomes' a plain, to try to understand how this image is connected to the perception of the external world, and what consequences it brings in the way of looking at a landscape. I quote the text according to Séamus Mac Mathúna's edition and translation:[2]

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1 Sims-Williams (1998b): 118–9.

2 Mac Mathúna (1985): 38–40, 43, 51–53, 56; *Immram Brain* is one of the four surviving *immrama* (journeys overseas) of the earliest Irish literature

[§ 32] *Luid Bran íarom ara bárach for muir. Trí nónbuir a lín [. . .]. Óro-boí dá láa ocus dí aidhci forsin muir co n-acc(a)i a dochum in fer isin charput íarsin muir. Canaid in fer ísin tríchait rand n-aile dó,ocus sloindsi dó, ocus as-bert be hé Manannán mac Lir [. . .]. Cachain íarom in tríchait rand-so dó:* [§ 33] *Caíne amræ lasin mBran / ina churchán tar muir nglan; / os mé im charput do chéin, / is mag scothach imma-réid. /* [§ 34] *A n-as muir glan / don noí bro(i)nig i-tá Bran, / is mag meld co n-immut scoth / damsa i carput dá roth. /* [§ 35] *At-chí Bran / lín tonn tibri tar muir glan; / at-chíu cadéin i mMaig Mon / scotha cennderca cen on. /* [§ 36] *Taitnit gabra lir i sam / sella roisc ro-ṡiri Bran; / bru(i)ndit scotha srúaim de mil / i crích Manannáin maic Lir. /* [§ 37] *Lí na fairci fora-taí, / geldod mora imme-rái, / ros-sert bude ocus glass: / is talam nád écomrass. /* [§ 38] *Lingit ích bricc ass de brú, / a mmuir find for n-aicci-siu; / it loíg, it úain co ndagdath, / co cairdi, cen imarbath. /* [§ 39] *Cé ad-chetha oínchairpthech / i mMaig Meld co n-immut scoth, / fil mór d'echaib fora brú / cen suide, nád aicci-siu. / [. . .]* [§ 42] *Is íar mbarr fedo ro-sná / do churchán tar indrada, / fil fid fo mess i-mbí gnóe / fo braine do beccnoë. /* [§ 43] *Fid co mbláth ocus torad / fors-mbí fíne fírbolad, / fid cen erchra[e] cen esbad /*

(together with *Immram Curaig Húa Corra, Immram Curaig Máel Dúin* and *Immram Snédgus 7 Meic Riagla*: cf. Van Hamel [1941]; some include in the *immrama* tradition also the Latin *Navigatio Sancti Brandani Abbatis* and *Vita Columbae*: cf. for example Oskamp [1970]: 16–9). It is perhaps the oldest one, as it is possible to say that it 'was originally written down in the seventh century': Meyer–Nutt (1895, 1897): XVI, that is to say in a pre-Viking period. For various aspects of the text, in addition to other studies that I will quote in this chapter, cf. Thrall (1917): 449–74, Thrall (1923): 276–83, Hull (1930): 409–419, Hull (1960–1961): 256–7, Mac Cana (1976): 95–115, Carney (1976): 174–93, Charles–Edwards (1976): 43–59, Dumville (1976): 73–94, Greene (1976): 75–82, Eldevik (1984): 1–8; see also the recent Wooding (2000).

fors-fil du(i)lli co n-órdath. / [...] [§ 60] *Fossad air sin imrad Bran, / ní cían co Tír inna mBan, / Emnæ co n-ildath féle / ricfe re fuiniud ngréne.*

[§ 32] On the following day, then, Bran went to the sea. Three groups of nine men was their number [...] When he had been two days and two nights at the sea, he saw a man approaching him in a chariot over the sea. Then that man sang another quatrain to him, and named himself to him, and said that he was Manannán son of Ler [...]. Then he sang these thirty quatrains to him: [§ 33] Bran thinks it a wondrous beauty / in his coracle over the clear sea; / as for me, in my chariot from afar, / it is a flowery plain around which he drives. / [§ 34] What is clear sea / for the proved ship in which Bran is, / is a pleasant plain with abundance of flowers / for me in a two-wheeled chariot. / [§ 35] Bran sees / many waves breaking over the clear sea; / I myself see in Mag Mon / red-topped flowers without flaw. / [§ 36] Sea-horses glisten in summer / as far as Bran has stretched the glances of his eye; / flowers pour fourth a stream of honey / in the land of Manannán son of Ler. / [§ 37] The colour of the ocean on which you are, / the bright colour of the sea over which you row: / it has spread out yellow and green; / it is solid land. / [§ 38] Speckled salmon leap out of it, from the womb, / from the white sea on which you look; / they are calves, they are lovely-coloured lambs / at peace, without mutual slaying. / [§ 39] Though you should see but a single chariot-rider / in the Pleasant Plain with abundance of flowers, / there are many steeds on its bosom / besides, which you do not see. / [...] [§ 42] It is along the top of a wood / that your little coracle has sailed over ridges, / there is a beautiful wood of fruit / under the prow of your little ship. / [§ 43] A wood with blossom and fruit / on which is the true scent of the wine, / a wood without decay, without defect, / on which are leaves of golden hue. / [...] [§ 60] Steadily then let Bran row, / it is not far to the Land

> of the Women, / Emnae of the many-hued gentility / you will reach before the setting of the sun.

There is a text, far in space and in time from the Irish one, which I want to put near the *Immram Brain*: the poem that opens the *Sonnets from Crimea* by the Polish Romantic poet Adam Mickievickz, titled *The Akkerman Steppe*:

> I sail a sea where waters never ran; / My wagon like a boat with plunge and dip / Cuts waves of green and floods of flowers, to slip / Past rosy isles of wild cornelian. / Night falls. No road or hill— My eyes must scan / The stars by which the sailor guides his ship. / That distant cloud, the Dniester's gleaming strip; / That star, the evening lamp of Akkerman.[3]

Here, the Akkerman steppe, where the poet's journey begins, 'is likened to an expanse of dry ocean into which the traveller "floats", suggesting that he is not following a road but is being borne irresistibly along. The carriage plunges like a boat into waves of rustling meadows and torrents of flowers'.[4] Apart from the overturning of the perspective (from the land to the sea), we are clearly in the same imaginative context as the poem in *Immram Brain*. I have wanted to propose this matching at once because I believe that the presence of this image, of this co-penetration between waters and lands as found in such widely separated poets and traditions, is an indication that we are dealing with a real archetype of perception, which goes beyond the literary tradition of metamorphoses. Also because,

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3 Noyes (1944): 153–4; the original text can be read in Mickievickz (1948–1955): vol. 4, 131.

4 Welsh (1966): 49.

neither in Mickievickz nor in *Immram Brain*, it is not the question of an actual transformation: this is a first point to bear in mind. The sea on which Bran is sailing does not actually become a plain (I mean not at a narrative level). Or rather, it is the way in which Manannán suggests (or enjoins) Bran to look at it that creates this transformation. It is a way of looking at, a way propitiated by the poetic word,[5] that 'transforms' the sea in a plain.[6] It is a perceptive transformation, and at the end, after this pause, Bran will continue his journey to the Land of the Women.

This story has an evident and incontestable visual-imaginative power, but I do not think it is simply a 'visionary' power in the usual sense. Here the 'vision' is generated by the elements and by their combinations. It is remarkable that it is possible to observe a passage from a documented metaphoric use of the elements of a landscape[7] to a narrative-metonymic use, in which they are again separated. This fact engenders (and at the same time gives evidence of) a different consciousness. And it corresponds to what Gaston Bachelard calls 'the passage from a poetry of shapes and

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5 I would like to consider this image as a synthesis of the main thesis connected to this research, in which I am trying to show how the structures of a landscape can influence a poetical and narrative structure, and how the reverse is also true.

6 In the same way in which Wordsworth, as a result of a perception propitiated by a combinatory use of the poetic word, comes to see, in the *Prelude*, worlds and morphologies of land under Lake Windermere: cf. Wordsworth (1959): 24.

7 I allude to those metaphors, kennings and riddles that Sims-Williams considers to be at the origin of the technique in question, such as 'sea-horse' or 'wooden horses' for 'ship' (cf. Old Norse *brimhengest*, Welsh *gwyddfeirch*), 'whales' sanctuary' for 'sea' (cf. Old Irish *nemed bled*), etc.: cf. Sims-Williams (1977–1978): 113.

colours to the poetry of the matter'.[8] I want to dwell on Bachelard's texts because it seems to me that some concepts elaborated in his *La poésie et les élements* could be decisive in analysing the poem in question.

When Bachelard writes that 'it is the water in its mass, not its surface, that sends the insistent message of its hues', because 'only a matter can hold up the weight of multiple impressions and feelings',[9] we can read again the quatrain in §37 of *Immram Brain* and discover this principle as explained at a level of poetic consciousness. What Manannán says in four lines is not (or not only) that the water is actually a land, but more in particular that the colour (*lí*) of the sea, the brightness of its surface (*geldod*)[10] (that generates, in the new vision, new colours: yellow and green, *bude ocus glass*) becomes a solid land. On this point we must linger with attention, because the text does not actually speak of solid land, but of a land which is 'not not-very-solid' (*nád écomrass*).[11] This reading (which is the same in all manuscripts)[12] is extremely significant for

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8 Cf. Bachelard (1942) : 35.

9 Cf. ibidem, 37.

10 *Geldod* seems to be a 'compound made up of *gel* "bright" and *dath* "colour"': Mac Mathúna (1985): 181. It is also interesting the etymology proposed by Vernam Hull, who thinks that the second element could be interpreted as *doth* 'act of bearing, bringing forth, procreation, hatching', and proposes the following possible translation of the two lines: 'the sheen of the sea on which you are is the bright procreation of the sea over which you row': Hull (1962–1964): 177–8.

11 On the etymology of this adjective see Murphy (1998): 256, quoted also in Mac Mathúna (1985): 182.

12 *Immram Brain* is contained in eight manuscripts, and the passage in question is preserved in six of them [U, *Lebor na hUidre*; R, Rawlinson B 512 (Oxford, Bodleian Library); B, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy

my argument: as a result of this double syntactical litotes, in fact, it is manifestly underlined that the new way of seeing is not created by visual characteristics, but derives from the material substance. That is to say, the creative imagination is here moulding its matter, whereas metaphor, after all, 'flattened' (and 'will flatten') the 'tactile', 'magmatic', and material perception, crystallizing it in a linguistic icon that does not allow a real combination of different elements, because it is in itself a new arbitrary element that does not belong to reality anymore. Thus the use of metaphor and the kenning cause deterioration, and even if they are the result of a combination principle, they actually steal any further possibility from it[13]. Instead, 'the material imagination, the imagination rooted in the four elements, even when it prefers a single element, it loves to play with images of their combinations'.[14] This happens because 'imagination needs always a dialectic [...]'. For concepts of material imagination are, in fact, not centres of images that are accumulated because they are similar, but 'crossings of images, at a right angle, incisive and decisive'.[15] And, ultimately, 'it is in the combination of water and land that the double *rêverie* of shape and matter suggests the most incisive times of creative imagination'.[16]

This combinatory principle, this 'feeling of transparency and

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23 N10; E, London, British Library Egerton 88; H, London British Library Harleian 5280; S, Vitterhet Englesk II (Stockholm, Royal Library)]; for a synoptic edition of the line in question, cf. Mac Mathúna (1985): 93–94.

13 Cf. in particular Weinrich (1977): 43.

14 Bachelard (1997): 22.

15 Ibidem, 23.

16 Ibidem, 23–4.

interpenetration of one element with another',[17] does not lack traces in early Irish poetry. Among other numerous examples, I quote here only the one which seems to me the most significant: a poem attributed to Amairgen and preserved in the *Leabhar Gabhála*:[18]

> *Iascach muir / mothach tir / tomaidm neisc / iascc fo thuinn / rethaibh é / fairrci cruaidh / cassair fionn / cedaibh iach / lethan mil / portach laíd / tomaidm neisc*
>
> Fishful sea / fertile land / burst of fish / fish under wave / with courses of birds / rough sea / a white hail / with hundreds of salmon / broad whale / a port song / a burst of fish.

In this poem it is possible to recognize a sort of paratactic 'syntax of seeing' that creates, in the matching of the two elements, a real perceptive interpenetration of land and sea. In other poems, the land is actually described as sea and vice versa.[19] At different levels, then, it is possible to find a combinatory-perceptive process that realizes its concretisation and its most complete formulation in *Immram Brain*. As Sims-Williams pointed out, this 'narrative manifestation of the analogical mode of thought [...] both heightens the metaphors' paradoxical quality and gives the illusion of the rela-

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17 Jones (1959): 238.

18 Cf. Macalister (1940): 180–181.

19 In a tale of the early seventh century which describes a prosperous country under a lake, John Carey sees a possible connection with the sea–land episode in *Immram Brain*: cf. Carey (1982): 36–43; it is to note that the early romance tradition presents many (Celtic?) episodes in which knights and poets meet a wonderful land under the water: cf. the numerous texts quoted in Benozzo (1994): 137–168; cf. also Benozzo (2003c), and Minard (2002): 115–158.

tivity of reality'.[20] I would only substitute, in this context, 'paradoxical' with 'archetypal', because if it is true that we are dealing with (conscious or unconscious) 'experiments in manipulating analogies between categories which are fully recognized as distinct in reality',[21] we should not misunderstand the deep nature of these 'experiments', which do not seem to be rhetoric or stylistic 'exercises', but rather poetic and perceptive answers to the solicitation of the external world. Recalling what three epistemologists wrote ('the perception of landscape, even "scenery", involves some sort of action, because it encompasses the human'),[22] and considering that a landscape is 'a constant creator of motivational images of movement',[23] I would say that these 'experiments' are actual poetic *actions*.[24]

The interaction of land and water concerns a different level of perception and unifies two elements which are separated also at different sensory levels.[25] Water is in fact HORIZONTAL (visual

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20 Sims-Williams (1977–1978): 114.

21 Ibidem, 116. This process is observable also in Dafydd ap Gwilym, who in many of his poems 'is striving to make us look at the world with fresh eyes, to see unexpected relationships, to see analogies between one relationship and another [...]. Dafydd's dyfalu is a kaleidoscope in which fragments of the natural world transform themselves into a myriad of alternative world-views and unborn mythologies': Sims-Williams (1983): 316.

22 Zube–Sell–Taylor (1984): 76; cf. also Bender (1993): 1–17.

23 Ittleson (1973): 84; on other aspects of the relations between landscape and movement, cf. Rothman (1961), Stea (1965), Pande (1969), Braustein (1976), Groenewegen-Frankfort (1978), Appleton (1997).

24 Cf. also Kobayashi (1980): 42–47, and Matro (1978): 14–18.

25 I would not exclude that this interpenetration of land and sea may be originated by a direct and concrete observation of the tides. In this con-

level), DYNAMIC (morphological level), LIQUID (tactile level) and SONOROUS (auditory level). At the opposite pole, land is VERTICAL-OBLIQUE, STATIC, SOLID, and SILENT. The interpenetration of these two elements (at the beginning simply put near one another and then 'fixed' in metaphoric icons) generates a *complex* vision of reality rather than a 'relativistic' one. My conclusion is that in *Immram Brain* we can observe, in a pre-metaphoric (and historically also post-metaphoric) form an archetypical process of the creative mind, connected with the perception of elements of space. The land 'which is not not-very-solid' is the final point, which transcends the pure vision, of a cognitive process that is able to perceive a dense physicality, of a perception related to matter rather than to the simple morphologies.[26]

Nevertheless, as 'the eye itself, the complex vision, get tired of solids',[27] the subsequent quatrain [§38] realizes a dynamic image which gives a new movement to the narration: the 'speckled salmon'

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text, it would also be possible to quote many examples which give evidence of an actual perception of tidal phenomena in early Irish poetry: the most famous and significant is perhaps the so-called 'Lament of the old woman of Beare', in which the tide is perceived as connected with the flowing of time: cf. Murphy (1998): 74–83; for the deep meanings related to the perception of the tide in early Welsh poetry (in a discussion which could involve also the Irish examples), cf. Benozzo (1998d): 23–30.

26 I do not agree, of course, with Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter's considerations about early Irish poetry; for them, in fact, 'nowhere is there evidence of a sustained contemplation of nature's forms, or of any attempt to compose those forms into landscape' (Pearsall–Salter [1973]: 35): a sentence in which I moreover do not clearly understand why 'contemplation' would be necessary, or what it concretely means 'to compose forms into landscape'.

27 Bachelard (1942): 45.

that 'leap out [...] from the white sea', which are 'calves' and 'lovely-coloured lambs'. We are in the same imaginative field of that 'symbiosis of images which attributes the bird to the deep water and the fish to the firmament',[28] of which it is possible to find numerous examples in Irish texts.[29] A practically identical image is for example the description of the Plain of Tethra in *Compert Con Culainn*, where the fish of the sea are the cattle (*ar is búar in mara a iasclach*) and the sea becomes a plain (*ocus is é in muir Mag Tethrai*).[30]

I believe that the ultimate meaning of the 'sea-land poem' in *Immram Brain* has been caught (or at least expressed) by John Carey, when he wrote that this story illustrates 'the transgression of our habitual ideas of human space'.[31] I interpret that sentence in its deepest meaning, that is to say as the formulation of a general principle about the poetic word intended as an instrument able to save human language (and sight) from habitude in perceiving the world, from what Yi-Fu Tuan calls the 'common psychological structures and responses to space and time'.[32] Not by chance, just at a level of discourse that is beyond the simple stylistic analysis, this poem introduces a sort of verticality in the horizontality of the navigation,

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28 Ibidem, 48.

29 Cf. for example poems n. XVII (stanza 5), XIX (stanza 2) and XXII (stanza 3) in Jackson (1935): 17–19. This is not, of course, an exclusively Irish or Celtic tradition: cf. Pàlsson (1990): 119–133, quoted also in Sims-Williams (1998): 119.

30 Cf. van Hamel (1933): 35, quoted in Mac Mathúna (1985): 182.

31 Carey (1992): 24; I refer also to this article for a discussion of other Celtic texts in which is described the interpenetration of waters and land.

32 Tuan (1974b): 13.

and creates a space which becomes 'a pause in the temporal current'.[33]

The fact that the poem leads through this space-time interaction to a description of an 'other', non-human world, which is beyond death, is not, in my view, to be taken as a starting point of the analysis (in other words, we should not merely take it for granted that Bran is in contact with the other world, and that what we know about the Celtic other world is enough to justify that he arrives there and looks at things in that way); rather, it is an arrival point, a narrative resolution, extreme and final, of a poetry that has been able to journey to the most distant limits of the perceptive exploration of space (and of time). In this sense, Mac Cana has reason to write that this story 'explores the relationship between the natural and the supernatural, between this and the other world, together with the ambiguities and relativities of time and space'.[34] But I consider it a limited interpretation to remark that these ambiguities and relativities of time and space 'were implicit in their interaction'.[35] I prefer and find more rich in its consequences (at the level of the study of relationships among word, space, and time) to follow the sequence of events of the text, without taking anything for granted, just as Bran himself will realize only after the narrative that it was Manannán who spoke to him. In the same way, I consider valuable what Robert Tracy suggests, considering that 'the poem dissolves, or at any rate questions, the logical distinction between sea and land', and 'asserts that two realities can exist

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33 Tuan (1974b): 23; cf. also Tuan (1979c): 89–102.

34 Mac Cana (1981): 150.

35 Ibidem; in the same interpretative direction, cf. also Mac Cana (1976): 95–115.

simultaneously in the same place',[36] but I prefer to frame it, at least as a starting point, into a phenomenology of cognitive processes, rather than appealing to a generically Celtic inclination to the supernatural. As we see, the latter will do us no good in seeking to interpret the example of 'natural magic' in the following passage:

> Instead of sky and water, it is one vast field, bounded only with the horizon, its surface gently undulating like the waves of the ocean; and as the wind (which blows fresh on the prairies) bows down the heads of the high grass, it is a running swell.

Here the creature who speaks suggesting a complex vision is not a sea-god who is describing the Celtic other world, and who is able to transform the sea in land and vice versa; instead, these are impressions of North America written by a naval officer and geographer, Captain Marryat, in 1830.[37]

I believe that one of the reasons for which the narrative technique in question 'has more often been experienced rather than analysed'[38] is to be found just in the fact that many scholars continue to flatten and confine stylistic processes in a semantic interlace of coordinates connected, for example, to the 'other-world visions', often reducing their interpretations to rhetoric or to narrative canons only in terms of texts belonging or not belonging to precise literary

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36 Tracy (1996): 169–186.

37 Marryat (1839): 86; as Richard Muir notes, 'the analogy with the sea occurs frequently in the accounts of the early travellers to the West': Muir (1999): 132; Charles Dickens himself describes an American prairie as being 'like a sea without water' (ibidem; cf. Dickens [1842]); cf. also the texts quoted and discussed in Lowenthal (1968): 61–88.

38 Sims-Williams (1998b): 119.

genres.[39] These comparative approaches of a formalistic and macro stylistic type, if on the one hand they consent to recognize a sort of *long durée* memory into poetry, on the other hand, when they are applied in a servile way, risk reducing the semantic freshness of some images (and in this case their archetypical deepness) to simple variants of an *ur-motive*.[40] And it is probably due to this kind of approach that generalisations such as the following one expressed by Chris Fitter are generated: 'Celtic verse [...] can be seen to be empirical—concerned descriptively more with actuality than

39 Carey calls this tendency 'to adduce possible parallels from the great religious traditions, from exotic mythologies, or from the general findings of comparatists' a '*natural temptation*': cf. Carey (1987): 2.

40 Cf. the important theoretical explanation by Raimondi (1967): 95–112, and Raimondi (1988): 163–181. Even if it is true that 'the themes of voyages—real and visionary—to paradisal lands of delight are virtually universal in recurrence and appeal', and that 'they appear among the Chinese, the Japanese, the Indo-Europeans, and the Ural-Altaic peoples' (Mac Mathúna [1985]: 241), to reduce the imaginative strength of a text to being a simple variant means, in my opinion, to give more importance to a critical method of classification than to the text itself and to its 'internal' reasons. And it seems to me that Celtic philology has a particular inclination towards big reference frames: it has never happened, for example, that an Italian philologist, after having recognized symbolic and narrative archetypes in Dante's *Commedia*, ended by reading poetic passages of the poem as if they were simple variants of the motif of other-world journey. I discussed this problem, with reference to the description of forests in medieval poetry and narrative, in Benozzo (1998c): 103–125; the theoretical problem of critics methodology used in approaching Celtic literature is currently discussed by Celtic philologists, cf. for example, to quote two studies very different in their conception and conclusions, Sims-Williams (1998b): 1–35 and Koch (in press); I analysed these and other problems of Medieval studies in Benozzo (2000b); see also Benozzo (2002a).

authority—but not 'pictorial' or 'phenomenological' in its tendencies'.[41]

A scholar who devoted his life to the study of the relationships between mind and landscape, Kenneth Craik, wrote that 'the organisational nature of landscape perception serves as a counterpart to the physical composition of spaces on the land':[42] in this way he was trying to explain that it exists as a perceptive structure that superimposes itself on the morphological structure of landscape, even if it originated from it in the first place.[43] This 'organisational nature of landscape perception' (which is mostly generated by language) is itself prone, like all cognitive processes, to be fixed in habitual images and to lose its original complexity.

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41 Fitter (1995): 174; it is very difficult for me to understand this opposition between 'actuality' and 'authority': when I consider a landscape description in a text or I listen to someone who is describing a place, I feel a sort of authority just in the fact that I understand this description has been originated by an actual experience of the landscape. The fact is that 'literary art uses words to realize images of experience. Because words are also the traditional means by which we explain, there may be a tendency to confuse description with explanation [...]. However, literary works, like other modalities of art, do not explain; what they do is to enable us to recognize the multivalent character of experience': Tuan (1967): 263; cf. also Salter–Lloyd (1977), Thrift (1978): 337–349, Drabble (1979), Lutwack (1984), Appleton (1986): 26–47, Collot-Mathieu (1987), Cavicchioli (1992), Arnold (1993), Mondada (1994), Albert (1995), Mellard (1996): 471–490.

42 Craik (1986): 55; cf Craik (1970, 1972, 1975); in the same direction, cf. also Wohlwill (1966): 29–38, and Canter (1977).

43 To use Tuan's words, 'the human being, by his mere presence, imposes a scheme on space. Most of the time he is not aware of it. He notes its absence when he is lost': Tuan (1974): 36.

As I said before, I believe that poetic language is able to rescue this settling of perception and of language into habitude. And I believe that trying to understand the rôle of poetry in the perception of the world, that is to say also as a 'de-structurer' of our habitual perception, it becomes in the end secondary to analyse the different strategies utilized each time by poets. If we do not want to betray this ultimate meaning of poetry, the important thing should be its result.

And then I wonder if our way of looking at a landscape (in this case at a plain of water in movement) really changes, and how it changes, after reading the poem recited by Manannán. But here the answer becomes also individual, because fortunately the ways of meeting a poetic text (or a landscape) are as many as the persons who meet it. Nevertheless, I hope to have shown how the construction of so complex an image—that in the case of *Immram Brain* must attempt a description of a non-reality in order to be expressed in writing—arises from (and remains anchored to) the concrete elements of landscape, and has to do with archetypes of perception which belong strictly to the field of the relationships between human mind and physical space.

CHAPTER II

The Annihilation of Anthropocentric Perception of Landscape: Semantics of Space in *Buile Shuibhne*

In a book about the human perception of space, Yi-Fu Tuan collected and listed series of so-called 'human common responses'[1] to the external world. The most evident attitude, verifiable either at the level of everyday perceptions or in the examples offered by literature and the arts, seems to be the one of *ethnocentrism / egocentrism*,[2] two categories that I would lead back to the one of *anthropocentrism*. The external world—that is to say—is classified, named, and therefore perceived, through a close relation with the human body, which becomes an 'organising centre', an absolute reference. This is where primary oppositions like 'high' *vs.* 'low', 'right' *vs.* 'left', 'behind' *vs.* 'in front of', 'near' *vs.* 'distant', 'inside' *vs.* 'outside' are originated: oppositions that are part of every culture, and that are verifiable by everyone in his individual perceptions.[3]

With regards to this fundamental notion, the middle-Irish *Buile Suibhne*[4] represents a sort of striking exception: a unique episode

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1 Tuan (1974): 23–34.

2 Cf. ibidem, 24.

3 Cf. also Fischer (1975): 197–239, Hallowell (1977): 23–45, Tuan (1977), Deregowsky (1990, 1991), Collot (1995): 221–244.

4 I quote from O'Keeffe (1913); cf. also O'Keeffe (1931); for a historical

—as far as I know—in the history of medieval verbal arts, which lets one see inside and behind itself, a phenomenological model far removed from our common perceptions of the external world. It seems without doubt that, at the level of its reception also, the *Buile Suibhne* was a real avant-garde text, something without precedent and—I would say—without successors: one of those texts destined to remain isolated as a result of their destructive nature.[5] I believe that one of the most important elements of this 'destructive nature' has to be looked for in the acentric, asymmetrical, and in a sense 'anarchic'[6] canon that organises the text in its structure as well.

First of all, I would like to consider Suibhne's movements, without giving too much importance—as is often done—to his inclination to flight, or his transformations into a bird. As far as I am concerned, I consider those elements as narrative instruments and not as sufficient reasons to explain certain 'obscure' points of this prosimetre.

Trying to consider these flights not as possible traces of a

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and literary framing of the text cf. Jackson (1955): 535–550, Lehmann (1953, 1954), Ó Riain (1974): 173–188, Carney (1984): 93–109, Frykenberg (1984): 107–120.

5 I am thinking, for similar examples, of the *De Rerum Natura* by Lucretius, or *The Prelude* by Wordsworth; I analyse the 'destructive' characteristic of these text from a theoretical point of view, in Benozzo (1997i): 3–11, where, utilising also botanical metaphors in trying to describe it, I outline a possible distinction between poets (or texts) who go towards other poets and poets towards which the other poets go.

6 I use 'anarchic' in the same way in which the anthropologist Jean Malaurie calls 'anarchic' the structure of the hummocks on the ice pack of the Arctic regions: cf. Malaurie (1982).

shamanic culture,[7] but just as movements, it is possible to say that they do not follow a recognisable order, and that they look like a chaotic accumulation of trajectories: you cannot consider them as itineraries or travels,[8] because their logic, their 'syntactical' structure, does not seem to lie in an immediate relationship between the territory and the man who is travelling on it, nor in an 'internal' rationale of the journey itself.

Suibhne moves 'on the world's ridge' (*ar druim dhombhain*),[9] without describing a precise or even understandable topology: he moves 'aimlessly and restlessly',[10] unceasingly ['restless my wandering' (*utmhall mh'imirce*);[11] 'unsettled is my faring through each land' (*utmhall mh'irche in gach íath*)[12]], 'from one point to another',[13] 'from the point of every height and from the summit of one hill to another' (*do ind gach aird 7 do tulmhoing gacha tulchi*),[14] 'from thicket to thicket' (*gach muine día aroille*).[15] His movement is not exactly a 'zigzag movement',[16] because if it was you could recognise a sort of pre-determined intention that is in fact absent.

Considering only the cases in which place-names are mentioned, Suibhne changes places 37 times, and every new place

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7 Cf. Benes (1961): 309–334, Salvaneschi (1979): 119–147.

8 For the distinction between 'movement' and 'itinerary', cf. Labbé (1991): 159–201, Deregowsky–Parker (1992): 397–403, Zumthor (1993) : 75–78.

9 O'Keeffe (1913): 148 and 149.

10 Ibidem, 134 and 135.

11 Ibidem, 94 and 95.

12 Ibidem, 120 and 121.

13 Ibidem, 35 and 36.

14 Ibidem, 114 and 115; this is actually a sort of formula, which is repeated also at §64, 125.

15 Ibidem, 124 and 125.

16 As stated by Rapallo (1979): 114.

coincides usually with the beginning of a new part in prose:

[XVII]

go rainic Glenn mbit[h]aluinn mBolcáin

till he reached the ever-delightful Glen Bolcain[17]

[XXII]

Tainic Suibhne roimhe iarhum co riath an chill ag Snamh dha Én for Sionainn

So Suibhne fared forth until he reached the church at Snamh dha En on the Shannon[18]

[XXIV]

*Rosiecht im*morro *Suibhne arnabhárach go [Cill] Derfile*

On the morrow Suibhne went to Cell Derfile[19]

[XXVIII]

A haithle na laidhe sin doluidh-siumh isin oidche ar ccionn co muilenn Loingseacháin

After that lay he came the next night to Loingseachan's mill[20]

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17 O'Keeffe (1913): 22 and 23.
18 Ibidem, 32 and 33.
19 Ibidem, 34 and 35.
20 Ibidem, 42 and 43.

[XXXIII]

Ni roan-somh don reim sin co rainic ría n-oidhchi co Ros mBeraigh

He halted not in his career until before the fall of the night he arrived at Ros Bearaigh[21]

[XXXV]

7 tóet roimhe co rainic isin mbile ag Ros Earcáin

And [he] went on his way until he reached the old tree at Ros Earcain[22]

[XLI]

*A haithle na laidhe sin tainic Suibhne a Fidh Gaibhle co Beinn mBóghaine, assein co Beind Fhaibhne, aisséin co Raith Murbuilg 7 ni ffuair a dhíon ar an ccaill*igh *co rainig co Dun Sobairce i nUlt*aibh

After that lay Suibhne came from Fiodh Gaibhle to Benn Boghaine, thence to Benn Faibhne, thence to Rath Murbuilg, but he found no refuge from the hag until he reached Dun Sobairce in Ulster[23]

[XLII]

Luid Suibhne iarhum co Ros Chomáin i Connachtuinh

Suibhne then went to Ros Comain in Connacht[24]

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21 Ibidem, 48 and 49.
22 Ididem, 50 and 51.
23 Ibidem, 82 and 83.
24 Ibidem, 82 and 83.

[XLIV]

[. . .] *luid aissein arnambárach co Slíabh n-uráoibhinn nEachtghe, aissein co Slíabh mínaluinn Mis, aissein co Slíabh bennard Bladhma, assein co hInis Mureadh*aigh; *coecáois ar mhís do inti-sein i n-uaimh Dhonnáin Eghæ, aissidhein co Carraic Alustair*

[. . .] and [he] went thence on the morrow to delightful Sliabh Aughty, thence to smooth, beautiful Sliabh Mis, thence to lofty-peaked Sliabh Bloom, thence to Inis Murray. For a fortnight and a month he tarried in the cave of Donnan of Eig, and went thence to Carrick Alastair[25]

[XLVI]

[. . .] *co ráinic Crioch Bhreatan*

[. . .] he reached the land of the Britons[26]

[LI]

Tainic iarhum Suibhne reimhe dochum nErenn co ttarla i ndíuidh laoi é go Magh Line i nUltaibh

Suibhne then came to Ireland and at the close of the day he arrived at Magh Line in Ulster[27]

25 Ibidem, 90 and 91.
26 Ibidem, 100 and 101.
27 Ibidem, 104 and 105.

[LIII]

A haithle na laoidhi sin tainic Suibhne roime co Glenn mBolcáin

After that lay Suibhne came on to Glen Bolcain[28]

[LVII]

[. . .] *co riacht Benna Boirche fodhes*

[. . .] he reached Benn Boirche in the south[29]

[LIX]

Tainic-siumh roimhe isin maidin arnambárach co Magh Feimhin, luid aisséin co Sionainn sru*thghlain sriobhúaine, asséin co hEchtge n-aird n-uraoibhinn, aisséin co feronn mionghlas móirédrocht Maenmhuighe, asséin co* sru*th sáoraluin Suca, aissein go himlibh Locha soileathain Ríbh. Gab*haidh *iaromh fos 7 comhnaidhe i nglaic Bhile Tiobradáin i cCrích Gháille i n-oirther Connacht on oidche sin.*

On the morning of the morrow Suibhne came on to Magh Femhin, thence he fared to the limpid, green-streamed Shannon, thence to lofty, beautiful Aughty, thence to the smooth-green, bright land of Maenmagh, thence to the noble and delightful river Suck, thence to the shores of spreading Lough Ree. That night he made his resting place in the fork of Bile Tiobradain in Crich Gaille in the east of Connacht.[30]

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28 Ibidem, 108 and 109.
29 Ibidem, 114 and 115.
30 Ibidem, 118 and 119.

[LXVIII]

Aroille aimsir do Suibhne i Luachair Dheadhadh for a bhaeithreimennaibh baoisi

On a certain occasion Suibhne happened to be in Luachair Deaghaidh on his wild career of folly[31]

[LXX]

Dorala dho-somh laithe n-áon techt co Druim Iaroinn i Connachtaibh

One day it happened that he went to Druim Iarainn in Connacht[32]

[LXXIV]

Tainic Suibhne roime fo dheóidh cunuige an baile i raibhe Moling .i. Teach Moling

At length Suibhne came along to the place where Moling was, even Teach Moling[33]

[LXXVII]

*Rosoigh*edh *lá n-ann co hInnis Bó Finni i n-iarthar Chonnacht, lá oile co hEss rocháoin Rúaidh, lá oile co Slíabh mináluinn Mis, lá oile go Bend*a *biothfhúara Boirche*

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31 Ibidem, 130 and 131.
32 Ibidem, 132 and 133.
33 Ibidem, 136 and 137.

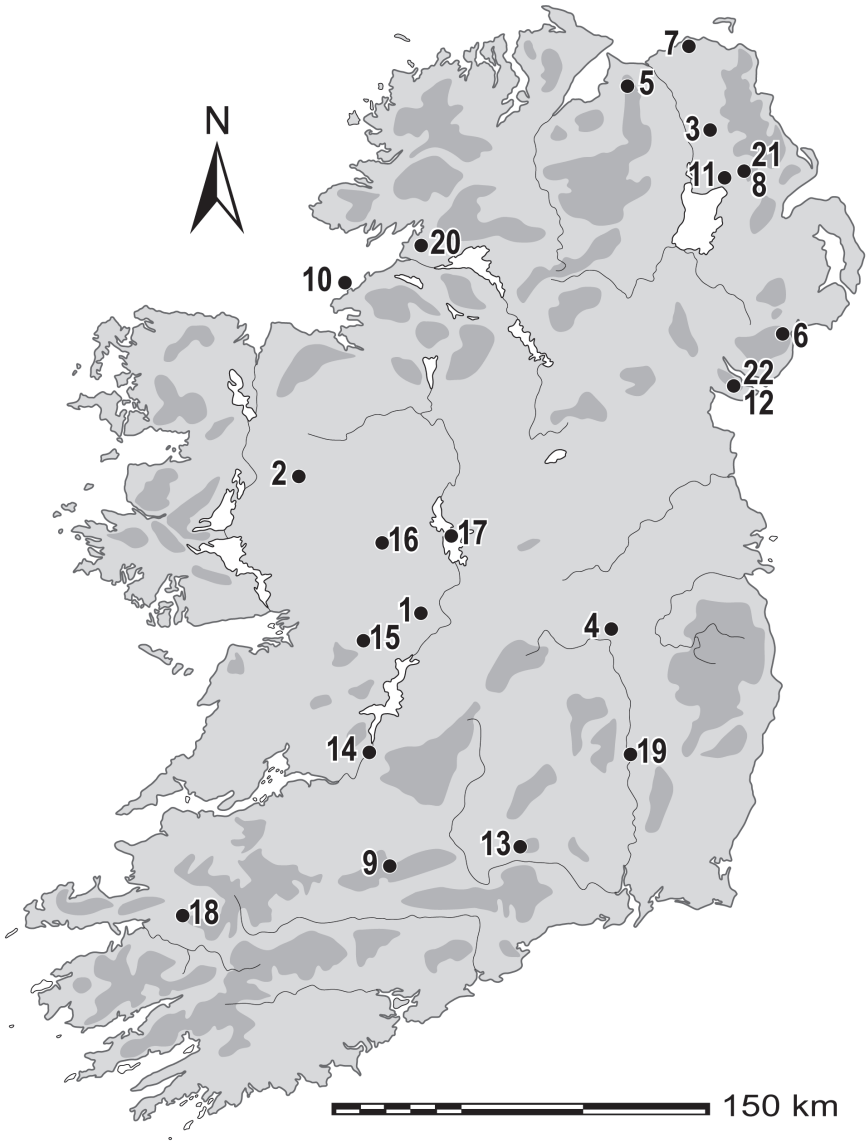
> One day he would go to Innis bo Finne in west Connacht, another day to delightful Eas Ruaidh, another day to smooth, beautiful Sliabh Mis, another day to everchilly Benn Boirche[34]

Starting from these place-names, it is interesting to follow Suibhne's trajectories. The following is a 'graphic summary' of his movements through Ireland that I recreated utilising the place-names that it is possible to locate:[35]

34 Ibidem, 142 and 143.
35 Following Rapallo (1979).

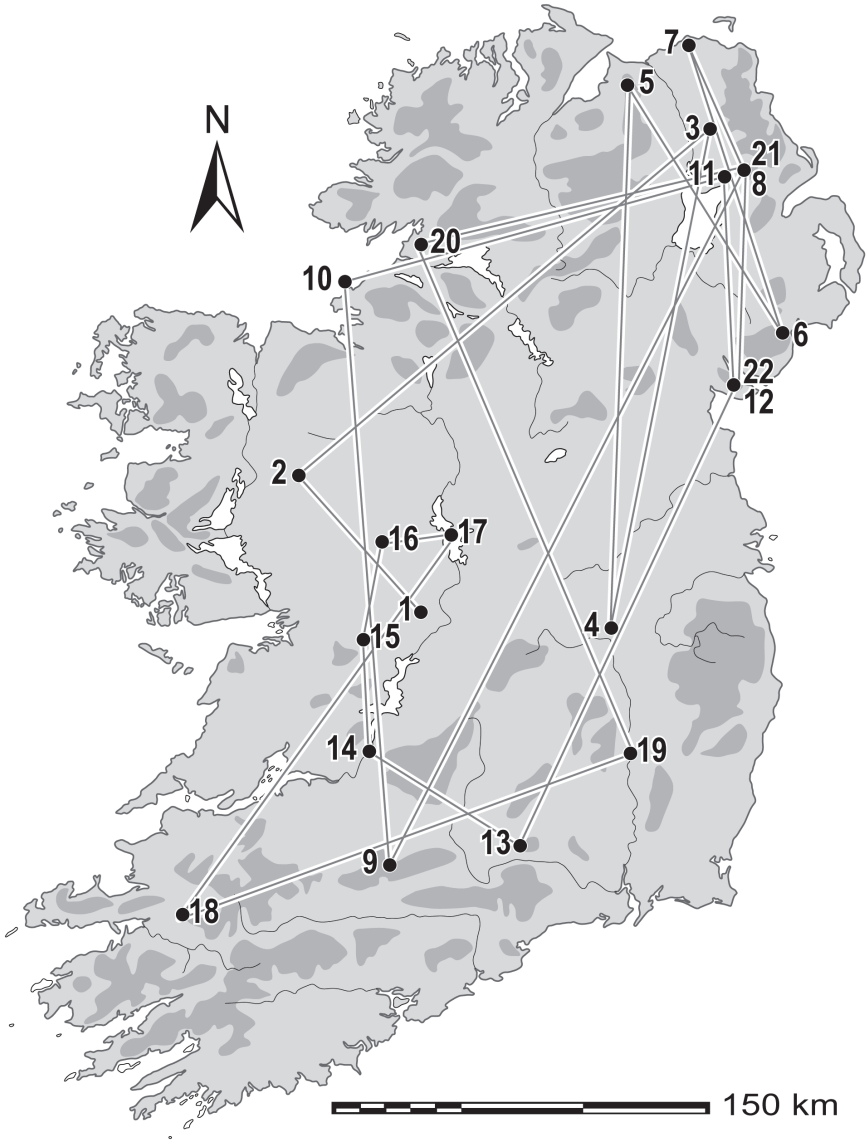
Dun Sobairce
Buas
Ros Ercain
Leithed Lar
Sliabh Mis
Rathmor
Magh Line
Seimhne
Glenn Aighle
Sliabh Liag
Es Ruaidh
Loch Eirne
Innis Muredhaigh
Loch Diolair
Cenel Eoghain
ULAID
Magh Li
Magh Rath
Druim Lorgan
Cell Lainne?
Loch Cuan
Benn Gulbain
All Fharannain
Dun Sodairce
Rath Murbuilg
Benn Boirche
Magh Luirg
Muirthemhne
Ettan Tairb
CONNACHT
Cell Derfile
Cruachan Oighle
Ard Abhla
Loch Ribh
Suca
Gabhal
Magh Life
Fiodh Gaibhle
Ui Faelain
Maenmagh
Sliabh Echtge
LAIGEN
Teach Moling
Sliabh Eibhlinne
Airgeadros
Berbha
Imlech Jobhair
Sliabh Bladhma
Magh Femhin
Crota Cliach
Luachair Deadhaidh
Sliabh Cua
Loch Lein
Dun Cermna
Teach Duinn

Progressive map of places reached by Suibhne[36]



36 1 (Snámh dha Én) [XXII]; 2 (Cill Derfile) [XXIV]; 3 (Ros Earcáin) [XXXV]; 4 (Fiodh Gaibhle) [XLI]; 5 (Benn Faibhne) [XLI]; 6 (Rath Murbuilg) [XLI]; 7 (Dun Sobairce) [XLI]; 8 (Sliabh Mis) [XLIV]; 9 (Sliabh Bloom) [XLIV]; 10 (Inis Murray) [XLIV]; 11 (Magh Line) [LI]; 12 (Benn Boirche) [LVII]; 13 (Magh Femhin) [LIX]; 14 (Shannon) [LIX]; 15 (Maenmagh) [LIX]; 16 (river Suck) [LIX]; 17 (Lough Ree) [LIX]; 18 (Luachair Dheadhadh) [LXVIII]; 19 (Teach Moling) [LXXIV]; 20 (Eas Ruaidh) [LXXVII]; 21 (Sliabh Mis) [LXXVII]; 22 (Benn Boirche) [LXXVII].

Graphic summary of Suibhne's movement



As it can be seen, there is not a 'centre' of perception, something that corresponds, on the narrative level, to the anthropocentric model of space perception. Moreover, space, so to speak, has

not sufficient time to settle and root itself in time, to become the recognisable co-ordinate of a chronotope.[37] This is a point that clearly separates the *Buile Suibhne* from the possible analogous texts with which it is commonly associated: for example the *Vita Merlini* by Geoffrey of Monmouth.[38] There, in fact, you can always feel a clear topology, orientated towards a centre of perception (the Caledonian forest), which creates an archetypal opposition between inside and outside, between here and there.[39] Nothing similar is present in *Buile Shuibhne*, where even a place like Glenn Bolcain, where Suibhne 'stood his fortress and his dwelling-place', in spite of what it is said (*úair dosoich*edh *chuige as gach aird d'Eirinn 7 ni theighadh úadh acht re huaman 7 re huiregla mhóir*, 'for thither would he go from every part of Ireland, nor would he leave it except through fear and terror'), is actually a false centre, a *non-*

37 For a definition of 'chronotope', cf. Bakhtin (1978): 231–240: 'Chronotope (which literally means time-space) is the interconnection of relationships between space and time artistically reproduced by literature'. For the concept of time living in space, the following writings by Martin Heidegger are fundamental: Heidegger (1953, 1967, 1969); for an anthropological point of view on this interconnection, with considerations which go beyond the analysed cultures, cf. also Jones (1959): 241–250, Groenewegen-Frankfort (1978), Thornton (1980), Harvey (1990): 418–434, Clark (1992); on a more theoretical level, cf. also the relevant (but sometimes unclear) Lynch (1972); for further texts, cf. the references quoted in chapter III, 'Landscapes indside the Landscapes', at note 23.

38 On the relationships between the two texts, cf. Jackson (1953–1955): 112–116.

39 Cf. Benozzo (1998c): 103–125; in this sense the forest in the *Vita Merlini* can be considered as the first example of a wood similar to the ones of the old French Arthurian romances: cf. Benozzo (1994, 1996a).

lieu,[40] a non-place that survives mostly in his memory, and that at the end of the story he has still to explore.[41]

In addition, if you pay careful attention to the movement of Suibhne during his story, you can see that there is more than one so-called 'centre' where he goes back every time: in 'chapter' XXXV it is stated that 'he had three dwellings in his own country in which he was wont to reside, viz.: Teach mic Ninnedha, Cluain Creamha, and Ros Earcain' (*úair dobhadar tri dúnáruis aigi-siumh ina cclecht*adh *comn*aidh*e do dhenamh ina thír feisin .i. Teach mic Ninnedha 7 Cluain Creamha 7 Ros Earcáin*),[42] and when he arrives to the place where Moling lives, he remains there for a year, and he attends there at vespers each night.[43] But all these places are not centres from where the world around is perceived: they are starting points for new movements, that is to say, further halting-places of his asymmetrical wanderings, branches that generate new branches.

I find that the most useful image to try to understand such an elusive text is the one of the map. It is well known that we tend to organise and structure space through mental maps which are made by memories, crossings, and memories of crossings. In doing that, I think that we follow a twofold instinct: on the one hand we try to 'control' space and reduce it to a readable icon, on the other hand, perhaps in a less conscious way, we contribute to 'enlarge' it in always new perspectives, and to 'give it movement'.[44] I believe that these two inclinations (which belong so deeply to human nature that they perhaps precede, historically, the development of

40 Cf. Augé (1992).
41 Cf. § 53: O'Keeffe (1913): 107 and 108.
42 Ibidem, 50 and 51.
43 Ibidem, 76 and 77.
44 On the concept of giving movement to the space, cf. in particular Pande (1969), Braustein (1976), and Levy–Segaud (1983): 87–91.

language)[45] co-exist in everybody, but it is a fact that they also correspond to two opposite ways of looking at the world, and that are the embodiment of a universal opposition belonging to the same semantic field as the opposition between, for example, non-nomadic and nomadic cultures. The first is a centripetal and symmetrical way of mapping the world, the second a centrifugal and asymmetrical one. The first tends to immobility, the second changes continuously.[46]

Before going to the point, I would like to quote a few remarks expressed by Gordon A. Knott about the perception of space in medieval texts; trying to understand it by studying the old French *chansons de geste* (in an article that I consider important also for its theoretical implications), he formulates the following methodological considerations: 'I ask whether, in considering concepts of space as they appear in literature, we should not be looking very seriously at the work of those concerned with spatial behaviour,

45 Cf. Cassirer (1955–1957): 153; cf. also Munn (1973): 65–77, Hallowell (1977): 133–145.

46 On the 'cognitive mapping' cf. Downs–Stea (1977): 134, where a useful definition is provided: '*Cognitive mapping* is an abstraction covering those cognitive or mental abilities that enable us to collect, organize, store, recall and manipulate information about the spatial environment [. . .]. Above all, cognitive mapping refers to a process of doing; it is an *activity* that we engage in rather than an object that we have. It is the way in which we come to grips with and comprehend the world around us [. . .]. A *cognitive map* is a *product*, a person's organized representation of some part of the spatial environment [. . .]. Most importantly, a cognitive map is a cross-section representing the world at one instant in time. It reflects the world as some person believes it to be'; cf. also Blaut (1971): 1–4, Downs (1981): 65–78, and Blaut (1999): 510–515; on the oldest roots of cognitive mapping, cf. H. de Hutorowicz (1911): 669–679, Gear (1944): 79–83, Thrower (1972), Blakemore (1981): 1–24, Meschiari (1999a).

and, in particular, with the idea of cognitive mapping. [. . .] One has not to be a follower of behavioural psychology in all its aspects to find this useful'.[47] And later on: 'In considering concepts of space in the *chansons de geste*, then, we have to take into account more than the 'medieval' linearity and lack of perspective proposed by Labbé. It is necessary to move outside purely literary and artistic considerations, and beyond art history and literary history, into that fascinating border country where psychology and geography meet and interact'.[48] It goes without saying that I agree with Knott's considerations, and I also find very stimulating the fact that analyses which are in part methodologically similar to my research on Celtic literature are starting to appear in other fields of Medieval studies.

Going back to *Buile Shuibhne*, my second conclusion is that its whole structure (which—as I showed before—is a sort of acentric exploration of the landscapes without directions) is an unresolved icon of the world, a *map in progress* of reality that 'puts the space into movement'. This implies, on the cognitive level, a model of understanding based on a displacement of points and trajectories rather than on their connections.[49]

This 'open syntax' of directions and thoughts is confirmed by considerations about the style. Here, in fact, one has to underline the extensive use of catalogues in the description of landscapes. This stylistic procedure (which is not an exclusive trait of oral literature, as has been said too many times)[50] has the power to *decentralize* the points of view in looking at the reality. This is true

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47 Knott (1999): 23–24.
48 Ibidem, 33; the study quoted by Knott is Labbé (1991).
49 On this concept cf. also Meschiari (2002) : 159–173.
50 Cf. for example Gray (1971): 37–55 and Renoir (1987): 533–548.

and observable both in the oldest examples (for instance the Sumerian cycle of Gilgamesh, the middle Asiatic *Manas*, or the old Welsh *Gododdin*) and in the late-medieval and modern ones (like the old French *chansons de geste*, or the modern experiments by authors like the French Georges Perec or the Venezuelan Juan Liscano).[51] Catalogues use words in verbal, nominal, sometimes strophic sequences that, much more than simple and contracted descriptions, collect the external world in sort of 'portable tables'.[52] This instinct to repeat the morphologies of phenomena and their dynamics through the anaphoric accumulation of words, one line after another, one step after another, ends by expressing the complexity in an open structure, rather than interpreting it in a crystallised image. A catalogue is thus an 'index' that opens new possibilities each time, instead of organising them in closed and structured relationships.[53]

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51 The most complete study of the catalogic technique in Celtic and Indo-European traditions is Campanile (1981): 53–74; cf also Benozzo (2000c: 5–13, 2001b, 2001c, 2003b); on the stylistic relevance of catalogues, cf. also Benozzo–Meschiari (1999): 39–60. A comprehensive study on catalogues in medieval literatures is in my opinion one of the *desiderata* of medieval philology; catalogues can be used and re-used for different purposes, as it is showed by the ironic and parodic intent of the catalogue in the Middle Welsh *Culhwch ac Olwen*: cf. Edel (1982–1983): 253–267; for catalogues in the Gilgamesh saga, cf. Hecker (1974).

52 *Petite cosmogonie portative* (*Little Portable Cosmogony*) is, not by chance, the title of a long catalogic text written by Raimond Queneau in 1955.

53 For the rhetorical problem of repetition (with its psychological and philosophical implications), cf. Lonzi (1970): 133–142, Deleuze (1972), Cohen (1976) : 413–422, Frei (1976): 1–25, Riffaterre (1978): 89–98, Bernard (1985): 16–39, Frédéric (1985).

There are many different examples of this 'moderate encyclopaedism'[54] in *Buile Shuibhne*, and they all concern landscapes and natural places. I limit myself to quote three of them:

[XII]

Ni roan don reim roiretha sin co nár fág magh na machairi na maolsliabh, móin na muine na mothar, cnoch na cabhán, na coil chlithardhlúith a nEirinn [. . .]

He halted not from that headlong course until he left neither plain, nor field, nor bare mountain, nor bog, nor thicket, nor marsh, nor hill, nor hollow, nor dense-sheltering wood in Ireland [. . .][55]

[XVII]

*Baoi fri re chein iarsin seachnoin Erenn ag tadhall 7 ag turrag a sgalpaibh cruadhcharrag 7 a ndsoaib crann urard eidhn*each *7 u ccuasaibh caol-chumhguibh cloch o inber do inber 7 o binn do binnd 7 o glinn do glionn* [. . .]

For a long time thereafter he was (faring) throughout Ireland, visiting and searching in hard, rocky clefts and in bushy branches of tall ivy-trees, in narrow cavities of stones, from estuary to estuary, from peak to peak, and from glen to glen [. . .][56]

54 'Enciclopedismo moderato': cf. Benozzo–Meschiari (1999): 57.

55 O'Keeffe (1913): 14 and 15; this is an example of 'negative catalogue', not unknown to the oldest poetic tradition, and for example typical of *Gilgamesh*.

56 Ibidem, 22 and 23.

[XVII]

*Uair as amlaidh ata Glenn mBolcáin 7 ceithre doirsi ag an ngaoith ann 7 roschoill roaluinn rocháoin ann bheós 7 tiobrada táobhghlana 7 uaránа ionnfhuara 7 glaisi gainm*idh*e glanuisgidhe 7 biorar barrghlas 7 fothlocht fann foda for a lár. Iomda fhos a samha 7 a siomsáin 7 a lus-bían 7 a biorragáin, a chaora 7 a chreamh, a mhelle 7 a miodhbhun 7 airn*idh*e dubha 7 a dercain donna.*

For it is thus Glen Bolcain is: it has four gaps to the wind, likewise a wood very beautiful, very pleasant, and clean-banked wells and cool springs, and sandy, clear-water streams, and green-topped watercress and brooklime bent and long on their surface. Many likewise are its sorrels, its wood sorrels, its *lus-bian* and its *biorragan*, its berries, and its wild garlic, its *melle* and its *miodhbhun*, its black sloes and its brown acorns.[57]

There are other catalogues, like the one at § 40, which is the longest one: a tree-list of 64 quatrains.[58] I will quote other examples of lists talking about the sounds of the landscape.

The whole structure of the *Buile*, as I showed before, is actually an 'amplified catalogue', an unresolved index of points and parts, an accumulation, I would say, of possibilities, an inventory of landscapes.

The catalogues I quoted show also that the landscapes that Suibhne crosses and reaches are of different kinds, even if they are mostly vegetable landscapes (Suibhne is accustomed to sleep on

57 Ibidem.

58 I will analyze the Irish and Welsh equivalents in chapter 5 ['Landscape as a Force in Movement'].

the trees). He comes into contact with seas, lakes, rivers, waterfalls, mountains, fields, plains, forests, heaths.[59]

The structure of the tale, the trajectories of Suibhne's movements, the kinds of landscapes he crosses, and the stylistic technique of catalogues contribute therefore to create this feeling of 'decentration', this absence of actual references, of recognisable points of view. And the same thing is observable, and even clearer, on the sensory level.

Visual perceptions (morphologies, colours and lights of the landscape) are of course the most typical ways of describing landscapes in literature:[60] among them I could quote the following:

[XLIII, 15]

*Ar brú tobair ghlais grean*aigh

At the brink of a clear, pebbly spring[61]

[XLV, 8]

Rith tar tuinnbennaibh / Duine Sobhairce

Racing over the wave-tops / of Dun Sobairce[62]

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59 It is not necessary to quote further examples: the whole texts describes a crossing of different landscapes. On the connections between trees and movement, cf. Meschiari (2001).

60 Cf. the theoretical considerations in Benozzo (1999): 153–172; cf. also, from the point of view of cognitivism, Gibson (1950), Zube (1970), Jacobs (1975), Ulrich (1977), Balling–Falk (1982), Jakle (1987), Riley (1997); cf. also the references quoted in the chapters 6 ['Landscape as a Symbolic Form'] and 8 ['Fragments of a Chromatic Non-Phenomenology of Landscapes'].

61 O'Keeffe (1913): 87 and 88.

[XLV, 27]

Caille combfhada

Far-stretching woods[63]

[XLV, 28]

Duibhlinn dúnBhoirche

The black lake of fortressed Boirche[64]

[LXIX]

Sionainn sru*thghlain sriobhúaine*

the limpid, green-streamed Shannon[65]

[LXIX]

feronn miongblas móirédrocht Maenmhuighe

the smooth-green, bright land of Maenmagh[66]

[LXVIII]

Fiodh glansrot[h]ach gégáloinn Gaible

Fiodh Gaibhle of clear streams and beautiful branches[67]

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62 Ibidem, 93 and 94.
63 Ibidem, 98 and 99.
64 Ibidem.
65 Ibidem, 118 and 119.
66 Ibidem.

There are many examples of *tactile perceptions*: first of all descriptions of the cold (similar to those of the Old English *Seafarer*),[68] which here become also a way of describing visible elements such as the snow and the water:

[XXI, 1]

Anocht is fúar an snechta

Cold is the snow tonight[69]

[XXI, 5]

Gaoth an reoidh ag mo rébadh, / sneachta reomleón go leige

Frosty wind tearing me, / already snow has wounded me[70]

[XXI, 10]

Beith re sneachta go nochtach

being in snow in nakedness[71]

[XXVII, 7]

As fuit, fuit damh o nach mair / mo chollan i n-eidhnechaibh, / feraidh mor síonaibh air / agus mor do thoirneachaibh

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67 Ibidem, 130 and 131.
68 Where they express a possible connection with a state of mind or a moral concept, as stated by Stanley (1955): 413–436.
69 O'Keeffe (1913): 28 and 29.
70 Ibidem, 30 and 31.
71 Ibidem, 32 and 33.

Cold, cold for me is it / since my body lives not in the ivy-bushes, / much rain comes upon it / and much thunder[72]

[XLIII, 3]

as fúar an ghaeth domanuig

cold is the wind that has come to me[73]

[XLIII, 11]

As úar anocht an adhaigh

Cold is the night tonight[74]

[XLIII, 17]

*As úar gæth an mhadanr*aidh, / *doicc etrom is mh'ionar*

Chilly is the wind of morn, / it comes between me and my smock[75]

[XLV, 1]

adhbha úairseaca, / garbha gáoithsnechta

abode of cold frost, / roughness of wind-driven snow[76]

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72 Ibidem, 38 and 39.
73 Ibidem, 84 and 85.
74 Ibidem, 86 and 87.
75 Ibidem, 88 and 89.
76 Ibidem, 90 and 91.

[XLV, 2]

Gaoth uar oighreata

Cold, icy wind[77]

[LIX]

[. . .] *ba fúar mh'ionadh aréir .i. mullach Bheinne Boirche 7 ní nemhfhúaire mh'ionadh anocht a nglaic Bhile Tiobradáin.*

[. . .] cold was my dwelling-place last night on the summit of Benn Boirche, nor less cold is my dwelling-place tonight in the fork of Bile Tiobradain.[78]

[LXI, 4]

Romc[h]raidh sioc, sion nach súairc

Frost and foul storm have wrung my heart[79]

[LXVII, 2]

reod, sioc, sneachta agus síon / agum thúargain tre bith síor

Frost, ice, snow, and storm, / forever scourging me[80]

Among these tactile perceptions there are more considerable images that express real contacts between the body and the physi-

77 Ibidem.
78 Ibidem, 118 and 119.
79 Ibidem, 120 and 121.
80 Ibidem, 126 and 127.

cal landscape; in the following examples, Suibhne's body touches the ground, the dew, the trees, the stones and the hailstones:

[XII]

*An tan in*morro *doriacht assin ccath amach ba hainminic nothaidhl*edh *a c*[*h*]*ossa lár ar lúas a réime 7 an tan nothaidhl*edh *ni bhenf*adh *a drucht do bharrúachtar an fheóir ar ettroma 7 ar aerrdhacht an chéme noching*edh.

Now, however, when he arrived out of the battle, it was seldom that his feet would touch the ground because of the swiftness of his course, and when he did touch it he would not shake the dew from the top of the grass[81] for the lightness and the nimbleness of his step[82]

[XVIII]

*Roba deacair do-sumh iumfhulang na leaptha sin, uair gach cor 7 gach iompodh nochuir*edh *dhe nothegmadh frais do dhealgaibh sgiach ann, co mbittis ag tolladh 7 ag treaghdh*adh *a thaoibh 7 ag comhghuin a c*[*h*]*nis.*

It was hard for him to endure that bed, for at every twist and turn he would give, a shower of thorns off the hawthorn would stick in him, so that they were piercing and rending his side and wounding his skin[83]

81 Literally 'top-top'; on these pleonastic constructions, typical of Middle Irish tales, cf. Sjoestedt (1927): 400–407, and Rapallo (1977): 541–597.

82 O'Keeffe (1913): 14 and 15.

83 Ibidem, 22 and 23.

[XXI, 6]

Romgonsat géga glasa / co rorébsat mo bossa, / ni fargaibhset na dreasa / damna creasa dom chossa.

Grey branches have wounded me, / they have torn my hands; / the briars have not left / the making of a gridle for my feet[84]

[XL, 4]

*A fhern, nidot naimhdidhe, / as aloinn do lí, / nidat cuma sceó sceanb*aidh*i / ar an mbeirn a mbí.*

O alder, thou art not hostile, / delightful is thy hue, / thou art not rending and prickling / in the gap wherein thou art[85]

[XLV, 6]

[. . .] *coss i cclochsneachta*

[. . .] footing it in hailstones[86]

[XLV, 3]

Fulang fraissíne

Enduring the rain-storm[87]

84 Ibidem, 30 and 31.
85 Ibidem, 64 and 65.
86 Ibidem, 92 and 93.
87 Ibidem, 90 and 91.

[XLV, 10]

clúas re clochadhart / Crúacháin ghargOighle

ear against a stone pillow / of rough Cruachan Oighle[88]

[L]

*7 o rainic an t-es robaid*edh *ann é*

and when he reached the waterfall he was drowned in it[89]

But the preponderant sensory perceptions in the *Buile Suibhne* are the *auditory* ones.

I am not referring in particular to the voices of birds (or even of other animals), which represent a *topos* in old and middle Irish literature, and are not a peculiarity of this text:[90]

[XXIII, 1]

[. . .] *an chú do*[*gní*] *cúi Banna*

[. . .] the cooing of the cuckoo of the Bann[91]

[XXIII, 4]

*nocha deab*aidh *rochúala / ó ealaib búadha binne*

it was not strife that I heard / from splendid, melodious swans[92]

88 Ibidem, 92 and 93.
89 Ibidem, 104 and 105.
90 For a comparative analysis of this theme in Celtic and other medieval literatures, cf. Benozzo (1997c, 2000d).
91 O'Keeffe (1913): 32 and 33.

[XXIII, 5]

Dord daimh dhíthreibhe ós aille / bios a Siodhmuine Glinne, / nochan fuil ceol ar talmain / im anmuin acht a bhinne

The belling of the stag of the desert above the cliffs / in Siodhmuine Glinne: / there is no music on earth / in my soul but its sweetness[93]

[XL, 1]

A bhennáin, a bhuiredháin, / a bhéiceadháin bintt, / is binn linn an cuicherán / do[g]ni tú 'san ghlintt

O little stag, thou little bleating one, / o melodious little clamourer, / sweet to us is the music / thou makest in the glen[94]

[XLIII, 11]

[. . .] *atchúala guth an ghioghruinn / ós Im*ligh *iomluim Iobhair.*

[. . .] I have heard the cry of the wild-goose / over bare Imlech Iobhair[95]

[XLIII, 12]

[. . .] *teichim re guth na cuirre / m*ar *b*udh *buille rombe*nadh

[. . .] I flee at the cry of the heron / as though it were a blow that struck me[96]

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92 Ibidem, 34 and 35.
93 Ibidem.
94 Ibidem, 62 and 63.
95 Ibidem, 86 and 87.

[XLV, 4]

Gair na damhraidhe / ar fhud fidhbhuidhe

The bellowing of the stags / throughout the wood[97]

[LXXXIII, 16]

bheith icc luthmhairecht im linn / cuchairecht fhéráinn eidhinn

the cooing of the turtle-dove / flitting about a pool[98]

[LXXXIII, 17]

ceileabhradh an luin don bheinn / is dordán doimh ar doininn

the warbling of the blackbird to the mountain / and the belling of the stag in a storm[99]

[LXXXIII, 18]

guth circe fráoich an stléibhe / do cluinsin im iarmhéirghe

to hear at dawn / the cry of the mountain-grouse[100]

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96 Ibidem.
97 Ibidem, 92 and 93.
98 Ibidem, 152 and 153.
99 Ibidem.
100 Ibidem.

The following examples of auditory perceptions, instead, concern landscape elements such as the sea, the trees and the rivers, and it is important to note that almost in all cases they are not associated with other kinds of perception, but are able to 'compose', sometimes together with the voices of animals, a landscape made of distances, movements and fluctuating borders:

[XLV, 4]

fogar fionnmhuire

the voice of the white seas[101]

[XLV, 6]

osnadh geamhoidche

the sough of the winter night[102]

[IL]

[. . .] *antí úain as luaithe chluinfes glædh cuirre do loch linnghlas linnúainne no guth gléghlan gaircce, no leim creabhair do chraoibh, fedghaire no guth feadóige ar na fiordhúsg*adh *no fuaim crionaigh aga choimhbris*edh, *no fosgadh eóin ós fiodhb*aidh, *erfhúagradh 7 innisedh antí atchluinfe é ar tús don fior oile* [. . .]

[. . .] that is, he who shall soonest hear the cry of a heron from a blue-watered, green-watered lough or the clear note of a cormorant, or the flight of a woodcock from a branch, the whistle or sound of a plover on being woken from its sleep, or the sound of withered

101 Ibidem, 92 and 93.
102 Ibidem.

branches being broken, or shall see the shadow of a bird above the wood, let him who shall first hear warn and tell to the other [. . .][103]

[LIV, 5-7]

Uisge Ghlinne Bolcáin báin, / éistecht re a énlaith n-iomláin, / a srotha millsi nach mall, / a innsi agus a abhann. // A chuilenn cliuthar 's a choill, / a duille, a dreasa, a dercoinn, / a sméra áille uagha, / a chna, a airne ionnúara. // Iomad a chúan fo chra*nnuibh, / búi*redh*ach a dhamh n-all*aidh*, / a uisci iodhan gan gheis* [. . .]

Water of bright Glen Bolcain, / *listening to* its many birds; / its melodious, rushing streams, / its islands and its rivers. // Its sheltering holly and its hazels, / its leaves, its brambles, its acorns, / its delicious, fresh berries, / its nuts, its refreshing sloes. // The number of its packs of hounds in woods, / the bellowing of its stags, / its pure water without prohibition [. . .] [104]

[LXV]

[. . .] *uile fri slea*saibh *crann 7 fria cennuibh carrag le lar 7 re lántalmain*

[. . .] like the rush of a wild torrent from the breast of a high mountain[105]

103 Ibidem, 102–104 and 103–105.
104 Ibidem, 110 and 111.
105 Ibidem, 124 and 125.

[LXIX, 1]

[. . .] *osnadh ghaoit[h]e gairbe*

[. . .] the soughing of the rude gale[106]

Unlike the sense of sight, touch and specially hearing are unsuitable for giving us a structured sense of place, for describing a system of co-ordinates able to adapt or reduce the external world in a readable icon, in a perceptible landscape.[107] The *soundscape* is a space made up by distances, sound perspectives, audible directions without definite outlines and recognisable shapes. It can create a sense of distance, the feeling of a landscape, an articulated movement, but always without real borders, always in an 'open' and every time different way.[108]

It seems that *Buile Shuibhne*'s 'auditory' peculiarity in perceiving landscapes (poetically reinterpreted, if I am not mistaken, also by Séamus Heaney)[109] was recognised first of all at a level of medi-

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106 Ibidem, 130 and 131.

107 Cf. Ihde (1982): 239–251, and O'Shaughnessy (1989), 37–58.

108 Cf. in particular Ehrenzweig (1953), Robinson (1996): 151–164, and Carta (1998); it is interesting to underline that the visual perceptions are mostly concentrated, in *Buile Shuibhne*, in the prose sections, where Suibhne's movements are described from an external point of view, while the auditory and tactile ones are present when Suibhne himself is speaking. This is perhaps a possible functional distinction of these alternating parts, which follow one another in the tale giving different 'descriptions' and propitiating different perceptions of the same landscape.

109 Cf. his 'The First Flight', in the collection of poems titled *Sweeney Redivivus*, lines 7–11: 'I drew close to pebbles and berries, / the smell of wild garlic relearning / the acoustic of frog // and the meaning of woodnote [. . .]': Heaney (1984): 75.

eval tradition: among the poems attributed to Suibhne that are not part of the *Buile*, there is for instance the example of the poem known as *The Cry of the Garb*, which is a description of a river made up almost only by sound perceptions.[110]

Map in progress, catalogic accumulation, changing landscapes, tactile and auditory perceptions: these (structural, stylistic, phenomenological, sensorial) characteristics of the *Buile Shuibhne* create its unique 'de-structured structure', and are the elements of its *unity*. It is of course an anthropological model of unity, more similar to the fragmentary, acentric and asymmetrical unity of a landscape[111] than to the one laid down by the literary tradition. And in fact 'a certain lack of unity', a 'lack of artistic coherence' has often been recognised in the tale.[112]

In my opinion, if the advanced ideas of this text go beyond the same modern conceptions of the art, it means that they touch a layer of experience related to something very deep, difficult to understand and perhaps hard to accept: in any case distant from our habitudes and categories, from our tidy and reassuring way of considering literature.

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110 Cf. Murphy (1998): 112–117.

111 On the asymmetrical unity of landscapes, cf. Sauer (1925): 19–53, Schmithüsen (1964), Jackson (1979): 153–163, Wunenburger (1982): 13–34, Muir (1998): 1–6.

112 O'Keeffe (1913): XXXVI; it is significant to note that this 'lack of unity' is particularly perceived, not by chance, in the 'catalogic' parts of the texts: 'The long poem (§ 40) which opens with a description of the trees of Ireland furnishes a good instance of this lack of artistic coherence' (ibidem); in the same page, O'Keeffe remarks also that 'this lack of coherence and restraint is a characteristic of many medieval compositions'.

All commentators have noticed the special attitude of *Buile Shuibhne* towards landscapes, its 'very intimate knowledge of the actual place or of the spirit of the place'.[113] But we risk misunderstanding this characteristic, confining it in a literary current or considering it just as a curious chapter of the history of poetry. In anthropological terms, to say that *Buile Shuibhne* 'reveals a love of nature'[114] or a love of landscapes, is to say nothing, because such an approach ends by identifying a 'poetic instinct'[115] simply with an individual inclination, instead of considering poetry as a valuable instrument to understand a cognitive process, a fundamental connection, the coming to the surface of an ontological kernel.

The epistemologist Gaston Bachelard wrote that 'when it is connected with natural elements, poetry is made by things which have roots in the human psyche so deep that we have to look for the reasons of a similar deepness. These insistent, deep, universal images belong at the same time to the cosmos and the human nature'.[116] In this way, the real aim of literary criticism should become 'to find the original, primitive effort of imagination, the effort through which men try to interpret the world around them'.[117] It is in this perspective that I feel in *Buile Shuibhne* the same 'unity in progress' of a real landscape, manifold but cohesive, chaotic but structured, catalogic but stratified.

Of course, I am not saying that this is the meaning of the prosimetre taken as a literary text, and I am not saying that its author(s) wanted to express a similar problem by composing it.

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113 Cf. ibidem, XXXVII.
114 Ibidem.
115 In the sense expressed by Wittgenstein (1957): 132.
116 Bachelard (1974) : 7.
117 Ibidem, 8.

But I cannot ignore that the text lets one recognise in itself (and that its structure gives expression to) the problem of a crucial relationship between the human mind and the physical space, between the world and the word.[118] This is why I am tempted to include it, with its 'anti-anthropocentric' way of looking at the world, among those works of art that, from *Gilgamesh* to Picasso, have changed, continue to change, or could change our everyday perceptions, enabling us to feel a non-culturally-sclerotized 'sensation d'univers'.[119]

And in this case, if from the point of view of the 'logique événementielle' Suibhne's madness can be inscribed in the *topoi* of the 'supernaturally transfigured battle survivor'[120] and of the wild

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118 The theorist of literature Jurij M. Lotman wrote that 'the structure of a text is always a model of the structure of space [. . .], and the internal syntagmatic relationships becomes a sort of simulator, on the structural level, of the space': I translate from the Italian translation (Lotman 1985: 262). Bearing in mind an epistemological urgency, it is in fact secondary to try to understand whether the author of *Buile Shuibhne* was aware of this deep structure: as Ezio Raimondi remarks, 'every time a text becomes part of the perception of who runs across it, and it happens that proprieties still unexplored and fluctuating are felt as anthropologically effective' (Raimondi [1977]: 105). Because, following Peirce's terminology, a literary work is essentially an indication that unconsciously brings in itself what it is an indication of, or a voice that contains in itself also its origin. And I do believe that an approach attentive to the problem of space perception and to the connections between landscape structures and literary structures can be one of the less arbitrary ways of looking for deep relationships in a text, because in this case the interpreter moves in a field which has its own ontological status; on this point, cf. Maldiney (1994): 78–83.

119 I take the expression from White (1987): 274.

120 Koch (1997): 175.

man of the woods,[121] from the point of view of the 'logique profonde'[122] it represents the same psychic state of those men who became mad as a result of their too deep penetration into the layers of human experience of the world. Every time he speaks about himself, Suibhne seems perfectly conscious of his madness, of his improvements and relapses; this fact reminds me of a similar attitude that I recognise in Van Gogh's letters to his brother: 'Inside me there is some too deep emotion that wiped the floor with me. . . there is something broken in my brain'. And after: 'Sometimes, in my desperate isolation and loneliness, I feel *the world around and its logic* better than my own thoughts'.[123]

The logic of a landscape. . .[124] I think that we have to reflect on this fact: Suibhne too, who is mad, alone and isolated, when he is in contact with the external world becomes (paradoxically?) the 'living' expression of attitudes that are anti-egocentric, destructive, and open to the apparent dispersion of landscapes; the expression of an off-putting cognitive model that even today, even after so bold and presumptuous a century, we find difficult to understand.

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121 Cf. in particular Husband (1980), without forgetting the valuable comparative study by Bertoni (1928): 93–191.

122 For the distinction between 'logique événementielle' and 'logique profonde', introduced by the historians of the 'Annales' school, cf. Le Goff (1979).

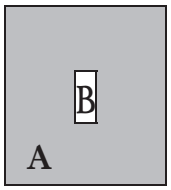
123 Cf. Willem (1952–1954): vol. III, 142.

124 Cf. also White (1998): 87–94 (new edition in White [1997]: 18–26).

CHAPTER III

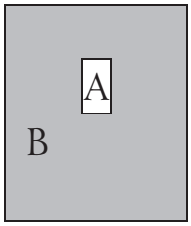
Landscapes Inside the Landscapes: The 'Resonance' of Space and Time in the *Metrical Dindsenchas*

A FEW years ago, being asked to write something about my way of perceiving the coasts of Brittany, I tried to connect the concept of intertextuality with the one of landscape perception.[1] The main idea was that when you look at a landscape you always look at it through other landscapes that you have met before. Every landscape reminds you of another landscape, and the memory of the first becomes also the way of perceiving the second. You are looking at B through A, that is to say A ⇒ B, or

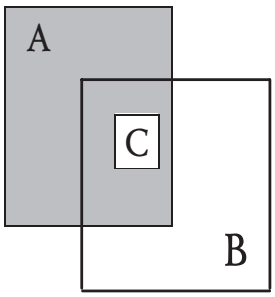


1 Cf. Benozzo (2000a): 20–24 [in Italian, with a few variants, Benozzo (1997b): 15–19].

But at a certain point this relation becomes something distant from a 'linear' model of perception, and you start to look at the second as if it was inside the other: A ⇐ B, or



In the end, the 'meaning' of what you are perceiving, the new landscape you are looking, is just created by this deep interconnection: what you are now looking is C, and this C is the result of A + B, or better of a fluctuating A ⇔ B perception; that is to say



This is how a landscape perception (consciously or not) always develops and grows, similarly to the way in which literary texts grow: for example, as I have explained elsewhere,[2] when you read

2 Cf. Benozzo (1997c, 1997i), and also Raimondi (1996).

the first two lines of the *Orlando Furioso* your memory probably brings you back to the lines of the *Divina Commedia* that Ariosto (consciously or not) quotes there; you start to listen to Ariosto's voice through the one of Dante, and after that, going back to Dante's poem, you will perceive in it also the 'voice' of those two lines by Ariosto, even if his poem is of about three centuries later. In this way, literary texts always transform; to quote Julia Kristeva, who used the term *intertextualité* (*intertextuality*) for the first time, 'any text is the absorption and transformation of another'.[3]

The relationship between landscapes, their 'absorption and transformation', is a part of the landscape itself, of its way of being and of being perceived. This relationship, that is to say, is not only what connects a landscape to another landscape, but also what connects two landscapes to their common essence, to their being landscapes. I have proposed to define this process of perception, either referring to literary texts or to landscapes, as *resonance*.[4] In my opinion, this concept goes beyond the general one of *hyper-textuality*, that is, according to Gérard Genette, 'a relationship between two texts in which the latter, defined as the *hypertext*, is the result of a transformation of the former, the *hypotext*'.[5] The limit that I find in this definition is that it remains within the field of a binary perception, without describing the complexity of the cognitive process that is generated by it.

I start with this reference, because I think that the concept of

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3 Kristeva (1986): 37.
4 Cf. Benozzo (2000a): 22.
5 Bernardelli (1998): 9; Bernardelli is referring to Genette (1982).

resonance can become important in trying to understand the deep meaning and the more than purely literary richness of texts like the *Metrical Dindsenchas*, which I would like to take into consideration in this chapter; moreover, and at the same time, I believe that these texts can be decisive in trying to analyse the relationships between space, time, and poetry.[6]

The importance and peculiarity of the *Dindsenchas* can be understood starting from the etymology of the name. This is clearly explained by Charles Bowen:

> The first element [...], *dind*—literally 'hillock, raised ground'—means, by extension, 'landmark, eminent or notable place'. But if we want to understand what kind of knowledge was designated by this term, it is on the second element, *senchas*—'ancient or traditional

6 Cf. Gwynn (1903–1935). The *Dindsenchas* is a collection of 207 poems and 207 prose pieces (according to Bowen [1975–1976]: 121); it has come down in three recensions, which are commonly designated (since Thurneysen [1921]: 36–46) as *Recension A* (poems found in the *Book of Leinster*, written about 1160), *Recension B* (a series of short pieces in prose found in three manuscripts: [1] *Book Of Leinster*; [2] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawilnson B 506, *c.* 15th century; [3] Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Gaelic XVI, *c.* 15th century), and Recension C (poems and proses found in seventeen manuscripts, of which the following two appear to preserve the text in a form quite close to the original: [1] *Book of Ballymote*, *c.* 1400; [2] Rennes Irish Ms, *c.* 1400). For editions of the single recensions, cf. Stokes (1892, 1893, 1894). Gwynn considered *Recension C* as a sort of collection and integration of *A* and *B*; this opinion has been contested by Ó Concheanainn (1981, 1982), who, on the contrary, thinks that the prosimetre is the original form of the *Dindsenchas*. In any case, apart from their chronological collocation, the *Metrical Dindsenchas* can be considered as single literary corpus; for a general introduction to the *Dindsenchas*, cf. O'Daly (1965): 59–72.

> lore'—that we should put the most emphasis. In the preliterate stage of Celtic society, the notion of *senchas* was basic to every intellectual field. The learned tradition of that oral culture was almost entirely based on memory, and consisted of the accumulation, preservation, and transmission of *senchas* [...], the ancient lore, the traditions of the race.[7]

The corpus of *Dindsenchas* represents, in Bowen's words, 'a science of geography based on *senchas*, in which there is no clear distinction between the general principles of topography or direction-finding and the intimate knowledge of particular places';[8] it can also be defined, as Marie-Louise Sjoestedt proposed, as 'the mythological geography of the country'.[9]

In a recent article Proinsias Mac Cana has approached the *Dindsenchas* in a comparative way, referring in particular to the Old Indian *Brāhmanas*, to African traditions, and to the connections that these cultures created between mythology and place names.[10] His remarkable conclusion is that 'as in some societies in Africa, and doubtless elsewhere, the landscape and the place-lore which was its reflex in tribal myth and history functioned together as an effective

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7 Bowen (1975–1976): 114–115; Bowen is also referring to Binchy (1961): 7–8.

8 Bowen (1975–1976): 115.

9 Sjoestedt (1949): 24; it is quite possible that the *Dindsenchas* had also a political-social function, as pointed out by W. J. Smyth: 'The early medieval Celtic elites and families, using these place-names and the myths and stories associated with the nature and meaning of places—the *Dindsenchas*—invested these now permanently settled and bounded places with enduring symbols of their own identities' (Smyth [1993]: 405); on the other possible functions of the *Dindsenchas*, such as, its connections with pilgrimages, cf. Ford (1974): 67–74.

10 Mac Cana (1998): 319–341.

mnemonic index of a large part of native tradition. It was this combination of cultural, spiritual and practical consideration which assured *dindsenchas* its place in the curriculum of the schools of the *filid* and no doubt of the druids before them'.[11] I agree with this point of view, in particular when Mac Cana emphasizes the importance of referring to a mythopoeic thought in opposition to 'those who approach the subject from a purely philological or legalistic point of view', and who consider this tononymic tradition 'nothing more than a harmless, thought occasionally absurd, form of pedantry'.[12] Nevertheless, I think that the really deep nature of the *Dindsenchas* has to be found in the fact that here landscapes, places and place names, rather than an 'index of the native tradition', are perceived themselves as the tradition, or more precisely, they are the tradition in *spatial form*.

It is very easy today to misunderstand the deep nature of what we call 'tradition', and to consider it as an abstract inventory of legends, tales, and rituals, that is to say, as something that can be separated from its way of being transmitted and of being transformed. However, ethnologists and anthropologists have often reminded us that with tradition, in pre-modern times, we have to mean precisely the way of living with and transforming these

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11 Ibidem, 333.

12 Ibidem, 336; Mac Cana is here quoting Binchy (1943): 19; also the etymological tradition, in his view, has to be considered in its pre-Isidorian roots, that is to say as the expression of a mythopoeical thought instead of an art of combining names and creating stories about them; for a different approach, cf. in particular Baumgarten (1986–1987, 1990); more interesting for the discourse I am developing is Sheeran (1988): 191–206.

legends, tales, and rituals, and not a separated 'grammar' of them.[13] The anthropology of literature insists on the same point, explaining that, also centuries after the Middle Ages, the idea of literature or of literary tradition could not be understood as an abstract concept, because literature lived only in the performance, in the poetic act, and in the dialectic between the performer (or the author) and the listener (or the reader). This kind of relation (and arbitrary separation) is the same as exists between *form* and *material*, which the theorists of literature, in particular the Russian formalists, taught us to consider in their unity and as exactly the same thing, rather than in their interdependence, or as two aspects of the same thing.[14]

It is in this sense, or starting from similar considerations, that I find it more stimulating and correct not to consider the *Dindsenchas* as an 'index of the tradition', but *as* the tradition. If it is true that the tradition is not 'transmitted' by the tales, but it *is* the tales (and the tales do not 'transmit' the tradition, but they *are* the tradition), when you consider the rôle of landscapes in the *Dindsenchas* you have to conclude that its specific anthropological quality is that here the tradition *is* the places, and places *are* the tradition.

I would like to quote a few examples, and to continue my discourse starting from a textual analysis. The following, for its structure and its way of developing, can be considered as a typical example of a *Dindsenchas* poem:

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13 Cf. at least Toulmin (1972), Eisenstadt (1973), Hobsbawm–Ranger (1983), Ben-Amos (1984), Nyíri (1995).

14 To quote Yury N. Tynyanov, '"Material" is in no way opposite to "form", for "material" outside construction cannot exist': Tynyanov (1977): 30.

Síd Nechtain sund forsin tsléib, / lecht mic lLabrada lán-géir, / assa silenn in sruth slán / dianid ainm Bóand bith-lán. // Cóic anmand déc, demne drend, / [5] forsin tsruth-sin adrímem, / otá Síd Nechtain asmaig / co rosaig pardus Adaim. // Segais a hainm issin tsíd / [10] ria cantain duit in cach thír: / Sruth Segsa a hainm otá-sin / co Lind Mochúi in chlérig. // Otá cocrích Midi mag-móir / [15] Rig mná Nuadat's a Colptha / a dá ainm ána imarda. // Otá cocrích Midi maiss / corrici in fairgi fond-glaiss / Mór-Chuing Argait gairther di, / [20] ocus Smir Find Fedlimthi. // Trethnach-Tond ósin immach / connici Cúalnge cráibach. / Sruth Findchuill ó Chúalnge chrúaid / co Loch n-Echach Abrat-rúaid. // [25] Banna ó Loch Echach cen ail, / Drumchla Dílenn co h-Albain; / Lunnand hí I n-Albain cen ail / nosturrand iarna tucsain. // Sabrann dar tír Saxan slán / [30] Tibir I ráith na Román, / Sruth n-Iordanen iarsain sair, / ocus Sruth n-Eufrait adbail. // Sruth Tigir I pardus búan, fota sair síst fri himlúad: / [35] ó phardus darís ille / co srothaib na síde-se. // Bóand a h-ainm coitchend cain / otá in síd co fairge fraig: / mebur lim aní diatá / [40] usce mná mic Labrada. // Nechtain mac Labrada laind, / diarbo ben Bóand, bágaimm, / topur diamair bói 'na dún, / assa maided cech mí-rún. // [45] Ní fail nodécced dia lár / nach maided a dá rosc rán: / dia ngluased do chlí nó deis, / ní thargad úad cen athis. // Aire níslaimed nech de / [50] acht Nechtain 's a deogbaire: it é a n-anmand, fri gním nglan, / Flesc is Lam ocus Luäm. // Fecht and dolluid Bóand bán—/ dosfuargaib a dímus n-án—/ [55] cosin topur cen tarta / d'airgud a chumachta. // Immar rothimchill fo thrí / in topur co n-étuachli, / maidit teora tonna de / [60] dia tánic aided Bóinne. // Rosiacht cach tond díb ria chuit, / romillset in mnái mbláth-buic: / tond ria cois, tond ria súil sláin, / tres tond brisid a leth-láim. // [65] Rethis co fairgi, ferr de, / d' imgabáil a hathise, / ar nách acced nech a cned: / furri féin a himathber. // Cach conair dolluid in ben / [70] moslúi in t-usce úar imgel: / ón tsíd co fairgi nách fand, / conid di gairthir Bóand. // Bóand do bruinni ar mbrúich braiss / máthair Oengussa oll-maiss, / [75] mac ruc don Dagda, maid nglé, / dar cend fir na síde-se. // Nó Bóand bó ocus find / do chomrac in dá ríg-lind, / in t-

usce a sléib Guaire glé / [80] ocus sruth na síde-se. // Dabilla ainm in chon chóir / robói oc mnái Nechtain nár-móir, / messán Bóinne co mblaid / luid ina diaid dia torchair. // [85] Rosróen sruth in mara immach / corrici na cairge clach, / co ndernsat dá gabait de, / conid úad rohainmnigthe. // Atát I n-airthiur Breg mbrass / [90] in dí chloich 'sin loch lind-glass; / Cnoc Dabilla ósin ille / di choin bic na síde-se.

Sid Nechtain is the name that is on the mountain here, / the grave of the full-keen son of Labraid, / from which flows the stainless river / whose name is Boand ever-full. // [5] Fifteen names, certainty of disputes, / given to this stream we enumerate, / from Sid Nechtain away / till it reaches the paradise of Adam. // *Segais* was her name in the Sid / [10] to be sung by thee in every land: / *River of Segais* is her name from that point / to the pool of Mochua the cleric. // From the well of righteous Mochua / to the bounds of Meath's wide plain, / [15] the *Arm of Nuadu's Wife* and her *Leg* / are the two noble and exalted names. // From the bounds of goodly Meath / till she reaches the sea's green floor / she is called the *Great Silver Yoke* / [20] and the *White Marrow of Fedlimid.* / *Stormy Wave* from thence onward / unto branchy Cualnge; / *River of the White Hazel* from stern Cualnge / to the lough of Eochu Red-Brows. // [25] *Banna* is her name from faultless Lough Neagh: / *Roof of the Ocean* as far as Scotland: / *Lunnand* she is in Blameless Scotland—/ The name denotes her according to its meaning. // *Severn* is she called through the land of the sound Saxons, / [30] *Tiber* in the Romans' keep: / *River Jordan* thereafter in the east / and vast *River Euphrates.* // *River Tigris* in enduring paradise, / long is she in the east, a time of wandering / [35] from paradise back again hither / to the streams of this Sid. // Boand is her general pleasant name / from the Sid to the sea-wall; / I remember the cause whence is named / [40] the water of the wife of Labraid's son. // Nechtain son of bold Labraid / whose wife was Boand, I aver; / a secret well there was in his stead, / from which gushed

forth every kind of mysterious evil. // [45] There was none that would look to its bottom / but his two bright eyes would burst: / if he should move to left or right, / he would not come from it without blemish. //Therefore none of them dared approach it / [50] save Nechtain and his cup-bearers:— / these are their names, famed for brilliant deed, / Flesc and Lam and Luam. // Hither came on a day white Boand / (her noble pride uplifted her), / [55] to the never-failing well / to make trial of its power. // As thrice she walked round / about the well heedlessly, / three waves burst from it, / [60] whence came the death of Boand. // They came each wave of them against a limb, / they disfigured the soft-blooming woman; / a wave against her foot, a wave against her perfect eye, / the third wave shatters one hand. // [65] She rushed to the sea (it was better for her) / to escape her blemish, / so that none might see her mutilation; / on herself fell her reproach. // Every way the woman went / [70] the cold white water followed / from the Sid to the sea (not weak it was), / so that thence it is called Boand. // Boand from the bosom of our mighty river-bank, / was mother of great and goodly Oengus, / [75] the son she bore to the Dagda—bright honour! / In spite of the man of this Sid. // Or, Boand is *Bo* and *Find* / from the meeting of the two royal streams, / the water from bright Sliab Guaire / [80] and the river of the Sids here. // Dabilla, the name of the faithful dog / who belonged to the wife of Nechtain, great and noble, / the lap-dog of Boand the famous, / which went after her when she perished. // [85] The sea-current swept it away, / as far as the stony crags; / and they made two portions of it, / so that they were named therefrom. // They stand to the east of broad Breg, / [90] the two stones in the blue waters of the lough: / Cnoc Dabilla [is so called]

from that day to this / from the little dog of the Sid.[15]

In the structure of this poem it is possible to recognise two main parts: (1) Different names of the river Boand, taken either from the real toponymy or from an imaginary or mythical geography [ll. 1-38]; (2) A story that lies at the origins of its name [ll. 39-92]. Such a procedure reminds me of a similar one followed by an old Chinese collection of geographical-mythological legends: the *Shanhai jing* (*Book of mountains and seas*), composed in the pre-Han era (4th century BC).[16] This text is a long collection of stories about the mountains of China, in which you can individuate the following structure: (1) Name of the mountain (and sometimes its distance from other mountains); (2) Brief description of the landscape; (3) Mythological events that took place there *in illo tempore*.[17]

The form of this Chinese text is a clear symptom that the rôle of landscape as a 'structurer/organiser of images' and the inclination towards a sort of 'geographical literature' cannot be considered a Celtic peculiarity;[18] and I think that a comparison between the two texts can be useful in order to understand better the specific character of the *Dindsenchas*. The first aim of the Chinese text, which has been defined as an 'exploratory report',[19] seems to be to build a

15 Gwynn (1903–1935): Part III, 26–33.

16 Cf. Yuan (1985); a partial edition with an English translation is Schiffeler (1977); the most recent edition (with an Italian translation) is Fracasso (1996).

17 On the structure and meaning of the *Shanhai jing*, cf. in particular Eitel (1888): 330–348 and Fracasso (1983): 657–694; further bibliography can be found in Fracasso (1991): 81–104.

18 Landscape descriptions in the *Shanhai jing* are analysed in Schlegel (1892): 101–168, Laufer (1915): 299–373, Loewenstein (1961): 31–40.

19 Wei–Xu (1974): 3.

concrete topography, in a sense a cartography,[20] of Old China. I quote a passage chosen at random:

> Second itinerary of the central sequence: the first ridge of Ji mountains is the mountain called Huizhu; on its top there are mulberry-trees. Among the animals, there are many *lü* and elks. Among the birds there are many pheasants.
>
> 200 *li* south-west there is the mountain called Fashi; on its top it is rich in metals and jade; on its roots there are many stones.
>
> 300 *li* West there is the mountain called Hao; on its top it is rich in jade; no trees grow there.
>
> 300 *li* West there is the mountain called Xian; it is rich in metals and jade; no trees grow there. It is there that river Xian flows. The *huashe* have a human face; their bodies are like wolves; they fly like birds; they go like serpents. Shun's concubine had a great power. But she did not come back to the sky.
>
> 300 *li* West there is the mountain called Zhong; Yo Shi's concubine has a human face. She threw a tortoise and she had many powers.[21]

Here you could also separate the legendary parts, which are a sort of mythological ornament, from the main ones, which are the geographical connections between the different mountains. In particular, it has to be noticed that places are not connected with their own past, but rather with a more generic legendary past: they seem to be a simple 'container', a separated articulation, and—in this case—an 'index of the tradition'. Here, that is to say, places are considered in their synchronic / 'horizontal' dislocation, and the

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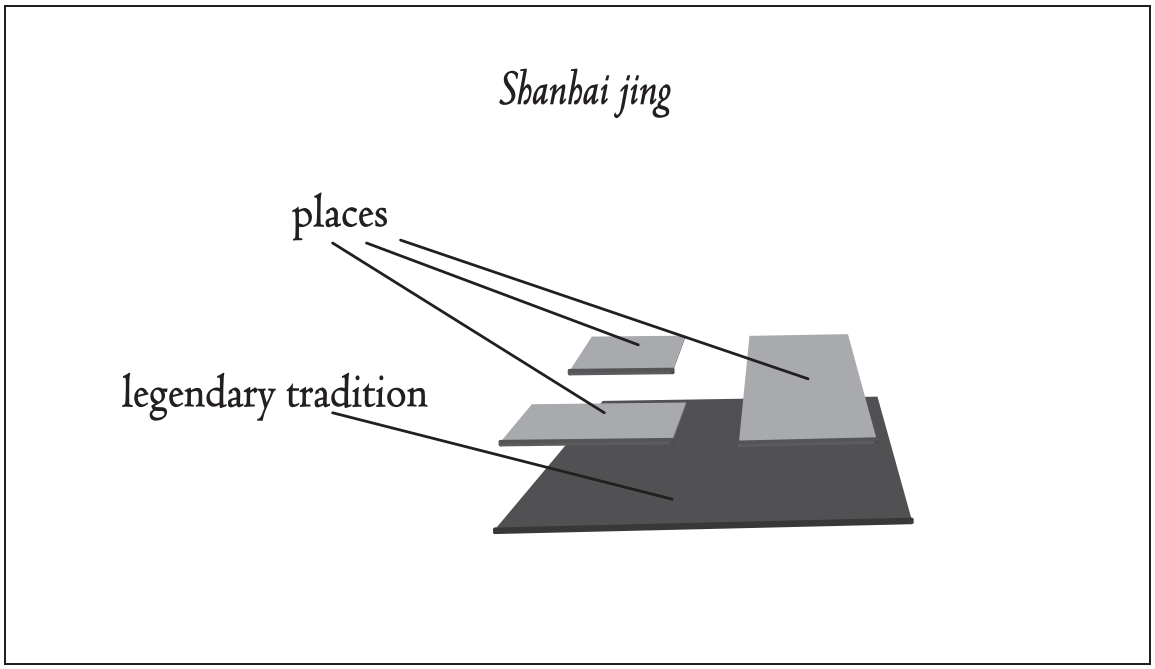
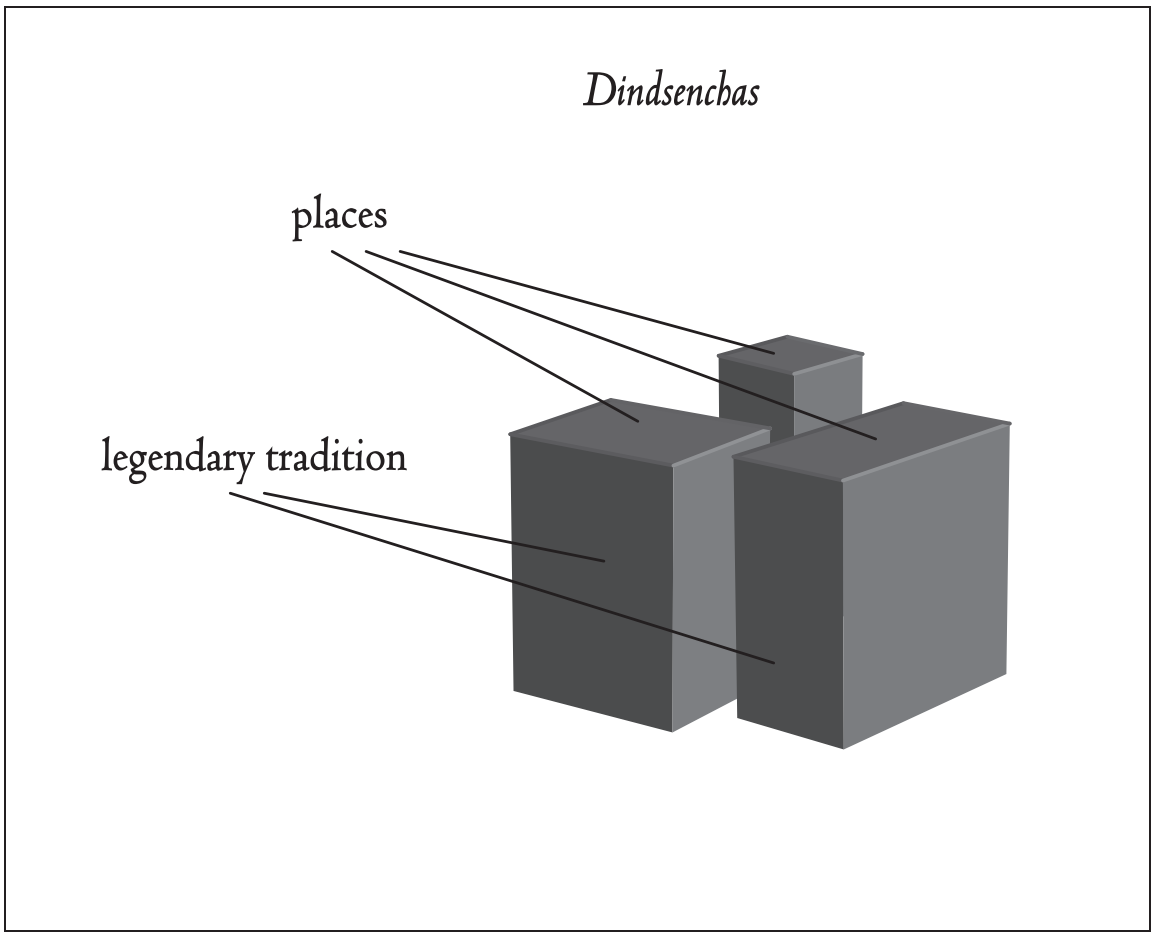
20 Cf. Chavannes (1903) : 214–247.

21 Cf. Fracasso (1996): 37 (my translation from the Italian translation).

diachronic /'vertical' deepness of time is just a kind of shadow that gives them a vague legendary thickness. You could visualize it in the following way:



In the *Dindsenchas*, instead, the tale connects places with *their own* past—which is impossible to separate from the legendary one—giving each one of them a mythological consistency, a historical-legendary 'volume'; and the tale itself, actually, is an indivisible part of this volume:



The legendary tradition is not part (or a part) of the landscape: rather, I would say that it *is* the landscape, or it *is perceived* as the landscape.

This is textually confirmed by the fact that real landscape descriptions are quite exceptional in the *Dindsenchas*.[22] The following are the only references to landscape elements in all the corpus:[23]

22 Considering that the *Dindsenchas* (according to Gwynn's edition) is a corpus of 10,873 lines (588 lines the first part, 900 the second; 4920 the third; 4465 the fourth), the data that I am going to mention actually describe a lack of landscape elements.

→ GLENS: I, 16, 45; I, 20, 107; III, 326, 34;

→ GRASS: II, 10, 7; III, 96, 15;

→ HILLS: I, 6, 22; I, 14, 1; I, 24, 141; I, 38, 10; II, 48, 40; II, 72, 7; II, 72, 12; III, 44, 75; III, 46, 81; III, 58, 59; III, 176, 121; III, 176, 125; III, 180, 181; III, 182, 198; III, 228, 34; III, 228, 44; III, 356, 17; III, 356, 20; III, 444, 55; IV, 106, 103; IV, 184, 18; IV, 190, 53;

→ ISLANDS: II, 10, 8; III, 80, 26;

→ LAKES: III, 32, 90; III, 168, 1; III, 168, 11; III, 168, 19; III, 168, 22; III, 170, 45; III, 174, 88; III, 174, 89; IV, 12, 3; IV, 182, 16; IV, 230, 5;

→ MOUNTAINS: II, 54, 16; III, 26, 1; III, 106, 54; III, 116, 96; III, 226, 1; III, 240, 3; III, 240, 20; III, 304, 10; III, 304, 13; III, 376, 14; III, 400, 20; III, 436, 4; III, 186, 41; III, 260, 9; III, 306, 39; III, 328, 48; III, 328, 52; III, 328, 55; III, 328, 55; III, 328, 64; III, 338, 1; III, 338, 9; III, 344, 93; III, 376, 2; III, 376, 19; III, 378, 1; III, 400, 6; III, 400, 8; III, 400, 28; III, 400, 32; III, 404, 24; III, 408, 13; III, 450, 4; IV, 168, 29; IV, 170, 2; IV, 184, 15;

→ PLAINS: II, 10, 1; II, 10, 6; II, 12, 38; II, 16, 74; II, 20, 42; II, 30, 52; II, 30, 58; II, 32, 85; II, 34, 95; II, 42, 22; II, 68, 26; III, 8, 75; III, 26, 14; III, 28, 38; III, 92, 39; III, 282, 92; III, 324, 5; III, 326, 36; III, 330, 1; III, 330, 20; III, 332, 36; III, 380,4; III, 386, 1; III, 400, 24; III, 400, 25; III, 422, 12; III, 426, 17; III, 432, 4; III, 434, 45; IV, 20, 24; IV, 90, 1; IV, 93, 28; IV, 122, 1; IV, 124, 1; IV, 130, 108; IV, 146, 15; IV, 148, 32; IV, 216, 2; IV, 260, 9; IV, 260, 10; IV, 262, 53; IV, 324, 15;

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23 I quote Gwynn's edition by number of volume, number of page, and the line in the poem.

→ RIVERS: II, 14, 60; II, 58, 10; II, 68, 26; III, 26, 3; III, 30, 73; III, 32, 80; III, 34, 14; III, 134, 2; III, 138, 11; III, 168, 17; III, 170, 28; III, 170, 36; III, 174, 84; III, 180, 163; III, 180, 178; III, 286, 18; III, 290, 52; III, 290, 55; III, 290, 60; III, 2904, 38; III, 294, 42; III, 420, 25; IV, 200. 68; IV, 354, 45;

→ SEA: I, 10, 56; I, 22, 118; II, 12, 27; II, 6, 10; II, 26, 16; II, 28, 22; II, 28, 35; II, 30, 45; II, 30, 51; II, 38, 26; II, 38, 30; II, 52, 3; II, 56, 25; III, 10, 109; II, 26, 18; III, 80, 26; III, 94, 15; III, 104, 27; III, 106, 33; III, 112, 34; III, 112, 59; III, 120, 3; III, 120, 7; III, 120, 14; III, 122, 22; III, 122, 43; III, 174, 87; III, 186, 26; III, 190, 9; III, 190, 15; III, 194, 9; III, 202, 31; III, 209, 37; III, 212, 31; III, 212, 46; III, 286, 13; III, 300, 32; III, 318, 6; III, 426, 10; III, 428, 36; III, 434, 33; IV, 8, 33; IV, 80, 5; IV, 82, 14; IV, 146, 2; IV, 222, 21; IV, 262, 53; IV, 306, 38;

→ TIDES: II, 13, 42; II, 31, 64; II, 59, 6; II, 59, 11; III, 11, 116; III, 105, 7; III, 176, 135; III, 190, 19; III, 338, 3; III, 456, 95; IV, 60, 47;

→ VALLEYS: III, 100, 12;

→ WELLS: I, 22, 128; I, 22, 129; I, 22, 135; III, 36, 42; III, 36, 50; III, 108, 72; III, 174, 83; III, 292, 14; III, 344, 79; III, 344, 96; III, 436, 11; IV, 66, 128;

→ WOODS: I, 7, 17; I, 7, 19; II, 34, 98; II, 58, 2; II, 58, 7; II, 58, 18; III, 6, 73; III, 96, 8; I, 78, 83; II, 6, 59; II, 12, 30; III, 32, 90; III, 122, 36; III, 130, 35; III, 144, 1; III, 206, 16; III, 218, 41; III, 242, 1; III, 270, 3; III, 280, 63; III, 332, 35; III, 334, 12; III, 426, 12; IV, 148, 29; IV, 172, 9; IV, 172, 13; IV, 214, 53.

The above characteristic of the *Dindsenchas* seems to belie the modernist philosophical assertion according to which territory can be defined as space rather than as a series of places.[24] Moreover, it seems to indicate the possibility of an anthropological approach more attentive to a dynamic relationship between people and territory. What I mean to say is that distinctions like the one between space and place, or even the more general one between space and time, turn out to be—in a way—old-fashioned, because they maintain a dualism that seems absent here.[25]

It is easy to understand that in the *Dindsenchas* the problem of space is also a problem of time. Going back to the concept of *resonance*, in fact, it has to be noticed that here the relationship is not a connection between a landscape A and a landscape B, but between different diachronic layers of the same landscape ($A \Leftrightarrow A^1$, $B \Leftrightarrow B^1$). What has to be underlined in particular, is that you are looking at a TIME A^1 through a SPACE A, that is to say at a 'at that time' through a 'here'; not by chance, poems often begin emphasizing the *here* of the reader/listener, with the repetition of the adverb of place *sund*, 'here, in this place':[26]

24 Cf. Casey (1993): 3–39; and see also Clark (1992).

25 On the limits of this dualism cf. also Reichenbach (1956): 117–125, Lucas (1973): 35–41 and Prigogine (1980).

26 Cf. *DIL*: 568; cf. also Thurneysen (1946): 305.

[RATH ESA]

Sund dessid domunemar [...]

Here settled, as we believe [...][27]

[BRUG NA BÓINDE]

Án-sin a maig mic ind Óc [...]

Bright is it here, O plain of Mac ind Oc![28]

[BOAND I]

Síd Nechtain sund forsin tsléib [...]

Sid Nechtain is the name that is on the mountain here [...][29]

[MAISTIU I]

Robái brón for bantrocht ban / sund 'sin maig mór [...]

There was grief on the company of women / here in the great plain [...][30]

[ATH FADAT II]

Líath Lurgan lúam gaiscid géir / robói sund ó sléib do sléib

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27 Gwynn (1903–1935): Part II, 2 and 3.
28 Ibidem, 10 and 11.
29 Ibidem, Part III, 26 and 27.
30 Ibidem, 134 and 135.

Liath Lurgan, pilot of the sharp weapon, / lived here from hill to hill[31]

[PORT LAIRGE]

Fil sund áige do churp ríg [...]

There is here a limb from the body of a king [...][32]

[CROTTA CLIACH]

Sunda sefain fer síde [...]

Here a man of the fairies made music [...][33]

[DUMA SELGA]

Duma Selga sund 'sin maig [...]

Here stands Duma Selga in the plain [...][34]

[DRUIM CLIAB]

Sunda roboí Caurnán cass [...]

Here dwelt sturdy Caurnan [...][35]

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31 Ibidem, 156 and 157.
32 Ibidem, 190 and 191.
33 Ibidem, 224 and 225.
34 Ibidem, 386 and 387.
35 Ibidem, Part IV, 8 and 9.

[MAG SLECHT]

Sund nobíd / idar ard [...]

Here used to stand a lofty idol [...][36]

[LIA LOTHAIN]

Atá sund fo choirthe chrúaid [...]

Here under a hard headstone [...][37]

[CARN FURBAIDE]

Atá sund Carn uí Chathbath [...]

Here stands the Carn of Cathbad's grandson [...][38]

[MAG ITHA]

In mag itám sund 'nar socht [...]

The plain <here> where we are met in silence [...][39]

36 Ibidem, 18 and 19.
37 Ibidem, 26 and 27.
38 Ibidem, 30 and 31.
39 Ibidem, 90 and 91; in this case, Gwynn does not translate *sund*.

[LECHT OEN-FIR AIFE]

Lechtán sund óen-fir Aífe [...]

Here is the grave of 'Aife's only man' [...][40]

[ODBA]

Sund rohadnacht Odba úais [...]

Here was buried proud Odba [...][41]

[LUIBNECH]

Sund rocoscrad in cétach [...]

Here was the Cetach made a spoil [...][42]

[LOCH SÉTA]

Sund robáided in sét sen [...]

Here was sunk that ancient treasure [...][43]

[DRUIM SUAMAIG II]

Feart Suamaigh sund ara leirg [...]

Here on the hillside is the grave of Suamach [...][44]

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40 Ibidem, 132 and 133.
41 Ibidem, 174 and 175.
42 Ibidem, 220 and 221.
43 Ibidem, 224 and 225.
44 Ibidem, 238 and 239.

This spatial specification (*sund*, 'here') indicates that the poet is (or pretends to be) *on* the place, is talking about something that he is seeing (as sometimes he also specify: *In carn-sa atchíu co ndechair*, 'This carn I see, pre-eminent'[45]), and not—from a distance—about a sort of 'abstract' or 'literary' geography.[46]

At a certain point, as a result of this *resonance* of space inside time, and of time inside space, you start to look at SPACE A as if it was inside the TIME A^1, and at the end the new landscape you are looking is C, which is the result of the mythological/legendary volume created by this diachronic and poetic interconnection between space and time.[47]

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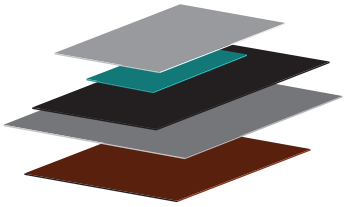
45 Ibidem, Part III, 266 and 267.

46 This reminds me of a similar attitude of the 20th century bard Calum Ruadh, who, to tell a story about a place, felt the necessity to go there: cf. Ruadh (1994): page 4 of the booklet; on this connection between poetry and really seen places, and also for a complex definition of the concept of 'tradition', cf. Flower (1947), in particular 1–23 ('The Founding of the Tradition'), with the remarks expressed by Sims-Williams (1998c): 73–96.

47 Sometimes we are told about how the landscape A was at that time A1: *Imchían etarru moalle, / mad-dia-fégthar fírinne, / ó maidm na haband cen ail, / co maidm in locha lind-glain. // Ind aband atracht ar tús, / am eólach ina n-imthús, / ní rabi in loch mór-glan mall, / co cían dar éis na haband*, 'Tis long between one and the other, / if the truth be well tried, / from the outburst of the stainless stream / to the outburst of the limpid lough. // The river first arose—/ I am versed in their fortunes—/ the broad pure placid lake was not / till long after the river' (Gwynn 1903–1935: Part III, 168 and 169); *In lind-se lúadit ethair, / cid lind fo thuile threthain, / ropo mag scothach fo scí, / co fúair lochrad lind-usci*, 'This lake that shallops stir, / though it be now a lake under a stormy flood, / was once a plain blooming with whitethorn, / till it was inundated by the waters of a lake' (ibidem, Part III, 450 and 451); *Ba bec Banna, roboí tan, / dia mbeth nech las' bad chuman: / noslingtis mná is maic immach / ria maidm lond locha Echach*, 'Small was the Banna, once a time (if there were any that could

Interpreted in this way, the well known 'propensity of the composers or redactors of the *Dindsenchas* to furnish side by side two or more quite different legendary explanations of a given place-name without betraying any trace of unease or embarrassment at the evident conflict of verities'[48] can be considered as a further 'complication' and 'enrichment' of the new 'volumetric' place [C] created by the mythopoeic process: as if what I have designated as A^1 was made of many layers. In this sense, the five poems about Temair[49] could be visualized as five different 'A^1 layers' belonging to the same C.



Discussing the geology of Ireland, a few years ago the writer and mapmaker Tim Robinson has introduced the concept of *timescape*.[50] Actually, he does not give a definition of it, but the expression itself, 'timescape', is rich in implications, because it resolves in one word the apparent dualism between time and space. I would like to use it with reference to what I have said above, because the *Dind-*

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remember): women and boys would overleap it, before the outburst of Loch Echach' (ibidem, Part IV, 62 and 63).

48 Mac Cana (1998): 338.

49 Cf. Gwynn (1903–1935): Part I, 2–45; it has to be specified that 'the composition described as "Temair V" is so called for convenience, and because it is grouped in the mss. along with the Tara poems; it is really little more than a string of names' (ibidem, V).

50 Cf. Robinson (1986): 1–13; I am much indebted to William Mahon, who introduced the works of this author to me two years ago, and with whom I have discussed many times subjects that are now part of this chapter.

senchas seems to be an actual expression of it, and to suggest it as a possible operative key-concept in analysing the relationships between 'duration' and 'extension'.[51]

To summarize the foregoing considerations, the *Dindsenchas*, in its *resonance* and through its *timescape*, indicates in particular that:

1. Time is not the 'container' of space [rather, if you continue to accept the dualism, the contrary is true].

2. Space and time are two aspects of the same thing: time too lives in (and as) an extension, space too lives in (and as) a duration.

3. This resonance of space and time, this timescape in progress, finds its visible and perceivable form in landscapes.

4. The three previous points become evident only as a result of a poetic (or mythopoeic) process.

These provisory conclusions are similar to the ones at which Bruce Chatwin arrived in his famous book *The Songlines*:

> To some, the Songlines were like the Art of Memory in reverse. In Frances Yates's wonderful book, one learned how classical orators, from Cicero and earlier, would construct memory palaces; fastening sections of their speech on to imaginary architectural features and then, after working their way round every architrave and pillar, could memorise colossal lengths of speech. The features were known as *loci* or 'places'. But in Australia the *loci* were not a mental construction, but had existed forever, as events of the Dreamtime. Other friends were reminded

51 For a definition of 'extension' cf. 'Introduction', note 3.

> of the Nazca 'lines', which are etched into the meringue-like surface of the central Peruvian Desert and are, indeed, some kind of totemic map. [...] I have a vision of the Songlines stretching across the continents and ages; that wherever men have trodden they have left a trail of song (of which we may, now and then, catch an echo).[52]

However, apart from the similar anthropological background (that is the attitude towards the perception of a sort of memory in landscapes),[53] I feel that there is also a difference and a peculiarity in the Irish text. In fact, the Aboriginal relationship between myth, space and time seems actually to keep the three terms separated; to quote the experience of an anthropologist who was born in an Aboriginal village: 'To travel with Yolngu people is like taking part in a "guided excursion" where the territory—to me just a uniform plain of trees of eucalyptus—appears instead full of signals that testify ancestral events and human activities in the past: "This place is where the ancestral men left this valley...", "This is the field where peoples used to rest under a stone...", etc.'[54] In the Aboriginal culture, landscape can be defined as a sort

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52 Chatwin (1987): 279–280.

53 Cf. also Küchler (1993): 85–106, and Schama (1995); in a recent book about *Landscapes of Neolithic Ireland*, Gabriel Cooney underlines how 'looking at time and traditions of long duration, in societies where knowledge is passed on orally, connections with the landscape are regarded as history and memory' (Cooney [2000]: 6–7); landscapes, that is to say, were the only possible 'texts'; cf. also Cooney (1993): 632–641, and Ingold (1993): 152–174.

54 Tamisari (1999): 293 ['Viaggiare con gente Yolngu è come partecipare a "un'escursione guidata" in cui il territorio—ai miei occhi una distesa uniforme di alberi di eucalipto—appare invece satura di segni signifi-

of 'reproduction' of the past,[55] as a metonymic *spatial figure* that recalls something belonging to time,[56] and perhaps as something permanent where non-permanent things are incorporated.[57]

I do not think that the same definitions could be used for the Irish *Dindsenchas,* where places are certainly a reproduction of the past, but where the opposite is also true; where space is not only a spatial figure of time, but a 'time-figure' itself, a duration; where landscape (this text as a text being far removed from essential mythological thought), is also something non-permanent[58] becoming permanent just because it 'incorporates' things belonging to a 'permanent' way of perceiving the tradition.[59]

It is perhaps difficult to understand the nature of the *Dindsenchas* as a literary work. Recently, for example, a new model of interpretation has been proposed, and this text has been considered as an example of 'abstract narrative',[60] that is to say as a narrative that 'focuses on elements of the medium itself—story-

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cativi che testimoniano eventi ancestrali e passate attività umane. "Questo luogo è dove il tale essere ancestrale ha lasciato questa depressione…", "Questo è l'accampamento ove la gente era solita riposarsi sotto un riparo…", etc.']; cf. also Tamisari (1995), and Dubinskas–Traweek (1984): 15–30.

55 Cf. Morphy (1995): 184–209.

56 Munn (1996): 446–465.

57 Cf. Ruddler (1993).

58 Cf. note 47.

59 Gwynn's translation expresses all these things in the following passage: 'Here is the pleasant legend of Moenmag': Gwynn (1903–1935): Part III, 337; the original is a bit different: *Fail sund, ós cech cúan-bla, cind, / tria chobra mbúada bél-bind, / derbthas ní baisech blaide, / senchas maisech Móenmaige* (ibidem, 336).

60 Cf. Scowcroft (1995): 121–158.

patterns, motifs, principles, themes, metaphors and other verbal association—often at the expense of plausibility in setting, motivation, even cause and effect, to produce an ordered strangeness'.[61]

I agree with this point of view, if by *strangeness* we mean a strangeness at the level of our modern reception: I think that the meaning of literary texts grows exactly in this way, always producing apparent non-senses or misunderstandings that other authors will try to transform in some new work. But I do not think that the *Dindsenchas* actually 'focuses on elements of the medium itself'. Rather, I believe that in this case the *media* are more than one, or better than the *medium* is something stratified and complex. What is the *medium* of the *Dindsenchas*? Is it just the language, or it is a proteiform interlace of time, space and legends? I think that its linguistic form has to be considered no more than a sort of alternative translation of something that actually lives in places themselves: as a mark, or impression, of that 'volumetric' resonance. We have lost the 'here' (*sund*) of these things, and this means for sure that we can look at the *Dindsenchas* only as at a black and white, static, non-permanent, and perhaps 'abstract' photograph of that continuously transforming timescape.

But the Irish authors and readers/listeners were themselves part of that interlace, and they were looking/listening and 'incorporating' their own stories as settled inside places. Actually, they were probably going back from the 'abstract' and 'superficial' way of living lives to a 'concrete', 'rooted', and 'real' experience of

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61 Ibidem, 123; the author, who follows in part Claude Lévi-Strauss and Northrop Frye, refers to the concept of 'abstract story-patterns' introduced by Carney (1996): 160–171.

time and space[62]: to something similar to what Martin Heidegger defined as *being-in-the-world*:

> Only through the fact that Being-there is rooted in temporality can we get insight into the existential possibility of that phenomenon which [...] we have designated as its basic state: *Being-in-the-world*. We had to assure ourselves in the beginning that the structural unity of this phenomenon cannot be torn apart [...]. The existential-temporal condition for the possibility of the world lies in the fact that temporality, as an ecstatical unity, has something like an horizon.
>
> With regard to that space which it has ecstatically taken in, the 'here' of its current factual situation never signifies a position in space. But signifies rather the leeway of the range of that equipmental totality with which it is most closely concerned—a leeway which has been opened up for it in directionality and de-severance.[63]

The only difference with the *Dindsenchas*—and rather a fundamental one—is that this resonance between people and the world, this being-in-the-world as being part of a timescape, was there more

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62 As Cooney pointed out, 'the reality for people was not their role in wider history, but in the way they constructed their own history, drawing their own maps of past and present in their own place': (Cooney 2000, 20); John Carey's article on 'Time, Memory, and the Boyne Necropolis' (Carey [1993]: 24–36) is very important too for the problem of relationships between the poetic tradition and its connection with space and time; the continuity between Stone Age and medieval Ireland is studied by Alinei (2000): 465–573; cf. Benozzo (2002b).

63 Heidegger (1992): 402, 416, 420. For a detailed comment on these passages, cf. at least Mulhall (1990), Dreyfus (1991), and Frede (1993): 42–69.

a spontaneous attitude than a literary or discursive reasoning: a simple 'listening to the landscape'[64] that evidently, starting from that black and white photograph, we are physically unable to recover.

64 Cf. Robinson (1996): 151–164, and Robinson (1990): 5–19.

PART TWO

Welsh Landscapes

At the height of the battle between land and sea, the storms seem to hurl themselves against the rocky coast. Squalls and waves break over the cliffs and rocks; shafts of light from behind the dark clouds shine on the wetness of the land. This is one of the skirmishes that have continued since our geological world began and the battle will not cease for as long a time as has already been.

Kyffin Williams, *Storm over Caernarfon Bay*

CHAPTER IV

Landscape as a Source of Poetic Authority: The 'Systematic Constitution of Space' in Early Welsh *Englynion*

When I first read the early Welsh *englynion*, which together make up what has conventionally taken the name of *Saga Poetry*[1] and *Gnomic Poetry*,[2] I understood the enigmatic qualities of these texts as a deep anthropological problem more than a dilemma connected with literary technique; or, rather, that the language of this poetry was (in a more manifest way than other texts) a kind of profound, structured answer to a crucial question regarding the impossible interpenetration of words and space, of men and landscapes, of human wisdom and the silence of nature. The first aspect that emerges from these poems, in fact, is that of the landscape as a non-dialoguing stratum of the perceived world, as something that conceals (in a very simple and not mysterious way) a complex web of knowledge.

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1 Cf. Rowland (1990); using this definition, scholars underline the possibility that these poems were parts of sagas where the prose has been lost: cf. also Jacobs (1989): 109–120, and Sims-Williams (1993): 27–63.

2 Cf. Jackson (1934).

As is well known, these early *englynion* are compositions structured in groups of three-line stanzas that present in many cases the first line (or the first two lines) of landscape description followed by an affirmation in the form of a sentence.[3] The problem of their interpretation, which is among the most debated in the field of Celtic philology, was first posed by Kenneth Jackson:[4] what meaning can the presence of these landscape lines have in a context of gnomic poetry? Or rather, turning the question around, what sense do gnomic type affirmations have in compositions concerned with landscapes? Jackson thought of an assembly of two traditions, a meeting of a practice of 'nature poetry' with an originally independent practice of 'gnomic poetry', and defined compositions born from this assembly with the term 'quasi-gnomic verses'.[5]

In the other studies that tackled this problem subsequently,[6] one can say that substantially nothing new was said before the work of A. O. H. Jarman.[7] On more than one occasion and especially in books aimed at a widespread audience (and thus able to give life to a 'vulgate' interpretation), Jarman tried to identify the connections that exist between the landscape verse and the

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3 On the origins of the *englyn*, cf. in particular Jones (1982): 250–293, and Rowland (1990): 305–308.

4 Cf. Jackson (1935).

5 Ibidem, 135–136.

6 Cf. for example, among the best known, Henry (1966): 69–71, and the introduction by Patrick Ford to his edition of Llywarch Hen's poems, where the hypothesis is also expressed that many of these englynion 'were the result of some single bardic transmigratory excursion' (Ford [1974]: 61).

7 Jarman actually follows an idea that was already expressed in Thomas (1976): 93–96.

gnomic line that follows, stating that it is almost always possible to discern a homology.[8] I am not about to quote the most obvious cases in which this interpretative procedure (which tries to connect the luminosity of heather logically, for example, with the anger of the jealous, or the wind which gathers snow with the cowardice of he who does not travel) would result in the most uncontrolled whim. Instead, I would like to point out how, while he tries to reverse or adjust the dichotomy identified by Jackson, Jarman actually stays within the same type of interpretation: to find a plausible connection, to look for semantic links within each triplet.

The latest extensive work dedicated to *Saga Poetry*, the monumental edition of *englynion* edited, translated, and commented upon by Jenny Rowland, goes beyond the analyses I have summarised above. The reading offered by Dr Rowland tries to cross these compositions transversally, according to a combinatory and syntagmatic principle, seeking to overcome the isolating approaches of Jackson and Jarman, which are paradigmatic and not long-ranged.[9] However, an equally 'transversal' interpretation does not result from these methodological premises. Despite going beyond the 'monolithic' and 'monadic' idea (which had tended to identify nuclei of sense within individual triplets), what Dr Rowland tries to gather is once more a logical or symbolic link between what is said in the landscape verses with what is said in the gnomic verses.[10]

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8 Cf. Jarman (1979): 95–97.

9 Cf. Rowland (1990): 206–216.

10 Cf. ibidem, 281: 'the saga *englynion* also provide a model for the use of nature description and gnomes in harmony, although nature there is used for evoking mood and gnomes from a commentary on specific situations'.

The most relevant contribution to the problem is in my opinion a study by Maria Tymoczko,[11] where she comes to recognize 'two scenarios' in order to explain the 'apparent random arrangement of gnomes, the abrupt shifts of topic, the variety of the materials'.[12] I think it is important to quote a few passages of Tymoczko's work in full:

> On the one hand, vision can point us to connections we might miss in gnomic poetry and can tell us what sort of links we should be looking for. Thus, more connections may bind the elements of a gnomic poem than we ordinarily perceive, because the connections are not those of casual logic, knowledge, or rational analysis. The connections we may be missing in early Welsh gnomic poetry are perhaps those of free associations, dream, or non-rational experience—in short, connections similar to those in visionary or mystic experiences.
>
> Let us consider the possibility that there are relatively few connections between gnomes in a given poem—that our sense of confusion is the poet's intention and that a medieval audience would have had a similar response [. . .]. The diversity of materials in such a poem would leave the audience with a heightened awareness of the intricacy of the world, the complexity of life, the immense amount of knowledge to be mastered, and the difficulty of finding patterns in that knowledge [. . .]. Figuratively, we can say that a poem of this type would leave the audience in the dark. The lack of thematic or conceptual focus would represent the world as complex—easy to understand in its particulars, just as the sense of each line of the poem might be obvious in its

11 Cf. Tymoczko (1983): 5–19; this article has been incredibly omitted in the huge list of references quoted in Rowland (1990): 646–661.

12 Tymoczko (1983): 5–6.

meaning but mysterious and obscure overall.[13]

Maria Tymoczko thinks that the *englynion* fall continuously between these two perspectives. What I find powerful in this interpretation is that it limits itself in pointing out the poet's familiarity with many different categories of knowledge, without trying to find a logic in it. On the other hand I do not agree with her when she speaks of a 'lack of structural articulation':[14] instead, I believe that the structural articulation is here of the same type of the structural articulation of a landscape.

There is no doubt, from this point of view, that all the scholars I have mentioned reason in terms of 'nature': they isolate a verse or three-line *englyn* as something 'abstract', which can be read and understood as an isolated element, just as a tree can be perceived ('naturally' rather than 'landscapely') in itself and just as a tree. If you try to read these compositions in terms of landscape, thus gathering a complexity, an intertwining, then an isolated element (like the tree, indeed) may be perceived in its relationships (the wood, the tree on the mountain, etc.) as something concrete, really seen (or imagined), in first instance by the Welsh poet.

Now, I would like to concentrate on the following well known example:

> [1] *Eiry mynyd, gwynn bob tu; / kynneuin bran a chanu; / ny daw da o drachyscu.* / [2] *Eiry mynyd, gwynn keunant, / rac ruthur gwynt gwyd gwyrant; / llawer deu a ymgarant / a phyth ny chyfaruydant.* / [3] *Eiry mynyd, gwynt ae tawl; / llydan lloergan, glas tauawl; / odit dyn dirieit dihawl.* / [4] *Eiry mynyd, hyd escut; / gnawt ym Prydein gynrein drut; / reit oed deall y alltut.* / [5] *Eiry mynyd, hyd ar des, / hwyeit yn llynn,*

13 Ibidem, 6.
14 Cf. ibidem, 2.

gwynn aches; / hwyr hen, hawd y ordiwes. / [6] *Eiry mynyd, hyd ar dro; / chwerdyt bryt wrth a garo; / kyt dywetter wrthyf chwedyl / mi a atwen veuyl lle y bo. /* [7] *Eiry mynyd; graennwyn gro; / pysc yn ryt; clyt y ogo; / kas vyd a oreilytto. /* [8] *Eiry mynyd, hyd ar daraf; / gnawt gan gynran eiryan araf, / ac ysgynnu o du corof / a disgynnu bar ar araf. /* [9] *Eiry mynyd, hyd kyngrwn; / llawer a dywedeis, os gwnn; / anhebic y hadfyd hwnn. /* [10] *Eiry mynyd, hyd hellawt; / gochwiban gwynt ywch bargawt twr; / trwm, a wr, yw pechawt. /* [11] *Eiry mynyd, hyd ar neit; / gochwiban gwynt ywch gwenbleit uchel; / gnawt tawel yn deleit. /* [12] *Eiry mynyd, hyd ym bro; / gochwiban gwynt ywch blaen to; / nyt ymgel dewc yn lle y bo. /* [13] *Eiry mynyd, hyd ar draeth; / collyt hen y uabolaeth; / drycdrem a wna dyn yn gaeth. /* [14] *Eiry mynyd, hyd yn llwyn, / purdu bran, buan jyrchwyn; / iach ryd, ryuedawt pa gwyn. /* [15] *Eiry mynyd, hyd mwyn brwyn, / oer micned; med y gherwyn; gnawt gan bob anauus gwyn. /* [16] *Eiry mynyd, brith bronn twr, / kyrchyt aniueil glydwr; / gwae wreic a gaffo drycwr. /* [17] *Eiry mynyd, brith bronn kreic, / Krin kalaf, alaf dicheleic; / gwae wr a gaffo drycwreic. /* [18] *Eiry mynyd, hyd yn ffos, / kysgyt gwenyn yn didos; / kytuyt lleidyr a hir nos. /* [19] *Eiry mynyd, kynglhennyd [yn] auon; / hwyrwedawc yng kynnyd / Ny moch dieil meuyl meryd. /* [20] *Eiry mynyd, pysc yn llyn; / balch hebawc, bacwyawc unbynn; / nyt ef a geiff pawb a uynn. /* [21] *Eiry myn<yn>yd; coch blaen pyr; / llidiawc lluossawc ongyr; / och, rac hiraeth vy mrodyr! /* [22] *Eiry mynyd, buan bleid, / ystlys diffeithwch a dreid; / gnawt pob anaf ar dieid. /* [23] *Eiry mynyd, hyd nyt hwyr; / dygwydyt glaw o awyr; / megyt tristit lleturyt llwyr. /* [24] *Eiry mynyd; eilion ffraeth; / gowlychyt tonneu glann traeth; / keluyd kelet y aruaeth. /* [25] *Eiry mynyd, hyd mywn glynn; / gwastat uyd haf, araf llynn; / baryflwyt rew; glew y erchwynn. /* [26] *Eiry mynyd; brith bronn gwyd; / kadarn vy mreich a'm ysgwyd, / eidunaf na bwyf gannmlwyd. /* [27] *Eiry mynyd, llwmm blaen cawn, / crwm blaen gwrysc, pysc yn eigyawn; / lle ne bo dysc ny byd dawn. /* [28] *Eiry mynyd, pysc yn ryt, / kyrchyt carw culgrwm cwm clyt; / hiraeth am uarw ny weryt. /* [29] *Eiry mynyd, hyd yg koet; / ny cherda*

detwyd ar troet; / meckyt llwuyr llawer adoet. / [30] *Eiry mynyd, hyd ym bronn; / gochwiban gwynt ywch blaen onn; / trydyd troet y hen y ffon.* / [31] *Eiry mynyd, hyd ar naw, / hwyeit yn llynn, gwynn alaw; / diryeit ny mynn gwarandaw.* / [32] *Eiry mynyd, coch traet ieir; / bas dwfyr myn yt leueir; / chwennechyt meuyl mawreir.* / [33] *Eiry mynyd, hyd esgut; / odit a'm didawr o'r byt; / rybud y drwch ny weryt.* / [34] *Eiry mynyd, gwynn y gnu; / ys odidawc wyneb ku o gar / gyt a mynych athreidu.* / [35] *Eiry mynyd, Gwynn to tei; / bei traethei dauawt a wypei geudawt / ny bydei gymydawc neb rei.* / [36] *Eiry mynyd, dyd a doeth; / bit glaf pop trwm; llwm lletnoeth; / gnawt pob anaf ar a[n]*noeth.[15]

[1] Mountain snow, white is every place; / the raven is accustomed to sing; / good does not come of excessive sleeping. / [2] Mountain snow, white is the ravine, / the trees bend at the assault of the wind; / many a couple love each other / but never come together. / [3] Mountain snow, the wind heaps it; / broad is the full moon, green the dock-leaves; / a mischievous man is rarely without litigation. / [4] Mountain snow, swift is the stag; / usual are valiant chieftains in Britain; / there is need of discretion for the alien. / [5] Mountain snow, the stag is heat, / ducks in the pond, white is the ocean; / slow is the old man, easy to overtake him. /

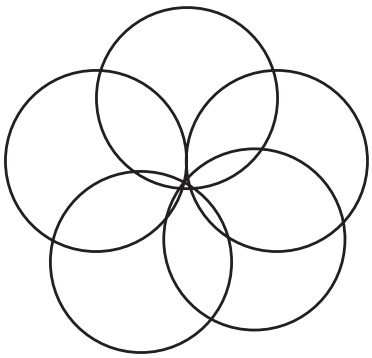
15 Jackson (1934): 22–26; this poem is preserved in the *Llyfr Coch Hergest* (*Red Book of Hergest*) (Oxford, Jesus College, MS 111), the largest of the Welsh medieval vernacular manuscripts, written after 1382: cf. Charles-Edwards (1980): 246–256, Rowland (1990): 395 (for a description of the manuscript, cf. HMC [1902]; a complete digital facsimile can be found at the website of the Oxford University: http://image.ox.ac.uk/pages/jesus); Jackson (1935) thinks that the poem was composed in the early 12th c.; as to the metre, *Eiry Mynyd* is an example of poem which is entirely in *englynion milwr*, that is to say in three monorhymed lines of equal length (the other common type is represented by *englynion penfyr*, with a lengthened a–line and shortened b–line): cf. Morris-Jones (1925): 320, quoted in Rowland (1990): 305.

[6] Mountain snow, the stag is roaming / the hearth smiles on what it loves; / though a tale be told me / I recognise what is shameful wherever it be. / [7] Mountain snow; white pebbled is the shingle; / the fish is in the ford; one is sheltered in a cave; / hateful is he who oppresses. / [8] Mountain snow, the stag in flight; / usual for a chieftain to have a splendid weapon / and to mount by the side of the saddle-pommel / † and . . . †/ [9] Mountain snow, the stag is hunched; / much have I said indeed; / this is not like a summer day. / [10] Mountain snow, the stag is hunted; / the wind whistles over the caves of the tower; / grievous, my friend, is sin. / [11] Mountain snow, the stag is leaping; / the wind whistles over the high white wall; / it is usual for the calm to be comely. / [12] Mountain snow, the stag is in the vale; / the wind whistles over the top of the roof; / evil does not conceal itself wherever it be. / [13] Mountain snow, the stag is on the strand; / the old man misses his youth; / an ill countenance hampers a man. / [14] Mountain snow, the stag is in the grove; / very black is the raven, swift the roebuck; the healthy and free, it is strange that he complains. / [15] Mountain snow, the stag is in the rushes; / cold are the bogs; mead is in the vat; / usual for the wounded is lamentation. / [16] Mountain snow, flecked is the front of the tower, / the animals make for shelter; / woe is the woman who gets a bad husband. / [17] Mountain snow, flecked is the front of the crag, / withered the reeds, the cattle †shun the water†; / woe to the man who gets a bad wife. / [18] / Mountain snow, the stag in the ditch, / the bees sleep snugly; / well agreed are the thief and long night. / [19] Mountain snow; liverwort in the river; / slow to strife / the sluggard does not soon avenge an insult. / [20] Mountain snow; there are fish in the lake; / proud is the hawk, curly-haired are chiefs; / everyone does not get what he wants. / [21] Mountain snow; the crest of the †pear tree† is brown; / fierce and serried are spears; / alas, for longing, my brothers. / [22] Mountain snow;

swift is the wolf, / it frequents the border of the wilderness; / usual is every hurt upon †the wretched†. / [23] Mountain snow, the stag is not slow; / rain falls from the sky; / sadness breeds utter despondence. / [24] Mountain snow, the deer are nimble; / the waves wet the brink of the strand; / the skilful, let him conceal his design. / [25] Mountain snow, the stag is in the glen; / summer is calm, the lake is still; / greybearded is the ice; the brave is on the exposed side. / [26] Mountain snow; speckled is the breast of the goose; / strong is my arm and my shoulder, / I pray I may not be a hundred years old. / [27] Mountain snow, bare are the tops of the reeds, / bent the tops of the branches; there are fish in the ocean; / where there is no learning there will be no mental facility. / [28] Mountain snow, there are fish in the ford, / the thin bent stag makes for sheltered coombe; / longing for the dead does not avail. / [29] Mountain snow, the stag is in the wood; / the fortunate does not journey on foot; / the coward fosters many hurts. / [30] Mountain snow, the stag is on the hillside; / the wind whistles over the top of the ash-trees; / a third foot to the aged is his stick. / [31] Mountain snow, the stag is swimming; / ducks in the lake; white is the lily; / the perverse is not willing to listen; [32] Mountain snow; red are the feet of hens; / water is shallow where it babbles, / talking big increases the disgrace. / [33] Mountain snow, the stag is swift; / scarcely anything at all interests me; / warning avails nothing to the unfortunate. / [34] Mountain snow, white is its fleece; / rarely is the face of a friend kindly / at frequent visiting. / [35] Mountain snow, white are the roofs of houses; / in the tongue related what the mind knew, / none would be neighbours. / [36] Mountain snow, day has come; / sick are the sad, bare the ill-clad; / usual is every hurt for the full.[16]

16 Jackson (1935): 59–61.

Maria Tymoczko thinks that '*Eiry Mynydd* is an example of a poem that has no topical congruence to the gnomes', but that it is still possible to find 'a sort of coherence', and 'a thematic link within each stanza [. . .], signalled by the rime':[17] in stanza 13, for example, 'the rime associates *traeth* 'beach', *mabolaeth*, 'youth, boyhood', and *caeth*, 'bound, captive'. Intuitively, we may be intended to see that the man's youth has become 'captive' or 'bound', and that it is on the shore. Here the figure might suggest the common sensation that one's youthful self is the true self imprisoned within the aging body. Somehow, inexplicably, the youthful self must meet death—the shore here represents the boundary between life and death, between this world and the other world'.[18] In this sense, she points out how stanzas of *Eiry Mynydd* seem to relate each other by free association or antithesis ('intuitive connections rather than logical ones'[19]). She represents the movement of the poem as follows:



17 Tymoczko (1983): 7.
18 Ibidem.
19 Ibidem, 8.

Each *englyn*, perceived as a unity, builds up associations around a precise theme, and then brings the reader/listener back to the starting point (the phrase *eiry mynyd*). In this sense it is possible to speak of a 'fragmentary revelation', and of a 'centripetal poem'.[20]

I think that this structural approach is very useful, first of all because it tries to understand the poem avoiding subjective analogical interpretations and identifications,[21],but I do not agree with the idea that 'there are gaps in the contents, and the gaps are highlighted by the meter of the verse';[22] it is not true that 'the use of *englynion* [. . .] rather than the longer stanzaic forms [. . .] means that the poems are divided into small, discrete units', and that 'attendant rime changes highlight the stanzaic organization and often mark changes in subject as well'.[23] If it was true, we would also have to interpret in this way narrative texts like the *Divina Commedia*, which is structured in three-lines stanzas metrically, not so different from the *englynion*.[24]

The so-called unity of these poems must be found, in my opinion, in their whole structure, and the reading I propose starts from the landscape verses making a distinction on the interpretative

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20 Ibidem, 11.

21 Even if sometimes it goes back to a sort of symbolic interpretation, as in the quoted passage where the shore is perceived as the boundary between life/world and death/other world.

22 Ibidem, 10.

23 Cf. ibidem; rather, one could say that the opposite is true, if one considers for example the apparent fragmentary and non-narrative structure of longer stanzaic form as the *awdlau* in *Y Gododdin* (cf. note 4 in chapter VII, 'Towards a Morphology of Landscape Perception in the Epic Tradition').

24 On this *terza rima* structure, which finds its unity in the dislocation of triplets, see the fundamental Parodi (1965): 53–67.

level between nature and landscape.[25] Let us read in sequence the landscape verses of *Eiry Mynyd*, without considering, for a moment, their possible relationships with other gnomes. The resulting structure of images is the following:

[1]

EVERY PLACE IS WHITE

↓

[2]

THE RAVINE IS WHITE ~ THE TREES BEND AT THE ASSAULT OF THE WIND

↓

[3]

THE SNOW IS HEAPED BY THE WIND

↓

[4]

THE STAG IS SWIFT

↓

[5]

THE STAG IS HEAT ~ THE DUCKS ARE IN THE POND ~ THE OCEAN IS WHITE

↓

[6]

THE STAG IS ROAMING

↓

[7]

THE SHINGLE IS WHITE-PEBBLED ~ THE FISH IS IN THE FORD

↓

[8]

THE STAG IS IN FLIGHT

↓

25 For a definition of landscape and nature, cf. the Introduction.

[9]

THE STAG IS HUNCHED

↓

[10]

THE STAG IS HUNTED ~ THE WIND WHISTLES IN THE TOWER

↓

[11]

THE STAG IS LEAPING ~ THE WIND WHISTLES OVER THE WALL

↓

[12]

THE STAG IS IN THE VALE ~ THE WIND WHISTLES OVER THE TOP OF THE ROOF

↓

[13]

THE STAG IS ON THE STRAND

↓

[14]

THE STAG IS IN THE GROVE

↓

[15]

THE STAG IS IN THE RUSHES ~ THE BOGS ARE COLD

↓

[17]

THE FRONT OF THE CRAG IS FLECKED ~ THE REEDS ARE WITHERED

↓

[18]

THE STAG IS IN THE DITCH

↓

[19]

LIVERWORT IN THE RIVER

↓

[20]

THERE ARE FISH IN THE LAKE

↓

[21]

THE CREST OF THE PEAR TREE IS BROWN

↓

[22]

THE WOLF IS SWIFT ~ THE WOLF FREQUENTS THE BORDER OF THE WILDERNESS

↓

[23]

THE STAG IS NOT SLOW ~ RAIN FALLS FROM THE SKY

↓

[24]

THE DEER ARE NIMBLE ~ THE WAVES WET THE BRINK OF THE STRAND

↓

[25]

THE STAG IS IN THE GLEN ~ THE LAKE IS STILL ~ THE ICE IS GREYBEARDED

↓

[27]

THE TOPS OF THE REEDS ARE BARE ~ THE TOPS OF THE BRANCHES ARE BENT ~

THERE ARE FISH IN THE OCEAN

↓

[28]

THERE ARE FISH IN THE FORD

↓

[29]

THE STAG IS IN THE WOOD

↓

[30]

THE STAG IS ON THE HILLSIDE ~ THE WIND WHISTLES OVER THE TOP OF THE ASH-TREES

↓

[31]

THE STAG IS SWIMMING ~ THE DUCKS IN THE LAKE ~ THE LILY IS WHITE

↓

[32]

WATER IS SHALLOW WHERE IT BABBLES

↓

[33]

THE STAG IS SWIFT

↓

[34]

THE FLEECE OF SNOW IS WHITE

One is dealing with, as can be seen, with a complex, articulated, dynamic landscape. It is a landscape that is growing, that is delineated according to different means and trajectories starting from single elements. This configuration of physical space follows procedures of *focussing* on images from a generic vastness (for example the white of snow) to a specification of elements taken ever more in detail (the white of the ravine), and of *accumulation* of different elements that go to make up the dynamic intertwining. In other words, we are faced with what Husserl defined as the 'systematic constitution of space' (*Raumkonstitution*), which indeed happens through moving, changing the 'zero point' of perception continuously, that is the point in which the observer (in this case the poet who describes or mentions different points, ever farther away or

ever more defined) modifies and creates, in juxtaposition, perspective, orientation, and the plotting of spatial intertwining.[26]

If from the 'natural' point of view the problem was that of understanding the relationship existing between each first verse (that is each 'zero point') of the triplet and the other two verses, from the 'landscape' point of view, this means trying to understand what meaning this growing landscape (which is starting to form, slowly, from the accumulation of all the first verses) may have for the structure of the whole composition. I believe the answer has to be sought in the gnomic character of these texts. In other examples of poetry of comparable type[27] the poet who pronounces phrases in the form of sentences claims his own authority by listing the experiences he has had, for instance the journeys he has undertaken (as in the case of the Anglo-Saxon *Widsith*),[28] or recalling mysterious aspects of his own faraway origins (as in many of the compositions attributed to Taliesin). The bard who speaks through *englynion*, instead, does not speak of himself in the time in which he travelled to in faraway places, nor of the fact that he is travelling in faraway places: more simply, he speaks of those faraway places. This expedient also has the power of *making* the journey of knowledge *a reality*, because the poet does not refer (in the past) to what he saw before ('I saw' and 'I was' are the recurring anaphoric formulas in examples of the same type),[29] but to what is happening far away, in

26 Cf. Husserl (1934, 1983).

27 Cf. Williams (1914), MacGregor Dawson (1962): 143–154, Shippey (1976).

28 Cf. Malone (1962), and the precious analysis of Buti (1993): 95–102.

29 'We should note [. . .] that in Celtic tradition a connection is maintained between "knowledge" and "sight" [. . .]. In Irish tradition *éicse*, "lore", the material mastered and preserved by the *éices*, "poet" and originally "seer", was perhaps originally the object of his sight. In the same way, know-

those places of journey, at the same time in which he is speaking. Slowly, as the composition grows (and, I would say, 'advances'), he demonstrates his own knowledge of the world. He knows that it snows on the mountains, how a fish moves in the lake, or in what way the wind bends trees. To declare this journey of knowledge, he can also use, as seen, the image of a stag, moving with it in the landscapes, and describing in this way the faraway places according to a dynamic and travelling model of experience. It is therefore really by virtue of the landscape lines that the gnomic lines receive authority. Despite Jackson's definition, one has to consider as 'quasi-gnomic poetry' those texts where the declarations of truth are not supported by a demonstration of mantic authority.

The same procedure individuated above is used in gnomic poems like *Gorwyn Blaen Onn*,[30] where the poet demonstrates a sort of botanical knowledge as well, and also in 'saga poems' like *Llym Awel*[31] where, for example, in stanzas 5–10 the falling of the snow gives place to a landscape built up in almost cinematographic terms:

[5] *Ottid eiry guin y cnes. / nid a kedwir oe neges. / oer llinnev eu llyu heb tes.* / [6] *Ottid eiry guin. aren. / segur yscuid ar iscuit hen. / ryuaur guint*

---

ledge cannot be separated from sight in early Welsh tradition. *Gwyddbod, gwybod,* "to know'", is literally "to be in a state of having seen"': Tymoczko (1983): 2; also Ifor Williams underlined that 'the poet was the man who saw. Over and over again in our early poetry the bard sings *gwelais,* "I have seen". The poet was a seer' (cf. Williams [1944]: 8).

30 Cf. Jackson (1934): 29–32, and Jackson (1935): 64–68.

31 *Llym Awel* is preserved in the *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* (*Black Book of Carmarthen*) [Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 1), written in the latter half of 13th century (cf. Jarman [1982, 1985); Rowland (1990) dates this poem mid 9th century to late 9th century; a specific study of it is Jones (1981): 3–14, where this text is used in order to counter the so-called folk origin theory of gnomic poetry; for an alternative edition and translation, cf. Ford (1974): 121–127.

reuhid dien. / [7] Ottid eiry ar warthaw reo. / gosgupid g[u]int blaen guit tev. / kadir yscuid ar yscuit glev. / [8] Ottid eiry tohid istrad. / diuryssint vy keduir y cad. / mi nid aw. anaw nim gad. / [9] Ottid eiry o dv riv. / karcharaur goruit cul biv. / nid annuyd hawdit hetiv. / [10] Ottid eiry guin goror mynit. / llum guit llog ar mor. / meccid llvwyr llauer kyghor.[32]

[5] Snow falls; white is its surface. / Warriors do not go to their expeditions. / The lakes are cold; their colour is without warmth. / [6] Snow falls; hoarfrost is white. / Idle is a shield on the shoulder of the old. / The wind is very great; it freezes the grass. / [7] Snow falls on top of ice; / wind sweeps the top of the thick woods. / Fine is a shield on the shoulder of the brave. / [8] Snow falls; it covers the valley. / Warriors rush to battle. / I do not go; an injury does not allow me. / [9] Snow falls on the side of the hill. / The steed is a prisoner; cattle are lean. / It is not the nature of a summer day today. / [10] Snow falls; white the slope of the mountain. / Bare the timbers of a ship on the sea. / A coward nurtures many counsels.[33]

The resulting structure of images is the following one:

[5]

SNOW FALLS, THE SURFACE IS WHITE

↓

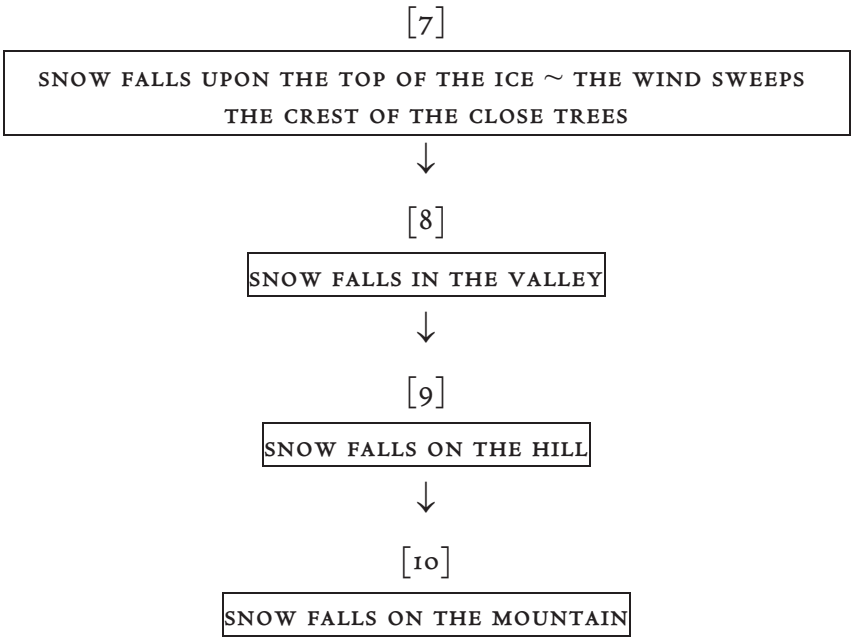
[6]

SNOW FALLS, THE HOARFROST IS WHITE

↓

32 Rowland (1990): 454–455.

33 Ibidem, 501; at stanzas 5 and 6, Dr Rowland translates 'it snows' instead of 'snow falls': this would be a paraphrase, rather than literal, as the possessive adjective ('its') cannot refer to a verb.



In this case, the configuration of physical space follows a procedure of *enlargement* from a centre (the eye or the voice of the poet, with the generic whiteness of the snow) to distant zones (the valley, then the hill, then the mountain).

Landscapes represent thus a sort of map where the other gnomic (or saga) lines are set,[34] the skeleton where the other sentences are

34 I find it very hard, in this case, to recognize a distinction between gnomic *englynion* and saga *englynion* (*englynion chwedlonol*) and also find it difficult to maintain this rigid classification speaking of 'gnomic statements which are used in saga *englynion*' (Rowland [1990]: 15). There is the strong tendency among medievalisists to try to keep old categories: for example, a sentence like 'Both *Llym awel* and *Geraint fab Erbin* are true saga poems, although divorced from the context of a cycle' (ibidem, 243) contradicts the definition of saga poetry as a corpus of poems belonging to a cycle; on the other hand (if you want to mantain this kind of classifications) I do not see why we should not consider the dialogue between Gwyn ap Nudd and Gwyddno Garanhir, or the one between Ugnach and Taliesin, as saga poems, since the consideration that 'it is doubtful whether situational or narrative interest lies behind them' (ibidem) clearly is conjecture; I wonder where the concrete utility is in defining these latter

settled. Maria Tymoczko has reason to write that 'there is no immediate esthetic that governs where the poem should start and where it should end' and that 'we have the sense that the poems begin *in medias res* and could go on forever': in fact, this could be a good definition for the structure of a landscape, which has no beginnings and no ends, and which we can perceive only being *in medias res*, being surrounded by it.[35] If it is true that the *englynion* 'do not tell a story and, whatever relation they may bear to any narrative, they represent a break in it', and that in the end the problem is 'to find a context for them',[36] one could say that, even more than a supposed invisible narrative background to the lyrics, the landscape framework represents a visible and articulated context. I find this image very useful, because it again implies that, as in any functional correlation between a structure and the single points arranged in it, the link between landscape lines and gnomes has to be found considering the frame (that is to say the growing landscape) in its totality and unity (that is to say without isolating the nature descriptions of single stanzas). Landscape is thus the meaningful *substratum* that connects the other apparently isolated lines.

Modern epistemologists taught us that when one approaches things with a gneosological intention, one has to put oneself in a place, in an 'angle of enquiry', in order to give a concrete horizon to the analysis, and to create a 'tangible space' enabling one to give substantiation to things one talks about.[37] The *englynion* approach

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poems as 'dialogue poems' (cf. ibidem; and Roberts [1978]: 284).

35 Cf. Gibson (1950): 3–8, Eckbo (1969), Tuan (1974b): 78–79, Coones (1997): 5–12, Bell (1999).

36 Jacobs (1989): 10.

37 I am referring in particular to Alston (1989), Chisholm (1989), and Lehrer (1990).

knowledge in the same way: the physical space is here something that supports the other affirmations, and we are always brought back to a mountain, to a wood, or near a lake, as a necessary place from which to understand the world. I would consequently define the nature of this rapport as an *organic polarity*: landscapes are a dialectical *pendant*, not a symbol or an evocative scenery.

I want to insist on a point that I raised at the beginning of this chapter: physical places and man are represented in the *englynion* as two distinctly separate things. Anyone who reads these poems can notice the binary structure of each stanza as an unmistakable sign of this ontological separation.[38] The *englynion* are a manifest pre-metaphoric and pre-symbolic poetic expression of the irreconcilability between our lives and the earth (an incompatibility that many scholars try to resolve—and end by betraying—through symbolic-analogical interpretations). In the end, this is probably these poems' most subversive characteristic: not only are they clearly situated in an area that is very the opposite of our idea of literature and art,[39] but they also annihilate, with their concrete and simple evidence, any rhetorical pretence claiming a possible 'dialogue with nature'.[40]

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38 Cf. also Benozzo (2000e): 133–149.

39 'The reader's first reaction to early Welsh nature poetry is one of disappointment. He is pleased with the setting, with the mountain snow and the tops of the ash trees, but only puzzled and annoyed by the unfamiliar gnomes': Jackson (1935): 12; for the contemporary relevance of this eversive approach, cf. also Benozzo (in press c).

40 This attitude, which has always been part of human life (maybe as a symptom of his fear of loneliness: cf. Benozzo–Meschiari [1994a]: III–XVIII), seems to be a true obsession of contemporary society; for a critic of this 'pathetic' (as they define it) approach, cf. Prigogine–Stengers (1984).

Instead of pursuing a nostalgic aspiration to fusion inside the natural environment, we could try to discover the richness connected with our distance from it. Early Welsh *englynion* seem to make it obvious that landscapes can be a source of knowledge and wisdom only by keeping this separation untouched.

CHAPTER V

Landscape as a Force in Movement: The Dynamic Perception of Space in *Cad Goddau*

In a few books that have in part revolutionized the methods of medieval historiography, and that are mainly concerned with the analysis of the mental and physical relationships of man and space, the late lamented Italian historian Vito Fumagalli pointed out that it would be impossible to approach any cultural phenomena belonging to the 6th–14th centuries without considering that they were part of a natural world which radically interfered, often in a violent way, with the lives of people, with their attitudes and thoughts.[1] The environmental conditions were of course different according to different areas and to different periods;[2] however it is possible to say that one of the most striking aspects that emerges from the study of the attitudes towards nature in any region of medieval northern Europe is that of the landscape perceived as a force in unceasing movement.[3] This was particularly true with reference to the 'dense forests stretched for

1 Cf. in particular Fumagalli (1994); I had the fortune of being one of Fumagalli's students in the years 1988–1991; it is with emotion and nostalgia that I mention here the name and the works of a person who strongly influenced my way of considering landscapes and the Middle Ages, and who also took part in a few literary projects of mine; on his approach to landscapes, cf. Benozzo–Meschiari (1997a): 4–6.

2 For medieval Welsh landscapes, cf. Davies (1978): 28–32, and Davies (2000).

3 Fumagalli (1994); 134–142.

mile upon mile, interrupted only occasionally by the ruins of towns and villages', also because the struggle to impose order on nature, cultivating the land and controlling it, caused almost everywhere 'inexorable natural disasters, starvation and destitution', which in many cases 'generated fear and hysteria in people'.[4]

We often tend to consider texts as if they were separated from reality, forgetting the very elemental fact that literature, which is certainly also a system growing within itself, is first of all a way of looking at the world, the expression of things that continue to live apart from books. What historians like Fumagalli (or, just to name other famous masters, Fernand Braudel and Lucien Febvre)[5] seem to indicate to their colleagues who study the literary tradition, is that a cultural phenomenon can be understood only in its complexity and in the wide range of its connections with the world.[6] A few years ago—just to quote a borderline case—an Italian scholar who was talking about a book written by the writer Renato Serra about trench warfare,[7] ended by regarding the comparison he had made between clouds and freedom, just ten minutes before the narrator died fighting, as an allusion to Ronsard. This is—as I said—a borderline case, but it illustrates

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4 Ibidem, 71, 120; cf. also Bechmann (1984), Alexandre (1987), and Higounet (1989): 35–42. In Welsh territory, the clearance of forests became also a vital part of military strategy, as explained by Linnard (1982): 21–20 (the chapter titled 'Military Significance of Forests in the Norman Conquest') [this book has been reprinted in Linnard (2000)].

5 I am thinking in particular of the posthumous Braudel (1997) and Febvre (1947); cf. also the valuable Lyon–Lyon (1991).

6 Of course, theoretical works affirming the importance of these interactions are not absent (among the numerous contributions, I find very interesting the old but still important Wimsatt [1962], and the well known writings by Michail Bakhtin: cf. in particular Bakhtin [1981]: 50–100); but it would be very difficult for me to quote books where these ideas find a concrete expression.

7 Serra (1972): 327–360.

an attitude that is always present in literary studies: the temptation to separate words from the world. And I wonder how many similar cases exist, in our way of interpreting things, particularly when we approach medieval literatures, belonging to people who remain mostly unknown in their mentality and attitudes.

Going back to the perception of forests: are there traces in early Welsh poetry of the way in which they were perceived?[8] To me, one of the texts which are most obviously connected with the perception of landscapes as dynamic forces is the famous *Cad Goddau* preserved in *Llyfr Taliesin*.[9] I would like to consider it in this chapter, also because, apart from this critical starting point, this analysis may give suggestions about the way of 'writing a movement'.[10] *Cad Goddau* is a poem of 250 lines, the central section of which tells the story of a battle fought against an army of Britons by a formation of 34 species of trees.

The following is the sequence of the battle, as in Marged Haycock's edition and translation:

> [1] *Gwern blaen llin / A want gysseuin. / Helyc a cherdin / Buant hwyr y'r vydin.* / [5] *Eirinwyd yspin / Anwhant o dynin. / Keri kywrenhin: / Gwrthrychyat gwrthrin. / Ffuonwyd eithyt* / [10] *Erbyn llu o <gywryt>. / Auanwyd gwneithyt: / Ny goreu emwyt / Yr amgelwch bywyt. / Ryswys a <gwyduyt>* / [15] *Ac eido, yr y bryt, / Mor eithin y'r gryt. / Siryan se<i>nyssit. / Bedw, yr y vawr vryt, / Bu hwyr gwiscyssit:* / [20] *Nyt yr y lyfyrder, / Namyn yr y varwed. / <Awron> delis bryt; / Allmyr uch <allfryt>. / Ffenitwyd yg kynted,*

8 Literary sources, such as the *Mabinogi* and *Llyfr Taliesin*, are considered in Linnard (2000).

9 *Cad Goddau* has been edited and translated in Haycock (1990): 321–325; for a description of *Llyfr Taliesin*, cf. Haycock (1988).

10 On the opposition between 'writing *about a* landscape' and 'writing *a* landscape', cf. Benozzo–Meschiari (1994b): 495–501.

/ [25] Kadeir <gywryssed>. / Onn goreu ardyrched / Rac bron teyrned. / Llwyf, yr y varanhed, / Nyt oscoes troetued: / [30] Ef lladei a pherued / Ac eithaf a diwed. / Collwydd bernissit / Eiryf dy aryfgryt. / Gwyros gwyn y vyt, / [35] Tarw trin, teyrn byt. / Morawc a Moryt. / Ffawyd ffynyessit. / Kelyn glessyssit; / Bu ef ygwrhyt. / [40] Yspydat amnat: / Heint ech y aghat. / Gwinwyd gorthoratgorthoryssit ygat. / Redyn anreithat. / [45] Banadyl rac bragat / Yn rychua briwat. / Eithin ny bu vat; / Yr hynny gwerinat. / Gruc, budyd amnat, / [50] Dy werin swynat. / Hydgwyr erlynyat. / Derw buanawr: / Racdaw crynei nef a llawr. / <Glesyn> glew drussyawr: / [55] Y enw ym peullawr. / Clafuswyd kygres / Kymraw a rodes. / Gwrthodi, gwrthodes, / Ereill otylles. / [60] Per goreu gormes / Ym plymlwyt maes. / <Goruthrawc> kywyd / Aches <veillonyd>. / Kastan kewilyd, / [65] Gwrthryat <ferwyd>. / <Handit> du muchyd, / Handit crwm mynyd; / Handit kyl <coedyd>, / Handit kynt myr mawr / [70] Er pan gigleu yr awr. / A'n deilas blaen bedw / A'n <datwrith> datedw; / A'n maglas blaen derw / O Warchan Maelderw.

Alder at the head of the line / Pierced first. / Willow and mountain-ash / Were slow [to join] the army. / [5] Thorny [wild] plum-trees / Eager for slaughter. / The strong service-tree: / One who anticipates the battle. / Rose-trees advanced / [10] Against a wrathful host. / Raspberry-bush took action: / He did not make a defensive palisade / In order to protect [his] life. / ?Privet-wood and honeysuckle / [15] And ivy, despite their appearance, / How fiercely [did they go] into the fray. / ?Cherry made a commotion. / Birch, despite his mighty appearance, / Was slow in putting on armour: / [20] Not because of his cowardice, / Rather because of his greatness. / ?Golden rod maintained [his] resolve; / Strangers on the foreign waters. / Pine in the seat of honour, / [25] Contention in the shape of branches (*or*: contention for a chair). / Ash wrought magnificence / Before princes. / Elm, despite his bluster, / Did not move a foot: / [30] He slashed the centre [of the army] / And the wing and the rear. / Hazel adjudged / The weapons for the

conflict. / Blessed/white dogwood / [35] The bull of battle, lord of the world. / † [. . .] † / Beech was successful. / Holly grew vigorous/verdant; / He was present in battle. / [40] Whitethorn the skilful one / [Dispensing] pestilence from his hand. / Wine/woodbine the destroyer/was destroyed / ([Yet]) hewed in the fray. / Bracken the pillager. / [45] Broom in the forefront of the battalion / Was wounded in the churned-up [battle-ground]. / Gorse was not worthy; /All the same he was brought into line. / Heather, skilful victor, / [50] Was enchanted into the army. / Hindberry the pursuer. / Oak [was] swift his shout: / Heaven and earth trembled before him. / ?Bugle, a brave warrior: / [55] His name [is kept] on a writing-tablet. / The attack of the [. . .] / caused terror. / He was repulsing, he repulsed,/ [And] stabbed others. / [60] The sweet fruit-tree [?pear] wrought oppression / On the battle-field / A terrifying array / [Was] the surging clover/wood sorrel. / Bashful chestnut, / [65] ?his strong branches repulsing. / Jet is black, / Rounded is a mountain; / Spiky are the trees, / The great seas are swifter / [70] Since I heard the battle-cry. / The top of the birch put forth leaves for us, / [Its] vigour reinforced us; / The top of the oak ensnared [the enemy] ?for us / Because of [the declamation of] Maeldderw's *Gorchan*.

Different interpretations have been put forward. Apart from the algebraic-mystic one by Robert Graves, who identifies in the poem—if I understood him correctly—a sort of secret alphabet,[11] I cite only the 'mythologizing' ones by Pierre le Roux, who ends by considering the poem as 'a metaphysical text',[12] and Christian Guyonvarc'h, who recognizes in it the attestation of a vegetal

11 Cf. Graves (1961): 14–27; on Graves' interpretation, cf. now Constantine (2001).

12 Cf. Le Roux (1959a, 1959b).

myth spread throughout the Celtic settlement area,[13] and that, from a radically opposed point of view, by Marged Haycock, according to which *Cad Goddau* is essentially a parody of the epic poems and probably of the heroic ideal embedded in them.[14] Dr Haycock has the enormous merit of 'bringing the text back to the text', whereas Le Roux and Guyonvarc'h approached it as a simple attestation, considering the (mythological) background as a more important thing than the poem itself. Nevertheless, a parody being something essentially connected with individual inclinations, it is difficult for me to accept the interpretation that she proposes, as the motif of the battle of the trees is not only present in other literary texts,[15] but also in many folkloric traditions (not only in Europe, but also in Australia, Africa, and America).[16] In a recent poetry competition in France, a seven year-old child submitted a poem about his way of seeing the wood near his house, in Montélimar: to give the idea of the strong wind that had moved the beech-trees in a stormy night, he described the wood as an army of warriors marching towards his village.[17] Maybe he knew the story of *Cad Goddau* (or a similar one), but I doubt he had any parodistic intention. What I am trying to say is that, even accepting that signals of a 'comical' purpose are present in *Cad Goddau* (a fact that is actually very difficult to demonstrate starting from

13 Cf. Guyonvarc'h (1953).

14 Cf. Haycock (1990).

15 To the list of texts quoted by Dr Haycock (the Irish *Mesca Ulad* and *Cath Ruis na Rig*, and *Macbeth* (ibidem, 304), one may add the battle between the Christian warriors and the wood of Saron in Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (canto XIII) (on which see the remarkable analysis in Raimondi [1980]: 71–202), and the battle of the trees in *The Lord of the Rings* by Tolkien.

16 Cf. Benozzo (1998a): 329–343; for Brittany, cf. the ballad titled *Itron Varia ar Porz-Gwenn*, edited and translated in Constantine (1996): 218–221; cf. also Aldhouse-Green (2000).

17 Cf. Morin (1999): 44–46.

the text), one need not necessarily connect them with a parody of heroic poetry, because it is a very well known fact that comical elements are a structural feature of the epic tale itself.[18]

The difference is a crucial one: to read *Cad Goddau* as a parody of texts like *Y Gododdin* means to perceive it as something which was exclusively born within the literary world, and thus the presence of the trees, that is to say the real world, becomes a mere *ornatus*, an expedient of rhetoric. Instead, let us try to reason in terms of landscape: to which sources or to which repertory could a Welsh poet turn in the early Middle Ages to tell the story of a forest? His narrative needs were essentially twofold: above all he had to be able to name as many varieties of trees as possible, and secondly he had to find a way to 'dynamicise' them, to create movement. This because a wood is perhaps the type of landscape that is most complex to describe, a landscape in which the multiplicity is at the same time a unitary cohesion, but in which real and true recognisable surroundings do not exist, and in which the elements move according to elusive and apparently chaotic trajectories.[19]

The catalogues of trees and plants created likewise in a legal or medical field could resolve the first of the two problems of composition posed by the vegetal element: the need to name a multiplicity. I am referring to texts which are particularly well attested in Irish sources, like the tree-list found in four manuscripts of

18 Cf. Hatto (1989): 195–306; cf. also the forthcoming Proceedings of the 'XVe Congrès International de la Société Rencesvals' (Poitiers, 21–27 août 2000), where the third section is about 'Humour, ironie, dérision dans les chansons de geste'.

19 Cf. Benozzo–Meschiari (1996a): 247–256, and Meschiari (2001): 11–23.

Bretha Comaithchesa, the main law-text on farming:[20]

> AIRIG FEDO: /*Daur a mes 7 a saíre* /*Coll a mes 7 a cháel* / *Cuillen fer for araili innsin 7 feirtsi carpaid* / *Ibar a haicdi sáera* / *Uinnius folach rigsliasta 7 leth arad airm* / *Ochtacht* / *Aball a mes 7 a rúsc* / AITHIG FEDO: / *Fern* / *Sail* / *Scé* / *Cāerthann* / *Beithe* / *Lem* / *Idath* / FODLA FEDO: / *Draigen* / *Trom* / *Féorus* / *Findcholl* / *Caithne* / *Crithach* / *Crann fir*.
>
> NOBLES OF THE WOOD: / oak, for its acorns and its [use for] woodwork / hazel, for its nuts and its rods / holly, ?grass substitute? and for making chariot shafts / yew, for its noble artefacts / ash, support of a royal thigh and half-material (?) of a weapon / Scots pine for its resin in a bowl / wild apple, for its fruit and its bark / COMMONERS OF THE WOOD: / alder / willow / whitethorn / rowan / birch / elm / wild cherry (?) / LOWER DIVISION OF THE WOOD: / blackthorn / elder / spindle-tree / white beam / arbutus / aspen / juniper / BUSHES OF THE WOOD: / bracken / bog-myrtle / furze / bramble / heather / broom / wild rose.

Tree-lists like the one quoted above could be used as the structural bases for poetic compositions, as is demonstrated by the archaic legal poem titled *Ma be ri rofesser*, edited by D. A. Binchy in 1971:[21]

> [32] *Cia annsom fidbéime* / *fiachaib baeth?* / *Briugid caille,* / [35] *coll eidnech.* / *Esnill bes díthernam* / *dire fidnemir náir.* / *Ni bie fidnemed* / *fiachaib secht n-airech,* / [40] *ara teora bú* / *inna bunbéim bís.* / *Biit alaili secht* / *sétaib losae.* / *Leaumur ar dochondaib* / [45] *dílsi cailli:* /

20 As Fergus Kelly points out, 'the manuscript was copied about the fourteenth century, but the Old Irish text [...] was composed in the eighth century' (Kelly [1997]: 11); I quote the text according to Kelly (1976): 107–124.

21 Binchy (1971): 152–168.

cairi fulocht benar, / bas chnoe foísce / frisna láim i sáith soi. / Slánem de / [50]díthgus díthli. / Díre ndaro, / díre a gabal mar, / mes beobethad; / bunbém n-ibair / [55] inon cumbe cuilinn, / colluth cuill / combach n-ablae, / annsom de / díre secht n-aithech / [60] asa mbí bó: / bunbéim beithe, / béagal fernae, / fube sailech; / sluind airriu aithgein / [65] anóg sciath / sceo draigin; / dringid co fedo forball, / forball ratho, / raited, aíne, / [70] acht a ndílse do flaithib.

[32] What are the most oppressive [cases of] tree-cutting / for which fools are mulcted? / The hospitallers of the forest, / [35] the ivied hazel. / A danger from which there is no escape / is the penalty for [felling] the noble sacred tree. / Thou shall not cut a sacred tree / [and escape?] with the fines for seven noble [trees] / [40] on account of [the fine] of three cows / that is [fixed] for cutting its stem. / There are others, seven, / [attoned for] in *séoit* [due for] undergrowth. / Let me venture for [the benefit of] the immature / [45] [to state] the immune things of the forest: / a [single] caldron's cooking [-wood] that is cut, / a handful of ripe nuts / to which one stretches not his hand in satiety (?). Freest of it (all) / [50] is the right (?) of removal. / The penalty for the oak, / the penalty for [lopping] its larger limbs / [with its] life-sustaining mast; / the stem-cutting of the yew; / [55] the same [penalty] for cutting the holly tree, / the destruction of the hazel, / the breaking of the apple-tree. / Most oppressive of it [all] / is the penalty of the seven commoners [of the forest] / [60] for [each of] which there is a cow [as payment]: / the stem-cutting of the birch, / the peril of the alder, / the undermining of the willow. / Declare restitution for them, / [65] the masiming (?) of the whitehorn / and of the blackthorn; / it (restitution ?) extends to the undergrowth of the wood, / the undergrowth of fern, / of bog-myrtle, of reeds, / [70] save that these are free to lords.

As Marged Haycock recalls, there are two tree-lists also in the

Welsh tradition, both preserved in the *Llyfr Coch Hergest*:[22] more than original tree-lists they can be considered poetic re-elaborations of previous catalogues, as the Irish *Ma be ri rofesser*. The use of catalogues as *hypo-texts*[23] is very common in medieval literatures, and *Cad Goddau* presents the same stylistic characteristics as texts like the Anglo-Saxon *Widsith*, the Norse *Hyndlolióð*, or the same *Ma be ri rofesser*, that is to say an easily recognizable regular structure underneath, mainly based on the principle of *anaphora*.[24]

But to transform a list of trees into a poetic tale, the poet had to be able to dynamicise the simple naming into a story. Here he might have been helped first by the epic tradition of battles, which in any event would necessarily have made up an important part of his repertory. This is why there is a 'battle' of the trees, and also why there are cross-references (which have nothing of parody about them) to epic texts. For example, the fact that 'the trees and shrubs are mostly treated individually with a vignette for each'[25] recalls similar technique used in *Y Gododdin*, where warriors are treated in the same way. The language itself is the technical one of epics, and here I have to quote in full the detailed analysis by Marged Haycock:

> [...] the tree-list passage resounds with the hackneyed phrases of heroic poetry. For example the alder was first to the attack: *a want gysseuin* (lines 1-2). The privet is a 'bull of battle': *tarw trin* (line

22 They are edited in Jackson (1934): 20–21, 29–32, and translated in Jackson (1935): 64–68.

23 For a definition of hypo-text, cf. Genette (1982): 38–39.

24 For the quoted Germanic texts as catalogue texts, cf. Campanile (1981): 53–74; Benozzo (2003b) is a structural analysis of catalogue poems; other references concerning the use of anaphora and catalogues are quoted in chapter II ['The annihilation of Anthropocentric Perception of Landscape', note 51].

25 Haycock (1990): 302.

35). The whitethorn (line 41) dispensed pestilence 'from his hand' (*ech y aghat*) like the Gododdin warriors. Broom (line 45) stands at the forefront of the battalion: *rac bragat*. Elm (lines 30–31) slashes the centre, the wing and the rear of the enemy army. Many of the plant-names are accompanied by an alliterating absolute verbal-form which describes their action: *ffawydd ffynyessit*, 'beech flourished' (line 37); *siryan se<i>nyssit*, '*siryan* resounded/clamoured' (line 17). Others are characterised by a ridiculously unsuitable agent noun: vine/woodbine 'the destroyer' (line 42), bracken 'the pillager' (line 44). Some plants exhibit the extreme rashness prized in the heroic ideal: the raspberry-bush (lines 11–13) was so brave that he did not bother to erect the usual wooden palisade to safeguard his life. Others are more naturally fitted for warfare: the plum-tree with his thorns at the ready was only too eager for slaughter (lines 5–6).[26]

What perplexes me in Dr Haycock's interpretation is her insistence on the parodistic register ('the tone is one of play', 'we are clearly in the realm of parody', 'the tree list is to be read primarily as a mock-heroic parody'). For example, the fact that 'the birch (lines 18–21) has [...] difficulty in getting armour on—not out of cowardice [...] but because of his greatness',[27] is not necessarily a signal of an 'unheroic' attitude: medieval epic poems are full of similar descriptions, and the same Renaut de Montauban, the leading character of the homonymous *chanson de geste*, is many times described in the very same manner.[28] Moreover, the passage in question reminds me of popular proverbs that sometimes put emphasis in the slowness that a few trees have in flowering, just

26 Ibidem, 302–303; in the notes, Dr Haycock quotes similar passages in the *Gododdin* (ibidem, 315).

27 Ibidem, 303.

28 Cf. Melli (1973): 143, 187, 203, where Renaut cannot put his armour on, because of his shoulders are too big.

because of their bigness: an Emilian proverb states that *la piopa la va leinta a far i fiur, ch'le grosa fin al zail,* ('poplar is very slow in flowering, because it is as high as the sky').[29] Maybe in this case the 'armour of a tree' can be seen as a metaphor for the foliation, and it is also a fact that birch, being one of those trees characterized by the so-called 'second foliation', is one of the slowest trees to gemmate. In the same way, the allusion to the 'terrifying array' by a host of clover can certainly be seen as a comical *exaggeratio,*[30] but it also reminds me of cases of destructions that clover caused in some fields in Burgundy, which are listed in a medieval Latin chronicle.[31]

The comical tone that is sometimes present in *Cad Goddau* is more similar, I think, to the tone that one can recognize in fairy-tales. To quote an example from modern literatures, a *fiaba* written for children in 1907 by the Italian writer Ceccardo Roccatagliata Ceccardi, titled *L'albero delle ciliege* (*The cherry-tree*) tells how the cherry-trees 'climbed' the mountains of the Apennines, frequently using ridiculous associations, as the identification between one of the trees and an awkward giant.[32] But here there is no parodistic intention: on the contrary, epic hypo-texts like the *Orlando Furioso,* and their humorous elements, are used to tell a story about real trees.

My conclusion is that in *Cad Goddau* one can read an admirable example of what Gaston Bachelard calls the 'dynamic projection' of the creative mind in its relationship with the pure and simple

29 Quoted in Menarini (1995): 76.
30 Cf. Haycock (1990): 303.
31 Cf. Délage (1941): 177–178.
32 Cf. Roccatagliata Ceccardi (1978): 278–294.

forces of the material.[33] This text can be considered as one of the few epic texts exclusively concerned with the physical landscape.[34] As the most mature examples of epics, this poem contains different narrative registers, and the comical elements contribute to enliven a story which tells about a fighting still rooted in our everyday perceptions. Because, unlike the warriors of the *Gododdin* or the knights of the *chansons de geste*, willow, mountain-ash, and the slow and great birch continue to live nowadays. And in their way, even in a world that has lost the epic singers, they fight their battle against man.

33 Bachelard (1942): 218. For other examples of dynamic perceptions of landscapes in the *Llyfr Taliesin*, particularly with reference to elements like the sea, the rivers, or the wind, cf. Haycock (1997): 19–79, and Benozzo (1988d): 95–96; for a definition of 'epic landscape', cf. Meschiari (1999b).

34 Cf. Benozzo (1998a): 319–325.

CHAPTER VI

Landscape as a 'Symbolic Form': The Perspectival Space in *Breuddwyd Maxen*

It has been said that *Breuddwyd Maxen* is one of the most 'literary' tales of the *Mabinogion*,[1] a text 'handled with a quite remarkable skill', where it is possible to recognise a 'particularly notable' 'co-ordination of sense and style'.[2] As the perception of physical space plays a central rôle in this miniature romance, I find it stimulating, after the articulated space of the early *englynion* and the dynamic morphologies of the *Llyfr Taliesin*, to conclude my 'critical walk' in the medieval Welsh landscapes on such ground, situated between the stuff of traditional oral narrative and the stylistic elaboration of a more modern conception of literature.[3]

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1 *Breuddwyd Maxen* is one of the so-called 'three native tales' of the *Mabinogion* (the other are *Lludd ac Llefelys* and *Breddwyd Rhonabwy*); recently, Brynley Roberts suggests that it can be dated 'to the first half of the thirteenth century' (Roberts [2000]: 72). It seems that this tale, often considered as one of the most beautiful examples of medieval short story composed on a single narrative motive, has not particularly attracted Celtic scholars: apart from Ifor Williams' edition (Williams [1920]), the only two studies specifically concerned with the text are Brewer–Lewis Jones (1975): 23–30 (based on an unpublished M.A. thesis: Brewer [1966]), and Thomas (1997).

2 Mac Cana (1977): 84–85.

3 As Mac Cana collocates it: ibidem, 86–87.

The plot of *Breuddwyd Maxen* can be summarised as follows:

> The emperor of Rome falls asleep while out hunting; in a dream he sees a beautiful princess, with whom he falls in love; he sends messengers to find her, which they do in Caernarfon; he comes to Wales and marries her. Later, he uses troops withdrawn from Britain to win his empire back from usurpers.[4]

The sequence which describes Maxen's journey through the dreamt landscape does not have the simple aim of outlining a setting: its narrative importance is crucial, because this description is the only possibility for Maxen to pass from dream to reality, to find the princess Elen, and to cure his (love) sickness. This is because the messengers have to find a place without any toponymic reference, only starting from the description of it, and the dreamt landscape becomes a real place because Maxen remembers and is able to describe its features.

Here is the sequence of the journey, according to Ifor Williams' edition:[5]

> *[. . .] sef breidwyt a welei,—y uot yn kerdet dyffrynn yr avon hyt y blaen. Ac y vynyd uchaf o'r byt y deuei. Ef a tebygei vot y mynyd yn gyfuch a'r awyr. A phan deuei dros y mynyd ef a welei y vot yn kerdet gwladoed teccaf a gwastattaf a welsei dyn eiryoet, o'r parth arall y'r mynyd; a phrif auonyd mawr a welei o'r mynyd yn kyrchu y mor, ac y'r mor rytyeu ar yr auonyd y kerdei. Py hyt bynnac y kerdei velly, ef a doeth y aber prif auon vwyhaf o'r a welsei neb; a phrif dinas a welei yn aber yr avon, a phrif gaer yn y dinas [. . .]. Ef a welei y dyuot y ynys deckaf o'r holl vyt; a gwedy y kerdei ar draws yr ynys o'r mor py gilyd hyt yr ymyl eithaf o'r ynys, kymmeu a welei, a diffwys, a cherric uchel, a thir agarw amdyfrwys, ny rywelsei eiryoet y*

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4 Breeze (1997): 82.

5 Williams (1920): 1–2; I operated the following substitutions in letter forms: *6* > *w*; *2* > *r*; 'long *s*' > *s*.

gyfryw. Ac odyno ef a welei yn y mor gyuarwyneb â'r tir amdyfrwys hwnnw, ynys: ac y rygtaw a'r ynys honno y gwelei ef gwlat, a oed kyhyt y maestir a'e mor, kyhyt y mynyd a'e choet. Ac o'r mynyd hwnnw avon a welei yn kerdet ar traws y wlat yn kyrchu y mor.

The dream that he saw was how he was making along the river valley towards its upper reaches; and he came to the highest mountain in the world. He thought the mountain was as high as heaven; and as he came over the mountain he could see how he was traversing the fairest and most level regions that mortal had ever seen, on the far side of the mountain. And he saw great wide rivers making from the mountain to the sea, and he journeyed towards the sea-fords on the rivers; however long he was journeying so, he came to the mouth of a river, the greatest any one had seen. And he saw a great city at the mouth of the river, and in the city a great castle [. . .] a sail was hoisted on the ship, and away she went over sea and ocean. He saw how he came to an island, the fairest in the whole world, and after he had traversed the island from the sea to answering sea, even to the uttermost bound of the island, he could see valleys and seeds and towering rocks, and a harsh rugged terrain whose like he had never seen. And from there he saw in the sea, facing that rugged land, an island. And between him and that island he saw a country whose plain was the length of its sea, its mountain the length of its woodland. And from that mountain he saw a river flow through the land, making towards the sea.[6]

Proinsias Mac Cana pointed out how this sequence is dominated by the sense of vision, as a result of 'the way in which the author has used the verb "to see": [. . .] he employs the imperfect indicative *gwelei* "saw, could see" twenty-four times, not to men-

6 Jones–Jones (1974): 79–80; in the discussion of the landscape terms and adjectives, I will not use this translation.

tion five instances of the pluperfect *gwelsei'*.[7] I would like to add that this 'sense of vision' is not of a traditional *chromatic* kind.[8] Colours are totally absent in this landscape, and the description is an account of *directions*, *shapes*, and *distances*.

The elements of this 'seen' landscape, in sequence, are the following:

dyffrynn ['valley'] → *avon* ['river'] → *mynyd* ['mountain'] → *gwladoed* ['countries'] → *avonyd* ['rivers'] → *mor* ['sea'] → *rytyeu* ['arm of the sea, estuary']9 → *aber* ['mouth of a river'] → *ynys* ['island'] → *mor* ['sea'] → *kwm* ['deep narrow valley']10 → *diffwys* ['precipice'] → *cerric* ['rocks'] → *tir* ['land'] → *ynys* ['island'] → *maestir* ['plain'] → *mynyd* ['mountain'] → *coet* ['wood'] → *avon* ['river'] → *mor* ['sea']

The adjectives which 'determine' these elements are very few, and only express the idea of their shapes, always in a generic 'standard' way:

7 Mac Cana (1977): 85.

8 For the literary tradition of 'chromatic descriptions', cf. Benozzo (1999), together with the bibliography that I quote in the last chapter ['Fragments of a Chromatic 'Non-Phenomenology' of Landscapes'].

9 'Mor ryd: an arm of the sea, or estuary. A river can generally be forded at its mouth at low tide if it broadens out into a estuary. This is the case at the mouth of the Clwyd, hence called *Y Ford*, the sea-ford. Also at Caernarfon a similar estuary is called *Y Foryd*. The Latin cognate of rhyd, *portus*, also means the mouth of a river occasionally in poetry': Williams (1920): 16.

10 Cf. *GPC*: 640.

mynyd	=	*uchaf o'r byt* ['the highest in the world'] *gyfuch a'r awyr* ['as high as the sky']
gwladoed	=	*teccaf* ['the most beautiful'] *gwastattaf* ['the most level']
avonyd	=	*mawr* ['great']
aber	=	*mwyhaf* ['the greatest']
ynys	=	*teccaf o'r holl vyt* ['the most beautiful in the whole world']
tir	=	*agarw* ['rough'] *amdyfrwys* ['rugged'] *ny rywelsei eiryoet y gyfryw* ['no (other) similar (to it), ever'][11]

As can be seen, this 'standardization' is very often rendered through the use of superlatives, and this *exaggeratio* is another symptom of a narration that is not interested in describing the real characteristics of a place, and which clearly avoids variants and details in favour of 'absolute' forms, in the attempt to create an *Ur-landscape*.[12] Prepositions that indicate directionality play a

11 It has to be noted that the other elements of the landscape (*dyffrynn, avon, mor, rytyeu, kwm, diffwys, cerric, maestir, mynyd, coet, avon, mor*) are listed without adjectives.

12 I recognize here a clear example of the process known as *law of Pragnanz* (from a German word meaning 'conveying the essence of something'), which states that the organization of the visual array into perceptual objects always goes towards concepts of *regularity, simplicity,* and *symmetry* (cf. Oyama [1990]: 77–86); for a discussion of this and other laws formulated by the Gestalt school of psychology, cf. Coren–Girgus (1980): 404–412; cf. also the remarkable Diwadkar–McNamara (1997):

central rôle in connecting and determining the different elements of the landscape:

hyt ['as far as']	⇒	connects the river with its source (*blaen*)
dros ['over, across']	⇒	connects the mountain with the whole landscape behind it
o'r parth arall ['on the other side']	⇒	connects the mountain with the level land
traws ['across']	⇒	connects the two parts of the island
odyno ['from that place']	⇒	connects the rough, fertile land with the second island
rygtaw ['between (him)']	⇒	connects the two islands
ar draws ['across']	⇒	connects the mountain with the land

Distances and connections between different elements of the landscape are also rendered through the use of verbs expressing movement; the 'action' signified by these verbs actually replaces the real description of places:

160–190. On the rhetorical consequences of using superlatives, cf. Richards (1936): 37–65.

cerdet ['to walk, to cross, to move']	⇒	describes the space between the valley and the river source
dyuot ['to come']	⇒	describes the space between the river source and the top of the mountain
cerdet	⇒	describes the space of the level country
cyrchu ['to make for any place']	⇒	describes the space beween the mountain and the sea
cerdet	⇒	describes the space between the rivers and the sea-fords
dyuot	⇒	describes the space between the sea and the island
cerdet	⇒	describes the whole space of the island, from one side to the other side
cyrchu	⇒	describes the space between the mountain and the sea

Directions, distances between the different elements, and their dislocation, seem therefore to be more relevant than the quality of the element itself; or, better, they are the quality of the element. A single part of the landscape finds its definition in its 'relative distance'[13] from the other parts. This fact, which could also be

13 That is to say 'the distances of objects relative to one another': Coren–Ward–Enns (1994): 363; a discussion of the concept of *relative distance* is in Michaels–Carello (1981): 132–134.

seen as an *ante litteram* structural approach to the landscape, is a symptom of a space perceived as a 'system of representation' rather than a simple composite (what in German would be defined an *Agregat-raum*). It is a 'visual space',[14] a topological system of formal co-ordinates created by functional relationships.[15] The real landscape disappears: it becomes a 'structural envelope' made of projections, directions, and planes. Finally, this is not a landscape actually experienced, but a dreamt landscape.

If you consider the second description of the same landscape, the one that occurs when the thirteen messengers cross it, you find that almost nothing changes in style. The only differences, apart from the shift from imperfect to the preterite, are the omission of a few passages and the presence of 'place-names which serve to localize the adventure in the audience's experience and to contrast it with the unspecified area of the dream'.[16]

> *Ac o'e blaen y gwelsant mynyd mawr a debygynt y uot wrth yr awyr. [. . .] Ac ual y doethant dros y mynyd hwnnw, wynt a welynt gwladoed mawr gwastat, a phrif auonyd drwydunt yn kerdet. [. . .] Y'r mor rydyeu ar yr auonyd y kerdassant, yny doethant y prif auon a welynt yn kyrchu y mor, a phrif dinas yn aber yr auon, a phrif gaer yn y dinas [. . .] y kerdassant ar y mor. Ac y doethant y ynys Prydein. A'r ynys a gerdassant yny doethant i Eryri. [. . .] Wynt a doethant racdunt yny welynt Mon gyuarwyneb ac*

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14 For a definition of 'visual space' as something situated between 'subjective' and 'objective' space, cf. Bouveresse (1976): III–VII.

15 On the topographic/topologic perception of landscapes in medieval Wales, cf. Williams (2000).

16 Roberts (1992): 211–212; one has to note that this repetition structure can be found also in *Owein*, one of the 'three romances' of the *Mabinogi*, when the author twice describes the journey in search of the magic fountain: cf. Thomson (1975); for the analysis of the same 'double journey' in Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain*, cf. Laidlaw (1984): 195–219.

wynt, ac yny welynt heuyt Aruon.[17]

And before them they saw a huge mountain which they thought touched heaven. [. . .] And as they crossed that mountain, they could see wide level regions, and great wide rivers flowing through them. [. . .] They journeyed towards the sea-fords on the rivers till they came to a great river which they saw making towards the sea, and a great city at the mouth of the river, and in the city a great castle. [. . .] they voyaged over the sea and came to the Island of Britain. And they traversed the island till they came to Eryri. [. . .] They pressed forward till they could see Môn facing them, and till they could see Arfon likewise.[18]

More in particular, the following are the corresponding passages in the two descriptions:

mynyd uchaf o'r byt y deuei	>	mynyd mawr
y mynyd yn gyfuch a'r awyr	>	wrth yr awyr.
A phan deuei dros y mynyd	>	Ac ual y doethant dros y mynyd hwnnw
gwladoed teccaf a gwastattaf a welsei dyn eiryoet gwastat	>	gwladoed mawr
o'r parth arall y'r mynyd	>	*omitted*
phrif auonyd mawr	>	phrif auonyd

17 Williams (1920): 6.
18 Jones–Jones (1974): 83.

o'r mynyd yn kyrchu y mor	>	*omitted*
ac y'r mor rytyeu ar yr auonyd y kerdei	>	Y'r mor rydyeu ar yr auonyd y kerdassant
prif auon vwyhaf or a welsei neb; a phrif dinas a welei yn aber yr avon a phrif gaer yn y dinas	>	prif auon a welynt yn kyrchu y mor, a phrif dinas yn aber yr auon, a phrif gaer yn y dinas
Ef a welei y dyuot y ynys deckaf o'r holl vyt; a gwedy y kerdei ar draws yr ynys o'r mor py gilyd hyt yr ymyl eithaf o'r ynys, kymmeu a welei, a diffwys, a cherric uchel, a thir agarw amdyfrwys, ny rywelsei eiryoet y gyfryw	>	y kerdassant ar y mor.
Ac y doethant y ynys Prydein. Ac odyno ef a welei yn y mor gyuarwyneb â'r tir amdyfrwys hwnnw, ynys: ac y rygtaw a'r ynys honno y gwelei ef gwlat, a oed kyhyt y maestir a'e mor, kyhyt y mynyd a'e choet. Ac o'r mynyd hwnnw avon a welei yn kerdet ar traws y wlat yn kyrchu y mor	>	A'r ynys a gerdassant yny doethant i Eryri. [. . .] Wynt a doethant racdunt yny welynt Mon gyuarwyneb ac wynt, ac yny welynt heuyt Aruon

If it is true that a correspondence exists between the techniques of visual arts and the procedures of verbal arts,[19] I think that prepositions indicating directionality in a literary text can be usefully compared to the lines describing projections in a painting.

19 Cf. in particular Barthes (1977): 123–126; and Shlovsky (1988): 16–30

The concept of *perspective*, used as an instrument of interpretation, could be therefore decisive in order to better understand the structure of the landscape described in *Breuddwyd Maxen*.

Also here, as in the history of the visual arts, you could speak of a 'conquest of the world as representation'.[20] This expression was introduced at the beginning of the last century by Erwin Panofsky, in his fundamental article about *Perspective as a symbolic form*.[21] Panofsky, who is clearly referring to the first volume of Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*,[22] understands (anthropologically) the so-called 'linear perspective' (*perspectiva linearis*) as a conceptual way of approaching reality, rather than (historically) a particular technique used in a particular period. He believes that 'each historical period had its own special perspective, a particular symbolic form reflecting a particular *Weltanschauung*'.[23] Perspective is therefore an answer to the problem of representing space, a way of connecting the elements of space to their 'absolute' essence, to their being landscape.[24]

Breuddwyd Maxen's landscape is rendered through a 'perspectival code'. More in particular, it is possible to recognise here what the historians of art call a 'streaming perspective',[25] that is to say a perspective that adapts its directions step by step to the 'vanishing point', and moves continuously in search of it.[26] The relationships

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20 Damisch (1987): 7; English translation in Damisch (1995): 9.

21 Panofsky (1927); English translation in Panofsky (1991).

22 Cassirer (1923, 1925, 1992); English translation in Cassirer (1955–1957).

23 Panofsky (1927): 163.

24 Damisch (1995): 13; on this point, cf. also the palaeo-anthropologial study by Deregowsky (1991), who points out how perspectival codes already existed in the rock art of Africa.

25 Cf. Cutting (1986): 122–124.

26 Cf. Dubery–Willats (1983): 34; in this sense, there is also a continuous change of planes and angles of view: the vertical height lines which

between the elements are 'symbolic' here in the sense that they seem to be generated by a convention, as opposed to the 'natural' relations of a real landscape. You could in fact substitute the mountain with a lake, the island with a hill, and the dreamt landscape would remain almost the same, its function would not change. The important things, as in any perspectival system, are the coordinates, the lines, and the projections that bring Maxen to the 'vanishing point'.

In cognitive terms, using Jean Piaget's categories through the filter of the remarkable considerations expressed by the art historian Suzi Gablik,[27] this attitude corresponds to an *iconic mode*, that is to say, 'the stage at which representation can arrange all spatial figures in co-ordinate system'.[28] At this stage the 'separation between the observer and the world'[29] has already happened, and 'the paradigm of representation of space is repeated over and over again in every picture in much the same way, so that every picture is rigidly bound and dictated by the rules of the system'.[30]

I have the feeling that, in this sense, *Maxen*'s landscapes have to be seen as the typical landscapes of modern pre-Romantic literature: places whose only function is for other things, which do not

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characterise the landscape at the beginning of the journey (the mountain, which is 'the highest in the world' and 'as high as heaven') change into the horizontal ground lines of 'the most level' country, and then into the oblique lines that follow the rivers towards the sea.

27 Cf. Gablik (1976); Gablik's main thesis, created as a variant of the classical 'embryological law', is that the evolution of cultural wisdom parallels the development of the individual, and that it is possible to see interesting convergences between the development of cognitive abilities in children and the evolution of art.

28 Ibidem, 43.

29 Ibidem, 44.

30 Kubovy (1986): 169.

find their own definition without the story of the characters, and which are almost all simple variants of the same 'formal' and 'symbolic' landscape, of the *Ur-landscape*. Not to go far from the tradition of the *Mabinogi*, this is for example the characteristic of landscapes in Arthurian texts, where all the forests are described as the same forest, all plains resemble each other, because they are no longer real places, but 'symbolic forms'.[31] The difference, in *Breuddwyd Maxen*, is the more complex use of the perspectival code, which creates, in a way, the idea of volume, of visual deepness, of a space that exists as an accumulation of planes and directions.

The landscape must be represented in this way in *Breuddwyd Maxen* owing to the nature of the tale itself. As Mac Cana wrote, 'in the dream the journey is described in considerable detail and with much stylistic elaboration, during the search it is recounted more concisely though this time the destination is firmly identified by the use of place-names, and in the final instance it is compressed to a couple of sentences, reflecting Maxen's impatience to reach his goal, but to the place-names of the second journey are now added the names of Elen's father and brothers'.[32] I would call this technique, in cinematographic terms, a *zoom lens*, a technique whose effect is 'a sense of being plunged into a scene';[33] and I find that the same effect is obtained, apart from this

31 On Arthurian landscapes, cf. Golinelli (1995): 98–123, and Benozzo (1998c).

32 Mac Cana (1977): 84–85.

33 Giannetti (1996): 117; this technique is used, with the same qualities and aims, also in *Owein*, when the author describes Owein's journey in search of the fountain that Kynon had told about in King Arthur's court: in the description of his journey, 'we follow with interest the succession of events leading him to the spring, condensed by the narrator to spare our impatience but without omission' (Thomson [1975]: CI).

'reiteration with omissions' of the same journey, in terms of landscape description, of perspectival description.

I am not saying that the author of *Maxen* is—so to speak—'writing *in* perspective': I am rather suggesting that he is 'writing *a* perspective', describing a system of projections that converge to the subject of his dream. And the actual 'vanishing point', the 'point in the horizon line at which all the lines appear to meet in perspective',[34] has to be identified with Elen. This fact describes very well, in my opinion, one of the most evident characteristics of the history of medieval and modern literature: the passage from epic to lyric subjects, from war motives to love themes, the absorption of almost everything in the inclusive (*englobant*) tradition of love poetry and literature.[35] This is, for example, the case of Arthurian literature, where Arthur himself, a warrior of Dark Age Britain, became a sort of guarantor of *amour courtois*;[36] this is the case of troubadours, who transformed the lexis of battles into a vocabulary of love;[37] and it is the case of epic poems such as the *chansons de geste*, which will become, in the pre-modern reinterpretations of Boiardo and Ariosto, the setting for love stories and love adventures.[38] Evidently, the perception of space also had to share this development, and, as a consequence, real landscapes started to be perceived, in literature, as a generic system of repre-

34 Walters–Bromham (1978): 127.

35 Cf. Fowler (1982): 212–234 (the chapter titled 'Hierarchies of Genres and Canons of Literature'), and Todorov (1990): 34–35.

36 Cf. e.g. Morris (1982), and Lagorio–Day (1990).

37 Cf. the remarkable Pezzi (1993); it would be very interesting to analyse the same aspect in medieval Welsh court poetry, where the analogies with *troubadours* and *trouvieres* are not only the result of a genetic process of transmission and reception: cf. now the remarkable typological studies by Peter Busse (Busse [2001, 2003]).

38 Cf. Benozzo (2001a): 43–52.

sentation, a perspectival frame functional to other subjects.

In this sense, *Breuddwyd Maxen* illustrates the crucial passage from an idea of literature as something rooted in reality, as an expression of the relationship between the subject and the external world, to an idea of literature as a system which can grow within itself, creating its own code, its own intertextual references, often forgetting the real things that happen. This is also why, I think, one finds in this tale one of the first literary expressions of the 'triumph of the visual', the predominance of sight over the other senses. The use of the verb 'to see', employed 29 times, is not counterbalanced with the use of verbs or images expressing other kinds of perception. You cannot find, here, the references to the sense of touch or hearing that we have encountered in the landscape descriptions of the *Buile Shuibhne* or the early Welsh *englynion*. I think that this fact has to be connected, in anthropological and ethnological terms, with the changing function of literature, with its separation from the everyday life. Sight, a sense that has been called (sometimes in association with hearing) 'social',[39] was starting to be considered the most noble, and touch, taste, and smell (which have been called 'senses of survival')[40] remained only in popular genres, such as ballads and folk songs,[41]

39 Corbin (1991); English translation in Corbin (1995): 192.

40 Ibidem.

41 Cf. the useful consideration expressed (even if with reference to a completely different context from the one of medieval Wales) in Hawkins (1990). A 'history of sensibilities' has never been written; suggestions and remarks in that direction were expressed by the historian Lucien Febvre (cf. Febvfre [1938, 1941]). Not by chance, the only allusion to something perceived through the sense of touch is when Maxen 'had his arms around the maiden's neck' Jones–Jones (1974): 81 [(. . .) *yttoed ef a'e dwylaw am uynwgyl y vorwyn* (. . .): Williams (1920): 4]: a further confirmation that almost everything, every theme and every sensation, started

or in parodistic texts.[42] This evolution can be observed also in other medieval literatures: it is interesting to notice, for example, that in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, with the introduction of the *perspectiva naturalis* (through the filter of the contemporary painters like Cimabue and Giotto),[43] the complex perception of space that characterized the *Commedia* by Dante (where you find references to visual, tactile, and also olfactory sensations in the description of landscapes, although referred to a dreamt journey in the Otherworld)[44] completely disappear. It is not only a matter of different genres: auditory and tactile perceptions of landscapes are still present in the novelistic tradition before the *Decameron*, as it has been recently pointed out in two studies of the medieval Italian collection of short stories titled *Il Novellino*.[45] Another medieval Romance example is the one of the *chansons de geste*, where to the stratified perception of the external world in the early texts (12th century) there corresponds a simple collection of sceneries, a juxtaposition of visual miniatures, in the most recent ones.[46] The more landscapes become cultural phenomena the more they are perceived only as figures, as *visual textures*,[47] losing their physical characteristics.[48]

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to be absorbed, in literature, by the 'imagination of love'.

42 Cf. the classical study on the perception of reality in Rabelais, by Bakhtin (1970).

43 The use of the perspectival methods in Boccaccio's descriptions has been studied in Veglia (2000): 221–244.

44 On the perception of space in Dante, cf. in particular Parronchi (1964): 3–90.

45 Cf. Ciccuto (1995), and Battaglia Ricci (1987).

46 As two opposite cases, one can consider the first and the late versions of the *Chanson de Guillaume*: on this point, cf. Knott (1999): 22–34.

47 Cf. Weisstein–Wong (1986): 31–64.

48 On 'cultural landscape', cf. Rowntree–Conkey (1980), Berglund (1986),

Recently it has been written that 'modern' poetry was born in the 12th century, with the Occitan poet Jaufré Rudel and his invention of a psychology of love;[49] this is certainly true also with reference to the problem of landscape perception, if you consider that this troubadour, in a cycle of poems that I have already associated with *Breuddwyd Maxen*,[50] transformed real landscapes into imaginary places, the real land of Provence into a 'remote land of love'. The love for real places, possible to find in texts like Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, becomes an *amors de tera lonhdana*, a love for the symbolic land of love, which can only be seen in a dream. Landscape is now seen as a metaphor of something, sometimes as a symbol: in *Breuddwyd Maxen* it is without doubt a symbolic form used to express a dimension of alterity, to give the idea of a sense of distance which is either spatial (from Rome to Caernarfon) or mental (from the dream to reality).

Our way of considering physical space, unfortunately, has not outgrown this approach. Maybe because, unlike Suibhne or Aneirin, we prefer to think that landscapes are a part of our life, rather than the opposite—a scene or a metaphor for our feelings, rather than their historical and logical *prius*.

Roberts (1994), Jacques (1995), Plachter–Rossler (1995): 15–19; cf. also Broth (1997): 1–21, and Phillips (1998): 21–38.

49 Cf. Bond (1995): 117–124.

50 Cf. Benozzo (2000d): 269–280.

CHAPTER VI

Landscape as a 'Symbolic Form': The Perspectival Space in *Breuddwyd Maxen*

It has been said that *Breuddwyd Maxen* is one of the most 'literary' tales of the *Mabinogion*,[1] a text 'handled with a quite remarkable skill', where it is possible to recognise a 'particularly notable' 'co-ordination of sense and style'.[2] As the perception of physical space plays a central rôle in this miniature romance, I find it stimulating, after the articulated space of the early *englynion* and the dynamic morphologies of the *Llyfr Taliesin*, to conclude my 'critical walk' in the medieval Welsh landscapes on such ground, situated between the stuff of traditional oral narrative and the stylistic elaboration of a more modern conception of literature.[3]

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1 *Breuddwyd Maxen* is one of the so-called 'three native tales' of the *Mabinogion* (the other are *Lludd ac Llefelys* and *Breddwyd Rhonabwy*); recently, Brynley Roberts suggests that it can be dated 'to the first half of the thirteenth century' (Roberts [2000]: 72). It seems that this tale, often considered as one of the most beautiful examples of medieval short story composed on a single narrative motive, has not particularly attracted Celtic scholars: apart from Ifor Williams' edition (Williams [1920]), the only two studies specifically concerned with the text are Brewer–Lewis Jones (1975): 23–30 (based on an unpublished M.A. thesis: Brewer [1966]), and Thomas (1997).

2 Mac Cana (1977): 84–85.

3 As Mac Cana collocates it: ibidem, 86–87.

The plot of *Breuddwyd Maxen* can be summarised as follows:

> The emperor of Rome falls asleep while out hunting; in a dream he sees a beautiful princess, with whom he falls in love; he sends messengers to find her, which they do in Caernarfon; he comes to Wales and marries her. Later, he uses troops withdrawn from Britain to win his empire back from usurpers.[4]

The sequence which describes Maxen's journey through the dreamt landscape does not have the simple aim of outlining a setting: its narrative importance is crucial, because this description is the only possibility for Maxen to pass from dream to reality, to find the princess Elen, and to cure his (love) sickness. This is because the messengers have to find a place without any toponymic reference, only starting from the description of it, and the dreamt landscape becomes a real place because Maxen remembers and is able to describe its features.

Here is the sequence of the journey, according to Ifor Williams' edition:[5]

> *[. . .] sef breidwyt a welei,—y uot yn kerdet dyffrynn yr avon hyt y blaen. Ac y vynyd uchaf o'r byt y deuei. Ef a tebygei vot y mynyd yn gyfuch a'r awyr. A phan deuei dros y mynyd ef a welei y vot yn kerdet gwladoed teccaf a gwastattaf a welsei dyn eiryoet, o'r parth arall y'r mynyd; a phrif auonyd mawr a welei o'r mynyd yn kyrchu y mor, ac y'r mor rytyeu ar yr auonyd y kerdei. Py hyt bynnac y kerdei velly, ef a doeth y aber prif auon vwyhaf o'r a welsei neb; a phrif dinas a welei yn aber yr avon, a phrif gaer yn y dinas [. . .]. Ef a welei y dyuot y ynys deckaf o'r holl vyt; a gwedy y kerdei ar draws yr ynys o'r mor py gilyd hyt yr ymyl eithaf o'r ynys, kymmeu a welei, a diffwys, a cherric uchel, a thir agarw amdyfrwys, ny rywelsei eiryoet y*

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4 Breeze (1997): 82.

5 Williams (1920): 1–2; I operated the following substitutions in letter forms: *6* > *w*; *2* > *r*; 'long *s*' > *s*.

gyfryw. Ac odyno ef a welei yn y mor gyuarwyneb â'r tir amdyfrwys hwnnw, ynys: ac y rygtaw a'r ynys honno y gwelei ef gwlat, a oed kyhyt y maestir a'e mor, kyhyt y mynyd a'e choet. Ac o'r mynyd hwnnw avon a welei yn kerdet ar traws y wlat yn kyrchu y mor.

The dream that he saw was how he was making along the river valley towards its upper reaches; and he came to the highest mountain in the world. He thought the mountain was as high as heaven; and as he came over the mountain he could see how he was traversing the fairest and most level regions that mortal had ever seen, on the far side of the mountain. And he saw great wide rivers making from the mountain to the sea, and he journeyed towards the sea-fords on the rivers; however long he was journeying so, he came to the mouth of a river, the greatest any one had seen. And he saw a great city at the mouth of the river, and in the city a great castle [. . .] a sail was hoisted on the ship, and away she went over sea and ocean. He saw how he came to an island, the fairest in the whole world, and after he had traversed the island from the sea to answering sea, even to the uttermost bound of the island, he could see valleys and seeds and towering rocks, and a harsh rugged terrain whose like he had never seen. And from there he saw in the sea, facing that rugged land, an island. And between him and that island he saw a country whose plain was the length of its sea, its mountain the length of its woodland. And from that mountain he saw a river flow through the land, making towards the sea.[6]

Proinsias Mac Cana pointed out how this sequence is dominated by the sense of vision, as a result of 'the way in which the author has used the verb "to see": [. . .] he employs the imperfect indicative *gwelei* "saw, could see" twenty-four times, not to men-

6 Jones–Jones (1974): 79–80; in the discussion of the landscape terms and adjectives, I will not use this translation.

tion five instances of the pluperfect *gwelsei'*.[7] I would like to add that this 'sense of vision' is not of a traditional *chromatic* kind.[8] Colours are totally absent in this landscape, and the description is an account of *directions*, *shapes*, and *distances*.

The elements of this 'seen' landscape, in sequence, are the following:

dyffrynn ['valley'] → *avon* ['river'] → *mynyd* ['mountain'] → *gwladoed* ['countries'] → *avonyd* ['rivers'] → *mor* ['sea'] → *rytyeu* ['arm of the sea, estuary']9 → *aber* ['mouth of a river'] → *ynys* ['island'] → *mor* ['sea'] → *kwm* ['deep narrow valley']10 → *diffwys* ['precipice'] → *cerric* ['rocks'] → *tir* ['land'] → *ynys* ['island'] → *maestir* ['plain'] → *mynyd* ['mountain'] → *coet* ['wood'] → *avon* ['river'] → *mor* ['sea']

The adjectives which 'determine' these elements are very few, and only express the idea of their shapes, always in a generic 'standard' way:

7 Mac Cana (1977): 85.

8 For the literary tradition of 'chromatic descriptions', cf. Benozzo (1999), together with the bibliography that I quote in the last chapter ['Fragments of a Chromatic 'Non-Phenomenology' of Landscapes'].

9 'Mor ryd: an arm of the sea, or estuary. A river can generally be forded at its mouth at low tide if it broadens out into a estuary. This is the case at the mouth of the Clwyd, hence called *Y Ford*, the sea-ford. Also at Caernarfon a similar estuary is called *Y Foryd*. The Latin cognate of rhyd, *portus*, also means the mouth of a river occasionally in poetry': Williams (1920): 16.

10 Cf. *GPC*: 640.

mynyd	=	*uchaf o'r byt* ['the highest in the world'] *gyfuch a'r awyr* ['as high as the sky']
gwladoed	=	*teccaf* ['the most beautiful'] *gwastattaf* ['the most level']
avonyd	=	*mawr* ['great']
aber	=	*mwyhaf* ['the greatest']
ynys	=	*teccaf o'r holl vyt* ['the most beautiful in the whole world']
tir	=	*agarw* ['rough'] *amdyfrwys* ['rugged'] *ny rywelsei eiryoet y gyfryw* ['no (other) similar (to it), ever'][11]

As can be seen, this 'standardization' is very often rendered through the use of superlatives, and this *exaggeratio* is another symptom of a narration that is not interested in describing the real characteristics of a place, and which clearly avoids variants and details in favour of 'absolute' forms, in the attempt to create an *Ur-landscape*.[12] Prepositions that indicate directionality play a

11 It has to be noted that the other elements of the landscape (*dyffrynn, avon, mor, rytyeu, kwm, diffwys, cerric, maestir, mynyd, coet, avon, mor*) are listed without adjectives.

12 I recognize here a clear example of the process known as *law of Pragnanz* (from a German word meaning 'conveying the essence of something'), which states that the organization of the visual array into perceptual objects always goes towards concepts of *regularity, simplicity,* and *symmetry* (cf. Oyama [1990]: 77–86); for a discussion of this and other laws formulated by the Gestalt school of psychology, cf. Coren–Girgus (1980): 404–412; cf. also the remarkable Diwadkar–McNamara (1997):

central rôle in connecting and determining the different elements of the landscape:

hyt ['as far as']	⇒	connects the river with its source (*blaen*)
dros ['over, across']	⇒	connects the mountain with the whole landscape behind it
o'r parth arall ['on the other side']	⇒	connects the mountain with the level land
traws ['across']	⇒	connects the two parts of the island
odyno ['from that place']	⇒	connects the rough, fertile land with the second island
rygtaw ['between (him)']	⇒	connects the two islands
ar draws ['across']	⇒	connects the mountain with the land

Distances and connections between different elements of the landscape are also rendered through the use of verbs expressing movement; the 'action' signified by these verbs actually replaces the real description of places:

160–190. On the rhetorical consequences of using superlatives, cf. Richards (1936): 37–65.

cerdet ['to walk, to cross, to move']	⇒	describes the space between the valley and the river source
dyuot ['to come']	⇒	describes the space between the river source and the top of the mountain
cerdet	⇒	describes the space of the level country
cyrchu ['to make for any place']	⇒	describes the space beween the mountain and the sea
cerdet	⇒	describes the space between the rivers and the sea-fords
dyuot	⇒	describes the space between the sea and the island
cerdet	⇒	describes the whole space of the island, from one side to the other side
cyrchu	⇒	describes the space between the mountain and the sea

Directions, distances between the different elements, and their dislocation, seem therefore to be more relevant than the quality of the element itself; or, better, they are the quality of the element. A single part of the landscape finds its definition in its 'relative distance'[13] from the other parts. This fact, which could also be

13 That is to say 'the distances of objects relative to one another': Coren–Ward–Enns (1994): 363; a discussion of the concept of *relative distance* is in Michaels–Carello (1981): 132–134.

seen as an *ante litteram* structural approach to the landscape, is a symptom of a space perceived as a 'system of representation' rather than a simple composite (what in German would be defined an *Agregat-raum*). It is a 'visual space',[14] a topological system of formal co-ordinates created by functional relationships.[15] The real landscape disappears: it becomes a 'structural envelope' made of projections, directions, and planes. Finally, this is not a landscape actually experienced, but a dreamt landscape.

If you consider the second description of the same landscape, the one that occurs when the thirteen messengers cross it, you find that almost nothing changes in style. The only differences, apart from the shift from imperfect to the preterite, are the omission of a few passages and the presence of 'place-names which serve to localize the adventure in the audience's experience and to contrast it with the unspecified area of the dream'.[16]

> *Ac o'e blaen y gwelsant mynyd mawr a debygynt y uot wrth yr awyr. [. . .] Ac ual y doethant dros y mynyd hwnnw, wynt a welynt gwladoed mawr gwastat, a phrif auonyd drwydunt yn kerdet. [. . .] Y'r mor rydyeu ar yr auonyd y kerdassant, yny doethant y prif auon a welynt yn kyrchu y mor, a phrif dinas yn aber yr auon, a phrif gaer yn y dinas [. . .] y kerdassant ar y mor. Ac y doethant y ynys Prydein. A'r ynys a gerdassant yny doethant i Eryri. [. . .] Wynt a doethant racdunt yny welynt Mon gyuarwyneb ac*

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14 For a definition of 'visual space' as something situated between 'subjective' and 'objective' space, cf. Bouveresse (1976): III–VII.

15 On the topographic/topologic perception of landscapes in medieval Wales, cf. Williams (2000).

16 Roberts (1992): 211–212; one has to note that this repetition structure can be found also in *Owein*, one of the 'three romances' of the *Mabinogi*, when the author twice describes the journey in search of the magic fountain: cf. Thomson (1975); for the analysis of the same 'double journey' in Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain*, cf. Laidlaw (1984): 195–219.

wynt, ac yny welynt heuyt Aruon.[17]

And before them they saw a huge mountain which they thought touched heaven. [. . .] And as they crossed that mountain, they could see wide level regions, and great wide rivers flowing through them. [. . .] They journeyed towards the sea-fords on the rivers till they came to a great river which they saw making towards the sea, and a great city at the mouth of the river, and in the city a great castle. [. . .] they voyaged over the sea and came to the Island of Britain. And they traversed the island till they came to Eryri. [. . .] They pressed forward till they could see Môn facing them, and till they could see Arfon likewise.[18]

More in particular, the following are the corresponding passages in the two descriptions:

mynyd uchaf o'r byt y deuei	>	mynyd mawr
y mynyd yn gyfuch a'r awyr	>	wrth yr awyr.
A phan deuei dros y mynyd	>	Ac ual y doethant dros y mynyd hwnnw
gwladoed teccaf a gwastattaf a welsei dyn eiryoet gwastat	>	gwladoed mawr
o'r parth arall y'r mynyd	>	*omitted*
phrif auonyd mawr	>	phrif auonyd

17 Williams (1920): 6.
18 Jones–Jones (1974): 83.

o'r mynyd yn kyrchu y mor	>	*omitted*
ac y'r mor rytyeu ar yr auonyd y kerdei	>	Y'r mor rydyeu ar yr auonyd y kerdassant
prif auon vwyhaf or a welsei neb; a phrif dinas a welei yn aber yr avon a phrif gaer yn y dinas	>	prif auon a welynt yn kyrchu y mor, a phrif dinas yn aber yr auon, a phrif gaer yn y dinas
Ef a welei y dyuot y ynys deckaf o'r holl vyt; a gwedy y kerdei ar draws yr ynys o'r mor py gilyd hyt yr ymyl eithaf o'r ynys, kymmeu a welei, a diffwys, a cherric uchel, a thir agarw amdyfrwys, ny rywelsei eiryoet y gyfryw	>	y kerdassant ar y mor.
Ac y doethant y ynys Prydein. Ac odyno ef a welei yn y mor gyuarwyneb â'r tir amdyfrwys hwnnw, ynys: ac y rygtaw a'r ynys honno y gwelei ef gwlat, a oed kyhyt y maestir a'e mor, kyhyt y mynyd a'e choet. Ac o'r mynyd hwnnw avon a welei yn kerdet ar traws y wlat yn kyrchu y mor	>	A'r ynys a gerdassant yny doethant i Eryri. [. . .] Wynt a doethant racdunt yny welynt Mon gyuarwyneb ac wynt, ac yny welynt heuyt Aruon

If it is true that a correspondence exists between the techniques of visual arts and the procedures of verbal arts,[19] I think that prepositions indicating directionality in a literary text can be usefully compared to the lines describing projections in a painting.

19 Cf. in particular Barthes (1977): 123–126; and Shlovsky (1988): 16–30

The concept of *perspective*, used as an instrument of interpretation, could be therefore decisive in order to better understand the structure of the landscape described in *Breuddwyd Maxen*.

Also here, as in the history of the visual arts, you could speak of a 'conquest of the world as representation'.[20] This expression was introduced at the beginning of the last century by Erwin Panofsky, in his fundamental article about *Perspective as a symbolic form*.[21] Panofsky, who is clearly referring to the first volume of Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*,[22] understands (anthropologically) the so-called 'linear perspective' (*perspectiva linearis*) as a conceptual way of approaching reality, rather than (historically) a particular technique used in a particular period. He believes that 'each historical period had its own special perspective, a particular symbolic form reflecting a particular *Weltanschauung*'.[23] Perspective is therefore an answer to the problem of representing space, a way of connecting the elements of space to their 'absolute' essence, to their being landscape.[24]

Breuddwyd Maxen's landscape is rendered through a 'perspectival code'. More in particular, it is possible to recognise here what the historians of art call a 'streaming perspective',[25] that is to say a perspective that adapts its directions step by step to the 'vanishing point', and moves continuously in search of it.[26] The relationships

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20 Damisch (1987): 7; English translation in Damisch (1995): 9.

21 Panofsky (1927); English translation in Panofsky (1991).

22 Cassirer (1923, 1925, 1992); English translation in Cassirer (1955–1957).

23 Panofsky (1927): 163.

24 Damisch (1995): 13; on this point, cf. also the palaeo-anthropologial study by Deregowsky (1991), who points out how perspectival codes already existed in the rock art of Africa.

25 Cf. Cutting (1986): 122–124.

26 Cf. Dubery–Willats (1983): 34; in this sense, there is also a continuous change of planes and angles of view: the vertical height lines which

between the elements are 'symbolic' here in the sense that they seem to be generated by a convention, as opposed to the 'natural' relations of a real landscape. You could in fact substitute the mountain with a lake, the island with a hill, and the dreamt landscape would remain almost the same, its function would not change. The important things, as in any perspectival system, are the coordinates, the lines, and the projections that bring Maxen to the 'vanishing point'.

In cognitive terms, using Jean Piaget's categories through the filter of the remarkable considerations expressed by the art historian Suzi Gablik,[27] this attitude corresponds to an *iconic mode*, that is to say, 'the stage at which representation can arrange all spatial figures in co-ordinate system'.[28] At this stage the 'separation between the observer and the world'[29] has already happened, and 'the paradigm of representation of space is repeated over and over again in every picture in much the same way, so that every picture is rigidly bound and dictated by the rules of the system'.[30]

I have the feeling that, in this sense, *Maxen*'s landscapes have to be seen as the typical landscapes of modern pre-Romantic literature: places whose only function is for other things, which do not

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characterise the landscape at the beginning of the journey (the mountain, which is 'the highest in the world' and 'as high as heaven') change into the horizontal ground lines of 'the most level' country, and then into the oblique lines that follow the rivers towards the sea.

27 Cf. Gablik (1976); Gablik's main thesis, created as a variant of the classical 'embryological law', is that the evolution of cultural wisdom parallels the development of the individual, and that it is possible to see interesting convergences between the development of cognitive abilities in children and the evolution of art.

28 Ibidem, 43.

29 Ibidem, 44.

30 Kubovy (1986): 169.

find their own definition without the story of the characters, and which are almost all simple variants of the same 'formal' and 'symbolic' landscape, of the *Ur-landscape*. Not to go far from the tradition of the *Mabinogi*, this is for example the characteristic of landscapes in Arthurian texts, where all the forests are described as the same forest, all plains resemble each other, because they are no longer real places, but 'symbolic forms'.[31] The difference, in *Breuddwyd Maxen*, is the more complex use of the perspectival code, which creates, in a way, the idea of volume, of visual deepness, of a space that exists as an accumulation of planes and directions.

The landscape must be represented in this way in *Breuddwyd Maxen* owing to the nature of the tale itself. As Mac Cana wrote, 'in the dream the journey is described in considerable detail and with much stylistic elaboration, during the search it is recounted more concisely though this time the destination is firmly identified by the use of place-names, and in the final instance it is compressed to a couple of sentences, reflecting Maxen's impatience to reach his goal, but to the place-names of the second journey are now added the names of Elen's father and brothers'.[32] I would call this technique, in cinematographic terms, a *zoom lens*, a technique whose effect is 'a sense of being plunged into a scene';[33] and I find that the same effect is obtained, apart from this

31 On Arthurian landscapes, cf. Golinelli (1995): 98–123, and Benozzo (1998c).

32 Mac Cana (1977): 84–85.

33 Giannetti (1996): 117; this technique is used, with the same qualities and aims, also in *Owein*, when the author describes Owein's journey in search of the fountain that Kynon had told about in King Arthur's court: in the description of his journey, 'we follow with interest the succession of events leading him to the spring, condensed by the narrator to spare our impatience but without omission' (Thomson [1975]: CI).

'reiteration with omissions' of the same journey, in terms of landscape description, of perspectival description.

I am not saying that the author of *Maxen* is—so to speak—'writing *in* perspective': I am rather suggesting that he is 'writing *a* perspective', describing a system of projections that converge to the subject of his dream. And the actual 'vanishing point', the 'point in the horizon line at which all the lines appear to meet in perspective',[34] has to be identified with Elen. This fact describes very well, in my opinion, one of the most evident characteristics of the history of medieval and modern literature: the passage from epic to lyric subjects, from war motives to love themes, the absorption of almost everything in the inclusive (*englobant*) tradition of love poetry and literature.[35] This is, for example, the case of Arthurian literature, where Arthur himself, a warrior of Dark Age Britain, became a sort of guarantor of *amour courtois*;[36] this is the case of troubadours, who transformed the lexis of battles into a vocabulary of love;[37] and it is the case of epic poems such as the *chansons de geste*, which will become, in the pre-modern reinterpretations of Boiardo and Ariosto, the setting for love stories and love adventures.[38] Evidently, the perception of space also had to share this development, and, as a consequence, real landscapes started to be perceived, in literature, as a generic system of repre-

34 Walters–Bromham (1978): 127.

35 Cf. Fowler (1982): 212–234 (the chapter titled 'Hierarchies of Genres and Canons of Literature'), and Todorov (1990): 34–35.

36 Cf. e.g. Morris (1982), and Lagorio–Day (1990).

37 Cf. the remarkable Pezzi (1993); it would be very interesting to analyse the same aspect in medieval Welsh court poetry, where the analogies with *troubadours* and *trouvieres* are not only the result of a genetic process of transmission and reception: cf. now the remarkable typological studies by Peter Busse (Busse [2001, 2003]).

38 Cf. Benozzo (2001a): 43–52.

sentation, a perspectival frame functional to other subjects.

In this sense, *Breuddwyd Maxen* illustrates the crucial passage from an idea of literature as something rooted in reality, as an expression of the relationship between the subject and the external world, to an idea of literature as a system which can grow within itself, creating its own code, its own intertextual references, often forgetting the real things that happen. This is also why, I think, one finds in this tale one of the first literary expressions of the 'triumph of the visual', the predominance of sight over the other senses. The use of the verb 'to see', employed 29 times, is not counterbalanced with the use of verbs or images expressing other kinds of perception. You cannot find, here, the references to the sense of touch or hearing that we have encountered in the landscape descriptions of the *Buile Shuibhne* or the early Welsh *englynion*. I think that this fact has to be connected, in anthropological and ethnological terms, with the changing function of literature, with its separation from the everyday life. Sight, a sense that has been called (sometimes in association with hearing) 'social',[39] was starting to be considered the most noble, and touch, taste, and smell (which have been called 'senses of survival')[40] remained only in popular genres, such as ballads and folk songs,[41]

39 Corbin (1991); English translation in Corbin (1995): 192.

40 Ibidem.

41 Cf. the useful consideration expressed (even if with reference to a completely different context from the one of medieval Wales) in Hawkins (1990). A 'history of sensibilities' has never been written; suggestions and remarks in that direction were expressed by the historian Lucien Febvre (cf. Febvfre [1938, 1941]). Not by chance, the only allusion to something perceived through the sense of touch is when Maxen 'had his arms around the maiden's neck' Jones–Jones (1974): 81 [(. . .) *yttoed ef a'e dwylaw am uynwgyl y vorwyn* (. . .): Williams (1920): 4]: a further confirmation that almost everything, every theme and every sensation, started

or in parodistic texts.[42] This evolution can be observed also in other medieval literatures: it is interesting to notice, for example, that in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, with the introduction of the *perspectiva naturalis* (through the filter of the contemporary painters like Cimabue and Giotto),[43] the complex perception of space that characterized the *Commedia* by Dante (where you find references to visual, tactile, and also olfactory sensations in the description of landscapes, although referred to a dreamt journey in the Otherworld)[44] completely disappear. It is not only a matter of different genres: auditory and tactile perceptions of landscapes are still present in the novelistic tradition before the *Decameron*, as it has been recently pointed out in two studies of the medieval Italian collection of short stories titled *Il Novellino*.[45] Another medieval Romance example is the one of the *chansons de geste*, where to the stratified perception of the external world in the early texts (12th century) there corresponds a simple collection of sceneries, a juxtaposition of visual miniatures, in the most recent ones.[46] The more landscapes become cultural phenomena the more they are perceived only as figures, as *visual textures*,[47] losing their physical characteristics.[48]

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to be absorbed, in literature, by the 'imagination of love'.

42 Cf. the classical study on the perception of reality in Rabelais, by Bakhtin (1970).

43 The use of the perspectival methods in Boccaccio's descriptions has been studied in Veglia (2000): 221–244.

44 On the perception of space in Dante, cf. in particular Parronchi (1964): 3–90.

45 Cf. Ciccuto (1995), and Battaglia Ricci (1987).

46 As two opposite cases, one can consider the first and the late versions of the *Chanson de Guillaume*: on this point, cf. Knott (1999): 22–34.

47 Cf. Weisstein–Wong (1986): 31–64.

48 On 'cultural landscape', cf. Rowntree–Conkey (1980), Berglund (1986),

Recently it has been written that 'modern' poetry was born in the 12th century, with the Occitan poet Jaufré Rudel and his invention of a psychology of love;[49] this is certainly true also with reference to the problem of landscape perception, if you consider that this troubadour, in a cycle of poems that I have already associated with *Breuddwyd Maxen*,[50] transformed real landscapes into imaginary places, the real land of Provence into a 'remote land of love'. The love for real places, possible to find in texts like Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, becomes an *amors de tera lonhdana*, a love for the symbolic land of love, which can only be seen in a dream. Landscape is now seen as a metaphor of something, sometimes as a symbol: in *Breuddwyd Maxen* it is without doubt a symbolic form used to express a dimension of alterity, to give the idea of a sense of distance which is either spatial (from Rome to Caernarfon) or mental (from the dream to reality).

Our way of considering physical space, unfortunately, has not outgrown this approach. Maybe because, unlike Suibhne or Aneirin, we prefer to think that landscapes are a part of our life, rather than the opposite—a scene or a metaphor for our feelings, rather than their historical and logical *prius*.

Roberts (1994), Jacques (1995), Plachter–Rossler (1995): 15–19; cf. also Broth (1997): 1–21, and Phillips (1998): 21–38.

49 Cf. Bond (1995): 117–124.

50 Cf. Benozzo (2000d): 269–280.

PART THREE

Crossings

It is always a dangerous thing to try to define a literary text. Texts are similar to places which one can encounter in his life: one has always to cross different paths, finding out the complexity which is generated by the encounter between different landscapes.

Ezio Raimondi, *The Face of Words*

CHAPTER VII

Towards a Morphology of Landscape Perception in the Epic Tradition: The Frontier Space in the *Gododdin*

With Comparative Remarks on Medieval European Epics

In the previous chapters, I have tried to show how the structures of a landscape (or the 'structure' of a landscape perception) can affect the structure of a literary text. Now, I would like to verify whether the opposite case also is possible, starting from a remark expressed by Paul Zumthor in the conclusion of his *La mesure du monde*: 'The different medieval genres do not express in the same way the characteristics of space. Each one has its own poetic space, and orientates its gaze towards a specific horizon'.[1] I think that this sentence has to be understood in its deepest meaning; in other words, I believe that a literary genre can actually be defined (among other things) as a particular way of referring to space: a literary genre is a system of (perceptive, stylistic, anthropological) co-ordinates which express a particular way of looking at the external world, and realises a particular interpretation of space.[2]

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1 Zumthor (1993): 245.

2 In this sense, I find very useful the philological-anthropological considerations expressed by Bakhtin (1978, (1981), and Bakhtin–Medvedev (1994): 174–179; cf. also Tomashevsky (1978): 52–93, and Raimondi (1990): 9–15 (with cross-references to José Ortega y Gasset's *Meditaciones*

In this chapter, it is my intention to consider the epic tradition, and to concentrate on the early Welsh *Gododdin*. As it is well known, the 'epic' nature of this text is still an unresolved point of discussion among critics; I have already remarked[3] that this sort of false question ends by moving the modern reader away from the possibility of approaching the *Gododdin*, and that perhaps it would be better to read it exactly as it is, without trying to understand whether it is more similar to a collection of elegies or to a single poem.[4] Nevertheless, analysis of its space perception could bring new decisive elements to the debate about the nature of the text, provided that the first aim should be not to resolve a problem of literary classification (starting from the text in order to arrange it in a genre), but rather to use these categories in order to recognise a peculiar anthropology behind them, a peculiar process of perception and representation of the external world.

Vagueness of landscapes in epic texts has always been noticed, and sometimes this summary description of space has even been considered as a distinctive element useful to separate the epic from the romance.[5]

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del Quijote and György Lukács's *Theorie des romans*).

3 Cf. the 'Introduzione' in Benozzo (2000c), 8, where I use the image of a cliff (coherent and fragmented at the same time) to illustrate the indefinable nature of the text.

4 Cf. in particular O Hehir (1988): 57–95; my opinion is anyway that *Y Gododdin* can be considered a single heroic text: I arrived at this conclusion through a stylistic analysis, comparing its anaphoric and catalogical technique with the technique of the *laisses similaires* and *laisses paralleles* of the *chansons de geste*: cf. Benozzo (2001b).

5 Cf., for example, Boeheim (1934), Ganzenmueller (1974), Kuttner (1989); a first result of this vagueness and sporadicity, is that the allusions to landscape have the power to give us an impression of brightness and

This vagueness can be observed in every epic tradition of the European Middle Ages. With regards to the old French *chansons de geste* (11th–13th centuries), it has been written that 'les différentes mentions de paysages épiques [. . .] forment un décor naturel suffissament vague pour ne pas distraire l'attention';[6] the geography of the old Spanish *cantares de gesta* (12th–13th centuries) is sometimes more careful, but descriptions of landscapes are quite exceptional;[7] the Anglo-Saxon *Battle of Maldon* (10th century)[8] is 'landscapely' laconic as well, with very few exceptions regarding the element of water, which I will analyse later on; landscape descriptions are practically absent in the High German *Nibelungenlied* (12th century), a text that is usually very careful in other kinds of descriptions (scenes of hunting, feasts, and many examples of *descriptio armorum*);[9] going back to the Celtic tradition, the Irish *Táin Bó Cuailnge* is no exception with its mere allusions

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realism which is often absent, for example, in the medieval romance: cf. Busquets (1988): 360–408 ['Prevaleciendo en el Poema la dramatizacion y el movimiento, los momentos estático-descriptivos (breves, pero altamente retórico-poéticos), brillan, como ornamento, de luz propia, resaltando como piedras preciosas engarzadas en fondo isocromo', 397].

6 Guidot (1986): 686; among the numerous studies published about the geography and the landscapes of the *chansons de geste*, cf. Schober (1902), Payen (1969): 261–265, Metz (1981), Baumgartner (1982): 1011–1019, Müller (1885), and the two innovative contributions by Knott (1999): 22–34, and Meschiari (2003).

7 Cf. Ménendez Pidal (1956), Riquer–Molas (1959): 121–130, Cirado de Val (1970), Michael (1976, 1977), Iliano (1970): 666–669 is very important in its attempt to recognise an epic phenomenology of landscape description.

8 Cf. the edition by Scragg (1981).

9 On this point, cf. Mancinelli (1969) and Mancinelli (1972): IX–LXI, XVIII–XIX; on the vagueness of geography in the poem, cf. Geis (1959): 13–21.

to landscapes, sometimes so vague that they seem to belong to a stylised convention (which I would consider in this case an 'epic convention');[10] finally, on a general level, it is possible to say that 'there is little or nothing in *Y Gododdin* that can be described as nature poetry'.[11]

The first point to underline is that, according to a general definition of epic poetry, these characteristics of landscapes, vague and sometimes imaginary, end by expressing a clear contradiction. In fact, every epic tradition is concerned on the one hand with a movement across a territory, and on the other hand with the presumed truth of what it is told:[12] two premises that should produce exactly opposite attitudes to the vagueness of landscape description and to an imaginary geography. If distances and places (and in particular true distances and true places) are essential elements in the epic tales I have quoted before, it becomes perhaps necessary to revise our way of considering geography and space,

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10 I will refer to the *Recension I*, the oldest version: *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, ed. in O'Rahilly (1976); regarding the nature of the text, I completely agree with Doris R. Edel, when she writes that 'The *Táin Bó Cúailnge* is a complex epic. To view the work as an epic despite the predominant use of prose no longer poses a problem': Edel (1997): 143; for 'the natural world' described in the *Táin*, cf. Mallory (1992): 115–118.

11 Jarman (1988): LIV; going beyond the European tradition, it would be easy to show how the same attitude towards landscape is a characteristic, for example, of the Sumerian *Gilgamesh*, the Asiatic *Manas*, or the Finnish *Kalevala*.

12 These are two elements which are common to every definition of epic poetry (including definitions proposed by medieval authors themselves): cf. for example Menéndez Pidal (1934): 144–147, Bowra (1952), Jauss (1972, 1978), Segre (1979): 514–542; fertile suggestions for a definition of epic poetry are in Raimondi (1984): 9–15; useful categories for a more detailed definition of epic in opposition to the romance can be find also in the old (but fundamental) Ker (1897).

unless we prefer to settle their landscapes simply as 'fantasiste, absurde, incohérente, ridicule',[13] that is to say considering them, and just them, as non-epic elements in an epic tradition.

I would like to recall that an epic tale is essentially the story of an engagement between two peoples: these battles are fought in order to conquer and to subdue a territory. Every epic text, without any exceptions, tells of a fighting between two territories, between two political spaces. It is easy to recognise this model in the medieval tradition: the *chansons de geste* simply exist as an opposition (sometimes also symbolic and allegorical) between the territories of the Carolingian empire and the Saracens;[14] in the *cantares de gesta* the opposition is between Castilla and the Arabic expansion from the South;[15] the *Battle of Maldon* tells about a battle between Anglo-Saxons and Vikings; the *Nibelungenlied* is a collection of battles fought by Burgundians against Saxons, Danish, Icelanders, and Huns. In the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* the opposition is between Connachta and Ulaid,[16] and in the *Gododdin* between the army of Gododdin and armies of other Britons, Anglo-Saxons, and Picts.[17]

As the romance philologist Alberto Vàrvaro remarks, 'un espace conflictuel entre deux empires se définit nécessairement *en termes négatifs, par ce qu'il n'est pas*, et comme une *aire de mouvance* en tant que zone susceptible d'être absorbée par l'un ou l'autre des *espaces déjà définis qui s'en disputent l'inclusion*'.[18] It is possible to 'read'

13 Wathelet-Willem (1960): 107.
14 Cf. Comfort (1940): 628–659, and Daniel (1984).
15 For the historical context of this opposition, cf. Moxó (1979), who uses the *cantares* as historical documents.
16 Cf. Dobbs (1923): 404–423.
17 According to Koch (1997): XXXV–XLII.
18 Vàrvaro (1989): 19 (my italics).

and 'understand' this 'space conflictuel' (which I would prefer to define *space of collision*) with reference to the concept of frontier. Opposed to the boundary (connected with a centripetal idea of linearity), the frontier describes a *zonalité*, a fluctuating area determined by centrifugal forces.[19] If we accept that this frontier space is the actual typical space of epic, the territory where action is settled,[20] we can better understand, without any contradictions, the often 'strange' geography of these texts. With acuteness, the anthropologist Marc Augé has studied the typology of these frontiers, and his conclusion is that a frontier is a 'non-place', a *non-lieu*, connected with an often vague phenomenology of perception, devoid of references and co-ordinates.[21]

In this sense, the Pyrenean region of the *chansons de geste* is not described as a real and known country because it is perceived only as a zone between the expanding Carolingian Christianity and the pressure, on the other side, of the Moslem enemy; place-names also are not clearly defined in this area, because they have to be defined or re-defined.[22]

The same uncertain and moving space is observable in the *cantares de gesta*, where the *reconquista* describes a back-and-forth movement in the frontier zones of Andalusia: 'un *movimiento de*

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19 Cf. Zientara (1979): 403–411, Raffestin (1980); on a more general level, cf. also Turner (1961), Te Brake (1985), Hartog (1996).

20 A. T. Hatto too remarks that in epic texts 'there is often a markedly linear movement of heroes and armies [. . .] on the same axis, the termini of which may be Good and Bad Places respectively. Frontiers play a great part in heroic/epic poetry': Hatto (1989): 215 (the paragraph at pages 215–222 is just titled 'Space and Places').

21 Cf. Augé (1992), in particular the second chapter.

22 Cf. Vàrvaro (1989): 20, and the remarkable Ruiz-Domènec (1997): 496–506 (on which cf. Benozzo [1997g]).

frontera, en el auténtico sentido americano, o sea, ocupación y desarrollo des territorios relativamente deshabitados próximos a otros ocupados por una sociedad *de tipo expansivo*'.[23]

In *Battle of Maldon* even if the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings fight at the meeting point of land and sea (two visible 'spaces in collision'), the area where the battle takes place is nevertheless a causeway which expands and recedes following the low and the high tide: that is to say, a frontier even where it would be natural to find a boundary:

Ne mihte pær pær for wætere werod to pam oðrum:
pær com flowende flod æfter ebban;
lucon lagustreamas

Because of the water, the two armies could not meet face to face:
the tide had become high after the ebb;
it had surrounded and isolated the area.[24]

The territory where Sigfrid and his warriors go to fight against Saxons is just described in this way [§ 71]:

An dem sehsten morgen ze Wormze ûf den sant
riten die vil küenen[25]

A week later, in the morning, Siegfried's valiant company
rode on to the sandy river-bank at Worms[26]

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23 Bishko (1965): 201 (my italics); and cf. also Piñera Valverde (1997): 59–65.

24 Scragg (1991):, ll. 64–66; on this landscape, cf. in particular Laborde (1925), and the more recent Petty–Petty (1993), which uses in particular studies from geographers and geologists (such as Devoy [1982], or Shennan [1987]); for an analysis of this fluctuating landscape, cf. also Buti (1982): 101–123.

25 Henning (1977): 13.

and afterwards [§ 177]:

Von Rîne si durch Hessen mit ir helden riten
gegen der Sahsen lande[27]

They rode with their warriors from the Rhine
through Hesse towards Saxony.[28]

At another point [§ 1672], the *Nibelungenlied* seems just to underline that they are fighting in a frontier zone:

die marke Rüedegêrs fundens übele bewart[29]

they remained there, on the frontier of Rüdiger.[30]

The frontier space of the *Táin*, where Fergus marches with the army of Connacht, becomes a space which expands and recedes, where warriors continuously change trajectories; the first persons to notice that are Medb and Ailill themselves:

A Ferguis, is andam amne
cinnas conaire cingme
fordul fadess nó fothúaid
tíagmai tar cach n-ailetúaith

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26 Hatto (1969): 25.
27 Henning (1977): 30.
28 Ibidem, 36.
29 Ibidem, 257: this frontier zone has been properly recognised also by Hatto, who writes that 'the line of movement in the *Nibelungenlied* is unusually extended, stretching from the potentially Bad Place of Isenstein in Iceland in the north-west to the Bad Place of Gran/Etzelnburc [. . .] in the south–east': Hatto (1989): 215.
30 Hatto (1969): 204.

O Fergus, this is strange.
What manner of path do we travel?
We go astray to south and to north,
past every strange district.[31]

Also the king is afraid to reach this area:

'Inn é Conchobar dorigni seo?' 'Nach hé,' ol Fergus. 'Ní tergad-side co hor críche cen lín catha immi'

'Is it Conchobar who has done this?' 'It is not indeed,' said Fergus. 'He would not have come to the marches unless he was accompained by a number sufficient to give battle'.[32]

The motif of border-warrior is not by chance a *topos* in the epic tradition, as you can find it from the Ob-Ugrian to the Finnish, Nanai, Australian, Fang or American Indian epic traditions.[33] And, here also, the *Gododdin* is no exception:

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31 O'Rahilly (1976): 8 and 131; the fact that Fergus decides to follow this strange itinerary 'in order to give the Ulstermen time to recover from they debility' and 'to send warnings to Cú Chulainn that Medb's army is advancing' (Mallory [1992]: 10) does not change the substance of the matter, that is Medb's 'fluctuating' perception of that space.

32 O'Rahilly (1976): 12 and 135; Thomas Kinsella's translation is 'border country' instead of 'marches' (cf. Kinsella [1969]: 75). The same attitude of Conchobar is described with regards to Celtchar mac Uthidir.

33 On this point, cf. Hatto (1989): 157–159; for the single traditions cf. also Kuusi–Bosley–Branch (1977): 110–114, Kroeber (1951): 71–176, 78–83, Hefter (1939): 108–150; the warriors of Albanian epic tradition are called *kreshnik*, from a Serbian root *kray-* 'frontier', with the meaning of 'warriors of the frontier': cf. Sako (1967): 8.

disgynneist ran fin[34]

thou didst attack in the border region [l. 232][35]

Pan gyrchei yg kywlat e glot oed anvonavc[36]

When he attacked in the borderland his renown was great [l. 255][37]

Nar od uch gwyar, fin festinyawr[38]

A lord above the bloodshed, speedy defender of the border [l. 428][39]

Twrch goruc amot e mlaen ystre ystrywyawr[40]

A boar pledged himself before the treacherous boundary [l. 431][41]

Yng ystryng ystre[42]

Straits of border conflict [l. 558][43]

i cinnif apheryf rac stre[44]

to strive with a chieftain before the boundary [l. 663][45]

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34 Benozzo (2000c): 56 (Ifor Williams's text [Williams 1938: 9] is *disgynneis rann fin*).
35 Jarman (1988): 16.
36 Benozzo (2000c): 58.
37 Jarman (1988): 18.
38 Benozzo (2000c): 70.
39 Jarman (1988): 30.
40 Benozzo (2000c): 70.
41 Jarman (1988): 30.
42 Benozzo (2000c): 78.
43 Jarman (1988): 38.
44 Benozzo (2000c): 84.
45 Jarman (1988): 44.

Kynnedyf y Ewein ar ystre esgynn[46]

Ywain's custom was to approach the border [l. 684].[47]

Like Roland on the Pyrenees, like the Cid in the South of Castilla, like Byrthnoth on the estuary of Panta, like Sigfried on the frontier of Bavaria or Cú Chulainn and Fergus on the frontier between Ulster and Connacht, the warriors of the Gododdin fight in a frontier-space.

But what kind of landscape do they encounter? As it is a frontier space, a 'non-place', everything is unknown. According to what I have said above, according to this 'imagination of conquest',[48] I would say that, for epic narrative coherence, this landscape *has to be* unknown: it has to be vague, unexplored, perhaps hostile, different from the expanding territory, and composed of details rather than perceived in its complexity.

Space in epic texts is therefore an uncertain area, which can be defined as the zone of collision between two spaces. Usually, the territory from where the enemies come (or, better, which they are expanding) is just mentioned with allusions; on the contrary, the territory which is expanding, and which the text associates with the main (and good) heroes, is described according to the coordinates of a more or less precise topology. The narrative strategies of this kind can be derived from a twofold procedure: [A] the heroes are associated with the places from which they come in their country, creating an interweaving of trajectories

45 Jarman (1988): 44.
46 Benozzo (2000c): 86.
47 Jarman (1988): 46.
48 I take the expression from Suard (1990): 247, who is actually quoting Le Goff (1983): 837.

which cross (and then describe) an expanding space, and then come together to the battlefield (or in any case to the frontier where the action is settled); [B] the text insists on the movement of the army towards the frontier and underlines that this place is hostile, different and distant from the centre of their country. This twofold strategy gives the feeling of a whole space, which is expanding, including the opposite borders.

Such construction of a topology is extremely clear in the *Chanson de Roland,* where: [A] the names of French heroes are always associated with their places, which represent the borders of the Carolingian empire: 'Bevon, sire de Belne e de Oigun', 'Ogier de Danemarche', 'Geifrei d'Anjou', 'Gui de Saintoinje', 'Hamon de Galice', etc.;[49] [B] the movement of the army towards and across the frontier space is repeated so many times that in the structure of the *chanson* it can be considered as a genuine formula;[50] moreover, the obsessive repetition of the place-name Rencesvals (where the final battle will take place), together with the description of few and laconic elements of the landscape (*Halt sunt li pui et li vaus tenebrus,* 'The mountains are high, and the valleys are dark' [l. 814])[51] emphasise the feeling of a hostile and unknown space, far from the fields (evoked with nostalgia) of *dulce France* ('sweet France').[52]

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49 I refer to the critical edition by Segre (1971). In other *chansons de geste,* like the *Renaut de Montauban,* this topology is built toward a centrifugal system of co-ordinates which grow directly from the centre of expansion: cf. the analysis in Melli (1982), where a topology orientated towards the four cardinal points is recognized; cf. also Guidot (1996, 1997).

50 Cf. Rychner (1954): 127–128.

51 Cf. Segre (1971): 197.

52 Cf. the analysis in van Emden (1995): 46–47; on this laconic decription of the landscape see also Aebischer (1952).

In the *Cantar de Mio Cid,* the feeling of the distant borders of the territory which is expanding [A] is frequently created through a detailed toponymy (I quote just a few examples):

De Castiella vos ides pora las yentes estrañas[53]

you are leaving Castile to go among strangers[54] [l. 175]

Ixiendos va de tierra el Campeador leal,
de siniestro Sant Estevan, una buena çipdad,
de diestro Alión las torres que moros las han,
passó por Alcobiella que de Castiella finesya;
la calçada de Quinea íuala traspassar,
sobre Navas de Palos el Duero va passar,
a la Figurela mío Çid iva posar[55]

The loyal Campeador left his land,
with the town of San Esteban on the left
and on the right the fortifications of Ayllón, which belong to the Moors.
He went through Alcubilla, the last town in Castile,
crossed the Roman <fields of> Quinea
and the river Douro at Navapalos
and halted at Figuerela[56] [ll. 395-401];

vánsele acogiendo yentes de todas partes[57]

Men crowded him from all directions to go with him[58] [l. 403]

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53 Cf. Menéndez Pidal (1954): 1031.
54 Hamilton–Perry (1975): 31.
55 Menéndez Pidal (1954): 1040.
56 Hamilton–Perry (1975): 43; Hamilton and Perry translate 'he left Castile' at the first line, and 'the Roman road called Quinea'.
57 Menéndez Pidal (1954): 1040.

[B] the movement of the army is repeated many times as well, and sometimes it is impossible to separate it from the toponymy of the crossed places:

Afevos los dozientos e tres en el alagra,
e sin dubda corren[59]

Here you have the two hundred and three knights of the raiding party going relentlessly into the attack[60] [ll. 476-477]

Vansse Fenares arriba quanto pueden andar
troçen las Alcarrias e ivan adelant,
por la Cuevas d'Anquita ellos passando van,
passaron las aguas, entraron el campo de Taranz
poer essas tierras ayuso quanto pueden andar[61]

They rode at full speed up the river Henares,
traversed the Alcarria
and went past the caves of Anguita.
There they crossed the river and entered Campo Taranz,
riding down through those lands as quickly as they could[62] [ll. 542–546]

e passó a Alfama, la Foz ayuso va,
passó a Bovierca e a Teca que es adelant,
e sobre Alcoçer Mio Cid iva posar[63]

[he] passed Alhama and went down the river bend
and past Bubierca and Ateca, which is farther on.

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58 Hamilton–Perry (1975): 43.
59 Menéndez Pidal (1954): 1043.
60 Hamilton–Perry (1975): 47.
61 Menéndez Pidal (1954): 1046–1047.
62 Hamilton–Perry (1975): 51.
63 Menéndez Pidal (1954): 1047.

Then he encamped near Alcocer[64] [ll. 551-553].

Passing to the descriptions of these landscapes, the Sierra is just described as 'wild and lofty'[65] (*fiera es e grand* [l. 422]),[66] a formula which is repeated also with regards to the hill of Alcoer (*rredondo, fuerte e grand*, 'rounded, hard and vast' [l. 554]).[67]

As in the Old French text, the Burgundian army in the *Nibelungenlied* is described as it crosses the territory. The only described elements of the unknown land that they reach are a mountain (or hill)

alsam die lewen wilde di liefen an den berc[68]

they then ran towards the <mountain> like raging lions[69] [§ 96],

the flowers stained with Sigfried's blood when he dies [§ 998],[70] and the allusion to the basin where one of the battles takes place

Si beliben unvermeldet des heizen bluotes rôt,
unz daz diu sunne ir liehtez schînen bôt
dem morgen über berge[71]

That they were dyed red with the hot blood remained undivulged till the sun sent its bright rays

64 Hamilton–Perry (1975): 51.
65 Ibidem, 45.
66 Menéndez Pidal (1954): 1041.
67 Ibidem, 1047; Hamilton and Perry seem not to translate the formula (cf. Hamilton–Perry (1975): 51).
68 Henning (1977): 17.
69 Hatto (1969): 29; Hatto translates here 'cavern', but this is not the meaning of *berc, berg*.
70 Henning (1977): 157.
71 Ibidem, 256.

over the hills to greet the morning [§ 1624]).[72]

The same structure is observable in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, where [A] the movements of the army across the territory are frequently described, often with reference to place-names:

Dollotár ass arna bárach do Móin Chóiltrae

Next morning they set out for Móin Choltna[73]

Dothíagat íarom co feótár I nGránairud Tethba túascirt, iar tabairt imthúsa fordallaig forsin slúag dar grellacha 7 dar srythra,

Then, after the army had been led astray across bogs and streams, they went and spent the night in Granard in northern Tethba[74]

Tecait trá co mbátár i nIraird Chuillend <.i. is fris atberar Crossa Caíl indiu>

They went on then to Irard Cuilen, today called Crossa Caíl[75]

Feótar íarom i Cúil Sibrille <.i. Cennannas>

They spent the night then in Cúil Sibrille, that is, Cennannas.[76]

More than through the description of a 'strange' landscape, the hostility of the frontier zone [B] is expressed in the *Táin* through

72 Hatto (1969): 203.
73 O'Rahilly (1976): 6 and 130.
74 Ibidem, 7 and 131.
75 Ibidem, 9 and 132.
76 Ibidem, 10 and 133.

the prodigies and the exploits of Cú Chulainn, which occupy all the first part of the text, and cannot be quoted in full.

The story adumbrated in the *Gododdin* is based on the same spatial structure: [A] the borders of the Gododdin are associated with warriors; sometimes a single place-name is evoked in association with the name of the warrior:

Maban y Gian o Vaen Gwynngwn[77]

The young son of Cian from Maen Gwyngwn [l. 93][78]

Dutvwlch [. . .] *fab Kilyd*[79]

Tudfwlch son of the Caledonian [ll. 129-130][80]

vn maban e Gian o dra Bannauc[81]

Cian's only son from beyond Bannog [l. 260][82]

Issac anuonawc o barth Deheu[83]

The renowed Isag from the southern part [l. 303][84]

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77 Benozzo (2000c): 48.
78 Jarman (1988): 8.
79 Benozzo (2000c): 50.
80 Jarman (1988): 10; in this case, I follow the hypothesis of John T. Koch, who prefers to identify the name with a northern ethnonym, rather than a warrior (cf. Koch [1997]: 188).
81 Benozzo (2000c): 58.
82 Jarman (1988): 18.
83 Benozzo (2000c): 60.
84 Jarman (1988): 20.

Gorthyn Hir o orthir Rywynauc[85]

Gorthyn Hir from the uplands of Rhufoniog [l. 856][86]

Tra Merin Iodeo[87]

From beyond the sea of Iddew [l. 944].[88]

In other cases, it is the centre of the expanding territory (I would say the centre from where the army is expanding the territory) that is evoked in association with the whole army:

gosgord Mynydawc Mwynvawr[89]

the retinue from Mynyddog Mwynfawr [ll. 99, 106, 339, 543, 549, 736][90]

O Eidyn ysgor[91]

From the fortress of Eidyn [l. 123][92]

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85 Benozzo (2000c): 96.
86 Jarman (1988): 56.
87 Benozzo (2000c): 102.
88 Jarman (1988): 62.
89 Benozzo (2000c): 48, 64, 76, 77, 90.
90 Following Isaac (1990) and Koch (1993, 1997: XLV–XLVII), I consider Mynyddog Mwynfawr a place-name rather than the name of a chieftain; moreover, I think that the recognition of a coherent topological construction of space in the *Gododdin* provides further arguments on behalf of Isaac's and Koch's hypothesis; see however Padel (1998): 53, and Wmffre (2002).
91 Benozzo (2000c): 50.
92 Jarman (1988): 10.

Eidyn eu ruchawc[93]

From Eidyn of the goldsmiths [l. 193].[94]

[B] the movement of the army (associated in many cases to its territory [*gwyr pebyr temyr tudwet*, 'the valiant warriors of our land and territory', l. 769], from where it is far away [*oed ech eu temyr treis canaon*, 'The whelps of violence were away from their land', l. 636])[95] towards and across the frontier space is repeated, as in the *Chanson de Roland*, obsessively:

Gwyr a aeth Ododin[96]

Warriors went to Gododdin [ll. 67, 74][97]

Gwyr a aeth Gatraeth[98]

Men went to Catraeth [ll. 78, 84, 94, 100, 240, 356]).[99]

It is important to underline that these hemistichs represent also the beginning of each new *awdl*, that is to say a dynamic point of the whole structure, a point of 'conversion' that originates an 'expansion':[100] it means that the action of marching from the

93 Benozzo (2000c): 54.
94 Jarman (1988): 14.
95 Benozzo (2000c): 92, 82; Jarman (1988) 52, 42.
96 Benozzo (2000c): 46.
97 Jarman (1988): 6, 16.
98 Benozzo (2000c): 46, 48, 56, 64.
99 With the variant *Gwr a aeth Gatraeth* ('A man went to Catraeth'), the hemistich is repeated also at ll. 107, 115 and 131.
100 To use Michael Riffaterre's terminology: cf. Riffaterre (1978), in particular the third chapter. Elsewhere, I recognised in the catalogical

centre towards the frontier has to be perceived as an element of unity within the apparent chaotic disposition of stanzas.

Frontier is the key concept when trying to interpret landscapes in the epic tradition.[101] I believe that its ambiguous, sometimes ambivalent nature,[102] expressed also through the vagueness of its landscapes, has to be understood—yet again—as an anthropological problem. A frontier is a zone where space seems to be separated from time, because it is a territory *in fieri* which is not yet part of a collective consciousness, of an 'ethnic memory', of a place where a people identify itself in history.[103] A frontier is the site of a 'history in progress', it is a zone that will be (or could be) part of history, a collision between two spaces, which are trying to absorb that zone into their own time, in their own memory. A frontier is also the place where men acquire awareness of an 'other space'.[104]

In this sense, a frontier is a zone where men come into contact with non-permanent things, and first of all with their own non-

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procedure of the *Gododdin* an original technique of epic tales: cf. Benozzo (2001c, 2003b). It would be interesting, but perhaps far from the purposes of this book, to analyse the spatial structure of the text itself: like in other examples of medieval texts, in fact, it seems that, even if it is not described (or instead of being described), space is present as a structural element of the text: cf. Vance (1967) and Meschiari (2003); on a general level, cf. also Diffley (1997): 47–61.

101 Not by chance, it has been argued that the first conquistadores of America looked themselves as if they were heroes of medieval epic tales: cf. Cremona (1994): 201–214, Benozzo (1997h).

102 On this point, cf. Bartlett–Mackay (1989), and Ruiz Domènec (1997).

103 Cf. H. Lefebvre (1978), Severi (1985), Braudel (1997): 13–54, Bachelet (1998), Tuan (1982).

104 Cf. Zientara (1979), and also Todorov (1989).

permanence. As I suggested in the introduction to my edition of the *Gododdin*, the apparent immobility of the narrative blocks and the noisy exuberance of the warriors of Mynydawc, actually allow a silent precariousness connected with the vanishing of things to emerge.[105] In the *Gododdin*, in its deep dialectic between stability and mobility, landscape seems to be a continuous representation of time that is running away and of forces that destroy the human monad at the very same moment when nature asserts itself as something that belongs to our need for permanent things. Also because the *Gododdin* (like the *Battle of Maldon*, and the *Chanson de Roland*)[106] tells about a frontier space that has been lost. All the warriors die on this frontier, and no one goes back to the place he came from.

And then (this is the real conclusion) the frontier space of the *Gododdin* is also the archetypal ground between friendship and loneliness, between life and death: these are the real opposing forces of this space, the real characters of this text. In the end, what landscapes express in their laconic vagueness, but also in the certainty that they will outlive men,[107] is thus the terrible necessity

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105 Cf. Benozzo (2000c): 14.

106 The central and most important part of the *Chanson de Roland* is in fact the one of the defeat suffered by Roland and the French rear-guard; this is not a fortuitous circumstance, but a consequence of King Charles's decisions (cf. Fassò [2002]).

107 This fact seems also to be signalled textually: I have already asserted (cf. Benozzo [2000c]: 115) for example, that the line *huan ar wyran* ('Sunlight on grass' [l. 161]) (cf. Jarman [1988]: 12, 13) could be read in opposition to expressions like the one at line 692 (*Gwyrd weryt gwaet am irved*, 'On the green earth there was blood around the fresh grave': ibidem, 46, 47), and understood as a reference to what lasts in opposition to what dies; in this sense, it has the same function of the Greek formula *phaos êlioio* ('sunlight') in the *Iliad*, a formula that introduces a different sense of

of things, and our continuous fluctuation between certainties and anguish.

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time and space in the theme of life and death: cf. Foley (1991): 150–154.

CHAPTER VIII

Fragments of a Chromatic 'Non-Phenomenology' of Landscapes: Colour Perception and the Sense of Space in Early Irish and Welsh Poetry

FROM the point of view of critical methodology, this last chapter is perhaps the most experimental one. Its tentative nature is a consequence of the difficulty in defining the essence of the topic: the interactions between the perception of landscape and the discernment of colours.

It has often been said that words which are used to express colours are defeated by the indefinite nature of this visual *medium*, which always changes according to individual attitudes and also particular conditions (such as light, shadows, etc.):[1] as Goethe wrote, 'nothing proves that the world is coloured'.[2] Rather than being 'described' or 'defined', a colour can be represented (with a word, with a numerical code, or with a letter linked to a number),[3] and the concept of colour can be identified, in the end, with this representation. In this sense, one could speak of a sort of 'auto-referentiality' of colours.

Together with shapes and morphologies, colours are the filters

1 Cf. in particular McCulloch (1987): 265–281.

2 Cf. Matthaei (1971): 95.

3 As in the famous scheme created by Munsell (1941); the first who tried to identify colours with numbers was Aristotle: cf. Ross (1973): 204–207.

through which we perceive landscapes (as Cézanne said: 'a colour is the place where our brain meets the universe'),[4] and here a first ontological question arises: are colours *qualities* of landscape elements, or are they landscape elements themselves?[5] Different languages have developed words for the different parts of landscapes, and if asked to describe the same natural place, a Chinese, an American, and an Italian would name (and thus recognise)[6] the same 'objects' (trees, rocks, etc.). But languages have very different ways of naming colours, and, if asked to describe the colours of the same landscape, the American would probably recognise as grey a few parts that the Chinese would describe as brown, and the Italian as green.[7] In a recent study on the terminology of colours, Renato Pierantoni has demonstrated that all languages have a word for 'black' and a word for 'red' (a few languages recognise only these two colours); if there is another word it is the word for 'yellow' or for 'green'; a few other languages have only—in addition to these—a word for 'blue', but words for 'grey', 'purple', 'orange' and 'pink', which have been a part of western cultures since the early stages of their languages, do not exist in many languages of Africa, Oceania, or North America.[8] Colours

4 Quoted in Merleau-Ponty (1967): 136.

5 Cf. Rosenberg (1982): 315–335.

6 'If the European languages had not collocated the orange between the red and the yellow, who can say if the perception of that colour would have been different?': Duve (1984): 199; cf. also the classic Berlin–Kay (1969): 144–176, Robertson (1967), Bornstein (1973), and the remarkable Hacker (1976): 23–46.

7 Cf. Coren–Ward–Enns (1994): 173–175.

8 Cf. Pierantoni (1991): 132–134. On a more general level, this linguistic variation is a consequence of the fact that, as Bernard Harrison argued (Harrison [1973]: 144), 'colours are not naturally nameable' (cf. also Harrison [1986]). I will return to this problem at the end of the chapter,

are also related to more general categories, which affect our way of seeing:[9] for example, a flower can be red, yellow, or blue, but it still belongs to the category of 'greenness';[10] as a consequence of that, when a word is used to describe a tree or a flower, it is transferred from the element to the category, and a 'separation' is generated between the object and its chromatic quality. Considering colours as elements of landscapes, we should be able to write a natural history of colours, as we can do with respect to plants or rocks; a dissimilarity which has to be noted here is that while a history of natural elements is always 'temporal', a history of colours seems to be 'non-temporal'.[11]

To avoid any kind of misinterpretation, I find it helpful to introduce also for colours the kind of terminology used in phonology: in other words, the word for *red* should be considered as a 'chromeme' that always represents, in the infinite numbers of its possible associations, itself. As with phonemes, chromemes cannot be led back to the formal substance of the represented or referred thing: 'green' is first of all the 'green chromeme', and its 'truth' (in

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but I would like to add that just because they are so difficult (or impossible) to define, colours can be interpreted as *basic* qualities of reality: 'Semantically, colors seem to be basic. This is a difficult but important notion to get a grip upon. It is reflected in the *indefinability* of colors, and their apparent *irreducibility*; it is reflected too in their *information value*, or *simplicity*. These characteristics [. . .] seem to do with the fundamental role of colors in explanation and description, and in the identification and re-identification of things' (McGilvray [1983]: 38).

9 Cf. Conklin (1973): 931–942.

10 Ibidem, 937.

11 Cf. also Wittgenstein (1977): 17; a history of colours can be only understood in terms of a history of colour vision: in this sense, cf. the remarkable chapter titled 'The Colour Currency of Nature', in Humphrey (1983): 146–152.

philosophical terms) is, tautologically, the chromeme itself.

In this lack of a theoretical definition, I think that the language of literature and poetry, with its peculiar capacity for understanding the internal 'qualities' of things, can give more suggestions for approaching the problem of the chromatic (or 'chromematic') perception of reality than any philosophical or scientific study of the concept of colour. Also because, as Wittgenstein pointed out, 'the colour concepts are to be treated like the concepts of sensations'.[12] Moreover, I believe that in approaching this problem the critical method must also avoid any attempt to build a systematic theory, and to follow instead the fragmentary nature of literary suggestions. What follows is thus a sort of critical 'experiment' that tries to reflect also in its form the 'non-systematic' deepness of the poetic intuitions offered by early Irish and Welsh texts.

I. IRISH TEXTS

I, 1

Rorúad rath;
ro cleth cruth

Bracken is very red;
its shape has been hidden[13]

12 Wittgenstein (1977): 26.

13 *Scél lem dúib* (poem from the Finn Cycle) [9th or 10th century]; Murphy (1956): 160 and 161 [LIII, 3].

I, 2

Fomm-chain coí menn, medair mass,
hi mbrot glass de dingnaib doss

A clear-voiced cuckoo sings to me (goodly utterance)
in a grey cloak from bush fortresses[14]

I, 3

ler tonnbán for talmain

the white-waved sea on earth[15]

I, 4

Int én bec
ro léic feit
do rinn guip
glanbuidi

The little bird
released a whistle
from the point of the beak
bright-yellow[16]

14 *Dom-farcai fidbaide fal* [early 9th c.]; ibidem, 4 and 5 [II, 1].
15 *Adram in Coimdid* [9th c.]; ibidem [IV].
16 *Int én bec* [9th c.]; ibidem, 6 [V]; Murphy translates 'The little bird which has whistled from the end of a bright-yellow bill'.

I, 5

lon do chraíb
charnbuidi

blackbird from a branch
yellow-heaped[17]

I, 6

Int én gaires asin tshail
álainn guilbnén as glan gair:
rinn binn buide fir duib druin

The bird which calls from the willow
beautiful beaklet of clear note
melodious yellow point of a firm black lad[18]

I, 7

Mong co libri
ibair éoglais

Long branches
of a yew-green yewtree[19]

I, 8

Cáin in magan:
márglas darach

Lovely the place:
the large green of an oak[20]

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17 Ibidem.
18 *Int én gaires asin tshail* [9th c.]; ibidem, 6 and 7 [VI].
19 *A Marbáin, a díthrubaig* [9th c.]; ibidem, 12 and 13 [13].
20 Ibidem; Murphy translates 'The great greenery of an oak'; for the

I, 9

Mad fri samrad,
suairc snóbrat,
somlas mlas,
curair, orcáin,
foltáin glaise,
glaine glas.

When summer comes
pleasant rich mantle
tasty savour
earth-nuts, wild majoran,
foltáin from the stream,
green purity.[21]

I, 10

Fogur gaíthe
fri fid flescach,
forglas néol

The voice of the wind
against its branchy wood
grey with cloud[22]

translation that I have quoted, cf. Jackson (1935): 37 (note 6, III).

21 Murphy (1956): 14 and 15 [23].

22 Ibidem, 16 [29]; I quote Jackson's translation (Jackson [1935]: 8); for this translation cf. note 22 in ibidem, 38.

I, 11

Lí na fairci fora-taí,
geldod mora imme-roi,
ros-sert bude 7 glas:
is talam nád écomrass.

The colour of the ocean on which you are,
the bright colour of the sea over which you row:
it has spread out yellow and green;
it is solid land[23]

I, 12

Lingit ích bricc ass de brú,
a mmuir find forn-aiccisiu

Speckled salmon leap out of it, from the womb,
from the white sea on which you look[24]

I, 13

Mētt in maigi, līon int slōig,
taitnit līga co nglanbōaid;
finnsruth airgit, drepa ōir,
tāircet foīlti cech imrōild

The vast plain and the numerous host shine
with brightly excellent colours;
a fair stream of silver and stairs of gold
beget joy at all feasting[25]

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23 *Immram Brain* [7th c.?]; Murphy (1956): 94; I quote Séamus Mac Mathúna's translation: cf. Mac Mathúna (1985): 52.
24 Ibidem.
25 Ibidem.

I, 14

A fern, nídot náimtide
is álainn do lí

Alder, you are not spiteful,
lovely is your colour[26]

I, 15

Maith a uisce idanglas

Good is the clear blue water[27]

I, 16

Maith a birar birarglas

Good its cress-green water-cress[28]

I, 17

Sionainn sru*thghlain sriobhúaine*

the limpid, green-streamed Shannon[29]

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26 *A Bennáin, a búiredáin* (poem attributed to Suibhne Geilt) [c. 1175]; Murphy (1956): 122 [4]; I quote Jackson's translation (Jackson [1935]: 11).

27 Mac Mathúna (1985): 52; Murphy (1956): 128 [26]; Jackson (1935): 13.

28 Mac Mathúna (1985): 52; Murphy (1956): 128 [26].

29 *Buile Suibhne*; G. O'Keeffe (1913): 118 and 119. The chromatic richness of the river Shannon seems to be a real *topos* of Irish poetry: when Micheál Ó Braonáin wrote, in 1794, the long poem *Príomhshruth Éireann* (*The Principal River of Ireland*, 1356 lines), he introduced the river Shannon in the following way: *Sionainn oileánach na ngealtonn* / [...] *na róistí lannach rua agus donna* / *na gcíor fionnbhána i mbrá a tonna* ['the islanded Shannon of the bright waves [...] of the scaled red and brown roach, fair-white crested, in the breast of her waves'] (Ó Braonáin [1994]: 6 and 7 [ll. 2, 9–10]).

I, 18

feronn mionghlas móirédrocht Maenmhuighe

the smooth-green, bright land of Maenmagh[30]

I, 19

Madid glass for cach luss

Green bursts out on every plant[31]

I, 20

Síatair denn do dinn

colour has settled on every hill[32]

I,21

álaind lí do ghlas ngedhair
a ghlas uaine fhoithremhail

lovely is the colour of your sprigs of arum lily,
green brook in the wooded hollow[33]

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30 O'Keeffe (1913): 118 and 119.

31 Ibidem, 128 and 129.

32 *Cétemain, cain cucht* (poem from the Finn Cycle) [9th c.]; Murphy (1956): 156 [6]; I quote Jackson's translation (Jackson [1935]: 23); Murphy translates *denn* as 'dust'; but cf. *DIL*, 203, where *denn*, with nine other occurrences, is interpreted as 'colour'.

33 From the *Agallamh na Senórach* [c. 1200]; O'Grady (1892): 96; Jackson (1935): 15.

I, 22

Díglaim corcra ara cairrcib

Gleaning of purple on its rocks[34]

I, 23

Dubaid rathib rogemrid

In the black season of deep winter[35]

I, 24

Is acher in gaíth in-nocht;
Fu-fúasna fairggæ findfholt

The wind is keen tonight;
It agitates the white-hair of the open sea

I, 25

[...] *riachtain faigthi na hindsi*

after reaching the green of the island[36]

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34 *Arran na n-aiged n-imda* (from the *Agallamh na Senórach*) [c. 1200]; Lehmann (1982): 85 and 114; Jackson translates 'gathering of purple lichen on its rock' (Jackson [1935]: 16).

35 From *Aigidecht Aithirni* [9th c.]; cf. Meyer (1914): 1–9 [2–3].

36 *Immram curaig Máel Dúin* [9th c.]; Oskamp (1970), 112 and 113 [col. 373, line 7].

II. WELSH TEXTS

II, 1

gan wyrd wawr kyui dodei

With the green dawn wherever he came[37]

II, 2

kyn bu clawr glas
bed Gwruelling fras

before the green covered
the grave of mighty Gwrwelling[38]

II,3

[*yr*] *athuc y techas.*
oer adrawd ar glawd gorlas

despite the onslaught he did not retreat.
sad is the tale on the very green bank[39]

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37 Jarman (1988): 14; Benozzo (2000c): 54 [l. 207]; cf. also Williams (1938), 9 [l. 207], Jarman (1988): 16 [l. 217].

38 Benozzo (2000c): 54 [ll. 186–187], Williams (1938): 7 [ll. 176–177], Jarman (1988): 14 [ll. 196–197 (Jarman translates 'before the green earth covered […]').

39 *Canu Llywarch Hen* [late 8th–mid 9th c.]; Rowland (1990): 406 and 469 [14bc]; Dr Rowland translates 'green', but the meaning, as she points out in the *Notes* (ibidem, 518) is 'very green'.

II, 4

Pan orwisc coet teglyw haf

When the woods put on the fair colour of summer[40]

II, 5

Llwyt gwarthaf bryn

The top of the hill is (grey) washed out[41]

II, 6

Ottid eiry guin y cnes.
nid a kedwir oe neges.
oer llinev eu llyu heb tes

Snow falls; white is its surface.
Warriors do not go on their expeditions.
The lakes are cold; their colour is without warmth[42]

II, 7

k[a]ssulwin kewin brin coch gwaur

White-cloaked the ridge of the hill; red the dawn[43]

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40 *Claf Abercuawg* [9th c.]; ibidem, 448 and 497 [2b].

41 Ibidem, 450 and 498 [19a]; the meaning of *llwyt* is 'grey', but, as Dr Rowland points out, 'since the setting is bright summer's day *llwyt* probably refers to the hazy, washed-out appearance of peaks and distant hills on sunny days or in heat haze' (ibidem, 622).

42 *Llym awel* [9th c.]; cf. ibidem, 454 and 501 [5].

43 Ibidem, 455 and 502 [12c].

II, 8

gwirtliv mor

green-coloured the sea[44]

II, 9

Hir nos llum ros lluid riv
glas glan guilan in emriv

Long is the night; bare the moor; grey the hill
silver-grey the shore; the seagull is in sea spray[45]

II, 10

graenwynn tonn

white-pebbled is the wave[46]

II, 11

Marchwyeil bedw mynyd

The saplings of the green-crested birch[47]

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44 Ibidem [14a].

45 Ibidem [16ab]; this insistence in using the word *lluid* ('grey'), a true key-term in this winter poem, reminds me of the following description by the Welsh painter Kyffin Williams (who is commenting the meaning of colours in one of his paintings): 'The cold winter had sucked the colour from the land and the distances faded away into an impenetrable grey' (Williama [1998]: 76).

46 *Baglawc bydin, bagwy onn* [12th c.?]; Jackson (1934): 20, Jackson (1935): 57 [1b].

47 Jackson (1934): 21, Jackson (1935): 57 [4a].

II, 12

gwynn gro mor

white is the shingle of the sea[48]

II, 13

gwelwgan gweilgi

grey the ocean[49]

II, 14

Eiry mynyd; graennwyn gro

Mountain snow; white pebbled is the shingle[50]

II, 15

Eiry mynyd; coch blaen pyr

Mountain snow; the crest of the pear tree is red[51]

II, 16

Baryflwyt rew

greybearded the ice[52]

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48 Ibidem [8b].
49 Jackson (1934): 21, Jackson (1935): 58 [10c].
50 *Eiry mynyd, gwynn pob tu* [12th c.?]; Jackson (1934): 22, Jackson (1935): 58 [7a].
51 Jackson (1934): 24, Jackson (1935): 60 [21a].
52 Ibidem [25c].

II, 17

goruelyn kangeu bacwyawc

very yellow are the clustering branches[53]

II, 18

guirt mor brithottir tiret

green the sea, the lands are many-coloured[54]

II, 19

Pan yw gwyryd gweryt?
Gweryt pan yw gwyrd?

Why is the soil is green?
The soil, why is it green?[55]

II,20

Ny wyr neb pan rudir y bron huan

No one knows why the breast of the sun is reddened[56]

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53 *Gorwyn blaen onn, hirwynnyon vydant* [12th c.?]; Jackson (1934): 30, Jackson (1935): 66 [12b].

54 *Kintevin keinhaw amser* (from *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*) [12th c.?]; Jarman (1982): 15 [VIII,4], Jackson (1935): 50.

55 *Angar Kyfyndawt* (from *Llyfr Taliesin*): cf. Haycock (1997): 66 (Dr. Haycock translates 'earth', but explains that the meaning is connected with the idea of 'soil' and 'ground').

56 Ibidem, 35; on the semantic evolution of the Welsh root *rud*, which appears to denote a chromatic quality between red and brown, cf. now Jacobs (2000): 27–33 [the problem of the meaning of this word has not only to be connected, in my opinion, with the 'high poetic register' (ibidem, 30) and with ornithological classifications (ibidem, 29): the fact

II, 21

Py dyduc llyw gayaf?

What took away the colour of the winter?[57]

II, 22

Py datweir yssyd yn eur lliant?

What transformation is there in the golden sea?[58]

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that many languages adopt the same word for what we identify as 'red' and 'brown' indicates that this dilemma is epistemological before being philological: cf. Westphal (1982): 417–433]. Going back to the quoted line from the *Llyfr Taliesin*, I do not think that a general statement (in form of a question) about the colour/shape of the sun has to be connected, as Marged Haycock suggests as a possibility, with 'Christ's reply to the Pharisees and Sadducees on being asked to show a sign from Heaven (Matthew 16, 2–3)' (Haycock [1997]: 56). To me, the *Bible* being such an enormous *corpus*, it would be easy to interpret almost any line of the *Llyfr Taliesin* (or of any other piece of literature) as a (direct or indirect) reference to a passage present there; I agree with her when she concludes that 'Taliesin's questions were frequently entertaining, brain-teasing, and sophisticated, and [. . .] there is more to them than wilful mystification' (ibidem, 79); in particular, I believe that Taliesin's approach to the external world is (anthropologically and poetically speaking) one of the more 'brain-teasing', 'sophisticated' and complex you can find in literature; however, I think that the reason for that is not to be found in an intertextual fact: the complexity of this text, as I understand it, is first of all in the articulated and deep relationship that it establishes between the world and the word.

57 Ibidem, 42; I follow Dr Haycock's translation, even though she points out that 'colour' is a doubtful translation.

58 Ibidem, 52.

The examples listed above represent a complex and multi-faceted phenomenology, and it would be dangerous to try to find out, as in a sort of discursive translation, a possible system of co-ordinates connecting them to each other. Instead, I would just like to add a few considerations in the form of a simple 'fragmentary comment'.

1. Colours are part of the morphology of a landscape element: our way of understanding and recognising the shape of an element of the landscape is affected by the way we perceive its colour (cf. *bracken is very red / its shape has been hidden*) [texts I, 1; I, 3; II, 12; II, 16].

2. Not only are colours qualities of landscape elements: landscape elements are qualities of colours (cf. *long branches / of a yew-green yewtree*) [texts I, 7; I, 16].

3. An element of the landscape changes its colours continuously. The sea is 'blue' only in an abstract way: it is also white, white-pebbled, green, grey, and golden [texts I, 3; I, 12; I, 24; II, 8; II, 10; II, 12; II, 13; II, 18; II, 22]. Thus, colours change and grow not only with the changing and growing of the elements of a landscape, but also within themselves.

4. Colours have their own solidity, they are part of the solidity and concreteness of landscape elements (cf. *the colour of the ocean [...] is solid land*) [I, 11].

5. Colours are not to be considered only as a surface of things: they are also inside things; elements are also coloured inside (cf. *the soil is green*) [texts II, 2; II, 19].

6. Colours contribute, through their intrinsic expressive quali-

ties, to create an imaginative consciousness of space: their juxtaposition and combination generate a sense of synchronization (*ortoesthesis*),[59] a balanced intuition and perception of *discretum* and *continuum*, a complementary, ordered, and symmetric vision of reality which corresponds to the idea we have of *harmony* [text I, 13].

7. Colours are sonorous (cf. *melodious yellow point*) [text I, 6].

8. Colours are not inactive qualities of landscape: they are the action of being colours, the constant and growing creation of their being 'colour makers' of themselves (cf. *green bursts out on every plant*) [texts I, 8; I, 19].

9. Colours are morphologies that move within a landscape element (cf. *the green-streamed Shannon*) [text I, 17].

10. Colours are part of the way of visualizing durations and extensions;[60] they are not only qualities of elements and objects that can be actually seen, but also of notions related to the primary intuition of space, and to the so-called 'topology of time'[61] (cf. *the fair colour of summer*) [texts I, 23; II, 4; II, 21].

11. Colours are factors of in perceiving distances (cf. *the top of the hill is washed out*) [text II, 5].

12. Colours produce sensory impressions characteristic of other senses (cf. *the lakes [...] colour is without warmth*) [text II, 6].

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59 Cf. Paci (1973): 209.
60 For a definition of 'extension', cf. 'Introduction', note 3.
61 Cf. Lucas (1973): 35–41.

13. Colours generate ideas of complexity, multiplicity and variety (cf. *the lands are many-coloured*) [text II, 18].

14. Two adjacent colours do not mutually interfere (cf. *white [...] hill; red dawn*) [text II, 7].

15. Two adjacent colours mutually interfere (cf. *grey the hill; silver-grey the shore*) [text II, 9].

16. Colours permit one to imagine and visualize non-representational concepts belonging to abstract categories (cf. *green purity*) [text I, 9].

17. Like other elements (such as trees, rocks, or glaciers) colours settle and colonize other parts of the landscape (cf. *colour has settled on every hill*) [text 1, 20].

18. Colours have their own morphologies and dimensions, and are characterized by spatial attributes (cf. *the large green of an oak*) [text I, 8].

19. Colours are 'primary qualities'[62] of the perception of landscape; in our way of understanding the world, they can precede the identification of an element and of its morphologies (cf. *after reaching the green of the island*) [text I, 25].[63]

20. The most part of the previous nineteen observations about the semantic relationships between colours and landscape

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62 In the sense explained by MacIntosh (1976): 88–104 and by Dicker (1977): 457–471; for a relativistic approach to the problem, cf. Priest (1989).

63 In his *Salon de 1846*, Baudeleaire wrote: 'At the beginning, we perceive just colours, and the world is an agglomeration of chromatic spots' (quoted in Raimondi [1988]: 71).

also apply to the relationships between landscapes and space: landscapes are not the simple surface of things; landscapes are our way of perceiving space; space is a quality of landscapes (not only the opposite); landscapes change continuously; landscapes contribute to create an imaginative consciousness of space; landscapes are sonorous; landscapes are the constant and growing creation of their being 'landscapes makers' themselves; landscapes are morphologies which move within space; landscapes are part of the way of visualizing durations and extensions; landscapes generate ideas of complexity, multiciplity and variety; two adjacent landscapes do not mutually interfere (a tree on a rock); two adjacent landscapes mutually interfere (a lichen on/in a rock); landscapes consent to visualize non-representational concepts belonging to abstract categories; landscapes colonize space; landscapes are primary qualities of the perception of space.

I would like to add a few reflections to the non-systematic list of considerations expressed above, starting from a remark by the art historian Ernst Gombrich, who, in one of his most suggestive books, wrote that colours give us the possibility of bringing the representation towards exemplification, rescuing the form from the necessity of denoting/reflecting reality.[64] In saying this, I think he wished to emphasise that, when used by artists, colours are at the same time representations of reality and part of it, and this metonymic attribute allows us to go beyond the ambiguous and necessary relationship between representation and interpretation, where a separation is always involved. It is interest-

64 Cf. Gombrich (1973): 117.

ing to find the possible consequences that this point can have when one deals with words instead of images.

It is a manifest fact that our only possibility to say what colours are goes no further than to point to things which have these colours (eg. *yew-green yew*, or *cress-green cress*).[65] I think that this has to be considered true also with regards to colour description in literature and poetry. What relation exists between colours really seen and the colours described in the texts that I have taken into consideration? Is it the same relation that exists between the colours perceived in reality and the colours represented in a painting? My opinion is that there is a strong difference and that this divergence is not only connected with the well-known differences between visual and verbal arts, but with something that belongs to the particular nature of colours, and to how they are remembered. A colour that is painted is a kind of metonymic and mimetic reproduction of something seen (or remembered), but a colour that is 'described' is only a 'chromeme', as I have proposed to identify it, far from the formal substance of the thing that is described.

More particularly, when one reads the words 'red' or 'yellow', one has to make them pass through one's memory of what is red or yellow. It is a well known fact that the remembered colour of an object always differs from the object's actual colour,[66] and in the case of literature (as in all the possible cases of 'told colours'), the memory of the reader is also different from the memory of the person who tries to represent the colour through the medium of words. When the philosopher Christopher Peacocke tried to

65 Cf. Harrison (1967): 38–52.
66 Cf. Bartleson (1960), White–Montgomery (1977).

understand 'what is the relation between the concept of an object's being red on the one hand and experiences of red objects on the other', he ended by listing the two possible types of responses offered by philosophy: 1) The concept of being red is philosophically prior to that of looking red (*antiexperimentalist option*); 2) The concept of being red has to be explained in terms of experimental concepts (*experimentalist option*).[67] The first answer is based on the fact that the phrase 'looks red' contains 'red' as a semantic constituent; the second states that the concept of 'red' can be recognized as a concept only because it is experienced. I find it very easy to consider these two answers as two variants of the same one: they just state the simultaneous and unbreakable relation between the concept of being red and the experience of what is red.[68] In other words, they describe the nature of colours as an 'anthropocentric problem'.[69] When a definition generates other definitions, the problem is not to forget the real thing towards which the definition should move;[70] and I agree with the

67 Peacocke (1984): 365–367.

68 To quote George Dicker, 'We have a visual experience in which an object looks red to us. In one sense, that experience is identical with (an instance of) redness; in another, it constitutes seeing the disposition, redness; though that disposition is not seen *as* a disposition' (Dicker [1988]: 236).

69 Cf. Averill (1985), and also the important Averill (1980): 19–33.

70 The mentioned problem of 'seeing red', for example, brought a few scholars to almost 'algebraic' conclusions: cf. Goldman (1987), Strawson (1989). Bringing back the philosophical speculations to common sense, Paul Boghossian and David Velleman wrote that, in the end, 'ordinary discourse about colours reports the contents of visual experience. The most plausible hypothesis about what someone means when he calls something red, in an everyday context, is that he is reporting what his eyes tell him' (Boghossian–Velleman [1989]: 100). An articulated critical

epistemologist Edoardo Troncon, when he writes (commenting Goethe's considerations on colours) that 'if one tries to understand the aims of a theory of colours, one has to conclude that in colours and in their manifestations there is nothing which has to be defined, but a lot which has to be understood'.[71] I think it is important to bear in mind that, despite many relativistic philosophical assertions, colours, like landscapes, are real things, and not only ways in which reality appears to us;[72] the problem of perceiving things has not to be treated as a deconstructive truth: the way we perceive the world should rather tell something about the world itself.[73]

The early Irish and Welsh 'chromatic' passages quoted above make us understand a few things about colours without giving any answers (poetry, I believe, is basically a question in the form of a statement). All we can do is to read those passages through our own experience of colours, but it is essential to underline that, in doing that, we are not betraying (from a philosophical or scientific point of view) their original meaning, because—on the contrary—we are giving them the possibility of producing new

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discussion of philosophical approaches to the problem of colour perception is Hardin (1988).

71 Troncon (1981): 187 ['Se proviamo a fissare il compito di una teoria del colore, arriviamo a dire che nel colore e nelle sue manifestazioni non vi è niente da definire ma molto da capire'].

72 Cf. Hilbert (1987); on the relationships between colours, time, and the perception of space, cf. the decisive remarks (about lichens) expressed by the artist Claudia Losi (Losi [1999]: 16–19).

73 Cf. the intelligent and moderate conclusions expressed in Jones (1985) and Luntley (1989); I do not agree with scholars who speak of a 'perceptual world' as if it was something separated from the 'real world' (cf. Pluhar [1986–1987]: 228–240); to me the perceptual world is simply the physical world as perceived.

meaning continuously: as I have previously pointed out,[74] this is how literature lives and grows. This decisive 'interference' of our experience happens also when we read landscape descriptions that do not mention the colour of an element: would it be possible to read those descriptions imagining elements as if they were without any colours? I think that memory always understands this non-existence by adding its own chromatic reminiscence. Therefore, in considering the problem of colour descriptions in literature we should also think about the semantic relevance of passages where colours are not mentioned. A simple hemistich like *eiry mynyd* ('mountain snow'), for example, immediately produces in our mind a sensation of whiteness. We cannot imagine a non-white snow, a non-green tree, or a non-coloured world. This is also true at a more general level: we always perceive landscape descriptions in their relationships with our remembered landscapes.[75]

In any event, any attempt to start from literary texts in order to 'understand' the nature of colours would be based on something akin to nothing, on data that elude our control even before being considered. What I find powerful, however, is that literary texts, as a result of their associative and metamorphic techniques, can easily connect colours with qualities which are usually (and culturally) perceived as separated from them: a peculiarity that scientific or philosophical languages, with their analytic necessities, cannot share with the language of poetry, unless contradicting their own epistemological paradigms.

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74 Cf. chapter III ('Landscapes inside the landscapes').

75 For a short history of perception of snow in medieval western poetry (in particular Occitan and Old Italian poetry), cf. Pasquini (2001): 48–72, where the author studies the connections between intertextuality and the memory of images.

The more an analysis of colour (and landscape) perception in literature seeks to preserve the questioning sense present in texts, rather than to offer possible answers (or, what is probably the same, to classify questions), the more it can be useful and constructive. To me, a described landscape is not a pretext for a critical activity, but a coffer created by poets, full of practical suggestions enriching my perception of the existing world. In this sense, I have tried to bear in mind one of Wittgenstein's most remarkable statements: 'there is indeed no such thing as phenomenology, but there are phenomenological problems'.[76]

And it is my hope that this assertion can also be regarded as a general definition for the whole of the present piece of research.

76 Wittgenstein (1977): 49.

PART FOUR

Apparatus

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