

A description of Cú Chulainn's chariot, one of the three principal chariots in story-telling, on the Foray of Cúailnge:

‘How does Cú Chulainn look to you?’ said Fer Diad to his charioteer. ‘I see,’ he answered, ‘a beautiful roomy chariot of white crystal, with solid gold yoke, with great sides of copper, with shafts of bronze, with lungeta of white gold, with framework of narrow compact opening and fair awning, a framework in which heroic feats are displayed and which would hold seven sets of weapons fit for princes. Beautiful is the seat for its lord which that chariot contains, the chariot of Cú Chulainn which travels with the swiftness of a swallow or a great deer hastening across a plain on high ground, such is the speed and swiftness with which they drive for it is towards us they travel. That chariot is drawn by two horses with small round heads, round-eyed, prick-eared, broad-hoofed, redchested, steady, splendid, easily harnessed ... One of these horses is strong, swift-jumping, battlesome, with great hoofs and skittish ... The other horse has curling mane, narrow slender feet, small heels, ... The chariot has two dark black wheels and there is a chariotpole of bronze with enamel of beautiful colour. There are two ornamented golden bridles.’

‘In the chief place in that chariot is a man with long curling hair. He wears a dark purple mantle and in his hand he grasps a broadheaded spear, bloodstained, fiery, flaming. It seems as if he has three heads of hair, to wit, dark hair next to the skin of his head, blood-red hair in the middle and the third head of hair covering him like a crown of gold. Beautifully is that hair arranged, with three coils flowing down over his shoulders. Like golden thread whose colour has been hammered out on an anvil or like the yellow of bees in the sunshine of a summer day seems to me the gleam of each separate hair. Seven toes on each of his feet; seven fingers on each of his hands.

A warrior's grasp in each of his hands (gloss)

. In his eyes the blazing of a huge fire. His horses' hoofs maintain a steady pace.’

‘In front of him is a charioteer fully worthy of his master. He has curling jet-black hair, a great head of hair. He wears a fullskirted hooded cape with an opening at his elbows and a light-grey mantle.

In his hand he holds a beautiful golden horsewhip

In his hand a goad of white silver (alternative reading incorporated in text)
with which he goads the horses along whatever road the valorous warrior

He is his friend (gloss, incorporated in text)

in the chariot travels...' And Fer Diad said to his charioteer: 'Arise, lad,' said Fer Diad. 'Too highly do you extol that man. Prepare the weapons for our encounter with him at the ford.' 'If I were to turn my face in the direction to which my back is now turned, I think that the shafts of the chariot would pierce the nape of my neck.' 'O lad,' said Fer Diad, 'too highly do you extol Cú Chulainn, for he has not given you a reward for your praise.' And as he described him, he said

1. It is time now for help for this is no deed of friendship (?). Be silent. Do not praise him for he is no overhanging doom. If you see the hero of Cúailnge with his proud feats, then he shall be dealt with by us. Since it is for reward, he shall soon be destroyed.
2. If I see the hero of Cúailnge with his proud feats, he does not flee from us but towards us he comes. Though skilful, he is not grudging. For his excellence we praise him. He runs and not slowly but like the swift thunderbolt.
3. So greatly have you praised him that it is almost ground for a quarrel. Why have you chosen him (for praise) since he came forth from his dwelling? Now they are challenging him and attacking him, and only cowardly churls come to attack him.

Not long afterwards they met in the middle of the ford, and Fer Diad said to Cú Chulainn 'Where do you come from, Cúa?'

For Cúa is the word for squinting in old Irish and Cú Chulainn had seven pupils in his royal eyes, two of which were asquint. But this was more an adornment than a disfigurement to Cú Chulainn, and if he had had a greater bodily blemish, Fer Diad would undoubtedly have taunted him with that. And as Fer Diad proclaimed this, he made a lay and Cú Chulainn made answer until the lay was ended.

1. Whence do you come, O Cúa, to fight with fresh strength? Your flesh will be blood-red above the steam of your horses. Woe to him who comes as you do, for it will be as vain as the kindling of a fire with one stick of firewood. You will be in need of healing if you reach your home again.
2. I have come, a wild boar of troops and herds, before warriors, before battalions, before hundreds, to thrust you beneath the waters of the pool. In anger against you and to prove you in a many-sided encounter, so that harm may come to you as you defend your life.
3. How shall we meet? Shall we groan over corpses as we meet at the ford? Shall it be with strong spear-points or with hard swords that you will be slain before your hosts if your time has come?
4. Before sunset, before nightfall, if you are in straits ... When you meet with Boirche, the battle will be bloody. The Ulstermen are calling you. They have taken you unawares(?) Evil

will be the sight for them. They will be utterly defeated.

5. You have come to the gap of danger. The end of your life is at hand. Sharp weapons will be wielded on you. It will be no gentle purpose. A great champion will slay (you). Two shall meet in conflict. You shall not be the leader of even three men from now until doomsday.
6. When we were with Scáthach, by dint of our wonted valour we would fare forth together and traverse every land. You were my loved comrade, my kith and kin. Never found I one dearer to me. Sad will be your death.
7. Leave off your warning. You are the most boastful man on earth. You shall have neither reward nor remission for you are no outstanding hero. Well I know that you are but a nervous lad, you with the heart of a fluttering bird, without valour, without vigour.
8. Too much do you neglect your honour that we may not do battle, but before the cock crows your head will be impaled on a spit. O Cú Chulainn of Cúailnge, frenzy and madness have seized you. All evil shall come to you from us, for yours is the guilt.

Then Cú Chulainn asked his charioteer to urge him on when he was overcome and to praise him when he was victorious fighting against his opponent. So his charioteer said to him 'Your opponent goes over you as a tail goes over a cat. He belabours you as flag-heads(?) are beaten in a pond. He chastises you as a fond woman chastises her son.' Then they betook themselves to the 'ford-feat,' and did all that Scáthach had taught both of them. They performed wonderful feats. After that Cú Chulainn leapt on to Fer Diad's shield, and Fer Diad cast him off three times into the ford, so that the charioteer kept on inciting him once more. Cú Chulainn swelled and grew big as a bladder does when inflated. His size increased so that he was bigger than Fer Diad.

'Look out for the gaí bulga!' cried the charioteer and cast it to him downstream. Cú Chulainn caught it between his toes and cast it at Fer Diad into his anus. It was as a single barb it entered but it became twenty-four (in Fer Diad's body). Thereupon Fer Diad lowered his shield. Cú Chulainn struck him with the spear above the shield, and it broke his ribs and pierced Fer Diad's heart.

1. Strong is the spear-shaft cast by your right hand. My ribs like spoils are broken; my heart is gore. Well did I fight, but I have fallen, O Cú!
2. Alas, O noble warrior! O brave Fer Diad! O strong and beautiful smiter, your arm was victorious.
3. Our friendship was fair, O delight of my eyes! Your shield had a golden rim. Your sword was beautiful.
4. Your ring of white silver on your noble hand. Your chess-set of great worth. Your cheeks were rosy and beautiful.
5. Your curling yellow hair was thick—a fair jewel. Your girdle, supple and ornamented, you wore around your side.
6. Alas! my loved one, that you should fall at the hand of Cú Chulainn! Your shield which you wore against force afforded you no protection.
7. Our fight ... our sorrow, the din of our battle. Fine was the great champion. Every army was defeated and trampled underfoot. Alas! O noble warrior, Fer Diad!

1. All was play and pleasure until I met with Fer Diad in the ford. Alas for the noble champion laid low there at the ford.
2. All was play and sport until I met with Fer Diad at the ford. I thought that beloved Fer Diad would live after me for ever.

While the enemy hosts were going south from Áth Fhit Diad, Cú Chulainn lay there wounded until Senoll Úathach came to him ahead of the others and Senoll was there with the two Meic Fhice. They brought Cú Chulainn back to the streams of Conaille Muirthemne to heal and bathe his wounds therein. These are the names of those rivers: Sás, Buan Bithshlán, Finnglas, Gleóir, Bedg, Tادg, Talaméd, Rind, Bir, Breinide, Cumang, Cellend, Gaenemain, Dichu, Muach, Miliuc, Den, Delt, Dubglaise. While Cú Chulainn went to bathe in those rivers, the army went south past him and made their encampment at Imorach Smiromrach. Mac Roth left the army and went north to watch out for the men of Ulster, and he came to Slíab Fúait to find out if he might see anyone pursuing them. He told them that he saw only one chariot.

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