

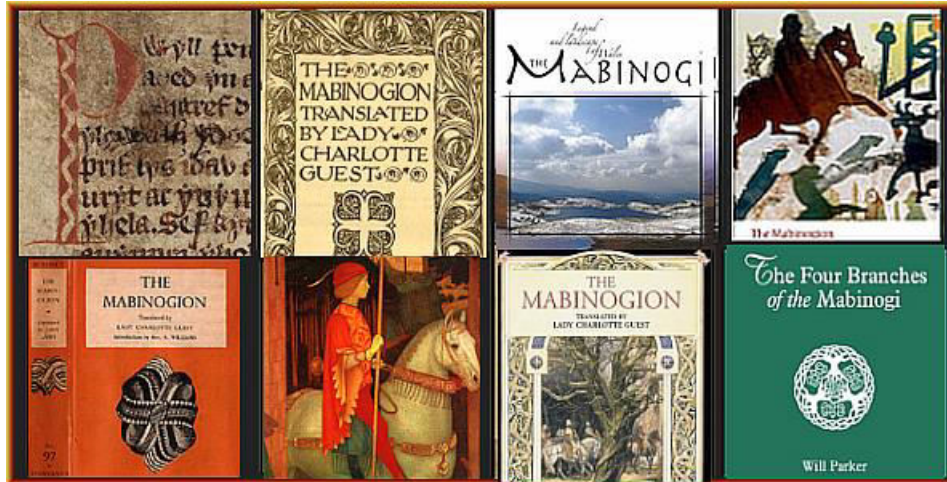
A MABINOGI BRIEFING

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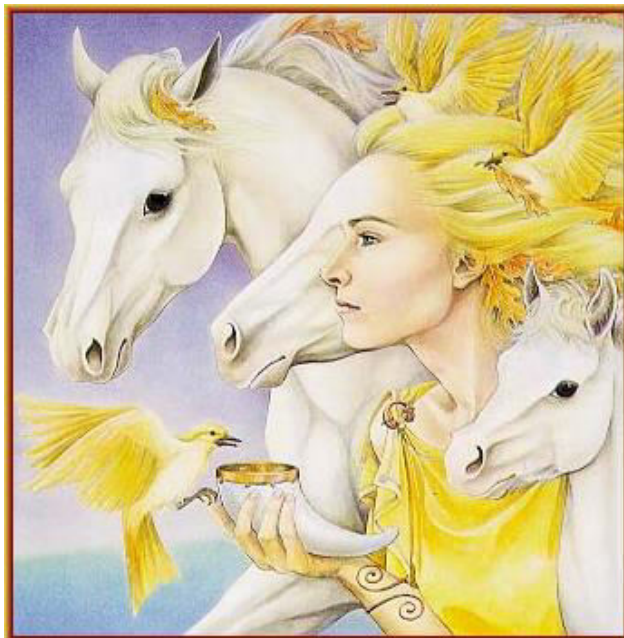
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This is a brief but informative Mabinogi outline first prepared for a MEMO discussion group 19/02/2015, where I shared my personal research strategy of Rhiannon as 'tour guide' and introduced my website..



Llyfr Gwyn MS and book covers: composition by Shan Morgain.



LEFT 'Rhiannon' Hrana janto, 1992.



RIGHT. 'Regeneration' Jonathon Earl Bowser 1991.

For searchable indexes, bibliography and articles see www.mabinogistudy.com



'Pool of Annwfn' John Davies 2011. (Header of website)

The Mabinogi are the oldest prose stories in Britain: a coherent, unified work, in four parts.

The tales are deceptively simple, so children can enjoy them, but they have hidden complexities. They tell of queens and kings, heroes and villains, politics, love, magicians and war. Strikingly secular, they focus on the elite class of Welsh nobility, in a time of legend when Britain was one land ruled from London.

'The Mabinogion' is a larger collection of 11 tales* which includes the Mabinogi.

See 'The Mabinogion' notes bottom right of this page.

c.1100 The Mabinogi quartet of tales very likely compiled as a single work, coordinated stories from the oral tradition.

The tales were composed in Middle Welsh.

c.1100 Mabinogi authorship.

We have little clear information. Speculation ranges from clerics at an abbey like Strata Florida near Ceredigion, to a commission by the Lord Rhys, to a royal lady such as Gwenllïan.



MS. first letter 'Pwyll.'

13th & 14thC manuscripts

survived to give us these first British prose tales.

c. 1250 **Peniarth 6** is fragmentary.

Conserved National Library of Wales.

c.1300-25 **Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch, White Book.**

Scribed probably near Ceredigion.

Conserved National Library of Wales since 1907.

1375-1425 **Llyfr Coch of Hergest, Red Book.**

Scribed near Swansea for Hopcyn ap Thomas fab Einon. Conserved Bodleian, Oxford since 1707.

Both the two main MSS. are named after the colour of their covers. They are each like a small library with a lot of other varied material: early poetry, genealogies, chronicles, religion, medicine, farming and almanacs.

1795 William Pughe began to publish the tales in modern print format in his journal.

He was the leading scholar of the 18-19thC Welsh Renaissance generated by the London Welsh. Sadly he died in 1835 before he could publish the complete set of tales he had by then prepared.

1838 - 1845 Charlotte Guest published the complete set, bilingually, in 'The Mabinogion' series of 7 vols.; published both Wales and London.

(The Mabinogi were in the 1841 and 1845 vols.)

Guest was a Victorian English aristocrat who married an immensely wealthy Welsh ironmaster. Her money, social influence, ruthless ambition, and entrepreneurial skill, won the Welsh tales respect in European literature. Guest editions continue to be popular today.

* **The title 'The Mabinogion'** used since the 18thC

Welsh scholars, became established as a modern convenience to name a collection of 11 or 12 tales.

But the name is a linguistic mistake, found just once as 'mabynnogion' in the surviving mediaeval MSS. It was used as the plural of 'mabinogi' which is already a plural word. The stories have almost no connection to each other except being tales in the Middle Welsh MSS. The list of tales was largely Guest's selection.

~ The Four Branches of the Mabinogi.

~ Two Welsh 'native tales'

 ' Culhwch ac Olwen' a magical adventure quest;

 'Lludd and Llefelys.' a quasi- historical legend.

~ Three Romances in Anglo-Norman style.

~ Two unrelated stories with Dream sequences.

PEDEIR CAINC ~ THE FOUR BRANCHES OF THE MABINOGLI.

FIRST BRANCH

Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed reclaims his honour by agreeing to a strange contract. He shapechanges with **Arawn, King of Annwfn** (the Underworld) in order to fight a duel in Arawn's place. He stays in Annwfn a whole year, while Arawn rules in Dyfed. **Pwyll** meets the marvellous **Rhiannon** on her great magical **horse**. She sharply plots with him to confound her unwanted suitor, and marries Pwyll instead. Their **baby son** disappears. Rhiannon is accused of infanticide; she elects to perform years of penance. Far away in Gwent a baby is rescued by the good man **Teyrnion**, who restores him to the House of Dyfed. The boy is named **Pryderi**.

SECOND BRANCH

Britain - Ireland genocidal war.

It begins with a marriage alliance but **Branwen** the bride, once in **Ireland**, becomes an abused wife. She suffers backlash due to her brother **Efnysien's** pride and aggression. He had mutilated her husband's valuable horses. The **giant British king Bendigeidfran** avenges his sister but everyone dies except a tiny handful of survivors. The story features an eerie **Cauldron** which revives the dead. **Pryderi** is a named Survivor on a long, trancelike journey taking Bendigeidfran's decapitated, talking head to London.

THIRD BRANCH Pryderi brings his great friend **Manawydan** home to **Dyfed**, arranging his marriage to **Rhiannon** his mother. The three, together with Pryderi's wife, become close friends. A magical **Devastation of the land of Dyfed**, forces them to live by **hunting**. They also try to live as **craftworkers** in faraway towns. Pryderi, then Rhiannon following him, are entrapped by enchantment. Through complicated negotiations with a vengeful **magician**, involving a pregnant mouse, Manawydan as **farmer** achieves their freedom.

FOURTH BRANCH Pryderi's death by treachery, and the new hero **Lleu**.

Gwydion of **Gwynedd** fomented war with **Dyfed**. He tricks and kills **Pryderi**. It is all so as to rape the virgin **Goewin**. His uncle King **Math** punishes him with shapechanging. Gwydion's sister **Arianrhod** is exposed as a false virgin. She publicly births a 'little thing' which Gwydion fosters. Arianrhod decrees the child may have no name, no arms nor a true wife. Gwydion tricks her, and the boy is named **Lleu**. Gwydion and Math construct a synthetic wife made of flowers. But **Blodeuedd** 'flower-face' takes a lover, and they murder her lord **Lleu**. The tale ends with Gwydion's magical quest for **Lleu's** renewal, and vengeance. He becomes king of **Gwynedd**.

THEORIES ABOUT THE MABINOGLI

18thC William Pughe at first saw the tales as 'juvenilia' because 'mabinogi' suggests 'youth, or boy' from the root 'mab.' Fantasy content also suggested children's tales. Pughe later dropped this juvenilia tag.

19thC Charlotte Guest honoured the tales she published as the cradle of the Romance tradition of Europe. Under her powerful patronage they gained fame as ancestral legends.

1912 -53 W. J.Gruffydd. The Mabinogi as myth governed the early Welsh university scholars, who saw fragments of religious myth from a lost Golden Age of the Celts. This noble, tragic idea relegated the text to a impoverished status which aptly reflected the long colonialism of wider Welsh culture. It also led to elaborate reconstructions of the 'original myth' to the point where the base text became unrecognisable. Early insight that the Mabinogi are a hero cycle about Pryderi/ Mabon could not be sustained.

1927-64 Roger Loomis explored Irish connections, and the Cauldron as proto-Arthurian Grail.

1955 Proinsias Mac Cana promoted dominant Irish sources.

1961 Kenneth Jackson contributed a wider comparison with international folktale motifs.

1974 John Bollard introduced a new paradigm: the tales in their contemporary mediaeval context, as a complex literature in its own right. He analysed key themes of marriage, friendship and feud, and proposed an 'interlaced' structure, where nodes of drama reflect or oppose each other across the different tales. Jeffrey **Gantz** 1978 and Patrick **Ford** 1981, supported the new outlook.

1986 Roberta Valente led a feminist examination which others developed in the 1990s.

1988 Sioned Davies identified the storytelling formulas in the tales and the oral tradition impact.

1997 Andrew Breeze suggested a female author, proposing Gwenllian as favoured candidate.

2002 Will Parker proposed a political propaganda, with **Lleu** as **Llewelyn** ap **Iorwerth**. He speaks of **Dyfed's** intimacy with the Indigenous Underworld. He also placed the Mabinogi online.

RESOURCES

INTRODUCTORY Book, free online text, recording, or video.

- ~ BOOK **Bollard**, John Kenneth., 2006. *Legend and Landscape of Wales: The Mabinogi*. Gomer Press, Llandysul, Wales. Beautifully designed book, a clear and expert translation of the Mabinogi. Photographs of Mabinogi sites in Wales. Discreet inline notes. Similar volumes cover all 'The Mabinogion.'
- ~ BOOK **Davies**, Sioned, 2007. *The Mabinogion*. OUP, Oxford. The most recent English version, a clear and expert translation of all eleven tales of 'The Mabinogion' in one compact volume.
- ~ BOOK **Williams**, Ifor., 1930. *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi, Allan o Lyfr Gwyn Rhydderch*. Cardiff University Press. Middle Welsh text of all Four Branches, with Introduction and notes in modern Welsh.
- ~ BOOK **Thomson**, R. L., 1957. *Pwyll Penduic Dyfed*. DIAS (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies), Dublin. Middle Welsh text, First Branch. English Introduction and notes. Useful glossary of Middle Welsh.
- ~ FREE ONLINE TEXT **Parker**, Will, 2003. *Mabinogi Translations*. www.mabinogi.net/translations.htm (Accessed 12.12.05) Literal translation with lengthy helpful notes. Each Branch on one webpage, very useful for looking things up quickly. See articles site below. See also Guest below.
- ~ RECORDING **Jones**, Colin. 2008. *Mabinogion, the Four Branches* <http://themabinogion.com/album/mabinogion-the-four-branches> Recording of the Guest trans. with background music. First tale free on website. (Accessed 03.12.2013)
- ~ VIDEO **Cybi**, 1996, 2004. *The Mabinogion*. Valley Stream. www.valleystream.co.uk/mabinogion-tube.html (Accessed 03.12.2013). Illustrated retelling of the first three Branches, close to but not exactly the original. Some free youtubes www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLE33783E05BD97741 (Accessed 03.12.2013).

FOR STUDYING

- Guest**, Charlotte, (Ed.) Hare, John Bruno, 2004. *The Mabinogion*. Online text, Guest trans. 1877 edition incl. her Dedication, Introduction, copious notes, and the original illustrations. <http://sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/mab/index.htm> (Accessed 12.05.05)
- Hawke**, Andrew et al. (Ed.), 2014. *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru / A Dictionary of the Welsh Language*. <http://welsh-dictionary.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html> (Accessed 19.08.14). Exhaustive etymology.
- Parker**, Will, 2002. *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi, A Medieval Celtic Text; English Language Scholarship 1795-1997*. www.mabinogi.net/bibliog_essay.htm (Accessed 12.12.05). Bibliographic Essay More detailed review of my brief list of theories above (without his own later 2002 paper).
- Parker**, Will. 2003. *Mabinogion Info* www.mabinogion.info (Accessed 12.12.05) Specialist Mabinogion website; substantial articles.
- Morgain**, Shan, 2012. *The Mabinogi Bibliography* www.mabinogistudy.com/bibliog/ Comprehensive bibliography. Annotated, searchable, and selectable on category tags. Approx 1,200 entries, incl. some fiction and media. Secondary focus on other tales from *The Mabinogion*.
- Morgain**, Shan, 2012. *Mabinogi Study*. www.mabinogistudy.com Specialist Mabinogi website. Quick lookup indexes characters, places, themes, scholars, theories. A-Z. Timelines. Library of articles. Key terms in the text are active links to give instant popup summary, or can open longer relevant article.
- Morgan**, Gareth, 1996. *Reading Middle Welsh: A Course Book Based on the Welsh of the Mabinogi*. U. of Texas at Austin. www.mit.edu/~dfm/canol/contents.html (Accessed 12.11.13) Free online guide 2001.
- School of Welsh, Cardiff**, 2007. *Welsh Prose 1300 -1425*. University of Wales, Cardiff. All the manuscript texts, extremely useful searches. www.rhyddiaithganoloesol.caerdydd.ac.uk/en/ (Accessed 12.09.14).

FOR DISCUSSION, CRITIQUE OR QUERIES please do contact me.

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My thanks are due to Eleri Gwilym, Cardiff, for the Welsh version of this guide.