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ÉCHENNACH: A STUDY IN THE TERMINOLOGY OF SHAPE-CHANGING¹

ABSTRACT

This article proposes a new interpretation of the medieval Irish word *énchennach*, a term associated with transformation between bird-form and human form. It is argued that the word has almost always been misrepresented in the scholarship and the dictionaries. A sketch of early Irish shape-changing imagery is first offered, using a range of materials from the Old Irish to the Early Modern period, before examining the attestations of *énchennach* in light of the hypothesis that the second element of the compound is not the familiar *cenn* ‘head’ but the rarer *cenn* or *ceinn* meaning ‘skin, surface’. Comparative evidence from Norse and Old English contributes to the argument, and a possible survival is proposed in the first element of the Modern Irish word *ceannchochall*.

INTRODUCTION

SHAPE-CHANGING as an aspect of the art of pagan sorcerers and Otherworld beings is a recurring theme in medieval Irish literature, and it presents special challenges for the resources of language and imagination.² A classic example, probably of ninth-century date, is the moment in *Tochmarc Étaíne* — a narrative which can be seen to play throughout on questions of ambiguity between identity and appearance³ — when Fuamnach strikes Étaín with her rod of scarlet rowan-wood (*co fleiscc caerthinn corcraí*) so that she ‘made

¹A version of this paper was presented at the Tionól of the School of Celtic Studies, DIAS, in November 2019. For subsequent help and discussion I am grateful to Jacopo Bisagni, Ruairí Ó hUiginn, Seán Ua Súilleabháin, Jürgen Uhlich, and Daniel Watson, who also shared a pre-publication copy of Watson 2020. Mikael Males and *Celtica*’s anonymous reader and editors contributed valuable corrections and improvements. The datings given to texts in parentheses in this article are offered merely as tentative indications for the sake of clarity. In passages cited from medieval texts, italicisations and other details of editorial presentation have been preserved only in displayed quotations, or in other cases where they may be relevant for the argument.

²For shape-changing as the special skill of Otherworldly sorcerers, key examples include Úath mac Imomain (‘Fear son of Terror’) at *Fled Bricrenn* §75, Henderson (1899: 96–7), whose power (*cumachta*) revolves around his endless shape-changing (see further below, and cf. Borsje (2005)), and the swineherds in *De Chophur in Dá Muccida*, whose ‘pagan wisdom’ (*suíthe ngentlechta*) enables them to change themselves into any kind of form (*in cech richt*), ‘just like Mongán mac Fiachnai used to do/be’ (*amal no bith Mongán mac Fiachna*) (Roider 1979: 26, cf. Bondarenko 2015: 185–6). This cross-reference to the paradigmatic example of Mongán (on whom see Watson 2020 and below) is probably an example of the Middle Irish contribution to this text, glossing and contextualising its motifs.

³See Williams (2016: 83–9, 96–9), with Carey (2016).

a pool of water of her', *co nderna lind n-uscí di*.⁴ Has the girl's nature disappeared into the water, or is there a sense in which the water still 'is' Étaín behind a deceptive appearance?⁵ This issue becomes unavoidable in the reverse metamorphosis that follows immediately afterwards: the water becomes heated, boils and coagulates so that the pool becomes a maggot (*cruim*) which in turn becomes a purple fly (*cuil corcraí*),⁶ and when the fly visits Midir he knows that this is Étaín herself returned.⁷

Depending on the way it is framed, the problem of the relationship between visible form and personal identity can be addressed in several ways: in terms of the relationship between surface form and essential identity, or between body and soul, or between illusion and reality. This is equally true for the most ancient and traditional mythopoeic imagination, or for complex poetic explorations like those of the Classical Latin poet Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, or for the systematic investigations of Neoplatonic philosophy, right up to the 'twelfth-century Renaissance' and beyond.⁸ Any given narrative of shape-changing may correspond better to one or other of these models; it may also partake of several of them at once.

BIRD-TRANSFORMATION IN MEDIEVAL IRISH LITERATURE

Familiar Old Irish examples of the motif of an Otherworld being taking the form of a bird include that in *Aislinge Óengusso* (?c. 800), with the cyclical transformation of Cáer Iborneith between bird-form (*i ndeilb éuin*, etc.) and human form, followed by Óengus's self-transformation so that they fly away as a pair of singing swans;⁹ and the third tale of *Tochmarc Étaíne*, in which Midir, having been granted permission to embrace Étaín, carries her out through the skylight of the house (*for forles an tighi*) and the men of Ireland see them next

⁴*Tochmarc Étaíne I* §16, Bergin and Best (1938: 152–3).

⁵The same motif of the scorned wife effecting transformation with a wand of sorcery is found, for example, in the various medieval accounts of the hound-transformation of the mother of Bran and Scéolang (Carey (2002a: 38–9), noting the parallel in *Tochmarc Étaíne*; see also *Feis Tighe Chonáin* 740–5 (Joynt (1936: 22), cf. Reinhard and Hull (1936: 45–6)) and in particularly subtle form in the late medieval text *Oidheadh Chloinne Lir*. Here Aoife strikes the children 'with a wand of magical shape-changing', *do fhleisg doilbthe droigheachta*, and thus puts them into the shapes of swans, *a reachtaibh ceithre n-éaladh* (O'Curry 1863: 120). When Bodhbh Dearg finds out what Aoife has done, his vengeance is reciprocal: he asks her in what shape she would least like to be (*cá riocht in budh measa lé bheith ar bith*) and she answers 'in the shape of a demon of the air' *a riocht deamhain aéoir*, so he strikes her with his own magic wand (*do fhleisg doilbthe droidhiochta*) to turn her into that shape, in which she remains fixed forever (O'Curry 1863: 128). See Breatnach (1999: 16–20) on the bird-transformations, with which he compares the bird-souls of *Imram Curaig Ua Corra* discussed later in the present article.

⁶*Tochmarc Étaíne* §16, Bergin and Best (1938: 152–3).

⁷*Tochmarc Étaíne* §17, Bergin and Best (1938: 154–5).

⁸For various essays in negotiating this range of paradigms for interpreting Irish narratives of shape-shifting, see for example Bondarenko (2015: 183–95); O'Connor (2016); Watson (2020); and compare the approaches to thematically similar Norse and other Germanic materials in the essays in Barreiro and Cordo Russo (2019). On earlier Classical sources for metamorphosis and its cognitive issues, see Buxton (2009).

⁹*Aislinge Óengusso* §§12–14, Meid (2017: 57–58).

as swans.¹⁰ The same motif is recast in the later medieval period in *Oidheadh Chloinne Lir* (c. 1400), with the metamorphosis of the children of Lir into swans and their subsequent reverse transformation into humans at the time they are baptised.¹¹ This mode of shape-changing is loosely connected with the depiction of the Morrígan, the Bodb and their kin as demonic beings of the air,¹² and relates to the idea that the ability to manipulate the visible forms of living beings is central to the magical power (*cumachtae*) of the people of the Otherworld. Correspondingly, in the Ulster Cycle narratives the distortion that Cú Chulainn undergoes in his battle-fury (*ríastrad*) is related to his name or nickname *sirite*. In *Fled Bricrenn* this is also applied to the shape-changer Úath mac Imomain, in a passage attested as one of the twelfth-century H-interpolations in the Lebor na hUidre copy:¹³ ‘He was called the *sirite* because he used to transform himself so much into different forms’.¹⁴

Dualism of various kinds provides ways of making conceptual sense of a tale of transformation. As early as the (probably mid-seventh-century) *De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae* of Augustinus Hibernicus, the author recalls with contempt the ‘ridiculous tales of the sorcerers (*magi*), who say that their ancestors flew through the ages in the substance of birds (*in avium substantia* [...] *saecula pervolasce*)’.¹⁵ The theological principle being argued here is that such a metamorphosis could only be a phantasm, an illusory change of appearance, because the essential nature (*substantia*) of a human being cannot be transformed into that of a bird.¹⁶ A different species of dualism, that between spiritual and corporeal beings, informs the famous episode of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* (c. 800 and later) in which the saint encounters white birds, who explain that they are survivors of the Fall of the Rebel Angels who did not join with Lucifer in that rebellion and now wander through air and earth, but when the time comes to praise God they take on these bodies that the saint sees

¹⁰*Tochmarc Étaíne III* §15, Bergin and Best (1938: 134–5).

¹¹On the transformation motif see Breatnach (1999: 16–20), with revised texts of the key passages as originally published in O’Curry (1863).

¹²See comparative study by Egeler (2011).

¹³On the intellectual concerns of the H-interpolator(?)s see Carey (2015).

¹⁴... *is de at-berthe in siriti de ar a met no delbad i n-ilrechtaib* (*Fled Bricrenn* §75, Henderson 1899: 96–7). On *sirite* in relation to the *ríastrad* see further Sayers (1991).

¹⁵*De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae* 1.18, MacGinty (1971: 23); translation, Carey (2000: 58). In his well-known discussion of this passage, Carey goes beyond the evidence, in my view, when he asserts (1999: 57, similarly 2000: 58) that the text here refers to *Irish* druids: in fact Augustinus Hibernicus says nothing about the location of these *magi*, and the word *magus* in Early Christian Latin from Ireland or anywhere else is applied equally to pagan sorcerers from any part of the world. It is striking, however, that the closest parallel for the *De Mirabilibus* image is from an Insular source, albeit expressed as allegory rather than metamorphosis: the famous speech of the pagan nobleman of the last pagan generation of Northumbria in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*, comparing the life of man to a sparrow which flits into the king’s hall on a winter’s day and flies through it (*domum citissime pervolaverit*) before flying out again into the storm like a man passing out to death (Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.13, Colgrave and Mynors 1969: 182–5).

¹⁶On the work’s strategy of extending and modifying St Augustine of Hippo’s principle that after the sixth day of creation God can operate only through what is already in nature, see Carey (1999: 53–8), with MacGinty (1971: 105–6). Smyth shows that the *De Mirabilibus* articulates subtle distinctions between visible appearance and inner essence (2008; cf. Smyth 1996, *passim*).

(*accipimus corpora talia qualia nunc vides*).¹⁷ When an episode related to this appears in the Middle Irish *Immram Curaig Ua Corra* (?c. 1200), the articulation is again different when the travellers are told that these birds *are* the souls of holy men.¹⁸ There are similar encounters in other *immrama*,¹⁹ and the image ultimately derives from the story of Elijah preaching to the birds perched on the Tree of Life in Paradise, which is also evoked in the vision of Heaven in *Fís Adomnáin* (c. 1000),²⁰ and again — with Elijah's name explicitly mentioned — in *Dá Brón Flatha Nime*,²¹ which was composed shortly after *Fís Adomnáin* and draws directly upon it.²²

A choice between metamorphosis and metaphor seems sometimes to be posed by accounts of human revenants living in successive bodies through reincarnation, of which there are abundant examples from the Old Irish period onward.²³ The sequences of incarnations recounted by the youth in *Immacallam Choluim Chille 7 ind Óclaig* (eighth century),²⁴ and by Tuán in *Scél Tuáin meic Chairill* (late ninth century),²⁵ are closely matched in their articulation and imagery by those of Fintan in the Middle Irish poem *Colloquy Between Fintan and the Hawk of Achill*.²⁶ Considered in purely formal terms, the claim to have taken on different physical forms — 'I have been a hawk [...]' — cannot always be distinguished from a purely metaphorical discourse, as in the extravagant chain of assertions by Amairgen in the *Leabhar Gabhála*, in the archaising poem (*laíd*) that he utters on setting foot on the shore of Ireland.²⁷ Already in a text dated to the eighth century, *Immram Brain*, the foretelling of Mongán's heroic greatness and future incarnations in Manannán's prophecy²⁸ seems to be poised between the two modes, with some of the images demanding to be read in terms of metamorphosis and others in terms of metaphor.

Looking to later medieval explorations, this ambiguity between metaphor and metamorphosis is integral to the narrative of the penitential wanderings of Suibhne Geilt in the (probably twelfth-century) narrative *Buile Shuibhne*. When he is cursed, a series of abstract phenomena 'fill' him (*ro líon*), including 'frenzy' and 'fluttering' (*dásacht*, *foluamain*) and he goes in his frenzy 'like

¹⁷*Navigatio Sancti Brendani* §11.42–44, Selmer (1989 [1959]: 24), discussed by Carey (1999: 22–3).

¹⁸*An enlaith atchithisi anmanna daine naemtha iat* (*Immram Curaig Ua Corra* §52, Stokes 1893: 44–5); similarly the voyagers go on to encounter souls in bird-form undergoing punishment for their sins (§57, Stokes 1893: 48–51). Both passages are cited by Breatnach (1999: 16–20).

¹⁹See for example *The Voyage of Máel Dúin* §§18–19, Oskamp (1970: 136–9); *The Voyaging of St Columba's Clerics*, Prose iv and verses §§ 22–33, Murray (2014: 784–7).

²⁰*Fís Adomnáin* §15, edited by John Carey in McNamara et al. (2019: 62–3).

²¹*Dá Brón Flatha Nime* §2, edited John Carey in McNamara et al. (2019: 184–7).

²²Carey in McNamara et al. (2019: 182).

²³Because many of the texts witnessing this theme formed part of the lost compilation *Cín Dromma Snechtai*, the connections can often be understood as intertextuality within a single corpus, as argued by Watson (2020).

²⁴Carey (1984).

²⁵Carey (2002b: 60–1).

²⁶Meyer (1907).

²⁷Macalister (1938–56: 4.110–13). See the recent study by Archan (2012).

²⁸*Immram Brain* §§52–5, Mac Mathúna (1985: 42–3). See further Watson (2020).

any bird' (*amail gach n-ethaid n-aerdha*),²⁹ but although what follows is full of bird-like behaviour there is no explicit statement that he has changed shape; at one point, indeed, it is unambiguously denied that he has become (as light as) a bird, when he is perched on the branch of a tree and it bends under his weight so that he falls to the ground.³⁰ It is impossible to visualise this scene without running the risk of seeming absurd: but is this very challenge to the imagination an aspect of the narrator's art?

It is no coincidence that exactly the same range of possibilities exists for fashioning a story of transformation into wolf or hound. The Irish examples, while relatively few, bear comparison with the rich attestations of this mythical theme in Old Norse, where a similar range of representations is found with transformations into bear as well as wolf.³¹ In Norse it may be said that the transformed human being is enveloped in the animal's outer shape or skin (*hamr*), but the same term is also used to refer to a human being wearing an animal skin as a garment on his shoulders. This ambiguity is suggested, for example, by lines of pre-Christian date (c. 900) in the poem *Haraldskvæði*, where the wolf-skin warriors (*ulfheðnar*) and bear-skin warriors (*berserkr*)³² howl and bellow as if they were the very beasts whose skins they wear.³³ Alternatively, the beast-form may be thought of as distinct from the human's bodily self, so that the beast roams around in the world while the man lies unconscious elsewhere: this articulation is found, for example, in Snorri Sturluson's account of Óðinn (understood as an ancient but mortal sorcerer) in *Ynglinga saga* (c. 1220–30), where it is explained that he used to change in shape (*skipti hqumum*) so that his body (*búkr*) would lie as if asleep or dead while he himself was bird, beast, fish or worm.³⁴ In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, a probably fourteenth-century saga set in the legendary pagan past (*fornaldarsaga*), there is a comparable structure in the account of the warrior Böðvarr bjarki, in which the man himself lies asleep in his tent while he simultaneously roams around outside in the form of a bear.³⁵ Again, the identification between man and beast can be a matter purely of nomenclature, understood metaphorically, as in another of the *fornaldarsögur*, *Völsunga saga*: here the ancestor-figure Sigi, condemned after having

²⁹ *Buile Shuibhne* §11, O'Keeffe (1913: 14).

³⁰ *Buile Shuibhne* §18, O'Keeffe (1913: 24).

³¹ Among the vast secondary literature on Norse beast-transformations, I have found the study by Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2007) particularly useful; cf. O'Connor (2016), Merkelbach (2019). Dale (2014) offers a thorough survey of the evidence and argues for a minimalist interpretation of *berserkr* and 'berserk fury', suggesting that the most appropriate translation of *berserkr* is simply 'champion' (summarised, 383–7). Although this is an important corrective to the often speculative and extravagant treatments in traditional scholarship, Dale perhaps draws an excessively strict distinction between the lexical meaning of the term and the imagery consistently associated with it.

³² On the vexed question of whether the *ber-* element is etymologically 'bare' or 'bear', see Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2007: 281 n. 18), with the useful survey of interpretations of the question by Dale (2014: 248–50).

³³ Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2007: 280). For the text see R. D. Fulk's edition at Whaley (2012: 102), also available at www.skaldic.abdn.ac.uk, last accessed 20 April 2020.

³⁴ *Ynglinga saga* §7, Wessen (1976: p. 10.7–9).

³⁵ Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2007: 282).

murdered a neighbour's servant, is named as *vargr í véum*, 'wolf in the sanctuary'.³⁶ Similarly, in the more rationalised and historicising part of the account of Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga*,³⁷ his *berserkir* go bare-chested to battle with the fury of dogs, wolves, bears, bulls, and it is explained that this phenomenon is called by the name *berserksgangr* 'berserk behaviour' — the naming matches their mental state and behaviour, including specifically their gait and movement (-*gangr*), but there is no mention of a transformation of form.

A similar, at times overlapping, range of articulations is found in the scattering of medieval Irish texts in which humans are identified with wolves and hounds, *i richt con* or *i conrachaib*.³⁸ The beast-form may be a skin or outer covering, as in the account of the werewolves of Cruachu in the twelfth-century *Acallam na Senórach*, who lay aside their *cochailh chiarleabhra* 'long dark coverings' when they return to human form;³⁹ or it may be understood as a phantom shape that moves around while the person is unconscious, as in the celebrated account in the late eleventh-century *Wonders of Ireland* and its derivatives.⁴⁰ Again, the terminology may be used in a way that seems purely metaphorical, as when outlawry is named as *fáelad* 'wolfing' or when an outlaw is called *cú glas* 'grey hound'.⁴¹ Heroic poetry seems sometimes to deploy the image in a way that exploits these very ambiguities.⁴² The conceptual question — how does the inner identity of the man relate to the outer form of the wolf? — is alluded to explicitly in the remarkable theological tract *Scéla na hEsérgi*,⁴³ probably composed in the later eleventh century, in which the author lays out the distinctions between an array of different kinds of 'resurrection', including the calling-up of phantoms and the transmigration of souls. An item in the list is *metaformatio* ('transformation'), glossed in Irish as *tarmchrutad*. This word is seen already in the Old Irish Würzburg Glosses referring to the Transfiguration of Christ,⁴⁴ but here the phenomenon that it names is exemplified by the case of werewolves

³⁶Cited by Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2007: 283).

³⁷*Ynglinga saga* §6, Wessen (1976: p. 10.3–6).

³⁸I draw here on the fundamental studies, Reinhard and Hull (1936) and especially Carey (2002a). See also the exhaustive collection of examples and interpretations by Bernhardt-House (2010, especially chapters 3, 4).

³⁹*Acallamh na Senórach* 7706, Stokes (1900: 215), discussed by Carey (2002: 67), and see below in this article.

⁴⁰Gwynn (1955: 12–13), discussed by Carey (2002a: 53–4); see further Boyle (2014: 248–51).

⁴¹*Fáeladh* refers to werewolfism as such in the account of Laignech Faeladh in *Cóir Anmann* (Long Version §218, Arbuthnot 2007: 2.58, 131), but must be taken figuratively at *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* 206 (Knott 1936: 7): on the latter see further Carey (2002a: 68–9), O'Connor (2013: 83), with West (1997). Beyond the scope of this article is the issue of early Indo-European and Irish wolf- and hound-imagery associated with outlawry and initiation into manhood. For Irish purposes the fundamental treatment remains McCone (1986).

⁴²Carey cites from *Táin Bó Cúailnge* a poem in which Fergus prophesies the slaughter of battle, including the phrase *slúag inna ndunechon* 'the army of the man-hounds' (*TBC* I 2420, O'Rahilly (1976: 74), discussed by Carey (2002a: 69–70), drawing in turn on Kelly (1992: 88)). The imagery here is very closely comparable to that in the Norse *Haraldskvæði* discussed earlier.

⁴³Text and translation: Stokes (1904).

⁴⁴Wb 15b6, *Thes* 1.600.

(*iar ndesmirecht na conricht*).⁴⁵ The presence of this example here shows that werewolf transformation is being treated as a serious conceptual problem.⁴⁶

In short, transformation of the outer body, illusory change of appearance, and figured language are all possible ways of giving substance to the image of a human being becoming an animal. Against this background, I return from wolves to birds with the remarkable word *énchennach*, which, as I will argue, represents one way of specifying the relationship between inner identity and outer bird-form in a narrative of shape-changing.

ÉNCHENNACH IN EARLY IRISH SOURCES⁴⁷

The best-known and probably the earliest attestation of this word is in the tenth- to eleventh-century saga⁴⁸ *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (hereafter *TBDD*), Recension II, in the episode of the conception of Conaire. Mess Buachalla, the foundling daughter, who is hinted to be a descendant or reincarnation of the Étaín of *Tochmarc Étaíne*,⁴⁹ has been exposed at birth, but she has been spared from death and raised secretly by the herdsmen of the king of Tara in a house with no door but only a window and a skylight (*forléas*, cf. above). The king, who is childless and has received the prophecy that a woman of unknown parentage will bear his child, is about to seize her to be his wife; but the night before that is due to happen a bird (*én*) flies in through the skylight of the building. This bird lays down (*fácaib*) his *énchendaich* on the floor of the house, and seizes her (*arda-gaib*); he tells her that she will be pregnant by him and that the son who will be born to her must not kill birds (*TBDD* 91–7). Later the boy indeed attacks birds — Otherworldly birds, whose flight draws him to the sea, where he threatens them with his sling. On the waves they lay down their *énchendcha*, and they attack him with swords and spears; one of them protects him and explains that he is Nemglan, *rí énlaithe do athar* ‘the king of your father’s bird-troop’ (*TBDD* 145); it is forbidden to the boy to attack birds, because every bird is ‘akin’ or even ‘related by blood’ (*dír*) to him through its parentage (146–7). A key aspect of this episode is that Nemglan is the source of the prohibitions, *geissi*, that will be upon him as king (*TBDD* 168–81), just

⁴⁵*Tidings of the Resurrection* §33 = LL 2702–7, Stokes 1904: 250. See Carey (2002a: 44–8).

⁴⁶The theological affinities of *Scéla na hEsérge* remain disputed. Carey (2002a: 44–8) treats many of its ideas and even its terminology as derived ultimately from the same sources as the seventh-century Hiberno-Latin *De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae*, while Elizabeth Boyle argues in contrast that the text is imbued with contemporary (i.e. eleventh- or early twelfth-century) Neoplatonic thought (Boyle 2009, 2015). Arguably there is truth in both perspectives.

⁴⁷For clarity’s sake I adopt the normalised spelling *énchennach* throughout this article, except when citing a specific passage of a text. Every attestation cited has been checked against the relevant manuscript images online: the underlying form is consistent throughout, although there are the usual trivial spelling variations and hypercorrect forms, e.g. *aencheandach* (*Dán ar chogadh na Traoi* §14.3, at NLS Adv. 72.1.19, fol. 1vb29, see Mac Eoin (1961: 32) and *oencheannaich* (*Togail na Tebe* 586, reading from NLS Adv. 72.1.8, fol. 4va30, see Calder (1922: 36).

⁴⁸Following the dating adopted by O’Connor (2013: 20 and *passim*).

⁴⁹On Mess Buachalla’s otherworldly identity as descendant or reincarnation of Étaín, see O’Connor (2013: 53–67).

as the bird-father told his mother of the prohibition on killing birds. The king's violation of his *geissi* will of course be vital to the fulfilment of the plot.⁵⁰

What then is an *échnennach*? The word obviously looks like a compound based on *én* + *cenn*. Formally, one would posit a compound **échnenn* 'bird-headed being',⁵¹ with the *-ach* suffix forming an adjective which then becomes nominalised, as with (e.g.) *bolgach* 'smallpox', *gaiscedach* 'warrior'.⁵² Something of this kind was assumed in the entry in the printed *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (s.v. *échnendach*), almost certainly written by Eleanor Knott,⁵³ which has survived without change into the new electronic edition.⁵⁴ This begins with the words 'bird-covering, feather mantle', keyed to an entry in the seventeenth-century compilation *O'Clery's Glossary*, which glosses our word as *cochall én*. It then gives us the two *TBDD* instances with the explanation that 'the original meaning [*sc.* in these passages] may have been something like *bird-cap*, perhaps a mask worn in totemistic ceremonies'.

The thought-process behind this is worth reconstructing. *Cochall*, being derived from the Latin *cucullus*, is indeed the normal word for a monk's cowl, which is a hooded garment, so it is *prima facie* reasonable to link it to headgear (for a revised treatment of the entry in *O'Clery's Glossary*, see below). But why the startling invocation of 'totemistic ceremonies'? This is unsupported by any evidence, and appears to be a remnant of Stokes's note at this point in his original edition of *TBDD*, where he remarked on 'the existence in Ireland of totems, and of the rule that the person to whom a totem belongs must not kill the totem-animal.'⁵⁵ Nettlau, whom Stokes cites as his authority, seems to have been the first to use the term *totemistic* in the present context; and one suspects that the lexicographer was encouraged to carry this over into the dictionary entry because of the linkage in early twentieth-century anthropological thought between the terms *totem* and *taboo*, given that both the birdman father and Nemglan (*TBDD* 168–81) speak of *geissi*, customarily translated 'taboos'.⁵⁶

It is because of all this, and especially the imputation that the basic image is a garment in the form of a cloak or cowl that covers the head, that translators and scholars persist with terms like 'feather-hood',⁵⁷ or the more generalised 'bird-covering'.⁵⁸ In context, however, the word seems to have nothing specifically to do with head or headdress, still less with masking. Conaire's father

⁵⁰O'Connor (2013, especially 129–52).

⁵¹Familiar comparanda would be such terms as *conchenn* 'doghead', *caitchenn* 'cathead', the names of monstrous peoples living on the edge of the world, on which see Clarke (2012), Bernhardt-House (2010: ch. 5).

⁵²See Russell (1990: 95–7) on the 'unpredictable though understandable' shift from adjectival to nominal function in such cases.

⁵³Eleanor Knott and Maud Joynt were responsible for the fascicle in question, according to Quin's explanatory note at the beginning *DIL* vol. 1. The entry in the Glossary of Knott's edition of *TBDD* is similarly 'bird-head-dress, feather hood' (Knott 1936: 121).

⁵⁴*eDIL* s.v. *échnendach*, last consulted 23 February 2021.

⁵⁵Stokes (1901: 20 n. 9), citing Nettlau (1891–3, at 1891: 243).

⁵⁶On *geis* and *taboo* here see O'Connor (2013: 72–81), with the many publications on this theme by Sjöblom, especially Sjöblom (1996, 2000).

⁵⁷Gantz (1981: 64).

⁵⁸O'Connor (2013: 233); similarly Miles (2011: 75).

first flew in through the skylight, then laid down his *énchennach* before uniting sexually with a woman, so at this stage he was presumably equipped with a man's body. Nemglan and his followers appeared to Conaire to be birds, and flew like birds, but after removing their *énchendcha* they could wield human weapons, evidently in human hands. The vital clue, I suggest, is in the item in O'Clery's *Glossary* (probably copied from an earlier gloss or glossary), explaining our word as *cochall én*.⁵⁹ Although the Latin parent word of *cochall* regularly refers to a hood, the attestations of the Irish word in *eDIL* overwhelmingly refer to the enveloping garment as a whole; and the word can also refer simply to the shell of an acorn or nut,⁶⁰ a sense found as early as the glosses in the Southampton Psalter.⁶¹ I suggest that it is this sense of *cochall* that is attested in the shapechanging narrative from *Acallam na Senórach* discussed above: the *cochaill chiarleabhra* that the werewolves lay down when they return to human form are the visible outer shapes that have made them look like wolves.⁶² This in turn finds a close echo in the transformation of the children of Lir back to human form at the end of *Oidheadh Chloinne Lir*: Laigrnéan the king of Connacht seizes the birds of the altar and *do chuaidh a ttlacht cochaill dhíobh*, 'their covering [consisting in] a *cochall* came away from them', so that they are transformed back into four aged humans.⁶³

So far, then, our revised assessment of the evidence is that an *énchennach* is something that endows one with the overall shape and appearance of a bird, including the ability to fly. When the *DIL* entry considers the remaining medieval attestations of *énchennach*, it says that the word seems to have been 'transferred' to mean 'wings, feathers, winged thing'. On further investigation, however, we will see that these attestations are in fact entirely consistent with the first group, with the proviso that the word becomes the *mot juste* for one specific item of 'bird-gear', the feathered guise of the Roman god Mercury when he flies through the world.

Probably the earliest example of this is in the eleventh-century poem on the Trojan War, beginning *Luid Iasón ina luíng lóir*,⁶⁴ whose wording is closely matched in the corresponding passage of the Book of Leinster version of *Togail Troí*.⁶⁵ In the traditional legend Aeetes king of Colchis says that he will let Jason have the Golden Fleece only if he yokes two monstrous bulls and uses them to sow the dragon's teeth; but in these Irish texts the king's demands are more elaborated, and include his acquiring the flying-gear of Mercury:

⁵⁹The translation 'comb of a cock' offered by the editors of the scholarly edition of O'Clery's *Glossary* (Müller and Miller 1879–83, at 1879/80: 412) is presumably no more than a guess.

⁶⁰*eDIL* s.v. *cochall* (b), last consulted 16 April 2020.

⁶¹Mac Néill (2012: 212.4).

⁶²For *cochall* in the context of shape-changing see also Ó Briain (2000: 156–71).

⁶³O'Curry (1863: 150–2).

⁶⁴Mac Eoin (1961).

⁶⁵To the best of my knowledge, the passage is not found in any of the other versions of *Togail Troí*.

Tabhrad claidheabh Olcāin āin,
 teascas íarann, cloch is cnāimh,
 'san aen-cheandach Mercūir mín
 imthigheas muir is mōr-thīr. (*Dán* §14, Mac Eoin 1961: 32)

'Let them fetch the sword of noble Vulcan which cuts iron, stone,
 and bone, and the *énchennach* of gentle Mercury which travels on
 sea and dry land.' (tr. Mac Eoin, adapted)

In the prose of the Book of Leinster version of *Togail Troí*, similarly, Aeetes asks for *encennach Mercūir*, *cumma inthéit muir 7 tír*,⁶⁶ and the phrasing of the passage as a whole suggests that the author of this text is drawing directly on the poem or its immediate source.⁶⁷ In a remarkable example of generic continuity, the image is reworked several centuries later in the late medieval text *Ranna an Aeir*,⁶⁸ an account of the mythology of the constellations, where the *enceannaidh Mercur* and the sword of Vulcan are reassigned to Perseus.⁶⁹

The relationship between this sub-meaning and its Latin antecedents can be seen in most detail in a passage of *Imtheachta Aeniasa*, the (probably eleventh-century) Irish prose rendering of Vergil's *Aeneid*.⁷⁰ In the Latin original, Vergil describes how Mercury binds around his feet the golden sandals (*talaria*) which carry him high over sea and land on wings (*sublimem alis*, *Aeneid* 4.240, similarly 252), and takes up the rod (*caduceus*) with which he draws souls to and from the Underworld and also rules the winds and travels across the clouds (4.242–44); he then flies down from Olympus and lands in the sea like a bird, *avi similis* (4.254). In the Irish this becomes the following:⁷¹

Dochuaid iarsin Mercur risin teachtaireacht sin, 7 ro gab a encheandaigh uime, 7 is cuma roimluaidhedh-se muir 7 tír, 7 gabaid a luirg n-encheandaighi ina laim .i. indar[a] cend di fri beoad 7 in cend ele fri marbad [...] (*Imtheachta Aeniasa* 765–8, Calder 1911: 48)

'Thereupon Mercury went with that message, and donned his bird gear, and indifferently he would traverse sea and land, and he took his wand in his hand, the one end of it to make alive, the other to kill...' (tr. Calder)

This thing that he 'donned', or more precisely put 'around himself' (*uime*), is naturally taken as some kind of garment, a garment that enables one to fly. The peculiar phrase that follows, *luirg n-encheandaighi* (767), repays examination: the second noun is presumably a defining genitive, thus giving '*énchennach*

⁶⁶LL p. 220b26–7, Stokes (1881: 7.258).

⁶⁷Mac Eoin (1961: 24–7), cf. Miles (2011: 74).

⁶⁸Anderson (1909). The text is tentatively dated to the sixteenth century.

⁶⁹Noted by Miles (2011: 75 n.); cf. Mac Eoin (1961: 25 n. 19).

⁷⁰Edition by Calder (1907); fundamental treatments by Poppe, most recently Poppe (2014).

⁷¹On the Irish rendering of this passage of Vergil see also Miles (2011: 75).

wand’ or ‘wand consisting of an *énchennach*’. The item in question is the *caduceus* of Mercury, which was always depicted as a stick with a pair of wings on the sides. Together, then, the two instances in this passage confirm that the essential meaning of the *énchennach* is that it makes one feathered or winged. Although the familiar image of Mercury in ancient and Renaissance art typically has him wearing a winged helmet, this is clearly not the image here: a point that can be further corroborated by the final member of the Mercury group of attestations. In *Togail na Tebe* (c. 1100?), starting from cues in the source text where Mercury is described as *impiger alis* ‘surging on his wings’ (Statius, *Thebaid* 1.292) and as binding his winged sandals to his ankles (1.304), before heading off in flight (*aliger* 2.1),⁷² the Irish author describes how Mercury first *rogob a oenchendach luim luaimnig lanalaind imi re himluad 7 re hetegail os talmain do*,⁷³ ‘put around him his smooth darting full-beautiful *énchennach* in order to hover and to fly above the earth’, and *then* put on his ornamented helmet (*cathbarr orecair ilbrechnaighthi*, 587). Here, clearly, the *énchennach* is distinct from the headgear.

In final corroboration of this we can adduce two later medieval examples — so far as I know, the only other attestations of the word in existence — which refer to things *other* than Mercury’s flying-gear. The first is in *Scél an Mínaduir* (?late twelfth century), where our word refers to the flying apparatus which Daedalus and Icarus make out of feathers so that they can fly away from captivity in Crete.⁷⁴ The second is in the remarkable text *Forbais Droma Damgaire*, probably thirteenth-century, about the war fought by the druid Mog Ruith to secure control of the lands around Fermoy.⁷⁵ Here Mog Ruith uses his magical arts to fly up in the air, and to enable him to do this he is given ‘the hide of a hornless brown bull and a *encennach alath brec cona foluamain ethaidi*, ‘his pied and dappled *énchennach* with its fluttering of a bird’.⁷⁶ Mog Ruith is, I suggest, following the example of his teacher Simon Magus (*Simon druí*),⁷⁷ whom he has invoked in a *retoiric* a little earlier in the narrative (*dogairiur Simon*, §113) and whose most notorious occult practice was the use of magical means to achieve flight.⁷⁸

CE(1)NN, ‘SKIN, OUTER COVERING’

If the examples above have been adequately explained, the meaning of *énchennach* is clear and unproblematic: it is a form or garment that envelops the

⁷²The episode of *Togail na Tebe* combines elements of both these passages, in which Statius describes two stages of the same episode of the action, separated by a long digression.

⁷³*Togail na Tebe* 586–7, Calder (1922: 36–7).

⁷⁴*Sgél in Mínaduir* 45–6, Hillers (1999: 136–9).

⁷⁵This passage is adduced by West (1986: 2.160–2).

⁷⁶*Forbais Droma Damgaire* §117, Sjoestedt (1926). The shorter texts about Mog Ruith are edited by Müller-Lissowski (1923).

⁷⁷O’Brien (1962: 279).

⁷⁸On Mog Ruith and his relationship to Simon Magus see O’Leary (2001), (2017); on the flight motif, O’Leary (2013: 1.49–52). I am grateful to John Carey for discussion of the passage cited here.

body, covered in feathers and associated with the magical or demonic power of flight. What, then, of the *-cenn-* element? One could, of course, guess that there was originally a meaningful ‘head’ element here, which was ‘bleached away’ when the compound was lexicalised; but I believe a stronger explanation is at hand.⁷⁹ Let us return to the details of the formation. One class of compounds in *-ach* is comprised of feminine *ā*-stem nouns, in each case indicating a collectivity or mass of the item named by the headword, as for example *cráebach* ‘mass of branches’, ‘branchwood’, *íascach* ‘an abundance of fish’.⁸⁰ If we analyse *énchennach* as an example of this pattern,⁸¹ a candidate for the headword presents itself in the word *ce(i)nn*, meaning *skin* or *outer covering*. Before the recent updating of *eDIL* this word had a shadowy history in the scholarship,⁸² and we must first review the scanty attestations.

In the St Gall Priscian manuscript (850–1 cē), in a list of nouns formed by suffixing *-tudo* to the stem of another noun, Priscian is explaining that *testudo* (literally ‘tortoise, tortoise-shell’, and itself glossed here above the line as *bestia tardigrada cum longo collo* ‘a slow-moving beast with a long neck’), is formed *a testa sive testu*, ‘from [the word] *testa* or *testu*’. This Latin word *testa* literally means ‘jug, shell, potsherd’; the key item for us is the gloss *hua cheinn* inserted above *a testa*.⁸³ Later on the same folio, *[tes]ta* is again glossed *ceinn* (52b26), here formally an accusative. The next example, also ninth-century, is

⁷⁹So far as I know, the principal argument of this article has been anticipated twice before. Stokes in the Vocabulary to his original edition of *TBDD* (1901: 418) gave for *énchennach* ‘birdskin [...] cf. Icel[andic] *fjadr-hamr* winged haunch’: this can now be understood in relation to the note in his earlier edition of *Togail Troí* (see below, n. 94), but the wording in the *TBDD* Vocabulary entry is obscure (haunch = thigh?) and does not actually mention the parallel in *Togail Troí*. As such, ‘birdskin’ must have looked like a contextual gloss, which presumably explains why Knott or others did not take it up in any subsequent publications. Separately, some eight years later Anderson in his edition of *Ranna an Aeir* (1909: 408 n. 1) cited Kuno Meyer — apparently a personal communication, as no reference is given — for the view that our word is built on *ceinn* ‘skin’. As the entry for that word in Meyer’s *Contributions* of 1906 was not carried forward into future dictionaries (see below), the opportunity to build on this was lost.

⁸⁰For numerous examples of collectives formed in this way see Russell (1990: 93–5).

⁸¹Note, for example that the accusative *énchendaich* at *TBDD* 92 (see above) implies that the noun is an *ā*-stem.

⁸²Meyer listed *ceinn* ‘skin’ in his *Contributions* (1906: 331), giving only the Book of Armagh example. Greene argued in opposition (1958: 45) that *cenni* ‘scales’ there is plural of *cenne*, a singulative derived from an *o*-stem noun *cenn* ‘skin’. For the existence of *cenn* ‘skin’, he relied on the indirect evidence of the Brythonic cognates and the modern Scottish Gaelic compounds (discussed later in the present article). In his 1975 article, he turned to the MS St Gall 904 attestation and proposed that what was originally an *o*-stem **cenn* has here been shifted from its original declensional class to become a feminine *ā*-stem, as a way of distinguishing it from the homonymous *o*-stem *cenn* ‘head’. As Greene explains (1975), the C volume of the printed *DIL* simply gave the lemma ‘*ceinn*, *cenni*’ with no English translations, citing Greene (1958) for the explanation that ‘this is a singulative from 1 *cenn*’; but this latter word does not appear in its place, the only *cenn* entry being the *o*-stem ‘head’, which is not relevant. Vendryes et al. (1987: s.v. *ceinn*) give a précis of Greene’s two articles, but do not add to the discussion; nor does Matasović (2009: 201 s.v. **kenno*). A careful reassessment is provided by Toner et al. (2013, s.v.), and *eDIL* now (since 2018) has an entry for 2 *cenn* ‘skin’, adding the new *cenn for sallaib* example and following Greene (1975) by also listing the singulative *cenne* as a separate lexical item.

⁸³Bauer-Hofman-Moran in their online database (www.stgallpriscian.ie, last consulted 20 April 2020) take a line consistent with that followed here, identifying the Irish word as 2 *cenn* ‘skin’ and translating ‘from a covering’. Hofman’s note, however, is ambivalent: he offers the translation

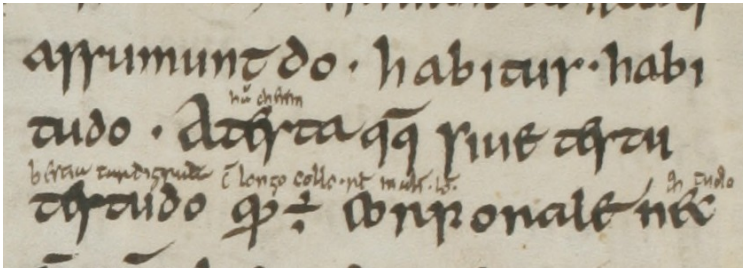


Fig. 1: MS St Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek 904, p. 52b, detail.
Image courtesy of Stiftsbibliothek St Gallen and the e-codices project.

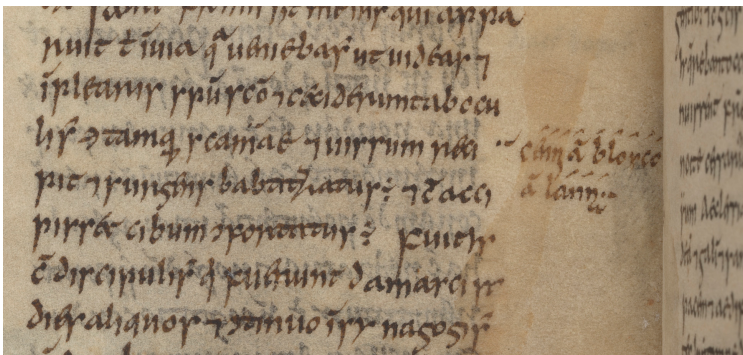


Fig. 2: MS Trinity College Dublin 52 (Book of Armagh), fol. 177vb, detail.
Image courtesy of the Library of Trinity College Dublin.

in the Book of Armagh's glossed copy of the Acts of the Apostles, the passage recounting how the blinded Saul recovered his sight and 'the scales fell from his eyes', *ceciderunt ab oculis eius tamquam scamae ut vissum recipit* (Acts 9.18).

Here *scamae* (for standard Latin *squamae*, 'scales') is glossed *cenni aut bloscc aut lanna*. *Bloscc* represents standard *bláesc*, a covering or integument; *lanna* is again 'plates, scales'.⁸⁴ Here, then, we have nominative plural *cenni*. That these glosses bear witness to a genuine lexical configuration is neatly corroborated by an entry in a late medieval collection of glossed Latin words, where we find Latin *testa* itself explained as Irish *blaesc*.⁸⁵ Recent scholarship has added a third attestation, in an eleventh-century satirical poem:

Gilla Cellaig, cenn for sallaib,
seilche co ndí bennaib,
finna ar gúaire cullaig allaid
challaig Gilla Cellaig. (McLaughlin 2008: 160)

⁸⁴ 'from a head', but points out in his note that, although *testa* became the source of French *tête* 'head', it here carries its older meaning 'jug, shell' (1996: 2.256).

⁸⁴ See *Thes* 1.497.1.

⁸⁵ Stokes 1860: 8, at line 179.

‘Gilla Cellaig, a scum on flitches of bacon,
a snail with two horns;
a hair on the bristles of a fat (?) wild boar
is Gilla Cellaig.’ (tr. McLaughlin)

McLaughlin identifies *cenn* here⁸⁶ as another instance of our word, extended in sense from ‘skin, surface’ to ‘scum’, perhaps ‘mould’.⁸⁷ The image resonates with that of the ‘hair on bristles’ later in the same quatrain.

Allowing for trivial orthographic variation in the manuscripts, we may posit either an *ā*-stem *cenn*, with acc./dat. *ceinn*, or an *i*-stem *ceinn*, with the meaning ‘skin, surface, covering’; it remains possible that both exist as separate lexemes, with the *i*-stem distinguished as ‘plate, layer, scale’.⁸⁸ The pattern of attestations is certainly curious: the fact that the word is found twice within explanatory glosses suggests that it was a relatively familiar one when the manuscripts in question were annotated, yet subsequently it virtually disappears from attested medieval Irish. However, there is evidence for its survival in modern Scottish Gaelic, where it may be detected in such compounds as *boicionn* ‘goatskin’ and *laicionn* ‘calfskin’.⁸⁹

Further, as pointed out by Greene, close cognates are abundantly attested in other Celtic languages, most prominently Welsh *cen* ‘skin, hide, peel, scales of fish, scurf’.⁹⁰ The semantic match with the Old Irish materials is close: it is particularly striking that John Davies’ *Dictionnarium Duplex* of 1632 equates the word with Latin *squama*, reminiscent of the Book of Armagh attestation discussed above. Another of the sub-senses given in *GPC Online*, *cen diod fethedig* ‘mouldiness on the surface of beer’, recalls the *cenn for sallaib* example of the Irish word, and there are also compounds with words for animal types: *hyddgen* ‘deerskin’, *marchgen* ‘horsehide’.⁹¹ Because the Welsh word is probably an original *o*-stem, the formal match with the Irish materials is not exact, but there can be no reasonable doubt that the Irish word or words reach back to an Insular/Common Celtic ancestor, and that one should expect to find *cenn*- compounded with words for particular types of creature.

From positing **énchenn* ‘birdskin’ it is only a short step to interpreting *énchennach* as a derivative of that word. It signals the idea that the Otherworld

⁸⁶And repeated at line 6, *nocho cen for sallaib*.

⁸⁷*Celtica*’s anonymous referee suggests that the posited extension to ‘scum’ or ‘mould’ is unnecessary and that the meaning could simply be ‘skin’. In context, however, an insulting meaning seems to be required, and the image of putrefaction proposed by McLaughlin is appropriate for this. Compare, for example, the description of disgustingly poor food at *Erchoitmed Ingine Gulidi* §6 (Meyer 1894: 66–7).

⁸⁸This last proposal is not fully pursued in the present article, as the second element of the proposed compound *én-chenn*- would necessarily be formed from the base word. The Book of Armagh example is clearly related to the others collected here, whether or not it is a separate singulative formation. The new *eDIL* entry follows Greene (1958) in accepting the singulative as a lexeme in its own right.

⁸⁹These words are adduced by Greene (1958: 45). See now *Corpas na Gàidhlic* svv. (www.dasg.ac.uk/corpus/, last consulted 22 April 2020).

⁹⁰See *GPC online* s.v. *cen* (last consulted 20 April 2020).

⁹¹For these and other Brythonic cognates see Jackson (1950, 76–7); Greene (1958: 45), Greene (1975: 176).

being — god, sorcerer, demon — is enveloped in the outer form or ‘skin’ of the creature whose form he has taken. The *énchennach* of Conaire’s Otherworldly father is precisely equivalent to the grey *cochall* of the werewolf, and conceals his true identity in just the same way. It should be noted that although this noun **énchenn* is not directly attested, there is a strong possibility that it survives in a proper name. In *Tochmarc Emire* Cú Chulainn, on leaving the fort of the exotic warrior-teacher Scáthach, is confronted by a hostile Otherworldly hag (*sentonn*) called *Eis[si] Énchinne*;⁹² the second part of the name seems to represent a genitive, as it were ‘Eissi the Birdskinned’, and perhaps refers to a lost narrative in which she took bird-form.⁹³

PARALLELS IN OLD NORSE AND OLD ENGLISH

Although the conception scene in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* is the best-known example of the word *énchennach*, it is seen more often as a technical term for the flying-gear of the Roman god Mercury. This is doubly strange because in the original Latin texts (most prominently the passage of *Aeneid* 4 discussed above) the god flies by means of *talaria*, usually translated ‘sandals’. How have the winged sandals of the Classical sources become the all-over feathered body that we propose here? The issue is compounded by a remarkable equivalence in the Germanic languages, which was originally noted by Stokes⁹⁴ and has been discussed recently by Miles and O’Connor.⁹⁵ This word takes in Norse the form *fjaðrhamr*, in Old English *feðerhoma* (var. *feðerhama*) ‘feather-body’, ‘bird-shape’. The second element is the same as *-hamr* ‘covering, outer form, body’, noted at the start of this article in connection with wolf-transformations. Norse *fjaðrhamr* appears in the Eddic poem *Þrymskviða*, dated as early as the tenth century, where Loki borrows this thing from Freyja (here perhaps seen as close to a valkyrie) so that he can fly to the land of the giants;⁹⁶ being feathered, it makes a roaring or rustling noise (*dunði*, 5.2, 9.2) as he flies. Much later, in *Alexanders saga* (c. 1260) it reappears naming the flying-apparatus of a god, Sleep (*Somnus*) in one case and Betrayal (*Proditio*) in the other, responding

⁹²I am grateful to Ruairí Ó hUiginn for bringing this name to my attention.

⁹³Van Hamel in his edition makes potentially misleading choices here. He prints *Éis Énchend* for the nominative of the name (*Tochmarc Emire* §77, Van Hamel 1933: 56) but this is not the reading of the principal manuscripts on which his edition is based, all of which have *-chinne* or similar (see the readings from RIA MS D iv 2 (1223) and BL Harleian MS B 5280 in Van Hamel’s apparatus; similarly the spelling is *Essi Enchinne* at MS Dublin, RIA MS 23 N 10 (967), p. 25.30). Van Hamel seems to have replaced the testimony of these manuscripts with the reading in *-chend* found at Bodleian MS Rawlinson B 512, fol. 118rb18, presumably on the assumption that the second element is to be taken as *o*-stem *cenn* ‘head’. Against this, however, it should be noted that the name also appears in an earlier passage in the genitive (*Tochmarc Emire* §75) and here all the manuscript witnesses, including Rawlinson B 512 (fol. 118ra8), have the ending *-chinde*, *-chende* or similar, precluding the possibility of an *o*-stem. The pattern is similar when the name reappears in the later version of the tale of Cú Chulainn’s stay with Sgáthach, *Foghlaím Con Culainn* §§32, 53–6 (Stokes 1908: 127–8, 136–9).

⁹⁴Stokes (1881: iv), referring to a correspondence with Sophus Bugge.

⁹⁵Miles (2011: 75–6), O’Connor (2013: 233).

⁹⁶*Þrymskviða* 3.6, 5.2, 9.2, Bugge (1867: 124–5); translation, Orchard (2011: 96–7).

each time to a cue in the Latin source text saying that the god in question is feathered.⁹⁷ Twice elsewhere in pseudo-historical sagas it refers to flying-gear made by human wonder-workers.⁹⁸ The distribution — between indigenous Otherworld narratives in which a pagan divinity uses the feather-garment to fly, learned Classicising narratives of pagan flying deities, and accounts of human feats of flight — compares closely with what we observed for *énchennach*. The word *hamr* in turn has a close cognate within Old Norse in the form of *hams* ‘shell of fruit, (sloughed) skin of snake’, which heightens the sense of a semantic match with *énchennach*, *cochall* and the other Irish and Welsh words discussed above.⁹⁹

However, the clinching Germanic evidence is in the attestations of this word’s Old English cousin. (Given the respective manuscript dates, it is quite possible that an originally Old English word was borrowed into Norse,¹⁰⁰ or equally we may be looking at independent developments identical in spirit.) One of the very earliest surviving examples of Anglo-Saxon learning is the fragmentary collection of Servian commentary on Vergil known as the Spangenberg Bifolium, probably written in England in the early eighth century and then brought to Fulda, a monastery with continuing Anglo-Saxon links since its foundation.¹⁰¹ Here, in one of several Old English annotations that have been inserted into the manuscript, the Vergilian word *talaria* for the winged sandals of Mercury is glossed above the line with the words *sāx. fether haman*.¹⁰² Thus the Old-English-speaking exegete of Vergil reaches out to — or creates — a vernacular equivalent meaning ‘feather-body’, ‘feather-covering’.

The curiosity here is that in both Irish and Germanic the same shift has taken place so that the original reference to ‘winged sandals’¹⁰³ has been lost and replaced by the image of an all-body covering. Direct cross-influence between the learned communities of the two languages is a distinct possibility

⁹⁷The *fjaðrhamr* of the sleep-god Somnus (Finnur Jónsson (1925: 70.23) is translated from the image of the god’s *madidas pennas* ‘damp feathers’ in the source text, Walter of Châtillon’s Latin poem *Alexandreis* (*Alexandreis* 4.442, Colker 1978: 111); that of Proditio (Finnur Jónsson 1925: 148.25) responds to Walter’s *pennis ... venenatis* ‘poisoned feathers’ (*Alexandreis* 10.164–5, Colker 1978: 259).

⁹⁸*Þiðreks saga* §131, Bertelsen (1905–11: 126.17); *Breta saga* §12, Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson (1892–6: 248).

⁹⁹See De Vries (1962: 208), svv. I am grateful to Mikael Males for pointing out this word *hams* to me.

¹⁰⁰Suggested by Ruggerini (2006).

¹⁰¹MS Marburg, Hessisches Staatsarchiv 319 Pfarrei Spangenberg, Hr Nr. 1. The text, edited by Marshall (2000), consists of a selection of (mostly lexical) notes to portions of the *Aeneid*, which are believed to come from a text that originally covered the entire poem. This was not a copy of the vulgate Servius but a distinct though related collection, either the extended version known as Servius Auctus (Herren 1998: 91; Gneuss 2003: 304; O’Sullivan 2016: 81–2) or the lost commentary by Aelius Donatus on which Servius Auctus itself also draws (thus Stok 2019).

¹⁰²Marshall (2000: 198, at fol. 1r29).

¹⁰³For *talaria* in Latin as sandals, see Isidore, *Etymologies* 19.34.7; the mythographers explain that Mercury’s sandals are winged and enable him to fly (Servius Auctus on *Aeneid* 1.300, vulgate Servius on *Aeneid* 4.239, see Thilo and Hagen (1881–1902: 1.111, 1.507); similarly *pennatis talaribus calciatus* ‘shod with feathered *talaria*’, Second Vatican Mythographer 54.9 (Kulcsár 1987: 139)).

here. Alternatively, however, we may be dealing more with parallel responses to the same stimuli in Latin learning. The shift from winged sandals to winged body might (I suggest) have been encouraged independently in both groups by Isidore's statement that Mercury *fingitur habere pennas* (*Etymologies* 8.11.46), 'he is depicted as having feathers', as if all over his body, and also (more decisively) by the fact that the adjective *talaris* need not necessarily refer to sandals at all. *Talaris* simply means 'of the heel[s]', and as an adjective or noun it can refer to a full-length garment, as in Isidore and the Late Antique glossaries:

Talare: pecturale vel umerale quae usque ad pedes est. (*Liber Glossarum*, Goetz 1888–1923: 5.247.21)

'*Talare*: A garment of the breast and shoulders that goes all the way down to the feet.'

Talaris tunica dicta eo quod ad talos usque descendat et ad pedes defluat. (Isidore, *Etymologies* 19.22.7)¹⁰⁴

'The *talaris* tunic is so called because it goes all the way to the heels (*tali*) and flows down to the feet.'

Isidore and Vergil were the staple fare of both Norse and Irish *literati*, and could have influenced both in similar ways.

The second Old English attestation is from perhaps 350 years later than the Spangenberg bifolium. This is in the poem *Solomon and Saturn*, describing the demons against whom the Lord's Prayer works its power,

[...] næfre hie ðæs syllice
bleoum bregdað, æfter bancofan
feðerhoman onfoð. (*Solomon and Saturn I* 149–51, Anlezark
2009: 78–9)

'[...] [not] even if they change their hues ever so strangely, draw a feather-cloak over their bodies.' (tr. Anlezark)

Here again the word refers to the adoption by the supernatural being of the overall shape of a bird. Crucially, however, this is not an ancient mythological figure but a contemporary enemy, a demon and agent of the Devil.¹⁰⁵ This, I suggest, provides a useful tool for thinking back to the way Irish *énchennach* too was used for the form taken by the mysterious father of Conaire as well as by the gods of Classical pagan fable. The assumption is that the supernatural beings of the Otherworld are in some sense equated with the demons, the fallen angels, or the wonder-workers of old who used the demons' powers to give themselves the same magical arts, among which the pagan sorcerer's trick *par excellence* is that of shape-changing.¹⁰⁶ Since the Fall of the Rebel Angels

¹⁰⁴See also Servius Auctus on *Aeneid* 9.613 (Thilo and Hagen 1881–1902: 2.362–3).

¹⁰⁵Cf. Christie (2011).

¹⁰⁶For this principle in the Irish materials, focussing on the idea that the Tuatha Dé are or may be seen as fallen angels, see Williams (2016: 78–83), with Carey (1999: 1–38), Borsje (2009). For overviews of the Germanic evidence, principally Norse, see e.g. Hobson (2017), Clunies Ross (2018).

was universal, potentially affecting every language and people, it makes perfect sense from the viewpoint of the medieval scholar-authors that the forms taken by these beings should be equivalent in Latin, Germanic, and Celtic languages and tale traditions. The data that we have gathered could be used to argue for direct cross-influence from Irish to English or other Germanic-language scholar-authors, but the alternative possibility remains open: that parallel responses to typologically similar motifs in their respective cultural inheritances led them to map Mercury's *talaria* onto the imagery of vernacular Otherworld narrative in such similar ways. The lore and language of demonology is by nature especially responsive to cross-language equivalences of the kind explored in this article.

CONCLUSION: CONTINUITY IN MODERN IRISH?

It is natural to conclude that the disappearance of *ce(i)nn* 'skin' as an independent lexeme will have left the compound ripe to be reinterpreted as 'bird-headed' or similar, with its original meaning entirely forgotten. However, the evidence from one noted oral storyteller of the early twentieth century suggests at least a vestigial survival into our own age. The tale *Eochair mac rí in Éirinn*, recorded from Éamon a Búrc in south Conamara in 1938, includes an episode in which the hero is instructed how to get power over the daughters of the king of the distant land of Sorcha (Syria?), who have travelled from their homeland in the shape of swans to swim in a lake in Spain:

Agus is é an áit a dtiocfaidh siad i gconáí nuair a thiocfas siad ina n-ealúcháí don Spáinn as Tír na Sorchaí, tiocfaidh chuile bhean acu agus caithfidh sí a ceannchochall féin isteach ar an mbinse. Agus is í an bhean is mó a bhfuil draíocht aici — is í an t-ainm atá uirthi All — is í an chéad bhean a thiocfas í agus a chaithfeas a ceannchochall isteach. Agus beidh sí trí ceathrúna uaire roimh na mná eile fréna chéile, ag snámh. Agus nuair a gheobhfas tú an ceannchochall, cuir idir do chraiceann agus do léine í, agus ar a bhfaca tú riamh ná a bhfeicfidh tú go brách ná scar leis an gceannchochall go dtuga sí gealltanais duit go dtabharfaidh sí go Tír na Sorchaí thú féin. (Bourke 1982: 42–4)

'And it is the place they will come to always when they come as swans to Spain from the Land of Syria, each woman of them will come and will cast her own *ceannchochall* on the bench. And it is the woman who has most magic — the name she bears is All — who will be the first to come and cast her *ceannchochall* in. And she will be three-quarters of an hour before the other women all in all, swimming. And when you get her *ceannchochall*, put it between your skin and your shirt, and for all you ever saw or will see hereafter, do not part with the *ceannchochall* until she gives you a promise that she will bring you herself to the Land of Syria.' (tr. K. O'Nolan at Bourke (1982: 43–5), adapted)

He does as instructed with All and her sisters; with the *ceannchochall* removed each swan becomes a (human) woman, and when they are returned they can again fly in swan-form.

Although Kevin O’Nolan in the published edition gives the translation ‘head-cloak’, the logic of the text is clearly that the garment covers the whole body and effects a full transformation into the shape of a swan. Given that the word *cochall* is also central to the vocabulary of shape-changing in the earlier texts discussed above, it seems certain that the first element of this compound was originally not *ceann* ‘head’ but *ce(i)nn* ‘skin’. It is impossible at this distance to guess what Éamon a Búrc himself might have taken the word’s exact meaning to be, and the first element has of course become indistinguishable from *ceann* ‘head’; but it seems likely that in the ultimate sources of this storyteller’s repertoire it held a meaning very close to what we saw in medieval Irish *énchennach*.

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