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"MERCHEDE Y MABINOG:
WOMEN AND THE THEMATIC
STRUCTURE
OF THE FOUR BRANCHES"

Cornell University PH.D. 1986

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MERCHED Y MABINOZI:
WOMEN AND THE THEMATIC
STRUCTURE
OF THE FOUR BRANCHES

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Roberta Louise Valente
August 1986

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Roberta Louise Valente was born in New York City on April 25, 1956. She lived there until she graduated from Queens College (of the City University of New York) in June 1977, with High Honors in English and Creative Writing. The following term, she began a course of graduate study of medieval Celtic literature and languages at Cornell University. In 1982, she registered as a visiting student at the University College of North Wales at Bangor. Under the direction and encouragement of Professors Bedwyr Lewis Jones and Gwyn Thomas, she studied Modern and Medieval Welsh and attended the lectures offered by the Welsh Department. She continued her research in Celtic Studies there for the next three years, returning to Cornell in 1985 to finish her dissertation. She is presently employed as a Lecturer in the English Department.

To my parents,
who inspired me to start,
and to Neil,
who helped me to finish.

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I have been extremely fortunate to have had the freedom and support during the greater part of the past nine years to follow my academic interests; it is with sincere gratitude that I acknowledge those people and institutions which have encouraged me in my work. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the patient friendship and support I have received throughout this long process; this has made the completion of this project not only possible, but enjoyable.

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Though even medievalists might find the study of Welsh medieval texts and laws an arcane discipline, several faculty members here at Cornell have stepped

outside the borders of their own areas of knowledge into the Otherworld of Celtic literature, assisting me in my research and writing. I am grateful to my committee members--Professors Jon Staliworthy, Alison Lurie, and Thomas Hill--for their interest and encouragement. I am also grateful to them for their patience, as I worked my way through the difficulties of this project. I owe the greatest debt, however, to Lionel Joseph, a great Celticist and a sensitive critic--and a good friend during the long process of reading and editing this dissertation. On the other side of the Atlantic, I owe thanks to Professor Bedwyr Lewis Jones--and his family--for inspiring me to study in Wales and making me feel so welcome there; I would also like to acknowledge the enthusiasm Professor Gwyn Thomas showed as he smoothed out the rough edges of my thesis in its earlier stages.

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Chapter I

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE SOVEREIGNTY MOTIF

This maiden was of such excellence of mind that the foolish people of that time, because they did not know who her parents were and saw her doing things which had never been done before, said she was a goddess descended from Heaven; for the less they knew about her ancestry, the more marvelous her great knowledge seemed to them.

--Christine de Pizan

A historical review of the readings of female characters in medieval Welsh literature will not prove arduous for any individual interested in the field; the interpretive methods used to analyze the women and their function in stories and legendary material from this period have not changed substantially over the decades in which criticism of medieval Celtic literature has developed. The same (and, by now, old-fashioned) approach that led many scholars to find a solar-hero in every myth,¹ continues to be employed by certain modern scholars in their search to prove that every strongly characterized female figure in Welsh and Irish folk and legendary tales is a euhemerized remnant of a shadowy Celtic goddess.

¹ For a summary of the solar mythologists and the contemporary view of their work and their excesses, see Richard M. Dorson's article, "The Eclipse of Solar Mythology" in *Myth: A Symposium*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1958), pp. 25-63.

Though no scholar today would look to solar mythology as the principal interpretive tool with which to analyze the movements and motivations of the male characters in Celtic literature, the female characters are less fortunate in that many contemporary works of criticism deal with them through a method developed in the late 1920's.² In an article which appeared as recently as 1975, Charles Bowen identified Medb, the queen of Connacht, as "the continuing power, some four or five centuries after its official demise, of the pagan mythological tradition in Ireland."³

Bowen rests his assertion on the comfortable foundations of a long and well-worked tradition. Tomas Maine was one of the first to describe Medb and her activities as the degenerated behavior of a one-time divinity. Medb was actually rescued at this time--by the efforts of the writers of this type of scholarship--from her detractors who insisted on reading her liberality with lovers as a sign of moral looseness which made her thoroughly distasteful. Millie, drawing a careful picture of Medb as a degenerated fertility goddess who granted sovereignty, showed that her seeming promiscuity was actually a natural function she possessed in an earlier, divine incarnation in literature and religion.

² Tomas O Maille, "Medb Chruachna," *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 17 (1928), 129-63.

³ Charles Bowen, "Great-Bladdered Medb; Mythology and Invention in the Tain Bó Cuailnge," *Eire Ireland*, 10, No. 4 (1975), 14-34.

He employed evidence from the Book of Leinster which stated that she "never was without one man in the shadow of another," a necessary function indicating her approval of the male candidate for the kingship of the land and its people.⁴ Thus, without Medb's approval, her husband, Ailill, could not be king, and his acceptance of her lovers could be explained by her goddess-aspect; according to tradition, no man could aspire to the sovereignty of Connacht without such approval.⁵

Certainly, the new reading of Medb was preferable to the old, and the satisfactory explanation of a female character's exploits in such a positive fashion spurred on other scholars in their readings of the many women in Celtic literature. Thus, Blodeuwedd, the unfaithful wife of Lleu in the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi, could be read as a vegetation deity, and her liaison with Gronw could be understood as a symbolic rite of union with a new king-candidate.⁶ Rhiannon, who first appears in the

⁴ O Maine, p. 130. "Daig ni raba-sa riam canfer ar scath araile ocum," *LL*, 7586-87. Her promiscuity and its relationship to sovereignty and her divinity is discussed at length in the following places: Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 223-4; and Proinsias Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology* (London: Hamlyn, 1970), pp. 85-95, 120.

⁵ Gwyn Thomas, "The Four Branches of the Mabinogi," in Loughborough 1983, *Proc. of an International Seminar on Children's Literature*, 20-26 Aug. 1983 (Aberystwyth, Wales: Welsh National Centre for Children's Literature, 1983), p. 20. See also, Mary Williams, "The 'Dying God' in Welsh Literature," *Revue Celtique*, 46 (1929), 149-214.

⁶ The identification of Blodeuwedd as a vegetation deity does not add to our understanding of her motivation for unfaithful behavior; it makes her love-affair with Gronw seem less important--merely an ephemeral liaison--rather than an individual decision which leads to tragedy.

Mabinogi on horseback, and who later is punished twice by having to serve in an equine manner, is equated by scholars with Epona, an attested horse-goddess in Gaulish regions.⁷

The identification of the women who appear in these works with earlier goddesses is auspicious in that sometimes seemingly negative actions can be explained as positive symbolic remnants of an earlier power possessed by female divinities and priestesses, yet as anyone who has ever struggled through Frazer's *The Golden Bough* or Graves' *The White Goddess* will recognize, there are some serious problems inherent in a rigid application of this interpretive methodology. In the case of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, this sort of reading will actually create more problems than it will solve. When the female characters of the Mabinogi--like the males--make mistakes or exhibit weaknesses, they are doing so for thoroughly human reasons which can even be quite

⁷ Mac Cana, p. 83; Ross, pp. 225-6, 247, 267; W.H. Gruffydd, *Rhiannon: an inquiry into the origins of the First and Third Branches of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1953), 67, 103-8. Patrick J. Ford, *The Mabinogi*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 4ff; Brinley Roberts. "Penyd Rhiannon," *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 23 (1970), 325-27.

ordinary, for that is the source of the stories: the protagonist is introduced, finds himself or herself in a problematic situation of manners which is generally resolved by the process of trial and error. We give the women in these tales little leeway to act as ordinary human beings if we insist on reading them only as shadows of goddesses. In this way, a scholar like Proinsias, Mac Cana creates a textual problem which does not exist: in his reading of Rhiannon, he gives evidence to support his belief that she is a euhemerized goddess and then questions her behavior in the Third Branch of the *Mabinogi* as incompatible with her divinity.⁸ The moment he discusses is the second abduction of Pryderi, her son. Pryderi is stuck magically to a golden bowl and is about to be whisked away by an unseen enemy. Pryderi's closest friend and ally, Manawydan (who is married to Rhiannon), watches this but makes no attempt to rescue him;

Rhiannon, on the other hand, dashes forward and is stolen away with her son by the same enchantment. To Mac Cana, this scene reveals a flaw in Rhiannon's character: she is suddenly impetuous and over-hasty, compounding the problem by ensnaring herself as well. Manawydan comes off as the prudent man in this reading, for he does nothing, and thus is not a victim of the unexplained magic. By this sort of analysis, Rhiannon's impulsive leap in this scene compares

⁸ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1977), pp. 57-8.

unfavorably with the scene in which she first appeared in the Mabinogi, as a regal horsewoman; according to this logic, there is a flaw in her character, for she has lost her wisdom and prudence by the Third Branch and makes an ill-advised move. Mac Cana finds that Manawydan, by not responding, looks all the more prudent and wise in contrast.⁹

What seems a glaring inconsistency in behavior in the world of a goddess may well be perfectly understandable in terms of mortal behavior: Rhiannon is a mother, and her son is in danger of his life; there is nothing odd in her behavior, nothing impulsive about her reaction, if we remember her quite normal maternal function.¹⁰ If we do read her as a mortal woman, we cannot help but expect her to react as she does. What would seem peculiar to us then would be a description of inactivity; were she to stand complacently at Manawydan's side, we would find her to be a heartless creature. By trying to explain her role by

⁹ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, pp. 47-9.

¹⁰ Even if we do view her as a goddess-queen, her behavior is acceptable. Anne Ross says, "The maternal aspects of the goddess are thus of first importance and must be regarded as having taken precedence over all the other functions with which the female deities were concerned," p. 230. Rhiannon, in particular, has been identified as a maternal figure by several critics.

The earlier presumed mythology built around her has been "reconstructed" to show that she was once Modron, the Great Mother, and Pryderi, her child, was once Mabon, the Great Son. See Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, p. 83; Gruffydd, pp. 67, 93-108; and Eric Hamp, "Mabinogi," *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*. (1974-5), 243-9.

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analyzing only the remnants of her former divinity, we overlook the human drama with which even modern readers can identify.

The Mabinogi treats specific and quite common themes which have been, and continue to be, of interest to the general reader, and does so in a coherent fictional narrative. The characters are developed in the tales as human and personable beings, allowing the reader to identify with or react to their mistakes and further to appreciate whatever emotional and moral growth allows them to attempt to resolve their problems. While I have merely described a given aspect of most literature and narrative, I think it is a crucial definition which has, until recently, been denied to the Mabinogi--and has never yet been discussed in terms of the functions of the female

characters. A flaw or misstep which would be incomprehensible in a goddess-figure is absolutely necessary to the dramatic presentation of a literary character; without the recognition of the human element we have a static image--a divine idol who never stirs from her pedestal lest she should stumble from its heights.

The humanity of a woman is anything but a flaw; it is, rather, the very element which attracts readers and draws them into the world of the author's creation.

I do not mean to suggest that there should be a complete reversal in our reading process. It is important

to identify and appreciate the aspects of the women which owe their strength and power to an earlier goddess-figure who existed in both the religious and creative imaginations of the culture from which the literature springs. But it is dangerously limiting to rely only on that aspect of the female characters, for not being able to see the forest for the trees, we render ourselves incapable of discussing the women as maturing, active characters in the text of the story.

The folk literature and legends of the medieval Celtic period are particularly suited to an interpretive technique which focuses on the female characters because they are so active in the text. Thomas Kinsella, in his translation of the *Tain*, calls the women of that medieval Irish epic its "greatest achievement," noting that the female characters, whether primary or minor, work a fascination on the reader unequalled by the male characterizations.¹¹ More importantly, he credits them with being the "strong and diverse personalities upon which the action continually turns."¹² Kinsella, in his assessment of the function of the female characters in the *Tain*, begins to suggest the point of synthesis we need in our critical method. In looking at texts like the *Tain*--and especially the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*--we

¹¹ Kinsella, *The Tain* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp.iiv-xv.

¹² Kinsella, p. xiv.

must take care not to read only a reconstructed mythology, but to regard these texts as works which--like all classics--address issues of interest to all readers.¹³

Like Kinsella, I am drawn to these tales by the women who inhabit them; they are characters who operate on a heroic--and sometimes divine--level. Because they are, in so many episodes, the initiators of action or the pivots upon which the story turns, they are more "heroes" than "heroines." The sleeping princesses of fairy-tales and the beleaguered maidens of romances are the characters who come to mind when we use the word "heroine"; yet even captive queens like Branwen, the unjustly punished protagonist of the Second Branch, have a depth and capacity for action which is ordinarily associated with a masculine "hero." Although Branwen does not use brute strength to effect her release--as her brother will do later--she possesses the ingenuity and initiative to teach a bird to understand human speech and thereby seek out the military assistance of the men of the Island of the Mighty. The women of the Mabinogi and the women of the Tain participate vigorously in their worlds, either questioning the actions of other characters, casting spells of love and enchantment, fighting in cattle raids,

¹³ In suggesting this approach, I do not mean to discount the genuine mythologies and mythological elements and structures which can be found in these tales. My concern here is with the studies which emphasize the mythology to the exclusion of the real events which are narrated in the tale.

running incredible races, or challenging formidable foes in verbal battles and games of skill--but always speaking out dramatically at critical moments. Yet I would not call them "heroes" any more than I would term them "heroines" since their strengths and weaknesses are a result of individual character traits rather than stereotypical actions consistent with their respective genders. The moment we judge their activity--or passivity--solely on the basis of their sex, we fall into the traps which are raised by our own expectations. Gender is an issue in these texts in terms of discussions regarding social behavior or obligations to other characters, but it is no more important than rank or kinship in the various characterizations in the Four Branches. Viewing the men and women as protagonists--participants of equal importance in the tales--prevents the reader or critic from exaggerating or limiting the potential of any of the characters, male or female, in understanding the meaning of the text.

A difference of perception based on the gender of a character is evident in many readings of the Four Branches and other Irish texts. Cu Chulainn is a hero, whose awesome strength and extraordinary physical contortions in his battle rages enliven the actual story for some readers, while others can only find comfort in reading a goddess into the character of Medb, the independent and

idiosyncratic queen of Connacht--though her one-time divinity is not an issue in the events of the narrative. The problem with this methodology is that it shifts our focus from her real behavior to what some critics suppose her to have been in the shadowy past of Celtic mythology, causing us to overlook the human comedy and tragedy in her rages, affairs, or battles. It seems unfair to assume that what are simply noble, human qualities in a male character are so extraordinary when found in a female that they can be accepted only if we explain them in terms of her old divinity. When T6mis O Maine argued for Medb's original divinity in the 1920's, he seems to have intended only to rescue her from a reputation as a promiscuous queen. It is unfortunate that subsequent readers have been so fascinated by this discussion that they have made it a consuming methodology in interpreting most of the women in medieval Celtic literature.

The attributes--though not the level of activity--of the female protagonist differ from those of the male according to the social functions which were the province of each sex.¹⁴ Motherhood was primarily the realm of the woman, though fostering as a means of child-rearing could also be a male function in these texts. The powers related to maternity--fertility and motherhood--were

¹⁴ See Anne Ross' fifth chapter, "The Goddesses," in *Pagan Celtic Britain*, pp. 204-233, for a detailed account of the multiplicity of functions associated with divine women.

important to the community and the individual: if a woman failed in them, severe repercussions might be the result, but if a woman exercised these powers, she could exert control over others' lives. In the First Branch, Pwyll's subjects suggest that he set Rhiannon aside because she has not borne him any children by the end of the third year of their marriage; but in the Fourth Branch, Aranrhod, angered by her brother's interference in her maternal life, revenges herself by refusing to recognize her son, thus denying him his role in society.

A more expanded interpretation of the woman's maternal function--which has been employed to excess by earlier critics--is the extension of the woman's fertility to the fertility of the land. A customary reverence for the female power of fertility, more than any other function or attribute, has excited discussion about women's roles in medieval Celtic texts; it is worth examining several Irish and Welsh tales--using the methodology which identifies the elements of a woman's earlier divinity--in an attempt to understand the limitations of this process.

The connection between the kingship or sovereignty of a land and its dependence upon a sexual union with the goddess associated with the country or locality in question has been discussed exhaustively by many scholars

as a feature of Celtic legend and mythology.¹⁵ T.F. O'Rahilly's view, that the sovereignty of a locality was granted by the goddess herself, in connection with her fertility aspect, or through some other intimate link with the land (cf. the goddesses Eriu, Banba, or Fotla who gave their names to the country),¹⁶ certainly has some application in the attempt to explain how some male-female relationships function in Irish and Welsh texts, but it cannot provide a total explanation for all of the interpersonal dynamics that emerge in tales like the Tain or the Mabinogi. O'Rahilly suggested that the presentation of a liquid to the king-candidate--or the meeting of the male-female pair by a body of water or a well--was a sign of the woman's divinity.¹⁷

While many of these romantic encounters do occur in proximity to water,

¹⁵ The articles and books cited above contain information which identifies the attributes and powers of the goddesses in both Irish and Welsh texts. For an application of the sovereignty motif reading, see T.F. O'Rahilly, "On the Origin of the Names Erainn and Eriu," *Eriu* 14 (1940-46), 7-28; Proinsias Mac Cana, "Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature," *Etudes Celtiques*, 7 (1955-6), 76-114 and 356-413, also 8 (1958), 59-65; Rachel Bromwich, "Ceitic Dynastic Themes and the Breton Lays," *Etudes Celtiques*, 9 (1961), 439-74; Anne Ross, "The Divine Hag of the Pagan Celts," in *The Witch Figure*, ed. Venetia Newall (London, Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 139-64. As a theme which provides structural unity in medieval Welsh literature, the sovereignty motif is discussed by I.C. Lovec in "The Celtic Sovereignty Theme and the Structure of Peredur," *Studia Celtica*, 12-3 (1977-78), 133-46.

¹⁶ O'Rahilly, pp. 7-8.

¹⁷ O'Rahilly, p. 14.

and there are attested goddesses who had links to particular rivers in Ireland, the presence of water--or any liquid--in these tales does not seem to have any significant effect on our reading of what is actually happening within the texts. As a means of proving that the goddess-within-the-woman exists, it seems a minor point in the reading process.

An element of the sovereignty motif that does help us in our reading of the text is the nature and extent of the rewards of a union between the goddess and the king-candidate. In the extraordinarily strict mythological sense proposed by critics like O'Rahilly, the people under the king-candidate's rule depended on the male-female contract for their own prosperity and the fertility of the land. The choice of candidate could be considered to be the goddess' identification of the best man for the role, an element evolving, according to readers like Bowen, out of a need to resolve a complicated succession to the kingship by means of a mythological or religious justification,¹⁸ sealing the contract with the presentation of a cup of water or wine. An important element in many of the tales and legends concerning sovereignty is the goddess' initial appearance in disguise--most often as a loathesome hag--requiring the prospective king to show his perceptive ability by

¹⁸ Bowen, p. 20.

recognizing her under a mask intended to deceive the unworthy.

The offer made by the goddess is generally placed under some prohibition or limitation with which the candidate must comply.¹⁹ In later legendary material, the goddess or queen could insist, as Medb does, that she has the right to sleep with any man she chooses. And if we look at folktales from the same regions, the magical female figure--a water nymph or Otherworld woman--places a prohibition upon the prosperity she gives to her chosen mate, threatening to take her wealth with her if he gives her three unnecessary blows.²⁰ While most critics simply look at this prohibition as a single element in the sovereignty motif, it is worth remembering that this prohibition also has a literary function, providing dramatic tension as we observe the male protagonist's respect for the woman's demands, or the resulting difficulties when he ignores them.

¹⁹ The extreme limits of this prohibition--death of the candidate--are discussed by Maire Bhreathnach in "The Sovereignty as Goddess of Death?" *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 39 (1982), 244-5. She says since the woman's divinity is linked to death as well as fertility, "she provokes the downfall and death of the unjust king when the union between him and his realm has been irreparably damaged by his actions, and when, thereby, his reign has ceased to be productive."

²⁰ One of the best examples of this version is "The Legend of Llyn y Fan Fach" in John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1901), I, 2-22.

Turning to the Irish epic, *Tain BO Cuailgne*, we can trace this pattern in the story concerning Morrigan, the war goddess, and the Irish warrior, Cu Chulainn. She appears to Cu Chulainn at the Ath da Fertá (Ford of the Two Chariot Poles), wearing a crimson mantle of dramatic proportions, driving a chariot, a man, and a cow. Cu Chulainn, not having recognized her as a goddess, addresses her scornfully, then threatens to attack her. She tells him she is a female satirist and sings to him, whereupon he attempts to attack her again, but she disappears. His lack of perception indicates his unworthiness as the recipient of the goddess' love; when she reappears as a black crow, her divine shape, Cu Chulainn realizes who she is:

"If I had only known that it was thou," said Cu Chulainn,
"we should not have parted thus."
"What thou hast done," said she, "will bring thee ill-luck."
"Thou canst not harm me," said he.
"Certainly I can," said the woman. "I am guarding thy
deathbed, and I shall be guarding it henceforth."²¹

The Morrigan, in her role as war-goddess, has approached Cu Chulainn in order to test his perception, she tells him. She acts according to the formula which is outlined above in granting her gift: she meets the candidate by a ford (near water, which is associated with the act of gift-giving); she comes disguised to test him,

²¹ Tom Peete Cross and Clark Harris Slaver, *Ancient Irish Tales* (New York: Henry Holt, 1936), p. 213.

and when he fails, he loses the opportunity to receive her gift of prowess in battle; and he invokes her anger, which she *expresses* by prophesying his defeat in the cattle-raid of Cooley, guaranteed by her participation in the fight--specifically in conflict against him.²² In this tale, there is little degeneration of the ritual elements, and the Morrigan is actually a goddess, despite her mortal mask (unlike Medb, who is definitely mortal in the story). The drama of this episode hinges on Cu Chulainn's ignorant rejection of her offer: if there were a moral to this tale, it would clearly warn all aspiring candidates to look closely for the signs of the goddess; harm befalls him who mistakes the identity of the woman addressing him.²³

Medb, the warrior-queen of Connacht and one of the most powerful of the protagonists in the 'rain, has been the most widely discussed female sovereignty figure in the decades since 6 Mgille first identified this aspect of her. While one cannot help but recognize the goddess who inspired her character, it is equally important to

²² Though she threatens his death, he is actually able to overcome her later on.

²³ The successful version of this story is the tale of the granting of kingship to the Irish warrior Niall. Meeting an old hag by the well, Niall alone among his brothers agrees to both kiss and sleep with her. When she then reveals herself to be a young and lovely woman who offers him the sovereignty of Ireland, Niall has his reward. This tale's sovereignty aspects are discussed by Rachel Bromwich in "Celtic Dynastic Themes and the Breton Lays."

integrate an identification of her former divinity with her actions in the tale. She is a well-developed character who not only reacts to the world around her, but is a shaper of activity as well; the elements which mark her as a goddess are also crucial aspects of her story.

To show the limitations of this methodology in greater detail, I will look at *Lain 136 Frafch*, the story of Froech's introduction to the court of Medb and Ailill and the subsequent adventures which lead to Froech's marriage to their daughter, Findabair.²⁴ I hope to show here that the sovereignty reading must be used in conjunction with other critical reading processes to be effective; when used alone as an interpretive tool, the symbols and characterizations of the narrative are distorted.

Although it is never stated specifically in this story, Ailill is known to be the special choice of Medb. The history of their courtship is outlined by O Maille's article, "Medb Chruachna": many suitors seek her in marriage, but she has the authority to reject them.²⁵ She chooses Ailill as her consort and spouse when she is already married to Eochaid Dala, her third husband. Her reasons for preferring Ailill are enumerated in the following passage:

²⁴ I have chosen this tale in particular because the recognizable elements of the sovereignty motif are clearly part of the story, and because it has not been completely analyzed by means of this methodology.

²⁵ O Maille, p. 133.

Ailill is reared in Cruachan after that until he was a proud-spirited warrior, until he was powerful in battles and conflicts and a tower to sustain battle against Conchobar in making war and protecting the province of Medb (i.e., Connacht), and Medb loved him for his virtues, and he was united to her and he became her husband in place of Eochaid Dala. Eochaid grew jealous (of him) on account of this, and the Fir Domnann were jealous through sympathy, so that they sought to banish Ailill and all the Ernai who were with him out of Connacht. And Medb prevented this deed being done because she preferred Ailill to him (Eochaid).²⁶

As Medb's fourth husband, Ailill should be well aware of the ephemeral quality of his wife's affection, and the necessity for a certain amount of tolerance on his part if he wishes to maintain his position. In most tales concerning the two characters, his reaction to her seeming promiscuity is muted; whether one takes that to be a sign of the king-candidate's acceptance of the goddess' prohibitions, or simply an aspect of his character--a quiet acquiescence learned from observing Eochaid's failure--Ailill does not often object to Medb's choice of lovers. But in this tale, the *Tain Bo Fraich*, he jeopardizes his position by his rejection of the great queen's prohibitions, provoking the wrath of the woman who may represent the goddess. Yet at the same time, the *Tain Bo Fraich* is a very human story of jealousies and affections--a level of reading which should not be forgotten in the reader's haste to identify the elements of the sovereignty motif.

²⁶ Quoted and translated by O Maille, p. 135.

The first two elements are understood to have taken place before the action of the 'rain BO Fraich gets under way. Medb's choice of Ailill has already occurred, for they are a long-established couple with an adult daughter, Findabair. As for the presentation of some liquid in association with the ceremony of union, we have Medb's own name, which has been translated as either "the drunken one" or "she who intoxicates," which makes Medb herself the liquor presented to the king; it is more effective to read her name as "she who possesses the intoxicating drink."²⁷ Her connection with the sovereignty and fertility of the land is also understood in the text, for Medb's authority is a matter of record: "Great indeed was the strength and power of Medb over the men of Ireland, for it was she would not allow a king in Tara without his having herself as wife."²⁸ In the Ulster cycle, she herself boasts about the condition upon which the kingship rests: that she would never have one man without another waiting in his shadow. If she is the euhemerized goddess associated with the kingship, and if Ailill is indeed a man of perception, then he must recognize that his kingship is conditionally based on his

²⁷ Rudolf Thurneysen first discussed the etymology of Medb's name in "Zu GOTTIN Medb," *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 18 (1929), 108-10. See also Heinrich Wagner, "Studies in the origins of early Celtic traditions," *Eriu* 26 (1975), 12.

²⁸ O Maille, 138.

acceptance of her many extramarital interests.

The *Tain* 136 *Frafch* is essentially a courtship tale, for Froech approaches Ailill and Medb to seek the hand of their daughter, Findabair. Upon his arrival at the court, Froech is greeted warmly by Medb and they sit down to play at draughts for three days and nights, during which time the queen neglects the hospitality of the hall. This is a violation of general social codes, for the visiting warriors end up providing hospitality for themselves.

When the two conclude their game, Froech points out how much time has passed, and Medb goes out to Ailill saying, "*Morgnim doringensam, 'ol sf, 'ind Oic annechtair donnlncatar do bith en hi*"²⁹ ("A fine thing we have done, the warriors who came from outside to us being without food"). "*Diliu dait imbeirt fidchille, 'ol Main*" ("Dearer to you is playing draughts," said Ailill).³⁰ Medb's speech is important as an assessment of the magnitude of her offense in not offering hospitality; Ailill's reply is ambiguous. It is possible that the irony in the remark is meant to suggest that Medb's concern has been expressed too late to avoid insult. Medb's next statement is clearer: she admits to the

²⁹ I use my own translation here, based on the edited version of the text: *Tain Bó Fraech*, ed. Wolfgang Meld (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1974), p. 5. I will cite the text as Fraech in all further references.

³⁰ Fraech, p. 5.

neglect, but points out that no insult can be taken, as the hospitality of the hall has--through the agency of Froech's people--been maintained. "*Ni derban in fodail dia muntirseom sethnu in taige. Atigt tri lAa 'I teora aidchi and,*' of sisi, 'acht nAd n-airigmer inn-aidchi la bSmsuilsi inna liac 16gmar issin tig'"³¹ ("Still it does not hinder the distribution [of the food] to his people throughout the house. Three days and nights have gone by," she said, "but we didn't notice the night what with the bright light of the precious stones in the house"). The mutual absorption of Froech and Medb in their game of draughts to such a degree hints at flirtation. Froech forgets his original purpose for coming to the court--the wooing of Findabair, not her mother, Medb--and Medb is somewhat lax in respect to her guests, concentrating on Froech as she does. Ailill's words to Medb may have an undertone of anger at her carelessness--particularly with a rival--but there is no evidence at this point that he is directly challenging the prohibition that governs the sovereignty he possesses at this point. Ailill's tone will be clearer in later dialogue passages, showing that he will take Froech's interference in his world less complacently in future encounters.

³¹ Fraech, p. 5.

To explain this episode reasonably, using the elements of the sovereignty motif, then Froech's interest in Medb must be explained in a way that is consonant with her role as a euhemerized goddess and as a mortal queen. Medb is a ruler in her own right, having inherited her land and her power,³² and Froech, in seeking her daughter's hand, would find it necessary to approach Medb--the representative of the goddess--with as much respect and interest as he approaches Ailill, Medb's co-ruler and Findabair's father. And if we read Medb as a one-time goddess who has the right to entertain as many lovers as she chooses to guarantee the fertility and prosperity of the land, then Froech is wise in gaining her approval first. One possible way to satisfy this function is to read Medb and Findabair as a linked pair.³³ The daughter as an extension of the mother might be a possible permutation of the *puella senilis* motif, the older woman who turns into a lovely young girl for the protagonist who chooses correctly. If we accept this, then we have the element of disguise here, a common feature in sovereignty tales.³⁴ Able to perceive the power Medb possesses, Froech

³² O' Maille, p. 133.

³³ Meld suggests this in his introduction. His contention is that the identification of the two women together is a result of two earlier versions merging awkwardly together. Fraech, xii-xiii.

³⁴ The *puella-senilis* motif's importance to critics of sovereignty tales is discussed in Bhreathnach, pp. 245-7.

takes the time to "court" her as well as her daughter, for his success relies on her approval. Yet the focus of his interest--and of the story--is really Findabair, and the tale focuses on the interactions between the two younger lovers.

Froech meets Findabair while she is washing at the river nearby the palace. In terms of storytelling, this is not an unusual meeting-place; conveniently, Froech has discovered Findabair in a situation most likely to reveal her attractions to him. There is, additionally, an element of the sovereignty pattern here, for this brings in the connection of the goddess with a liquid or body of water. Froech, upon seeing her, asks her to come with him; she refuses to elope but says, "*Bid h' mo thogasa dano dul chucutsu*"³⁵ ("It will be my choice then to go with you"), if he offers an acceptable bride-price. Here in Findabair's own words we have the element of the goddess' choice and approval of the candidate. She gives him a ring to bind the agreement, one which Ailill had once given her. It is this act in particular that signals the beginning of the conflict between the characters, for the ring will become the physical object upon which all the jealousy and anger of the characters are centered.

³⁵ Fraech, p. 6.

Ailill, when informed of Froech's and Findabair's mutual affection, resists the union, although Medb is quite agreeable. The interpreter of this tale who relies only on the sovereignty theme will have difficulties in analyzing the behavior of both characters in a coherent way, though Medb's reaction fits neatly into the expectations of this methodology. This reader will anticipate that she will prefer other men to Ailill, for as the degenerated goddess she has the right--indeed the obligation--to ensure her people's prosperity and well-being by taking lovers, which may occur here through her extended identification with her daughter and her initial three-day encounter with Froech. Ailill, on the other hand, rejects this alliance.

In this tale, the clearly defined elements of the sovereignty theme provide the structure which supports the story. But although the problem which constitutes the dramatic impulse of the plot grows out of the sovereignty theme (for Ailill will violate the prohibition Medb has set on the kingship), the real attraction of the *Tain Bo Fraich* lies in the exploration of jealousy within a father-daughter relationship, a theme which can be found in any number of contexts.

Ailill, to end Froech's suit permanently, sends the young suitor into a dangerous pool of water which contains a monster. While Froech is swimming, Ailill reaches into the purse (bossin) which he has left behind, and there the

reigning king finds the ring, which can be read as a symbol of Findabair's love, which she has given to Froech. Ailill throws it into the pool, and Froech sees a salmon catch it and swallow it; he then hides the fish at the edge of the pool. But before he can climb out, Ailill sends him back to get a branch from the other side of the pool. Froech returns, and when he is sent out a second time, the monster attacks him. Findabair gives Froech his sword, which enrages Ailill, so that he throws a spear at her which goes through a braid of her hair: just grazes her. Froech tosses the spear back and dispenses with the monster. Nothing is said concerning Ailill's misdeed until Medb chides him, "*Morgnim dorifig'nsam, 'ol Medb*"³⁶ ("A fine thing we have done"). And Ailill, perhaps afraid that he has jeopardized his position by his rashly emotional act, agrees, "*Issinn aithrech, 'ol Ailill, 'a ndoringensam risin fer*"³⁷ ("We regret what we have done against the man"). Then the focus of his rage changes: he threatens to kill Findabair. His speech indicates the psychology at work here; no man will have his daughter if he has to kill her to ensure that. The reader of the sovereignty tale may say that he is afraid of being

³⁶ Fraech, p. 9. Note the repetition here of the same correcting statement that Medb used earlier in the draughts episode with FrOech. The first time, the insult she refers to is one which she has offered, and the second utterance refers to an insult offered by Ailill.

³⁷ Fraech, p. 9.

supplanted by the younger warrior; but on a strictly human scale, Ailill is characterized here as the jealous father who cannot conceive of his daughter's leaving him for another man--a classic familial problem that countless members of the audience could recognize. Ailill differentiates between his initial anger towards Froech and the consuming and growing rage he feels towards Findabair when he expresses his regret concerning his misdeeds against Froech, but shows no remorse about his murderous intentions towards his daughter. The sovereignty methodology indicates that the woman should indeed be the focus of the story--as Findabair becomes here--but it cannot explain what a psychological reading can: why the father would try to kill his daughter and not her interfering suitor. A social relationship of years' duration is about to be ruptured here.

At the evening meal, Ailill asks Findabair for the ring which he had given her, knowing full well that this request is the final tug at the slim threads which bind their relationship together. It is merely custom which dictates duty here, for Ailill has abandoned his love for his daughter symbolically already by throwing the ring--the physical representation of his paternal love--into the pool. It had, by that point, become meaningless for him when the meaning of the symbol changed: Findabair took her love for her father--the

ring--and gave it to Froech as a symbol of a new kind of love. Findabair, unable to produce the ring or the love she once had for her father, merely admits that she does not have it with her. Ailill then makes his emotional reactions and intentions clear by telling her to bring in the ring or lose her life. She responds that she cannot do it herself; but that another may go out and get it, and he bids her send for the ring; for the king, the encounter has reached its dramatic climax and is a closed issue. In his view, his daughter has been faithless to him.

Although he attempted to punish Froech by sending him into the pool containing the monster, he was unsuccessful in driving away his rival. Unable to overcome Froech, Ailill transfers his rage to Findabair who is still bound to him by filial duty, threatening her with death; yet, we, as experienced readers of folk literature since childhood, can recognize that someone or something is going to save Findabair in the nick of time. In terms of the sovereignty theme, we know the goddess has enough power to extricate herself from such a problem and adequately punish the offender. But whether we are reading this with eyes that search out the hidden goddess or with the anticipation of the storyteller's audience, we know one thing positively at this point: Ailill has stepped beyond the bounds of all interpersonal etiquette and his right as Medb's consort, and he will not succeed in carrying out

this threat. The change in the movement of the story occurs in Findabair's speech to her father. Realizing that he has violated the social codes governing behavior between a father and his daughter, she breaks the bond by saying, "*Tongusa do dia thofiges mo thtlath, dia faigbither of con beosa fot chumachtasu ba sire, diandum roib forsa rol mo greis*"³⁸ ("I swear by the god by which my people swear, if it may be found, I will not be under your power any longer, if it may not have been protection to me"). Until this moment, Ailill has been the shaper of events, but Findabair, in her statement, indicates that he will no longer have that responsibility. And to the surprise of no one--with the exception of Ailill--a servant arrives, carrying the fish and the ring.³⁹ So Ailill does indeed lose his daughter, though it turns out to be by her wish rather than his, a psychological outcome not in the least surprising to anyone who has been a witness to the interactions between a daughter possessed of an opinion contrary to her father's.

What I hope is evident in this reading is neither a condemnation of the tracing of the sovereignty theme nor an exaltation of ordinary fictional reading, for literature which has such obvious remnants of earlier

³⁸ Fraech, p. 11.

³⁹ The phrase used by Froech when the ring is brought out is, interestingly enough, "*for fir do flatha*" meaning "on the truth of your sovereignty."

mythological patterns as we can find in Celtic legendary and folk tales demands recognition of those elements in our interpretation of them. Yet we must also explore those aspects of the tales which attract the reader who is not entirely familiar with the mythology that underlies the story. The simple fact that this literature has had a continuous and highly interested audience since the manuscripts were first transcribed, preserving the oral material up to the present, indicates that the power of the euhemerized goddesses may be evident in some subliminal way in the tales and may contribute to their attractiveness, but that there must also be another factor which explains why these tales are popular even today among audiences who have no idea that a Celtic mythology existed and runs as an undercurrent through all of the texts. We must remember that these tales, like all classic literature, absorb the reader in the lives of characters who experience the same problems, emotions, and growth that every human being must undergo.⁴⁰ We are tempted by the form and style in which these tales are preserved to assume that they are more static and stylized than they are in truth; the seemingly authorless, depersonalized writing does not necessarily exclude the

⁴⁰ The two classic studies which explore the psychological uses of fairy or folk tales in mental or emotional development are Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977) and Max Luthi's *Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

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possibility that these are works which, like any novel or play, explore the multiple experiences of human interaction, the challenges and consequent growth of the characters, and the strengths and weaknesses of all the characters, whether male or female.

Chapter II

THE PROBLEM OF INCOHERENCE

Incoherence seems to me preferable to a distorting order.

--Roland Barthes

At this point, I would like to focus primarily on the Four Branches of the Mabinogi. The school of seekers after a proto-goddess had a great disciple in W.J. Gruffvdd,⁴¹ yet this is not the only form of analysis to which the Four Branches have been subjected. There are several major disciplines of interpretive theory which are part of the larger speculations of the late nineteenth century: comparative folkloric analysis; comparative and historical linguistic analysis; and, more recently, thematic and structural analyses. All of these methodologies have contributed to our knowledge of the Four Branches, though many of their analyses have ended by suggesting that there is no coherence or narrative strategy in the Mabinogi.

To say that there is no coherence to the Four Branches as we now have them,⁴² is to deny them their place

⁴¹ *Rhiannon* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1953).

⁴² As opposed to the several schools of theory which insist on reconstruction of an assumed proto-form; I shall discuss several of these ideas in greater detail below.

in the body of classic literature. What do we have, if they do not have some internal order? Why then has so much paper and ink been employed in discussion of these texts? Why do so many non-academic readers find these stories so attractive? They cannot be entirely "incoherent."

Theories of interpretation create nearly as many problems as they solve. No single methodology or reading can be expected to illuminate every facet and unearth every layer of meaning in a text; there are too many possible aspects to explore in any good piece of literature for any one critic to hope to treat them all. Equally, there are in many different readers opinions too many different points of view and types of experience to expect to come up with one reading that satisfies all. And when the question of "incoherence" is raised in connection with the Four Branches, it may be well worth our while to see whether the problem results from an overly vigorous application of a particular theory rather than from an overwhelming deficiency in the text.

To challenge the charge of "incoherence" we must look into the statements made by the critics. We already have a wealth of theory concerning the Four Branches; perhaps it would be useful to turn to an academic discussion of narrative structure that has not concerned itself with the
shall discuss several of these ideas in greater detail below.

specific problems of the Mabinogi at all. Frank Kermode, in his lecture series on narrative interpretation, opens with an outline of the "rules and cautions" critics need to employ in their analysis of narratives:

First, we need some assurance that a book has sufficient value . . . to warrant the kind of attention we are proposing to give it.⁴³

In the case of the Mabinogi, we can easily establish its worthiness of attention. Aside from the recent body of academic criticism about the text, we can point to several hundred years of creative writing inspired by the themes and characters of the Four Branches in a multitude of genres. That these tales have continued to live in the Welsh national imagination as symbols of personal and political beliefs is manifest in the range of literary voices which call up images from the Mabinogi. One of the great poets of Anglesey, Lewys Man, writing at the turn of the sixteenth century, identified his own emotional responses in the characters of the Fourth Branch:

*Mae 'nghwyn am forwyn yn fwy no Math Hen fab
Mathonwy,
Braich un ddi-wair, brechwen, ddoeth,
fu'i obennydd of beunoeth: Arianrhod,--ni bu'r unrhywin
ni byddai Fath hebddi fyw.*⁴⁴
(My complaint concerning a maiden is greater than [that
of] old Math son of Mathonwy.)

⁴³ *The Genesis of Secrecy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1979), p. 16. All the quotations which I draw from Kermode's book appear on pp. 16-18.

⁴⁴ *Gwaith Lewys Mon*, ed. Eurys I. Rowlands, (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1975), p. 347.

The arm of a chaste, white-armed wise one was his pillow
each night:
Arianrhod,--there was none like her--
so that Math could not live without her.⁴⁵

And in the early twentieth century, Saunders Lewis utilized the theme of faithlessness in the story of Blodeuwedd to explore aspects of political and personal commitment, much as the original text of the Four Branches does.⁴⁶

Kermode's second point concerns interpretation rather than justification, how a reader's ear sorts out the various elements of the story:

It is true that outsiders also interpret; the most naive reading of a text, that treats it, for example, as a transparent account of reality, and picks up only the clues that enable it to satisfy the most conventional expectations, say of coherence and closure, is an interpretation. A reading at the next level, which is as spiritual to carnal, perceiving to seeing, understanding to hearing, calls for divination .

At this point in the act of interpretation, Kermode warns us, we must accept eccentricity on the part of the writer; we may very well come across "a sort of intermittency, a willful narrative deafness, a preference for the interesting over the obvious and sequential." He brings out a significant point here about the reader: we have a

⁴⁵ See also the version in *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, ed. Rachel Bromwich (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961, rep., 1978), p. 278.

⁴⁶ An English translation of his play, *Blodeuwedd*, appears in *Presenting Saunders Lewis*, introd. David Jones, ed. Alun R. Jones and Gwyn Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973), p. 82.

basic need for "coherence and closure," yet as sophisticated readers, we have just as strong a need to see what lies behind the everyday and obvious, to "divine" the spirit behind the physical object or action. These two aspects of interpretation can come into conflict, in that the simpler reading which is satisfied with a coherent story may clash with a reading that attempts to reveal what lies beneath the simple surface. This is a problem which inhibits our flexibility in interpreting the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, for the text presents a temptingly simple surface which begs for a secondary analysis of the sort that Kermode refers to. But the stories in the Four Branches do not always work out so easily under dissection; the structure of the narrative does not always seem to enhance the meaning. In many cases, chronology and sequence are abruptly interrupted in the Four Branches. For instance, the sudden insertion of Teyrnon's story into the midst of Rhiannon's in the First Branch creates a startling disruption of the narrative. Equally, the return to the adventures of Pryderi and Rhiannon in the Third Branch occurs only after the telling of the events in the Second Branch. And in the Fourth Branch, the events seem to be linked only by the fact that they happen to the same family of characters, for at first glance, the story of Goewin's rape seems to have little to do with the sequence of events in the story of Blodeuwedd,

except for the continuing presence of Gwydion and Math in the tale.

The puzzle produced by Kermode's second point leads us to his next "rule and caution":

Thirdly, there is a moment of interpretation, the discovery or choice of what, after Dilthey, might be called an "impression-point." One may perceive in a life some moment that gives sense and structure to the whole, and it need not come at the end of the life; Dilthey cites the conversion of Augustine, which made sense of the apparently unrelated flux of events on which it supervened--it is a part with a relation of particular privilege to the whole. A work of art, he believed, could have this same impression-point, around which the whole gestalt must be articulated....interpreters would certainly choose different moments.

So if we come across difficulties in the text of the Four Branches, ones which might arise from "incoherence" or interruptions in chronology or the sudden interpolation of characters and events into the stories that have no seeming connection with earlier events or characters, we might suspect them to be signposts rather than distractions as we follow the narrative. The question is, which are signposts and which are problems? There is no conclusive answer to this; readers will be struck by whatever signifies most to them in terms of their own interests or background. But are there not some things which are undeniably "impression-points," like Augustine's conversion? How can we be sure to find them? What structures does the author or compiler employ in the narrative to ensure our finding the path we were intended to follow?

The fourth point is, for me, the most crucial of the six: "This divination must not be left to stand on its own; indeed it can only be justified if we continue to reconcile it with a larger whole." In the case of the Mabinogi, too many interpretations have been presented which assume, from the start of the argument, that there is no narrative whole in the text we presently possess. There are suggestions of earlier, whole narratives which must have predated the "faulty" written texts which survived them; there are proposals for entirely discrete stories which, though they seem to have lost their logic in the extant text, must have once been perfect because the characters are so well delineated, while other sections, by the same process, are judged to be less successful with their less technically perfect characterizations. What would happen if we were to reverse the process and begin with a belief in the essential wholeness of the text? The Four Branches, as they now exist, are grouped together in a particular order. If we look for an intelligence which links the texts together, we may well find it, just as those who begin by lamenting its incompleteness will probably find that it is indeed incomplete. To reconcile this "divination" with a larger whole, as Kermode suggests, means we must allow that there is a larger whole to start.

The fifth admonition is to

recognize the historicity of the interpreter, inevitable change in modes of attention, complex interaction between present and past....We feed our new theoretical and methodological positions into the text; they govern the course of the narrative as it appears in our interpretation, just as, in psychoanalysis, the analyst's beliefs and procedures modify the nature of the analysand.

We are on tricky ground as critics. It is easy--too easy--to find the theories of the past are inadequate or impossibly aged from our vantage point in the present. Each interpretation is a product of its time--the arguments and theories currently in fashion, as well as the product of the personality and specific experience of the critic--all of which makes it "right" for the moment, but seldom forever. This is not to say that what has gone before is useless; but it is not to say that one cannot take an old brick wall apart if one section is not holding together as strongly as it once did. The important thing to remember is that we do not necessarily need all new bricks to repair the gap; the old may just need to be placed in new positions. In my reading of the Four Branches, I hope to show that I am proposing to add but a few new bricks, for the Mabinogi and the readings of it we now have are undoubtedly strong. I see the job of subsequent readers as a search for the chinks in the hope of adding to the total strength of our understanding, as opposed to sweeping all the old structure away in favor of the new.

The sixth and final point to consider in interpretation, according to Kermode, is genre:

At present let me simply assert that the notion of a text absolutely free, absolutely open to us, in which we can "produce" meaning at will, is--as most of its proponents allow--a utopian fiction. There are constraints that shadow interpretation; and the first is genre.

In the case of all of the Mabinogi, genre certainly becomes an important consideration, for there are romances among legends and legends among folktales; and quite often the line of demarcation is ambiguous, leaving the definitions open to the arguments of the critics. And even in confining discussion to the Four Branches as I intend to do, there are differences in definition. Are we dealing with the juxtaposed elements of the international popular tale, as Kenneth Jackson suggests?⁴⁷ Or are these the remnants of legendary or mythological tales, as W.J. Gruffydd argued?⁴⁸ Or are we dealing with a work which approaches our modern expectations of fiction in terms of characterization and thematic unity, as J.K. Bollard says?⁴⁹ The Four Branches prove elusive when it comes to identifying genre. It is easy to say what they are not--poetry, drama, novels, non-fiction--but it is

⁴⁷ *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961).

⁴⁸ Gruffydd, p. 67.

⁴⁹ "The Thematic Structure of the Mabinogi," *Transactions of the Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion*, (1974-5), 250-76.

nearly impossible to decide what one genre they do represent, and this may be one of the factors which has made it so difficult to arrive at a satisfactory reading resulting in a whole text.

Kermode's "rules and cautions" end here, but there is one more that comes to mind: to observe and discuss the functions of the dramatis personae in the text with as much care as has been given to their antecedents or analogues outside the text. This caution arises from my own "historicality" as a reader--and a female reader at that. The first time I turned to the Four Branches, I followed the text as a naive reader--one whom I would define as an individual who reads only for entertainment, not to search out or prove any philosophical, theoretical, or otherwise analytical aspect of the stories. My satisfaction on this naive level was due to two factors. Firstly, I was intrigued by the unexpected, and sometimes "unchronological" sequence of events, a kind of pleasant juggling of motifs and elements which I recognized from folk and fairy tales. The interpolation of secondary, but related stories--like Teyrnon's rescue of Pryderi or the story of the unpleasant couple in the Second Branch--provided vivid and multi-layered reinforcement to the major narrative threads. It was not until my interest in the Four Branches led me on to critical studies that I realized that these points--which seemed fresh and vital

to me by virtue of their idiosyncratic placement--could be perceived as problems in the coherence of the text's narrative. I began to look at these stories again with eyes open for difficulties, yet the problem points, while admittedly unusual, did not seem to me to obscure the process of the tale. Was there a way to read them as connected passages of the text?

This led me to my second initial reaction to the Four Branches: a fascination with the female characters. They were actively involved in the events of the stories, and when they spoke, their words were charged with a wide range of reactions--anger, sarcasm, relief, honest fear. More importantly, their speeches stood out powerfully in the narrative, having an effect on the actions surrounding them. Rhiannon, expressing her relief when released from her penance, simultaneously names her child; Branwen movingly reminds her oppressors of the punishment they had inflicted upon her while agreeing to interpret the portents which will result in their destruction and her deliverance; Cigfa seeks a confirmation of the obligations due her when her husband vanishes; Aranrhod nearly succeeds in denying her son the three things he needs to take his place as a man in society. The activity of these women appeared in sharp contrast to the women of ordinary folk literature; one would not expect to find these characters permanently confined to an enchanted castle or

bound by a sleeping spell, unable to help themselves in any way until a young hero came along. Certainly, there are women in the Four Branches who are unjustly punished or confined or otherwise victimized by other characters, but the narrative shows them, at the very least, verbally reacting to their tribulations. They are not merely the passive object around which the male protagonist directs his actions, but very human and altogether individual personalities who affect the events of the stories. Blodeuwedd, though she is created by men for their own purposes, exercises her own free will in a recognizably and passionately human situation; without her and Gronw's fatal choice, there would be no tragedy, and thus, no story. Rhiannon, with her quick and sharply humorous speeches, twice forestalls the the tension of unpleasant or awkward events with a few well-chosen words. Even, Branwen, shut off as she is in the scullery, plans her escape as she suffers humiliation and pain, and we feel the depth of her anger in her reply to the messengers who come to her for information. All the major characters--male and female--of the Four Branches possess this kind of vitality, but not all the critics who have looked at these texts have been as interested in the specific actions of the women as they have been attentive to the men.

It may, perhaps, seem obvious to say this, but there has certainly never been a serious discussion of the functions or motives of the female characters within the extant text of the Four Branches.⁵⁰ There has been considerable examination of the more dramatic women (especially Rhiannon) in terms of their being earlier goddesses.⁵¹ While these interpretations shed light on the sources of the characters we now follow in the Four Branches--and help, by means of analyzing their analogues, to overcome some of the difficulties in the narrative--they do not adequately explain why the women do what they do in each Branch, and what effects those actions have on the rest of the narrative. Nor can we expect them to: analyzing the story so as to understand its themes and meanings, we need primarily to work with what is in the story. To exclude the female characters from such analysis is to ignore important elements of the narrative. I do not think this ignoring of the women is due to some subversive sexism on the part of any critic; I think the fault lies in our fascination with constructing a proto-text to work with in place of the real thing. Proto-texts are critically useful in two ways. Firstly, it is so important to the human mind to understand the

⁵⁰ Bollard, p. 263.

⁵¹ As I have outlined in Chapter I, it seems a peculiar fate to which many of the female characters in Celtic literature are subjected. Numerous works--which are examples of this critical method--are cited there.

underlying machineries that make things happen, that we would rather dabble speculatively in possible machineries rather than abandon the texts as altogether unfathomable. Secondly, the proto-text is created by a mind which knows which theories it wishes to satisfy in its discussion; a possible text is created selectively out of possible sources and analogues to the extant text, and the critic can consciously or unconsciously choose to satisfy theoretical needs by selection, justifying an argument which cannot be explained or employed by using the primary text alone.⁵²

W.J. Gruffydd's book *Rhiannon* provides one of the most extraordinary examples of interpretation by means of a reconstructive method, resulting in a startling treatment of one of the most enigmatic and attractive women in the Four Branches.⁵³ Gruffydd was clearly most impressed by the power which surrounds Rhiannon's activities; undeniably, her magic is an important part of her characterization, but to focus on that one aspect

⁵² Kermode, p. 79. He says, "it strikes me as testimony to the way our minds work when confronted by a problematical text; we find it easier to think about it if we imagine something behind it rather different from what we have in front of us."

⁵³ His conviction that a study of cognate Irish tales would assist the critic in sorting out the Welsh tales seems to have been based upon the unverifiable assumption that one set of tales is "correct" (i.e., the Irish) and the other (the Welsh) is "incoherent." This thesis seems vulnerable in that another critic could just as easily--and unverifiably--assume the reverse opinion, as Kenneth Jackson does in his study.

exclusively is to create problems rather than to solve them. Rhiannon, it must be remembered, has credibly human attributes which are emphasized by the narrative structure of the story: her assertiveness (when she tells Pwyll she has come to seek him out of all possible suitors); her ability to take positive action quickly (her speech and subsequent magic after Pwyll unwittingly gives her away to Gwawl); her sense of humor (her comment to Pwyll when he chases her at Gorsedd Arberth); her patient dignity (when unjustly accused of killing her infant, enduring the punishment rather than arguing with her serving women; In each of these cases, we find that we are looking at moments when Rhiannon speaks--or refuses to. Speech is as important a factor in the analysis of her character as is her golden costume or the fact that she rides a supernatural horse. In her reported dialogues, we are offered sharp insights into her personality; and, by paying attention to the tone and moment of delivery, we can understand why, in ordinary human terms, she has behaved in the way she has.

Gruffydd, like many other critics, has chosen to focus on the external, physical aspects of her characterization rather than on verbal evidence, leading him to the conclusion that she can be better understood outside the extant text, creating a proto-myth to explain her presence and actions. She is not the only character

to suffer this displacement; indeed, by the time he is done, he has separated her story from Pryderi's as effectively as the monstrous claw had done that May Eve of Pryderi's birth. Gruffydd proposed two distinct stories to sort out the "confusion" of the First and Third Branches: The Saga of Pryderi and The Myth of Rhiannon.⁵⁴ The end product results in two good stories, but stories which exist only by virtue of the "violence he does to the text."⁵⁵ He describes the Four Branches as we now have them: "a vast number of unrelated stories and incidents [which] have in the course of time been thrust in by the storytellers."⁵⁶ This seems an equally apt description of his own reconstructions. The mutation of the story to fit the theory implies an existing difficulty in the text without providing any proof of it.

Is it necessary to redesign the plot? Is it helpful to reassign the identities of the characters? Is it less confusing to identify Gwawl with the Head of Annwn? And in terms of the primary female character, Rhiannon, do we learn any more about the story by calling her Matrona and marrying her to Teyrnnon in a proto-myth outside the text of the Four Branches?⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Gruffydd, pp. 12-15.

⁵⁵ Catherine McKenna, p. 35.

⁵⁶ Gruffydd, p. 15.

⁵⁷ Gruffydd, p. 13.

Gruffydd opened up a world of speculative thinking in terms of literary reconstructions and the contamination of the Four Branches by other traditional tales. His completed proto-tales go too far in convoluting the original text into the imagined one, but some of his theories were clearly acceptable as the work of later critics shows.⁵⁸ The Pandora's box is opened in his proposal to strip back the narrative elements of the tales until the Branch lies denuded before us:

myths, legends, folktales, and links by the author have been heaped together into so compact a mass that it is difficult to decide which of its various elements should first be pulled out from the jumble in order to make a start. It is very much like the problem which faces the lumberman in a logjam; he knows that amid the hopeless-looking accumulation which has held up his work there is one particular 'key' log, which if released, will, eventually cause the free flow of the rest.⁵⁹

Gruffydd followed this proposal with a ten-page analysis of the identifiable motifs in the extant story of Rhiannon, taking a sideways glance at the story of Branwen in support of his identification of the "key" in both tales: the punishment "which bears no logical relation to the crime."⁶⁰ In the case of Rhiannon, Gruffydd could not reconcile her penance--bearing visitors to the court like

⁵⁸ Proinsias Mac Cana and Kenneth Jackson, while not the enthusiasts of literary reconstruction that Gruffydd was, see the value of comparative textual analysis with Irish or other Indo-European tales, respectively.

⁵⁹ Gruffydd, p. 57.

⁶⁰ Gruffydd, p. 58.

a horse--with her supposed crime.⁶¹ Why should she be forced to serve as a horse? he asked, focussing on only one aspect of the narration concerning her punishment. Sidestepping into a discussion concerning the similarity of Branwen's story to Rhiannon's, he unknowingly provided an excellent study of the echoing similarities of the elements and structure of the two narratives, giving ample evidence of the very stylistic coherence which he insisted did not exist in the Four Branches. By recreating the story of Branwen, he made a proper version of the Calumniated Wife out of her tragedy, without attempting to reconcile that motif with the rest of the events in the Second Branch--or indeed with the Third and Fourth Branches. In this version, the poignant affection between Bendigeidfran and his honored sister, Branwen, is lost, so that we can only wonder--if what Gruffydd asserted was correct--what Bendigeidfran was doing in the Second Branch and why Branwen bothered to summon her brother from across the sea, nor does the story of the Feast of the Head have any connection with the previous events as Gruffydd outlined them.

⁶¹ This punishment is not unique to the Mabinogi; there is a similar motif noted by Stith Thompson: S21.4, "King banishes mother to stables." *Motif-Index*, V (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1955), p. 299. The tale referred to is an Indian one.

To return to Rhiannon, however, as Gruffydd did in his discussion, we find that he reconstructed her tale so that she gives birth to a foal as well as a child, condensing her act of childbirth and the foaling of Teyrnnon's mare into one event and the characters of horse and woman into one. In this reading, then, her punishment makes sense, according to Gruffydd, for if she gives birth to a foal, it is only fitting that she should have to behave like a horse. Yet if we turn to the actual passage under discussion, we may find that her equine punishment is not as great a problem as it seems:

Hitheu Riannon a dyuynnwys atei athrawon a doethon. A gwedy bot yn degach genthi kymryt y phenyt nog ymdaeru a'r gwaged, y phenyt a gymerth. Sef penyt a dodet erni, bot yn y llys honno yn Arberth hyt ym penn y seith mlyned. Ac yskynuaen a oed odieithyr y porth, eisted gyr ?law hwnnw beunyd, a dywedut y pawb a delei o'r debygei nas gwyppei, y gyffranc oll, ac o'r a atei idi y dwyn, kynnig y westei a phellynic y dwyn ar y cheuyn y'r llys. A damwein y gadei yr un y dwyn. Ac yuelly treulaw talym o'r ulwydyn a wnaeth.⁶²

(Rhiannon consulted her advisers and wise men. And since it was more pleasing to her to accept her penance than to wrangle with the women, she accepted her penance. This was the punishment which was put on her, that she be in that court of Arberth until the end of seven years, and a mounting block that was outside the gate, sitting beside it every day, and telling everyone who might come who did not know, the whole story, and any of them who would allow her to bear them, offering to take guest and stranger on her back into the court. And only by chance would anyone allow himself to be carried. And so she spent part of the year.)

⁶² *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, ed. Ifor Williams (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1930), p. 21. All references to the text of the Four Branches will be to this edition, hereafter cited as PKM. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of Welsh material are my own.

Gruffydd's analysis led him to his extensive argument proving that Rhiannon was both the Great Mother and Epona, the Celtic horse-goddess. Rhiannon's associations with Epona cannot be denied, linked as she is in the First and Third Branches with horses, but his rewriting of her story approaches the bizarre, reassigning identities, friends, and marital partners indiscriminately. In the process, he even created dialogue for another female character, putting uncharacteristically violent words into Cigfa's mouth,⁶³ although he seems to be otherwise uninterested in any other woman's speeches.

The problem for Gruffydd was that Rhiannon should have performed a horse's duties when she had been accused of eating her child; and his manner of relating the story made it seem as though she spent every day of her penance weighted down by unfeeling strangers. Yet the text of the First Branch indicates that the times when she was forced to work as a horse were very few, the majority of visitors preferring to leave her alone. The crux here, to me, is not why she should be forced to behave as a beast. She is accused of eating her child, which is the behavior

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⁶³ Gruffydd, p. 69. He says, "A sentence of Cigfa's has been lost such a '*Pes lladut, ni a gaffem y wiat yn ryd i ni an hunein*,'" which he translates as "If you were to kill them, we would have the country free for ourselves."

of an "animal," so why should not her punishment fit the crime? Or, on the other hand, one can see this as a humiliation which indicates her unfitness for her station; she is no longer noble, a woman served as befits her rank, but rather a servant, forced to stagger along, because as an alleged murderess, she is lower than all other human beings. Whatever the punishment is meant to symbolize, one thing is clear from the text: she rarely had to endure the humiliation. And why? Part of her penance was to tell her story to each person who came to the court and after that, offer to carry them in. Yet few took her up on her offer. Does this not indicate the effect her speech had on others? We do not know exactly what she said, whether she claimed she was unjustly accused or whether she told the same story that her servingwomen did, but we do know that after hearing her speak, it was only by chance or accident ("damwein") that anyone would make her carry them in. Gruffydd passed over this information available in the passage to go on to create a long and convoluted proto-saga to explain her punishment, a story which may be interesting as a possible source, but one which does not attempt to work with characterizing elements in the extant text. I do not think the author or final redactor of this Branch intended to indicate her latent divinity in her penance, but was, instead, interested in the more human aspects of her humiliation as

well as the power of her speech and how it protected her dignity. She is innocent, as we know, and something in her very words must have touched most visitors to Pwyll's court for them to have left her alone. And if we look at other passages in the First Branch, we can see more evidence of the strength of her words, a consistent power which recurs and affects events wherever she appears.

Branwen suffers equally in Gruffydd's treatment of the Second Branch, for his summary of her story neglects her rather startling reply to the messengers,⁶⁴ or the fact that she has communicated with her brother. There is a kind of deafness here that can be found in many places--an ignorance of what women have said--although most of their power and magic is asserted through words. There is an obsession with physical deeds at the expense of speech in a number of works about the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, a strange tendency, since so much of the dialogue is strikingly prominent, especially in the case of the female characters.

Kenneth Jackson's study of the Mabinogion, *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition*, opens medieval Welsh folk literature to comparison with the whole of folklore (or international popular tales, to use his more accurate name for that body of literature).⁶⁵

⁶⁴ "'*Kyn ny bwyf Arglwydes, heb hi, 'mi wnn beth yw hynny.*'" PKM, p. 40. ("Although I am no lady," said she, "I know what that is.")

While Jackson's series of lectures show us the overwhelming value of applying comparative folkloristic methodology to a study of Celtic literature in our efforts to understand the sources of the stories, there comes a point in his third lecture where the technique of analysis creates more chaos than order.⁶⁵ He begins his discussion of the theft of Rhiannon's child with a premise that I find difficult to accept: "It is obvious, as all agree, that this story as it stands is confused and senseless and must have undergone some considerable corruption."⁶⁶

The problem, once again, has to do with the interpretation of the woman's actions in the story. It is the misfortune of the female characters to be thoroughly misunderstood in their roles in the Four Branches (by both the male characters and critics), resulting in explanations of their roles which all too often have nothing to do with their perfectly reasonable presence and activities in the world of the Mabinogi.

In Jackson's discussion, he identifies three interspersed motifs in the story of Rhiannon's child: the Calumniated Wife, the Monster Hand and Child, and the Congenital Animals.⁶⁷ It is the violent and somewhat careless insertion of the first and third motifs into the

⁶⁵ Jackson, p. 17.

⁶⁶ Jackson, p. 87.

⁶⁷ Jackson, p. 91.

second that creates the textual problem, in his estimation. While there are similar elements in each motif--which clearly inspired the storyteller to draw otherwise discrete motifs into one tale--the manner in which they are joined is associational, rather than logical. He says that Gruffydd's reading of Rhiannon as a horse goddess is a possibility, though the horses associated with her in the tale have more to do with the Congenital Animals motif than as conclusive proof of her one-time divinity.⁶⁸ It is another motif, however, which causes the greatest problems:

It was the clumsy patching at this stage of the tale, consequent on the violent introduction of the Calumniated Wife, which has left it practically unintelligible in its present form. Who stole the child? What was this mysterious claw? Why did it steal Teyrnon's foals? How did it come to drop the child in Teyrnon's stable and what was it doing there anyway?

These are some of the questions which arise when we first read Pwyll, and the tale provides no answers--the answers are only to be found by the methods of comparative folklore study.⁶⁹

While many of these questions assuredly remain mysterious--and unanswered--in the tale, they do not have to be the cause for alarm which Jackson suggests here; fairy tales and folktales are, by their nature, loosely mysterious. Many things happen in such stories which are odd and exist only to lend an eerie air to the proceedings: why, for example, should a giant in one tale

⁶⁸ Jackson, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁹ Jackson, pp. 93-4.

have blue hair? or why should a princess sit on top of a glass mountain? It is often the very inexplicable and breathtaking qualities of description and location which lend the greatest magic to folk and fairy tales.

Nevertheless, the questions Jackson asks are not entirely unanswerable if we employ the information available within the tale. The problem, I think, is identifiable in an analysis of his questions: we are discussing the story which he himself has called "the story of the stealing away of Rhiannon's child,"⁷⁰ yet what question has he asked in relation to Rhiannon? In emphasizing the importance of the Calumniated Wife motif, Jackson points to the most important character in this section of the story. The actions which take place here center around Rhiannon: she gives birth; she is accused of murdering her child; she is forced to serve a humiliating penance; and, finally, she is the one who is delivered of her "care" at the end.⁷¹ By recognizing her importance to the tale, we may rephrase our questions somewhat: Why is her child stolen? Why does the storyteller arrange the elements of the tale so that her child is left with Teyrnion and his wife (for let us not forget that both of them take an active part in rearing the mysterious orphan)? Why does Rhiannon not resist her penance,

⁷⁰ Jackson, p. 86. Italics mine.

⁷¹ "*Y rofi a Duw, heb y Riannon, 'oed escor uym pryder im, pei gwir hynny.*" PKM, p. 26.

declaring her innocence before the accusations of her lying serving women? What is the effect of her restoration to her former status? What does this story have to do with the rest of the First Branch? Is it a continuation of any earlier ideas or themes?

Jackson subsequently analyzes Branwen in a briefer breakdown of international popular tale motifs than he gave to the First Branch. The Second Branch is, in his own words, "exceedingly interesting in itself, though [having] little of interest to offer the student of the non-Celtic international tale," most of the tale being traceable to an internal Celtic source, Irish legendary material and folklore.⁷² His comparison of several elements of the Second Branch with several similar episodes in the tales from the Arabian Nights is certainly a proof of the widespread familiarity of certain folklore motifs in otherwise distant and divergent cultures, but it does not elaborate on his opening compliment to the Second Branch--its being "exceedingly interesting." Why is it interesting? Why do we enjoy this story so much? Why is the Second Branch, like the Fourth, such an inspiration to later writers? And why has he made no mention at all of the chief female character, after whom the Second Branch is commonly known? Even in the context of a study of the elements of international popular tale motifs, Branwen

⁷² Jackson, pp. 100-103.

should be a conspicuously interesting character to discuss. She is, quite obviously, an example of the Calumniated Wife, a motif which fits in more neatly here--and with less interruption--than it does in the First Branch. There is the incident of her banishment to the scullery, a well-known folk tale motif, one identified by Stith Thompson as "Punishment; noble person must do menial service."⁷³ Her training of the starling which alerts Bendigeidfran to her distress can be identified as an example of the Animal Helper.⁷⁴ And the throwing of her child Gwern onto the fire and her simultaneous distress has an echo of Demeter's passing Queen Metaneira's son, Demophoon, through a fire every night, and his mother's subsequent distress at the discovery of this activity.⁷⁵ What is striking in Jackson's discussion is his complete lack of attention to Branwen. Admittedly, he is not proceeding with as detailed an analysis as he offered for the First Branch--but it seems to me that the title character offers some significantly interesting examples of international popular tale elements. And in the case of the Calumniated Wife and Animal Helper motifs, a

⁷³ Thompson, V, p. 239. This is a larger heading numbered Q482; the incident in the Second Branch is listed as a sub-heading, Q482.2, "Queen placed in kitchen and abused by butcher."

⁷⁴ Thompson, I, p. 436; "Helpful Birds", B450.

⁷⁵ Apollodorus, trans. Sir James George Frazer, (London: William Heinemann, 1921), pp. 37-39.

mention of these might offer a chance to identify structural echoes with the First Branch, showing an internal and subtle literary link between the two stories which argues, in part, for an intelligent and careful storyteller.

The next tale in the Mabinogion, Manawydan, is very poor in international themes, and those it does contain are trifling; it is perhaps significant that Manawydan is the most interesting and successful of all.⁷⁶

It is curious that Jackson should find the Third Branch so unsatisfying, for it has the approving attention of such other critics as Proinsias Mac Cana and W.J. Gruffydd.⁷⁷ It is equally interesting that most of the discussion

and Cigfa are discussed, but only in terms of their secondary roles as wife to Manwydan and Pryderi, respectively. And in the case of Mac Cana's reading, one can hardly say that they emerge as responsible characters.⁷⁸

In Jackson's treatment of the tale, he points out only two international themes, the All Stick Together (in reference to Pryderi's and Rhiannon's abduction by touching the golden bowl), and the Mice in the Corn. He

⁷⁶ Jackson, pp. 103-104.

⁷⁷ See *Mac Cana, The Mabinogi* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1977), pp. 55-57; and Gruffydd, *Rhiannon* pp. 84-87.

⁷⁸ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, p. 57.

is right in saying that there is not much for the student of the international popular tale to sift through here, but that hardly qualifies as a reason for dismissing this Branch from serious critical discussion. It only requires a quick side-step into another critical methodology (or methodologies) to see the importance of this tale and to appreciate how well it works with the other Branches. Proinsias Mac Cana has advanced the thesis that the character of Manawydan offers clues to the identity or personality of the possible author of the Mabinogi.⁷⁹ If this is indeed the case, then the Third Branch is vitally interesting to the serious reader of the Four Branches, as an insight into the virtues most respected by the otherwise unknown author. Yet another important point is raised by Brinley Rees in his *Ceinciau'r Mabinogi*: that the Four Branches can be perceived as a tri-partite structure, and that the adventures related in the Third

Branch are a continuation of one family's saga:

Ni chyflwynir teulu newydd yn y drydedd gainc. Cydir dechrau honno wrth ddiT,edd yr ail, ac y mae'r helyntion yr adroddir amdanynt yng nghorff y gainc yn deilliocp.'r hyn sydd wedi ei adrodd yn y gainc gyntaf.⁸⁰

(There is no new family presented in the third branch. That beginning is joined to the end of the second, and the troubles which are talked about in the body of the branch result from that which was told in the first branch.)

⁷⁹ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, pp. 55-57.

⁸⁰ Brinley Rees, *Ceinciau'r Mabinogi* (Siliwen, Bangor: 1975), p. 10.

If we try to look at all Four Branches as a composite, linked structure, as I intend to do in greater depth in the following chapters, then the Third Branch becomes as important as any other, and not unsuccessful in any respect. The point I would like to make here is that no one methodology can be applied too vigorously to the Mabinogi, for--as the wide range of analysis, interpretations, and theories surrounding these tales show--we are dealing with a multi-layered text which can be understood by giving attention to its many different aspects. The Third Branch is infertile ground for deep comparative international popular motif study, but it provides a great deal of useful information for the critic who is interested in proving the existence of an author of the Mabinogi, or equally for the critic who is interested in identifying the great families of the Mabinogi and their feuds.

The rest of Jackson's study (*Math, Culhwch ac Olwen, The Dream of Macsen, Peredur, Hanes Taliesin*) confines itself to one or two motifs found in each work that can be identified--and, if necessary, be rendered more comprehensible--through the application of international popular tale motif study. Here, the analysis does not move into the question of narrative coherence or literary merit; but I cannot help but feel that once again, because not enough attention is given to the female characters of

the Fourth Branch (for there are a number of interesting elements connected with each of them that would be made clearer by comparison with other, similar international tales), yet another opportunity to observe links between the Branches is lost. Most of these links are narrative and thematic, yet the motifs which recur in the tales are signposts to larger themes. In Aranrhod, for example, we have an echo of Branwen: a woman who is placed in a humiliating position because of her brother's thoughtless actions. By concentrating only on the international popular tale motifs, Jackson does not find unity or coherence in the Four Branches, for the elements which have been drawn from international sources are not employed in the Mabinogi as they would have been in the usual popular or folk tale. To Jackson's way of thinking, this is sheer clumsiness on the part of the storyteller(s),⁸¹ yet it is possible that there was a compiler who did mix up the bits and pieces ordinarily found in folktales--but on purpose, for the compiler's own literary reasons, creating new patterns out of the old.

If we expect only the traditional uses of folkloric material in the Mabinogi, we will be greatly disappointed. But if we recognize old materials re-utilized in new constructions, we do not have to agree that "the plots of the Four Branches . . . are extraordinarily confused and

⁸¹ Jackson, pp. 124ff.

incoherent.⁸² Where some have always said that the glass is half-empty, others may find it equally possible to argue that it is half-full.

Proinsias Mac Cana's discussion of the Four Branches in his book, *The Mabinogi*, is primarily an argument for literary coherence; he sees the extant text as a work which shows the guiding hand of a usually careful author. Agreeing with the thesis that there are strong structural and thematic links woven throughout the Four Branches, as J.K. Bollard as argued,⁸³ he disagrees with Bollard in the degree to which he makes deductions about the characters' motivations. Though Mac Cana does not find the Mabinogi to be utterly incoherent, he still maintains that it possesses a number of examples of "crude joinery" as a result of the "compilatory" nature of the work; but most refreshingly, he reminds us that "one must at one and the same time have regard to all the several different methods of assessment and interpretation."⁸⁴

This bodes well for the text. And, although reconstructive speculation is a part of his analysis, his application of this technique does not result in the kind of extraordinary reshuffling found in Gruffydd's work; in this respect, Mac Cana's intention is to show that the

⁸² Jackson, p. 124.

⁸³ Mac Cana, pp. 33-8.

⁸⁴ Mac Cana, p. 38.

Second Branch is linked closely with Irish analogues which strike him as more coherent or satisfactory than the extant text of *Branwen*. The problem with this is that once again a proto-text is more "correct" than the actual story, leading Mac Cana to perceive the Second Branch as "incoherent" because of "the excessively large number of 'loose ends' in the narrative."⁸⁵ No literary work is perfect, of course, and no critic can explain all the elements of any given tale, especially in a structure as complex as the Mabinogi, but what may appear to be illogical in isolation may make more sense in the context of the larger whole. It is helpful to see the Irish analogues of *Branwen* if we are to explain certain aspects of the tale, but if we stop at that and say that we cannot produce a fluid reading of the tale, we have not completed the task. Why always look outside for understanding rather than within the whole of the Four Branches?

Perhaps comparison with one of the other Branches will resolve problems which cannot be worked out by searching another country's literature. *Branwen*, at least, is not forgotten by Mac Cana in his observation of the text, for he states that she is indeed the "centrepiece" of the drama of the Second Branch:

⁸⁵ Gruffydd, quoted by Mac Cana, p. 41.

There is a suggestion of how this may have come about in an Irish analogue of the Otherworld raid. Here the heroes Cu Roi and Cu Chulainn set out to recover (or alternatively to abduct) the woman Blaithine and to gain possession of a Cauldron of Plenty. The lady is the principal object of the quest, the cauldron a secondary but important attraction. In the original form of the Welsh tale the cauldron was the principal object, but . . . it is possible that a redactor saw in the recovery of the lady a neat way of giving his tale variety and a more human motivation.⁸⁶

At last we find an interest in the motivations of the characters; at last there is a recognition of humanity within the text rather than divinity or mythology outside it. Yet with this promising suggestion, we are disappointed on two counts: in the first place, Mac Cana returns to comparative folkloric analysis in proto-texts; in the second place, he abandons his discussion of the central importance of Branwen and the emotions she exhibits and elicits in her story. In the seventh chapter of his book about the Second Branch (in the chapter bearing the title "Branwen"), his first concern is not how her character inspires other, but where the sources for her character might have come from prior to and outside the Second Branch.⁸⁷ The rest of that chapter has little to do with Branwen's role specifically, and even his questions relating to the proto-Branwen and her story remain unanswered for fifteen pages, while incidents

⁸⁶ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, p. 40. See also Branwen, p. 152.

⁸⁷ Mac Cana, *Branwen*, p. 154.

relating to other, sometimes secondary, characters are treated in depth. Greater evidence of his lack of interest in the character of Branwen is to be found in his later book, *The Mabinogi*. While saying that all the characters of the Second Branch "lack depth," he focusses his disappointment on Branwen, who seems to him "a passive and colourless figure who has little of the spirit and complexity of the great heroines of Celtic literature."⁸⁸ This judgement follows directly upon his observation of the importance of dialogue in the Four Branches:

No one has read these tales but has been impressed by that subtle weave of dialogue that enriches the texture of the narrative and frequently blurs the distinction between the arts of the storyteller and the dramatist. It is not an invention of the author's--the more extensive Irish materials, as well as the other Middle Welsh tales, bring out clearly the Celtic storyteller's delight in the dramatic use of dialogue--but the qualities which distinguish his narrative prose--clarity, succinctness, style, and a certain intellectual subtlety--these are again present in his speech passages but enhanced by an acute sense of situation and character.⁸⁹

There is certainly a dynamism inherent in the speech passages of each Branch; it strikes me as contradictory, therefore, to notice this and in the following sentences accuse Branwen of being a "colourless figure" by this criterion. If any character has an arresting line in this

⁸⁸ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, p. 55.

⁸⁹ Mac Cana, p. 55.

Branch--one which combines "clarity, succinctness, style, and a certain intellectual subtlety" in its crafting--it is the unfortunate Queen of Ireland. It is true that much of the dialogue in the Second Branch is indirectly reported, a narrative technique which causes the text to lose some vitality and immediacy, but it is not true to say that Branwen is completely passive and silent. As I have already pointed out, she makes use of speech to alert her brother to her distress and to respond sharply to those who have treated her so badly. Female characters in this body of literature can be physically active, but their chief power emerges through words, which should come as no surprise, given the physically limited world the noble woman in medieval romances and folk literature inhabits. Women in Irish texts impinge on traditionally male territory, leading armies, like Medb, or providing the finest example and instruction in martial arts, like Scathach, the woman-warrior who taught Cu Chulainn, or Aife, the woman-ruler whom he overcame in battle after her great resistance.⁹⁰ The women in Welsh texts are not the

⁹⁰ See *Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories* ed., A.G. Van Hamel (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1956); these women appear in the story "Compert Con Culainn." When Cu Chulainn wished to learn the martial arts from the best warrior, in the world, he sought out Scathach: "*no forsetla Scathach imon milltr imon figaisced*" ("Scathach taught him about the military arts, that is, about feats of arms"), p. 52. Aife is described as the only foe Scathach fears: "*in banfennid ba hansam isin domun*" ("the hardest woman-warrior in the world"), p. 54.

warriors their Irish sisters are, but they possess the same intensity of expression, exhibiting a fuller range of emotions and opinion than most of the men. This is a fact recognized by Mac Cana even as he doubts Branwen: "Apart from Manawydan, and Gwydion to some extent, the female characters are the most strongly delineated.... Rhiannon, Aranrhod, and Blodeuwedd are all in their different ways strong and assertive characters that lend themselves to dramatic treatment."⁹¹

His subsequent discussion of Rhiannon does take into account the power of her speech, though he attributes it to her role as the reincarnation of the sovereignty goddess who rules the hero by her "masterful behavior."⁹² Maccana points out one of Rhiannon's three important lines in the First Branch, her response to Pwyll's carelessness

⁹¹ Mac Cana, p. 57. The portion of this quotation which I have omitted in ellipses is important enough to mention separately and briefly here, though the point is not entirely relevant to an argument about the conversational powers of the female characters. After dismissing Branwen once again, Mac Cana has this to say of Cigfa, one of the more talkative characters of the Third Branch: "Cigfa strikes me as a slight though effective vignette of a contemporary 'bourgeois' snob." Whether or not one likes Cigfa's questioning attitude towards Manawydan's work and behavior, her dialogue is not carping, and she accepts Manawydan's answers without further response, either positive or negative. I cannot understand the vehemence of Mac Cana's impression of her character; his reaction is not warranted by the events in the text, and I cannot help but wonder if this is not another instance of bringing external speculation into a simply and understandably executed narrative.

⁹² Mac Cana, p. 58.

at the wedding feast where he gives her away to Gwawl. In this instance, he sees her speech as a means of characterization rather than a sign that she is a euhemerized goddess. Equally, in his brief observation of the Fourth Branch, he recognizes the dramatic impact of both Aranrhod and Blodeuwedd, crediting the latter with being the character "who imparts to the fourth branch the dramatic colour and force which raises it above the more balanced and more unified narrative of Manawydan."⁹³ There is the implication in this statement that the Fourth Branch is less unified than the Third, an opinion common to many readers besides Mac Cana and one which seems to approach the unshakeable quality of tradition. I think this impression may be due to a lack of analysis of the women, for the Fourth Branch is possibly the most concerned with the status of the female characters, telling the histories of three women, two of whom--Aranrhod and Blodeuwedd--are recognizably among the most impressive of all the female characters of the Mabinogi.

The last comment Mac Cana has to make concerning the women of the Mabinogi is in the realm of the expected:

This formidable trio of women [Aranrhod, Blodeuwedd, and Rhiannon] owes its dramatic impact more to the resonance of tradition than to the pen of the author. If Branwen is by comparison a flaccid, colourless creation, this is probably because she plays none of the

⁹³ Mac Cana, p. 59.

independent roles that formed the traditional repertoire of the Celtic goddess"⁹⁴

Here we see, briefly, the greatest problem in looking for the goddess within the woman. By creating a dichotomy of such strict proportions--that where there is a female character we can only find a goddess or an uninteresting, poorly executed characterization--we create an untenable division in our analysis. It is a common cultural dichotomy in the perception of women, akin to the Victorian separation into virgin/whore. If the woman can be proved to be the first, she is "good" or "correct," and if she cannot be proved to be the former, she undoubtedly is the latter, which is "bad" or "incorrect." Such a reading does not allow for intermediate shadings, which of course is what characterization is all about. Even though the text is drawn from folkloric sources, there is no clearcut dichotomy between good and bad; so an analysis which insists on reducing the female characters in the Mabinogi to those which can be identified as euhemerized goddesses and those which cannot is based on a false assumption about the functions of the characters. The author whom Proinsias Mac Cana so admires, a man who is as prudent and thoughtful as Manawydan,⁹⁵ would not be satisfied with caricatures of extremes of good and bad; he would be a careful writer who, as Mac Cana says, possesses

⁹⁴ Mac Cana, p. 59.

⁹⁵ Mac Cana, pp. 59ff.

"an acute sense of situation and character" in each episode and for each character, regardless of gender.

Brinley Rees's *Ceinciau'r Mabinogi* opens the study of the Four Branches to the kind of tripartite analysis developed by Georges Dumezil, though the primary importance this technique is to identify patterns within the text that show how the tales are bound together. He utilizes supporting evidence from other Celtic or Indo-European literatures, but only to supplement arguments which concern information inherent in the real text. The major thesis of his small, but interesting, book is that the Four Branches are based on the histories of the three families connected with three regions of Wales.⁹⁶ Rees's concern is not to forge a meaning out of physical and external elements in isolation, but rather to observe the events within the stories in a search for triads of echoes and resonances, noting which elements stand out in greatest relief. This work he does exhaustively, unravelling the multiplicity of tripartite patterns to be found in the Four Branches, *Lludd a Llefelys*, and *Culhwch ac Olwen*. In this process, he excavates some important details concerning the female characters. There are three women who give birth in the Four Branches, each a member of one of the three major

⁹⁶ Rees, Sections I and II, pp. 7-14, deal with the particular evidence which supports this thesis, while the three families are specifically identified on p. 10.

families: Rhiannon, Branwen, and Aranrhod. A pattern, clearly, but of what significance? That a woman gives birth is no oddity, but there are women in the Four Branches who do not give birth.⁹⁷ What we find here--by identifying this pattern--is that these three women are not only parents, but the three most important parents in Britain. It is a signpost in the narrative guiding us to observe each of the three--particularly in their roles as mothers--with great care.⁹⁸

Rees finds another pattern concerning these three women in their speech:

"*am Aranrhod, grym tyngedfennol ei geiriau a amlygir*"; for Rhiannon, "*y mae ei geiriau'n dyst i'w ffraethineb (gwawdlyd braidd), a'r ddawn arbennig a briodolir iddi yn dawn ymddiddan*"; and for Branwen, "*urddas, a gofal brenhines am ei phobl, a glywir yn ei*

⁹⁷ The statement concerning the three chief mothers in Britain occurs in the Second Branch, in reference to Branwen: "*A honno oed tryded prif rieni yn yr ynys hon*" (And that was the third chief parent in this island). PKM, pp. 30-31; and Rees, p. 13. Ifor Williams supposed that the other two parents were Rhiannon and Aranrhod; "*Cynigiad mai'r tair prif rieni oedd Rhiannon fel mam Pryderi, Branwen fel mam Gwern, ac Aranrhod fel mam Llew Llawgyffes*," PKM, p. 167 (I would propose that the three chief parents were Rhiannon as the mother of Pryderi, Branwen as the mother of Gwern, and Aranrhod as the mother of Llew Llawgyffes).

⁹⁸ I will not go into any analysis of their roles as mothers here, reserving those points for the specific chapters in which I consider each Branch individually. But if I may hint at my later argument, I will say that I think the relationship between mother and child is an important theme in the Mabinogi.

geiriau hi, ac yn ei 'thawelwch."⁹⁹ This observation seems to me a crucial one, for this particular pattern, if studied, yields information about the themes of the Four Branches, as I hope to show in following chapters. The magic and strength of speech, the power of words and names, the acts of creation which are generated by the enunciation of integral sounds or syllables are part of international cultural beliefs.

In Section IV, Rees looks at the women's links with the triple aspects of life: "*gwybodaeth gyfrin ac iawn berthynas a'r duwiau, nerth a amlygir mewn rhyfel ac mewn cadernid brenhinol, ac yn drydedd cyfoeth, ffrwythlonder, harddwch, cynghanedd, llawnder*"¹⁰⁰ (a secret knowledge and right relation with the gods, a power which is revealed in war and in royal strength, and thirdly, wealth, fertility, beauty, harmony, abundance).

The women govern fertility and prosperity, an aspect we have already seen in the work of earlier critics:

Yn hraddodiadau nifer o bobloedd, y mae i bob un o'r tair agwedd ar fywyd a amlygwyd uchod ei duwiau neu ei chymeriadau chwedlonol ei hun, ac y mae'n beth hynod mai dau gymar--yn am dau efell-- ynghyda duwies a fydd yn aml yn cynrychioli'r drydedd agwedd. Hwyl fydd yn noddi

⁹⁹ Rees, pp. 13-4. (For Aranrhod, a fateful power of her words is revealed; for Rhiannon, her words are a testimony to her wit (almost satirical), and the special gift which is attributed to her is conversation; and for Branwen, dignity, and a queenly concern for her people which is heard in her words and in her silence.)

¹⁰⁰ Rees, p. 16.

*ffrwythlonder a llawnder a chynghanedd.*¹⁰¹

(In the traditions of a number of peoples, there is, for each one of the three aspects of life which is revealed above, its gods or its own mythological characters, and it is a remarkable thing that here are two comrades--often a pair of twins--together with a goddess who represents the third aspect. They protect fertility and abundance and harmony.)

In the sovereignty motif, the hero who cooperates with the woman/goddess gains either material success above and beyond the lot of an ordinary mortal, or fame in martial pursuits, or gains responsibility for the prosperity of his land and people as a sovereign chosen by the goddess.

Each of these attributes is echoed closely in the outline proposed by Rees:

Rees's "*tair agwedd ar fywyd*"

The Elements of the Sovereignty Motif

1) *gwybodaeth gyfrin ac iawn berthynas a'r duwiau*

(secret knowledge and a right relation with the gods)

1) material success from a relationship with the goddess/fairy woman

2) *nerth a amlygir mewn rhyfel*

2) martial prowess (strength revealed in war,

¹⁰¹ Rees, p. 18.

- 3) *cyfoeth, ffrwythlonder, harddwch, cynghanedd, llawnder*
(wealth, fertility, beauty, harmony, abundance)
3) fertility, the land's and people's prosperity

The two patterns have a point in common: the female figure as the source and distributor of desired objects or states of being. What is useful in Rees's analysis is not so much his application of the sovereignty elements to the text--which he identifies as a pattern which occurs in the traditions of numerous cultures--but rather the fact that he uses these elements as signposts or impression-points, indicating which characters might be of the greatest importance to a passage which is marked by the pattern. But his process of selection and his deafness regarding women's speech in this literature is paralleled by a blindness to the women's actions in the same context, as the events surrounding women are paraphrased to their detriment. His summary of the meeting between Pwyll and Rhiannon is strangely distorted: "Pendefig Dyfed . . . yw'n enill ei wraig ar of ymryson ras a hi ar gefnau meirch"¹⁰² (Pendefig Dyfed . . . who wins his wife after competing in a race with her on horseback). Nowhere in the text are the words "ras" or "ymrysonfa" ("race" or

¹⁰² Rees, p. 19.

"competition") to be found. Actually, the situation as it is narrated in the First Branch is quite unlike a competition: Rhiannon's horse walked slowly ("*kerdet araf*"), and the intention of Pwyll and his servants was to meet her: "*Aet un, 'heb ynteu, 'yn y herbyn y wybot pwy ywin*"¹⁰³ ("Let one of you go," he said, "to meet her to know who she is"). And the text itself relates that the chase was distinctly unsuccessful: "*Ac of a dygei ar yr eil neit, neu ar y trydyd, y gordiwedei. Nyt oed nes hagen idi no chynt*"¹⁰⁴ (And he thought that on the second leap, or on the third, he could overtake her but he was no nearer to her than he had been before). Pwyll did not "win" Rhiannon; he was able to meet her by requesting her to stop, eliciting a sarcastic reply from her, wherein we see the power of a woman's words at work: "*Arhoaf yn llawen, 'heb hi, 'ac oed llesach y'r march, pei ass archut yr meityn*"¹⁰⁵ ("I will wait gladly," she said, "but it would have been better for your horse if you had asked this sooner").

It is difficult to see how anyone can say that Pwyll "won" Rhiannon in this--or any other passage. She is so very much her own woman in the First Branch, making her own decisions and directing events that one might say, as

¹⁰³ PKM, p. 9.

¹⁰⁴ PKM, p. 12.

¹⁰⁵ PKM, p. 12.

Mac Cana does, that it is her second husband, the wise and prudent Manawydan, who is her equal; "the shrewd old pragmatist is more her match than the conventional heroic prince,"¹⁰⁶ especially one as innocently bumbling as Pwyll. What cannot be forgotten in this passage is the revelation that Rhiannon has come to the mound to seek Pwyll, having decided before this incident that he was her favorite: "*Pennaf neges un ymi, keissaw dy welet ti,*" says Rhiannon to Pwyll, and makes it clear that she is responsible for this encounter by telling him, "*Riannon, uerch Hefeydd Hen, wyf i, a'm rodi y wr o'm hanwod y ydys. Ac ny mynneis innheu un gwr, a hynny o'th garyat ti. Ac nys mynnaf etwa, ony ti a'm gwrthyt. Ac e wybot dy attep di am hynny e deuthum i*"¹⁰⁷ ("Rhiannon, daughter of Hefeydd Hen, am I, and I am being given to a man against my will. And I do not want anyone even now, unless you reject me. And to know your answer concerning that I have come"). These are not the words of a woman won in a competition, but rather a statement from the mouth of an assertive and confident lover.

Jeffrey Gantz traces the structural unity of the Four Branches in brief, diagramming the echoing events which occur in each Branch and between them.¹⁰⁸ He opens by

¹⁰⁶ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, p. 58.

¹⁰⁷ PKM, p 12.

¹⁰⁸ "Thematic Structure in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi," *Medium Aevum*, XLVII, no. 2, 247-54.

recognizing a "greater degree of logic and coherence than has heretofore been acknowledged" which manifests itself in "a systematic arrangement of parallel and antithetical sequences [which create] from the Mabinogi a single matrix, and that this matrix generates the work's central theme."¹⁰⁹ This theme, which Gantz keeps lurking in the wings until his final paragraph, is revealed to be, in his own words, "a simple one":

In a sense, the structure is the theme; for, as alternating tales balance and sequences parallel each other so the world of the Four Branches is an ideally, just one in which good begets good, evil evil."¹¹⁰

In a sense, Gantz is entering a more complex realm than he admits to; his intention as a critic is to derive a comprehensible reading by confining his speculations to the text of the Four Branches, forswearing almost all temptations to create proto-texts or indulge in comparative analysis of external texts.¹¹¹ He does this by linking an event in each Branch with either parallel or antithetical events in that same Branch or another.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Gantz, p. 247.

¹¹⁰ Gantz, p. 254.

¹¹¹ Indeed, if we consider that the only comparative reading turns up in one of his few footnotes we find ourselves being treated to a radically inward-looking analysis.

¹¹² He does this by dividing the Branches into smaller narrative units. While I agree with the premise, I disagree with the number of subsections he proposes. He divides the First Branch into three sections, for example; I would say that there are five. I apologize once again for suggesting a difference of opinion only briefly in these first chapters, but I will give my full reasons in detail later on in the chapters appropriate to each Branch.

Thus, Manawydan is not compared with his Irish analogue, Mannanan Mac Lir, but rather with a character in the same Branch who competes with him--namely, LLwyd. And interestingly, because Gantz's primary concern is with echoes rather than individuals or event, he even manages to compare male and female characters with each other, in some case implying an equivalence of activity--and perhaps, importance. Aranrhod is paralleled with Gwydion in a list which deals with powerful characters who dominate others.¹¹³

Gantz's argument is a severely limited one. He insists that he will refrain from suppositions concerning the creativity of the redactor who "refashioned" the Mabinogi, which abstention permits him to step lightly out of a tangled undergrowth of critical discussion. Whether or not that constitutes fair play, Gantz says it has no bearing on his argument: but the nature of his discussion will, at the very least, imply either an author's hand at work or the detached pragmatism of a scribe filing a complicated collection of materials. I think he lets himself off too easily here; the kinds of structures he is identifying are--according to his own proofs--too complex to be the result of chance. Having begun the labor of once again for suggesting a difference of opinion only briefly in these first chapters, but I will give my full reasons in detail later on in the chapters appropriate to each Branch.

¹¹³ Gantz, p. 251.

proving the consistency which only a good author could give to a text, he abdicates responsibility for any opinions regarding this point.

Furthermore, he says his argument is confined to "structural rather than narrative unity," again releasing himself from an obligation which he has already begun to fulfill in the process of his reading.¹¹⁴

Despite his self-imposed restrictions, Gantz offers an introduction to a more positive attitude in reading the Four Branches. The largest structure he identifies is the contrasting up-and-down orchestrating of events in the Four Branches:

of the our stories, the first and third (*Pwyll* and *Manawydan*) are set in the south of Wales, while the second and fourth (*Bronwen* and *Math*) are set in the north *Pwyll* and *Manawydan* conclude upon notes of rejoicing, while *Bronwen* and *Math* are, to say the least, equivocal in their final statements.¹¹⁵

It makes good literary sense to utilize dichotomies of structure, events, and characterizations; a basic good-versus-evil or happy-versus-sad structure is one of the most satisfying in popular storytelling. It is quite a common aspect of folktales: to look at one of the most well-known examples, we see that Cinderella is good-natured, kind, unselfish, and pretty, while her stepsisters are bad-tempered, cruel, grasping, and ugly.

¹¹⁴ Gantz, p. 247.

¹¹⁵ Gantz, p. 243.

Dichotomies can work in reverse for great dramatic effect, as well. While good Cinderella suffers in the most deplorable living conditions, her evil stepsisters enjoy a pleasant life, yet when her fortunes take a turn for the better, her stepsisters' fates become relatively unpleasant. As Bruno Bettelheim argues, in his book, *The Uses of Enchantment*, these divisions, on the simplest level, provide a sense of satisfaction in the reader; it is the child within us which tends to anticipate deep chasms between good things and bad. Those primary levels of entertainment and identification lead us to respond to clear-cut dichotomies rather than unrelated ambiguities in our desire to find symmetry and balance. Bruno Bettelheim says we react this way as children in response to complex emotional situations, unable to process the idea that all aspects of the world can and do embody good and bad properties simultaneously.¹¹⁶ Yet even when we become adults, aware of the ambivalences of character and situation which govern real life, we tend to retain from childhood that satisfaction of placing all things on one side or the other until the scales weigh in balance.

The Four Branches have this balance of dichotomies, as Gantz illustrates: the First and Third are "happy" while the Second and Fourth are tragic; there are heroes (like Pwyll and Arawn) and their unyielding enemies (like

¹¹⁶ *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977) p. 9.

Gwawl and Hafgan); there are similar events that provoke antithetical results (the relatively happy marriage of Pwyll and Rhiannon versus the unhappy one of Matholwch and Branwen). There are regular surges upward into success or joy which are complemented by crashes into failure or sorrow. But here Gantz's argument becomes strained. The *Mabinogi* is more than a fairytale; it is a work which is beginning to draw closer to the depth of a fictive narrative. Some characters are not developed as personalities, like Nisien, the good brother, yet many are complex, like Gwydion, who can remorselessly wreak utter havoc in Gwynedd and Dyfed, planning the rape of Goewin and causing the death of Pryderi, but who can also love and protect Aranrhod's child, Lleu, fiercely and paternally.

For all that Gantz makes a shift in reading, seeing a whole where others saw only part, and for all that he recognizes a power in Aranrhod which others have missed--he places some of the women in secondary positions when he draws up his structural tables. In his first chart, he compares Pwyll's meeting with Arawn with Pwyll's meeting with Rhiannon, which superficially seems a logical and unarguable parallel. Yet the comparison also creates a hierarchy of importance among characters which is false, for Arawn and Rhiannon are not echoes of each other because they both meet Pwyll. Arawn is a shadowy

character who lives on the borders of events in which Pwyll is completely involved. They resolve their differences by separating entirely; Pwyll goes to the Otherworld, and Arawn takes on Pwyll's position in Dyfed.

Rhiannon interacts in an entirely different way with Pwyll. Their meeting is a joyous one, an introduction which occurs not by chance, but by arrangement, through Rhiannon's planning. For them, disaster strikes when they are separated involuntarily--by Gwawl, and later when Rhiannon is punished unfairly--and happiness for them comes from being together. Rhiannon is either the center of Pwyll's world (as his consort) or he is the focus of hers (at their wedding feast at her father's court), and the two ultimately learn to interact equally. Unlike Arawn, Rhiannon is an active participant in Pwyll's quest to remedy his social mistakes. She is concretely and vividly characterized in the comparison to Arawn; to place her in the same position in the equation, as Gantz does, is to create a false impression of her importance in the tale. In overlooking her actions, Gantz gives us the idea that she has said or done little, an inconsistency which is the result of his ignoring her function in the tale. Gantz has edited her participation in the story so that it matches Arawn's no matter what that does to our understanding of her actions, but she is utterly different, just as what Arawn teaches Pwyll is entirely

different from what Rhiannon shares with the Lord of Dyfed.

Are Arawn and Rhiannon equivalent? Their parts in the First Branch fit the schema of functions as outlined by Vladimir Propp.¹¹⁷ The structure of the story concerning Arawn and Pwyll and the structure of the story concerning Rhiannon and Pwyll are the same, but in view of Propp's work, this should come as no surprise, for he presents this structure as one more or less common to all folk tales.¹¹⁸ This is the equivalence Gantz has found--that the two sections of the First Branch which he has outlined do indeed satisfy the conventional structure of a folk tale--but he has not proved an equivalence of function between these characters.

Propp names seven functions which are distributed among the characters of a tale: villain; donor; helper; princess/father; dispatcher; hero; and false hero.¹¹⁹ Arawn touches on two functions. He is the "inadvertent" villain which Propp recognized as the catalyzing agent of the tale, the character whose unfortunate meeting with the

¹¹⁷ *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970), p. 21. He identifies a function as "an act of a character defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action."

¹¹⁸ Propp, pp. 26-65, for the whole outline. Its length prohibits my reproducing it here, but any reader familiar with the First Branch will see that it fits Propp's model.

¹¹⁹ Propp, p. 79.

hero precipitates all the subsequent action.¹²⁰ Arawn also fulfills the role of helper by providing both the spatial transference of hero and his transfiguration, sending Pwyll off to Annwfn after exchanging external forms with the lord of Dyfed.

Rhianon possesses a similarity of function in that she plays more than one role. The first role is as helper (as a liquidator of misfortune or lack or a solver of difficulties).¹²¹ She appears when Pwyll is driven by an aristocratic ennui to seek a wonder or come to blows: "ay kymriw neu archolleu, neu ynteu a welei ryweddawt")¹²² (either a wound or blows, or that he might see a wonder). And later, when Pwyll falls into Gwawl's trap and gives Rhiannon away, it is she, with her magic and wit, who provides the means whereby Pwyll can release himself from his rash promise. Her other function--quite different from Arawn's--is princess/father (assignment of difficult tasks; branding; recognition; punishment of second villain; marriage).¹²³ Her three visits to Gorsedd Arberth

¹²⁰ Propp, pp. 32-35.

¹²¹ Propp, p. 79.

¹²² PKM, p. 9.

¹²³ Propp insisted that the princess' function could not be separated from her father's as their interaction is so close and is bound by emotion, even when the father is hostile to a suitor--though in this case, Hefeydd Hen is in accord with his daughter's wishes. The simultaneity of their function is physically manifested in their co-hosting of the marriage feast and their mutual agreement to Pwyll's taking the pre-eminent role there.

provide Pwyll with a difficult task as he learns, by his mistakes, how to make the acquaintance of a lady; later, he obeys her instructions as to the proper way of dealing with Gwawl. He is "branded" or marked out specially by her in her own words:

*"Ac ny mynneis innheu un gwr, a hynny o'th garyat ti. Ac nys mynnaf etwa, onyt ti a'm gwrthyt. AciAwybot dy attep di am hynny e deuthum i."*¹²⁴

(And I did not want any man, and that out of love for you. And even now I do not want any, unless you may refuse me. And to know your answer to that I have come.)

She helps him to punish Gwawl after he tricks Pwyll, and the couple succeed in confining the unwanted suitor. And finally, she marries Pwyll, with her father's consent. Gantz, like many other critics, has difficulty in appreciating the activities of the women. As he does with Rhiannon, he misrepresents the function of Arawn's wife twice in his discussion.¹²⁵ The question I return to again is the one I have raised before: why is it always the female characters who are misunderstood? Even the use of methodologies which should, because of their open (rather than gender-linked)

¹²⁴ PKM, p. 12.

¹²⁵ First, he falsely equates: "Pwyll refuses Arawn's wife/Pwyll beats Gwawl in the bag," p. 248; and later, he incorrectly proposes "Pwyll refuses Arawn's wife/Rhiannon accepts Pwyll" as a cause-and-effect statement, p. 252.

systems, avoid bias against the women result in confusion as to the meaning of women's actions because the paraphrases or summaries of the actual text unconsciously distort the importance of each woman's actions in the story. And yet another question that comes to mind is this: has any critic of the Mabinogi noticed this problem?

J.K. Bollard suspects that the "incoherences" picked out by the critics of the Four Branches have more to do with the intransigent nature of the analytic methods which have been applied to these stories than with the major flaws in the texts themselves.¹²⁶ His solution is to choose a technique which seeks to find a whole by tracing the "interlaced thematic elements of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi in the hopes of revealing something about the nature and form of the Four Branches."¹²⁷ Studies of this kind in other fields of medieval literature are the starting point of his argument and the justification of his use of this method.¹²⁸ Bollard assumes that there was

¹²⁶ Bollard, "The Thematic Structure of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi," *Transactions of the Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion*, (1974-75), 252. He says "the study of origins has the disadvantage of fragmenting the text into more or less well-defined parts rather than seeking to find its unifying elements and its inherent meaning."

¹²⁷ Bollard, p. 252.

¹²⁸ He refers to Eugene Vinaver, *Form and Meaning in Medieval Romance* (Modern Humanities Research Association, 1966) and *The Rise of Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Ferdinand Lot, *Étude sur l Lancelot en Prose* (Paris: 1918, 1954); and John Leyerle, "The Interlace Structure of Beowulf" *The University of Toronto Quarterly*, XXXVIII (1967-8), 1-17.

an author who twined together the various threads contained in the Four Branches--his first step in the rejection of the theory that the Four Branches are an incomprehensible text. A belief in the existence of a knowledgeable and creative author permits him to search the text for evidence of style and narrative order. This may, on the surface, sound like a circular--and self-fulfilling--expectation. But as Bollard sets out to prove, it is possible to identify an idiosyncratic style and strategy which could only be the product of a distinct literary creator. Admittedly, this may lead a reader into the area of suggestive argument or extrapolation--which can be as dangerous as fantasizing about proto-texts--but certainly it is possible to identify stylistic qualities in the Four Branches that point to an anonymous author just as it is possible to differentiate Virginia Woolf's rendering of mental landscapes from James Joyce's.

Bollard works with all Four Branches at once, allowing himself the freedom to make cross-references as well as following the spiralling threads of the historical chronology.¹²⁹ He is concerned with three recurring

¹²⁹ There are several thematic or structural studies which employ some of the same techniques he has used here, but I will not discuss them at this point, as they deal primarily with the First Branch, and my concern here is to look at the whole. Articles of particular interest are: Catherine McKenna, "The Theme of Sovereignty in Pwyll," *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, XXIX (1982), 35-52; Sefin 6 CoirelIE, "A Thematic Study of the Tale Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet," *Studia Celtica*, 12-13 (1977-78), 78-82; Patrick K. Ford, "Prolegomena to a Reading of the Mabinogi: 'Pwyll' and 'Manawydan,'" *Studia Celtica*, 16-17 (1981-82), 110-25; and Elizabeth Hanson-Smith, "Pwyll Prince of Dyved: The Narrative Structure," *Studia Celtica*, 16-17 (1981-82), 126-34.

themes--Marriages, Feuds, and Friendships--as they wind through the text, investigating them in respect to the author's motivating interest in linking these stories together. Authorial intent here is, according to Bollard, very clearly to create a text which examines the variations and permutations of themes which deal with types of social conduct.¹³⁰ This thesis, simple as it is--and relevant as it is to most genres of literature--represents a method of reading which has not been applied before to the Mabinogi. Bollard does not intend to analyze it by linguistic examination, by historical comparisons, nor by comparative folkloric analysis, but rather by the qualities which make the Mabinogi literature and a document about the society in which it was created. Personal conduct, social codes, and legal obligations make up the cross-threads from which the Four Branches are woven. Interactions between individuals or within greater social groups are generally regulated by codified rules of behavior and response; obedience to rules usually guarantees that life will proceed smoothly,

¹³⁰ Bollard, p. 252.

but conflict arises from attempts to bend or break the rules. And these conflicts are often the catalytic moments which precipitate a story. This may seem an obvious process in more modern works, but it is less clear in the Four Branches because it is not expressed in a way which is clear to a modern reader.¹³¹

Bollard reflects mostly on the masculine characters, though in his treatment of the theme of Marriage, there is no escaping some discussion of the female participants. But he is well aware of the problem and realizes that it is an area which requires some attention:

the role of women in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi has so far not been adequately defined or examined, though no one would deny that women play a significant part in the tales.¹³²

He does look at the actions of the women, though he excuses himself from this responsibility for the most part,¹³³ insofar they are useful devices by which the author enacts of the themes of Feuds and Friendships between the male characters. This is a beginning: though the women are still not read as interesting individuals who express independent opinions, or are capable of taking

¹³¹ For a discussion about how the modern reader's expectations come into conflict with the expressions of a medieval writer, see Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), Chapter II.

¹³² Bollard, p. 263.

¹³³ Bollard, p. 263. "This paper is not intended to answer completely the need for an examination of this aspect of the Mabinogi, but it is hoped that it will indicate the importance of the women in these tales."

action when the situation warrants it, Bollard's analysis indicates their inextricable importance in the text. He looks at Arawn's wife as the tempting test which is set before Pwyll in the evolution of his new friendship with Arawn. He makes nothing of the queen's subsequent conversation with her husband after Pwyll's departure, although it has quite a noticeable power to it in its humorous sharpness. It is an elaborate and subtly constructed episode, leading to the point through her thoughts and statements. We begin with a description of Arawn's return to the court, his public reunion with his wife, followed by more intimate details:

A phan uu amserach kymryt hun no chyuedach, y gyscu yd aethant. Y vely a gyrchwys, a'y vreic a aeth attaw. Kyntaf y gwnaeth ef ymdidan [wreic], ac ymyrru ar digriwch serchawl a charyat arnei. A hynny ny ordifnassei hi ys blwydyn, a hynny a uedylywys hi. "Oy a Duw," heb hi, "pa amgen uedwl yssyd yndaw ef heno noc ar a uu yr blwydyn y heno?" A medylyaw a wnaeth yn hir. A guedy y medwl hwnnw, duhunaw a wnaeth ef, a farabyl a dywot ef wrth ef wrthi hi, a'r eil, a'r trydyt; ac attep ny chauas ef genthi hi yn hynny. "Pa achaws," heb ynteu, "na dywedy di wrthyf i?" "Diwedaf wrthyf," heb hi, "na dywedeis ys blwydyn yn gymmeint yn y kyfyw le a hwnn." "Paham?" heb ef. "Ys glut a beth yd ymdidanyssam ni." "Meuyl im," heb hi, "yr blwydyn y neithwyr o'r pan elem yn nyblyc yn dillat guely, na digrifwch, nac ymdidan, nac ymchwelut ohonot dy wyneb attaf i, yn chwaethach a uei uwy no hynny o'r bu y rom ni." Ac yna y medylywys ef, "Oy a Arglwyd Duw," heb ef, "cadarn a ungrw y gydymdo,thas, a diffleis, a geueis i yn gedymdeith."¹³⁴

¹³⁴ PKM, p. 7.

(And when it was more appropriate to take sleep than carousal, they went to bed. And so he went there, and his wife came to him. First he conversed with his wife, and he began to engage in affectionate pleasure and love with her. And she had been unaccustomed to this for a year and she reflected on this. "My God," said she, "if there isn't a different thought in him tonight than there has been all the nights of this year?" And she thought for a long time. And after that thinking, he awoke and he commented on it to her, and said it again, and a third time; and he could not get an answer from her about it. "For what reason," said he, "do you not speak to me?" "I will tell you," said she, "I haven't said as much in a year in such a place as this." "Why?" said he. "We've talked continually." "Shame on me," said she, "if every night last year when we went into the folds of the bedclothes there was any pleasure, or conversation, or turning of your face towards me, much less what might be more than that between us." And then he thought, "My God," said he, "uniquely steadfast in his friendship, and constant, I had in his friendship.")

The emphasis on the queen's thoughts and the revelation of this information through her words indicates that her feelings in the matter are of some interest to the author; perhaps the reason for this is not as obvious as the revelation of Pwyll's friendship, but the concentration on her point of view--her meditation on the subject--shows us that Pwyll's chasteness is not only important to Arawn. If that were so, the narrative would proceed differently: she would immediately offer the information when Arawn first begins to approach her and we would have a picture of his surprised reflection on the matter. The emphasis on her reaction should draw our attention to her as well, leading us to ask what her

reaction is meant to signify at this point in the story, as opposed to reducing her to a useful narrative tool in the exposition of the relationship between Pwyll and Arawn.

Rhiannon does better in this analysis, for he recognizes the power of her conversation as a means of characterization, as well as her importance as one-half of a marital relationship which is one of the primary themes under discussion in the later sections of the First Branch.¹³⁵

So, although the methods by which we can analyze the Mabinogi have gradually been leading to positive interpretations which prove we have a fairly well-integrated collection of tales before us, possibly arranged by the skillful hand of an author, the focus of these methods has not yet widened perceptibly. As far as the critics are concerned, this is a story about men and their conflicts and concords. The women are praised for their strength, but they have not as yet been made subjects of the same scrutiny as their masculine counterparts. I would now like to turn to the women, as Bollard suggested, and see what powers and significance they have in the story--and actually possessed in the medieval world--listening to what they are saying to the reader in their own words.

¹³⁵ Bollard, pp. 264-5.

Chapter III

WOMEN'S WORDS: THE THEMES OF THE MABINOGI

Whoever has received knowledge and eloquence in speech from God should not be silent or secretive but demonstrate it willingly.

--Marie de France

Though the text of the Four Branches is contained within less than a hundred pages, it discusses vastly complex issues of social conduct in medieval Welsh society. As a means of illuminating some of the social standards which both limited and protected women in that period and region, the Mabinogi elaborates on details of codes and laws in a fuller way than the legal texts themselves do. Here, we see not only the limitations of women's actions, but also the repercussions of those constraints in the lives of women and men; the vehicle of the fictive literary narrative gives us a larger picture of male-female interactions. Looking at these characterizing episodes--in combination with contemporary legal and authoritative texts of the same general period--we can draw a fairly accurate picture of the Welsh medieval woman's world:

to understand fully the experience of medieval women we can neither ignore nor can we confine

ourselves to examining official expressions of official culture. We must also examine, as best we can, the writings, the works of art, the evidences of "material reality" which variously informed the experience of medieval women--women of the aristocracies, their unofficial cohorts; women of the peasantry; women of the town. We must ask how, and to what extent, official culture impinged upon these women, and we must also ask what were the unofficial forms, their own cultural forms, and where within Wieval society these forms were given place.¹³⁶

The material in the Four Branches seems to have been collected and arranged to provide methods of discourse which permit closer examination of the social issues at the heart of the Four Branches. As J.K. Bollard puts it: "The constant concern of the author of the Four Branches is the modes of personal conduct which are necessary for society to survive and progress."¹³⁷

The Four Branches took their present shape between the second half of the eleventh century and the beginning of the twelfth, though they were not written in their

¹³⁶ Hope Weissman, in her introduction to "Women in the Middle Ages," in *Women's Studies*, 11 (1984), 1-2. For further discussions of women's actions and reactions towards men in medieval society, see the following articles in the same volume: Jo Ann McNamara, "Cornelia's daughters: Paula and Eustochium," 9-28; Joan Ferrante, "Male fantasy and female reality in courtly literature," 67-98; Clifford Davidson, "Women and the medieval stage," 99-114; and H. Marshall Leicester, Jr., "Of a fire in the dark: Public and private feminism in the Wife of Bath's Tale," 157-78. For yet another reading from the woman's point of view, see also Mary Carruthers, "The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions," *PMLA* 94, No. 2 (March 1979), 209-22.

¹³⁷ Bollard, "The Thematic Structure of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi," *Transactions of the Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion*, (1974-1975), 252.

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present manuscript form for another 150 years or so.¹³⁸ Their shaping had been taking place during a time when most of Wales was politically and socially shaken by the wars of competing tribal chieftains in their attempts to assert their supremacy over each other. Wales was a collection of principalities which were not united until 1055 under the rule of Gruffydd ap Llywelyn, and it is this pre-unification situation which is evident in the stories of the Mabinogi. The battles in the Second and Fourth Branches no doubt reflect some real hostilities of the period, though perhaps the instigating causes of these wars were not the dishonor suffered by a Welsh princess or the theft of pigs brought about by one man's uncontrollable lust for a woman. And even if these stories were not inspired by historically verifiable situations, then we can extract, at the very least, recognizable examples of problems and experiences common to nearly all members of society.

The First and Third Branches deal with equally difficult and real types of conflicts, though the problems are presented as magical experiences. The most important problem which is treated in these two texts concerns the individual who must survive or fail, depending on his or

¹³⁸ Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, *The Mabinogion* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons; New York: Dutton, 1963), p. ix. The datings of the three extant manuscripts are: Penarth 6 fragments, ca. 1230; Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch, late thirteenth century; Llyfr Coch Hergest, early fifteenth century.

her own ingenuity and common sense, in the face of the intrusion of the Otherworld and its unpredictable magic. And although these two Branches seem at first glance to have no connection with any reality of the medieval period, they are, at a second look, symbolic representations of common social interactions; the Otherworld is a fantastic representation of the unknown or heretofore unexperienced situation for which the protagonists have no ready-made set of social rules, but which they must explore and interpret to make effective decisions regarding their behavior. One of the points of the Four Branches is that there are general guidelines of behavior which are understood by everyone in the society--rules regarding blood and marriage ties, revenge, hospitality, aggression, property, and precedence, to name a few--but that the success or failure of the system depended not only on the obedience of the individual to the codes recognized by the social group, but also the individual's ability to understand and deal with complex situations where rules of behavior either come into conflict or appear not to exist at all.

The position of women in the Four Branches is not easy to define. We are dealing with texts that describe courtly situations which were quite limiting for women in that they were subordinate to men, yet the characterization provided by the dialogue in the Mabinogi

indicates great personal confidence and independence on the part of women like Rhiannon, Aranrhod, and Blodeuwedd--and a certain amount of spirit in the statements of Branwen, Cigfa, and Goewin. This intensity of personality did not remain unique to the Four Branches, for it had its counterparts in later European texts--romances which are built upon a woman's catalyzing action or highly active participation in the events of the story.¹³⁹ Where the women are less physically active, they tend to be more outspoken, their verbal acts having nearly as much power and effect on the men as a quick blow to a sensitive part of the anatomy. The verbal punches here are quite witty, suggesting a link with the traditional iconography associated with women in the twelfth century, a development of their earlier personifications of Wisdom¹⁴⁰-- just as their emotional sensitivity is linked to their identification with Love--as they bring one or both of these qualities into the male protagonist's life

¹³⁹ Joan Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp. 77-82. She analyzes four works in particular to illustrate this point: *Piramus et Tisbe*, *Floire et Blanchflor*, *Aucassin et Nicolette*, and *Erec et Enide*.

¹⁴⁰ Women and Wisdom are linked in medieval symbolism: "Wisdom (*Sapientia*), sometimes interchangeable with Philosophy, may appear . . . as a woman." The same concept was expressed in the female figure, Sancta Sophia, and the Virgin Mary "was often portrayed in the twelfth century (less frequently in the thirteenth) as the throne of Wisdom (*sedes sapientiae*), with Christ (wisdom) on her lap." Ferrante, p. 4.

by means of their verbal contributions to the narrative:

The woman is usually the first to feel love, the first to express it, and the instigator of the action that leads to its consummation. Because she represents a force that the man does not completely understand and cannot control, the lady is often said to possess supernatural powers--the power to cure fatal wounds or protect him from harm, to appear when needed, or draw him to her. But this magic, which seems to give her control over his destiny, does not work forever; when he betrays his love in some way, he frees himself of that power and loses its benefits. **Perhaps it is when he possesses her that she loses her power and then the fate of the love depends on him.** Their love is often consummated in a strange land, or other world, which offers a new life to the hero, and which attracts him, but to which he cannot totally commit himself. He is drawn back to the old life by personal and chivalric ties or habits.¹⁴¹

A misunderstanding of women's potential for exerting control over their lives has commonly emerged as a problem in most interpretations of medieval texts until recently. But the "new scholarship on medieval women," as Hope Weissman terms it, shifts this traditional viewpoint to a celebration and a positive reading of both the female characters and the male authors' motivations in presenting them as they do.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Ferrante, 74.

¹⁴² Weissman, pp. 4-5. She says the point is "to turn the question by asking, not how male elites have abused women's otherness, but rather how they have used it to acknowledge their own limitations or to represent sympathetically aspects of their humanness which official culture require them to repress."

A recognition of speech as action--rather than a sign of passivity--permits us to view the female characters' speeches as types of catalytic activity in the narrative.¹⁴³ Women's words are carefully used in the Mabinogi and have repercussive effects in most cases. Speech is very definitely an attribute of women, and though it has negative connotations when described as gossip or black magic, it can just as often (if not more often) represent a positive power, like white magic, an attractive quality in romantic situations, or--as it does in the Four Branches--a humorous assessment of a problematic social situation. A male character can be strongly affected by a female character's utterance as

each illocutionary act represents a clear attempt to achieve certain effects on her hearers. Telling her story from her point of view is a positive act for the speaker, the means by which she attempts to control the way the events of her life will be seen . . . [and] the way she uses words--reveals that she does not merely passively accept her fate, but rather takes advantage of, form of action available to women of her time.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Although I will not utilize speech-act theory in my analysis of the Four Branches, I nevertheless would like to acknowledge the very great influence it has had in inspiring me to look at women's dialogue in new ways. The discussions which have offered me the greatest assistance in recognizing the importance of dialogue are: *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962) and John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

¹⁴⁴ Barrie Ruth Straus, "Women's Words as Weapons: Speech as Action in the 'The Wife's Lament'" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 23, No. 2 (1981), 269-70.

The female victims of the Mabinogi are not silent in their misery like their medieval counterpart, Griselda, but manage to speak sharply when they are physically limited or incapable of preventing dishonor or physical violation. These characterizations reflect, to a large degree, the social standards of a period in which women were confined by legal codes limiting their independence, as well as a developing romantic philosophy of love which left women sitting precariously on pedestals created in their lovers' imaginations. Something of the conflicting feelings of the women of this period may be evident in the words of the women in the Mabinogi: they are not overly polite in deference to masculine characters, and their bluntness hints at confident independence despite physical and legal limitations. As Straus has shown in her discussion, women's speech in certain medieval texts can function as a means of making men sit up and take notice of certain inequities.¹⁴⁵ It is not just the actions of the women of the Mabinogi that make them such interesting characters--it is their acute consciousness of what happens around them and to them that makes them so unforgettable. What few rights the women have they are well aware of, and they inevitably teach the men to recognize--if not respect--their status.

¹⁴⁵ Straus, p. 269.

It is not possible to talk of characterization through description and/or dialogue in medieval texts in the same way we use this term in reference to modern fiction, but a kind of characterization can be identified in many texts which were written (or created) in this period; while there is no extensive psychological development or discussion of various characters' personal motivations,¹⁴⁶ there are grosser representations of aspects of personality which point to more general--or symbolic--actions and reactions. These motivating factors are suggested or detailed not so much to give us a vivid picture of a particular protagonist, but to highlight his or her dilemmas, as a means of exploring general moral or social codes which are exemplified by the situations in which the characters are placed. In courtly literature of the twelfth century, this concern emerges in a process which investigates ¹⁴⁷

man's emotions and impulses. The lady represents the force of love--she may even be confused with Love, particularly in the lyric. Love awakens man to a new sense of himself, to higher aspirations, but sometimes he is drawn away from his love by worldly desires, which, in romance, are often represented by other women. When and if he overcomes his lower impulses, he is reunited with the woman he loves and that union signifies the harmony he has achieved within himself and with his world.

¹⁴⁶ Ferrante, p. 1. She says women are not presented as "real people" in twelfth-century literature: "they are symbols; aspects of philosophical and psychological problems that trouble the male world."

¹⁴⁷ Ferrante, p. 2.

With this emphasis, the romance diverges in some respects from the flat-footed archetypes of folkloric tales; the quest for spiritual, moral, or even social improvement requires a guiding spirit, and when that inspiring role is filled by a woman, her characterization expands to include more abstract intellectual and emotional qualities, even to the point of eradicating references to physical attributes.

The shaping force of the stories of the Mabinogi is a concern with social order as opposed to debilitating chaos. While on one level we can trace this concern in the three themes investigated by Bollard, we can also see this issue in the echoing reflections of incidents throughout the Four Branches. Similar motifs are repeated--like the Calumniated Wife of the First and Second Branches--in which we find one situation resolved successfully, while the second version degenerates into failure and death. The abduction of Pryderi occurs twice, for different reasons, providing two further episodes of manners which result from his disappearance. There are three episodes in which a chieftain finds himself alone and in intimate circumstances with the wife of an equal; the three situations are approached in three different ways, indicating the multiple possibilities for good or bad behavior in this particular setting. In short, the Four Branches are a patterned, cross-referential

collection of tales which have been shaped--if at times rather crudely--to investigate the utility of the codes and systems which are meant to hold the social fabric together.

Bollard says this shaping was an interlaced pattern,¹⁴⁸ yet, at the same time, we can find actual symmetries in the narrative structure. This argument, of course, may lead to a question of whether we can say that there was an actual "author" who created the Four Branches. It is possible to imagine a single writer, in possession of a rather loose collection of oral tales who chose to edit and arrange them according to obvious systems: grouping families together in each Branch according to their links with certain geographic regions of Wales, and arranging the episodes in terms of linear chronology (which would explain why the First and Third Branches are separated by the Second). Yet it is also possible to find more subtle evidences of arrangement and narrative technique which would indicate the hand of a creative editor at work, not a mere filing clerk. The evidence is not clear from the episodes themselves, or the style of the storytelling, which still abounds in formulaic phrases and stock characters and folk tale motifs, but from the way the different scenes in all Four Branches are meant to resonate with each other. There is a certain progress from

¹⁴⁸ Bollard, pp. 250-2.

the beginning to the end of each Branch which indicates that experience has changed the characters and tested their abilities so that they are not the same as they were when they first made their entrance.

This is the tightrope between folk tales and creative literature. It is not possible to divorce the Four Branches from either its oral background or literary future, but we can see it as a liminal work. *Culhwch ac Olwen*, for example, can be comfortably defined as a proper folk tale growing out of Indo-European oral folkloric traditions, but the First Branch, on the other hand, illustrates such changes of personality and behavior that it becomes harder to call it simply a traditional tale about a traditional hero-prince. It is the beginning--crude and shallow as it is--of unique characterization which points to a literary shaper who used these tales for his own purposes. If nothing else, we can say that the effect is roughly didactic, a series of examples of negative or positive means of behaving in various social situations.

The dialogue in general supports the exploration of social conduct in its emotional range and general abundance. The sheer numbers of dialogue passages owe something to the preceding oral versions of the Mabinogi, for speeches and conversations offer wonderful opportunities for the storyteller to build up dramatic

tension, but the dialogue, for all its quantity, is not always formulaic, but often appears to have evolved uniquely in connection with the scene in which it occurs. It sometimes seems bare and stiff to the twentieth-century reader's ear, but it provides a source of information about the behavior of the characters which is almost entirely absent from the rest of the narrative:

Little is said about motivation or feeling. There is very little description of the participants. But they all talk and it is through their talk that they reveal themselves and their reactions.¹⁴⁹

This is certainly an important point in reading the Four Branches; very few emotional responses are described; they are expressed instead through vivid speech. There are silences as well which have equally great dramatic effect; the gaps in speech are often voluntary responses designed to convey even greater emotional force than any number of passionate words could. The silences most often belong to the women, indicating the irony of their reactions--Rhiannon, for example, accepts her punishment without "wrangling" (*ymdaeru*) to preserve her dignity, Branwen holds in her anger until she has taken effective action and Matholwch's messengers arrive--providing moments, for the reader, of intensely emotional and

¹⁴⁹ Bedwyr Lewis Jones, "Gladly would we have a tale," Loughborough 1983, *Proc. of an International Seminar on Children's Literature*, 20-26 Aug. 1983 (Aberystwyth, Wales: Welsh National Centre for Children's Literature, 1983), p. 24.

dramatic tension.

In terms of numbers of speeches, the women do not have nearly as much to say as the men. There are, of course, more male characters than female in any case, and they are the main focuses of interest for more than fifty percent of the text. Yet for all that the men have more lines of dialogue than the women, they also have more of the kinds of speech which are not unique to their characterizations, but owe more to general techniques of oral storytelling: standard greetings, stock responses, and the sort of threefold repetitions of the same conversation which are so typical of authorless folk literature. The lines which convey an emotional aspect--instead of being merely expository--very often are the women's, if for no other reason than the fact that women are most often betrayed or victimized when proper social codes are abandoned in these tales.

We know more of Rhiannon's outspoken and forthright manner than we do of her looks; description of this supernatural woman is limited to her dress and the type of horse she rides: "*gwreic ar uarch canwelw mawr aruchel, a gwisic eureit, llathreit, o ball amdanei*"¹⁵⁰ (a woman on a great big pale-white horse, and a golden dress, shining, with brocaded silk on her), providing us more with indications of her status and magical qualities rather

¹⁵⁰ PKM, p. 9.

than giving us a portrait of her identifying features. The visual images of the women of the Mabinogi are drawn mimpily; their physical features are catalogued very briefly--if at all--in abbreviated references to their beauty or extraordinary actions. Description of female characters in many contemporary European tales had developed into a static formula which praised the women's anatomical pulchritude at meticulous--and often ponderous--length. As Eric Auerbach illustrates, in some of the literature of the period, descriptions of women were laden with ornamental stylistic features, almost excessively so; and this technique, in its unyielding pattern, could quite easily arrest the characterizing elements of description into stagnation, as it could also simultaneously immobilize the progress of the narrative.¹⁵¹ Certainly the other seven Welsh tales which comprise the Mabinogion offer examples of traditional descriptive runs. In *Culhwch ac Olwen*, the technique is to

¹⁵¹ Auerbach, *Literary Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 182ff. In Chapter 3, he focuses especially on the evolution of the description of the female warrior, Camilla, beginning with the Latin poetic source which inspired medieval imitators, and moving on to a later version of the passage. His point is that the freshness and vitality of the Latin description--which functioned consistently with the rest of the text's narrative style and conveyed the activity, as well as the character, of the woman--was lost in the thudding, formulaic recitation of Camilla's standard physical features in the later medieval reconstruction of this story.

assail the reader with colorful variety:

She [Olwen] was sent for. And she came, with a robe of flame-red silk about her, and around the maiden's neck a torque of red gold, and precious pearls thereon and rubies. Yellower was her head than the flower of the broom, whiter was her flesh than the foam of the wave; whiter were her palms and her fingers than the shoots of the marsh trefoil from amidst the fine gravel of a welling spring. Neither the eye of a mewed hawk, nor the eye of the thrice-mewed falcon, not an eye was there fairer than hers. Whiter were her breasts than the breast of the white swan, redder were her cheeks than the reddest foxgloves. Whoso beheld her would be filled with love of her. Four white trefoils sprang up behind her wherever she went-and for that reason was she called Olwen¹⁵²

The description of Olwen is one very common to oral tradition: this style recurs again and again in folk and legendary literature of the period and region. In the Irish tale, "The Wooing of Etain," the text suggests that the princess's attributes represent a standard by which all other beauties are to be judged, though comparing this passage with similar descriptive runs in other contemporary works makes it clear that the description is the standard, and the princess's beauty is made to fit the pattern:

And the maiden was there loosening her hair to wash it, and her two arms out through the armholes of her smock. As white as the snow of one night was each of her two arms, and as red as the foxglove of the mountain was each of her two cheeks. As blue as the hyacinth was each of her two eyes; delicately red her lips; very high, soft, and white her two shoulders. Tender, smooth, and white were her two wrists; her fingers long and very white; her nails pink

¹⁵² Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, pp. 110-11.

and beautiful. As white as snow or as the foam of the wave was her side, slender, long and as soft as silk. soft, smooth, and white were her two knees; as straight as a rule were her two ankles; slim and foam-white were her two feet. Fair and very beautiful were her two eyes; her eyebrows blackish blue like the shell of a beetle. It was she the maiden who was fairest and the most beautiful that the eyes of men had ever seen.¹⁵³

Three elements recur in these types of description: a striking use of color; a sharp eye for the texture and composition of dress and ornaments; and finally, a style of comparison which links the individual aspects of a woman's beauty with corresponding aspects of nature.

Many attributes applied to female figures in twelfth-century European literature grew out of the allegorical tradition (which in turn grew out of classical perceptions of complementary male-female qualities), resulting in "a positive symbolism of women."¹⁵⁴ There are times when Celtic medieval texts celebrate the less tangible female attributes which positively complement masculine virtues; in these tales, one can find praise for abstract female qualities and aspects which indicate both passive and active conduct in the social group or situation. Cu Chulainn, the unique and overwhelmingly powerful Irish warrior, seeks more than beauty when he sets out to find himself a wife; he chooses Emer because

¹⁵³ 153 Ancient Irish Tales, ed. Tom Peete Cross and Clark ligiTisSlover, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1936), p. 83.

¹⁵⁴ Ferrante, p. 2.

"she had the six gifts: the gift of beauty, the gift of voice, the gift of sweet speech, the gift of needlework; the gifts of wisdom and chastity. "¹⁵⁵ While all of these represent attributes which are applied to women (as opposed to men), three of the gifts--voice, sweet speech, and wisdom--are traits which imply an active interaction with or an understanding of the others in their social environment. Complementary pairings, like the marriage of Cu Chulainn and Emer, illustrate equality in the partnership:

Cu Chulainn had said no maiden should go with him but she who was his equal in age and form and race, in skill and deftness, who was the best handiworker of the maidens of Erin, for that none but such as she was a fitting wife for him. Now, as Emer was the one maiden who fulfilled all these positions, Cu Chulainn went to woo her above all.¹⁵⁶

The preference for abstract qualities like conversation and wisdom is especially evident in the Mabinogi: the description we have of Rhiannon in the First Branch bears only faint hints of the grandeur of physical beauty to be found in folkloric texts. Yet the attribute awarded to her--and to other women of the Four Branches--which seems to have the greatest attractive power for the men of these tales is the one by which Pryderi recommends his mother to her second husband Manawydan. Expressed in a compound noun, this aspect is

¹⁵⁵ 155 Cross and Slover, p. 155.

¹⁵⁶ Cross and Slover, p. 155.

inextricably linked with her person: "*ymdidanwreic*" ("a woman of conversation").¹⁵⁷ We see the same emphasis in the description of Arawn's wife. Like Rhiannon, she is "*yn deccaf gwreic o'r a welsei neb, ac eurwisc amdanei o bali llathreit*"¹⁵⁸ (the fairest woman anyone had seen and a golden dress upon her of shining brocaded silk). But the attribute which Pwyll finds most appealing is her speech:

A dechreu ymdidan a wnaeth of a'r urenhines. Ac o'r a welsei eiryoet wrth ymdidan a hi, dissymlaf gwrOig a bonedigeidaf i hannwyt a'y hymdidan oed.

(And he began to converse with the queen. And from what he had seen of conversation with her, she was the woman who was least affected, and most gracious in nature and converse.)¹⁵⁹

An insistence on conversation and social manners as positive female attributes may seem odd when we think of women's attributes in the Celtic world of folklore, but here in the Mabinogi it may very well indicate a creative blending of traditions. These attributes are not unique to the Four Branches, rather they are the stock in trade of the Welsh bards. The specific adjectives used to praise women in the bardic grammar come closer to the qualities which are cited in the Mabinogi than to those in the rest of the tales which have been preserved as the

¹⁵⁷ PKM, p. 50.

¹⁵⁸ PKM, p. 4.

¹⁵⁹ PKM, p. 4.

whole of the Mabinogion. According to the *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaidd*, the Welsh bardic grammar, the attributes of a gentlewoman were the following:

Gwreicda a uolir o doethineb, a cymhendawt, a diweirdeb, a haelyoni, a thegwch pryt a gwed a, ffuryf, a disymlder ymadrodyon a gweitredoed."

(A woman is praised for discretion, and wisdom, and chastity, and generosity, and fairness of aspect, appearance and form, and unaffected manner of conversation and actions.)¹⁶⁰

These attributes are reserved for the older or married woman, while these and a few more are applied to a "*rhiain*" (maiden). A "*rhiain*" may also be praised for "*eglurder modd a defodau*" (brightness of manner and customs), "*molianrwydd*" (praise), "*bonedd*" (nobility), "*lledneisrwydd*" (modesty), and "*caedigrwydd*" (kindness).¹⁶¹ These rules of description deal with abstract qualities of personality and social behavior for the most part and refer to physical beauty only in general terms, unlike the descriptions in folk literature.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaidd*, eds. G.J. Williams and E.J. Jones (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1934), p. 16. For a discussion of the usage of these rules in medieval Welsh praise-poems and lyrics, see J.E. Caerwyn Williams, "Cerddi'r Gogynfeirdd i Wragedd a Merched, ell Cefndir yng Nghymru a'r Cyfandir," *Llên Cymru* 13, Nos. 1 and 2 (1974/79), 81.

¹⁶¹ Williams and Jones, p. 16. See also J.E. Caerwyn Williams, p. 108.

¹⁶² It is interesting to note that the most common praises of the troubadours are remarkably similar: "bela, doussa, fina, genta, sabers, cortezia, umilitatz." Ferrante, p. 69. Morgan Watkin, in *La Civilisation Française dans les Mabinogion*, (Paris: Didier, 1962), paraphrases several examples from French texts concerning the attributes of a noblewoman which are reminiscent of the language of the Mabinogi: "*Sage fu et courtoise, a raison emparlee*"; "*et s'est sage et courtoise, et parlans a raison*"; "*Je n'ai jamais vu demoiselle parler si bien et se comporter avec tant de simplicité*; and "*Pour le sens et le gent parler on ne saurait trouver sa pareille*," pp.146-7.

What we have in the Four Branches are references to women such as we might find in medieval praise poetry. Even in the two instances in which Rhiannon and Arawn's wife are depicted in costly clothing, the description is lacking in the comparisons of color and nature which are customary elements of folkloric descriptive runs. Blodeuwedd, who might have provided a good opportunity for the traditional catalogue of feminine beauty, constructed as she is from the very flowers with which storytellers commonly created their visions of female characters, is called simply "*yr uorwyn deccaf a thelediwaf a welas dyn eiroet*"¹⁶³ (the fairest and handsomest maiden ever seen by man). And the moment in which dangerous and all-consuming passion seizes both Gronw and Blodeuwedd is an emotionally depicted, not physically detailed, one; they look upon each other, but what they see--as revealed by the author--are their passionate responses, which they reflect in the ardor of their conversation.

*Sef a wnaeth Blodeued, edrych arnaw ef, ac yr awr yd
edrych, nit oed gyueir arnei hi ny bei yn llawn o'e garyat
ef. Ac ynteu a synwys arnei hitheu; a'r un medwl a doeth
yndaw ef ac a doeth yndi hitheu. Ef ny allwys ymgelu o'e
not yn y charu, a'e uenegi idi a wnaeth. Hitheu a*

¹⁶³ PKM

gymerth diruawr lywenyd yndi. Ac o achaws y serch, a'r caryat, a dodassei pob un o honunt ar y gilyd, y bu eu hymdidan y nos honno. Ac ny bu ohir e ymgael o honunt, amgen no'r nos, o'gno. A'r nos honno kyscu y gyt a wnaethant.¹⁶⁴

(This is what Blodeuedd did, she looked at him, and there wasn't any part of her which was not full of love for him. And he too looked at her and the same thought came to him which had come to her, and he told her. She took great joy in it. And because of the affection and the love which they gave to each other they conversed the whole night. And there was no delay in their taking each other that very night. And that night they slept together.)

Why should the Four Branches follow the rules of a bardic rather than a folkloric tradition in this respect? It is possibly the sign of a writer who was more than a redactor, someone who drew on a storytelling tradition on the one hand, and a set of creative guidelines on the other. We do not have exclusively one genre here nor another, but an integration of two literary techniques. The question is whether this integration is conscious or unconscious. There are no absolute means by which we can test this, but it would seem that these particular phrases serve a purpose in the stories of the Four Branches. Just as a description of elaborate dress denotes superior rank here, so does the emphasis on women's more abstract mental and emotional processes guide us to observe their actions in specific ways. The repetition of the excellence of the lady's conversation is not merely a formulaic application of womanly attributes: it also serves as a signpost to

¹⁶⁴ PKM, p. 85.

the importance of her actual spoken words. A description which is concerned with the woman's morality and social conduct also indicates the author's concern in general with these issues--and perhaps the treatment women receive at the hands of other characters who ought to behave in this virtuous fashion as well.

All of which speculation leads us back to Bollard's thesis, the obligation of the reader to retrieve the thematic threads of Marriages, Feuds, and Friendships in the Four Branches. It is one way of isolating and understanding what was created and what was integrated by the author into the narrative as a means of exploring themes of social conduct, but it does not help us to outline the symmetries of the narrative structure which suggest the work of a unique author or very careful redactor. While the themes Bollard has identified certainly emerge in an interlaced fashion, we can also find a narrative pattern that cuts across the spiralling threads, a structure which begins with a small, fixed focus, gradually opening out to consider greater repercussions and applications of the argument.

Superficially, Marriages, Feuds, and Friendships differ, yet in each Branch each theme develops in a common pattern: they evolve around or alongside tests of interpersonal conduct and obligations between men and women. In the theme of Marriage, the role of the two

sexes is of course obvious, but even in the enactments of Feuds and Friendships, the presence of women can be felt as having either a catalyzing or complementary effect on the general progress of the story. The great feud between Ireland and the Island of the Mighty in the Second Branch is a result of a disagreement which centers around Branwen and her two brothers' very different views as to who has responsibility for her. In the Third Branch, Pryderi and Rhiannon are stolen away to avenge the insult Gwawl suffered when he lost his suit for Rhiannon. Even in the smallest instances, the questions of behavior and action revolve around male•female relationships: Rhiannon and Pryderi are freed ultimately because Manawydan holds Llwyd ap Cil Coed's wife hostage, and Llwyd must ransom his wife even if it means the undoing of his carefully planned revenge. Women continue to be important factors even when the tale deals primarily with the friendship between two men: one of the strongest proofs of Pwyll's sincere desire to make amends and strengthen his friendship with Arawn is Pwyll's remarkable chastity night after night in the company of Arawn's attractive wife.

This is a point where I would like to amend Bollard's original statement to say that the constant concern of the author of the Four Branches is the modes of personal conduct as expressed in male-female relationships which are necessary for society to survive and progress.

Let us look at the Four Branches quickly and see what relationships are explored. In the First Branch, which is primarily the story of Pwyll but also contains a large portion of material which has Rhiannon as its focus, we can read about the most obvious male-female bond--the romantic relationship--and the rules and codes which govern behavior in its various stages of development.

This Branch begins with Pwyll as a bachelor, moves on to his adventures as a suitor, then bridegroom, husband, and ultimately, father, exploring the limitations and obligations he learns to obey in each phase. Equally, the story explores Rhiannon's activities and the changes in status and power she experiences in her progress from object of love to wife and mother. The Second Branch begins with marriage, a state which had been explored in rather traditional ways in the First Branch, but here the area of exploration widens in comparison to the First Branch, for Branwen's relationship with her husband is investigated in terms of her relationships with her brothers and how the romantic and sibling links operate in a system of checks and balances, depending on each individual's adherence to proper social conduct in their relationships with each other. The Third Branch extends the discussion to the relationship of in-laws--the man and woman who are not obligated to behave according to any set of rules because they are not bound by blood ties or a voluntary desire to be alone together. Manawydan has just

become a stepfather-in-law to Cigfa when they suddenly find themselves alone together in magic-induced isolation; their subsequent conversations are an indication of the codes they independently develop and enact to stabilize and identify their obligations to each other. And in the Fourth Branch, we come to the outermost ripples, which are likely to break and dissolve away altogether: these are the explorations of unnatural relationships between men and women which occur because one of the pair is forced to succumb to the assumption of roles or actions which are inappropriate--or the lack of cooperation which inspires individuals to deny that any social obligations exist. This tale, resulting in fatal chaos and the complete rupture of the social fabric, is even more powerfully didactic than the "happy" branches, in that the value of social codes is made all the more compelling in the depiction of their absence. It is easier to understand and believe in the importance of codes of behavior in the face of such catastrophe; it gives the reader a strong sense of what is wrong, a lesson perhaps more impressive than a portrait of social success. There is no way to prove conclusively what systems of social behavior governed each situation in the Mabinogi. But it is possible to look at Welsh laws regarding particular aspects of women's life and ascertain by the language used in the narration of the Mabinogi how often

the events in these stories relied upon or followed the prohibitions, punishments, or compensations which appear in the legal codes of the time. Welsh law deals primarily with issues regarding property, insults, and dishonor: the sections on women make reference to those areas of her life which involve the honor of and obligations to her husband, the distribution of property which she brought into or gained through marriage, and her own rights to privacy and security in the social group. The status of the Welsh woman was in some respects more restricted than that of a contemporary Norman woman, but she still had a few rights in marriage that she could expect to be granted to her.¹⁶⁵ A concise summary of the most important points regarding marriage and kinship in the Welsh legal code and the contradictions it posed regarding the Church's attitudes on matters of marriage, legitimacy, and inheritance is provided by R.R. Davies in his article on medieval Welsh manners and morals:

Native Welsh law and literature alike make it amply clear that the highest standards of behavior were required of women before and during marriage. Any departure from that standard brought shame to the guilty party and, what was worse, dishonor to her kin and husband. Welsh law certainly entertained the possibility of divorce and contained detailed provision on the division of goods between the partners. According to the Welsh law (as indeed the

¹⁶⁵ R.R. Davies, "The Status of Women and the Practice of Marriage," in *The Welsh Law of Women*, ed. Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980), p. 100. (Hereafter referred to as WSW.)

customary laws of much of medieval Europe), a marriage was a secular contract between two parties or, preferably, the two kindred-groups and, as with other contracts, it could be terminated by consent. It was the Church's attempt to insist that it was a sacrament which was the novelty and it was in the light of that novelty that Welsh practice stood condemned.

Likewise, the Church's teaching on the prohibited degrees of consanguinity in marriage--which the church itself came to accept as unworkable in 1215--stood little chance of practical application in a thinly-populated rural society and one which often used marriage as an instrument of social concord between feuding kin-groups. To create social bonds of dependence and affection across the barriers of exclusive agnatic kin-groups was also part of the purpose of the custom of fosterage; and literary and historical references show how well it might succeed in that aim. As to the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children, that was predicated on an assumption which Welsh society did not accept, namely that a man would normally have only one marriage partner. The children of all formally acknowledged unions were equal in the eyes of Welsh law, and even male children born outside of such unions could be formally admitted to the father's agnatic kin-group. 'Legitimacy' in Welsh custom was determined not so much by the character of the union as by a formal acknowledgement of paternity and affiliation (in the literal sense) with the appropriate kin-group.¹⁶⁶

This concern (at times amounting almost to obsession) with kinship affinities is a major narrative motivation in the Four Branches; and kinship, of course, depends on fertility, which in Celtic legendary and folk material is the responsibility and power of women. Equally, the women's status and protection arise from their kinship

¹⁶⁶ R.R. Davies, "Buchedd a Moes y Cymry," *The Welsh History Review*, 12, No. 2 (December 1984), 176.

ties, which may be the result of blood or marriage. Marriage in the Mabinogi seems to be the secular contract Davies refers to, an agreement which ought to provide economic and political stability for both the man and the woman, as well as offering some advantage to their respective families. Marriage in Welsh law was a state which took seven years of testing to accomplish successfully. ¹⁶⁷ Prior to the completion of that time period, the union could be dissolved without rancor, each partner taking away exactly what he or she brought into it, except in cases where one partner offended the other through the enactment of a legally recognized insult to the other. After that time, the marriage was recognized as a deeper bond and its dissolution could have resulted in the wife's taking away half of the marriage property if the fault for the failure of the relationship were her husband's. A wife also had the right to kill her husband's mistress ("*cywyres*"), without punishment.

So women had rights, even in the most rigidly defined areas of the law, which they could uphold against any unfair treatment they suffered.¹⁶⁸
And a careful

¹⁶⁷ Christopher McAll, "The Normal Paradigms of a Woman's Life," WLW, pp. 15-18.

¹⁶⁸ For the most part, women could not actually participate in the legal process directly, but had to find spokesmen to represent them. A representative of this type was called "tauodyauc, a person 'having a tongue' in the sense of the right to plead." Nerys W. Patterson, "Honour and Shame in Medieval Welsh Society," *Studia Celtica*, 16-17 (1981-2), 78.

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examination of the Mabinogi should reveal which codes were under discussion in each section of the Four Branches--either by direct reference to a right which has been violated, or by the recompense which is offered to a victim.

These women's rights--and the violation of them--are most often brought into the center of discussion by the women themselves, as they are most often the victims of illegal or uncustomary behavior. They make their complaints verbally, and quite often in their own ironic way; their speeches are formal accusations, in which they poke at injustice with a sharp jab of wit. The author guides the narrative to these scathing lines of dialogue, building up dramatic tension through earlier silences on the part of the women, silences which are meant to indicate, not passivity, but an active observation of the violation and the opportunity for the violators to see their errors and amend their behavior.

Chapter IV THE FIRST BRANCH

The major concern of the First Branch of the Mabinogi is the experiences and adventures of Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed, though its thematic interest is not confined only to the masculine pursuits of a Welsh chieftain. The most consistently and most broadly investigated theme is his development as a leader who learns to rule his country, its people, and his own impetuous impulses. The three women who appear in the First Branch are all important to the development of this theme whether they participate in an advisory capacity like Teyrnon's wife, or a tempting fashion like Arawn's queen, or in more direct--and sometimes derisory--function like Rhiannon.

The more we read of the story, the clearer it becomes that his name is a pun. *Pwyll* signifies "good sense" or "discretion,"¹⁶⁹ attributes which our protagonist greatly requires, so often does he find himself in situations

¹⁶⁹ Ifor Williams, ed. *Canu Llywarch Hen* (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1978), p. 91; see also, Jones and Jones, *The Mabinogion*, p. 23. The pun is further reforced in word choice: when Pwyll inconsiderately sets his dogs on Arawn's kill, the expression which the author uses to illustrate his ignorance is "*heb hanbwyllaw*" (without noticing; without bothering). His name is contained within the verb: the negating "*an*" + "*pwyll*" + the verbal ending.

requiring a delicate use and careful understanding of the common codes of etiquette. Yet in many episodes in the story, the meaning of his name ...resonates unfavorably with his behavior as he proceeds through each episode with well-meaning incompetence rather than social finesse. But for all that he makes his way through these initial adventures on two left feet, he develops a sensitivity to social obligations and exchanges, so that at the end of each episode, his name reflects his social ability more accurately. The point of this story extends beyond this superficial theme: Pwyll is not the only individual expected to improve after having gone through these adventures and events; this is also a primer of sorts for the reader, having taught us what behavior is expected from an aristocratic young man who meets all manners and ranks of people in the process of maintaining harmony in his little corner of Britain. It is the arrangement of the folk tale elements (such as Kenneth Jackson outlined in his book, *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition*) in deliberate order, and in conjunction with more uniquely creative passages of dialogue, which celebrates those attributes which are the hallmark of a wise and affectionate chieftain:

the redactor's intention was not only to record or re-weave archaic traditions to create a courtly entertainment, but also to compose a tale which would describe and praise the traditional virtues of Celtic sovereignty, as well as some newer political virtues, thus fulfilling a function similar to that of

contemporary bardic poetry, which was both eulogistic and exhortatory.¹⁷⁰ Catherine McKenna does not forget Rhiannon's presence in this analysis, though she sees her function primarily within the limits of the old sovereignty motif which has been used to explain so many female characters in Celtic literature. Certainly this motif exists in the text, though its power is more suggestive than effective within the extant narrative. The elements which I outlined earlier--the presentation of liquid, the initial test of the protagonist's perception of the goddess, sexual consummation, and the stable establishment of sovereignty--can be found in the narrative, sometimes in somewhat different form than we would expect, but the connection between the woman-goddess's fertility and the man-chieftain's ability to rule emerges as an important theme, as McKenna illustrates.¹⁷¹ She emphasizes that the use of the motif is more a traditional element which found its way into this story of the making of a good sovereign by affinity rather than as a consciously utilized tool with which the author intended to hammer the tale into shape.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Catherine McKenna, "The Theme of Sovereignty in Pwyll," *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 29 (1980), 35-52.

¹⁷¹ McKenna, pp. 45-8.

¹⁷² McKenna says there is no certainty that the author "understood, in the eleventh or twelfth century, the implications [of the sovereignty motif] which scholars have articulated for us in the twentieth." pp. 45-6. 173 PKM, p. 12.

The sovereignty elements are developed in character motivation, useful as a means of showing the independent factors which initiate both Rhiannon's and Pwyll's actions, as well as representing some of the basic needs and desires which link them together. The first element, the indication of the woman-goddess' preference, is inherent in the marriage feast which Rhiannon prepares for Pwyll, as well as in her outspoken admission that she would rather have him than Gwawl:

*"Riannon, uerch Heueyd Hen, wyf i, a'm rodi y wr o'm hanwod yd ydys. Ac ny mynneis innheu un gwr, a hynny o'th garyat ti. Ac nys mynnaf etwa, onyt ti a'm gwrthyt4, Ac e wybot dy attep di am hynny e deuthum i."*¹⁷³

("Rhiannon, daughter of Hefeydd Hen, am I, and I am being given to a man against my will. And I do not want any man, and that out of love for you. And neither do I want anyone, unless you reject me. And to know your answer to this have I come.")

Here the mythological element, the choice of the goddess, is utilized not only to illustrate the romantic interest that brings about Rhiannon's and Pwyll's marriage (as opposed to it being a union of economic or political convenience), but also to characterize Rhiannon as an independent woman; she, by her own admission, has arranged this magical meeting, because she wants to choose her own mate rather than have him chosen for her.

¹⁷³ PKM, p. 12.

The necessary binding of the contract between them--sexual consummation--is achieved only later, after Pwyll has shown ample discernment of Rhiannon's powers. The element of disguise, according to McKenna's analysis, is her penance, where she is made to do the work of a horse.¹⁷⁴

The fertility element is the strongest one here, as it generates its own episode: the birth and disappearance and final restoration of Rhiannon's child. Pryderi's return is the return of success to Dyfed, as guaranteed by the fertility goddess's link to the sovereign of a land; he becomes ruler of Dyfed after his father's death, and under his leadership time passes prosperously for his people ("*ar eu kyuoeth*")¹⁷⁵ for Rhiannon's link to Pwyll, her husband, and then Pryderi, her son, ultimately brings the reward of fertility and success to Dyfed's land and its people.

But the sovereignty motif is implicit in the First Branch rather than an obvious narrative device which gives structure to the tale. The elements outlined above

¹⁷⁴ McKenna, p. 48. I cannot quite agree with this, though it is one of the few moments which can be construed to be a disguise. In other sovereignty tales, the disguise is assumed deliberately by the goddess and through her own powers. Here, Rhiannon's penance is effected externally--it is devised by the wise men of the court--and results in her humiliation and isolation, not her link to the sovereign of the land.

¹⁷⁵ PKM, P. 27.

have been placed within another framework which organizes the arguments and themes which sinuously hold the tale together. There have been several analyses which break the First Branch into sections in an attempt to show the echoes and duplications which are part of the Mabinogi's narrative structure. W.J. Gruffydd said there were two separate stories (the story of Pwyll's adventures in Annwfn, and the history of his and Rhiannon's tribulations).¹⁷⁶ Sean ó Coileain divides the First Branch in this way as well, but he has a different end in mind:

This division will be seen to be only an apparent one; what Gruffydd calls Part II is in fact a doublet of his Part I, and the reason for this dwaication may be explained in terms of theme.¹⁷⁷

What Gruffydd metamorphosed into two discrete epics--the Myth of Rhiannon and the Saga of Pryderi.¹⁷⁸ O Coileain reads as replicates. The twin narrative frames, according to his analysis, allow us to see contrasting themes which are developed under similar circumstances: the primary theme concerns the adventures of a mortal man who "is rewarded for his aid to an Otherworld being with the love of a fairy woman", while the complementary structure explores similar events, concluding in a Chaste

¹⁷⁶ Gruffydd, *Rhiannon*, p. 23.

¹⁷⁷ O Coileain, "A Thematic Study of the Tale Pwyll Penduic Dyuet," *Studia Celtica*, 12-13 (1977-78), 78.

¹⁷⁸ Gruffydd, Chapters I and III, *Rhiannon*.

Brother/Friend episode.¹⁷⁹ O Coileain explains that the conjunction of the two themes necessitates a duplicating structure--to highlight the diverse conclusions, one which results in sexual gratification and one which precludes the same. The honorable self-denial presented in the first has its reward in the second story which relates the success of Rhiannon's and Pwyll's union.

In this analytic light, repetition and a rough narrative break signify a premeditated narrative shaping, a means of developing dramatic tension through the deliberate presentation of two otherwise unrelated folk tales. While it is a positive reading which sees a basic intelligence rather than a lack of it, it is problematic in that the catastrophic abduction of Pryderi, and Rhiannon's unjust punishment are perhaps too severely downplayed in favor of the courtship and marriage themes.

A division which would give equal weight to each episode and the theme which it investigates is needed. A breakdown into two parts is simply not enough. As we have identified Pwyll as the main character and we have identified his social gaucherie as one of the main problems under discussion in the First Branch, it may be worthwhile seeing if we can find clear divisions which surround the illustration of a problematic social situation, his misstep, and the factors or characters

¹⁷⁹ O Coileain. p. 80.

which enable him to resolve the problem. Looking at the narrative in this way, it is possible to divide it into five parts which are complete in themselves, but still resonate with each of the others in terms of theme. Briefly, I divide the First Branch into the following five episodes:

Pwyll A

Pwyll's encounter with Arawn and his defeat of Hafgan.

Pwyll B

Pwyll's encounter with Rhiannon on Gorsedd Arberth, their betrothal, and subsequent voluntary separation.

Pwyll C

The marriage feast of Rhiannon and Pwyll, the loss of Rhiannon to Gwawl, Gwawl's humiliation and submission, Rhiannon's and Pwyll's marriage proper.

Pwyll E

This tale is interposed in the middle of Pwyll D for reasons which I will discuss at length later. It is the episode in which Teyrnon rescues Pryderi and his foal, Teyrnon and his wife raise Pryderi, and Teyrnon and his wife recognize Pryderi's parentage.

Pwyll D

The initial barrenness of Rhiannon, the birth and abduction of Pryderi, the false accusation and Rhiannon's silence, the punishment, and (after Pwyll E) the restoration of Pryderi.

In each of these episodes, different aspects of one particular theme recur, though there are different weightings of importance in each. Part of Pwyll's

progress into mature sovereignty requires him to gain three things which will make him a man in his society: a name, arms, and a woman. These factors are not named explicitly in the First Branch (it is possible the readers of the Four Branches would have been expected to have heard of these requirements), but they are clearly indicated in the Fourth Branch, in the story of Aranrhod's rejection of Lleu. Just as Lleu cannot become part of the social order of Gwynedd without these three factors, so Pwyll must also acquire them for himself.

He has a name from the beginning of the text, as well as a title, but by the end of Pwyll A he has gained another--Pen Annwn--for his his services to the Lord of the Otherworld:

"Ac o achaws i drigiant ef y ulwydyn honno yn Annwuyn, a gwledychu o honaw yno mor lwydannus, a dwyn y dwy dyrnas yn un drwy y dewred ef a'y uilwraeth, y diffygywys y enw ef ar Pwyll, Pendeuic Dyuet"ac y gelwit Pwyll Penn Annwuyn o hynny allan."¹⁸⁰

("And because of his stay that year in Annwfn, and his ruling it so successfully, and his bringing the two lands together through his valor and his strength, the name Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed fell out of use, and he was called Pwyll Pen Annwfn after that.")

This second naming may be in the text as a means of satisfying the first requirement. Later on, his son Pryderi will go through a second naming process which is somewhat humorous in its handling by the author:

¹⁸⁰ PKM, p. 8.

"Y rofi a Duw," heb y Riannon, "oed escor uym pryder im, pei gwir hynny." "Arglwydes," heb y Pendaran Dyuet, da yd enweist dy uab Pryderi. A goreu y gueda arnaw Pryderi uab Pwyll Penn Annwn." "Edrychwch," heb y Riannon, "na bo goreu y gueda arnaw y enw e hun." "Mae yr enw?" heb y Pendaran Dyuet. "Gwri Walit Euryn a dodyssom ni arnaw ef.", Pryderi, "heb Pendaran Dyuet, "uyd y enw ef."¹⁸¹

("Between me and God," said Rhiannon, "a deliverance of my care from me if that is true." "Lady," said Pendaran Dyfed, "you have named your son well, Pryderi. It suits him best, Pryderi son of Pwyll Penn Annwn." "See," said Rhiannon, "if his own name does not suit him best." "What is the name?" said Pendaran Dyfed. "Gwri Golden Hair we named him." "Pryderi," said Pendaran Dyfed, "will be his name.")

The second name for father and son in the First Branch is an amalgamation of adventure with identity. Pwyll's new name serves as a reminder of his successful contract of friendship with Arawn,¹⁸² while Pryderi is forever linked with his mother's suffering. The name is a public thing, a means of advertising relationships--such as daughter ("merch") or son ("mab")--or reminding people of accomplishments or special events, as in the naming of Pwyll and Pryderi. And on the literary level, the names serve to reinforce the themes which are discussed: in Pwyll's case, his first name plays on his need and quest for discretion, while his second name recalls the friendship which evolves between the Lords of Dyfed and

¹⁸¹ PKM, p. 26.

¹⁸² It is interesting that his name is changed after his people have complimented him on his improved ability as a chieftain, which Pwyll correctly ascribes to Arawn's influence. In a sense, Arawn's good example of rulership (in the year when the two men exchanged forms) teaches Pwyll how to improve himself, for his people make him promise to rule them as well as Arawn did. The epithet "Penn Annwryn" is as much a sign of Pwyll's graduation to a higher degree of lordship as it is a sign of his friendship with Arawn.

Annwfn.¹⁸³ Pryderi's name (care)¹⁸³ harks back to Rhiannon's punishment and the themes which are investigated there, marriage and motherhood.

Pwyll's arming is less explicit; it is inherent in the exchange of identity with Arawn in preparation for the killing of Hafgan:

Ac ar y gossot kyntaf, y gwr a oed yn lle Arawn, a ossodes ar Hafgan ym perved bogel y daryan yny hyllt yn deu hanner, ac yny dyrr yr arueuoll, ac yny uyd Hafgan hyt y ureich ale paladyr dros pedrein y ua1g y'r llawr, ac angheuawl dyrnawt yndaw ynteu.¹⁸⁴

(And in the first onslaught, the man who was in Arawn's place struck Hafgan in the center of the shield's boss which split in two halves and broke all his armor so that Hafgan was the length of his arm and his spear across the horse's crupper to the ground, and a mortal blow upon him.)

Hafgan does not even have a chance for a counterthrust; the completeness of Pwyll's victory here is evidence of his aptness in taking up arms. Pwyll's increased sagacity in this encounter is illustrated in the dialogue which occurs when Hafgan begs him to strike him again and finish him off; Pwyll remembers Arawn's warning and refuses, with as a chieftain, which Pwyll correctly ascribes to Arawn's influence. In a sense, Arawn's good example of rulership (in the year when the two men exchanged forms) teaches Pwyll how to improve himself, for his people make him promise to rule them as well as Arawn did. The epithet "Penn Annwbyn" is as much a sign of Pwyll's graduation to a higher degree of lordship as it is a sign of his friendship with Arawn.

¹⁸³ Jones and Jones, p. 23.

¹⁸⁴ PKM, p. 5.

a careful ambiguity of speech: "*Keis a'th lado; ni ladaf i di,*"¹⁸⁵ (Seek who may kill you; I will not). The imperative command shifts the responsibility for Hafgan's death from Pwyll to the wounded king, and the use of the subjunctive--which imparts an impersonal tone to his speech--indicate a cleverer style of speaking on Pwyll's part. In previous speeches, Pwyll has spoken more directly and simply--and often more ingenuously--but here he is careful to do exactly as Arawn has asked him to do, and he is equally cautious about uncovering his disguise. If he spoke in the first person here, his answer might reveal him to be Pwyll and not Arawn; the impersonal tone helps him to maintain his disguise.¹⁸⁶

The third thing which Pwyll needs to be a man in this society is a woman; this requirement will be satisfied in the character of Rhiannon, Yet she is not the first woman to appear in this story though it is the exploration of her relationship with Pwyll that consumes most of our attention in the First Branch. This becomes an important theme in the Mabinogi (and especially in this Branch) which is explored from both the male and female point of view: the development and success of the most obvious of male-female ties, the romantic relationship, is a major point of discussion. This is clear from the episodes

¹⁸⁵ PKM, p. 6.

¹⁸⁶ I am indebted to Lionel Joseph for pointing out the ambiguity of Pwyll's speech in this passage to me.

which include or refer to Rhiannon--Pwyll B, C, D, E--but she is not in the first episode, though another woman is. What themes are investigated by this woman's participation in the events of the text if her part is so small, and how is it linked to the theme of romantic love?

Pwyll A primarily provides an exploration of the codes of behavior which govern the relationship between Pwyll and Arawn. Here we begin with a depiction of Pwyll's clumsy impetuosity: he is a young bachelor who is not always conscious of the finer points of etiquette in his passion for hunting, but his developing instincts help him ultimately to guard a friendship well worth having. This section concentrates initially on points of rank and hierarchy, as McKenna shows,¹⁸⁷ but expands from courtly obligations to the evidences and proofs of friendship, as Bollard explains in his analysis.¹⁸⁸ Yet it also touches on other themes which will emerge again and again in the Four Branches, even if some of the characters never appear after Pwyll A.

This introduction of definitive characters--like Arawn and his wife--and their subsequent and total disappearance from all of the text following this section has created problems for some readers. Patrick Ford raises the question in his introduction to the tale:

¹⁸⁷ McKenna, pp. 36-7.

¹⁸⁸ Bollard, p. 252.

It is difficult to account for the lack of continuity in the story . . . once Pwyll has received his new title, Pen Annwfn 'Lord of the Otherworld,' the storyteller shows no further interest in Arawn or Annwfn, and the story seems to begin anew. Some scholars have seen this as evidence for the corrupt state of the text, and have sought to reconstruct the opening episode in such a way that it results in the birth of Pryderi. But such reconstruction does too much violence to the text we have before us, and it is probably unnecessary anyway.¹⁸⁹

Ford reasons that Pwyll's sojourn in Arawn's kingdom establishes Pwyll's Otherworld connections, an explanation which is useful on an implicit level, but does not actually show the function of the Otherworld in terms of the themes under discussion.

The Otherworld--which can symbolize so many things in Celtic literature--also has several functions in the Mabinogi. On the simplest level, it is exactly what its name implies, a parallel country which follows some of our rules, but not others. Time is the most mysterious and fluid aspect of the Otherworld in folklore traditions; a visit to the Otherworld which seems to take only seven days turns out to have lasted seven hundred years in the real world. And in some Celtic traditions, the Otherworld is the country of women.¹⁹⁰ But in the Mabinogi, the literary function of this alternate world goes beyond the magical and mysterious: the people who come from it or

¹⁸⁹ Ford, *The Mabinogi and Other Welsh Tales* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977) p. 36.

¹⁹⁰ See *The Voyage of Bran*, ed. and trans. Kuno Meyer (London: David Nutt, 1895), pp. 165-6.

who are transported to it emerge in the text at moments when the protagonist must make an individual decision as to the correct behavior required, in contrast to the moments when general codes are clearly meant to apply.

The opening passage of the First Branch contains just such a situation. Pwyll is hunting in his own domain, in Glyn Cuch, when he espies some very unusual dogs:

*Ac yna edrych ohonaw ef ar liw yr erchwys, heb han
bwyllaw edrych ar y carw. Ac o'r welsei ef o helgwn y byt,
ny welsei cwn un lliw ac wynt. Sef lliw oed arnunt,
claerwyn llathreit, ac eu clusteu yn gochyon. Ac ual y
llathrei wynnet y cwn, y llathrei cochet y clusteu. Ac yr
hynny at y cyn y doeth ef, a gyrru yr erchwys a ladsysei y
carw e mileith, a llithyaw y erchwys e hunan ar y carw.¹⁹¹*

(And he looked then at the color of the pack, without bothering to look at the stag. And of all the hounds had ever seen before, he had not seen a hound the color of these. This is the color which was on them, a brilliant, dazzling white, and their ears red. And as white the shining of the dogs, as red gleamed their ears. And upon that he came to the dogs, and drove away the pack which had killed the stag and set his own pack on the stag.)

If we observe nothing else in this narrative, we can see that Pwyll has been guilty of bad sportsmanship in setting his dogs on another's kill. The hunt, of course, takes place in his own territory, where as lord he might have some justification in taking precedence in an organized hunt. But Arawn arrives almost immediately after his dogs appear to challenge Pwyll's action, and Pwyll must confess to his misdemeanor when Arawn's rank is

¹⁹¹ PKM, pp. 1-2.

revealed to him. The recompense which Arawn demands generates the next part of the story--in which Pwyll goes to the Otherworld in Arawn's place to deal with Hafgan.

What is interesting about this passage is that the presence of a being from the Otherworld is suggested immediately in the description of the dogs. These were of a type Pwyll has never seen before, though he was familiar with hunting dogs. And their coloring was startling, as the text emphatically indicates in the intensity of the adjectives used. Pwyll has his clues--as does the reader--and it is up to him to weigh the facts and decide what to do. The text has presented the dichotomy of possibility: this is Pwyll's own country where he has the highest rank, but these are unusual animals whose strangeness hints at a magical source. Like other moments in the Mabinogi where the Otherworld intrudes, we have a liminal legal situation, where ordinary codes of response are inadequate to make the decision as to the correct move. Pwyll chooses wrongly out of impulsiveness; good sense indicates that he ought to wait and see if any further wonders are forthcoming, but he is single-minded in his interest in the hunt and focuses exclusively on that desire. Here the Otherworld symbolizes those situations which are not entirely defined by general customs or responses, but present instead situations for which rules do not exist, or where rules come into conflict with each other.

Pwyll A, like the other four sections of the First Branch, contains an exemplary episode of the manners required in a male-female relationship, explored here in the chaste co-habitation of Pwyll with Arawn's wife. The importance of this event is indicated by the fine detail of the narrative and the dramatic statements and silences in the dialogue sections.

We never know Arawn's wife's name, nor does she appear in any part of the Four Branches other than *Pwyll A*, yet her attributes and emotions are recorded as faithfully and completely as those of Rhiannon or Blodeuwedd. Indeed, our first introduction to her provides more information concerning her most attractive points than we find in our first vision of Rhiannon. Arawn's wife is the fairest woman Pwyll has ever seen, and she is attired in the traditional garb of an important Celtic woman--gold brocaded silk ("*eurwisc amdanei o bali llathreit*").¹⁹² Pwyll is drawn to her by her considerable conversational ability: "*Ac o'r a welsei eiryoet wrth ymdidan a hi, dissymlaf gwreic a bonedigeidaf i hannwyt a'y hymdidan oed*"¹⁹³("And of all he had seen of conversation with her, there was no woman who was so unaffected in disposition and conversation").

¹⁹² PKM, p. 4.

¹⁹³ PKM, p. 4.

Pwyll is, as Bollard points out,¹⁹⁴ being subjected to a great trial of his friendship with Arawn. He is once more in the kind of Otherworld situation which requires some analysis and great discretion on his part. He has conflicting orders regarding his behavior as he enters Arawn's court. On the one hand, he has an obligation to give Arawn some kind of recompense for having dishonored him by stealing his kill; Arawn has specifically named his "sarhaed,"¹⁹⁵ and that is to kill Hafgan.¹⁹⁶ Arawn has also made it clear that Pwyll can act for Arawn in every way every way imaginable while in Arawn's guise:

*Mi a'th rodaf di y'm lle i yn Annwbyn, ac a rodat y wreic
deccaf a weleist eiroet y gyscu gyt a thi bennoeth, a'm
pryt innheu a'm ansawd arnat ti, hyt na bo na guas
ystauell, na swydawc, na dyn arall o'r a'tp,,ganlynwys i
yroet, a wyppo na bo miui uych ti.¹⁹⁷*

(I will put you in my place in Annwfn, and I will give you the fairest woman ever seen to sleep with you each night, and my face and form upon you, so that neither the chamberlain, nor officer of the court, nor other man who has followed me, will know that you are not me.)

¹⁹⁴ 194 Bollard, pp. 253-4.

¹⁹⁵ Literally "insult." It is the general word for a payment or compensation for dishonor. WLW, p. 216.

¹⁹⁶ "*Gwr yssyd gyuerbyn y gyuoeth a'm kyuoeth inheu yn ryuelu arnaf yn wastat. Sef yw hwnnw, Hafgan urenhin o Annwbyn. Ac yr guaret gormes hwnnw y arnaf, a hynny a elly yn haut, y keffy uygherennyd.*" ("There is a man of an opposing realm to mine continually warring on me. That is Hafgan, King of Annwfn. And ridding me of this oppression, which you can do easily, you will have my friendship.") PKM, pp. 2-3.

¹⁹⁷ PKM, P. 3.

Arawn has given everything into Pwyll's keeping, particularly--and quite explicitly--his wife, and reinforces this impression with his final words before the two men part: "*Llyna,' hep ef, 'y llys a'r kyuoeth i'th uedyant*"¹⁹⁸ ("There," said he, "the court and the realm in your power"). There are two ways for Pwyll--and the reader--to interpret these statements, and it is crucial that Pwyll makes the right choice if he is to avoid creating yet another difficulty between himself and Arawn. Can he take Arawn at his work in the most literal sense? Or is this a further test of Pwyll's discretion? Arawn has said that the only obligation which devolves on Pwyll is to kill Hafgan: that will secure the friendship. If Pwyll does sleep with his wife while he has Arawn's form, no one can say that he has violated anyone else's honor, for no one but Arawn will know him as Pwyll.

But what of Arawn's wife? Is it not possible for her honor to be compromised if Pwyll takes her by deception? What in the tale shows us that her thoughts are of any importance? And would Pwyll break any code of behavior if he accepted Arawn's generous offer?

This situation is not without parallel in medieval romance: Uther Pendragon visits Igraine, deceiving her by taking her husband's appearance with the help of Merlin's magic. But this device which, in Arthurian legend, has

¹⁹⁸ PKM, p. 4.

been utilized to explain the circumstances surrounding a great hero's birth, is not applicable to our understanding of the First Branch. There is no sexual consummation or subsequent birth of a hero out of the union of Pwyll and Arawn's wife. However many reconstructed versions have been offered to force this episode to fit the type we have in Arthurian legend, the fact remains that the actual relationship in the extant text is chaste; that is the signpost we are meant to follow in our interpretation.

If we look at some of the Welsh laws regarding women, the codes of conduct between the man and woman become clearer, and Pwyll's freedom to enjoy Arawn's wife becomes limited by the factors which affect her honor. It is not enough that her husband, Arawn, has given her to Pwyll in her absence. Certain romantic or sexual unions could require the woman's consent--as well as that of her nearest kin. Reading from the the group of laws known as "*Nau Kynywedi Teithiauc*," T.M.

Charles-Edwards shows that a man could offer a woman serious insult or dishonor if he has sexual relations with her by means of a deception ("*twyll*").¹⁹⁹ In looking at other male-female unions in these laws, Charles-Edwards emphasizes the woman's agreement to such a union, even when it poses possible insult to her kin (such as bearing children out of a secret affair), indicating that a recognition existed,

¹⁹⁹ Charles-Edwards, "*Nau Kynywedi Teithiauc*" in WLW, p. 36.

even in a repressive system like the medieval Welsh laws, of a woman's ability--or at the very least, persistence--in choosing her own partners, even if her activities were not condoned by her social or kinship group. Morfydd E. Owen discusses these issues of shame and reparation in the context of Welsh law, referring specifically to the triads in the texts; one triad seems especially apt in reference to the type of behavior Arawn's wife might expect, if she knew Pwyll's real identity:

*O teyr ford e serheyr e urenhines; o torry e naud, neu o'y tharau, neu o grybdyllau peth o'y llau.*²⁰⁰

(In three ways the queen is insulted, namely by breaking her protection, or by striking her or by snatching something from her hand.)⁴"

The queen's protection ("*naud*") rests with her husband or nearest male kin,²⁰¹ thus Arawn's wife is under the protection of Arawn. If Pwyll sleeps with her, he is relieved of culpability for "*sarhaed*" to Arawn's honor, as Arawn has waived that prohibition, but it is possible that he may insult Arawn's wife's honor if he enters into sexual relations with her while she is ignorant of his identity. On one count, he will violate her protection, on the second, he will be guilty of a deception ("*twyll*") if he takes advantage of his having Arawn's form.

²⁰⁰ Quoted by Owen, WLW, p. 46. Her translation.

²⁰¹Owen, p. 45.

This is a tricky test for Pwyll. If he proceeded with the kind of impulsiveness he displayed in the initial hunting scene, he might have succumbed to the queen's charms and willing ardor. He is being much more cautious in this instance, now seemingly aware that the Otherworld will present him with choices that appear to be simple but seethe with complexity.

The importance of the queen's feelings is reinforced in the episode of revelation: the narrative, as I have shown above, is built around her responses, not Arawn's. It is she who thinks abstractedly until he is forced to ask her to share her thoughts. She has a right to be meditative; in Welsh law, a husband who puts his wife aside for no good reason has insulted her and may be obligated to offer compensation for her loss of dignity.²⁰² It is interesting that the idiom used in the narrative reminds us of one of the correct legal terms for for "insult":

*"Meuyl im," heb hi, "yr biwyd yn y neithwyr o'r pan elem y nyblyc yn dillat guely, na digrifwch, nac ymdidan, nac ymchwelut ohonot dy wyneb attaf xgchwaethach a uei uwy no hynny o'r bu y rom ni."*²⁰³

("Shame on me," said she, "if in a year from last night, from when we went into the folds of the bedclothes, if there was either pleasure or conversation, or you turning your face toward me, much less what might be more than that

²⁰² She is entitled to a payment called either "gowyn" or "wynebwerth." Owen, WLW, p. 51.

²⁰³ PKM, p. 7.

between us.")

In Welsh law, "*meuyl*" (shame) signifies an act of dishonor necessitating a compensatory payment of "*sarhaed*".²⁰⁴ The queen's thoughts concerning her legal situation are reinforced by word-choice: her husband seemingly had rejected her, which resulted in her shame; yet suddenly his sexual attentions resume when she had clearly given up hope and suffered insult. When she responds to Arawn's questioning, the word which suggests how heavily this chasteness weighed on her mind. Arawn's explanation brightens the atmosphere; it was not her husband who had been cold and therefore shamed her, rather it was his friend who had respected her honor and Arawn's generosity in a sincere attempt to obey the codes of behavior which bound him even in disguise. The conversational pattern by which this information is revealed is one which will recur later on in the episodes concerning Rhiannon, a narrative structure which indicates a link between this woman's experiences and Pwyll's and Rhiannon's later on. The woman, in this pattern, remains silent initially when a law or code of behavior is breached, her silence creating a noticeable void in the exposition which centers the reader's attention on the shame which she feels herself in danger of suffering if her man does not amend his behavior

²⁰⁴ Owen, WLW, p. 47. She defines "*meuyl*" as "blemish," presumably in reference to reputation rather than physical damage.

or offer explanation for what he has done.²⁰⁵ Her non-participation in the conversation is an action meant to encourage the man to ask the question which will allow her to define the problem in no uncertain terms. We can see how the author has created this dramatic tension in Pwyll A ; Arawn's touch triggers a withdrawn meditation in his wife, and we who are permitted to hear her inmost thoughts--"*Oy a Duw, ' heb hi, 'pa amgen uedwl yssyd yndaw of heno noc ar a uu yr blwydyn y heno?*"²⁰⁶ ("My God," said she, "what a different thought is in him tonight after what has been this past year?")--feel the strength of her emotions as she contemplates this sudden release from a shame which she has had to suffer in silence for a year. Arawn, too, is aware of the intensity of her thoughts; the author shows him asking her once, twice, and then three times what she has been thinking about. The impetus which awakes this response is the absence of one of her most attractive attributes--"ymdidan"--or conversation. Her response to his questioning is sharp and contains the clue to the issue which is examined in the events of this episode. "Meuyl" (shame) is her worry, and that is precisely the problem which Pwyll's behavior was meant to prevent. Her accusation brings the issue out into the open so that she, Arawn--and we readers--can

²⁰⁵ See chart A.

²⁰⁶ PKM, p. 7.

the event (test of codes/honor)

Pwyll at Gorsedd Arberth, sees Rhiannon on magic horse. To meet her, he chases her.

Pwyll at marriage feast, in charge of court's resources. He carelessly vows to grant Gwawl's request.

Pryder abducted. Rhiannon's women falsely accuse her of murder. All, including Pwyll, ignore her right to testify.

the woman's silent response to insult

Rhiannon rides past slowly, though Pwyll mist race after her. She does not: acknowledge his presence.

Rhiannon does not identify Gwawl until Pwyll makes his rash promise. Rhiannon remains silent under accusation by her own choice.

the insult's effect on the relationship

Pwyll nearly loses Rhiannon forever by treating her as prey rather than an equal.

Owawl nearly takes Rhiannon. By not consulting with Rhiannon, Pwyll insults her gift of hospitality.

Rhiannon's punishment degrades her (she serves as a horse), and casts general shame on the court.

Teyrnnon expresses concern for Rhiannon's suffering (which Pwyll never does), restoring her child to her.-

the woman's dramatic reply

"Arhoaf yn llawen... ac oed Ilessach y'r march, pei ass archut yr meityn."
(Gladly I'll stop...and it were better for the horse if you'd asked before.)

"Taw hyt y mynnych...ny bu uuscrellach gwr ar y ssynnwyr e hun nog ry uuost ti." (Be silent as long as you like...there was never a stupider man in good sense than you were.)

"Y rof i a Duw...oed escor uym pryder im, pei gwir hynny." (Between me and God...it would be a deliverance of my care from me, if that were true.)

CHART A

appreciate how nobly the Lord of Dyfed has responded to temptation and how deftly he has avoided the possibility of insult.

Pwyll is not done with his testing after this section. He has learned how to be a good friend to a powerful king, and how he must behave with his friend's wife. But this is only one area in which a chieftain's behavior must be impeccable; he has many more tests before him, especially in his role as lover, bridegroom, and husband to Rhiannon. The problematic moments in these situations are again marked by the conversational pattern we saw Arawn's wife follow; Rhiannon is anything but introverted, and when she is silent, it is merely a preface to a statement which addresses the injury or insult which threatens her or her status.

Pwyll's quest for effective sovereignty follows several thematic paths; his tests and learning experiences are enacted through friendships and feuds to start, but occur most often and most profitably in the various stages of romantic relationships. The First Branch is like many other literary texts in that its thematic obsessions center around the various permutations of love. Pwyll's experience of love in *Pwyll A* was essentially a vicarious one, a relationship he comes to understand by observation rather than direct contact. The correct conduct for the bachelor-lord of Dyfed was a passive, though appreciative,

respect for a friend's wife. An active romantic relationship in the world of the Mabinogi has a strong element of communication in it, as we know from the important female attribute of "*ymdidan*" (conversation). When Arawn's wife lodges her complaint against her husband, she says she suffered not only from his apparent lack of sexual interest, but also because he refused to speak with her in intimate circumstances. Pwyll is correct in withholding speech as well as physical affection from her, as they are both elements of romantic behavior; as a friend of the Otherworld couple, he is obligated to do so. But such conversational passivity is unacceptable in the next section of the text.

Learning when to speak--and when not to--emerges as one of Pwyll's greatest problems, elaborated in the narrative structure of the four sections in which he appears. Pwyll sometimes seems lacking in an interpretive flexibility in his communications with Rhiannon; his difficulty seems to rest in speaking to her without listening to her, or speaking about her with others, rather communicating with her directly. With the introduction of Rhiannon, the importance of the role of women in the Four Branches begins to become much more apparent. Rhiannon is not merely an object around which Pwyll's activities takes place; from the beginning, she is characterized as an independent

individual who wishes to be with Pwyll---but on her own terms. Her strength and intelligence are contrasted somewhat humorously with Pwyll's awkwardness, and her tone, when she points out his inept manners, is not so much that of a nag, but rather an impatient teacher.

Pwyll has no sooner successfully fulfilled his obligations to Arawn and his wife than he is plunged into a new and equally complex situation in his curiosity to test his luck on Gorsedd Arberth. With the kind of impulsiveness which characterizes Pwyll's activities, he responds to an enticing description offered by one of the court--if he goes to the mound to wait, he will come to blows or see a wonder--either of which possibility seems preferable to him to doing nothing. His decision is made quickly, indicating that we will soon be observing his handling of yet another knotty problem; his recklessness also indicates that what he has learned in Arawn's court will not help him here, for he is proceeding with the same enthusiastic ignorance he had on the first page of the First Branch. He is about to learn something new.

Rhiannon makes her appearance as soon as Pwyll settles himself on the mound. The description of her entrance is suggestive of magic--or the Otherworld--the liminal state where Pwyll will need all of his good sense to emerge successfully. Her entrance is extremely dignified and indicative of her high rank.

*Ac wal y bydynt yn eisted, wynt a welynt gyreic ar uarch
canwelw mawr aruchel, a gwisg eureit, llathreit, a bali
amdanei, yn dyuot a yt y priffordd a gerdei heb law yr
orsedd.*²⁰⁷

(And as they were sitting there, they saw a woman on a
great big pale-white horse and a golden, shining dress of
brocaded silk on her, coming along the highway that led
past the mound.)

Her mount, too, has a supernatural gravity with its slow, measured pace. Just as Pwyll could have seen that Arawn's dogs were not from the real world, so too here are plenty of indications that this is no ordinary lady out for a ride: if her exceptional physical qualities are not signal enough, then Pwyll ought to remember where he is sitting and what had been promised to him if he sat there. Clearly, he is safe from receiving blows, for here is a wonder.

His reaction does not indicate that he has come to this realization; despite the many clues to her high status, Pwyll sends one of his company off on foot to intercept her. The failure of this pedestrian mission leads to an attempt to catch her on horseback. That a galloping horse is unable to overtake a horse which is going at a slow amble should be a sign to Pwyll that ordinary measures are useless and extraordinary ones must be considered, yet Pwyll repeats the same actions the following day. On the third day, he himself tries to overtake her with a similar lack of success. And all the

²⁰⁷ PKM, p. 9.

time, Rhiannon remains silent, though men are driving themselves and their horses to exhaustion close on her heels.

As in the episode in *Pwyll A*, the woman's silence serves as a dramatic void in the narrative which creates expectation in the reader, and points to the action which the man ought to take to amend the fault in his conduct. Pwyll, unable to catch Rhiannon, but unwilling to lose her, blurts out the very request which he ought to have made when he first saw her. "*A uorwyn,*" he calls out, "*yr mwyn y gwr mwyhaf a gery, arho ui*" ("Maiden, for the sake of the man you love most, wait for me"). The response to his plea is instantaneov, and highly gratifying to Pwyll, though it is not without its edge of mockery: "*Arhoaf yn llawen,' heb hi, 'ac oed llessach y'r march, pei ass archut yr meityn*"²⁰⁸ ("Gladly I'll stop," said she, "and it were better for the. horse if you'd asked a while ago")

This is no classic romantic meeting, an introduction of two equals whose passion is inflamed equally quickly.²⁰⁹ Pwyll has not considered Rhiannon's own feelings when he first desires to meet her; he thinks only of catching her. Her dignified bearing stands in stark

²⁰⁸ PKM, p. 12.

²⁰⁹ Cf. the meeting of Deirdre and Naoise or Rhiannon's meeting with Manawydan, in which they are mutually attracted to each other in the course of conversation.

contrast to his acquisitive attitude towards her. She did not come to Gorsedd Arberth to pass the time; indeed, this meeting was pre-arranged by her according to her own statement, and she is proud of her independence:

"Arglwydes," heb ef, "pan doy di, a pha gerder yssyd arnat ti?" "Kerdet with uy negesseu," heb hi, "a da y4 gennyf dy welet ti." . . . "Arglwydes," heb ef "a dywedy di ymi dim o'th negesseu?" "Dywedaf, y rof a Duw," heb hi, "Pennaf neges uu ymi, keissaw dy welet ti." "Llyna," heb y Pwyll, "y neges oreu gennyf i dy dyuot ti idi. Ac dywedy di i pwy wyt?" "Dywedaf, Arglwyd," heb hi.²¹⁰
("Lady," said he, "whence do you come, and where are you going?" "I go to do my errands," said she, "And I am pleased to see you." . . . "Lady," said he, "will you tell me anything of your business?" "Yes, between me and God," said she, "My chief errand was to try to see you." "That," said Pwyll, "is the most pleasing errand you could come on. And will you tell me who you are?" "Yes, Lord," said she.)

And so she tells him who she is and that she has come to Gorsedd Arberth because she wanted him, and not Gwawl, to whom she has been promised.

Rhiannon's independent and active nature is emphasized in this passage and in the description of her arrival before her admiring pursuer, Pwyll. She is not shy of speech, despite the initial silence. Her gift is conversation and she is not one to waste it until Pwyll has been tested. At the start, he offers her an insult by sending one of his men after her. Pwyll and Rhiannon are equals, and it is he who should approach her. Like Arawn,

²¹⁰ PKM, p. 12.

Rhiannon has arranged the meeting, but also clearly feels that the first salutation should come from Pwyll, as her obstinate silence and equally obstinate returns to the mound indicate. Pwyll succeeds in finding the right formula nearly by accident, speaking out more from fear of losing her than because he knows it is the right thing to do. Her rebuke reinforces the importance of his finally having asked her to stop; the pattern of the next passage of dialogue (quoted above) shows the difference in approach. He politely asks what he wants to know; he phrases each sentence as a question which allows her to explain her presence there. What we and Pwyll have learned in this episode is that a lord does not chase a woman of his own rank, nor does he send messengers to do the same. She is entitled to a courteous request to wait and meet him face-to-face; it is only right that he ask to ascertain whether she is interested in the encounter.

When Rhiannon tells him that she has come to arrange a tryst with him, we see a marked change in his conduct and style of address. She does most of the talking, saying that she will arrange the wedding feast, and giving him specific orders as to when and where he should come. His share of the dialogue is an expression of his interest in her: "*Goren yw gennyfheb y Pwyll, 'bo kyntaf; ac yn y lle y mynnych ti, gwna yr oet*"²¹¹ ("The sooner the

²¹¹ PKM, p. 13.

better, for me," said Pwyll, "and in the place that you wish, make the tryst"). Pwyll agrees to turn up at the appointed time, and that might be the end of this scene but for Rhiannon; it is not so much that she has to have the last word here, but she must make reference to Pwyll's unreliability: "Arglwyd," she reminds him, *nitric yn iach, a choffa gywiraw dy edewit, ac e ymdeith yd of i*"²¹² ("Lord, farewell, and remember to make good your promise and I'll be on my way"). Her admonition is not an expression of fear that he might forget her--perhaps for someone else--but simply a caution about his manners.

Pwyll's enthusiasm survives a year's separation, for at the correct time he sets off for Hefeydd Hen's court in the company of one hundred riders. Rhiannon, for her part, lives up to her word as far as the preparations go, and the two are pleasantly re-united. Pwyll's powers of judgement are about to be tested again, as the seating arrangements indicate: he is given the position of honor-- and power--at the head of the feast with Hefeydd Hen and Rhiannon to either side of him, a sign of unconditional trust, for the hospitality and provisions of the court are now at his disposal. Hospitality is a serious responsibility in this world; it is hard to know which is worse--to refuse to accept it or to forget to offer it.²¹³

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²¹³ Cu Chulainn dies because he is tricked into violating the "geas" (taboo) of hospitality. General social codes forbid him to refuse an offer of hospitality, but he is also bound by a prohibition against eating dogs' meat. Three women, intent on his destruction, wait by a roadside for him and offer him a meal of dogs' meat. He is forced to eat it, a general "geas" taking precedence over a personal one, and dies soon after. Cross and Slover, pp.

The doling out of provisions or gifts--as a type of hospitality offered to the visitor to the court--is the province of women; certainly it is one of the few areas where a married woman is able to act entirely independently of her husband or kinship group.²¹⁴ While the actual types and numbers of objects which could be given away varied according to the rank of the woman, as specified in the laws, and while a woman could be punished by beating for exceeding the legal limits of what she might give away, the emphatic detail with which this subject is treated in the laws makes it clear that this kind of hospitality was a customary and important function of women in medieval Welsh society.²¹⁵ This form of gift-giving is illustrated in both the First and Second Branches, in the lavish giving of gifts by Rhiannon and Branwen upon their arrival in their respective husbands' countries.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ McAll, "The Normal Paradigms of a Woman's Life," in WLW, p. 19.

²¹⁵ Owen, WLW, p. 52.

²¹⁶ Owen, WLW, p. 59.

Pwyll's position as gift-giver may be a role to which he is not entirely accustomed, as the hospitality of a court would be more likely in the hands of the highest-ranking female. And in any case, we as readers are becoming aware of his difficulties in dealing with previously unexperienced social situations, so we can expect another complication before he and Rhiannon are finally married.

Pwyll--and we the readers--are initially lulled into a false sense of security in the first part of the wedding feast. Pwyll is absorbed by the charming and entertaining company and the food: "*Bwyta a chyuedach ac ymdidan a unaethont*"²¹⁷ ("They ate and caroused and conversed").

Pwyll is clearly off-guard when the mysterious auburn-haired young man enters; he invites him to join the feast, but the young man says no and insists on carrying out his business immediately. Gwawl asks Pwyll to consider the errand on which he has come, and Pwyll carelessly answers, "*Pa arch bynnac a erchych di ymi, hyt y gallwyf y gaffael, itti y byd*"²¹⁸ ("Whatever request you make of me., as far as I can get it, you will have it"). Gwawl's caginess, his unwillingness to respond as warmly to Pwyll as Pwyll has to him, are clear indications that Pwyll is being led into a trap. It is fair to assume that

²¹⁷ PKM, p. 13.

²¹⁸ PKM, p. 14.

Rhiannon is well aware of this red-haired visitor's identity, even though Pwyll is excusably ignorant here; this raises the question in our minds as to her silence. It is only when Pwyll has committed himself to satisfying Gwawl's request that Rhiannon cries out, "*Paham y rody di 219 attep yuelly?*"²¹⁹ ("Why do you give an answer like that?"). But why does Rhiannon wait so long to warn Pwyll?

If we remember the major theme of the First Branch--Pwyll's gradual education (through experience) in the behavior befitting a chieftain--and how it ties in with the greater theme of the codes of behavior governing male-female relationships, an explanation may be found. We know from Welsh laws which refer specifically to women how important their interactions are with their men, whether they are related by blood, marriage, or political alliances. Pwyll's two previous experiences have illustrated the crucial nature of effective communication between men and women, both as a means of establishing relationships, but more importantly, as a way to prevent dishonor. In this episode, Rhiannon has indicated her affection and trust in Pwyll by giving him the place of honor, and thus the right to give hospitality. In return, Pwyll might find it profitable to consult with Rhiannon--what does he know of the friends and enemies of

²¹⁹ PKM p. 14.

his wife-to-be?--before making a such a generous offer of hospitality. Rhiannon's silence in the face of his rash behavior is part of a recurring narrative element in the First Branch; it functions as a dramatic device, as well as a reminder that Pwyll must learn by experience. It may be clear that disaster is at hand, but until Pwyll has actually made the mistake, she does not step in to rectify it. But once he has acted incorrectly, and once her wishes and honor are at stake, she registers her displeasure and suggests a remedial course of action.

Though Rhiannon alerts Pwyll to his indiscretion, it is too late; he has spoken the unfortunate words which cannot be taken back, as Gwawl points out. Pwyll, still unaware of what he is about to lose, addressing Gwawl with a welcoming form of address, "*eneit*".²²⁰ He asks Gwawl again to name his request, ignoring Rhiannon's cry and honoring his promise to Gwawl. And then the terrible answer is given: Gwawl wants Rhiannon and the wedding feast.

Throughout this brief exchange, Pwyll's naivete and ignorance are emphasized, in contrast with Rhiannon's knowledge and organization. As in the hunting scene in *Pwyll A*, we are struck by his seeming inability to perceive the concealed threats or problems in a delicate

²²⁰ PKM, p. 14. The literal translation is "life" or "soul," but as a form of address it means "friend." See *Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet*, ed. R.L. Thomson (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1957), p. 55.

social situation. He is not in his own territory, he knows remarkably little about the suitor he has displaced, and he takes on responsibility without consulting the more knowledgeable persons on either side of him. He is, after all, about to be married to a woman of rank, intelligence, and power, as he learned in their first encounter. And, as Rhiannon pointed out when they first met, it is better to ask her opinion than to charge on impetuously into a situation about which he knows very little.

Gwawl's request leaves Pwyll speechless, for he has no idea of what he should do to get out of this fix. Rhiannon, however, now has no trouble finding her tongue, and she tells Pwyll exactly what he ought to do: "*Taw, hyt y mynnych, heb y Riannon, 'ny bu uuscrellach gwr ar y ssynnwyr e hun nog ry uuost ti*"²²¹ ("Be silent as long as you like; there was never a slower man in his intelligence than you have been"). The sharpness of her answer almost borders on cruelty, but hidden within the mockery of her words is a genuine suggestion of a course of action.

Pwyll has created this problem by talking too freely; now it is time for him to be quiet and listen to the woman he might have consulted in the first place.

Pwyll excuses himself by saying that he did not know who Gwawl was; Rhiannon identifies the unwanted suitor and points out Pwyll's obligation to honor his word. Although

²²¹ PKM, p. 14.

Pwyll objects to giving her away, she insists on it, telling him she has a plan to trap Gwawl just as he has trapped Pwyll. Pwyll listens carefully, and agrees to do as she says. When Gwawl presses Pwyll for an answer, we see a new manner of speech in the Lord of Dyfed: he is subtler in his language than he was previously, which opens the discussion to Rhiannon:

"Arglwyd," heb y Guawl, "madws oed ymi cael attep am a ercheis." "Kymeint ac a ercheist," heb y Pwyll, "o'r a uo y'm medyant i, ti a'y keffy." "Eneit," heb hitheu Riannon, "am y wled a'r darpar yssyd yma, hwnnw a rodeis i y wyr Dyuet ac y'r teulu, a'r yniuroed yssyd ymma. Hwnnw nit eidawaf y rodi y neb. Blwydyn y heno ynteu, y byd gwled darparedic yn y llys, honn i titheu, eneit, y gyscu gennyf innheu."²²²

("Lord," said Gwawl, "high time it was for me to have an answer to what I asked." "As much of what you have asked as is in my power," said Pwyll, "you will have." "Friend," said Rhiannon, "for the feast and the preparation which is here, this I have given to the men of Dyfed and to their warband and to their retainers which are here. This I cannot allow to be given to anyone. A year from tonight, there will be a feast prepared in this court for you, friend, to sleep with me.")

Pwyll does not say yes, nor does he say no. His reference to what is in his power suggests that despite his seat of honor, he is well aware now that he shares certain responsibilities with Rhiannon; this is also his way out of his rash promise, as he shifts some of the decision onto Rhiannon's shoulders. She then takes over, denying Gwawl the feast on the basis of a technicality.

²²² PKM, p. 15.

The power of hospitality has reverted to her again, and she points out that she cannot give to a second guest what she has already put in front of a first, offering him the very same treatment in a year's time as she has just given Pwyll--so that Pwyll will have the very same opportunity to entrap Gwawl. She twice uses "*eneit*" in her speech as a form of encouragement, yet to the reader's ears it sounds ironic, a trickiness of language equal to Gwawl's.

Rhiannon and Pwyll, now working together, can outwit Gwawl at the second wedding feast, magically imprisoning him in a bag full of food and beating him unmercifully. When Gwawl begs to be released from his humiliation, Pwyll--behaving more cooperatively this time--asks for Rhiannon's counsel, as well as her father's, and follows their advice to the letter, forcing Gwawl to give up his claim forever. Rhiannon and Pwyll are then married without interruption and with great joy--and as a final coda to this episode, Rhiannon arranges another feast at which Pwyll is meant to preside, and where, she tells him, it is now safe for him to give gifts freely to anyone who turns up. And upon their arrival in Dyfed, Rhiannon takes up the special right of women: "*Na gwr na gwreic o hynny nyt edewis Riannon, heb rodi rod enwauc idaw, ae o gae. ae o uodrwyl, ae o uawen guerthuawr*"²²³ (Neither man nor woman of those left Rhiannon without her giving a memorable gift

²²³ PKM, p. 19.

to them, either a brooch, or a ring, or a precious stone).

That Pwyll's success as a chieftain is dependent on the success of his relationship with Rhiannon becomes clearer as we analyze the events of the First Branch: when they do not communicate effectively--indeed, whenever Pwyll sets out to do anything without regard to the obligations of the relationship between himself or others--everything goes awry and he stands in danger of losing the thing he desires most. In *Pwyll* B and C the lesson in the text centers around Pwyll's tests and failures, and Rhiannon's role becomes both humorous (in terms of the functions of her spoken words) and didactic (in terms of underlining the potential threat to honor and the best remedy to alleviate the problem). In these two sections, her participation revolves around Pwyll's activities, and the narrative focus centers on his thoughts and reactions for the most part. But when the two are joined in a legal union, Rhiannon begins to take precedence in the tale, becoming the one around whom our thoughts revolve. Though the emphasis shifts in this way, the theme of the need for a mutually respectful relationship between them is still being developed: we have already seen an investigation of the behavior of friends whose relationship excludes sexual intimacy, and we have seen the development of a mutual consideration between lovers in the courtship phase that leads to a

marriage. Now we will see the obligations binding a married couple together in their own union and as parents and how they must behave in respect to each other when external factors threaten to divide them. Pwyll and Rhiannon are a happy couple for the first two years of their marriage, and the success of their union extends to the whole of Dyfed, for the country prospers. In the third year a problem emerges, a conflict between the general obligation which Pwyll's people demand, and the obligation he has to preserve Rhiannon's honor. The men of his land summon him and express their anxiety:

"Arglwyd," heb wynt, "ni a wdom na bydy gyuoet ti a rei o wyr y wlat honn, ac yn ouyn ni yw, na byd it etiued o'r wreic yssyd gennyt. Ac wrth hynny, kymmer wreic arall y bo ettiued yt ohonei. Nyt byth," heb wynt, "y perhey di, a chyt kerxo di not yuelly, nys diodefwn y gennyt."
("Lord," said they, "we know that you are not of the same age as some of the men of this country, but this is our fear, that there will be no heir to you from the wife which you now have. And for this, take another wife from whom there will be an heir. You will not last forever," said they, "and though you love being so, we will not allow you to do it.")²²⁴

The symbolic link in the minds of his people regarding the link between Rhiannon's fertility and the prosperity of the people of the land is clearly the issue here, as well as an interest in securing the lordship of Dyfed. Pwyll's own son would be the strongest claimant to the

²²⁴ PKM, p. 19.

chieftainship; if Pwyll had no sons there might well be difficulties or struggles after his death which would threaten the stability of the land. There is some justification for their fears, but Pwyll thinks they may be hasty in their worries:

"Ie," heb y Pwyll, "nyt hir ettwa yd ym y gyt, a llawer damwein a digawn bot. Oedwch a mi hynn hyt ym pen y ulwydyn; a blwydyn y'r amser hwnn, ni a wnawn yr oet dyuot y gyt, ac wrth ych kynghor y bydaf."²²⁵

("Yes," said Pwyll, "it is not long even now we have been together and much may yet happen. Give me until the end of the year; and a year from this time we will make an appointment to come together, and I will submit to your counsel.")

Legally, Pwyll is within his rights to request this extension. According to the laws, a husband may not put his wife aside for such a reason until seven years have passed:

such a length of time need not be considered excessive for establishing whether or not the partners, were fertile, or acting in good faith, or both.²²⁶

Pwyll can safely honor his obligations and affection for Rhiannon despite a certain restiveness on the part of his men. His patience is rewarded--and the fertility of the two is proved--before a year is out, in the birth of their son. Rhiannon has survived this uneasy moment, but another trial relating to her fertility is close at hand.

²²⁵ PKM, pp. 19-20.

²²⁶ McAll, WLW, p. 20.

The last two stories unfold largely through expository conversational passages. Rhiannon, Teyrnnon's wife, and Rhiannon's serving women have the largest speaking parts in these two sections of the First Branch, though there are clear differences in their effectiveness as communicators. Teyrnnon's wife, in *Pwyll E*, represents the antithesis of Rhiannon; we will see how well she interacts with her husband and how that communication works to alleviate Rhiannon's humiliation. Communication and mutual respect between marriage partners are the social codes explored in *Pwyll D* and *E*, with the first section illuminating the weaknesses or absences of communication which lead to unwarranted suffering, and the second exemplifying more successful discussions and decision-making processes. Rhiannon is the main focus of the whole story--the combination of the two sections--although she does not actually appear in *Pwyll E*. She is often the object of discussion, whether she is being accused of barrenness or of eating her child, or whether she is being judged or enduring a humiliating punishment. Even in the passages about Teyrnnon and his wife, the reader remembers Rhiannon, as soon as it becomes clear that the mysterious child dropped by the mysterious claw is her lost son. Pryderi does not exist as a personality in this story; he is the object of concern, but any human interest in this tale is developed in the humiliation and suffering of Rhiannon.

Rhiannon has, or should have, spoken exchanges with the following people: her serving women; Pwyll; Pwyll's chief men; her teachers and wise men; visitors to the court; and finally, Teyrnnon Twryf Liant. The first three situations represent ineffective communication. Rhiannon is unable to establish a sense of trust with her serving women so that they will tell the truth,²²⁷ and the result is that she speaks to them, but is not heard, excluded from conversation with them because of their fearful intransigence. The second instance is most tragic in that she never communicates directly with Pwyll, who, as her husband, might be likely to hear her with sympathy and also might be expected to demand redress for her loss of honor.²²⁸ In the third situation, she is charged indirectly by Pwyll's chief men with the destruction of her child, though it is clear in the text that the burden of proof rests only on hearsay:

*"a chelu y damwein hwnnw guyrda a'e kigleu"*²²⁹
(and that occurrence could not be

²²⁷ PKM, p. 21. *"Yr a dywettei hi yn dec ac yn druan, ny chaffei namyn yr un ateb gan y gwraged"* (Whatever she might say, fairly or pitifully, she did not get but one answer out of the women).

²²⁸ While a woman was permitted to testify on her behalf in very limited ways (e.g., a paternity suit), most of her testimony would be offered by related males or professional representatives. Owen, WLW, p. 40. Women's words were not considered legally secure: *"Ny chegein gwreic yn uach nac yn tyst ar wr"* (No woman is competent as a surety or a witness on a man). Iorwerth 52/6, in WLW, pp. 174-5. Translation by Jenkins and Owen.

²²⁹ PKM, p. 21.

concealed. Out into the country went the story, and all of the nobles heard it).

An analysis of the reciprocity of communication shows Rhiannon to be isolated: no one allows her to speak directly or effectively, so that the argument concerning her guilt or innocence occurs around her, rather than including her.

Her next three attempts at conversational exchange are more effective. She consults with her teachers and wise men to determine how she should respond to her women's accusation. It turns out that her response, interestingly, is silence: "*a gwedy bot yn degach genthi kymryt y phenyt nog ymdaeru air gwaged, y phenyt a gymerth*"²³⁰ (and it was more pleasing to her to take on her penance than to wrangle with the women, and she took her penance). This silence, a part of the conversational pattern I have already outlined above, is a deliberate and catalyzing action on her part. While silence may seem superficially to represent passivity or helplessness, it is described as a preference here, indicating that Rhiannon can direct events in her life to some degree: if no one will listen to her properly, then she will not waste her breath defending herself. Those who have the power to accuse or judge her address her in only one role--as victim. With her silence, she is asking for

²³⁰ PKM, p. 21.

"*tauodyauc*" (a tongue to speak for her); someone else must speak up to clear her name, as she has been denied this power herself.

Her self-imposed silence contrasts ironically with her penance: she carries strangers into the court on her back--if they so desire-- after she tells them her story.²³¹ And since few strangers desire to ride on her back after hearing the tale (those that do, do so by accident), we may assume that she told her story movingly enough to suggest her innocence--or no would have any compunction about treating her like an animal.²³² Here, her testimony is effective; what we learn from the text is that strangers communicate with her better than her intimates do; and what is most ironic of all is that the very people who would not let her tell her tale during the judgement force her to tell the story for seven years as a punishment.

²³¹ PKM, p. 21. "*Ac yskynuaen a oed odieithyr y porth, eisted gyr claw hwnnw beunyd, a dywedut y pawb a delei o'r a debygei nas gwyppei, y gyffranc oll*" (And the mounting block which was outside the door, to sit beside that each day, and to tell everyone who might not know, the whole story).

²³² The only time we actually hear the words she speaks as part of her penance is when Teyrnon comes to the court to return Pryderi to her. When they arrive, she says: "*A unbenn, heb hi, 'nac ewch bellach hynny. Mi a dygaf pob un o honawch hyt y Ilys. A hynny yw uym penyt am lad o honafuu hun uy mab, a'e diuetha*" ("O Lord," said she, "come no further than that. I will carry each one of you as far as the court. And that is my penance for killing my son myself and destroying him). PKM, p. 25. Needless to say, both Teyrnon and Gwri decline her offer gracefully.

The obstinacy manifested on both sides results in a stalemate; for any change to take place, a new system of behavior must be adopted. At this point, *Pwyll E* begins. Though this section seems stylistically intrusive to critics like Kenneth Jackson and W.J. Gruffydd, it is simply a very apt--though very abrupt--insertion of a complementary episode which will both suggest and effect the remedy to the breakdown of Rhiannon's relationships with her husband and his court. Patrick Ford calls these two sections a "doublet," and says that Teyrnon and his wife are "shadows" of Pwyll and Rhiannon. The reason for this, according to Ford, is to ensure the fertility of the land--while Rhiannon is giving birth to a foal in her divine (equine) aspect, Teyrnon's wife is playing surrogate genetrix with Gwri.²³³ While it is possible to read some aspects of the sovereignty theme and fertility goddess in this tale, as I have done above, this reading alone is not sufficient as a means of understanding these two sections. Ford offers an interesting concept in his "doublet" theory--that Teyrnon and his wife are paralleled in some way with Pwyll and Rhiannon--but the surrogate birth theory seems a great deal of work, wrenching the text to suit the methodology. Can we find a reason for this parallel which relies on evidence within the text rather than a horse-goddess outside it?

²³³ Ford, "Prolegomena to a Reading of the Mabinogi," p. 121.

First, it is important to note that Pwyll E is subordinate to Pwyll D in that the former is a passage which elaborates on a particular issue raised in the latter. The paralleling of the two couples does not occur because they are equivalent to each other; the repeated structure is intended to show a contrast. Pwyll D works up to the disintegration of communication between Rhiannon and Pwyll, but Pwyll E illustrates the successful verbal exchanges and decision-making which take place between Teyrnon's wife and her husband.

That the community at large had a great interest in the success or failure of Pwyll's and Rhiannon's relationship is clear in the first few lines of *Pwyll D*, when Pwyll's men express their fears about Rhiannon's barrenness. In terms of legal process, no one may interfere in intimate matters like these; it is for the husband and his wife to work out privately, or in the case of a serious dispute between them, to hire an arbitrator who would help them settle their business quietly.²³⁴ Here is where Rhiannon and Pwyll might make use of the communication skills they have evolved in earlier episodes, yet as the tale develops, we see that Rhiannon and Pwyll must begin all over again, exploring this problem--and the codes of behavior governing their actions--in order to restore their child and Rhiannon's

²³⁴ Davies, WLW, pp. 95-6.

reputation.

Nearly every incident which occurs in *Pwyll E* is discussed thoroughly by Teyrnnon and his wife. Their dialogues are also marked by the mutual respect the couple have for each other; both solicit the other's opinion before making a judgement or decision. Teyrnnon discusses the disappearance of their mare's foal every May-Eve with his wife, just as he turns to her to decide what to do with the child left behind by the monstrous claw. He does not tell her what he has decided, rather he opens the question to suggestion, and it is her proposal which is adopted as their course of action:

Dodi cayat ar y drws a wnaeth, a chyrchu yr ystauell yd oed y wreic yndi. "Arglwydes," heb ef, "ay kyscu yd wyt ti?" "Nac ef, Arglwyd," heb hi. "Mi a yskeis, a phan doethost ti y mywn mi a defroeis." "Mae ymma mab it," heb ef, "os mynny, yr hwnn ny bu yt eiroet." "Argiwyd," heb hi, "pa gyfranc uu hynny?" "Llyma oil," heb y Teirnon, a menegi y dadyl oil. "Ie, Argiwyd," heb hi, "pa ryw wisc yssyd am y mab?" "Lien o bali," heb ynteu. "Mab y dynnyon mwyn yw," heb hi. "Argiwyd," heb hi, "digirfwch a didanwch oed gennyf i, bei mynnut ti, mi a dygwn wraged yr un a mi, ac a dywedwn uy mot y ueichawc." "Myui a duunaf a thi yn llawen," heb ef, "am hynny." Ac yuelly y gwnaethpwyd."²³⁵

(He shut the door, and looked in the room where his wife was. "Lady," said he, "Are you sleeping?" "No, Lord," said she. "I slept, but when you came in I awoke." "Here is a boy for you," said he, "if you like, that which you never had." "Lord," said she, "what adventure was that?" "Here's the whole [tale]," said Teyrnnon, and related the whole story. "Yes, Lord," said she, "what sort of clothes are about the boy?" "A cloak of brocaded silk," said he.

²³⁵ PKM, p. 23.

"The son of gentlefolk is he," said she. "Lord, " said she, "it was a joy and comfort for me that it might be your wish that I might bring the women in league with me, and say that I have been pregnant." "I'll agree with you gladly," said he, "about that." And so it was done.)

There is a world of difference between this kind of solicitous exchange and the lack of communication between Pwyll and Rhiannon. Teyrnon is polite from the first, showing concern about disturbing his wife--though what has transpired in the stables is so extraordinary that Teyrnon might justifiably burst in on his wife to share his news. When she responds positively to his entrance, he offers her the child, with a qualifying phrase ("*os mynny*"--if you will) that makes this a request, not a demand. She asks for his story, which Teyrnon shares; both are clearly listening to each other. And it is his wife who shows curiosity about the child's origins, and deduces the boy's nobility from his dress. It is also his wife who proposes what to do with the child and how to effect the charade of her having given birth.²³⁶ Teyrnon states that he agrees with his wife's decision; and he will uphold her story if there is any doubt, something which Pwyll will not do for Rhiannon.²³⁷ In the next exchange between Teyrnon and his

²³⁶ Notice, in this episode, that we have a lady who communicates effectively with her women. While Rhiannon's women conspire to exclude and dishonor her, Teyrnon's wife's women will cooperate in telling a falsehood to protect their lady's honor.

²³⁷ He only defends her proven fertility--possibly because that proof reflects on his own fertile powers. He will not extend that defense to the charge of infanticide, abstaining from responsibility with these ambiguous words: "*Nyt oed achaws ganthunt wy y erchi y mi yscar a'm gwreic namyn na bydei plant idi. Plant a wnn i y not idi hi. Ac nyt yscaraf a hi. O gwnaeth hitheu am, kymeret y phenyt amdanaw*" (They had no reason to ask me to divorce myself from my wife except that she did not have children. Children I know she has. And I will not divorce her. If she did wrong, let her do penance for it). PKM, p. 21.

wife, she initiates the discussion by asking about the foal born the night Gwri arrived. Teyrnon tells her where it is and she proposes another action: "*Ponyt oed da iti, Arglwyd,' heb hi, 'peri y hywedu, a'y rodi y'r mab? Kanys y noss y keueist y mab y ganet yr ebawl ac y idiffereist*"²³⁸ ("Would it not be pleasing to you, Lord," said she, "having it [the foal] broken in, and giving it to the boy? For the night you got the boy the foal was born and you saved it"). The suggestion is phrased as a question, a manner of address which has more delicacy than a statement of intent; Teyrnon can say yes or no. He says yes, though, and with equal respect and courtesy: "*Nyt of i yn erbyn hynny,' heb y Teirnon. 'Mi a adaf y ti y rodi 'idaw'*"²³⁹ ("I will not go against that," said Teyrnon, "I will let you give it to him"). She thanks him warmly and says she will give it to him.

After these three exemplary exchanges, the audience is well aware of the difference between Rhiannon's relationship with Pwyll and Teyrnon's with his wife. It

²³⁸ PKM, pp. 23-4.

²³⁹ PKM, p. 24.

is at this point that *Pwyll* D fuses together with the narrative of *Pwyll* E once the two worlds of behavior are outlined. The story returns directly to Rhiannon and her plight. Teyrnnon hears the rumors which had begun to spread the night of Gwri's strange arrival in Teyrnnon's stable--that Rhiannon was being punished--and that in the opinion of many, she was suffering beyond necessity:

*Sef a wnaeth Teirnon Twryf Uliant, o achaws y douot a gawssei, ymwarandaw am y chwedyl, ac amouyn yn lut ymdanaw yny gogleu gan lawer o luossogrwyd, o'r a delei y'r llys, mynychu cwynaw truanet damwein Riannon, a'y phoen."*²⁴⁰

(This is what Teyrnnon Twryf Liant did, because of the find he had made, he heard the news, and inquired assiduously about it until he heard from very many of the people who came from the court increasing complaint how pitiful was the misfortune of Rhiannon, and her suffering).

He meditates on the similarity of appearance between Gwri and Pwyll and is filled with anxiety. His first reaction is to turn to his wife for confirmation of his thoughts, and when he tells her of his suspicions, she backs him up. Again it is she who speaks at length, verbalizing their expectations:

*"A tripheth, Arglwyd," heb hi, "a gaffwn o hynny, diollwch ac elwissen o ellwg Riannon o'r poen y mae yndaw, a diollwch gan Pwyll am neithryn y mab, ate eturyt idaw. A'r trydyd peth, os gwr mwyn uyd y mab, mab,weth ynni uyd, a goreu a allo uyth a wna inni."*²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ PKM, p. 24. Again, we have a contrast with *Pwyll* D, in that gossip here is sympathetic and will instigate events that will restore her honor.

²⁴¹ PKM, pp. 24-5.

("And three things, Lord," said she, "will we obtain from that, gratitude and reward for releasing Rhiannon from the suffering which is upon her, and gratitude from Pwyll for raising the boy and restoring him to him. And the third thing, if the boy will be a gentleman, the fosterage of the boy will rest with us, and the best which he is able to do he will do for us forever.")

Teyrnon is characterized as a chieftain with a good deal of sensitivity for the welfare of others (and a good and courteous husband), but it is his wife who seems to possess a keen appreciation of the political qualities of each incident. She observes that the child is noble; she suggests the symbolic link between him and the foal in her gift-giving; and she realizes that, in addition to freeing Rhiannon from undeserved suffering, there will be benefits accruing to themselves, when they give up the boy. Teyrnon speaks from the heart and his wife speaks from the head; working cooperatively, they can resolve problems.

After Gwri is revealed to the court as Pwyll's and Rhiannon's lost son, it is Rhiannon whom Teyrnon addresses, not Pwyll. When the insult is finally corrected, Rhiannon participates actively in conversation. Her first speech after her vindication is an important one. Though it lacks her earlier ironic humor, it has a similar kind of power in the text; she names her son as she expresses her relief.²⁴² Pwyll agrees to the name she

²⁴² PKM, p. 26. *'Y rof i a Duw, heb y Riannon, 'oed escor uym pryder im, pei gwir hynny'* ("Between me and God," said Rhiannon, "it would be the casting off of my care to me, if that is the truth"). R.L. Thomson explains the pun here: "*escor*" means both "casting off" and "giving birth to" so that she may also be saying, "it would be the birth of Pryderi to me." *Pwyll Penduic Dyuet* (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1957), p. 41.

has inadvertently chosen, for the first time agreeing wholeheartedly with something Rhiannon has done: "*Yawnahaf yw hynny, heb y Pwyll, kylaryt enw y mab y wrth y geir a dywot y uam, pann gauas llawen chwedyl y wrthaw*"²⁴³ ("That is most fitting," said Pwyll, "to take the boy's name from the word which his mother spoke, when she had joyous news of him"). His agreement and pleasure--in addition to the agreement of the court--marks the change in his relationship with his wife. He has not only heard what she has said, but he attaches importance to the utterance, recognizing it as a phrase with more than one function.

Once all the relationships are restored to normal, the text winds up to a quick conclusion. The remaining paragraphs relate briefly the success and prosperity of the rest of Pwyll's reign, a period of stability and fertility which extends into his son's period of lordship.²⁴⁴ The problem which worried his people at the

²⁴³ PKM, 2. 26.

²⁴⁴ It is interesting, I think, that the First Branch ends by mentioning whom Pryderi married. "*Sef gwreic a uynnawd, Kicua, uerch Wynn Gohoyw, uab Gloyw Walltlydan, uab Cassnar Wledic o dyledogyon yr ynys hon*" (This is the woman he chose, Cigfa, daughter of Gwyn Gohoyw, son of Gloyw Wallt Lydan, son of Casnar Wledig of the noble ones of this island). PKM, 2. 27. His leadership qualities and his military successes are important factors in the success of his lordship, but so is his marriage. The extended lineage of Cigfa illustrated her kinship ties, one of the major concerns in choosing a wife in medieval Wales, a peaceful rather than a military means of ensuring peace.

beginning of *Pwyll* D is averted; everyone profits from the restoration of normalcy and stability to Pwyll's and Rhiannon's relationship.

In each of the five episodes, we have been shown either exemplary or inappropriate behavior in romantic relationships, progressing through the different stages and manifestations--bachelorhood, courtship, wedding, marriage and parenthood--which are the major bonds which hold men and women together. Whether Pwyll adapts instinctively to the situation (as he does with Arawn's wife) or learns by admonishment (as he does with Rhiannon) or example (as he does with Teyrnon), the social skills which emerge as the most important in maintaining stability and order are the ability to participate successfully in dialogue with others (male and female) and the capacity to interact cooperatively and sensitively with those in his public life--his people and his fellow-chieftains--as well as with the woman in his private life--Rhiannon.

Chapter V
THE SECOND BRANCH

The Second Branch differs from the other three Branches of the Mabinogi in its Irish setting:²⁴⁵ it is the only Branch which explores themes touching on codes of behavior between differing and competitive races. The rest of the Mabinogi is confined to Britain and its shadowy counterpart, the Otherworld, and though the people who inhabit the Otherworld are not related to the Welsh characters of the Four Branches, the interaction between the two worlds is close, lacking in the chauvinistic contention which emerges in the exchanges between the Irish and the Welsh. The Otherworld's special narrative function--as the testing ground for mortals--differs greatly from the narrative function of the Irish episodes in the Second Branch, which allow for an investigation of kinship politics in the formal--but competitive--behavior

²⁴⁵ Proinsias Mac Cana and W.J. Gruffydd have done extensive work sorting out the analogues and affinities that this text has with Irish folk and legendary material, and both men have concluded that the Irish material was borrowed to create the Welsh story. See Mac Cana, *Branwen*, and W.J. Gruffydd, *Rhiannon*, pp. 60-63. Kenneth Jackson, who sees more international than Irish folk material in this Branch, says the origins of the story are not so clear; it is hard to determine which came first, the Irish or the Welsh material. *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition*, p. 123.

between chieftains of two separate races which can never really be reconciled.

The emphasis on kinship ties is made evident from the beginning of the Second Branch; a very carefully drawn genealogy is presented to the audience before the actions of the story take place. We are introduced to the central-most figure of this family grouping first--Bendigeidfran uab Llyr, the crowned king ("*urenhin coronawc*")²⁴⁶ of Britain--while the rest of the *dramatis personae* are introduced in relation to him:

*Ac yn eisted yd oedynt ar garrec Hardlech, uch penn y weilgi, a Manawydan uab Llyr y urawt y gyt ac ef, a deu uroder un uam ac ef, Nissyen, ac Efnissyen, a guyrda y am hynny, mal y gwedei ynghylch brenhin. deu uroder un uam ac ef, meibon oedyn y Eurosswyd We uam ynteu Penardun, uerch Ueli uab Mynogan.*²⁴⁷

(And they were sitting on the rock of Harddlech, above the sea, and Manawydan son of Llyr, his brother, together with him, and two brothers of the same mother also with him, Nisien and Efnisien, and nobles besides that, as was fitting round about a king. His two brothers having the same mother as he did were the sons of Eurosswydd by his mother, Penarddun, daughter of Beli son of Mynogan.)

This is the only Branch which opens with the presentation of kinship ties to this elaborate degree, but like the closing of the First Branch, it provides information about relationships which must work well to maintain social order. The strongest bond is between

²⁴⁶ PKM, p. 29.

²⁴⁷ PKM, p. 29.

Bendigeidfran and Manawydan; we may expect them to work together cooperatively, if they respect the responsibilities their kinship demands. Bendigeidfran is also attended by his two half-brothers, Nisien and Efnisien, to whom he has obligations, but not perhaps at the level he owes Manawydan. Nisien and Efnisien--the good/bad archetypal pair--symbolically represent extremes of fraternal behavior:

*A'r neill o'r gueisson hynny, gwas da oed; of a barei tangneued y rwg y deu lu, ban uydint lidyawcaf; sef oed hwnnw Nissyen. Y llall a barei ymlad y.Kwng y deu uroder, ban uei uwyaf yd ymgerynt.*²⁴⁸

(And one of those lads, a good lad was he; he caused peace between the two hosts when they were likely to be angry; that one was Nisien. The other caused fighting between the two brothers when they might love one another most.)

The emotional traits ascribed to each of these men are consonant with the traditional functions of the Divine Twins which can be found in many Indo-European legends and folk tales.²⁴⁹ Dumézil sees these pairs as being "at once antithetical and complementary, [and] necessary to each

²⁴⁸ PKM, p. 29.

²⁴⁹ See Georges Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 5-8, 17, 54-64; Brinley Rees, *Ceinciau'r Mabinogi* (Siliwen, Bangor: 1975), pp. 15-17; Donald J. Ward, "The Separate Functions of the Indo-European Divine Twins" in *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 193-20; and Ward, *The Divine Twins: An Indo-European Myth in Germanic Tradition*, *Folklore Studies*, 19 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968).

other.²⁵⁰ Though their actions appear to be more antithetical than complementary in episodes where both appear, and though they do not function entirely according to the definitions of the mythological twins, Nisien and Efnisien share important affinities with the Divine Brothers. Nisien is actually a very minor character in the events of the Second Branch--it would seem that he is introduced primarily as a contrast to his twin--where Efnisien is quite important. Yet Nisien's passivity in the story is not entirely surprising, as the author tends to concentrate on those elements and characters which cause the Second Branch to end tragically, and Efnisien is the man who is always upsetting the social order.²⁵¹

Efnisien is linked more with Bendigeidfran here, personifying a negative impulse which is only barely suggested in the character of his royal half-brother. Although Efnisien is introduced as the utterly bad twin, his characterization is so much developed that by the end of the Irish episodes, he has become the kind of man who can feel remorse for his actions, and can perform an act of self-sacrifice to aid his people and atone for his sins. Equally, we find as the story progresses that

²⁵⁰ Dumezil, p. 55.

²⁵¹ This is not the only instance of the good twin fading out of the myth or story, his actions being supplanted or taken over by the bad brother. For a discussion of several Indo-European examples of this kind of narrative evolution, see Ward, "The Separate Functions of the Indo-European Divine Twins," pp. 198-202.

Bendigeidfran is good with a touch of bad: he is the noble king who restores his guests' "*wynebwerth*" (honor) and rescues his sister from suffering, but he is also a dissembler in some of his actions, working for his own gain under the guise of kingly courtesy. There are several facets to Bendigeidfran's personality, just as there is more than one side to his brother Efnisien:

the solicitous Bendigeidfran, trying to regain Matholwch's confidence, or the imperious Bendigeidfran, taking upon himself the responsibilities of a leader, and saying that he will act as a bridge; Efnisien in sardonic and laconic mood, pressing to pulp the heads of Irish warriors, or with a mixture of evil contemplation and incipient remorse deciding ,to throw the boy Gwern headlong into the fire.²⁵²

Though it may seem sacrilege to attribute negative impulses to Bendigeidfran (Bran the blessed), a character who has been consistently read as a noble and powerful man,²⁵³ it is difficult to read some of his statements and actions as unselfish and honorable deeds. He refuses to make peace with Matholwch after liberating Branwen from her humiliation, rejecting the Irish king's offer of recompense, not because the compensation is insufficient, but because Bendigeidfran wants to see if he can take the kingship of Ireland for himself:

²⁵² Derick Thomson, p. xlvi.

²⁵³ He has even been identified by some critics as a euhemerized version of the Fisher King. See Mac Cana, *Branwen*, pp. 162-65, and *The Mabinogi*, p. 51; Helaine Newstead, *Bran the Blesseid in Arthurian Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), pp. 62, 144, 176, 179, 188; and Thomson, pp. xxxi-xxxii.

*"Ie," heb ynteu Uendigeiduran, "ony allaf i ue hun cael y urenhinaeth, ac aduyd ys kymeraf gynghor am ych kennadwri chwi. o hyn hytAan del amgen, fly cheffwch y genhyf i attep."*²⁵⁴

("Yes," said Bendigeidfran, "unless I can get the kingship myself, perhaps I will take counsel about your message. For this, until a different one comes, you will not get an answer from me.")

Bendigeidfran conforms in several important ways to Dumézil's "warrior," the mythological figure who ranks just below the gods in power. The warrior-type is physically extraordinary, being excessively strong like Hercules, or distorted by battle-rage like Cu Chulainn--or larger than life-size, like Bendigeidfran. Their unique physical attributes are linked to their negative impulses; Dumézil says that they commit "sins" against society in order to preserve it:

They cannot ignore order, since their function is to guard it against the thousand and one demonic or hostile endeavors that oppose it. But in order to assure this office they must first possess and entertain qualities of their own which bear a strong resemblance to the blemishes of their adversaries. In battle itself, they must respond to boldness, surprise, pretense, and treachery with operations of the same style, only more effective, or else face sure defeat. Drunk or exalted, they must put themselves into a state of nervous tension, of muscular and mental preparedness, multiplying and amplifying their powers. And so they are transfigured, made strangers in the society they protect. And above all, dedicated to Force, which proves itself only by surpassing boundaries--even its own boundaries and those of its *raison d'être*. The warrior is the one who finds comfort only in being strong, not only in the face of this or that adversary, in this or that situation, but strong absolutely, the

²⁵⁴ PKM, p. 41.

strongest of all--a dangerous super§give for a being who occupies the second rank.²⁵⁵

The warrior fulfils a useful function by being bad: although he or she sins, redemption for all members of society is the outcome of these sinful actions. Dumézil calls this "a movement of progress" in the mortal social order because others are inspired to react against the sin or because the warrior will ultimately act unselfishly, though violently, in "the service of saving human victims in extremis."²⁵⁶

Both Bendigeidfran and Efnisien possess this dual ability to sin against and redeem others, though Efnisien sins more often than Bendigeidfran. The king of the Island of the Mighty sins covertly, either in thought alone, or in such a way that he seems to be doing the right thing even when his motives are wrong. Efnisien, on the other hand, does wrong blatantly, though his pensive reflections often reveal that he does so for quite good reasons. The two brothers thereby work in collusion, though a superficial inspection of their actions would result in reading Bendigeidfran's actions as thoroughly good and Efnisien's as utterly bad.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ Dumézil, pp. 106-7.

²⁵⁶ Dumézil, p. 107.

²⁵⁷ Though we may dislike Efnisien as a personality, it does not change his function as a disrupter who ultimately restores social order. "The warrior and the sorcerer, or, on another level, the soldier and the policeman, work equally, when occasion demands, for the liberty and the life of their fellows; but each operates according to procedures which others find distasteful." Dumézil, p. 107.

The Second Branch has remarkably little dialogue in contrast to the other three Branches. Many speeches are paraphrased indirectly, resulting in a less dramatic narrative style than we find elsewhere in the Mabinogi. This suppression of distinctive dialogue has an advantage, in that directly reported speech, when it does occur, stands out all the more.

The dialogue is natural and free in its movement, and is often conducted with a swift-moving economy and terseness. But there is time for humour, and for revealing characterization, as when Branwen, addressed as 'arglwydes' ('lady'), prefaces her reply with 'Kyn ny bwyf arglwydes' ('though I may not be a lady'). Indeed, great care would seem to have been taken with the dialogue, which is alwŷ in keeping with the character of the speaker.²⁵⁸

Communication between characters is inhibited more often than not, something which this tragic story has in common with the Fourth Branch. Effective verbal exchanges are blocked by several factors, the most common being duplicity, a disinterest in revealing true feelings or thoughts in order to maintain a facade of courteous and honorable behavior. But another inhibition between characters is excessive formality, the application of social codes to the point of rigidity. The tenuousness of the peace between the Irish and the British requires this formality, but for all that an intimate kinship bond is

²⁵⁸ Derick Thomson, pp. xlv-xlvi.

established by the marriage of Branwen to Matholwch, the moments in which the King of Ireland and the King of the Island of the Mighty address each other are marked by the restraint which exists between strangers who have reason to distrust each other's motives.

This lack of intimacy is exacerbated by the political and geographical distances between the two kingdoms:

messengers are used a great deal as a means of communication. The problems resulting from the exchange of messages in this way increases the possibility of insult. Secondhand communication creates difficulties in understanding; more importantly, the verbal exchanges take place between persons of differing ranks (messenger-servant and king). Conversation between equals can progress in a system of give and take, promoting openness, but when the partners in dialogue are of unequal rank, that ease of communication is impossible. Reactions--and interpretations of situations--are necessarily different from what we found in the First Branch. There, if deceptions or insults occurred, the persons involved were almost always present to participate or not as their pride dictated.

Jeffrey Gantz sees the narrative structure of the Second Branch as "two overlapping and counterbalancing sections [with a] coda."²⁵⁹ Gantz identifies the

²⁵⁹ Gantz, *The Mabinogion* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 66-7.

contrasting explorations of one people's insult to another: the first insult comes from the British and is directed towards the Irish, but the trend is reversed when the Irish later insult the British. The theme here may be a negative permutation of Friendship, explored in the superficial amity between Matholwch and Bendigeidfran which covers their more destructive emotions. The focus of their competition--and victim of their mutual distrust--is Branwen, the princess of Britain who becomes the unfortunate queen of Ireland.

Though the emphasis in the beginning of the Second Branch stresses the male characters--the network of brothers--we are learning about the relationships between siblings, the bonds which suggest what types and standards of protection Branwen is owed by each of the men in her kinship group--when they give her away to Matholwch, and after he has failed in his obligations.

Branwen is not merely a pawn passed back and forth in the struggle between the two islands; she is a woman whose sufferings and emotions are characterized in both her impulsive and decisive actions, and her few, but powerful, words. Branwen is the focus for the reader, as most events occur in relation to her. The Calumniated Wife motif is an elaboration on the theme of marriage which was similarly investigated in the First Branch in Rhiannon's unjust punishment. This version is the antithesis of

Rhiannon's story; Branwen's humiliation is alleviated, but the attempt to free her results in tragedy rather than stability. The focus of Rhiannon's suffering is her severance from her child and her husband (and by extension, the rift between her and Pwyll's people).

Here, in the Second Branch, we have a similar concern for the insults the woman and her kin suffer when her marital relationship is damaged by external accusations, but in Branwen's case, the interest centers not so much on the obligations her husband and his people owe her (which obligations they violate a year after the marriage), but rather on the variations of sibling bonds, especially in the characters of her full brother, Bendigeidfran, and her half-brother, Efnisien:

The Second Branch, the only one of the stories which has a woman's name as its title, shows itself particularly sensitive to the delicately balanced position of a woman. For the central theme of Branwen, daughter of Llyr is the relationship between two kins and the way in which the infringement of honour determines the course of that relationship which pivots on Branwen herself. The text contains constant echoes of the vocabulary and terminology of . . . the law 'books.²⁶⁰

The greatest problem in this Branch is the ineffectual bonding of two competitive kinship groups, though an attempt to secure peace is made by means of a political marriage. This is the reason for Matholwch's visit to the Island of the Mighty, and his desire for

²⁶⁰ Owen, WLW, p. 58.

peace is the first message he sends to Bendigeidfran, as his ship approaches: "*swch y taryan y uynyd yn arwyd tangneued*"²⁶¹ (the point of the shield upwards as a token of peace). When Matholwch asks for Branwen in marriage, he specifies his desire to bind ("*ymrwymaw*")²⁶² the two islands together and strengthen both in the process:

These words contain the most explicit expression in Welsh literature of the idea that the role of the wife is that of a link between kins, a peace weaver, the *fridstofe*, a role which is a familiar one for the heroines of Germanic and Anglo-Saxon saga.²⁶³

Branwen is an important woman in Britain and a desirable choice as a wife: "honno oed tryded prif rieni yn yr ynys hon; teccaf morwyn yn y byt oed"²⁶⁴ (that was one of the three chief parents²⁶⁵ in this island and the fairest

²⁶¹ PKM, p. 30.

²⁶² PKM, p. 30.

²⁶³ Owen, WLW, p. 58.

²⁶⁴ PKM, pp. 30-1.

²⁶⁵ There has been considerable discussion as to the correct translation of "rieni": it has been read as a version of "rhiain" (maiden) or as "matriarch"; and it has also been reasonably suggested that this word comes from "rhy-geini" (born before) in the sense of "ancestress"; another, less likely, reading is "descendant." See Derick Thomson, ed. *Branwen uerch Lyr* (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1976), p. 22 for a fuller discussion. Particularly interesting is Ifor Williams' proposal that Rhiannon and Aranrhod--in a trio with Branwen--are the three chief "rieni" referred to in this tale because they all give birth. PKM, p. 165. I have chosen "parents" (which is also the common meaning of the word in modern Welsh) because there is obviously a structural narrative echo in all three women's stories; their functions as mothers serve to elaborate similar themes, though not always in positive ways. It is hard to imagine how they function as "ancestresses," "matriarchs," or "descendants" in the text.

maiden in the world"). Later, when she is insulted by being banished to the kitchen and beaten, the severity with which Matholwch treats her seems all the more acute and unjust when we see the contrast between her earlier status as a princess of a powerful people and her subsequent fall into disgrace as a scullery maid.

Of all the female characters in the Mabinogi, Branwen ranks as the most victimized woman with the least ability to defend herself. When we consider that a woman in the culture which is described in the Mabinogi most commonly defended herself by speaking out against the injustices or insults she suffers--and could expect her nearest male kin to represent her cause legally--we find that Branwen has difficulty tapping these resources when she is punished for another's sins. This difficulty, which is unfairly assessed by Mac Cana as passivity,²⁶⁶ does not actually reflect on her own ingenuity or capability, but rather on the circumstances in which she finds herself. Her importance to the meaning of the text does not rely on proof of her activity; her role as victim is just as functional in the narrative--and as catalytic--as Efnisien's role as troublemaker is. There would be no story without Branwen, a point which is underscored in the

²⁶⁶ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, p. 55.

closing lines of the Second Branch: "*A llyna ual y teruyna y geing honn o'r Mabinogi, o achaws Paluawt Branwen, yr honn a uu tryded anuat paluawt yn yr ynys honn*"²⁶⁷ (And thus ends that branch of the Mabinogi, concerning the Blow to Branwen, that which was the third unfortunate blow in that island). The reference to "*Paluawt Branwen*" (the Blow to Branwen) marks the issue which is explored through her character: insult between rival kinship groups. This is reminiscent of one of the Triads in the Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch:

*Teir Gvith Baluavt Ynys Prydein:
Un onadunt a drevis Matholwch Vydol ar Vranwen verch Lyr;
A'r ell a drevis Gwenhvyuach ar Wenhvyuar. Ac o achaws hynny y bu
Weith Kat Gamlan gvedy hynny; A'r dryded a drewis Golydan Vard ar
Gatwaladyr Vendigeit.*

(Three Harmful Blows of the Island of Britain: The first of them Matholwch the Irishman struck upon Branwen daughter of Llyr; The second Gwenhwyfach struck upon Gwenhwyfar: and for that cause there took place afterwards the Action of the Battle of Camlan; And the third Golydan tOnPoet struck upon Cadwaladr the Blessed.)²⁶⁸

Although it is not Matholwch who actually strikes Branwen in the story in the Mabinogi, but the butcher,²⁶⁹ the

²⁶⁷ PKM, p. 48.

²⁶⁸ Bromwich, p. 144. Her translation.

²⁶⁹ Ifor Williams explains this inconsistency by assuming that "*kygyd*" may once have been in the text of the triad, but was lost in later transcriptions of it, PKM, p. xxvi; Rachel Bromwich disagrees on the grounds that the parallel phrasing (which is so important to the structure of all the triads) would be destroyed by the inclusion of "*kygyd*," and therefore, must not have been included in this, the original form of the triad, p. 145. Bromwich's point seems more likely, especially if we read "*trevis*" (struck) figuratively, allowing that his order that she be humiliated in this fashion is tantamount to actually committing the deed.

punishment takes place on Matholwch's orders. In the Second Branch, there are only rarely direct agents; so many acts of communication or insult are carried out indirectly or in solitude that this instance simply conforms to the rule.

What is mentioned in the triad is Matholwch's race-"*Matholwch Vydol*"--emphasizing the fact that Branwen is British and Matholwch Irish. The legendary enmity between the two countries may be suggested in this reference; certainly we know from the Mabinogi that this insult will turn out to be a primary cause for the war between Ireland and the Island of the Mighty and the destruction of the two kingdoms.²⁷⁰

The enmity between the two races is symbolized in the relationship between Matholwch and Branwen, a political alliance and not a romantic one, as Pwyll's and Rhiannon's was. The legal concept which is treated in their interactions is "galanas," another form of compensation for insult. "Galanas" could be defined as an insult growing out of feud or enmity:

²⁷⁰ Note that the second item in the triad indicates that a blow was the cause of another ruinous conflict, the Battle of Camlan. Bromwich sees this as a parallel to the British-Irish war of the Second Branch, p. 145.

The rules for compensation within marriage stress the conventions that both man and wife were expected to observe. They also show the persistent if shadowy involvement of a wife's natal kin in her interests While the *sarhaed* of a married woman is dependent on her husband's status, her *galanas* price is still linked with that of her natal kin This influence may explain in part the anomalous position of woman in the Welsh law of *galanas*, where her *galanas* links her closely to her natal kin even after marriage and where the maternal kin is deeply involved in the *galanas* of her children, thus forming a strong bond between two different kins for at least one generation. . . .
. A woman is not regarded as a natural participant in feud. . .
. The rules relating to *galanas* stress the conduit, non-participant, function of women in a particular institution.²⁷¹

Though Matholwch comes to Britain to seek peace, hostility soon erupts between the Irish and the British. All is amiable in the council which considers his request, and the wedding feast progresses happily--with "*kyuedach*" (carousal) and "*ymdidan*" (conversation).²⁷² The first sign of tragedy comes the morning after, in the outrageous actions of Efnisien--who offers insult because he feels his honor to have been threatened. He learns of her marriage to Matholwch indirectly:

*Ac ar hynny dydgueith, nachaf Efnysen [y] gwr
anagneuedus a dywedassam ucho, yn dywanu y lety
meirch Matholwch, a gouyn a wnaeth, pioed y meirch.
"Meirych Matholwch brenhin Iwerdon yw y rei hyn," heb
wy. "Beth a wnant wy yna?" heb ef. "Yma y mae brenhin
Iwerdon, ac yr gyscwys gan Uranwen dy chwaer, a'y
ueirych yw y rei hynn." "Ay yuelly y gwnaethant wy am
uorwyn kystal a honno, ac yn chwaer y minheu, y rodi
heb*

²⁷¹ Owens, pp. 55-7.

²⁷² PKM, p. 31.

*uyghanyt,i? Ny ellynt wy tremic uwy arnaf i," heb ef.*²⁷³

(And on that certain day, behold, Efnisien, the quarrelsome man of whom we spoke above, finding the quarters of Matholwch's horses, asked whose were the horses. "The horses of Matholwch, king of Ireland are these," said they. "What are they doing there?" said he. "The king of Ireland is here, and he slept with Branwen, your sister, and these are his horses." "Is it thus they have done to a maiden as good as that and a sister of mine, giving her without my consent? They could not insult me more," said he.)

The insult for Efnisien is that Branwen was given away without anyone having consulted him first; but the insult is compounded by the way in which he gets the news, as a secondhand report from members of the general household. It is Efnisien who must solicit the information with a question after being surprised by the presence of unfamiliar horses in the stables. He has clearly been excluded from the wedding feast, undoubtedly because he is so disruptive, but the breach of codes of conduct infuriates him--rightly so--though his means of revenge is excessive. This is a pattern we will see again with Efnisien: his motives for anger stem from real insults or threats, but his reaction is so dramatic that it transforms all sense of justice to outrage; he never deals with insult through legal channels, but answers with equally (if not even more) insulting behavior.²⁷⁴

²⁷³ PKM, pp. 31-2.

²⁷⁴ This excessive and equivalently bad behavior is similar to the redemptive sins which the warrior takes on in the pattern outlined by Dumézil which I have mentioned above.

What is also interesting to note in this passage is his reference to Branwen ("*uorwyn kystal a honno*"). It is possible that this is an indication of his pride, that he is sarcastically implying (evident in the use of the equative form) that Branwen is too good for Matholwch, a style of speaking which fits the contentious nature which is attributed to him. But it may also be possible to read that phrase as genuinely sympathetic, a commiseration with his sister's plight--that she seems to have been given away without her consent²⁷⁵ --in Bendigeidfran's and Matholwch's hasty overtures for peace.

Matholwch's response to the maiming of the horses reflects an intensity of passion and hastiness of reaction that is extraordinarily like Efnisien's tantrums. He is advised to leave Britain immediately, as the mutilation constitutes a gross insult to his honor. He is easily persuaded to leave in a huff, though he does pause for a moment to wonder whether this was indeed a premeditated insult: "*Dioer, eres genhyf, os uy gwaradwyaw a uynhynt, rodi morwyn gystal, kyuard, gyn anwylet gan y chenedyl, ac a rodyssant ym*"²⁷⁶ (Faith, strange to me, if it is

²⁷⁵ Some laws show a recognition of the importance of a woman's consent to a sexual union. Charles-Edwards, "Nau Kynywedi Teithiauc," WLW, pp. 35-36.

²⁷⁶ PKM, p. 32. Note that he uses the same words in reference to Branwen as Efnisien did: "*morwyn gystal*" (a maiden so good [as that]).

insulting me they wished to do, giving a maiden so good, of such high rank, so beloved by her kin, which they have given to me). He does not make a formal complaint nor does he express his sense of insult directly to Bendigeidfran. And when Bendigeidfran hears about Matholwch's hasty departure, the distanced communication continues, for Bendigeidfran sends messengers (courtiers, but still men of lesser rank than Matholwch, a king) to inquire why he is leaving. Matholwch complains of suffering full insult (*cwbyl waradwyd*)²⁷⁷ and expresses his surprise that they have treated him so well only to insult him afterwards. The messengers insist on Bendigeidfran's innocence in provoking insult and sincere desire to make amends, saying that he has felt the affront as strongly as his guest, in essence taking on the humiliation by identification. Matholwch refuses this symbolic reparation in preference to his desire for a properly legal--and more substantive--form of recompense and he tells the messengers: "*Ac eissoes ni eill of uy niwaradwyaw i o hynny*"²⁷⁸ (But nevertheless he cannot free me from disgrace on that account). The exchanges between the two kings are characterized by their indirectness; although the issues of honor and insult here are complex ones, the two men do not resolve them in face-to-face

²⁷⁷ PKM, p. 32.

²⁷⁸ PKM, p. 33.

conversation.

The compensation which Bendigeidfran offers Matholwch is exactly what the lawbooks prescribe in such a case: he offers (again via the messengers) a horse for each one that was mutilated,²⁷⁹ and as compensation for Matholwch's loss of "*wynepwerth*," he offers "*llathen aryant a uo kyuref [ale uys bychan] a chyhyt ac of e hun, a chlawr eur kyflet a'y wyneb*"²⁸⁰

(a staff of silver which is as thick [as his little finger] and as long as himself, and a plate of gold as broad as his face). As Morfydd Owen shows, Bendigeidfran has no other means of making reparation: "Bendigeidfran is on the horns of a dilemma. Efnisien's action is insult to him also as a breach of his protection but he cannot take revenge on his own half-brother for vengeance within the kin is forbidden."²⁸¹

Their lack of communication and the bickering over the recompense has given us a fairly clear picture of the distrust between the two kings--a distancing which will never break down throughout the rest of the story and which will be exacerbated by further clumsy attempts at

²⁷⁹ Vita Cadoci in A.W. Wade Evans, *Vita Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1944), pp. 58-59. Cited by Owen, WLW, p. 59.

²⁸⁰ PKM, p. 33. See *The Latin Texts of the Welsh Laws*, ed. Hywel David Emanuel (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967), Latin Redaction D 338.10; and *Welsh Medieval Law*, ed. A.W. Wade-Evans (Oxford: University Press, 1909) 123.17.

²⁸¹ Owen, WLW, p. 59.

communication. And it will be Branwen who will suffer the repercussions of their mutual distrust and who will graphically represent the hopelessness of their interactions in her role as helpless victim.

The closing sequence to the episode of Matholwch's and Branwen's marriage contains an unusual story, one which intrudes as roughly in the narrative as the story of Teyrnon and his wife did in the latter part of the First Branch. And like that story, the tale of the monstrous couple raises issues which serve to illuminate the depth of the problems in the main narrative.

Much has been said about the monstrous couple and the folkloric or legendary roots of the tale, but little has been said that indicates how the story functions within the text.²⁸² Mac Cana suggests that it is included primarily as a means of introducing a device (the cauldron) with which to finish off Efnisien:

the redactor contrived that it should return to Ireland and stand at the centre of the mighty conflict, as it did in the prototype. His anxiety not wholly to jettison the old while accomodating the new is a trait he shares with many medieval redactors of traditional narrative, but in this particular instance the compromise is worked very neatly and in such a way as to provide a timely and glorious demise for the fractious Efnisien, who had by then

²⁸² Mac Cana, *Branwen*, pp. 152-153, *The Mabinogi*, pp. 39-40; Jackson, pp. Ford, pp. 58-59.; Thomson, xxxvi-xl. All of these discussions treat the episode as an interpolation of another folk tale of Irish origin which has little bearing on the extant narrative.

outlived his usefulness.²⁸³

This seems an excessively simplistic reason for introducing the long and rather elaborate tale of Liasar Llaes Gyfnewid and his wife, Cymidei Cymeinfol. Both are specifically named, and in the case of the female half of this pair, the identification helps to focus our attention on her activities. In the First Branch, the wives of Arawn and Teyrnnon are identified only in relation to their husbands, yet in this secondary tale, the woman is not only described, but given a name as well, one which has a clear connection to the text. Her name functions importantly in respect to both the main problem of the Irish/Welsh conflict, while operating simultaneously on a lighter, punning level. Neither name is easily decipherable, but both contain elements suggesting argument or discord. Llassar Llaes Gyfnewid means something like "trailing flame of battle,"²⁸⁴ and the name Cymidei Cymeinfol--even more difficult to translate definitively--would work out to "equally open/distended battle." "*Cymeinfol*" may either refer back to her husband's disputatiousness, suggesting that her nature is as unpleasant as his, or if we read "greatly distended"

²⁸³ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, p. 40.

²⁸⁴ "*Cyfnewid*" can be taken to mean an exchange in the sense of battle--or an exchange of objects or words. "Llassar" can be translated as Old Irish "*lasar*" (flame), rather than the Welsh word "*llasar*" (blue), which makes less sense in this context. Again, thanks to Lionel Joseph for pointing this out to me.

here, we may find a punning reference to her startling ability to give birth to a "*gwr ymlad llawn aruawc*,"²⁸⁵ (a fighting man, fully armed). The hostile qualities implied by their names are verified by experience, as Matholwch attests:

*Yn y ulwydyn y keueis yn diwarauun wynt; o hynny allann y guarauunwyt im. A chyn penn y pedwryd (mis] wynt eu hun yn peri eu hatcassu, ac anghynwys yn y wlat, yn gwneuthur sarahedeu, ac yn eighaw ac yn gouudyaw guyrda a gwragedda. o hynny allan y dygyuores uyg kyuoeth am ym pen, y erchi im ymuadeu ac wx'p, a rodi dewis im, ae uyg kyuoeth, ae wynt.*²⁸⁶

(For a year, I kept them without grudging; after that it was grudged by me. And before the end of the fourth month they caused themselves to be hated and loathesome throughout the land, and offering insults and importuning and grieving the noble men and women. From that, my subjects rose up against me, to ask me to part myself from them, and they gave a choice to me, either my subjects, or them.)

The story narrated here is a serious discussion of the obligation a king has to his people. Their security and honor is in his keeping; when the structures guaranteeing safety and prosperity within the realm are broken down, then the king has failed. Matholwch gives the gigantic couple a probationary period in which to settle in with the rest of his subjects, but they violate that hospitable trust. Interestingly, one of the words used in this exposition--"*sarahedeu*" (insult)--is a legal

²⁸⁵ PKM p. 35. The pun is reinforced later when her pregnancy is described as "*torllwyth hwnnw*" (that bellyload).

²⁸⁶ PKM pp. 35-36.

term, invoking the connotations surrounding Matholwch's obligations to his people. Yet this story is not confined only to Matholwch's situation, but also offers an example of the tension between him and Bendigeidfran. Where Matholwch has had nothing but trouble with the argumentative pair, Bendigeidfran has an experience which contrasts positively with the Irish king's difficulties. The simplicity of Bendigeidfran's response to this long, troubling tale suggests smugness; because the peace Matholwch sought initially has been so badly disturbed, the two still do not trust each other. The differences in their experiences with this awful pair add to their competitive division rather than inspiring sympathy.

The startling fertility of Cymidei Cymeinfol is part of a larger structural pattern: a number of the women in the Mabinogi have an experience relating to their ability or inability--or propriety or impropriety--at producing offspring.²⁸⁷ The story of the giantess, her husband, and her children²⁸⁸ provides a prophetic introduction to Branwen's entry as a major character into the structure of the narrative. Branwen, like Cymidei Cymeinfol, is a

²⁸⁷ Note that the women who do not give birth are involved in triangles, in which the issues concerning one man's behavior in reference to a woman who is bound to another man take precedence over fertility (these women are Arawn's wife, Cigfa, Goewin, and Blodeuwedd). Fertility and fidelity are the two major themes which relate to women in the Four Branches.

²⁸⁸ "*Y wreic, a'y gwr, a'y phlant*," PKM, p. 36.

stranger in a hostile land, and her child, Gwern, will die, like the giantess' offspring, by burning. Before this segment, Branwen's personality is completely undeveloped; the opening passages of the Second Branch are concerned primarily with setting up the rivalry between the two kings. The story of the monstrous couple, with its emphasis on the function of the woman and the destruction of her offspring because of her and her husband's greedy and argumentative natures, creates a hyperbolic preview of the disasters about to befall Branwen. This interpolation aids the transition of narrative focus from the wary peacemaking between Matholwch and Bendigeidfran to the undeserved suffering of Branwen. Her story begins on an auspicious--and somewhat superficial--note, quickly summarizing her arrival and success in establishing a relationship with her husband's people. But her function within this story is essentially the same as Rhiannon's, certainly drawn more subtly, though no less carefully. She is not as outspoken as any of the other major female characters of the Four Branches, but this difference is a tribute to the author's ability to create more than one type of female personality: she is meant to be pathetic in the sense of arousing pity, but she is not meant to be perceived as passive or colorless.

In a text like the Four Branches, the woman--in her role as victim--illustrates the repercussions of male limitations and weaknesses. The narrative spotlight, which focuses initially on the men, sweeps across the activities of the functioning social group only to pick out a woman's suffering in painful, evocative detail. This contrast not only inspires our sympathy, but also provokes our concern for justice and the protections to which Branwen is entitled under the guarantees of the laws. The woman who points out inappropriate behavior on the part of the man who desires her is a figure in other, roughly contemporary medieval literary traditions:

In lyric poetry, in *pastorelas* and debates, the woman attacks the man's fantasies with words; in romance, with deeds. In the debates, such women show up the difference between what men claim and what they actually want, between what they say and what they do. In the narratives, where the women in question are either practical friends, rather than the love object, or substitute heroes, they force the hero to face reality and teach him to deal with it (as in Yvain and Partenopeu de Blois) or, less frequently but with striking effect, they come to grips with the reality themselves and master²⁸⁹

Branwen, like Rhiannon, will have her chance to correct her husband's misbehavior, though she will do so much more quietly. Both women exercise the right of gift-giving on arrival in their husbands' realms, satisfying their subjects initially with tangible and

²⁸⁹ Ferrante, "Male Fantasy and Female Reality," pp. 69-70.

costly proofs of their interest in their welfare. Rhiannon's problem in *Pwyll D* was caused by her temporary infertility and her later inability to keep her child; Branwen gives evidence of her fertility quickly and satisfactorily, bearing her child without extraordinary incident. This rapid history of Branwen's fulfillment of her obligations as genetrice and generous queen establishes her unblemished reputation and unimpeachable actions, though like Rhiannon, her words and deeds are not proof enough. Whatever she does or says will show up the mistreatment men force her to endure; and if she does not have the sharp humor of Rhiannon, then she has a poignant honesty which shames her tormentors.

A year after the marriage, Efnisien's misdeed is remembered and rued. As we saw in *Pwyll D*, the problem emerges when the chieftain is the object of his people's gossip. And in keeping with the tragic momentum of the Second Branch, the gossip to which Matholwch is subjected is not just talk, but rankling commentary, whispered slurs against his name and honor, growing into open challenges:

*A hynny y urodyr maeth, a'r gwyr nessaf gantaw, yn
lliwaw idaw hynny, a heb y gelu. A nachaf y dygyuor yn
Iwerdon hy at oed lonyd idaw ony chaei dial y sarahet.*²⁹⁰

(And at that his foster brothers and the men nearest to him taunted him about that, and without concealing it. And behold, an uprising in Ireland until there was no peace for him unless he avenged his insult.)

²⁹⁰ PKM p. 37.

The past haunts Matholwch; he must relive his earlier difficulties in his present problems. His people revive the old insult until they themselves seem to offer insult to him. And like an echo from the days of the monstrous couple, his own people make it impossible to maintain his rulership unless he satisfies their demands. His response is quick--and the insult is transferred to his innocent queen:

*Sef dial a wnaethant, gyrru Branwen o un ystauell ac ef,
a'y chymell y bobi yn y llys, a pheri y'r kygyd, gwedy bei
yn dryllyaw kic, dyuot idi a tharaw bonclust quei beunyd.
Ac yuelly y gwnaethpwynt y foen.*²⁹¹

(This-is the revenge he took, driving Branwen from the same room as his, and forcing her to bake for the court, and causing the butcher, after he had been cutting meat, to come to her and strike a blow to her ear everyday. And thus she was made to suffer.)

The beating of Branwen is an act of *sarhaed* against her:

*Sef yw y sarhaet pob maedu a wnel y gwr arnei. Eithyr
am tri pheth, sarhaet yw idi. Sef yw y tri pheth hynny y
dyly y maedu: am rodi peth ny dylyho y rodi, ac am y
chaffel gan wr, ac am unaw meuel ar y uaraf.*

(Her *sarhaed* is every beating which her husband gives her. Except for three things it is *sarhaed* to her. Those three things for which it is right to beat her are: for giving something which she is not entitled to give, for being found wAth a man, and for wishing shame upon his beard.)²⁹²

²⁹¹ PKM, pp. 37-38.

²⁹² Iorwerth 51.3, in WLW, pp. 170-171. Owen's and Jenkins' translation.

Branwen has done none of the three things which justify beating; if anything, it is Matholwch's people who have insulted him by casting aspersions on his honor. Additionally, in a triad concerning the honor of a queen we find the code which reinforces how grossly inappropriate Matholwch's revenge is: "*e serheyr e urenhynes...o'y tharau* (the queen is insulted...by striking her)."²⁹³ The blows he gives her are the greatest insult he can possibly offer.²⁹⁴

At this point, Branwen is checked. She is isolated from all allies, insulted by menials and forced to do demeaning labor; her one hope--gossip, which had brought her to this degradation--is controlled so that there is no chance, as there was for Rhiannon, of hoping that the terrible news might reach a sympathetic ear. More constrained than Rhiannon was, she is forced to be ingenious, and she industriously and cleverly devises a means of having her case heard. The law guaranteeing her a "*tauodyauc*" (a tongue to speak for her) in her defense, she finds her own representative:

*Blwynyded nit llei no their, y buant yuelly. Ac yn hynny,
meithryn ederyn drydwen a wnaeth hitheu ar dal y noe
gyt a hi, a dyscu ieith idi,*

²⁹³ Iorwerth 110.1-10, quoted and translated by Owen, WLW, p. 46.

²⁹⁴ "*o teyr ford e serheyr pob den en e byt; o tarau a gossot, a duen treys e arnau.* (In three ways is everyone in the world insulted; by blow and onslaught and bringing force against him.)" Iorwerth 110.1-10, quoted and translated by Owen, WLW, p. 46.

a menegi y'r ederyn y ryw wr oed y brawt. A dwyn llythyr y poeneu a'r amharch a oed arnei hitheu. A'r llythyr a rwymwyt am uon eskyll yr ederyn, a'y anuon parth a Chymry. A'r ederyn a doeth y'r ynys honn. Sef lie y cauas Uendigeiduran, yg Kaer Seint y Aruon, yn dadleu idaw dydgweith. A diskynnu ar e yscwyd, a garwhau y phluf, yny arganuuwyt y llythx5 ac adnabot meithryn yr ederyn yg kyuanned.²⁹⁵

(The years were not less than three that they were like this. And in that time, she raised a starling on the end of her kneading trough together with her, and taught language to it, and told the bird what sort of man her brother was. And she took a letter of the pains and dishonor which was upon her. And the letter was tied to the base of the bird's wing and she sent it towards Wales. And the bird came to this Island. This is the place where it reached Bendigeidfran, in Caer Seint in Arfon, in his meeting one day. And it landed on his shoulder, and ruffled its feathers, so that the letter was revealed, and it was recognized that the bird was raised in a human dwelling-place.)

There are only a few passages in the Four Branches which are narrated as delicately or evocatively as this one. Branwen patiently nurtures and educates the bird, in the midst of her humiliation, evidence of a determination which does not permit her to succumb to injustice, but to take hold of events and reshape them, just as she kneads the bread for the court. And the attention which the author gives to the bird, the creature which communicates on her behalf, makes it clear that it is not merely a messenger, but a projection of Branwen herself. Not only does the bird understand the speech²⁹⁶ but is clever

²⁹⁵ PKM p. 38.

²⁹⁶ The phrase here ("*a dyscu ieith idi*") is difficult to translate. "*Dyscu*," which can mean both "teach" and "learn," gains no definition from context. Does it mean "she taught language to it" in the sense that it learned to speak? Or does it mean that the bird learned language in the sense that it understood what it heard? Its miming when it finds Bendigeidfran supports the second reading--as does the fact that she writes a letter to explain her troubles.

enough to draw Bendigeidfran's attention to the letter by ruffling its feathers.

Branwen invokes a powerful kinship obligation, and Bendigeidfran spares no energy in mustering his forces to deliver his sister from her undeserved humiliation. Her brother makes his complaint and his plans in the presence of all his people; the deed which the Irish attempted to hide, by banning all sea-traffic, is broadcast loudly to all. Branwen's "*tauodyauc*" has spoken on her behalf. Crossing the waters which separate Ireland from Wales, Bendigeidfran and his army provide a magnificent--if initially somewhat misinterpreted--spectacle. When Matholwch's swineherds report a moving mountain and floating forest, the king of Ireland immediately sends messengers to Branwen who ask her to explain the mystery.

Why do Matholwch and his court turn to Branwen for the explanation? Matholwch's sudden confidence in Branwen and her ability to solve the riddle points to a change in her status. As a foreigner, Branwen had never quite been a part of the court, and it is likely that her strangeness of speech and custom had contributed to her victimization. Yet it is also likely that as a foreigner, her separate

experience and knowledge might be construed as a kind of power.²⁹⁷

The whole episode reminds us of the didactic narrative patterns we saw in the First Branch; just as it took Rhiannon's observant wisdom to educate Pwyll, so here it is a woman who will provide the information her husband and his court desire. The stylistic structure is the same: the woman is insulted or harmed by the unsocial behavior of the man; she remains silent during her suffering, until the male protagonist asks the woman to give him information about the problematic situation; then the woman points out the insult in the language of her response. Matholwch has unfairly shifted the punishment for Efnisien's insult onto Branwen; she does not complain to him about her degradation, but rather remains silent in the kitchen until her secret message inspires her brother to action. And with a tongue as sharp as Rhiannon's, Branwen answers the questions of the men who have insulted her, pointing out the nature of the insult with her sarcasm:

²⁹⁷ In other folk tales dealing with the Calumniated Wife motif, the woman who suffers is often a foreigner or exile; for this reason, she is consequently accused--because of her non-native status--of being a witch, or murderess, or in some way the possessor of extraordinary powers. See Juliette Wood's discussion of this in "The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature," *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 10 (1985), 26-28.

Kennadeu a aeth at Uranwen. "Arglwydes," heb wy, "beth dydygy di yw hynny?" "Kyn ny bwyf Arglwydes," heb hi, "mi a wnn beth yw hynny. Gwyr Ynys y Kedyrn, yg dyuot drwod o glybot ym poen a'm amharch."²⁹⁸

(Messengers went to Branwen. "Lady," said they, "what do you suppose that is?" "Although I am no Lady," said she, "I know what that is. The men of the Island of the Mighty coming over from hearing of my pain and my dishonor.")

Branwen may not be able to fight back physically, but the force of her anger is quite obvious in her response. She knows that the honorific title is given her only because the Irishmen need her help; no one remembered that she was a princess of Wales and the wife of a king when the butcher came to beat her everyday. Though Matholwch wants Branwen's help, he does not approach her personally, compounding the insult by sending messengers with second-hand requests. But since the answer to the riddle is the announcement of her imminent deliverance, she can afford to give vent to the emotions she has kept inside for three years.

Though all the men of Ireland are mustered together, it is clear that they are no match for the awesome Bendigeidfran and his army, so they retreat across the ninon. When Bendigeidfran acts as a bridge for his own people, the Irishmen have no other recourse than to sue for peace, and Matholwch tries to assuage Bendigeidfran by hasty diplomacy. Again, messengers provide the imperfect

²⁹⁸ PKM p. 40.

means of communication that does not permit the kind of intimacy

Matholwch claims in his greetings:

*yn kyuarch guell idaw, ac yn y annerch y gan Utaholwch
y gyuathrachwr, ac yil, Aenegi o'e uod ef na haedei arnw
ef namyn da.*²⁹⁹

(greeting him, and as the salutation from Matholwch his
kinsman by marriage, and telling him that by his will
nothing might happen to him but good.)

The hasty change in Matholwch's strategy is an attempt to forestall
righteous punishment. The tables have turned: when Matholwch was in
the Island of the Mighty, Bendigeidfran had to conciliate the offended
King of Ireland; in his own territory, Matholwch finds himself in the more
submissive role. Just as Bendigeidfran gave more than adequate
compensation to Matholwch, so Matholwch offers excessively generous
recompense for the pain he has caused Branwen:

*"Ac y mae Matholwch yn rodi brenhinaeth Iwerdon y
Wern uab Matholwch, dy nei ditheu, uab dy chwaer, ac yn
y ystynnu y'th wyd di, yn lle y cam a'r codyant a
wnaethpwyd y Uranwen. Ac yn y lle y mynnych ditheu, ay
yma, ay, xp Ynys y Kedyrn, gossymdeitha Uatholwch."*³⁰⁰

("And Matholwch is giving the kingship of Ireland to
Gwern son of Matholwch, your nephew, the son of your
sister, and is investing him in your presence, in
compensation for the wrong and the harm which was done
to Branwen. and in the place you desire, either here, or in
the Island of the Mighty, provide for Matholwch.")

²⁹⁹ PKM p. 41.

³⁰⁰ PKM p. 41.

It would seem from the magnitude of this concession that Bendigeidfran had won a bloodless battle; not only does the offer indicate that Matholwch is abdicating his royal powers, but he restores Branwen's reputation at the same time. A woman who married into a foreign kinship group (under both Welsh and Irish law) was cut off from her own kinship group and the consequent protections it would ordinarily afford her. Her male children would not participate fully in the economic system of their patrilineal kinship group; they would inherit only through the mother's line, and even then, their inheritances would be limited severely. If a son were "*mab alltut o pennaeth*" (the son of a foreign chieftain), like Gwern, he would be entitled to a larger share, but still only through the mother's kinship group; any inheritance of the son of mixed blood was called "*gwarthec dyuach*" (cattle of dark ancestry).³⁰¹ In Irish law, the child of a foreigner was called "*glasffne*" (grey kin).³⁰² In both systems such offspring had very limited status, as the imagery of these phrases suggests. Matholwch's compensatory offer then is a gift of exceptional privilege and power, one which would eradicate forever the insecurity and peripheral status Branwen and her son might ordinarily be expected to

³⁰¹ Iorwerth 53.1-3.

³⁰² T.M. Charles-Edwards, "Some Celtic Kinship Terms," *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 24 (1970-72), 119.

endure. Additionally, Matholwch subordinates himself to Bendigeidfran in requesting provision anywhere Bendigeidfran would like to offer it. His concessions are so extravagant that it is not surprising to find Bendigeidfran pressing for a little more: Why give the kingship to a child when he might--having cornered Matholwch--take the power himself?

Matholwch and his men consider the request and not only agree to it, but decide to further honor him by building a house to contain the Welshman who had never been contained in a house. When this offer is brought back to Bendigeidfran, he accepts it, "*a thrwy gynghor Branuen*" (and through the advice of Branwen) who checks any further ambition on her brother's part: "*a rac Ilygru y wlat oed genti hitheu hynny*"³⁰³ (and lest there be damage to the land that was done by her).

There might be peace, as Branwen desires, but the Irish are as ambitious as the Welsh despite their submissive promises. The house made to honor Bendigeidfran is an ambush in which two hundred armed men are hidden. Though the Irish intend to surprise the Welsh and overcome them, they are perceived immediately by the crafty Efnisien who proceeds to play an equally nasty trick on his enemies, coolly crushing the skulls of the Irishmen one by one, taking advantage of their inability to escape

³⁰³ PKM, p. 42.

from the sacks in which they are hidden.

The peace-making attempts are superficial; each of the two chieftains and their men are always prepared to take advantage of slackness on the other side. The tense tug-of-war for power cannot continue eternally, and there is finally an insult offered which cannot be compensated, the final pressure, which erupts into the frenzy of war.

After Efnisien disarms the Irish side, the two factions prepare for the investiture of Gwern as the confirmation of peace between the Welsh and the Irish. In the security of this agreement, Gwern goes to three of his uncles--Bendigeidfran, Manawydan, and Nisien--in affectionate recognition of their kinship. Then Efnisien complains that the boy has not come to him. Knowing what we do of this contentious brother, we can surmise why the child has not yet come to him, yet when Efnisien calls for the boy, Bendigeidfran sends him to his untrustworthy uncle "*yn llawen*" (gladly).³⁰⁴

Once again, we see into Enisien's thoughts, his motivation for the extraordinarily cruel act he is about to commit:

*"Y Duw y dygaf uyg kyffes," heb ynteu yn y uedwl, "ys anhebic a gyflauany tylwyth y wneuthur, a wnafi i yr awr honn."*³⁰⁵

("I make my confession to God," he thought to himself, "an outrage which the household cannot imagine to be done, I will do now.")

³⁰⁴ PKM, p. 43.

³⁰⁵ PKM, p. 43.

He then throws Gwern into the fire. And as strange as his action is, Bendigeidfran's reaction is equally strange. When Branwen leaps towards the fire to save her child, he holds her back: "*A chael o Uendigeiduran hi yn y neill law, a'y tarean yn y llaw arall*"³⁰⁶ (And she was kept back by Bendigeidfran by his one hand, and his shield was held in the other hand). And at that point all hell breaks loose as the two companies finally give vent to their hostilities.

Why does Efnisien throw Gwern into the fire? And why does no one try to save the child except Branwen? And why does Bendigeidfran stop Branwen from saving her son?

Efnisien's thought signifies premeditation. The death of Gwern is the death of "the tangible link which unites the people of Matholwch and the kin of Bendigeidfran."³⁰⁷ There is no need to pretend friendship any longer, and the gratuitous violence of the deed unleashes the spirit of carnage. Efnisien is evil, but his deed is a projection of thoughts we have seen before, though these secret wishes are fairly well hidden under the guise of negotiating. Bendigeidfran was willing to take the kingship from both Matholwch and his nephew; in an unpleasant way, Efnisien has rid him of the obstacle to his ambition. When Branwen tries to save Gwern,

³⁰⁶ PKM p. 44.

³⁰⁷ Owen, WLW, p. 60.

Bendigeidfran holds her back. This may be the act of a cautious man who senses that a battle is about to erupt, or who may think that his sister will not be able to save the child from death in any case; but this may also be the act of a man who has decided that saving Gwern might complicate his own ambitions. That he seizes his shield at the same time he catches hold of his sister may be an indication that this is a battle he has been looking forward to, knowing that the peace both companies agreed to was not sincere.

The issues of communication, negotiation, and obligation raised in the Second Branch cannot be resolved in the face of intransigent hostility. The protagonists cannot live happily together, so they all die unhappily apart, and the rest of the narrative describes the deaths of three of the Welsh siblings.

Efnisien's evil actions are atoned for by his sudden remorse and compensatory self-sacrifice: he throws himself into the cauldron of rebirth to destroy it--and himself--and thereby bring all contention to a halt. With only seven men surviving from the army of the Island of the Mighty and Bendigeidfran poisoned by a spear-wound, the company prepares to return home. Bendigeidfran orders the survivors to cut his head off and bring it to London. Branwen joins the men, but when they reach the shore of Wales, where she can see both her native home and the land of her marriage, she cries out:

"Oy a uab Duw," heb hi, "guae ui o'm ganedigaeth. Da a dwy ynys a diffeithwyd o'm achaws i." A doddi ucheneit uawr, a thorri y chalon ar hynny. A gwneuthlir bed petrual idi, a'e chladu yno yglan Alaw.³⁰⁸

("Alas, son of God," said she, "woe is me that I was born. Two good islands are destroyed on account of me." And she gave a great sigh, and her heart broke because of that. And a foursided grave was made for her, and she was buried in Glan Alaw.)

The two final episodes are distinct from the major narrative of the Second Branch in that they deal with peripheral characters and events--with the exception of Bendigeidfran's head, which magically retains its conversational powers after being separated from his shoulders. The successive events concerning the Island of the Mighty are entirely magical and fantastic, almost as though to provide a contrast to the persistent tensions and cruelties of the first part of the Second Branch. The story of the five Irish women who repopulated their country is a story of origins and hardly applicable to the previous issues and arguments.

The drama of kinship rivalries finishes with Branwen's lament and death. In her words we see the irony of her position throughout the tale: sought after and given as a peace-maker between two different races, she fulfilled all the functions which were required of her: she was attractive, and brought the advantages of her rank and wealth into the union; she was a generous and

³⁰⁸ PKM p. 45.

hospitable queen to her people; and she gave birth to a male-child. But it was also her existence--as the foreigner in the court, and kin to the man who insulted Matholwch--which provoked further hostility. Her intentions and her good will could not guarantee peace and a respect for legal and social codes, for the men most closely connected to her--her brothers and her husband--could not satisfy their ambitions. And as the insults mounted up, so did their demands for compensation, until they compensated for their excesses with their lives.

Chapter VI
THE THIRD BRANCH

The themes of the First Branch re-emerge in the narrative structure and character development of the Third. The central character of the latter tale, Manawydan, is a chieftain whose decisions and actions are presented in contrast with those of Pwyll, the protagonist of the First Branch: where Pwyll crashes headlong into mistakes and misfortune, Manawydan skirts dangerous situations with slow-moving thoughtfulness.

Manawydan's often-discussed prudence has been imaginatively interpreted as a projection of the unknown author of the *Mabinogi*, a manifestation of his own best attributes and virtues,³⁰⁹ but it is more important to see his severe caution as the opposite extreme of Pwyll's impetuosity, a structural echo which is the manifestation of the author's control over the disparate elements of the whole text. This contrast revives the discussion about the behavior of a good chieftain. Stylistically, the development of the character of Manawydan permits the

³⁰⁹ Mac Cana asserts that "as one reads the Four Branches one can hardly avoid the conclusion that the author has created in Manawydan a reflection of his own personality and a vehicle for his own philosophy of life," *The Mabinogi*, p. 48.

author to tie the threads of the First and Second Branches neatly together by reintroducing characters we have met before: Pryderi, Rhiannon, and Cigfa.

Kinship bonds between men and women are again an issue; the family group is presented at the beginning of this Branch in a manner reminiscent of the opening of the Second Branch. To understand the theme explored in the Third Branch, we must understand the relationship between the four main characters and the responsibilities they have towards each other, whether the relationship is by blood or by marriage.

Parents>	Rhiannon	=m=	Manawydan
	(natural)		(in-laws)
Children>	Pryderi	=m=	Cigfa

The story begins by establishing the friendship and affection between the two men, and the cementing of that emotional bond with the marriage of Rhiannon, Pryderi's mother, to Manawydan, who fills the gap created by Pwyll's death at the end of the First Branch. The initial adventures involve all four characters, during which time they act as a cooperative unit. The dialogue in this section occurs primarily between the two men.³¹⁰ The four

³¹⁰ Later on, though, Pryderi's role as Manawydan's confidante and questioner is taken on by Cigfa; the two sets of conversations are almost identical.

are then divided: Pryderi and Rhiannon, the natural parent and child, quickly enact the obligations between mother and son as an introduction to the problem of Manawydan's relationship to Cigfa, the undefined bond between stepfather-in-law and stepdaughter-in-law. The adventures which befall the two after the abduction of Pryderi and Rhiannon require a definition of their responsibilities to each other. They are lost in the magic of the Otherworld, the place in which normal rules are suspended; what better place to create the rules for a relationship which has not been codified?

The First Branch dealt with the primary male-female relationship--lovers who become married partners and ultimately parents. The Second Branch looked into the obligations owed in sibling relationships of varying degrees, especially in response to the failure of the primary marital relationship. Here, in the Third Branch, we see the obligations between a man and woman who are linked only indirectly as in-laws. This is one of the reasons--in the author's development of the narrative--for the abduction of Rhiannon and Pryderi. The absence of the pair who are the reason why Manawydan and Cigfa have been brought together forces them to forge a relationship between them, built upon codes they must agree to mutually, for they are alone in the world--not only are

Pryderi and Rhiannon gone, but they are also separated from their own people by magic.

The Third Branch opens immediately into an illustration of the emotional warmth which characterizes the interactions of the four protagonists. Manawydan, after the catastrophic war between Wales and Ireland, is homeless and filled with grief at the death of his beloved brother, Bendigeidfran. Pryderi praises Manawydan's gentleness of spirit: "*ny buost hawlwr tir a dayar eiryoet. Trydyd lledyf unben wyt*"³¹¹ ("you have never been a claimant of territory and land. You are the third humble chieftain").

The young lord of Dyfed shows us his own greatness of spirit as he tries to console his grieving friend: he offers him his mother, Rhiannon, in marriage, as well as sovereignty over his own inherited lands, the seven cantrefs of Dyfed. Manawydan mourns the loss of family and home and Pryderi offers him restoration of these two comforts. J.K. Bollard sees this offer as a sign both of Pryderi's great friendship for Manawydan as well as evidence of his prowess as a peace-maker. Treachery brings about the destructive feud in the Second Branch; fresh from those horrors, Pryderi seeks to heal

³¹¹ PKM, p. 49. See Ifor Williams' notes PKM, p. 227.

Manawydan's grief and forestall any thoughts of revenge on the homeless chieftain's part. His tribute to Manawydan's unselfishness, according to Bollard, is quiet advice not to stir up trouble:

By not mentioning Caswallawn's name in this speech, the author insures that the reader must think back to the events given near the end of the Second Branch to identify *y cefnderw* and thus remember the full story of the trickery and treachery of Caswallawn and the tragic death of Cradawc. The reference then, to the *Tri dyna dorres ei galon o aniuget*³¹² in turn recalls the full tragedy of Branwen which was the result of another, feud which should not have been reopened.³¹³

The manner in which Pryderi bestows his mother upon his friend may seem offhand--and potentially a cause for disaster, if we remember the actions of his father before him--but an examination of his words and the meeting of Rhiannon and Manawydan make it clear that this will turn out pleasantly. Manawydan expresses interest in Pryderi's offer, and Pryderi describes his mother's attractions with an ingenuousness reminiscent of Pwyll:

*"Mi a debygaf na werendeweist eiryoet ar ymdidanwreic well no hi. Er amser y bu hitheu yn y dewred, ny bu wreic delediw40 no hi, ac. etwa ny bydy anuodlawn y phryt."*³¹⁴

("I suppose you have never listened to a woman of conversation better than she. During the time she was in her prime, there was no woman of greater perfection than she, and still you will not be displeased with her aspect.")

³¹² "three people who broke their hearts from sorrow." TYP, p. 95.

³¹³ Bollard, p. 258.

³¹⁴ PKM p. 50.

The two men set out for Arberth, where Cigfa and Rhiannon greet them with a feast. It is interesting that both women are involved in giving hospitality (not just Pryderi's wife, Cigfa); a gesture of welcome, it also connotes approval on Rhiannon's part, as a freely-given gift. Manawydan first approves of his wife-to-be's speech, considering her physical appearance only secondarily:

Ac yna dechreu kyueisted ac ymdidan o Uanawydan a Riannon; ac o'r ymdidan tirioni a wnaeth y uryt a'y uedwl wrthi, a hoffi yn y uedwl na welsei eiryoad wr-o.9 digonach y theket a'y thelediwet no hi.³¹⁵

(And then Manawydan and Rhiannon began to sit together and converse; and from the conversation his aspect and thought grew tender towards her, and he thought that he had never seen a woman more satisfying in beauty and accomplishment than she.)

The language employed in the whole episode emphasizes the mutuality of their affection for each other. Unlike the description of Branwen's marriage, in which her feelings and actions go unremarked, or the initial clumsy courtship of Pwyll, when he chases Rhiannon in an undignified manner, this is a meeting of equals.

Manawydan cannot take the lordship of Dyfed without its lady--the stories of the First Branch have made clear how her security is linked to the security of the land's sovereign--and that is why Pryderi has given his mother to his friend. The necessity to gain Rhiannon's approval is

³¹⁵ PKM p. 50.

made apparent through deft references to her participation in the courtship process. Besides the welcoming feast, we learn of Rhiannon's attractiveness as a conversationalist, one of the powers and attributes of women. The verb "*kyueisted*" (sitting together) indicates equality; one is not seated higher than the other. And when Manawydan tells Pryderi that he is pleased with his offer, Rhiannon immediately asks for an explanation. When she is advised that her son has given her to his friend, she responds directly: "*A minheu a uydaf wrth hynny yn llawen*"³¹⁶ (And I will agree to that gladly) --a sign of the importance of her agreement to this contract beyond mere consideration of personal pleasures.

Pryderi offered Rhiannon as a wife for Manawydan in order to help prevent the outbreak of a feud between Manawydan and Caswallawn. The marriage is first viewed as a social expedient, and once it has been accomplished Manawydan has been given an honourable place in the society and thus he does not pursue his complaints against his cousin. As soon as this is established the author is free to develop the personal aspects of the friendly and marital relationships between the four characters within the wider framework of the tale.³¹⁷

The two sleep together, committing themselves in legal marriage, yet Rhiannon's powers are not diminished in her new position as a wife; when Pryderi considers leaving the feast to do homage to Caswallawn, a serious obligation he owes to a man of greater rank than himself,

³¹⁶ PKM, p. 50.

³¹⁷ Bollard, pp. 266-267.

Rhiannon's desire for his company prevails, and Pryderi stays with them. The success of this new kinship bond is reflected in the fertility of the land and the security of their friendship:

*A'r wled honno a dreulyssant, a dechreu a wnaethant
kylchaw Dyuet, a'y hela, a chymryt eu digriuwch. Ac wrth
rodyaw y wlat ny welsynt eiryoet wlat gyuanhedach no
hi, na heldir well, nac amlach y mel na'y physcawt no hi.
Ac yn hynny tyuu kedymdeithas y rydunt yll pedwar, hyt
na mx'pRei yr un not heb y gilid na dyd na nos.³¹⁸*

(And they finished that feast, and began to go about Dyfed, and hunted there, and took their pleasure. And while strolling around the countryside they had never seen a land more complete than it, nor better hunting ground, nor more abundant in honey and fish than it. And in that time friendship grew between all four, so that none of them wished to be without the others either day or night.)

The success of this moment is followed dramatically by the loss of all their joys: with a crash of thunder, the descent of a blinding mist, and a subsequent flash of lightning, the four find themselves in isolation; there is no sign of life in the court. Unable to solve this puzzle, the four continue to live as they did before, hunting and wandering about, satisfied temporarily with their own company. In the third year, on the advice of Manawydan, they leave Dyfed for England, escaping from the ennui of their solitude. Three times they set up shop, turning out work of such craftsmanship that no one will buy any goods but theirs until their hungry competitors

³¹⁸ PKM, p. 51.

threaten them with death. Each time, Pryderi, true son of an impetuous father, reacts vehemently, ready to kill the other craftsmen,³¹⁹ Manawydan wisely counsels forbearance--and a quick exit. Unsuccessful in establishing peaceful trade, the four return to enchanted Dyfed, once more turning to hunting as a means of supporting themselves. Misfortune returns in the form of a mysterious boar. This is an echo of the dangerous moment Pryderi's father, Pwyll, experienced when hunting in the beginning of the first Branch. The wild boar is described as "*clærwyn*"³²⁰ (brilliant white), like the Otherworld dogs Pwyll met, which were "*clærwyn llathreit*"³²¹ (shining brilliant white). The unusual color of an animal which appears

³¹⁹ Pryderi's three statements are: "*D rof i a Euw, ni chynghoraf i adaw y dref, namyn llad y tayogeu racco*"; "*Ny chymerwn ninheu y gan y tayogeu hynny. Awn adanunt a lladwn*"; "*Pam y kymerwn ninheu hynny gan y tayogeu lladron, namyn eu had oll?*" PKM, p. 53. ("Between me and god, I do not advise going from the town, rather killing the churls yonder"; "We will not take that from those churls. Let us go and kill them"; "Why do we take that from the churlish thieves, rather than kill them all?"). Pryderi emphasizes the difference in rank between the two nobles who choose to be craftsmen and the craftsmen themselves. The two couples prosper only when they pursue a noble career (hunting); even as they are victims of magic, they are able to support themselves easily and peacefully by choosing a way of life that suits their noble rank. This point is reinforced later when Manawydan is alone with Cigfa; she questions the fitness of shoemaking for a man of such high rank as Manawydan, and later, when they are threatened with death, she uses the same words as her husband did.

³²⁰ PKM, p. 55.

mysteriously on the scene is a clue not only to the intrusion of the Otherworld, but also a signpost to a moment requiring careful decisions about behavior.³²¹ Drawn by the strange sight, the men follow the boar until they see a caer where there had never been a building before. If the color of the boar were not signal enough to be wary, then the marvel of an unknown caer on a mound should give them pause. The dogs, chasing the boar, disappear into the caer, and Pryderi and Manawydan wait in vain for the sound of their barking. Pryderi heroically and impetuously goes in after the dogs, while Manawydan prudently remains outside to consider the signs of magic he has recognized. Inside, Pryderi sees a golden bowl and takes it in his hands, whereupon he is unable to move or speak,³²² At the end of the day, Manawydan leaves the mound, sure that he will learn nothing of Pryderi's whereabouts by waiting there. Meeting him, Rhiannon asks: "*Mae dy gedymdeith di, a'th cwn?*"³²³ (Where is your

³²¹ PKM, p. 1. Note also that Rhiannon rode onto the magic mound of Gorsedd Arberth on a "*uarch canwelw*" (pale-white horse), PKM, p. 9. In his article, Bollard notes another connection between these scenes, in the nearly identical descriptions of the feasts preceding the intrusion of magic (p. 259).

³²² The powers of magic over speech are evident again in the Fourth Branch, where we are told that one sign of Math's power is that he can hear whispering between men, however low, when the wind meets him ("*hustying bynnac, yr y uychanet, o'r a uo y rwng dynnyon, o ry kuarfo y guynt ac ef, ef a'y guybyd*"), PKM, p. 68.

³²³ PKM, p. 56.

fellow, and your dogs?). She does not use Pryderi's name, nor does she call him her son; she makes reference specifically to the relationship which binds the two men most closely, implying, in this word, that Manawydan has failed in the obligations which this word connotes. Manawydan tells her his story, and her response expands the play on words: "*Dioer, 'heb y Riannon, 'ys drwc a gedymdeith uuosti, ac ys da a gedymdeith a golleisti*"³²⁴ ("Without doubt," said Rhiannon, "it is a bad fellow you have been, and it is a good fellow you have lost"). She leaves Manawydan and goes after Iryderi, and when she finds him in the caer holding the golden bowl, she reaches out for him and it, and she is caught in the same magic. The caer vanishes with the two inside.

The abduction tale shows us examples of behavior, which though they seem to be at variance with each other, are actually based on different relationships. Proinsias Mac Cana says the episode is constructed to show up Manawydan's prudence in the best possible light: he does nothing because that is the smartest thing to do when it is clear that there is some magical power at work. Mac Cana see Rhiannon's role as a foil to Manawydan's wisdom.

Though she is, according to Mac Cana, clearly a euhemerized deity, she forsakes her goddess-wisdom and acts foolishly when she runs off after Pryderi.³²⁵ Aside

³²⁴ PKM, p. 56.

³²⁵ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, p. 48.

from the obvious retort here--that Rhiannon is Pryderi's mother, and clearly has a different emotional and obligatory bond with him than Manawydan does--we must also remember the story of the First Branch, where Rhiannon suffered humiliation when Pryderi last disappeared. Undoubtedly, she is determined this time not to let him be abducted again. Manawydan's lack of urgency could be construed as an insult to his relationship with Pryderi, but Manawydan's characterization has prepared us to appreciate his inactivity as caution rather than callousness. He is a man who considers things carefully, and he is famous for his gentle humility. From the text it is clear that Manawydan is not even aware that Pryderi is fixed fast to the golden bowl and unable to speak; without knowing what kind of danger Pryderi is in, he will not act. Manawydan's response is neither worse nor better than Rhiannon's. Each are motivated by different obligations--both emotional and narrative.

As J.K. Bollard has remarked, Manawydan's over-riding concern in the Third Branch is with the maintenance of law and order, even if this entails acting in ways contrary to the code of a medieval nobleman This is precisely what D. Myrddin Lloyd has in mind when he sees in Manawydan's conduct a thoroughgoing criticism of the heroic ideal. Where the archetypal hero opts for a short life and lasting glory, Manawydan's priorities are peace and prosperity, which can only be purchased through the practice of the unheroic and somewhat prosaic virtues of prudence and tolerance.³²⁶

³²⁶ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, p. 49.

The author needs to send Rhiannon in after her son so that both are abducted: they are the only two who are meant to suffer that particular manifestation of the revenge organized by Llwyd ap Cil Coed. Manawydan and Cigfa have no responsibility or connection to the insult he is avenging--the humiliation of Gwawl at Rhiannon's and Pwyll's wedding feast. The author also needs to separate Manawydan and Cigfa from their respective spouses in order to explore the kinship obligations resulting from their liminal relationship.

Cigfa is a far more important character than earlier critical works would lead us to believe. She, like her mother-in-law, Rhiannon, is not afraid to use her powers of speech, and questions and converses with Manawydan continuously. Her comments sometimes border on chiding, but she speaks for the same reason Rhiannon does: she is highly interested in maintaining the social order and status upon which her protection and honor are based.

When Rhiannon and Pryderi disappear, Cigfa cries out in fear: "*drygyuerth a wnaeth hyt nat oed well genti y byw no'y marw*"³²⁷ (she lamented that it was no better for her to live or die). Manawydan's answer is a secure promise of her safety--she need have no fears about his behavior:

³²⁷ PKM, p. 57.

"Dioer," heb ef, "cam yd wyt arnaw, os rac uy ouyn i y drygyuerthy di. Mi a rodaf Duw y uach it, na weleisti gedymdeith gywirach noc y keffy di ui, tra uynho Duw it not uelly. Y rof a Duw, bei et uwni yn dechreu uy ieuengtít, mi a gadwn gywirdeb wrth Pryderi, ac yrot titheu mi,4'y cadwn; ac na uit un ouyn arnat," heb ef.³²⁸

("Without doubt," said he, "you are wrong about it if through fearing me you lament. I give the surety of God to you, that you have not seen a truer fellow than you have in me, as long as God wishes for you to be thus. Between me and God, were I still in the beginning of my youth, I would keep true with Pryderi, and for your sake I will keep it; and let there be not one fear on you," said he.)

Cigfa's lament is not an expression of unnecessary anxiety, as some readers have unflatteringly said,³²⁹ but rather the enactment of an important negotiation. Her "naud" or protection should come from her husband, as would her honor and status, but her husband has mysteriously disappeared and might well be dead; she cannot turn to her male kin, abandoned as she is in this magical isolation. Manawydan is her only possible protector and champion--but not in the role of father, since they have no blood ties--but as the lord of the country in which she resides:

the lord is clearly the guardian of all those women not *sui juris* . . . i.e. not in the *mundium* or wardship of husband, father or other male agnate; or he is regarded as enjoying a species of *mundium* over all his vassals.³³⁰

³²⁸ PKM, p. 57.

³²⁹ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, 257.

³³⁰ D.B. Walters, "The European Context of the Welsh Law of Matrimonial Property," WLW, p. 125.

Cigfa, by making her plaint, tries to provoke a promise of protection from Manawydan. As her feudal lord, he would have complete power over her, and if he were not bound by affection to his friend Pryderi---or to herself--he might take advantage of her.³³¹ Manawydan's words are meant not only to comfort Cigfa, but to make the strongest possible contact of protection with her. He swears his faith to God, and underscores that promise with assurances of his affection and interest not only for Pryderi, her husband, but for herself, as a friend. The contract of friendship is reinforced when Manawydan addresses her as "*eneit*" (friend) after his vow.³³² The bond between them is as strong as any bond guaranteed by blood ties. The new relationship established between them is agreed to by a relieved Cigfa, and they decide to return to England to make a living.

Secure in this new position, Cigfa takes on the conversational role which her husband played in the earlier narrative concerning their exploits in England.

³³¹ Historical documents make it clear that lords of the Welsh Marches (especially in the later medieval period) frequently abused their power over their female vassals for both sexual and economic benefits, particularly in terms of collecting "*amobr*," the fee which the lord was entitled to collect when a woman was first bound in a marital or sexual relationship: "the lord was the protector, the champion, of the virginity of his womenfolk; but protection as such often degenerated into a racket and a sordid and profitable racket at that." R.R. Davies , "The Status of Women and the Practice of Marriage," *WLW*, p. 96.

³³² PKM, p. 58.

Her speech, like Rhiannon's, has a sharpness which helps to focus the narrative toward a discussion of potential or real insult. In the next episodes, her function will be to remind Manawydan--and the reader--of normal expectationr concerning his behavior and rank. This concentration on what constitutes acceptable activity allows the author to build up the dramatic tension before the revelation of Llwyd ap Cil Coed's hand in all their incomprehensible misfortunes. Manawydan's willfulness--which seems at times to border on daftness--is not explained as the careful progress of an intelligent and observant man until the very end, and Cigfa's constant questioning distracts us, maintaining the mystery until the right moment for its solution.

Upon arrival in England, Cigfa asks Manawydan what craft he will take up, and advises him to follow a clean one ("*urn lanweith*"),³³³ but Manawydan refuses and says he will return to shoemaking. Cigfa justifies her concern: "*nyd Koff honno y glanet y wr kygynhilet, kyuard a thydii*"³³⁴ ("that is not praiseworthy for cleanliness for a man of such skill and high rank as you"). Once again Manawydan expresses his determination to take up the craft. Cigfa's concerns here are conventional, for the author is using her voice to lead us to que-tion

³³³ PKM, p. 58.

³³⁴ PKM, p. 58.

Manawydan's actions When his skill inspires the other shoemakers to plot his death--as had happened in his earlier adventures in England--Cigfa responds as Pryderi did: "*Arghwyd, pam y diodeuir hynn gan y tayogeu?*"³³⁵ ("Lord, why is this endured from the churls?"). She does not suggest killing the conspirators, as Pryderi did. ³³⁶She does, however, make the same reference to the inferior rank of their competitors, very soon after she advises Manawydan to take up a profession more suitable to his rank. If the Third Branch is a continuation of the theme of how to be a good lord--exploring that theme in a way which contrasts sharply with the bumbling adventures of Pwyll--then her comments make sense. She is reminding him how to carry out his responsibilities properly, something which Manawydan is doing, but in a less conventional way than custom dictates.

As before, Manawydan counsels returning to Dyfed, and as before, he takes up hunting, a less dangerous way of making a living. He takes up agricultural pursuits as well, growing the best wheat in the world. On harvest day, however, he finds the first field destroyed, expresses surprise, but with the calm forbearance we have come to expect from this character, he merely resolves to

³³⁵ PKM p. 58.

³³⁶ This may be the reason why W.J. Gruffydd proposed adding that violent statement to her question (Rhiannon, p. 69).

harvest his next croft. When he finds that one ruined on the next day, he determines to set watch over his third, and last, field. At midnight, a countless army of mice appears and runs off with all the ears of wheat. Roused at last to anger and action, he pursues them, but cannot keep track of them. He is able to catch one mouse because it is so much heavier than any of the others, and he ties it up in his glove³³⁷ and brings it back to Cigfa. She asks him what is in the glove, and he relates his adventures, ending by promising to hang the mouse which he caught. Cigfa expresses no surprise at his anger, but warns him that his rank and dignity are threatened:

"Arglwyd," heb hi, "diryued oed hynny. Ac eisswys anwyp yw guelet gwr kyuurd, kymoned, a thidi, yn crogi y ryw bryf hwnnw. A pheî gwnelut iawn, nyt ymyrrut yn y pryf, namyn y ellwng e ymdeith . . . nit oes achaws y mi y not yn borth y'r pryf hwnnw, namyn goglyt asybyqKwyt y ti. A gwna ditheu dy ewyllus, Arglwyd."³³⁸

("Lord," said she, "that was not strange. And yet it is unseemly to see a man of such high rank, so noble as you, hanging some creature like that. And if you would do right, do not trouble yourself about the creature, rather let it go . . . there is no cause for me to be a help to that creature, save keeping dishonor from you. And do as you will, Lord.")

Manawydan tells her he would listen to her advice if she had a reason to save the mouse, but as she hasn't, he will kill it. Cigfa, after offering her obligatory counsel

³³⁷ Note that this is an echo of Gwawl's punishment--Badger in the Bag--which makes sense, as this revenge has been planned on his behalf.

³³⁸ PKM p. 61.

about customary behavior, is satisfied: "*A gwna ditheu yn 'llawen.*"³³⁹ ("And do it gladly").

Just as Pryderi's comments were echoed by Cigfa's, now her comments will be repeated by the three stange clerics who attempt to buy the mouse from Manawydan. While he builds the crossbeams upon which to hang the little thief, a clerk, a priest, and a bishop approach him; the clerk--like the priest and bishop--tells him that he is making the offer only to save Manawydan from dishonor:

*"Pryf a welaf i'th law di ual llygoden; a drwc y gueda y wr kyuurd a thidi, ymodi pryf kyfryw a hwnnw. Gellwng e ymdeith ef . . . rac guelet gwr kyuurd a thidi yn y gueith hwnnw, punt a geueis i o gardotta, mi a'e rodaf it, a gellwng y pryf hwnnw e ymdeith . . . Gwna di, Arglwyd," heb ef. "Ony bei hary guelet gwr kyuurd a t4Adi yn teimlaw y ryw bryf a hwnnw, ny'm torei."*³⁴⁰

("The creature which I see in your hand is like a mouse; and it ill-suits a man of such rank as you, to touch any such creature as that. Let it go . . . rather than seeing a man of such rank as you at that work, a pound which I got from begging I will give to you, and let that creature go . . . Do it, Lord," said he. "Only that it is ugly seeing a man of such rank as you touching some creature like that, it does not bother me.")

The similarity of the words of the clerics and Cigfa's warnings present another test of Manawydan's perceptiveness. Cigfa's concern about his honor is genuine:

³³⁹ PKM p. 61.

³⁴⁰ PKM p. 62.

not only does she have a strong bond of friendship with him, but she is dependent on him for her own honor and status. What he does affects her, so when he announces his strange plans to her, we expect that she will remind him of the proper behavior befitting a chieftain.

The clerics, on the other hand, are suspicious from the start. Manawydan meets them on Gorsedd Arberth, the mound upon which so many other magical events have taken place. And, as Manawydan himself notes, there has been no other living soul in Dyfed for seven years since the enchantment began. How did the clerk find his way there? But in any case, Manawydan will not turn aside from his obsession, no matter who asks him; he intends to hang the mouse, and the gallows goes up, piece by piece.

The reason for his strange behavior is made clear when the bishop asks him what he will take to set the thieving mouse free. Rhiannon and Pryderi, Manawydan tells him, and then we know what Manawydan has known all along--that the mouse is linked to the enchantment which stole his friends from him. After he secures Rhiannon's and Pryderi's release, he demands to know more about the mouse. It is the wife of Llwyd ap Cil Coed, the man who enchanted all of them to avenge the insult his friend Gwawl had suffered when Rhiannon and Pwyll tricked him in the First Branch. The mouse is not simply one of Llwyd's nobles; it is his pregnant wife, and however much he

would like to take revenge on the four from Dyfed, his obligation to his wife forces him to abandon his magic.

Her pregnancy undermines his plans in two ways: it makes her heavy even in her enchanted state, so that Manawydan catches her; and her fertility makes it altogether impossible for him to sacrifice her for the sake of an obligation he owes a friend. Llwyd returns Rhiannon and Pryderi from their imprisonment ("*carchar*"),³⁴¹ and Manawydan restores his wife to him; the lands of Dyfed are once more secure and fertile.

Like Pwyll in the First Branch, Manawydan is tested, but where Pwyll's tests often take place in public situations with an audience watching, Manawydan's abilities are examined in solitary adventures and one-on-one encounters. Though the women of the Third Branch play less central roles than the female characters of the First Branch, their function remains similar: to remind the men of the laws and codes which bind them together, and to let them know, in no uncertain terms, when they have begun to wander from the right path.

³⁴¹ PKM, p. 65.

Chapter VII
THE FOURTH BRANCH

The tongues of the women of the first three Branches are sharpened by tribulation, but it is in the female voices of the Fourth Branch that the potential for a woman's complete sense of alienation from society is given expression. Like the Second Branch, it is a tragic narrative, filled with contention; each episode illustrates the increasing disintegration of the social order by the willful and uncooperative actions of the male and female characters. The breaking of rules leads to the breakdown of trust, so that the injury of insults overshadows even the fairest attempts to make reparation. Here, female anger results in attempts by the women to exact their own retribution--or live their own lives--regardless of masculine attempts to avert their unyielding unforgiveness:

*Gwybod cyfrin a grym tyngedfennol geiriau sy'n amlwg
yng 'nghainc Gwynedd'....yng Ngwynedd tardd y gofidiau
o wyrdroi'r gwir a thorri cyfamod, o sathru ar gyfrinach,
o'r twyllo sy'n ymestyn o gynllwyn Gwydion ar
ddechrau'r gainc...oherwydd gwraidd a ffrwyth y twyllo
yw gwrthod hawliau,cyfiawn a chefnu ar y berthynas
sy'n ddyledus.³⁴²*

³⁴² Brinley Rees, *Ceinciau'r Mabinogi* (Bangor, Wales: 1975), p. 15.

(A secret knowledge and a fateful power of words is prominent in 'the branch of Gwynedd'....In Gwynedd, woes arise from the distortion of the truth and the breaking of a pact, from trampling over secrets, from the deceit which extends from Gwydion's conspiracy at the beginning of the branch...because root and fruit of this deceit are a rejection of lawful rights and a forsaking of obligatory relationships.)

The contentions of the Fourth Branch are narrated in three distinct sections which I will refer to as

Math A The rape of Goewin and the war between Gwynedd and Dyfed.

Math B The humiliation of Aranrhod, the birth of Lleu, his naming, arming, and getting a wife.

Math C The love affair of Blodeuwedd and Gronw, the death and resurrection of Lleu, the punishment of the lovers.

One story flows into the next, the element which resolves the difficulties of one section becoming the precipitating factor of the next crisis. In *Math A*, Goewin is recompensed by her elevation to the position of consort to Math, forcing Math to seek out a new virgin footholder to secure his sovereignty.³⁴³ In *Math B*, Aranrhod is meant to replace Goewin, but she fails the test of virginity, to her humiliation, giving birth to two

³⁴³ This represents an unusual reversal of the elements of the sovereignty motif. Where in all other instances the kin's security and the prosperity of the land and people is linked to sexual union with the willing women goddess, this story suggests that security is maintained through a chaste union and political chaos results from a (forced) sexual union.

children, one of which Gwydion raises. She successfully prohibits her son from marrying a normal woman; so Math and Gwydion are forced to create Blodeuwedd to evade that prohibition. Math C deals with Blodeuwedd's rejection of the role for which she was created and tells of the pain she causes her husband as a result.

Stylistically, each section echoes the others in the exploration of the same theme and the appearance of the same character. Violation is the recurring topic: a woman is maneuvered by the male characters into a situation which goes against her desires. These violations, like the others narrated in the first three Branches, are marked by a lack of direct communication between the men and women involved; the woman's consent is never solicited before any action takes place, and the end result is a vengeful enmity on the part (or on the behalf of) the women, leading to punishments which affect the male protagonist's status in the social order. The second narrative element common to these three sections is Gwydion, the magician, the storyteller, and one of the powerful family of Don, men and women whose lives and habits are so strange as to be unearthly:

Teulu o ddewiniaid yw teulu Don. Heblaw campau hud a lledrith Math a Gwydion y mae i'r naill'r hall (fel i Lwyd fab Cil Coed) ei Dylan a 144 th--dyna wybod dieithr Math hysbys, anian Llew uylan 4ic amodau rhyfedd hoedl Math a hoedl Llew.³⁴⁴

³⁴⁴ Rees, pp. 12-13.

(A family of magic is the family of Don. Math and Gwydion, besides possessing powers of magic and fantasy--both one and the other (like Llwyd son of Cil Coed) have their magic wand--there is the strange knowledge of Math the soothsayer, the nature of Dylan, and the strange conditions set on the lives of Math and Lieu.)

Gwydion is an unlikely protagonist as protagonists go in the Four Branches. A princely man like Pwyll or Bendigeidfran or Manawydan, he also represents Otherworld magic and ambiguity like Arawn or Llwyd ap Cil Coed. And unlike any other male character in the Mabinogi, Gwydion has a power of words that we have seen before--in the female characters. But where a woman like Rhiannon or Branwen has used words to correct injustice, Gwydion employs his talk to create it; and where Cigfa would give voice to her concern and curiosity, Gwydion asks questions merely to lead others off the track. Branwen used her storytelling ability to invoke her brother's aid, but Gwydion tells tales to create a false sense of security in preparation for his thievery. Aranrhod, his sister, is just about his match in verbal trickery: she loses the first two rounds in her encounters with him, but lays an unshakeable curse on her son in the third conflict of will. His lack of positive communication with the other characters of the Fourth Branch is one of the first things we observe about him; he is so intent on setting things up in his own way that he is careless of the constraints--or disasters--he imposes on others.

He is not a character who elicits a sympathetic response from the reader, yet he exhibits a capacity for loyalty--where men are concerned--that belies the crudity of some of his deeds. He wants to help his brother Gilfaethwy alleviate the pain of his desire, though Gwydion's solution imperils all of Gwynedd and brings about Goewin's violation. His obsessive love for and concern with Lieu, Aranrhod's unwanted child, saves the boy's life, but also causes him not only to humiliate his sister again and again, in violation of his fraternal responsibilities, but to use his power to violate natural laws in the act of creating Blodeuwedd.

Words are not power enough for Gwydion; his exertions go as far as his taking on the female power which no man ought to possess: the ability to give birth to new life and the nurturing of it to maturity. In each of the three sections, Gwydion "gives birth," either as the victim or wielder of magic. In *Math A*, he and Gilfaethwy are changed into animals as punishment for their own bestial behavior and give birth to three animal-children. The birth in *Math B* is more symbolic, as he takes up the generative role his sister spurns. And in *Math C*, with the help of his magician-uncle, he truly and consciously usurps the female generative power in the creation of Blodeuwedd.

In each of the three sections, women---Goewin, Aranrhod, and Blodeuwedd--are the victims of Gwydion's quest for control. The dramatic tension of each story emerges as Gwydion plots his way around these women--and as these women, in turn, declare their own rejection of his wishes. In the other three Branches, we see how misunderstandings between men and women occur, and how they should be healed; in the Fourth Branch, the insults lead to irreconcilable battles between the sexes.

Math A illustrates both the legal ramifications of the sexual violation of a woman and the severity of condemnation concerning this misdeed which is expressed in the laws:

the most extreme violation a girl might suffer was the forcible termination of her virginity by rape....The offensiveness of the action of rape and the dishonour that it brings is acknowledged in the exaction of *sarhaed* or *wynebwerth* which is paid to the girl. The *dilysrwydd*, *dilystod* or *diweirdeb*, if it was a payment, seem to be an acknowledgement of her free state even if the physical condition of virginity is irrestorable. The last payment exacted as compensation for rape is the *dirwy* payable to the king....The implication of this rule is that the safe keeping of virgins lay within the king's *nawdd* or protection.³⁴⁵

It seems to be this legal situation which is explored in the story of the rape of Goewin; while we would expect a discussion of her insult and reparation to form the

³⁴⁵ "Shame and Reparation," Morfydd Owen, WLW, p. 49. See also, Dafydd Jenkins, "Property Interests in the Classical Welsh Law of Women," WLW, pp. 86-88. The passages in the Welsh laws are: Cyfnerth 73.13c-22; Latin Redaction A 52.35-41; Iorwerth 50.1-5, 54.4-6.

framework of the tale, the honor of Math--the overlord of Gwynedd--is also referred to quite specifically, as though the author is being careful to remind us of the lord's responsibility for and connection with the virgin who is under his protection.

Math A opens by establishing Math's place in the world; he is a lord in North Wales, as powerful as Pryderi, the chieftain of the South. We are told of two of his peculiarities, one of which implies a magical vulnerability, and the other which indicates his Otherworldly power. His weakness is his unique immobility:

*Ac yn yr oes honno Math uab Mathonwy ny bydei uyw,
namyn tra uei y deudroet ymlyc croth morwyn, onyt
kynwryf ryuel a'y llesteirei. Sef oed yn uorwyn gyt ac ef,
Goewin uerch Pebin o Dol Pebin yn Aruon. A honw,teccaf
morwyn oed yn y hoes o'r a wydit yno.*³⁴⁶

(And in that time Math son of Mathonwy might not live, except that his two feet might rest on the womb' of a virgin, unless the tumult of war might hinder him. This was she who was as a virgin with him, Goewin daughter of Pebin of Dol Bebin in Arfon. And that was the fairest virgin who was in the time of those who were known then.)³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ PKM, p. 67.

³⁴⁷ Though Gwyn and Thomas Jones say "in the fold of a maiden's lap" (*The Mabinogion*, p. 55), and Patrick Ford says "in the lap of a maiden," (*The Mabinogi*, p. 91), it is possible to translate "*croth*" as "womb" or "belly" also; clearly the word "womb" has stronger overtones of the sexual violation which is about to take place, and suggests an even greater sense of usurpation of Math's position on Gilfaethwy's part.

The magic which only the purity of a virgin can guarantee is a well-known motif of folklore, but Goewin's role is more important than as a talisman against harm. Like Branwen, her role as victim serves the function of highlighting a sense of distrust between the male protagonists, and that distrust is revealed in the fear Gilfaethwy expresses about Math's magical ability to hear everything they say,³⁴⁸ and his and Gwydion's resolution to take Goewin through elaborate trickery. Every step they take is concealed from the rest of the world: they steal Pryderi's pigs by building a false sense of trust with their storytelling and magical illusions; they fly back to Gwynedd to avoid discovery once they realize that Pryderi's wrath will be incited; and once they have started a war and Math is on his feet and fighting in it, they creep back in the night to Caer Dathyl, where they drive out the women who sleep with Goewin--as protection for her honor--"*a chyscu genti o'y hanuod y nos honno*"³⁴⁹ (and slept with her against her will that night).

According to the legal texts, it is the woman who is raped who makes the accusation against her attackers if there is any doubt; if she places her hand on the appropriate part of the rapist's anatomy, and swears to his identity, her testimony is accepted as truth.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ PKM, p. 68.

³⁴⁹ PKM, p. 72.

³⁵⁰ Iorwerth 50.2; Latin Redaction A 52.36; Cyfnerth 73.15.

Goewin speaks out, as is her right, when Math returns from battle and attempts to resume his usual position with her:

"Arglwyd," heb y Goewyn, "keis uorwyn a uo is dy draet weithon. Gwreic wyf i." "Pa ystyr yw hynny?" "Kyrch, Arglwyd, a doeth am uym penn, a hynny yn diargel, ac ny buum distaw inheu. Ny bu yn y llys nys guypei. Sef a doeth, dy nyeint ueibon dy chwaer, Arglwyd, Gwydyon uab Don a Giluaethwy uab Don. A threis arnaf a orugant a chywyilyd y titheu, a chyscu a wnaethpwyt genhyf, a hynny i'th ystauell ac i'th wely."³⁵¹

("Lord," said Goewin, "look for a virgin who may be under your feet now. I am a woman." "What meaning is that?" "An attack was made upon me, and that in public, and I, for my part, was not silent. There was no one in the court who did not know it. This is who came, your nephews, sons of your sister, Lord, Gwydion son of Don and Gilfaethwy son of Don. They raped me and brought shame to you, and I was slept with, and that in your room and in your bed.")

Goewin's accusation is made in the spirit of the laws, if she does not actually perform the prescribed physical gestures. The process of identification is formal: she uses their full names, and she makes reference to the kinship bonds they have with Math, thereby reminding him of the insults they have offered to both the man and the woman. The kinship politics set into motion here are complicated--as all the webs of obligation are complicated in the Four Branches--recalling Bendigeidfran's dilemma when Efnisien mutilated Matholwch's horses. The rapists are Math's own nephews, so he is forbidden to take revenge with his own family

³⁵¹ PKM, p. 74.

group. On the other hand, he is Goewin's lord, and therefore her protector, and must demand recompense on her behalf. Math's response shows us that his obligations to Goewin rank above his obligations to his sister's sons. Yet he does not ask for either Goewin's honor-prices or the material compensations to which he is entitled (twelve cows³⁵² or a silver rod and a gold cup).³⁵³ His concern is for his foot-maiden who has served him:

*"Ie," heb ynteu, "yr hyn a allaf i, [mi ale gwnaf]. Mi a baraf iawn y ti yn gyntaf, ac yn of uy iawn y bydaf inheu. A thitheu," heb ef, "mi a'th gymeraf yn wreic im,,§9 a rodaf uedyant uyg kyuoeth i'th law ditheu.".*³⁵⁴
("Yes," said he, "this which I can do, [I will do it]. I will provide compensation for you first, and after I will let my compensation. For you," said he, "I will take you as wife to me, and I will give the power of my realm into your hands.")

This is not the response we would expect, knowing the laws, yet the author presents this as a correct form of redress by using the expected terminology: "lawn" (compensation, atonement). In terms of the literary patterning of the tale, this compensation provides a closure which resonates with the ideas presented in the introductory remarks concerning Goewin. The security of Math's lordship depended on her to start, and though she

³⁵² Iorwerth 50.4

³⁵³ Latin Redaction A 52.39. The rod and cup as compensation for a rape seem appropriate symbols of the offender and the victim, respectively.

³⁵⁴ PKM, p. 74.

is no longer a virgin, she is not held to blame. Math will continue to place the security of his realm in her power--in a different, but equally significant way--reinforcing the concept that her earlier status and honor has not changed, even though her physical state has.

Gwydion and Gilfaethwy keep their distance from the court until they are starved out of hiding.³⁵⁵ When the culprits return to the court, they submit to Math's will. Math tells them it is not compensation he wants, for the crime is irreparable, but he will punish them. According to one legal text, if a man rapes a woman who is alone and without protection, and he is unable to offer material compensation, then he must lose his testicles.³⁵⁶ One punishment which Math places on his nephews relates to the sense of the legal castration: he strikes them with his wand, and they are turned into a male/female pair of deer, meaning that one of the two, at least, is emasculated.

"Canys ywch yn rwymedigaeth, mi a wnaf ywch gerdet y gyt, a'ch bot yn gymaredic, ac yn un anyan a'r gwyduilot yd ywch yn eu rith, ac yn yr

³⁵⁵ PKM, p. 74. "A yn hynny ny doethant wy yng kyuyll y llys, namy trigyaw y gylchaw y wlat a wnaethant yny aeth guahard udunt ar y bwynt a'y llyn" (And in that time they did not come in the vicinity of the court, but rather remained to circle the countryside until there went out against them a prohibition against their food and drink). Interestingly, one way for a man to deny a charge of rape is to give "the oath of fifty men, three of whom shall be continent and abstainers from meat and horse riding." Latin Redaction A 52.37. Trans. Jenkins and Owen, WLW, p. 155.

³⁵⁶ Peniarth 37, 73.21.

*amser y bo etiued udunt wy, y not ywOwitheu. A blwydyn y hediw, dowch yma ataf i.*³⁵⁷

(Since you are bonded to each other, I will make you go together and be mates, and of the same nature as the wild beasts whose form you have, and in the time there is offspring to them, there will be to you, too. And a year from today, come here to me.)

The next year the two return with a fawn, and Math turns the young animal into a human child and the parents into wild pigs, switching their genders. The third year, their genders are again switched, as they are turned into a pair of wolves. At the end of the punishment, Math recites a triad, which names the offspring and identifies Gilfaethwy as the parent of the three. The lord of Gwynedd then tells them they are free, but dishonored:

*"a chywilyd mawr a gawssawch, bot plant o bob un o honawch. e o'y gilid"*³⁵⁸

(and you have had great shame, that there is a child to each one of you by the other). Math promises the end of his vengeance: "tangneued a gawsawch, a cherenydd a geffwch"³⁵⁹ (peace you have gotten, and friendship you will have).

Gwydion's and Gilfaethwy's punishment is thoroughly appropriate to their crime. They have dishonored Goewin and hurt her in a way that cannot be undone. Their lack of concern for both Goewin's desires and dignity can be impressed upon the brothers most effectively by their

³⁵⁷ PKM, p. 75.

³⁵⁸ PKM, pp. 76-77.

³⁵⁹ PKM, p. 77.

transformation into beasts--since they had behaved like animals--and by the time each spends as a female. Math's language makes it explicit that the two alternate male and female roles in a sexual union; and if we are not convinced by that, the fact that they give birth in each incarnation proves that each has--at least once--known the vulnerability of the female role.

With the introduction of Aranrhod in *Math B*, we find the return to a potency of characterization that we last saw in Rhiannon. The sharpness of Aranrhod's tongue is not mitigated by the interactive aspects of love and loyalty which we find in Rhiannon; Aranrhod is an independent and willful creature like her brother Gwydion, not one to allow the people and events around her to go against her desires. The competition and conflict between the siblings is instigated by Gwydion when he counsels Math to replace Goewin with Aranrhod.

According to the laws, her word and that of her kin would be taken initially as evidence of her sexual innocence--preliminary to testing.³⁶⁰ The words used for a female human cover a variety of sexual experiences:

³⁶⁰ WLW, McAll, p. 9; Owen, p. 48; Jenkins, p. 77. The legal texts discuss virginity only as a prerequisite to marriage, hence the punishments which are prescribed have reference only to a sexually experienced woman who offers herself as a virgin to her husband. Math questions Aranrhod about her sexual status only because it affects the taboo under which he lives, and his language is less exact than the terminology which appears in the laws,

There is first of all the word *gwraig*, which may mean a female of any age. More often it means a sexually experienced female, and it is often used in contrast with *morwyn* which has a range of meanings still found in the word *maid* in some English dialects.... *Morwyn* has the meaning *virgin*. Perhaps we should say *reputed virgin*, for the rule in question would apply to the *morwynwraig* (betrothed virgin] even if it were afterwards shown, that she was a *twyllforwyn* [false virgin].³⁶¹

Math uses the ambiguous word "*morwyn*" in questioning Aranrhod, seeking a specific definition of her status; she answers back with equal ambiguity. The tone of this exchange suggests that Math has suspicions about her fitness for the job, and that she is aware of his doubts:

*"A uorwyn," heb ef, "a wyt, oRrwyn di?" "Ny wnn i amgen no'm bot."*³⁶²

("Maiden," said he, "are you a maiden?"³⁶³ "I do not know otherwise than that I am.")

Aranrhod's answer addresses two issues. She defines herself as the laws prescribe, testifying on her own behalf, as is required, but she also throws a challenge back at Math, using language which is as evasive as his own. Her response in this exchange characterizes the stubborn independence which she will display again in this section of the Fourth Branch; it also forces Math to make a more specific test of her avowed status. He tells her to step over his "*hutlath*" (magic wand); if she is a

³⁶¹ WLW, p. 5.

³⁶² PKM, p. 77.

³⁶³ I use the English translation "maiden" here rather than "virgin" because it illustrates more clearly the ambiguity inherent in Math's question.

virgin, it will be obvious.

The use of the wand (*llath*) in determining virginity, in announcing or engaging in marriage, or in breaking off a romantic relationship survives in folklore up to the early twentieth century.³⁶⁴ It is impossible, of course, to say whether any of these customs predate the stories of the Mabinogi or whether they preserve Math's test as a social tradition, but the more clearly articulated concerns in the folk customs help to clarify the issues under discussion in Math's test of Aranrhod.

T. Gwynn Jones cites the custom of "priodas coes ysgub" (broom-stick wedding) in which the partners jump over a broom or other wooden stick to join themselves in a union not legally recognized as marriage.³⁶⁵ In reference to the wand which Math uses to test Aranrhod, he sees evidence of legal terminology:

one wonders whether the element *llath*, 'wand, staff,' in the term *llathlud* (abduction or elopement of a woman without the consent of her kin] in the Welsh Law, may refer to the practice of stepping over a rod, especially a bent rod as

³⁶⁴ Jonathon Ceredig Davies observed that the Gwahoddwr--or bidder to a wedding--traditionally carried a stick on his rounds: "This important wedding official, as he went from house to house, carried a staff of office in his hand, a long pole, or a white wand." In *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales* (Aberystwyth, Wales: 1911), pp. 17-18.

³⁶⁵ Jones, *Welsh Folklore and Folk-Custom* (1930; rpt. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1979), p. 185. The rejection of Aranrhod may be either the source or the echo of another custom: "presenting a rejected lover, whether male or female, with a stick or sprig of hazel-tree." Davies, pp. 6)8.

a chastity test in the tale of Math.³⁶⁶

When Aranrhod steps over the wand, she drops a yellow-haired boy-child, running off when she sees what has happened. Before she can leave the room, she drops "*ryw bethan ohonei*"³⁶⁷ (some small thing from her), which Gwydion hides away.

The symbolism of her stepping over Math's wand and dropping a child is fairly obvious, an image which recalls the violation of Goewin in the previous section. Yet that does not make the two narratives repetitious. W.J. Gruffydd, in a moment of reconstructive fantasy, suggested that Aranrhod was the original woman raped in *Math A*, not Goewin.³⁶⁸ The point of the similar events is to illustrate how two women both suffer shame as a result of sexual experience, stylistically linking the stories together for the purpose of contrast. And as Bollard says, the emphasis of Aranrhod's experience is the peculiar and humiliating manner of her giving birth, because her shame is the motivation for all her later acts

³⁶⁶ Jones, p. 185. One may also wonder if the wand has any reference to the legal compensation to which the lord or protector of a raped virgin is entitled: a rod and a cup.

³⁶⁷ PKM p. 77.

³⁶⁸ Gruffydd, *Math vab Mathonwy*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1928), p. 92. Gruffydd was unduly worried that it was Goewin who was raped, but Aranrhod who gave birth. One proof which he gave of their single identity was a reference in a later poem of Lewis Mon praising Aranrhod as the object of Math's love.

of cruelty towards her son.³⁶⁹

Goewin exemplifies the woman whose body is violated; Aranrhod is the woman whose private life and thoughts are penetrated and exposed. Both women are angered by the violations, but the text makes it clear that society deems Goewin's anger to be justified, while Aranrhod's is not. In terms of the literary structure, Aranrhod's anger is necessary to explain why she will later deny her son--living proof of her shame--a normal existence by denying him a name, arms, or a wife. Her treatment of Llew will not be the act of gratuitous cruelty, but an evidence of the repercussions resulting from Gwydion's putting his sister on the spot, because he did not communicate with her before nominating her as a candidate for foot-holder. As Bollard says, Aranrhod's prime interest throughout this section of the Fourth Branch is to ignore her son's existence--especially because he only exists through Gwydion's manipulations and trickery--and to prevent Llew from having his own children, "to prevent him from possibly perpetuating the memory of her shame even in future generations."³⁷⁰

For every attempt Aranrhod makes to flee her problem, Gwydion exerts equal energy in keeping it alive:

³⁶⁹ Bollard, p. 267.

³⁷⁰ Bollard, p. 268.

*a chyn cael o neb gaelet yr eil olwc arnaw, Gwydion a'y kymmerth, ac a droes lien o bali yn y gylch, ac a'e cudyawd. Seg,y cudyawd, y mywn claw gist is traed y wely.*³⁷¹

(and before anyone could get a second look at it, Gwydion took it, and wrapped a sheet of brocaded silk around it, and hid it. This is where he hid it, inside a small chest at the foot of his bed.)

The "small thing" which is not identified as a child, as the first boy was, is a kind of premature baby, and Gwydion, by putting it in the chest, has put it back into a womb-like place. The success of this action in permitting the "small thing" to mature further is manifest when some time later, Gwydion becomes aware of its presence again.

*Val yd oed Wydion diwarnawt yn y wely, ac yn deffroi, ef a glywei diaspat yn y gist is y draet. Kyny bei uchel hi, kyuuch oed ac y kigleu ef. Sef a oruc ynteu, kyuodi yn gyflym, ac agori y gist. Ac ual y hegyr, ef a welei uab bychan yn rwyuaw y ureicheu o blyc y llen, ac yn y guascaru. Ac ef a gymerth y mab y rwng y dwylaw ac a gyrchwys y dref ac ef, lle y gwydat bot gwreic a bronneu genti.;,Ac ymobryn a wnaeth a're wreic ueithryn y mab.*³⁷²

(As Gwydion was one day in his bed, and awakening, he heard a cry in the chest which was at his feet. Though it was not loud, it was loud enough that he heard it. This is what he did, he got up quickly, and opened the chest. And as he opened it, he saw a small boy waving his arms out of a fold of the sheet, and throwing it open. And he took the boy between his two hands and he went into town with him, where he knew there was a woman with breasts. And he made a bargain with the woman to nurse the boy.)

³⁷¹ PKM, p. 77.

³⁷² PKM, p. 78.

Gwydion takes over the birthing process which Aranrhod fled. The description of the child's emergence from the chest is a caricature of a natural birth. Gwydion is awakened by an awareness of the child's presence at the other end of the bed and opens the chest/womb. The child pushing its way out of a fold in the sheet is as close an image of a real birth as one could hope for; and the phrase "o blyc y lien" (out of a fold of the sheet) reminds us of the phrase used in Math A to describe the resting place for Math's feet, "ymlyc croth morwyn" (in the fold of the womb of a maiden).³⁷³ Gwydion essentially delivers the child, and like a good midwife (or mother), cradles it in his hands and finds it a satisfactory wetnurse.

In the next passages, the characterizations of Aranrhod and Gwydion are expanded more fully in their verbal exchanges. Perhaps hostilities is a more accurate term to describe their interactions, for Aranrhod, unlike Math, is an unforgiving individual, an outraged woman who, unlike Goewin, has received no compensation for her shaming. Aranrhod is an independent woman as no other woman of the Four Branches is independent. Not only does she defend herself with quick wit and words, but she lives

³⁷³ It also recalls the use of that phrase in Pwyll A, when Arawn's wife laments the lack of sexual activity between herself and her husband; her words are: "*yn nyblyc yn dillat guely*" (in the fold of the bedclothes), PKM, p. 7.

independently of male protection, the domina of her own retreat, Caer Aranrhod. Only Rhiannon enters and exits the scene with the same confidence and then only before she is the wife of Pwyll. Aranrhod, the woman having no major obligatory bonds to any man, introduces a new social and legal difficulty for discussion in the text. Having no special protector, she is not punished by any man when her sexual experience is revealed, but no man takes her part in gaining compensation for the humiliation her brother instigates, either.³⁷⁴

When Gwydion presents her with her four-year-old son, she is not at a loss for words to express her dismay:

"Oy a wr, ba doi arnat ti, uyg kywilydaw i, a, dilyt uyg kywilyd, a'y gadw yn gyhyt a hynn?"³⁷⁵

("Alas, man, what came over you, shaming me, and continuing my shame, and keeping him as long as this?")

Like statements we have seen earlier from Rhiannon and Branwen, Aranrhod's words contain a double entendre: she refers to her shame in the abstract, a state of humiliation which has never been compensated (or even referred to) in the intervening four years; but she also refers to her son in the noun "*kywilyd*" (shame),

³⁷⁴ We might expect Gwydion--her brother--to protect her under the rules of *galanas*, but he is, as we saw in *Math A*, a man whose respect for kinship obligations varies with the situation. And though we might wonder whether Math--as either the lord of Gwynedd, or one of her natal kin, is obligated to care for her, we can guess from her independent living status that normal protections do not apply in her case.

³⁷⁵ PKM, p. 78.

expressing her horror that Gwydion not only saved that small thing which no one else saw, but nurtured it until its identity would be unmistakable. His sister in stubbornness as well as heredity, she likes to keep her concerns to herself. Gwydion's compulsion to exert control over the people--and especially the women--in his world is played out dramatically in his exchanges with Aranrhod. Neither sibling likes losing, so the conflict quickly becomes acrimonious. -Gwydion puns as cleverly as Aranrhod in his retort:

*"Ony byd arnat ti gywilyd uwy no meithryn o honaf i uab kystgl a hwnn, ys bychan a beth uyd dy gywilyd di."*³⁷⁶

("Unless there is a greater shame on you than my raising a boy as good as this one, it is a small thing which is your shame.")

The irony of Gwydion's retort lies in the phrase "*bychan a beth*" (a small thing). As sarcastic understatement, we hear Gwydion tell her she has little to be ashamed of except that he has played her natural role better than she has. As a pun, the phrase reminds us of "*ryw bethan*" (some small thing), the unnoticed object which she dropped before fleeing. Angered by this reference, she curses the child raised by Gwydion, saying he will not have a name unless it comes from her. Gwydion is infuriated at being outwitted and retaliates at first with a spiteful taunt:

³⁷⁶ PKM, pp. 78-79.

"Dygaf y Duw uyg kyffes," heb ef, "direit wreic wyt, a'r mab a geiff enw, kyt boet drwc genhyt ti. A thitheu," heb ef, "yr hwnn yd wyt ti, ac auar arnat am na'th" uorwyn, ni'th elwir bellach byth yn uorwyn.³⁷⁷

("I bring my confession to God," said he, "you are a wicked woman, and the boy will get a name, though it be unpleasant to you. And you," said he, "because of what you are [i.e, a gwreic], unhappiness is on you, for you are not called maiden, and never again will you be called maiden.")

The two part, equally angry and equally stubborn. Gwydion turns once again to his magic resources to get his way. Transforming seaweed, he creates a ship and the supplies to set himself up as a shoemaker; sailing up to the entrance of Caer Aranrhod with the boy, he and his charge begin shoemaking until they have attracted the attention of the caer's inhabitants. Gwydion changes their forms before Aranrhod can identify them. She orders shoes from them made to the measure of her foot, but the first pair are too big, and the second too small, causing her to go visit the two shoemakers to set things right.

This is a characteristic element of the relationship between the warring brother and sister: neither will willingly give in, but one will perform an act so irritating that the other is goaded by frustration or anger into responding to the first. Reminiscent of the tensions between the two kings in the Second Branch, the struggle between Aranrhod and Gwydion victimizes the innocent person linked to each of them, the nameless

³⁷⁷ PKM, p. 79.

boy-child, just as Gwern was burned in the struggle between Matholwch and Bendigeidfran.

Aranrhod's defenses are down as she watches the shoemakers at work. The boy, spearing a wren with one of his tools, causes Aranrhod to remark on his skill, and Gwydion, seizing on the compliment, gloats that he has put on over on his sister:

*Sef a wnaeth hitheu, chwerthin. "Diver," heb hi, "ys llaw gyffes y medrwys y lleu ef." "Ie," heb ynteu, "aniolwch Duw it. Neur gauas ef enw. A da digaip Lyw y enw. Llew Llaw Gyffes yw bellach."*³⁷⁸

(This is what she did, she laughed. "God knows," said she, "it is with a skillful hand the fair one hit it." "Yes," said he, "the curse of God to you. Now he has got a name. And good enough is the name. He is Llew Llaw Gyffes henceforth.")

This incident reminds us of Rhiannon's naming of Pryderi back in the First Branch. Both Rhiannon and Aranrhod name their sons inadvertently, their expressions of surprise containing the word or words which are picked up by a male character who then identifies the women's speeches as formal acts of naming.

Why does Aranrhod refuse to name the child? Clearly, she can refuse him a place in normal society if he remains nameless, and keeping him out of the social order keeps her shame out of sight and mind as far as the court is concerned. But is her act of denial aimed only at the child?

³⁷⁸ PKM, p. 80.

A question which is never raised directly in the text is the identity of the child's father. As a legal and social requirement, paternity charges are clearly delineated, and even women without socially or legally recognized partners (women of bush and brake) could bear children knowing that the laws judged that the father's responsibility was as great as the mother's. The parents were required to maintain or make arrangements for the raising of the child for at least a year after its birth. The identification of the child's father was especially important in an economic system which gave preference to inheritance through the male line (though the female line was not entirely excluded).³⁷⁹ One way in which the mother could legally identify the child's father was to bring the child into the church with which the father was associated and charge him with paternity in the process of baptism.³⁸⁰

We see this partially enacted in the First Branch, when Rhiannon names Pryderi and the name is formally and publically recognized by a noble of Pwyll's court, Pendaran Dyfed:

"Y rofi i a Duw," het, y Riannon, "oed escor uym pryder im, pei gwir hynny." "Arglwydes," heb y Pendaran Dyuet, "da yd enweist dy uab, Pryderi. A goreu,x1 gueda arnaw Pryderi uab Pwyll Penn Annwn."³⁸¹

³⁷⁹ WLW, Jenkins, p. 91, Davies, pp. 106-108.

³⁸⁰ Iorwerth, 100.2-4.

³⁸¹ PKM p. 26.

("Between me and God," said Rhiannon, "it was the delivering of my care from me, if that were true." "Lady," said Pendaran Dyfed, "well have you named your child, Pryderi. And Pryderi uab Pwyll Penn Annwn fits him best.")

In the Second Branch, Branwen's child, too, is named in relationship to his father, an important distinction for the offspring of a foreign woman.³⁸² It is possible that Aranrhod refuses to name her son because the name of the child's father might be revealed in that act; the theme of Aranrhod's shame seems to be explored in terms of what information she wishes to present to the court and what information about her is revealed against her will.

Aranrhod has the last word once again when Gwydion reveals Llew's identity to her and gloats over his success:

*"Ie," heb hitheu, "minheu a dyghaf dyghet y'r mab
hwnn,,Rq chaffo arueu byth yny gwiscofi
ymdanaw."³⁸³*

("Well," said she, "I swear a destiny on this boy, that he will never get arms unless I put them on him.")

The angry words of Aranrhod are more than just spite. In swearing, she is acting definitively and conclusively. There is no going back on her words, and--to Gwydion's irritation--there is no changing them. If he wants Llew to be a man with all the rights and privileges of an adult male in society, he will have to get him arms. And since

³⁸² PKM p. 37.

³⁸³ PKM, p. 81.

he will never convince Aranrhod to do it, he must circumvent her intransigence, and he tells her he will succeed.

He does not attempt his challenge at once. First Llew must grow to maturity, the proper age for taking up arms, as the text indicates. It is strange how the author observes a certain propriety for the correct time at which Gwydion may initiate the attempt to make a man of Llew; certainly nothing else about Llew's life or progress into society occurs naturally. The second fight between Aranrhod and Gwydion is instigated by a military battle, another one of Gwydion's magical contrivances. Disguised as bards, Gwydion and Llew gain entrance to Caer Aranrhod. As before, Aranrhod is off her guard and responds to the two men with warmth and interest.

Diruawr leuenyd a uu yn eu herbyn. Yr yneuad a gyweirwyd ac y wwyta yd aethpwyd. Guedy daruot y bwyta, ymdidan a wnaeth hi a Gwydion am chwedle4n4 chyuarwydyt. Ynteu Wydion kyuarwyd da oed.³⁸⁴

(With very great joy they were welcomed. The hall was made ready and they went to eat. After they finished eating, she talked with Gwydion about tales and stories. Gwydion himself was a good storyteller.)

In this passage we see how evenly matched the two contestants are, talking with each other and exchanging stories. The art of the bard was no small talent, and the person who could entertain others with stories was an

³⁸⁴ PKM pp. 81-82.

educated individual, well-respected by the rest of the social group. Though Gwydion is especially lauded here for his storytelling ability, Aranrhod clearly has more than a novice's knowledge of the craft, as she discusses the bard's work with a man who is twice defined as a storyteller of great mastery. The author points to both characters' conversational prowess here; this may be the most attractive vision we have of the stubborn daughter of Don--the welcoming hostess who attracts the interest of her male guests with "*ymdidan*" (conversation) about their favorite subjects.

Gwydion's power to twist events as easily as he tells stories is employed successfully in the next passages. Conjuring up an attacking army, he then waits for Aranrhod to seek his assistance, as she soon does. He convinces her to arm Lleu while her maidens arm Gwydion. Then, when she finishes her job--"*yn llawen*"³⁸⁵ (gladly), as the author twice insists--Gwydion dissolves his magic and reveals the trick, the only way he could get her to arm her son and fulfill the destiny which she had earlier sworn on him. The siblings give vent to their anger with each other once again, then Aranrhod denies her son a wife, and Gwydion promises to overcome that prohibition, too. Aranrhod cannot be tricked again, for this prohibition is more cleverly worded than the previous

³⁸⁵ PKM p. 82.

two--Lleu will never have a woman "*o'r genedyl yssyd ar y dayar honn yr awr honn*"³⁸⁶ (of the race which is on this earth now)--a phrase which protects her because it describes a destiny which does not depend on her agency to be carried out.

The story of Blodeuwedd³⁸⁷ and Lleu is a type of the more familiar love-triangles of the early Irish tale Deirdre and Naoise: the woman who, given in marriage to a man she does not know or love, forms a romantic attachment to a second man--a hunter--who meets the woman by accident, as she waits in isolation for her husband. *Math C*, like these other tales, also narrates how the lovers elope from the court and their social group to hide in the natural world, until the avenging husband comes after the lovers. The folklore motif provides the skeletal structure for the author's purpose; the story is fleshed out with details and conversation which once again focus our attention on the contrast between marriages made to satisfy social obligations and unions which develop out of romantic desires.

The uncooperative tension between the sexes which we saw in the first two sections is manifest again in this part of the Fourth Branch. In creating Blodeuwedd with

³⁸⁶ PKM, p. 83.

³⁸⁷ Although she is called "Blodeuedd" at first, and not called "Blodeuwedd" until the end of *Math C*, I will use the ultimate form throughout this discussion to avoid confusion.

Math, Gwydion not only thwarts his sister's desires and takes on the female function of fertility, but also acts out an archetypal masculine role--attempting, by creating the female himself, to circumvent the wayward and independent behavior of naturally born women like Aranrhod.

Math's active assistance in this task is invoked as it was in Math A, when he hears a complaint about another's behavior (in this case, Aranrhod's); he responds by proposing that he and his magician-nephew conjure up a woman from flowers.

*Ac yna y kymeryssant wy blodeu y deri, a blodeu y
banadyl, a blodeu yr erwein, ac o'r rei hynny, asswynaw
yr un uorwyn decaf a thelediwaf a welas dyn eiroet. Ac y
bedydyaw o,g',bedyd a wneynt yna, a doddi Blodeued
arnei.³⁸⁸*

(And then they took the flowers of the oak, and the flowers of the broom, and the flowers of the meadowsweet, and out of those they invoked the fairest and most perfect maiden man ever saw. And they baptized her by the baptism they did then, and put [the name] Blodeuedd on her.)

Stylistically, this description provides a nice reworking of the folkloric runs describing female beauty. The static comparison of women's physical attributes with natural wonders--like flowers--is given new life in the magical composition of a human being. And as we have seen

³⁸⁸ PKM, p. 83. Ifor Williams notes that in Ellis-Lloyd's 1929 translation of the Mabinogion each flower represents an attribute: "Oak for strength and constancy; broom for fairness; meadowsweet for gentleness." The meanings of the flowers suggest the qualities which the men intended to instill in their creation; all of these represent the opposite of what we find in Aranrhod. PKM, p. 282.

in earlier passages, when magic crops up in the Four Branches, a test of the normal workings of society is about to begin.

Blodeuwedd is essentially given to Lleu immediately after her creation; we get no more sense of her personality or desires than if she were actually a bouquet presented to him. No conversation between the two is reported or even suggested here; the loving relationships we have seen in the previous Branches begin with mutually agreeable conversation. The silence here in the narration of the wedding feast and consummation of the union is reminiscent of Branwen's being given to Matholwch, a marriage which turned out disastrously. The perfunctory exposition here contrasts sharply with the passage concerning her meeting with Gronw. The author is telling us something here about the nature of Lleu's and Blodeuwedd's relations; and through narration of Gwydion's next request, we are shown that Lleu's marriage is only one more attempt to establish him firmly in the social order. Before we progress to a narration of Blodeuwedd's desires, we must be told how well everything else is going for Lleu: Gwydion secures the rulership of a cantref from Math for his adopted son because "*nyt hawd...y wr heb gyuoeth idaw ossymdeithaw*"³⁸⁹ (it is not easy...for a man without territory to maintain himself). Gwydion fights

³⁸⁹ PKM, p. 84.

all of Lieu's battles for him--even those which Lleu ought to win on his own--to guarantee the success of his protege. Without Gwydion's intervention, Lleu would have nothing, yet the fallacy of Gwydion's ultimate efforts at controlling the elements of his world soon becomes evident: Gwydion may be able to nurture and shape a boy-child into a chieftain, but he cannot succeed entirely at directing a woman, even one who is of his own making.

Lleu leaves his territory to visit Math, and the narrative shifts to Blodeuwedd's point of view. We are told of Gronw's approach to the court not through an impersonal narrative viewpoint, but rather through Blodeuwedd's eyes:

Y dyd yd aeth of parth a Chaer Tathyl, troi o uywn y llys a wnaeth hi. A hi a glywei lef corn, ac yn ol lief y corn llyma hyd blin yn mynet heibaw, a chwn a chynydyon yn y ol. Ac yn ol y cwn a'r kynydyon, bagat o wyr ar traet yn dyuot. "Ellynghwch was," heb hi, "e wybot pwy yr yniuer." Y gwas a aeth, a gouyn pwy oedynt. "Gronw Pebyr yw hwnn, y gwt yssyd arglwyd ar Benllyn4%heb wy. Hynny a dywot y guas idi hitheu."³⁹⁰

(The day he [Lleu] went to Caer Dathyl, she moved about within the court. And she heard the sound of a horn, and after the sound of a horn, behold, a tired stag going by, and dogs and hunters after it. And after the dogs and hunters came a host of men on foot. "Send a lad," said she, "to know who that company is." The lad went, and asked who they were. "This is Gronw Pebyr, the man who is lord over Penllyn," said they. That the lad told her.)

³⁹⁰ PKM, p. 84.

Through her eyes, our attention is drawn to the freer, outer world where men--like Lleu, her husband, and Gronw--can pursue adventures and seek out their goals. Her curiosity is the mechanism which informs us as to the hunter's identity. This is reminiscent of Pwyll's first glance of Rhiannon, but the roles are reversed--and the rules of etiquette are actually, though perhaps not sincerely, observed. Blodeuwedd sends a servant after Gronw to learn his name and status, but she makes no attempt to coerce Gronw into a meeting; she waits until he has finished hunting before trying to get his attention.

Blodeuwedd's actions seem, on the surface, to be correct. Gronw passes by the court again as he returns from the hunt, and Blodeuwedd points out to her people that they are obligated to invite him in; not to offer him hospitality would be an insult:

"Dioer," heb hi, "ni a gawn yn goganu gan yr unben o'e adu y prytwn y wlat arall, onys guahodwn." "QAger, Arglwydes," heb wy, "iawnhaf yw y wahawd."

("Without doubt," said she, " we will be satirized by the chieftain if we let him go now to another country, unless we invite him." "Without doubt, Lady," said they, "the most correct thing is inviting him.")

It is important to see that Blodeuwedd solicits the agreement of her court before she acts, and that they give assurance that her behavior is not only correct, but necessary. Until Blodeuwedd and Gronw sit down together
391 PF, pp. 84-85.

in the court, their being together is the result of chance meeting, and their actions indicate that they are maintaining a strict adherence to the codes of courtesy. It is Blodeuwedd's ability to manipulate the rules of hospitality--as Rhiannon did with Gwawl in the First Branch--that permits her to exert some control over parts of the external world which attract her in her isolation.

Once together, though, the lady of the court and her visitor fall in love at first sight:

Sef a wnaeth Blodeued, edrych arnaw ef, ac yr awr yd edrych, nit oed gyueir arnei hi ny bei yn llawn o'e garyat ef. Ac ynteu a synywys arnei hitheu; a'r un medwl a doeth yndaw ef ac a doeth yndi hitheu. Ef ny allwys ymgelu o'e not yn y charu, a'e uenegi idi a wnaeth. Hitheu a gymerth diruawr lywenyd yndi. Ac o achaws y serch, a'r caryat, a dodassei pob un o honunt ar y gilyd, y bu eu hymdidan y nos honno. Ac ny bu ohir e ymgael o honunt, amgen no'r nosaqnno. A'r nos honno kysgu y gyt a wnaethant.³⁹¹

(This is what Blodeuwedd did, she looked at him, and there wasn't any part of her which was not full of love for him. And he too looked at her and the same thought came to him which had come to her, and he told her. She took great joy in it. And because of the affection and the love which they gave to each other they conversed the whole night. And there was no delay in their taking each other that very night. And that night they slept together.)

The contrast between the brief expository sentence which tells us of Lieu's and Blodeuwedd's marriage and this intimately detailed moment of meeting is meant to reopen the discussion which had been explored throughout this Branch: the tension which results when one person

³⁹¹ PKM, P. 85.

manipulates social codes and obligations to satisfy his or her own ambitions and desires. In these unhappy tales, we see a superficial observance of social order, which should ensure everyone's happiness, but the hostile reactions of other characters make it clear that these rules are not being applied fairly to all members of the social group.

The Welsh laws contain a list of recognized relationships known as "*nau kynywedi teithiauc*" or "nine rightful couplings." These unions have been broken down into four distinct types by T.M. Charles-Edwards: "unions by gift of kin"; "unions not by gift of kin, but with the consent of the kin and of the woman herself"; "unions to which the woman's kin do not consent, but to which the woman herself does"; "unions to which neither the woman nor her kin consent."³⁹² The first type of union ranks the highest in correctness, and it would be a marriage of economic exchange, in which both the woman and the dowry she brought with her would enhance her husband's status--as in the marriage of Branwen. Here the external concerns of the social or kinship group take precedence over individual desires. That this union could provoke personal difficulties for the female partner is evident in the discussion of the payments due a virgin on her marriage:

³⁹² "*Nau Kynywedi Teithiauc*," WLW, pp. 35-36.

Try kywylyt moruyn: pan deweto y tat 'A uoruyn, neu rodet ty y vr.' Eyl yu pan el y'r guely ar y gur en kyntaf. Trydy yn pan geueto o'r guely a dyuot y plyth e dynyon. Am rod y telyr amobyr; am y gueryndaut y chowyll; am y chywylyt y aguedy.

(The three shames of a girl are: one is that her father tells her, 'I have given you to a husband,' the second is, when she first goes to bed to her husband, the third is when she first rises from the bed to the midst of people. For the giving, her *amobr* is paid. For her virginity, her *cowyll*. For her shame her *egweddi*.)³⁹³

The first union in which Blodeuwedd finds herself is of the first type of Charles-Edwards' group; it is highly correct, but impersonal to the point of denying the female's voluntary expression or emotion in the process. Yet the laws regarding women provide escape by divorce or separation:

Os y gwr a uyd clauur, neu anadyl drewedic, neu na allo ymrein, os a achos un o'r [try] pheth hynny yd edeu hi euo, hi a dyly caffel cwbyl o'r eidi.

(If the man is leprous or his breath stinks or he cannot copulate--if she leaves him because of one of these three things--she is entitled to have all that which is hers.)³⁹⁴

³⁹³ Owen, WLW, p. 49. Her translation.

³⁹⁴ Iorwerth 45.4. These seem to be very generous conditions for divorce or separation. The importance of reproduction is addressed in the third condition, and the first seems to be in keeping with the fears of the day. The second, the reference to the quality of the man's breath, must have been very elastic in interpretation and would almost seem to be a guaranteed escape clause in the days of minimal personal hygiene. While Blodeuwedd makes no attempt to leave Lleu on the grounds of his breath or sexual ability, it is interesting to note that Lleu, after his "death," is turned into an eagle and "kic pwdyr" (rotten flesh) falls from his bones continuously (PKM, p. 89). Folkloric beliefs echo the elements of this section: "Persons who had eaten eagle flesh had the power to cure erysipelas, and this virtue was said by some to be transmitted to thier descendants for ever, whilst others affirmed it only lasted for nine generations." Cited by Elias Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore* (Wrexham, Wales: Woodall, Minshall, and Co., 1887), pp. 263-264.

Blodeuwedd breaks this union to form another with the hunter with whom she has fallen in love--and with whom she has gladly committed adultery. After their first night, Gronw prepares to leave, but Blodeuwedd compels him to stay. After the second night, the two plan to make their union permanent; it is Gronw's suggestion that they remove the obstacle in their way by murdering Lleu. It is Gronw who counsels duplicity, also (though we have begun to appreciate Blodeuwedd's talents in this area already). He tells Blodeuwedd to find out how Lleu is fated to die--"yn rith ymgeled amdanaw"³⁹⁵ (in the guise of caring about him). Blodeuwedd counsels Gronw not to leave on the third day; saying she will not let him go until then. The advice seems strange until we turn once again to the laws of coupling. Under the conditions of the third group (unions to which the women's kin do not consent, but to which the woman herself does), we find a similar timescale in establishing that type of relationship; one type of "*llathlud twyll*" (false or secret elopement) called "*caradas*" had to have taken place for three nights before it was officially recognized.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁵ PKM, p. 85.

³⁹⁶ "*Caradas*" is described as follows: "the woman does not leave her house, but is openly visited by the man." With the return of Lleu, the relationship of the illicit lovers approaches a second kind of "*llathlud twyll*" defined by Charles-Edwards as "*beichogi twyll gwreic lwyn a pherth*", a secret union, again presumably because the woman's kin would oppose it if they knew of it. It involves no domestic habitation but is merely a secretive union which occurs out of doors. The woman continues to live at home." WLW, pp. 35-36.

With Llew's return home, we see more interest in communication between husband and wife. During the day they occupy themselves in "*ymdidan, a cherd, a chyuedach*"³⁹⁷ (conversation, and song, and carousal); it is almost as though Gronw has awakened the traditional female attributes in her. As we have seen in *Math A* and *B*, the superficial attitudes of happiness are a cover for scheming: Gwydion entertains Pryderi before tricking him, and he also puts Aranrhod off her guard with his verbal arts. Similarly, we are shown how Blodeuwedd dissembles so that Llew's solicitous affection can be used to entrap him. In bed with him at night, she is silent--as Arawn's wife was--forcing her husband to find out why she is so quiet. She responds to his third attempt at questioning:

*"Medylyaw yd wyf," heb hi, "yr hynn ny medylyut ti
amdanaf. Sef yw hynny," heb hi, "sirralu am
dy angheu di, of elut yn gynt no miui.*³⁹⁸

("I am thinking," said she, "that which you would not think about me. That is," said she, "concern about your death, in case you may go before me.")

³⁹⁷ PKM, p. 86.

³⁹⁸ PKM, p. 86.

Her statement is as ironic as any retort of Rhiannon's, though her intention is not to correct inappropriate behavior, as Rhiannon's was. In a sense, she is telling no lies here. She is thinking about something Llew would never guess, and she is thinking about whether--through her own arrangements--he will go before her. Llew's answer heightens the drama: he is thoroughly unaware of her real thoughts, though he has asked her to reveal them and, in a sense, she has. Llew's revelation of the complicated conditions required to bring about his demise makes it clear that his death will be as difficult to achieve as his naming, arming, and marrying were.

The communication between Blodeuwedd and Gronw is swift and clear, in contrast to her exchanges with Llew, and the two make the necessary preparations for Llew's death. Blodeuwedd uses the expected intimacy of communication between husband and wife to manipulate Llew, asking him to show her how he must be positioned on the bath and the goat so simply that Llew agrees readily and "*yn llawen*" (gladly)--as Aranrhod did when she was tricked. She takes him through the conditions step by step, asking him politely to enact each part, and Llew finally, and unwittingly, is in the right position to be slain. Again, Blodeuwedd has gotten her way by observing politeness and convention; she has tricked her husband, but she has also gotten him to agree with the manipulation

through each stage of the preparations. Like Gwydion, Blodewedd is able to bring about the impossible, breaking the prohibitions by getting the victim to participate in his own victimization.

From his hiding place, Gronw strikes Lleu with the poisoned spear, and the Lord of Arduwy turns into an eagle which screams and flies off. Gronw, assuming then that Lleu is dead, sets off to overwhelm the land which had been Lleu's--just as he has already overwhelmed Lleu's wife. With Blodeuwedd fulfilling the role of deceitful schemer, the characterization of Gwydion shifts to his more sympathetic aspects. He and Math grieve for their lost kinsman, and Gwydion dedicates himself to seek out news of his nephew. He sets off on foot to cover all the lands in the vicinity. In Arfon, he is led by a mysterious sow to the foot of a tree where the she-animal feeds on rotten flesh and maggots. Looking up, he sees the source of the sow's unpleasant feast, an eagle in the tree top. Gwydion uses his power of words to good purpose here: he sings three englyns to coax the eagle down to his lap. He restores Lleu's human shape with his magic, and takes the suffering man to Caer Dathyl to be cured after a year of treatments. Then Lleu is ready, for the first time in the Fourth Branch, to express his own wish--to avenge himself.

The focus of his activity now is getting "*iawn*" (compensation), especially in respect to Gronw. He and Math three times insist on getting redress, then set out to accomplish this by battle, mustering an army from Gwynedd to overcome the usurper in Arduwy. Blodeuedd flees when she hears the news, her maidens stumbling behind her,³⁹⁹ all but Blodeuwedd drowning in the mountain lake.

Gwydion catches Blodeuwedd at this point and tells her how he will punish her treachery:

*"Ny ladaf i di. Mi a wnafyssyd waeth it. Sef yw hynny," heb ef, "dy ellwng yn rith ederyn. Ac o achaws y kywilyd a wnaethost ti y Lew Llaw Gyffes, na ueidych ditheu dangos dy wyneb lliw dyd byth, a hynny rac ouyn yr hail adar. A bot gelynyaeth y rynghot a'r hall adar. A bat yn anyan udunt dy uaedu, a'th amherchi, y lle i'th gaffant. Ac na chollych dy enw, namy dy alw uyth yn Blodeuwedd."*⁴⁰⁰

("I will not kill you. I will do that which is worse to you. That is," said he, "sending you off in the form of a bird. And because of the shame you have done to Llew Llaw Gyffes, you will never dare to show your face by day, and that through fear of all birds. And there will be enmity between you and all birds. And it will be their nature to beat you and dishonor you, wherever they find you. And you will not lose your name, rather you will be called Blodeuwedd forever.")

³⁹⁹ The text says that "*ni wywdyn gerdet rac ouyn, namyn ac eu hwyneb tra eu keuyn*" (they did not know how to walk, through fear, save with their faces over their backs), PKM, p. 91. If we know that Blodeuwedd is about to be turned into an owl as punishment, this strange style of procession may be a reference to the impending transformation.

⁴⁰⁰ PKM, p. 91.

While Gwydion's punishment seems to be the unrealistic, but imaginative, solution we would expect to find in folk literature, it has a touch of the real and legal hidden in it. The other birds will "*maedu*" (beat)--and thereby "*amherchi*" (dishonor) her--which reminds us of a punishment prescribed by law: according to a triad, a wife may insult her husband by "*y chaffel gan wr*" (her being found with a man), and this insult is one of "*y tri pheth hynny y dyly y maedu*" (the three things for which it is right to beat her).⁴⁰¹

Blodeuwedd is transformed by Gwydion into an owl, an appropriate punishment as she is returned to the natural world from which she came. Her origins are inhuman, and no matter how much he would like to, Gwydion cannot control her in the human world. The two men who fought over her meet for one last exchange, one in which Llew treats Gronw to the same ignominious assault that he was made to suffer. Gronw asks for one concession--a stone between himself and Llew's spear, on the grounds that he had been manipulated by a woman into breaking the laws. This faithlessness to the woman he loved is manifest in his placing the blame on her, though it was Gronw who told her to find out how Llew could be killed and Gronw who did it--is symptomatic of most of the male-female relationships of the Fourth Branch. With the exception of

⁴⁰¹ Iorwerth 51.3.

Math and Goewin, the men and women of this Branch are brought together for individual--often incompatible--ambitions. As though to dramatize this irony, the closing sentences tell us only how Lleu won his lands back and became a prosperous chieftain and eventually the Lord of Dyfed; there is no further reference to marriage. And if we remember how the First Branch ends, with Pryderi's prosperity and marriage to Cigfa, we can see that this is a significant omission. Aranrhod's third curse cannot be circumvented. But in any case, the rather despairing message of the Fourth Branch is that success comes to the man who lives alone.

Chapter VIII FEMALE FUNCTIONS AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE
FOUR BRANCHES

The women of the Mabinogi---whose personalities range from the mysteriously elusive to the humorously practical--are among the most vivid characters in the world of the Four Branches. Their idiosyncratic powers derive from the dual use the author makes of the female functions of fertility and hospitality: suggesting the mythological or legendary sources in references to magical or fantastic female attributes and utilizing the traditional customs of everyday social codes to link the women's functions to those of the men. On the didactic level, the Four Branches continually remind us that the actions of men and women are inextricably woven together. Where the women are faithful to their responsibilities and where the men respect their powers, the social group finds stability and just resolutions to unexpected difficulties or decisions. When either gender sets out to do anything without regard to the obligations owed to the other, the social group breaks apart and restitution is possible only if cooperative behavior is implemented by the warring parties.

The women's speeches contain the clues to the necessary modes of personal conduct. In the First and Third Branches--the "happy" ones--the women and men ultimately learn to communicate effectively and straightforwardly, allowing the protagonists to evolve strategies which best serve the requirements of their people, but in the other, "unhappy" Branches, the teaching is done out of anger, and the women get recompense or revenge through their words, without any hope of re-establishing functioning relationships. It is clear at the endings of each of the Four Branches which method is the successful one, but the fact that the whole ends on a tragic note--the total disintegration of trust between genders--suggests that disillusionment is more likely than satisfaction, that the best intentions and the best-conceived set of laws and codes cannot fully control individual impulse.

The functions of the women parallel each other in terms of the lessons they teach, though their lessons are executed in different ways. Each woman is defined as the possessor of some kind of power or status which must not be challenged if the social order is to be maintained; and each woman finds her own way of communicating that ability or aspect which the male characters must not threaten.

Arawn's wife is the focus of two concurrent lessons in etiquette. On the one hand, she provides the testing

ground for Pwyll's avowed friendship with Arawn; but on a different yet equally important level, she forces Pwyll to recognize that a woman's consent is necessary to a successful relationship. This incident has a structural contrast in the story of Goewin and the rape she suffers. Both Arawn's wife and Goewin maintain their powers and rights through their chastity. Pwyll recognizes that violating a woman's consent can jeopardize his friendship and, by extension, his own chieftainship. Gwydion and Gilfaethwy do not respect Goewin's choice and bring about fatal war and the breaking of vows of friendship by thinking only of their own impulses. The power of fertility emerges not so much as the opposite condition of chastity, but rather as an adjunct to it. Men are meant to respect female sexual powers in these tales, to be called upon only at the correct moments and never forced. The fertility episodes are meant to illustrate--through both negative and positive experiences of birth--what the ideal unions between men and women ought to be. Rhiannon's power of fertility is called into question twice, both times unjustly. The paralleling of her experiences and those of Teyrnon's wife allows the author to explore and finally illustrate the model for a secure union of this type. The lesson is taught by antithesis: Rhiannon is fertile, but loses her child after birth, while Teyrnon's wife is barren, but adopts a

newly-born child; Rhiannon cannot raise her child, but Teyrnon's wife can raise a boy who grows larger and more skilled than any other children of his age; Rhiannon cannot refute the charge of murder (and by extension, of her own infertility) because her husband will not take her part against the conspiracy of her servingwomen, but Teyrnon's wife creates the illusion of fertility with her husband's approval when she and her servingwomen agree to conspire together.

Rhiannon's fertility is also paralleled with the two other mothers of the Four Branches: Branwen and Aranrhod. The offspring of all three women are directly or indirectly sources of pain. Rhiannon is first under threat of divorce for not having given birth, and then she is accused of murdering her child. Branwen gives birth without any trouble, but her child becomes the tangible symbol of the enmity between her Irish husband and her Welsh siblings, and she suffers the agony of seeing her own brother burn him alive and set off the war that destroys the two islands. Aranrhod is manipulated by her brother into demonstrating her fertility publically, and he fosters the product of her female power to her everlasting humiliation.

The women who have no children (by either natural or adoptive means) are Arawn's wife, Cigfa, Goewin, and Blodeuwedd. All of the women are involved in a romantic

triangle of some sort, and it may be that the discussion of the interactions with more than one man renders any treatment of their powers of fertility too complicated. Arawn's wife cannot have offspring; Pwyll's test of friendship through chastity precludes Arawn's wife demonstrating her power of fertility. The main character of the Third Branch is Manawydan, and a discussion of the obligations owed to and by Cigfa is explored almost entirely in relation to her husband's friend. The two must evolve a relationship based on chaste friendship so that Manawydan can fulfill his obligations to Pryderi. In Goewin's case, also, there is an obligation to chastity, so that Math can maintain his lordship. After she is raped, she does not give birth, and this is stylistically in keeping with the judgements and compensations made by Math to prove that she is not to blame in any way and therefore may keep some semblance of her original honors and privileges. Interestingly, it is her two attackers who give birth, under the influence of Math's magic punishment. The implication here seems to be that the act of giving birth is the sign of culpability in illicit sexual experience, but the symbolism changes as the narrative moves on to the story of Blodeuwedd. Her adulterous affair is explicitly narrated in the text; in this case we need see no offspring to prove the violation, and in this case, the birth of a child may be impossible

when we consider that she is a woman created by men, never having been born to a woman herself.

The female power of hospitality is utilized in the Four Branches for both good and bad purposes. Rhiannon is the pre-eminent gift-giver and organizer of feasts in the Mabinogi, and in her we see the only woman who offers hospitality both sincerely--out of respect and affection--and more manipulatively, to rid herself of an unwanted guest. Additionally, she is a teacher of this art, instructing her husband Pwyll to become as skillful a giver of hospitality as she is.

Hospitality is one of Branwen's virtues: her generosity to her husband's people makes the Irish seem all the more cruel when they punish her for another's insult. Her punishment--to serve in the kitchen, baking bread--is linked to this function which she once performed so well at the upper end of the court.

Blodeuwedd uses hospitality for incorrect purposes, though her offer of it seems utterly proper to the court. It is her only means of drawing the interesting stranger to her side when her husband is away from home. The power of hospitality is not the only power which is manipulated here. Her very nature is a perversion of the female power of fertility, for she is made out of flowers (the product of the earth's fertility).

The women in the Mabinogi also function as the focuses of the discussions of kinship obligations. If we use them as the central points, defining the kinship structures around them, we can see a pattern that works all the way through the Four Branches. In the First Branch, Pwyll's relationship to Arawn's wife is as a chaste friend, a bachelor. Rhiannon appears to Pwyll first as the object of his desire, and we see the rules of courtship explained with a great deal of humor. Through his desire, Pwyll is willing to learn, and we see Rhiannon instruct him in the proper behavior as a bridegroom. In the tale of Rhiannon's unjust punishment, Pwyll must learn his role as a father and husband, and that experience is illustrated through the equality of Teyrnnon and his wife.

Looking at the Second Branch from Branwen's point of view, we see that the kinship issues still relate to marriage, but in a more expanded form, to include the effect her natal kin has on the success and stability of the relationship. The importance of the obligations her brothers have to protect her throughout her life are highlighted by her husband's cruelty; she does not have to remain his victim as long as she can call on her kinship group. The problems of marriage in the First Branch can be resolved through honest discussion, but the isolation and suffering which Branwen endures in the Second Branch shows us that not all marriages have fairy tale endings, and sometimes the problems overwhelm the solutions.

The women of the Third Branch represent two generations of an extended family--mother-in-law and daughter-in-law--and their initial adventures with their husbands show an ideal of behavior (one at variance with the usual depictions of in-laws). When Rhiannon and Pryderi disappear, Cigfa must turn to Manawydan for protection and support; here the discussion starts with the mutual act of defining their relationship until Rhiannon and Pryderi are found again.

The female problems of the Fourth Branch have to do with women who are forced to be associated with men against their will, unnatural relationships which happen because rules or vows are violated or twisted. The hostility of most of the male-female interactions is the result of dishonesty or disrespect the men have for the women; with the exception of Math, the men are not actually concerned with the feelings of the women they try to control. To a character like Gwydion, the antagonism of Aranrhod is spark to dry tinder, an inspiration to take the rules and break them. For Lleu and Gronw, Blodeuwedd becomes another symbol of status to battle over, for both are as concerned with the land that comes with her as the woman herself.

There are many themes at work in the Mabinogi--not all of them, of course, confined to the women--and the discussions of each concern wind their ways through and

around the others. What we have looked at here are only the themes which are related to the women; yet it is by looking at the women and their issues that we can see a consistent structure in the Mabinogi. And it is by looking at their relationships with the men of the Four Branches that we can see why this text continues to evoke the sympathetic and emotional responses that still attract readers and permit them to identify with the legends and stories written down over seven hundred years ago. The lesson is still being taught through the sharp observations of women, and with any luck, the men are listening with the interest and attention of a mature Pwyll or a prudent Manawydan: the successful social group is the one that respects both male and female power and knowledge.

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