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THE FINAL TRANSFORMATION OF ÉTAÍN

JOHN CAREY*
Department of Early and Medieval Irish, University College Cork

In the third part of the tale *Tochmarc Étaíne*, Midir, lord of the *síd* of Brí Léith, agrees to restore to the king Eochaid Airem his abducted wife Étaín. His manner of doing so, however, confronts Eochaid with a daunting challenge. Text and translation are as follows in the edition of Osborn Bergin and R.I. Best:

> *A mbatar ann trath teirti arnabarach co n-accadar in .l. mban a n-aendeilb ⁊ i n-aenécosc uile fri hÉdaín. Sochtsat iarom in tsluaig. Bai gast glasliath*[1] *remib. Asber*[*a*]*t* [*fri*] *Eochaid: 'Togai do mnai din chur sa, no apair fri mnaí díb anadh lat. Is toich duinde ascnam diar tigh.'*
>
> 'As they were there at the third hour on the morrow, they saw fifty women all of like form and raiment as Étaín. Silence fell on the hosts. There was a grey slut before them. They say to Eochaid, "Choose thy wife now, or bid one of the women to abide with thee. It is meet that we set out for home."'[2]

Eochaid thinks that he will be able to identify his wife by her manner of pouring drink; but he errs, and chooses his own daughter instead.

This part of the tale survives only in the fragment of the Yellow Book of Lecan that is now NLI MS G4, where the phrase translated above as 'grey slut' appears as *gast gasatt liath*, a corruption apparently based on dittography. Bergin and Best supply the preferable reading on the strength of an entry in a glossary in TCD MS 1337 (shelf-mark H 3.18), subsequently edited by A.I. Pearson, which I shall designate below as *Adhart* from its first lemma:[3] *Gast .i. caillech, ut dicitur: bái gast glaslíath rompu* '*Gast*, i.e. hag; as it is said "There was a grey *gast* before them"'.[4] Kuno Meyer commented on this entry in a brief note, published after his death:

*I am grateful to Phillip Bernhardt-House and to Kevin Murray for their scrutiny of an earlier version of this piece, and also to the editors of *Ériu* and to an anonymous reader for comments and corrections which have led to several substantial improvements of the text. All remaining shortcomings are my sole responsibility.

[1] 'Glastliath', given here by Best and Bergin as the reading of the corresponding glossary entry (see below), is a typographic slip which they corrected when their edition was reprinted as a monograph: *Tochmarc Étaíne* (Dublin, 1938), 54. I am grateful to Liam Breatnach for calling the reprint to my attention.

[2] Osborn Bergin and R.I. Best, 'Tochmarc Étaíne', *Ériu* 12 (1934–8), 137–96: 186–7, §17.

[3] In this I follow the usage in William J. Mahon's unpublished doctoral dissertation, 'Contributions to the study of early Irish lexicography' (Harvard University, 1987). Paul Russell refers to the glossary as H[3]: 'The sounds of a silence: the growth of Cormac's Glossary', *CMCS* 15 (Summer 1988), 1–30: 6–7.

[4] A.I. Pearson, 'A medieval glossary', *Ériu* 13 (1942), 61–87: 72, §134. Pearson has silently corrected the manuscript's *un*de to *ut*.

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> Es handelt sich augenscheinlich um ein Lehnwort aus dem Kymrischen, indem das dort 'Hündin' bedeutende Wort wie engl. *bitch* von einer Weibsperson gebraucht wird. Vgl. bret. *gast* 'femme publique'.[5]

It is the proposed analogy with Breton which presumably led Bergin and Best to translate *gast* as 'slut' in our story, while others have been guided by *Adhart* in rendering it as 'hag', 'vieille femme'.[6] As only the women who looked like Étaín were asked to display their pouring skill, and Eochaid failed to find his wife by this method, it has been suggested that the 'hag' was the real Étaín, magically disguised: an example, if so, of the theme of the 'loathly bride' which appears so frequently in what are conventionally designated 'king and goddess' stories.[7]

What further evidence is there of the existence of a word *gast* in Irish? *DIL* s.v. *gast* offers two additional instances: the entry *GAST .i. cailleach* in Míchéal Ó Cléirigh's *Foclóir*;[8] and the puzzling '*gastgaoithe*, an old woman', from the 1864 edition of Edward O'Reilly's *Irish–English Dictionary*. The latter collocation has arisen from the garbled conflation of the second and third of three entries which appear as follows in the editions of 1817 and 1821:[9]

> *gast*, s.m. a snare, a wile
>
> *gast*, s.m. a puff, a blast; *Gastgaoithe*
>
> *gast*, s.m. an old woman

O'Reilly evidently took these items from Edward Lhuyd's *Archaeologia Britannica* of 1707, where they occur in the same sequence and with much the same wording:

[5] Kuno Meyer, 'Zur keltischen Wortkunde X', *ZCP* 13 (1921), 184–93: 193: 'What is evidently in question is a loan-word from Welsh, with the word which there means "female dog" used, like English *bitch*, of a female person. Cf. Breton *gast* "femme publique".'

[6] Christian J. Guyonvarc'h, 'La Courtise d'Étaín', *Celticum XV: Actes du Ve Colloque International d'Études Gauloises, Celtiques et Protoceltiques* (Rennes, 1966), 283–327: 309; Jeffrey Gantz, *Early Irish myths and sagas* (Harmondsworth, 1981), 58; John Carey, 'The wooing of Étaín', in John T. Koch and John Carey, *The Celtic heroic age: literary sources for ancient Celtic Europe and early Ireland and Wales* (4th edn; Aberystwyth, 2003), 146–65: 162. Frida de Jong and Maartje Draak, *Van helden, elfen en dichters: de oudste verhalen uit Ierland* (Amsterdam, 1979), 145, translate *gast glaslíath* as 'een oude grijze slons', i.e. 'an old grey slattern', combining the connotations of the glossary's *caillech* and of Best and Bergin's 'slut' (I am grateful to Jacqueline Borsje for this reference).

[7] Thus John Carey, 'Tara and the supernatural', in Edel Bhreathnach (ed.), *The kingship and landscape of Tara* (Dublin, 2005), 32–48: 45; Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, '*Tochmarc Étaíne* II: a tale of three wooings', in Pamela O'Neill (ed.), *The land beneath the sea: essays in honour of Anders Ahlqvist's contribution to Celtic Studies in Australia*, Sydney Series in Celtic Studies 14 (Sydney, 2013), 129–42: 133–4.

[8] *Foclóir nó Sanasán Nua* ([Louvain], 1643); I cite from A.W.K. Miller, 'O'Clery's Irish Glossary', *RC* 4 (1880), 349–428; *RC* 5 (1881), 1–69: 1.

[9] Edward O'Reilly, *Sanas Gaoidhilge–Sagsbhearla: an Irish–English dictionary* (Dublin, 1817 and 1821); *An Irish–English dictionary*, new edition with a supplement by John O'Donovan (Dublin and London, 1864).

> Gast, *A snare*: Deagla ngabhthaoi a ngaiste leis, *least thou be ensnared thereby*; *alsa* [sic] *a blast*: Gast gaoithe, *a blast of wind*.
>
> Gast, Cailleach, *An old woman*.[10]

Lhuyd's entries for *gast* had also been taken over, nearly verbatim, in John O'Brien's *Focalóir Gaoidhilge–Sax-Bhéarla*, published in Paris in 1768; O'Brien added the information that *gast* is used to mean 'whore' in Breton.[11] The same entries found their way into the lexicon of Scottish Gaelic via the 1825 dictionary of R.A. Armstrong,[12] from which they were taken into the still standard dictionary of Edward Dwelly.[13]

The information provided by O'Reilly, O'Brien, Armstrong and Dwelly, accordingly, goes back to Lhuyd. Lhuyd, in turn, almost certainly took his 'Gast, Cailleach' from Ó Cléirigh, whom he acknowledges as a source.[14] And Ó Cléirigh evidently had access to a version of the glossary material preserved in *Adhart*: his *Foclóir* shares with *Adhart* many entries (including this one) which appear in no other glossary,[15] and in several of these cases he provides the same passage to illustrate the word in question.[16]

As in other similar compilations, *Adhart*'s entries for the most part originated as attempts to explain words in the passages cited. Many of these reflect an impressive familiarity with the earlier language; and some indeed offer superior readings (such as *gast glaslíath* vs. the Yellow Book of Lecan's *gast gasatt liath*). But some of *Adhart*'s explanations appear to be conjectures suggested by the passages from which the words are cited, as I am proposing is the case with the entry for *gast*. Thus *airechus* 'nobility' is glossed *ealadha* 'art', on the strength of a line attributed to *Bretha Nemed*

[10] *Archaeologia Britannica*, vol. 1: *Glossography* (Oxford, 1707); this section of the book is not paginated. None of these items is to be found in the standard Irish dictionaries now in use. *Gast* 'snare' is evidently a ghost-word extrapolated from *gaiste* 'noose, trap'; while *gast* 'blast (of wind)' looks like a borrowing of English 'gust' (cf. current Irish *gusta*).

[11] 'GAST, a snare, a wile. *go d'eagla ngabhthaói a angaiste* [sic] *leis*, lest you should be ensnared thereby, also a blast. *gast gàoithe*, a blast of wind. GAST, an old woman. Armor[ic] *Gast*, a whore.' O'Brien presumably found the Breton cognate in the 'Armoric-English Vocabulary' which Lhuyd adapted from the 1659 dictionary of Julien Maunoir: 'Gast, *A whore.* Pl. Guisti' (*Archaeologia Britannica*, 203).

[12] *Gaelic dictionary in two parts* (London, 1825): 'GAST, *s.f.* (*Arm.* gasd, *a whore. Ir.* gast) An old woman: a whore; a snare; a wile; a puff, a blast.' Armstrong acknowledges his debt to 'the Irish dictionaries of O'Brien and O'Reilly' on p. x.

[13] *Faclair Gaidhlig air son nan sgoiltean*, 3 vols (Camus-a'-Chorra, 1902), and subsequent editions: 'gast,** *s.f.* Old woman. 2. Whore. 3. Snare. 4. Wile. 5. Puff, blast.' The double asterisk is Dwelly's siglum for words taken from Armstrong.

[14] *Archaeologia Britannica*, 311.

[15] Eleanor Knott, '"O'Clery's Glossary" and its forerunners: a note on glossary-making in medieval Ireland', in Sylvester O'Brien (ed.), *Measgra i gcuimhne Mhichíl Uí Chléirigh* (Dublin, 1944), 65–9: 69: 'Miss Pearson has noted 87 of O'Clery's articles in the Medieval Glossary mentioned above [i.e. *Adhart*]'. These articles are listed on p. 87 of Pearson's edition; forty-six of them do not appear to be attested apart from these two collections: §§15, 16, 18, 24, 27, 30, 31, 33, 62, 68, 72, 74, 78, 80, 88, 89, 94, 95, 105, 107–9, 113–15, 119, 121, 128, 131–4, 145, 146, 148, 151, 152, 155, 159, 160, 164, 169, 184, 191, 195, 212.

[16] §§15, 33, 53, 108, 109, 115, 119, 132, 153, 169 and 177.

that probably related to status in the skilled professions (§40);[17] *caem* 'precious' is glossed *beg* 'small', with reference to a passage in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in which Medb and Ailill apologise for having brought only fifty cartloads of a particular wine, explaining that this was because 'that drink was precious to them' (*bá cáem leó-som a llind sin*), not because they thought little of it;[18] *dochraidh* 'ugly, base' (sometimes 'ugliness, baseness') is glossed *drúis* 'lust', citing a phrase *dochraidh in chuirp* which closely resembles, and may be a version of, wording from a passage in *Saltair na Rann* in which Adam and Eve's sudden nakedness arouses disgust in them rather than desire (§95);[19] and *fola luimnig*, from a quatrain uttered by an impoverished poet in one of the Mongán anecdotes, is taken to mean 'scarcity of garments', when the actual sense appears to be 'a garment of rough cloth' with preposed genitive (§116).[20] These are all intelligent suggestions; but they do not reflect prior knowledge of the meaning of the passages in question.

Some sense of the date of *Adhart* is given by the sources on which it drew. Several of these belong to the later Middle Irish period: *In Cath Catharda* (§§72, 89), *Fled Dúin na nGéd* (§153), the later recension of *Mesca Ulad* (§142), a Passion homily preserved in An Leabhar Breac (§124), and the second recension of *In Tenga Bithnúa* (§109).[21] Others are still later: a poem composed in 1213 by Muireadhach Albanach Ó Dálaigh (§258),[22] another attributed to Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh (died 1244; §256), and a poem from the *Duanaire* of Gearóid Iarla (died 1398; §132);[23] while the final entries include references to the Anglo-Norman Roche family (§302) and (apparently) to the fourteenth-century bishop Stephen de Valle of Meath (§303). It may accordingly be the case that some five centuries separate *Tochmarc Étaíne* from the glossary that is the lone source for all assertions that there was a Gaelic word *gast* meaning 'hag'. While this does not of course mean that the glossator is incorrect, it does leave room for the possibility that this definition, like others in *Adhart*, is a guess based on context.

Meyer, as we have seen, took *gast* to have been borrowed into Irish from Welsh: such a word is in fact well attested in the latter language, while its

[17] *Dréimnithar eneclann dó in cach airechus ard* 'Honour-price is allotted to him in each [rank of] high nobility'. Cf. *CIH* 1292.5: *dreimnithar ene*clann *doib fo uaisli a tochus 7 a ngraid* 'honour-price is allotted to them according to the nobility of their property and their rank'.

[18] *TBC I*, line 1754; and cf. *DIL* s.v. 1 *cáem*, col. 13.66–70.

[19] David Greene and Fergus Kelly (ed. and trans.), *The Irish Adam and Eve story from Saltair na Rann*, vol. 1 (Dublin, 1976), line 1355: *dúairc leō dochraid a cuirp gil* 'they were sad for the ugliness of their bright bodies'.

[20] Kuno Meyer (ed. and trans.), *The voyage of Bran son of Febal to the Land of the Living* (London, 1895), 54; Nora White (ed. and trans.), *Compert Mongáin and three other early Mongán tales* (Maynooth, 2006), 163–4.

[21] This citation was not identified by Pearson; see John Carey, *In tenga bithnua: The ever-new tongue*, Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum 16 (Turnhout, 2009), 140.

[22] Osborn Bergin, *Irish bardic poetry* (Dublin, 1970), 89, quatrain 5; Pearson cites Bergin's original edition of the poem.

[23] Gearóid Mac Niocaill, 'Duanaire Ghearóid Iarla', *Studia Hibernica* 3 (1963), 7–59: 28; cited by Pearson from the manuscript.

final *-st* indicates that it cannot be native to Irish.[24] Given the slenderness of the evidence for the word's meaning on the Irish side, it will be useful to consider the usage in Brittonic.

In Breton, 'putain' is already the single meaning given for *gast* in the *Catholicon*, at the end of the fifteenth century; the only word for 'bitch' in the sense of a female dog ('chienne') is *kiez*, the feminine form of *ki* 'dog'.[25] The situation is different in Cornish: the sole pre-revival attestations of the word are in the writings of Lhuyd, for whom it designated only a female dog.[26] Although current Cornish dictionaries give both 'bitch' and 'whore' as meanings of *gast*, the latter sense appears to have been adopted on the analogy of Breton, and I am not aware that any instances antedate 1865, when Robert Williams noted the meaning of the Breton cognate in his *Lexicon Cornu–Britannicum*.[27] Earlier, the words used for a prostitute in Cornish are *druth* and the English borrowing *hôra*.[28]

Among the examples of Welsh *gast* provided by *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, the earliest that is applied to a woman dates from the later fourteenth century: in the final line of Madog Dwygraig's celebrated misogynistic satire *Afallen Beren*, the object of his condemnation is called *gast lemgul* 'a sharp skinny bitch'.[29] Thereafter there is nothing until 24 April 1762, when William Morris of Anglesey used the expression *map gast o'r Iuddew* 'the son of a bitch of a Jew' in a letter to his brother Lewis.[30] The latter instance, like the current colloquial use of *gast* as an insulting term for a woman, presumably reflects the influence of English 'bitch'. This seems less likely in Madog Dwygraig's case, however. Was *gast* already a conventional word of contempt in his time, or was he making derisive use of an animal term on his own initiative? Either seems possible; but it is a potential weakness in the former hypothesis that the postulated sense appears to be otherwise unattested for the next few centuries.[31]

[24] The cluster *st* is consistently simplified to *(s)s* in Irish. While this is often also the case in Brittonic (thus **glasto-* becomes *glas* 'blue/green/grey' in both branches of Insular Celtic), it is not always so (thus Irish *clúas* 'ear' contrasts with Welsh *clust*). The reasons for this variation in treatment are not clear: *VKG* i 78–80; *SNG*, 75.

[25] Jehan Lagadeuc, *Catholicon* (Tréguier, 1496–1512), s.vv 'Gast', 'Qui pe Quies'.

[26] *Archaeologia Britannica*, 14, 46, 241; also Lhuyd's handwritten *Geirlyver Kyrnẁeig*, now National Library of Wales MS Llanstephan 84, p. 74. The form in which Lhuyd consistently gives the Cornish word is *gêst*. On Lhuyd as our only evidence that this noun belonged to the traditional Cornish lexicon, see Ken George, *Gerlyver Kernewek Kemmyn: an gerlyver meur* (Callington, 1993), 106.

[27] *Lexicon Cornu–Britannicum* (Llandovery and London, 1865), s.v. 'GEST': 'In Arm. *gâst*, pl. *gisti*, is now used to designate a harlot, or common prostitute'.

[28] Thus William Pryce, *Archaeologia Cornu–Britannica* (Sherborne, 1790), s.vv.

[29] Huw Meirion Edwards, *Gwaith Madog Dwygraig* (Aberystwyth, 2006), 43.

[30] John H. Davies, *The letters of Lewis, Richard, William and John Morris, of Anglesey (Morrisiaid Mon) 1728–1765* (2 vols; Aberystwyth, 1907–9), vol. ii, 467; cited in *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* s.v. *mab gast*.

[31] Thus it is not reflected in the dictionaries of William Salesbury (1547), Sir Thomas Wiliems (1604–7) or John Davies (1632); although Salesbury, for instance, includes six entries designating sluts and prostitutes, together with several associated expressions, and such terms as *bram* 'a farte', *kachy* 'shyte' and *tin* 'an ars'. In the only other pre-modern instance of its use as a term of insult that I have encountered, in a composition by the fifteenth-century poet Dafydd ab Edmwnt, *gast* refers not to a woman but to a scrotum: Dafydd Johnston, *Canu Maswedd yr Oesoedd Canol / Medieval Welsh Erotic Poetry* (Caerdydd, 1991), 124.

If, then, there is such scant evidence for a Gaelic word *gast* applied to women, and so little evidence of such a usage in pre-modern Welsh, we are confronted with an obvious alternative: might the instance of *gast* in *Tochmarc Étaíne* have the word's undoubted original meaning in Welsh? Might the fifty counterfeit Étaíns have been accompanied, not by a grey 'slut', but by a grey dog?

A further detail in the wording of the passage must be considered at this point. We are told that fifty identical women appeared at the designated time, causing the men of Ireland to fall silent. The grey *gast* is mentioned, followed by the words *Asb-t Eoch-: 'Togai do mnai di*n c*hur-sa. . .'*. As the text stands in the sole surviving manuscript, accordingly, Eochaid himself is portrayed as uttering the speech beginning 'Choose thy wife now'—which obviously makes no sense. Bergin and Best, as we have seen, removed the problem by supplying the preposition *fri*, and by taking the verb to be 3 pl. present *as-berat* rather than 3 sg. preterite *as-bert* (the form which abbreviated *asb-t* would normally be taken to represent):[32] this yields a translation 'They say to Eochaid', with 'they' to be understood as the fifty women, or perhaps as Eochaid's own followers. But subsequent translators (Guyonvarc'h, Gantz, myself), while following Bergin and Best in supplying *fri*, have preferred to understand a singular verb *as-bert*. If singular, however, the speaker could scarcely be other than the *gast*: not surprising if she were an old woman ostensibly chaperoning the fifty beauties, but more curious if she were a dog. Bergin and Best's reading is, however, vindicated, as the anonymous reader of this article has pointed out, by a second instance of the same form later in the text: here *am- asb-t eolaig an tsencasa* must represent *amal asberat eólaig in tṡenchasa* 'as the learned in ancient lore say', with *asb-t* as a plural verb.[33]

If we do take *gast glaslíath* to mean 'grey bitch', the phrase finds a close counterpart in *sod glas*, one of the three animal forms assumed by the Morrígain when she opposes Cú Chulainn in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and *Táin Bó Regamna*.[34] Even more striking is the parallel afforded by the story of the origin of Find mac Cumaill's two hounds: their mother is said to have been a woman who was changed to a dog by the jealous wife or mistress of the man who had taken her as a mate,[35] a situation corresponding to that which brings about Étaín's initial transformation in the first part of

[32] The phrase in question appears in their edited text as 'Asber[a]t [fri] Eoch*aid*': for the verb, this notation is intended to denote the silent expansion of the suspension mark as *er*, leaving the following *a* to be supplied.

[33] Bergin and Best, 'Tochmarc Étaíne', 190, §22; the edition here expands the verb as 'asb*erat*'.

[34] *TBC I*, lines 1862–3; Johan Corthals, *Táin Bó Regamna: Eine Vorerzählung zur Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Veröffentlichungen der keltischen Kommission 5 (Vienna, 1987), 33 line 79.

[35] The sources are discussed by Máirtín Ó Briain, 'The conception and death of Fionn mac Cumhaill's canine cousin', in Anders Ahlqvist *et al*. (eds), *Celtica Helsingiensia: proceedings from a symposium on Celtic Studies*, Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum 107 (Helsinki, 1996), 179–202.

Tochmarc Étaíne.[36] Such a transformation may have been particularly appropriate to the 'king and goddess' theme: in the Middle Irish *Rígad Néill Noígíallaig ós Clainn Echach*, the personified sovereignty of Ireland is said to have appeared as a woman with the head of a dog.[37]

To Irish comparanda may be added an intriguing instance from medieval Wales. In the tale *Culhwch ac Olwen*, Gwydrut and Gwyden Astrus, 'the two whelps of the bitch Rhymhi' (*deu geneu gast Rymhi*), are included in the list of Arthur's warriors;[38] subsequently, however, obtaining them is one of the tasks that are to be performed in order that Arthur's cousin Culhwch can marry the maiden Olwen. At this point it is said of the *gast* Rhymhi that she is ravaging cattle 'in the form of a she-wolf' (*yn rith bleidast*), along with her two whelps; when the three are captured, God restores them to their own (presumably human) form.[39] Here the transformation of a woman into a bitch, and her having two canid offspring, recalls the story of the birth of Find's hounds, a story whose resemblance to the account of Étaín's early transformations has already been noted.[40]

Another bitch has a crucial role later in *Tochmarc Étaíne*. As we have seen, when Eochaid fails to identify his own wife, it is his daughter whom he chooses instead. When he learns who she really is, she is already pregnant by him, and in his revulsion he orders that their offspring be thrown to wild beasts. Instead, the infant is left with the bitch (*sod*) of a herdsman, and is nursed together with the dog's own puppies.[41] A bitch accordingly takes the place of Eochaid's daughter in mothering the child; while earlier (if I am correct), Eochaid had chosen his own daughter as his wife when he should have chosen a bitch.[42]

To conclude: the interpretation of *gast* in Irish as 'slut', 'hag' or 'old woman' depends upon a single glossary entry, fortified by the supposition that the semantic development of *gast* in Breton had an unattested

[36] I have called attention to this resemblance in 'Werewolves in medieval Ireland', *CMCS* 44 (Winter 2002), 37–72: 39. For the particular association of women with lycanthropy in Ireland see pages 64–8 of that article.

[37] *Cenn con fuirri* (Liber Flavus Fergusiorum fol. 25ra line7); for this reference I am grateful to Clodagh Downey, who is producing an edition of the text. Cf. *Echtra Mac nEchach Mugmedóin*, where the sovereignty in hag form is called *con(n)da* 'dog-like' (Whitley Stokes, 'The Death of Crimthann son of Fidach, and the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedón', *RC* 24 [1903], 172–207: 200). Further discussion in Phillip A. Bernhardt-House, *Werewolves, magical hounds, and dog-headed men in Celtic literature: a typological study of shape-shifting* (Lampeter, 2010), 313.

[38] Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans, *Culhwch ac Olwen* (Cardiff, 1988), lines 315–16.

[39] Bromwich and Evans, *Culhwch ac Olwen*, lines 929–41.

[40] On Rhymhi, see the careful analysis by Bernhardt-House, *Werewolves, magical hounds, and dog-headed men*, 218–21. Bernhardt-House also calls attention to a poem by Iolo Goch (*c*. 1340–98), which alludes to a version of the story in which two men named Gwydre Astrus and Odrud are changed by God to wolves, and their mother to a she-wolf (*bleiddiast*); in this account, it is Saint David who restores their human form. The text is in Dafydd Johnston, *Iolo Goch: Poems* (Llandysul, 1993), 121.

[41] Bergin and Best, 'Tochmarc Étaíne', 188, §20.

[42] As the anonymous reader has noted, dogs are also prominent in the attempts to recover Étaín from the *síd*: two ravens and two hounds appear during the first attempt to excavate Brí Léith; and blind puppies and blind cats are used when the attempt is repeated (see Bergin and Best, 'Tochmarc Étaíne', 185, §16).

counterpart in Old Welsh. Giving the word its primary Welsh sense 'bitch, female dog', on the other hand, can be justified with reference to comparable transformations elsewhere in Irish (and Welsh) narrative. Why such an isolated borrowing from Welsh into Old Irish was made in the first place is another question. The word may have come to Ireland in the context of importing dogs: according to an anecdote in *Sanas Cormaic*, British dogs were prized in Ireland, and indeed all of the lap-dogs in Ireland were said to be descended from a pregnant bitch brought from Britain.[43]

[43] Kuno Meyer, '*Sanas Cormaic* ... edited from the copy in the Yellow Book of Lecan', *Anecdota* 4 (1912), 75–7; discussion in Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish farming* (Dublin, 1997), 149.