

ARTHURIAN LITERATURE XXI
Celtic Arthurian Material

Edited by Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan

Arthurian Literature

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XXI

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Professor Keith Busby
Department of French and Italian
University of Wisconsin-Madison
618 Van Hise Hall
Madison
WI 53706
USA

The contents of previous volumes are listed at the back of this book.

Arthurian Literature XXI

Celtic Arthurian Material

EDITED BY
CERIDWEN LLOYD-MORGAN

General Editor
KEITH BUSBY

Associate Editor
ROGER DALRYMPLE

D. S. BREWER

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GENERAL EDITOR'S FOREWORD

I was delighted when Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan accepted my invitation to be Guest Editor for an issue of *Arthurian Literature* devoted to Celtic Arthurian texts and traditions. No-one is better placed and informed than she to fill such a role. Her introduction raises a serious problem of linguistic competency that is often glossed over, not only in connection with Celtic studies, but generally in medieval studies, as the ability to read texts in the original, older, forms of languages declines. This is not the place to indulge in a lament for the old days of philological education, but I agree wholeheartedly with Lloyd-Morgan's bold restatement of an unpleasant truth, if I may rephrase it bluntly: medievalists who do not know the languages of the texts they wish to study should learn them, use reliable translations, consult specialist colleagues, or leave well alone. It is then incumbent on those with the competencies to make the results of their work in languages accessible to the wider community of scholars. This raises the intractable problem of the languages of modern scholarship. It is natural for Welsh scholars to write in Welsh on Welsh topics, as Lloyd-Morgan points out, but the problems are not limited to writing on medieval texts in the modern form of the same language. Our German colleagues, for example, may feel more comfortable writing on French topics in what is after all the founding language of romance philology. Much modern scholarship on Old French literature, for example, is lamentably *deutschfrei*. There are tools which simply have to be acquired. This is not a polemical issue, it is a matter of scholarly responsibility. The problems are particularly acute in the case of Arthurian studies, given the obvious importance of Irish and Welsh traditions for the development of the legend and its literature. It is in this context, then, that the present issue of *Arthurian Literature* should be seen, for the English-language articles published here are state-of-the-art studies on important topics which cannot be researched properly without access to sources in languages that most medievalists do not possess.

Since Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan has done so in her own introduction, I shall not review the individual contributions here, but merely thank her and the contributors for the time and effort they have put into making this issue of *Arthurian Literature* such an interesting one. Along with *The Arthur of the Welsh*, it should become indispensable for those wishing to inform themselves on Celtic traditions of Arthur.

Keith Busby
University of Wisconsin-Madison

INTRODUCTION

This volume of *Arthurian Literature* is devoted to what is often loosely and inaccurately described as ‘Celtic material’. This encompasses texts composed in one or other of the Celtic languages, or tales preserved or reflected in written or oral traditions in the countries where a Celtic language is spoken, and includes material originally composed elsewhere but translated or adapted into one or more Celtic languages. Within the study of Arthurian literature this area has been the subject of considerable controversy since the nineteenth century. Recent decades have seen the publication of a constant stream of popular works purporting to ‘identify’ the ‘real’ King Arthur or locate the sites of his battles with precision. The fashion for New Age philosophies and ‘Celtic Spirituality’ has likewise led to a substantial increase in the general public’s interest in these sources, not least those in Welsh or from Wales and those relating to the grail traditions. Even amongst scholars of medieval languages and literatures, debates about the origins and interpretation of the story material they relate or reflect have at times been heated, often seemingly driven as much by emotion as by rational argument or firm evidence. That hardy perennial, the so-called *Mabinogion-frage*, focusing on the question of the relationship between the three Welsh tales of *Peredur*, *Owain* and *Geraint* on the one hand and the corresponding three romances by Chrétien de Troyes on the other, has perhaps generated more heat and certainly more words than any other topic within this field during the last hundred years and more. It has also had the unfortunate effect of distracting attention from the three Welsh narratives as literary works in their own right, as products of a particular linguistic and cultural time and place. Thus readings of them have often been coloured by our (modern) knowledge of their relationship to Chrétien’s romances.

But beyond the confines of that particular set of texts, opinions have been equally polarised on the question of the supposed or refuted ‘Celtic’ origins of certain characters, place-names and personal names, not to speak of themes and episodes, on both sides of the Channel. In these debates, the term ‘Celtic’ has frequently been used in so loose a sense as to be meaningless. There can be little doubt that many fires were fanned by the publications of the late R. S. Loomis, most notably his *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* (New York, 1927), and *Wales and the Arthurian Legend* (Cardiff, 1956)¹ where a ‘Celtic’ (usually Welsh or Irish) hero or myth seemed to lurk behind

¹ See also his *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes* (New York, 1949), *The Grail: From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol* (Cardiff and New York, 1963) and *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History* (Oxford, 1959).

every francophone twelfth- or thirteenth-century knight and his adventures. If Loomis often failed to distinguish between those story-elements that were common currency in the written and oral literatures of many peoples and those which were more particularly associated with Wales or Ireland, it is also a matter for regret that the etymologies on which many of his arguments rested could be no more kindly described than fanciful. Furthermore, since he did not fully take into account the many outside influences on Welsh traditions during the Middle Ages, late texts which had undoubtedly assimilated non-native material were misguidedly treated as if they were miraculous survivals of earlier times. In fact, as the essays in this volume confirm, those who produced or copied written texts in a Celtic language during the Middle Ages often had access to other languages: not only Latin but also to French or English or both. Literatures in those languages could also continue to influence the evolution of Arthurian material in the Celtic languages into the modern period. This process persists, with popular fiction, comic-strip and film, whether in French, English or American, influencing perceptions and retellings, for example in Brittany and Wales.

To many scholars working at first hand on texts in the Celtic languages, it seems almost unbelievable that scholars with a firm grounding in other medieval languages and literatures still place reliance on these works which have long been discredited by specialists. The conference of the International Arthurian Society at Bangor in the summer of 2002 provided a depressing reminder of the persistence of Loomis's influence, despite protests from scholars within Welsh studies such as Sioned Davies, Chris Grooms, Bill McCann and Helen Roberts. The problem has unfortunately been compounded by those whose own reading knowledge of any of the Celtic languages is limited or even non-existent.

Translations of important texts are, of course, available, not only in English but also in French, German and other languages, though the cover can be patchy. The same is not always true, however, for secondary literature. This is particularly so within Welsh studies, because of the nature of the texts and the fact that Modern Welsh is a living language used extensively as a medium of education and research. A significant number of Old and Middle Welsh texts are of interest to Arthurian scholars who work on other language areas and who have no working knowledge of Modern Welsh, but many Welsh scholars choose to publish at least some of their research in Welsh. This choice is made not in order deliberately to exclude others but simply because for many it is their first and most-used language, the natural medium through which they pursue their research and discuss it with friends and colleagues. Since in many cases it is also the language through which they teach, naturally they require teaching materials in the appropriate language. As a result, scholars who do not read Modern Welsh will not have access to significant publications and so may not be aware of recent findings or of the current consensus, whether on Arthurian texts and traditions or on relevant non-Arthurian areas of research. Many advances have been made, for

example, since the publication more than a decade ago of *The Arthur of the Welsh*, a volume designed more as a *résumé* of the then current consensus than as a collection of cutting-edge or speculative investigations.² To take one recent example: those who do not read Welsh will be unable to study the latest work on the tale of *Peredur. Canhwyll Marchogyon. Cyd-destunoli Peredur*, edited by Sioned Davies and Peter Wynn Thomas (Cardiff, 2000) is a collection of essays first commissioned by the editors as papers presented by seven scholars for the *Cylch Trafod Rhyddiaith yr Oesoedd Canol* (Circle for the Discussion of Medieval Prose). This informal series of open meetings was first begun by Professor D. Ellis Evans at Jesus College, Oxford, as a successor to *Cylch yr Hengerdd*, a similar group founded by the late Professor Idris Ll. Foster to promote the study of Old Welsh poetry. The meetings of the *Cylch Trafod Rhyddiaith* convened by Professor Sioned Davies in Cardiff have brought together interested scholars from all parts of Wales and beyond, and encouraged new empirical work, most notably on the manuscript tradition of *Peredur* and on the language of the various witnesses of the text. As a result, we now have far more specific indications of the date and place of origin of the exemplars than had previously been thought possible. Thanks to a lifetime of research by Daniel Huws, formerly Keeper of Manuscripts and Records at the National Library of Wales, far more is known today about Welsh manuscripts, including their scribes, provenance and relative chronology. Although some of Huws' most important essays originally published in Welsh are now available in English in his *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*,³ others, including some of his most recent work, are still only available in Welsh, the most notable example being his codicological study of *Llyfr Coch Hergest* (the Red Book of Hergest: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Jesus College 111).⁴

Reassessment of the texts preserved in Welsh manuscripts has been facilitated not only by advances in linguistic study generally but also by the publication over the last twenty years or so of many Middle Welsh texts previously unavailable in modern scholarly editions. Editing the work of the *Gogynfeirdd* (the poets of the princes) and the *Cywyddwyr* or *Beirdd yr Uchelwyr* (poets of the nobility in the period following the loss of Welsh independence in 1282), a major project undertaken by the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies in Aberystwyth has proved particularly valuable.⁵ Poetry, unlike most Middle Welsh prose, is

² Ed. R. Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman and B. F. Roberts (Cardiff, 1991).

³ (Aberystwyth and Cardiff, 2000).

⁴ 'Llyfr Coch Hergest', in *Cyfoeth y Testun: Ysgrifau ar Lenyddiaeth Gymraeg yr Oesoedd Canol*, ed. I. Daniel, M. Haycock, D. Johnston and J. Rowland (Cardiff, 2003), pp. 1–30. This volume also includes an important discussion by Sioned Davies on Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Llanstephan 58, an early seventeenth-century exemplar of *Owein* ('O Gaer Llion i Benybenglog: Testun Llanstephan 58 o "Iarlles y Ffynnon"', pp. 326–48).

⁵ Again, these are Welsh-medium editions.

usually attributed to named authors and can often be dated within, at worst, a few decades.⁶ It can therefore suggest *termini post quem* for linguistic features, for the currency of terminology, loanwords, proper names and so on, which can help to inform our reading of prose works. At the same time, work is also underway on compiling electronic texts of all Middle Welsh prose texts, which considerably facilitates linguistic study and comparative work.⁷ New theoretical approaches, such as post-colonial readings, have likewise led to new insights.

The understandable exasperation of Welsh scholars with the continued evocation of the Loomisite approach, or, worse still, the assumption that Welsh scholars themselves hold, or held, Loomisite views, is matched only by the frustration of those who, for lack of a knowledge of Modern Welsh, feel unfairly and needlessly excluded when they find that the most recent critical work, such as *Canhwyll Marchogyon*, must remain to them a closed book. For those Welsh scholars who, for the reasons outlined above, choose to publish in their own language, to be criticised for so doing – as many of us have been – can be baffling. After all, any anglophone scholar with a serious interest in Old French or Middle High German literature would be expected to master enough of the modern language to gain access to the standard secondary material relating to the texts themselves and to relevant manuscript studies.

In the case of secondary literature in Welsh, the question of the audience is crucial, but not always appreciated by those who have no reading knowledge of the language. Whilst it is true that some publications may be directly aimed at students whose courses are run exclusively in Welsh, there is a further dimension to be considered. In presenting a paper in Welsh on an Arthurian topic, whether orally or in a written form, scholars may not be aiming specifically at an audience whose interest lies primarily in the Arthurian field but instead at one within the worldwide community of Welsh-speakers studying the development of Middle Welsh poetry or prose traditions. Their priorities will not, therefore, be the same as if the approach was from a purely Arthurian perspective. Thus the essays in *Canhwyll Marchogyon*, and much of Sioned Davies's own work on style, formulae and story-telling techniques in Middle Welsh prose, provide as much meat for non-Arthurian scholars as they do for those whose interests lie mainly in the

⁶ Problems of attribution can arise, for the persistence into the modern period of oral composition and transmission, albeit in parallel to increasing recourse to the written word, means that in many cases the oldest exemplar may postdate the poet's lifetime by many years, even by a century or more. Multiple, conflicting attributions are not uncommon but new research by those contributing to the editing project at the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies in Aberystwyth and also to the separate Dafydd ap Gwilym project, led by Professor Dafydd Johnston of Swansea University, is helping to resolve a number of these problems.

⁷ See for example the CD-ROM *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg o lawysgrifau'r 13eg ganrif*, ed. G. R. Isaac and S. Rodway (Welsh Departments of the University of Wales, 2002). Further work on this project is currently being undertaken by Dr Mark Smith, based at the University of Wales, Cardiff.

Arthurian field.⁸ No doubt the same will be true when the ongoing series of meetings of the *Cylch Trafod Rhyddiaith on Geraint*, and the projected sessions on *Owain* which will follow, are eventually published. It should not be forgotten either that much secondary material relating to Middle Welsh literature and to the history of this period is also published in Welsh, including the new editions of poetry mentioned above. No serious scholar can expect to understand and interpret Middle Welsh tales without being also familiar with non-Arthurian material, whether primary or secondary sources in Middle Welsh, any more than a Welsh-speaking scholar in the field of medieval Welsh studies can afford to ignore secondary material in French, for instance, by scholars such as Bachelléry and Lambert.

The present collection of essays is not unmarked by the demands of two poles within the potential readership for studies of Arthurian literature preserved in the Celtic languages or originating in the countries where such languages are spoken. (In this context we should not, of course, forget the importance of Latin texts reflecting traditions which first developed within the vernacular but at times achieved written form in Latin, whether solely or in parallel to vernacular written versions). As contributors we cannot but be aware that not all of our readers will have access to material in any of the Celtic languages, hence translations have been provided of all quotations in those languages. We have also tried to bear in mind that not all our readers will necessarily be familiar with the texts discussed or mentioned nor – which is equally important – the current state of research and debate in those areas. Thus more explanation and more background information is given than would be needed if we were addressing an audience composed only of *cognoscenti* working within our own fields.

This is not to say that this volume is intended primarily as an *oeuvre de vulgarisation*. Rather we hope it will bring to a wider, certainly a slightly different, audience new work on Arthurian literature in the Celtic languages, work which reflects some of the current strands of research. It is not intended as a representative selection, and it should not be regarded as such: at another time a similar trawl would undoubtedly have produced quite different results. Neither was it conceived as an ‘Arthur of the Celts’ to vie with *The Arthur of the Welsh*, as a basic guide to a canon of texts. One priority was to represent Celtic languages other than Welsh; that we have not been able to include any study of Cornish material, in particular, is a matter for considerable regret, especially since much attention has recently been focused on Arthurian tradition in Cornwall following the discovery of a new Middle Cornish mystery play containing an Arthurian section.⁹ If Welsh sources dominate the

⁸ See for example Sioned Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd. Astudiaeth o dechnegau naratif yn Y Mabinogion* (Cardiff, 1995) and her essay in the present volume.

⁹ The incomplete, sixteenth-century manuscript of this hitherto unknown text was found among the personal papers of the late Professor J. E. Caerwyn Williams, who held the chair of Irish at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. After his death in 1999, his archive was donated to the National Library of

volume, this is neither deliberate nor entirely accidental. The sheer bulk of Arthurian texts and traditions preserved in Welsh as opposed to the other Celtic languages is, of course, a major factor here. At the same time, however, it is striking that over the last decades the number of scholars working on Arthurian literature within Wales, and within Welsh studies beyond the borders of that country, has been reduced to a sparse handful. It is now comparatively unusual in the Welsh departments of our universities to find graduate students choosing an Arthurian topic for their doctoral research. The reasons for this decline are not entirely negative. Within research at postgraduate level and beyond, the attention now being paid not only to medieval poetry but also to prose genres such as saints' lives and to cross-genre, more thematic studies, must be welcomed unequivocally, for, as we have seen, much of this work can assist our own endeavours in practical ways. A further factor is a major change within higher education in Wales since the 1970s, for many students who in the past might have taken an honours degree in Welsh can now choose from a far wider range of university courses taught through the medium of Welsh and which will prepare them for new employment opportunities undreamed of twenty or thirty years ago. These changes will surely have an impact on Arthurian studies over the next decades.

Some of the contributors to this volume have hitherto worked mainly on non-Arthurian material and in so doing bring fresh approaches and ideas. Translation studies, for example, have come a long way from the pioneering work by George Steiner and Susan Bassnett in the 1970s: the series of international conferences on medieval translation instituted in 1987 by Roger Ellis of the University of Wales, Cardiff, has played a crucial role in bringing together scholars working on a vast and varied corpus of material and helped to encourage the development of new approaches and methodologies.¹⁰ It is against this background of continuing research over the last two decades that Erich Poppe's paper should be set. In reassessing the thorny question of the relationship between Chrétien's *Yvain* and the Welsh *Owein*, he concentrates on the process of translation or adaptation of a narrative. Thus he first takes Welsh models from outside the Arthurian corpus – *Bown de Hamtwn* and

Wales by his widow, Mrs Gwen Williams, in 2000 and the manuscript, now NLW MS 23849D, came to light in the course of cataloguing. The play, which celebrates the life of St Ke, has been assigned the title *Beunans Ke*. A transcript prefaced with an introduction has been published by Dr Oliver Padel on the website of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic of the University of Cambridge (see <http://www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/Level2/BewnansKe.html>) pending the appearance of a full edition in preparation by Graham Thomas and Nicholas Williams. The Arthurian section of the play seems to be indebted to Geoffrey of Monmouth. A digital facsimile of the manuscript is now available on the website of the National Library of Wales at http://www.llgc.org.uk/drych/drych_s075.htm.

¹⁰ See G. Steiner, *After Babel* (London, 1975) and S. Bassnett-McGuire, *Translation Studies* (London, 1980); proceedings of the conferences on medieval translation have been published, see for example *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages. Papers read at a conference held 20–23 August 1987 at the University of Wales Conference Centre, Gregynog Hall*, ed. R. Ellis, J. Price, S. Medcalf and P. Meredith (Cambridge, 1989). See also *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation*, ed. J. Weiss et al. (Cambridge, 2000).

Cân Rolant – and considers their ‘relative distance’ from their French or Anglo-Norman sources before applying the same methodology to Hartmann von Aue’s *Iwein* and finally to *Owein*. Poppe’s contribution underlines the crucial importance of understanding the processes of medieval ‘translatio(n)’ – or adaptation of a text from one language and cultural context to another – in any study not only of *Owein* but also, we might add, *Geraint*, *Peredur* and their French analogues. In her contribution, Helen Roberts approaches this same, familiar problem from a new angle, focusing on the relationship between the narrative and its physical, geographic and social setting in her reassessment of the relationship between *Geraint* and Chrétien’s *Erec*. In a paper neatly complementing that by Poppe, she argues that the ‘abstract landscape of romance’ in *Erec* has given way to a ‘greater sense of realism’, revealing the degree to which the Welsh redactor has adapted the French narrative to its new cultural surroundings.

In a very different context, Ann Dooley similarly performs an act of reassessment, taking, however, a much broader canvas. Discussions of Irish Arthurian sources have perhaps focused too often on the later narratives, from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, such as *Lorgaireacht an tSoidhigh Naomhtha* (‘The Quest of the Holy Grail’) and *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* (The Story of the Crop-eared Dog), and their debt to English and ultimately French literary traditions.¹¹ In her essay on the concept of an Irish Arthur, Dooley explores far earlier references to Arthur(s), providing at the same time new thoughts on a separate debate about literary contacts between Ireland and Wales as well as a timely critique of Britain-centric views of medieval history and cultural traditions.

Bringing poetry and prose together as separate but related forms of cultural expression, Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan’s essay provides an overview of the breakdown, from the early modern period onwards, of the socio-literary structures that flourished in medieval Wales. Within this context she demonstrates the impact on Welsh Arthurian traditions of the unravelling of the bardic order in the early modern period, a process accelerated by the spread of both Nonconformism and industrialisation in the nineteenth century. The interplay of different strands of tradition in a process of constant evolution is also evoked in Mary-Ann Constantine’s contribution. Here she brings her expertise in ballad studies, and in the Breton ballad tradition in particular,¹² to the Arthurian field, providing an exegesis of a late Merlin tradition from Brittany, first collected from oral tradition in the nineteenth century. Using new approaches emerging in the study of ballads permits her to tease out the strands of her complex example in a way which more conventional methods might not permit. Sioned Davies returns to the question of the

¹¹ See for example C. Lloyd-Morgan, ‘The Celtic Tradition’, in *The Arthur of the English*, ed. W. R. J. Barron (Cardiff, 1999), pp. 1–9 (p. 1); see also A. Dooley, ‘Arthur in Ireland: The Earliest Citation in Native Irish Literature’, *Arthurian Literature* 12 (1993), 165–72.

¹² See her *Breton Ballads* (Aberystwyth, 1996).

interplay of the written and oral/aural aspects in the composition and transmission of narratives in her study of the Middle Welsh tale of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, revealing how even the comparatively late, written exemplars on which we must rely contain evidence of *viva voce* performance.

These papers, whose subjects span more than a thousand years and embrace material in both Celtic and non-Celtic languages, illustrate not only (to quote Ann Dooley) ‘the myriad reconstructions of a figure of King Arthur’, but also suggest the variety of current approaches in the study of Arthurian material from the Middle Ages and beyond.

Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan
Aberystwyth

I

ARTHUR OF THE IRISH: A VIABLE CONCEPT?

Ann Dooley

The myriad reconstructions of a figure of King Arthur, whether defined by literary works and/or situated in a historical context, have been one of the great distractions of British medieval cultural historians. Arthur never figured in medieval Irish tradition in any significant way; indeed, it is precisely because whatever traces may be recovered of an Arthurian tradition in Ireland are presumed to carry for an Irish scene none of the same configurations, developments and cultural concerns as in Britain, that these Arthurian markers have never been seriously revised or considered. For reasons that are as much political as historical, Arthur is only of minor interest to Irish scholars and a study of Irish Arthuriana will be presumed to yield no insights for the course of Ireland's own distinctive cultural or political history.¹ Although Irish scholars may easily dismiss Irish references to the British hero – the material is, after all, thin – the fact remains, however, that scholars of British history may not so quickly ignore them. I am reminded rather forcibly how all too easy it is to forget the Irish dimension when a truly masterful study of the early British tradition appears and has every appearance from its exhaustive thoroughness of being held for some time to come as the last word on the subject. I refer of course to Higham's recent volume on Arthur.² One look at the generous number of distribution maps in this work shows a Britain of splendid isolation in relation to which not even a bare outline of the Irish east coast is allowed to intrude.³ This is unfortunate for two reasons: first, some of the crucial developments in the history of the earliest part of the British historical horizon are best recorded in Irish sources, and the reality of an Irish Sea zone is still valid right down to the end of the twelfth century;⁴

¹ For the politico-cultural ramifications of the use of Arthur in the later Middle Ages see my 'Arthur in Ireland: The Earliest Citation in Native Irish Literature', *Arthurian Studies* 12 (1993), 165–72; see also my 'The Poetic Self-Fashioning of Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh' in *Ogma: Essays in Celtic Studies in honour of Próinséas Ní Chatháin* ed. M. Richter and J-M. Picard (Dublin, 2002), p. 220.

² N. J. Higham, *Arthur: Myth-Making and History* (London and New York, 2002).

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 52–4, 62–3, 67, 70–1, 93, especially 109; there is one brief glimpse of Ireland, 154, on a map indicating the *mirabilia* of the *Historia Brittonum*.

⁴ For a brief and convenient summary of the political associations in Wales of Leinster kings from the

secondly, in a study focused mainly on a reading of the *Historia Brittonum* (hereafter *HB*), the Irish version of this text, *Lebor Bretnach* (hereafter *LB*), reveals some interesting Irish scholastic attitudes to the text which can further enliven the fruitful debate – which Higham himself continues – of the nature of national histories in the early medieval period.⁵ One may also review the relative importance which the Irish literati accorded to the structure of the work as a providential national history of an area not their own and, as a subset of this, the position which Arthur held in it for them as they viewed the Welsh, or rather, the insular scheme of things. In short, early references to Arthur in Irish sources may shed some light, or at the very least cast some shadows of doubt, on cruxes in the interpretation of the British Arthurian puzzle and it is these possibilities that I wish to explore here.

We can divide the examination of earlier Irish medieval Arthuriana into three phases, each of which requires a somewhat different approach: there is first the matter of the Irish reception of the *Historia Brittonum*; second, the appearance of Arthurian names in the Irish genealogical tradition, and finally, the tale of a British Arthur in the great Irish compendium of Fenian tales, *Acallam na Senórach* (The Colloquy of the Ancients).

The Historia Brittonum in Ireland

The Irish translation of *HB* is found in a number of important medieval Irish manuscript collections of which the earliest is Dublin, Royal Irish Academy MS 23 E 25 (1229): *Lebor na hUidre* (The Book of the Dun Cow, hereafter U), pp. 3–4. Other important manuscript witnesses are: Dublin, Royal Irish Academy MS 23 P 12 (536), The Book of Ballymote (B), pp. 203a1–211b51; Dublin, Royal Irish Academy MS 23 P 2 (535) and Dublin, Trinity College MS H. 2. 17, Vol 2 (1319), The Book of Lecan (L), fols. 139r–144v; Dublin, Trinity College MS H. 3. 17 (H), fols. 232r–236r; Dublin, Royal Irish Academy MS Stowe D ii I (1225), *The Book of Uí Maine* (M) fols. 35v–37v.

mid eleventh to the later twelfth century and of learned links between the east coast monastery of Glendalough and Llanbadarn Mawr see F. J. Byrne, ‘The Trembling Sod: Ireland in 1169’, in *A New History of Ireland*, Vol. II, *Medieval Ireland 1169–1534*, ed. A. Cosgrove (Oxford, 1987), pp. 21–2, 40. The frequent use made of Ireland by the Welsh princes (notably, Gruffudd ap Cynan and Gruffudd ap Rhys ap Tewdwr) as a refuge and a means of recreating their *teulu* in the twelfth century is noted in R. Turvey, *The Welsh Princes 1063–1283* (London, 2002), pp. 139–40. The arrival of the Cambro-Normans also considerably strengthened connections in the zone. For an overview of this topic for the medieval period in general see R. R. Davies, *The British Isles, 1150–1500: Comparisons, Contrasts, and Connections* (Edinburgh, 1988).

⁵ The text of the *Historia Brittonum* is to be found in E. Faral, *La légende arthurienne: Études et documents, les plus anciens textes*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1929); for the *Lebor Bretnach* see A. G. Van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach: The Irish Version of the Historia Brittonum ascribed to Nennius* (Dublin, no date). For a discussion of the work’s place as a national history see Higham, *Arthur*, passim and David Dumville, ‘Historia Brittonum: An Insular History from the Carolingian Age’, in *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. A. Scharer and G. Scheibelreiter (Vienna and Munich, 1994), pp. 406–34.

The date proposed for the reception and translation of *HB* in Ireland by Van Hamel, the editor of *Lebor Bretnach*, as the second half of the eleventh century, has been generally accepted by scholars even if his analysis of the 'Recensions' was quickly rebutted.⁶ There seems to be no need to query this dating on linguistic grounds. In two manuscripts (H, M), the translation is ascribed to Gilla Coemáin (fl. 1071/2). Dumville doubts the validity of this ascription because of his assumption, following Ó Concheannain, about the oldest manuscript of the text, U: viz., that the manuscript was revised by Mael Muiri son of Conn na mbocht of Clonmacnoise who was killed in 1106.⁷ Hence the text of *LB* in U, in the hand of an earlier scribe, scribe A, must be dated to circa 1050.⁸ The fact that U *LB* ends at ch. 43 thus bears definite connection with the version in the Book of Ballymote (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy MS 23 P 12, dated late fourteenth to early fifteenth century) which shares this feature. In Dumville's view U *LB* is already a contaminated text at some remove from the original translation. As we have seen, Van Hamel opted on linguistic grounds for a composition date of the second half of the eleventh century for both U *LB* and the other manuscript versions. More recent work on *Lebor na hUidre* (U), however, has not followed the suggestion of Ó Concheannain on the date of the various scribal contributions to the manuscript so there is much more room for flexibility on dating issues than Dumville allowed.⁹ Indeed the *terminus ad quem* for the *HB* translation in U can be assumed to be largely similar to the manuscript of U itself and thus taken up to the beginning of the twelfth century.

The association of Gilla Coemáin with the Irish text thus merits acceptance on dating congruity alone. Besides the two manuscript citations of Gilla Coemáin as translator there is a third reference, hitherto overlooked, in the version of *Corpus Genealogorum Sanctorum Hiberniae* (hereafter *CGSH*) found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 610 and The Book of Uí Maine.¹⁰ The double entry on St Cairnech, who figures strongly in the main Irish addition to the translated *HB* (chs. 24–5), reads:

⁶ By F. Lot, ed., *Nennius et l'Historia Brittonum* (Paris, 1934), I, 135–42. In view of the general consensus concerning Van Hamel's misguided efforts to establish successive states of the text, it seems pointless to attempt recension-type analysis at this stage of our knowledge of *LB*.

⁷ David Dumville, 'The Textual History of "Lebor Bretnach": A Preliminary Study', *Éigse* 16 (1975/6), 255–73. See Tomás Ó Concheannain, 'The Reviser of Leabhar na hUidre', *Éigse* 15 (1973), 277–48.

⁸ 'The scribe [of *LB*] could hardly have been working much after the middle of the eleventh century', *ibid.*, 256.

⁹ See now Gearóid Mac Eoin, 'The Interpolator H in *Lebor na hUidre*', in *Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales*, ed. J. P. Mallory and G. Sweetman (Belfast, 1995), pp. 39–46.

¹⁰ The Oxford manuscript (O) once contained a copy of *LB* (Dumville, 'Textual History', 263–4). For *CGSH* see Pádraig Ó Riain, ed. (Dublin, 1985). The texts of *LB* are on M, fols. 91b2–94a1, fols. 35vb1–37va40; the texts of *CGSH* are on O, pp. 38ra–42re, M, fols. 50ra39–53vb16, 54va36–55vb58 respectively.

Cairnech; do Breatnaib Corrn do. Is imi sin aderar *Cairrnech* fris.
 .i. Cairneach m. Luitheich m. Luigdeach m. Thalunn m. Ithachair m. Allta.
 Is amlaig sin innis Gilla Caemain a Stairib na mBreatan.¹¹

(Cairnech: he is of the Cornish Britons. That is why he is called Cairnech
 [i.e. the 'Cornish man'].

That is Cairnech son of Luitech, son of Luigdech, son of Talunn, son of
 Ithachar, son of Allta.

This is how Gilla Coemáin relates it in the Histories of Britain.)

The reference here to Gilla Coemáin and to *LB* points to a version of the *CGSH* tradition originating in the barony of Lower Ormond in north-west Tipperary. The Cairnech interpolation in *LB* is found only in *The Book of Ballymote*, a late fourteenth-century manuscript. The text there does not, however, carry the Gilla Coemáin ascription. It is tempting to deduce from this that the Cairnech episode was part of the Irish translation from the beginning. But at the very least I think we can assume that *LB* was an immediately popular and widely disseminated text and that Gilla Coemáin was commonly held to be its author, responsible for the interpolated version with the story of St Cairnech even if the manuscripts that ascribe *LB* to him do not contain it.

Gilla Coemáin mac Gille Samhthainne himself is a prime architect of the final stages of the great Irish compilation of pseudo-history, *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (The Book of the Takings of Ireland, hereafter *LG*).¹² Three of his poems feature there, and the most important, *Ériu árd inis na rí* (Noble Ireland, Island of the Kings), versifies the list of kings of Ireland before the faith.¹³ Little is known of him other than the evidence provided by his father's name, 'devotee of St Samhthainne', which might imply a western midlands origin – Samhthainne's foundation, Clonbroney, is in the barony of Granard, Co. Longford, in medieval times in the northern section of the kingdom of Tethbha.¹⁴ St Cairnech is associated with the church of T[D]ulane in the vicinity of Kells. The Cairnech material in *LB* and the articulation generally of the Cairnech/Muircertach mac Erca story cycle is certainly not early; however, it fits in with Brega and Tethbha politics in the eleventh century.¹⁵ If the reference to Lyon in the Cairnech episode is of any

¹¹ Ó Riain, no. 381.1–2, p. 58. The Laud manuscript version transposes the double entry thus giving primacy to the genealogy rather than the name etymology of Cairnech. The interpolation itself, represented in the Book of Ballymote version alone, contains neither etymology nor genealogy but I assume that the M version which gives etymology first is a direct acknowledgment of the tradition associating Gilla Coemáin with the Cairnech-interpolated version.

¹² Ed. R. A. S. Macalister, Irish Text Society, 5 vols. (Dublin, 1942/6).

¹³ Ibid., V, 486–531.

¹⁴ See T. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 30–3, 260 for the early Patrician bias of Northern Tethbae. See F. J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (New York, 1973), pp. 91–2, for the eleventh-century takeover of this area by the Conmaicne Réin satellites of the O'Rourke's of Breifne. The foundation maintained close ties with Clonmacnoise and later became the basis for the diocese of Ardagh. The name-element Coemán might also suggest rather a Glendalough association but this is less likely.

¹⁵ The main saga, which features the sixth-century king of Tara, Muircertach mac Ercae, and the cleric

significance then a date shortly after 1072 would fit this episode also.¹⁶ This linkage between the *LG* and *LB* at the point when *LG* is achieving its final compilatory form is important in that, as Ó Riain points, out the British material in *LG* probably derives from *HB* – or, indeed, *LB*. In each of the two projects, then, Gilla Coemáin would seem to have had an important shaping hand.

LB's approach to the Arthurian material in *HB* is less an issue of specific interest or not in Arthur himself. Rather the treatment of the Arthuriana is determined by what elements of the text as a whole receive most attention in an Irish translation. In general, the Irish *literati* seem to have tended to view *HB* as an opportunity to tap into a new collection of general historical data. Where they found it lacking they augmented as in the case of the expanded Pictish material, the presence of the *Sex Aetatis Mundi* materials, and the fragments from Bede.¹⁷ Where their own information is full they summarize, particularly on matters that they see as central to Irish interests, hence, already covered in their own collections. In the latter case their general attitude can best be represented by the otherwise surprising shortening of the Patrician material in *HB*. 'Ferta tra Patraic do innisin duib si, a fhiru Herend, is usce de [recte, do] loch insin.' ('To relate to you, o men of Ireland, the deeds of Patrick would be like bringing water to a lake [i.e. coals to Newcastle]', ch. 42.) It is even more marked in the Yellow Book of Lecan complete version where the comment is delivered in a clear personal voice: 'Is usci fo thalmáin 7 liaither gainem mara andsin 7 lecfad daib sechaind cose can cumair 7 can faisneis indisín co leicc' ('The subject [Patrick's deeds], is as water on the ground and as wide-ranging as the sands of the sea, and I will pass over this without gathering it and relating an account of it at this point', ch. 42, Van Hamel, p. 70, n. 53). The note of national pride in the deeds of Patrick – the address to 'you men of Ireland' – also marks a degree of self-consciousness about the general enterprise of national histories, which translation projects that place one set of regional knowledge beside another are likely to provoke. Phrases such as these are significant as the markers of self-conscious cultural identity that can be engendered at such moments

Cairnech in the matter of violations of church property and an evil wife who dooms the king to a three-fold death, is probably not older than twelfth-century even though the motif of the three-fold death that the king undergoes is known from earlier sources (ed. Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique* 23 (1902), 395–437).

¹⁶ Van Hamel does not comment on this interpretation of manuscript *lien* by the previous editor of *LB*, J. H. Todd, ed. and trans. with A. Herbert, *Leabhar breathnach annso síis. The Irish Version of the Historia Britonum of Nennius* (London, 1848), p. 188.

¹⁷ The extra material on the Picts and their origins is inserted early at the point where the island, its inhabitants and geography are described. It belongs to a late redaction of the *Irish Book of the Takings of Ireland*. The relative geographical lie of Ireland and Britain is also adjusted to provide an Irish perspective. Cf. Van Hamel, pp. 4–5; Dumville, 275–8, points out that it is probably a gloss on the original Irish translation. The addition at the end of a Pictish king-list and the synopsis of the opening of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* is to be found in H and M, the two manuscripts that bear an ascription to Gilla Coemáin.

when an expansion of discourse exerts added pressure beyond the customary and conventional boundaries of people's common identities.

One of the results of this is that it is clear that detailed Arthurian material would not be part of the particular interest that the Irish literati would be likely to devote to the text. In ch. 43, for example, the Irish text reads:

Araide nocathaiget Artur 7 Bretain riu co calma 7 Dorat da cath dec doib .i. in cet-chath . . . In viii in Les Guinneain. Is annsin roimmarchuir Artur deilb Maire fora gualaind 7 roteichsetar na pagain . . . xii is andside romarb lam Artuir .xl. Ar ocht cetaib i n-oen lo 7 ba lescoscar intib uile.

(However Arthur and the Britons fought them bravely and inflicted twelve battles on them; namely, the first . . . : the eighth battle in the fort of (Lis ?) Guinneain. It was here that Arthur carried the image of Mary on his shoulder and the pagans fled . . . : twelve, there the hand of Arthur slew 840 in one day; and he was victorious in them all.)

The double aspect to the alliance in *HB*, that the kings of Britain fought with Arthur but that he was the military leader is elided; only Arthur and generalized Britons remain.¹⁸ The list of battles is carelessly or summarily given but the eighth, marked in *HB* by the religious symbolism of the shield and the Virgin's image, was obviously also the one that caught the Irish translator's pious attention. However, it should be noted that the detail of the Christian device on Arthur's shield is missing from the version in MS H 3 17, one of the versions with an ascription to Gilla Coemáin.

The *Miracula* section, chs. 44–46, should in principle be of considerable interest to an Irish audience considering the great popularity of the genre of Irish *Miracula* compilations;¹⁹ curiously, however, the section receives only the most cursory of treatments and is missing altogether in MSS D, H and L. In ch. 44 the miracles are greatly reduced and it is clear that there is very little of a geographically specific focus of interest in them. Neither is there any interest in the origin-narrative or explanation of the sites; rather, the bare bones of a landscape feature with some marvelous element is all that remains. In ch. 45, numeration is continuous with ch. 43 and the St Illtud marvel omits his name and flattens the tale to the briefest of mentions of a strange altar. The eighth *mirabilium* is located in Gwent and in the Irish version is reduced from 7 lines to less than 2. The next Gwent wonder is omitted altogether. The cairn for Arthur's dog, Cafal, is listed as Marvel 10 in ch. 45: 'In deichmed: cloch fuil for carnn in Bocuilt 7 at ealta con Airtoir indte 7 cid berar fon doman fogabar forin carnd cetna.' ('The tenth: a stone that is on a cairn in

¹⁸ The possibility that *HB* is using Irish sources for one in the list of Arthur's battles has not to my knowledge ever been discussed. The seventh battle, at 'silva Celidonis, id est Cat Coit Celidon', looks like a garbled version of Irish *Cath Coill Celidon*.

¹⁹ See J. Carey, 'Werewolves in Medieval Ireland', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* (Winter 2002), 37–72, and my 'The Frontier Freaks Talk back to Gerald of Wales', in *Limina: Proceedings of the Sixth Annual St Michael's Conference, February 2003*, ed. J. Goering et al. (forthcoming).

Bocuilt [*sic*] and the joint of Arthur's hound is in it; and whoever would put [the stone] anywhere in the world it would [still] be found on top of the same cairn.') The hunt of the legendary boar, found in the Latin text, is here omitted as is the dog's name, but the essence of the monumental nature of the site is still maintained perhaps better than one might otherwise expect.²⁰ The next Arthurian piece is equally laconic but this time with no reference to Arthur: 'In xi deg: fil adnacul i ferann Arging. Tan vii traigi, tan .x., in tan .xii., in tan a cuic deg ina fad.' ('The eleventh: there is a tomb in the region of Ercing. At times it measures 8 feet, at others 12, at others 15 feet in length', ch. 45.) In view of the brevity of the entries it is noteworthy that the name of Arthur should have survived at all in this section. This may actually have certain repercussions for the next items in Irish tradition on Arthur as we shall see below. After this final Arthurian marvel, *HB* has only one other in this section; *LB*, however, has seven (two of these are missing or mangled in some manuscripts). The marvels of the Isle of Man are shortened and the two Irish ones in *HB* are omitted altogether – presumably on the same principle as obtained earlier in the matter of adding in a fuller picture of Britain, Ireland and the islands, and the treatment of the Patrician section of omitting whatever is already known to Irish literary circles. It is impossible to deduce much from all this in view of the fact that the genre of *mirabilia* has an almost Protean tendency to accrue extra items to itself. The Irish versions of *HB* testify to a desire to create a fuller dossier of the marvels of Britain even as they give short shrift to the narrative aspects of the genre as reflected in the parent work. That Arthur is not elided from the account may not have much significance for the translators themselves but the fact that his name did survive into the Irish record will have some implications for later treatments of the Arthurian hunt theme in Ireland.

Arthur in the Irish Historical Record

When one turns to the Irish genealogical material problems of a different kind arise. Consideration of this evidence forces us to look again at what was so firmly dismissed by Higham: the possibility of an historical British hero, Arthur. The story here begins with the family lines of Dál Riata dynasts as these can be established from the Irish genealogical and annalistic records. More precisely it begins with Aedán mac Gabráin, king of the Scottish Dál Riata, who died in 608 after a long and momentous reign – his father had died in 558, he assumed the kingship in 573. A major aspect of his reign has been characterized by Smyth as the division of the spoils of northern Britain: 'Aedán had given this Scottish colony leadership and direction which had set

²⁰ For knowledge of the motif of the boar hunt as commonly held by Irish and Welsh tradition see references in n. 45 below.

its sights not just on settlements in Dal Riata but much further afield in the Scottish lowlands.²¹ Other historians of early Scotland have suggested that Aedán's son, Gartnait, and his great grandsons Gartnait and Drest were imposed as kings of the Picts in succeeding generations from the late sixth to the third quarter of the seventh century.²² His son Eochaid Buide is listed by Irish sources as a King of Alba. The Irish Annals imply friendly relations between Aedán and his British – and Irish – allies throughout his career whether in victories in the seventies and eighties or in the later reversals. It is in this context of alliances and networks that the curious legends surrounding the family of Aedán are to be understood: it is possible that these traditions, though referring to a seventh-century context, actually came together much later, perhaps even as late as the eleventh century.²³ The genealogical notes on the dynasties of Leinster record the curious account of Aedán's royal Leinster mother:

Feidelm (ingen Feidelmeda m. Cobthaig m. Nath-Í m. Fiacach m. Echach Mugmedoin) ben Echach meic Muridaig mathair Branduib et Aedain meic Gabrain.²⁴

(Feidelm . . . wife of Eochu son of Muiredach, mother of Brandub (king of Leinster) and Aedán mac Gabráin)

The Lecan version continues:

ar ba heman insin, co tuc Feidelm a leatheamuin .i. Aedan do mnai Gabrain meic Domangoir .i. rig Alban ar ni toictis maccu di.²⁵

(because they were twins, and Feidelm gave one of the two, i.e. Aedán, to the wife of Gabrán son of Domangort, the king of Scotland, because she had no sons.)

This genealogical linkage of Dál Riata and Leinster, repeated in the *Banshenchas* (Womenlore) tract which saw its final form in the late twelfth century, is, of course, no more than a symbol for what seems to be the close connections between the two groups in the seventh century;²⁶ the memory of it was powerful enough to generate a fairly continuous stream of legend, from the *Bórama* (cattle-tax) traditions of rivalry between the Uí Néill and the Leinstermen and their traditional allies among Ulaid stock, to the early

²¹ Alfred P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80–1000*, The New History of Scotland 1 (London, 1984), p. 30.

²² See M. O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1973), pp. 150ff. Also, J. Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dálriada* (Edinburgh, 1974).

²³ P. Mac Cana, *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1980), pp. 116–17.

²⁴ M. O'Brien, ed., *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (hereafter *CGH*), p. 355.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

²⁶ Ed. Margaret Dobbs, *Revue Celtique* 47 (1930), 306, 48 (1931), 181, 218.

modern romance account of the love of Brandub and Dublaca.²⁷ The *Bórama* tradition probably received its final form in the later eleventh century when there was again a close co-operation between the Ulaid and the Laigin.²⁸

It is within Aedán's family that the first historically attested Irish Arthur is to be located. Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* relates how Aedán lost his sons, Arthur and Eochaid Finn, in a battle against the British Miati some time before 597.²⁹ The *Annals of Tigernach* also have the death of these two and of two other of Aedán's sons, Bran and Domangoirt, in 595.³⁰ This is the period of Aedán's lowest fortune – the defeat of Degsastan occurs in 603 (600, *AU*). It comes after a generation of relative success in his quest to assert an expanded power base among the British, Pictish and Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of the middle north. The question here is, whence the name Arthur? In Higham's view this may simply reflect Irish in-comers' cultural negotiation with the name Arthur, understood by them as a wonder-worker and folk-hero. The assumption here is that it 'reflects a desire to capture whatever mythological kudos and religious potency already surrounded the name with British/Welsh families avoiding its use primarily because of its newly-acquired mythological connections which might have been considered un-Christian'.³¹ But the Irish were also Christian and Irish naming habits do not normally follow this pattern. There is very little recourse to the heroic legendary name Cú Chulainn, for example, among Irish families of any period, and the name Finn (which Padel assumes has the same kind of cultural currency as the 'folkloric' Arthur) is too common to be of value for comparison. According to the Welsh genealogical traditions, however, Aedán's mother was a princess from Britain, Luan, one of the many daughters of Brychan, an Irish – possibly Leinster – dynast settled in Brecknock.³² Though an Arthen is listed as one of her brothers, the name Arthur does not specifically appear in the list. Irish hagiographical tradition also gives considerable importance to a Dina, daughter of the king of the Saxons, as the wife of the same Brychan; she was the mother of eleven saints whose foundations are almost all in Leinster, in the south and on the midland border.³³

²⁷ Mac Cana, *Learned Tales*, pp. 100, 117. For an account of the legends of Brandub and Aedán see J. F. Nagy, 'In Defence of *Rómánsaiocht*', *Ériu* 38 (1987), 9–26.

²⁸ See Byrne, *Irish Kings*, p. 146.

²⁹ R. Sharpe, *Adomnán's Vita Columbae* (London, 1997), p. 120; Higham, *Arthur*, p. 76.

³⁰ 'Iugulacio filiorum Aedan .i. Bran Domungort Eochaid find Artur i cath Circhind inquo victus est Aedhan cath Coraínd.' There is undoubtedly a close connection between Adomnán's information and the Tigernach entry. Dan McCarthy demonstrated in 1999 that the *Annals of Tigernach* and the *Chronicon Scotorum* reflect the original Iona Chronicle more faithfully than any other in this period: www.cs.tcd.ie/Dan.McCarthy/chronology/synchronicisms/annals-chron.htm.

³¹ Higham, *Arthur*, p. 77.

³² Cf. *Cognatio Brychan* and *De Situ Brecheniauc* in P. C. Bartrum, *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (Cardiff, 1966), pp. 14–19; noted also by T. F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin, 1946), pp. 362–3.

³³ *CGSH*, 722.89, pp. 178–9. In *CGSH*, 722.35, p. 174, a 'Maithgemm ingen Aedain m. Gabrain rig Alban' ([Maith]gemm daughter of Aedán mac Gabráin, king of Scotland) is the mother of 'Molaisse m. Cairill. Is e congab Lethglenn' (Molaisse son of Cairill – he took over Leighlin Co. Carlow). A St

Although the multiple-sainted progeny of this convenient British house may make one rightly suspicious of the value of all this material, there is no need to doubt that Aidán did indeed select a British wife in view of his political ambitions, and that the special relationship between Dál Riata and Leinster makes it natural to structure hagiographical tradition around this political nexus also.

Another Arthur may also be added to the Irish historical evidence: The Irish Annals with the closest connection to the lost Iona chronicle provide information on the death of Mongán mac Fiachnae of Dál Fiatach, noting his death in Strathclyde in 625. This is the Mongán of legend who was supposedly the real son of Manannán mac Lir, the divine figure associated with the Irish sea area in general and the Isle of Man in particular. Fiachnae mac Baetáin, king of Dál Fiatach and father of Mongán was away helping Aedán mac Gabráin on his British campaigns when Mongán was conceived by Manannán. A poem attributed to Mongán on the kings of Emain Macha is in the Irish genealogical corpus (hereafter *CGH*), and a quatrain of another to his wife is in the Book of Leinster genealogy material on Dál Fiatach where his wife Dub Laca is also mentioned.³⁴ In the Clonmacnoise-based *Annals of Tigernach* it is said that he was killed by being struck by a stone from Arthur ‘filio bi coirpre tene’. The *Chronicon Scottorum* also includes this information and Gearóid Mac Niocaill has interpreted this textual puzzle as ‘son of Bicoir the Briton’.³⁵ There may be further possibilities to this item: the same information may also be represented in the Harleian Genealogies, appended to the *Historia Brittonum*, British Library, MS Harleian 3895, where ‘Artur map Petr’ appears in the line giving the maternal descent of Owain ap Hwyl Dda.³⁶ For Higham this genealogy and the *Annales Cambriae*, also appended to the *Historia Brittonum* in the same manuscript, represent a further reworking of Arthurian material in the interests of the mid tenth-century Owain of Dyfed, though if one follows Molly Miller, Arthur was already in the genealogies at this point.³⁷ For Irish genealogy scholars the word-liaison errors and variants possible in the combination *mac* + proper name beginning with a vowel or an identical consonant are well-known. A similar scribal error may lie behind both the Harleian and Tigernach references: *map Petr* can also be construed as *map Etr* as can the Irish Annal’s as *mab it* (with *c* as a misreading of *t*) *oir*. There are vowel quality difficulties here but the resulting name is very close to a plausible version of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s information on Uth(e)r as Arthur’s father, a detail that does not appear before Geoffrey.³⁸

Gemma is in ‘Féilire Óengusso’ (The Calendar of Oengus), Whitley Stokes, ed. (London, 1905), p. 116.

³⁴ *CGH*, pp. 282–4.

³⁵ His translation of the *Chronicon Scottorum* was done for the CELT on-line project (www.ucc.ie/celt).

³⁶ Higham, *Arthur*, pp. 212–15.

³⁷ ‘Date-Guessing and Pedigrees’, *Studia Celtica* 12–13 (1975–76), 96–109; *ibid*, 12–13 (1977–78), 33–61.

³⁸ Cf. O. J. Padel, *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 51, 121.

There exists then a body of genealogical detail in Ireland that points to an Arthur connected to two Irish septs, Dál Riata and Dál Fiatach. There is no way of knowing if the Irish material converges on a single figure or on two distinct Arthurs. The naming impulse may be a simple one – the wish to remember a grandfather or uncle in the maternal line – and it may not matter very much if this individual has any particular fame attached to his memory: the fact of his existence is sufficient and may indeed be guaranteed by the persistence of the tradition of the name in the kin line. Such names preserve not only familial connections in the private sphere but have their highest relevance in the political, guaranteeing the memory of old alliances and friendships between kindreds regardless of whether they belong to the same ethnic groupings or not. One might even be tempted to suggest that the emergence of an Arthur as champion of the Britons in the *Historia Britonum* may rely on the actual presence of individuals with this name among the Britons for which the Irish evidence is the only historical record. As a narrative trigger for the Arthur of the *HB* it may have taken no more than an epigraphic reference to a son of Arthur, or some knowledge of Dál Riata historical information, to have enabled the creation of the instant pop-up hero who fought so valiantly against the mainly Germanic barbarians.

Links between the Britons and the Leinster dynasts of the Uí Mail continue through the seventh century and the further history of the name Arthur in Ireland bears this out. It is clear that the marriage alliances created by the Uí Máil king, Cellach Gerthide (also called Cellach Cualann), towards the end of the century were of the highest diplomatic importance in his political ambitions in the midlands: this is evidenced by his own and his daughters' marriages to Brega families and with the southern Uí Néill dynasty of Síol nÁedo Sláine. Indeed, it has been suggested that increased contacts between Britain and Ireland in the end of the seventh century may actually have been superseding Dál Riata-British contacts at this time.³⁹ British mercenaries fought with Cellach in Ireland (*AU*, s.a. 709) and probably derived from Rheged via the Isle of Man.⁴⁰ A daughter of Cellach's, Caintigern (+733/4) was married to one Feriacus regulus of Monchestre. Mac Shamhráin suggests that this may well be Feradach hÓa Artúr (Feradach grandson of Arthur) of Dál Riata who in 697, along with Cellach Cualann, signed the list of guarantors for the *Law of Adomnán*.⁴¹ Thus the close connection of the two kings in 697 – Feradach's grandfather, the earliest historically attested Arthur – may account for the introduction and recurrence of this name in the Uí Máil dynasties. Thus one finds an early ninth-century figure, Artúr m. Coscraich m. Dunchada m. Óengusa m. Móenaich, in a line

³⁹ See A. Mac Shamhráin, *Church and Polity in Pre-Norman Ireland: The Case of Glendalough*, Maynooth Monographs 7 (Maynooth, 1996), 67.

⁴⁰ See G. Mac Niocaill, *Ireland before the Vikings* (Dublin, 1972), pp. 112–13.

⁴¹ Mac Shamhráin, *Church and Polity*, 68. See also M. Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor List of *Cáin Adomnán*, 697 A.D.', *Peritia* 1 (1984), 178–215.

in the Clann Óengusa of the Uí Máil genealogy.⁴² This demonstrated inter-familial naming pattern can also help to support my conclusion above, that the earlier transference of the Arthur name among Ulster/north British families is a much more likely source for the name's Irish appearance than any vague recourse to an image of superstitious, less Christianly sensitive, Irish in-comers into Britain.

After the death of Cellach Cualann the power of the Uí Máil dynasty fell into decline. They are succeeded in the power struggle stakes by the Uí Dúnlainge in the lineage of Uí Muiredaig, located in south Co. Kildare. With the career of Dúnlaing (+869) this line begins to assert a claim to the over kingship of Leinster.⁴³ The name Arthur may have been imported into the Uí Muiredaig line through Uí Máil marital connections – to the latter because of their British connections as argued above. The following occurrences may be noted in the Uí Dúnlainge family: an Artúr mac Muiredaig figures as a local ruler, styled king of Iarthar Líphi (+847). It is presumed that it is his son, Suthenén, taken hostage by the ambitious king of the Osraige, Cerball mac Dungaile, in 858, who was the father of Dunchad, the bishop of Clonmacnoise who died in 941. An Artúr grandson of Tuathal (+936) is called king of the Uí Dúnlainge. A century later the name still persists: an Artúr Clérech, abbot of Cluain Mór (+1054), was the brother of the powerful Cinaed, abbot of Glendalough and both belonged to the ruling Uí Muiredaig line. Artúr Clérech's daughter's marriage to another local dynast with strong connections to the monastery of Glendalough is recorded in the *Banshenchas*.⁴⁴ This is probably the last historical record for an Arthur in Ireland in the Middle Ages.

Arthur and Irish Legend

The next phase of Arthurian references from Ireland are of a literary nature; they, in their turn, raise other kinds of questions about the degree of cultural contact across the Irish Sea in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Again, I am hoping it will prove useful to return to what Welsh scholars might consider old and resolved issues on the development of Arthurian literary tradition. One of the first of these old chestnuts of Welsh/Irish scholarship is the degree to which Welsh literature is indebted to Irish materials and the existence of a two-way conduit whereby Irish material travels to Wales and conversely Welsh to Ireland.⁴⁵ In the well-known Irish tale list whose original form goes

⁴² CGH, p. 78; Mac Shamhráin, *Church and Polity*, p. 82.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 81.

⁴⁴ Op. cit., XLVIII, 193.

⁴⁵ Major scepticism has been expressed by, notably, Patrick Sims-Williams in 'The Evidence for Vernacular Irish Literary Influence on Early Mediaeval Welsh Literature', in *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe: Studies in memory of Kathleen Hughes* ed. D. Whitelock et al. (Cambridge, 1982),

back to the tenth century there are items that are plainly added later.⁴⁶ One of these is the tale title, *Aigidecht Arthúir* (The Hospitality of Arthur). Mac Cana, following Bruford, believes that this item was added sometime in the twelfth century on the understanding that it could only have come after the appearance of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*.⁴⁷ Bruford further supposed that the tale in question was related to the 'Irish version of the werewolf's tale, related to the Latin *Artur and Gorlagon*, and the Old French lays of *Melion* and *Bisclavret*'.⁴⁸ An equally good or equally tenuous case could be made for the Welsh *Culhwch ac Olwen*, which has as its first great set piece the display of generosity at his feast shown by Arthur to the young unknown Culhwch.⁴⁹ This is the only Welsh tale I know where knowledge of Irish storytelling is proudly displayed; the list of the retinue of Arthur invoked by Culhwch draws on Irish saga characters: Conchobar mac Nessa, Cú Roí mac Dáire, Fergus mac Roich, Loegaire Buadach and Conall Cernach. The fact that these are among the most significant figures in the Ulster saga cycle of tales after Cú Chulainn (who is also known in medieval Wales) would imply that their presence here springs from somewhat more than rudimentary knowledge of Irish saga tradition. I am inclined to believe that behind the reference to an Irish-circulating tale of Arthur's feast lies evidence for some kind of reciprocal performative system of story exchange between the two nations. A movement towards Welsh assemblages of this kind with Irish performers is attested from the late twelfth century but probably needs to be envisaged for a somewhat earlier period to allow for the mention of an Arthur's tale in the Book of Leinster. I am also assuming that it is this exchange system that caused Arthur to be absorbed into what is the most important of later Irish literary works, the *Acallam na Senórach*.

Quite early in this great compilation of Fenian storytelling which brings

pp. 235–57, and more specifically with respect to *Culhwch ac Olwen* in 'The Significance of the Irish Personal Names in *Culhwch ac Olwen*', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* (hereafter *BBCS*) 29 (1982), 600–20. By drawing up his criteria for cultural contact too severely and posing only the question of high literary textual connections Sims-Williams' negative arguments tend to obscure the general point that the occurrence of such Irish names in Welsh texts pre-supposes a degree of contact which I would place in a commonly shared performative arena. In his treatment of Irish names his painstaking linguistic work in his arrival at negative conclusions is impressive but not irrefutable. For example, he flatly states that the *maer* of the king of Ireland, Odgar (mab Aed), cannot be an Irish reference, and hence that the tendency of the author is to take his names from Irish and Germanic sources with cheerful insouciance. If one looks, not for the discrete items but for the name and patronymic, the genealogies of the Déissi contain an Odor (variant Oghar) son of Aed gaile. The phonetic confusion of lenited *d* and *g* (already underway in the late Middle Irish period) often resulted in digraphs like *-d(h)g(h)-*. Déissi traditions are a significant factor in medieval Wales. John Carey revisited the question of literary and popular Irish influences in Wales in 'A Tuath Dé Miscellany', *BBCS* 39 (1992), 24–45, and concluded '... legends of Twrch Trywd and the Ychen Banog derive from Irish *dindshenchas* brought to southern Wales by Irish settlers ... [they] provide us with concrete evidence of early Irish influence on British vernacular culture', 45.

⁴⁶ Mac Cana, *Learned Tales*, pp. 33–40, 115–17.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108 n. 107.

⁴⁸ A. Bruford, *Gaelic Folktales and Medieval Romances* (Dublin, 1967), p. 45.

⁴⁹ *The Mabinogion*, trans. J. Gantz (London, 1976), p. 140.

the old Fenian hero Cailte and St Patrick together in massive tale-telling sessions there is a general request from Patrick to tell another tale; and upon his asking about the mounts of the Fianna, Cailte proceeds to tell the story of a Fenian hunt on Benn Edair (Howth Head). As the tale may be unfamiliar to non-Irish readers I supply a text and translation as an appendix (see p. 00 below).

In order to assess the interest of this tale for present purposes it is necessary to place it first in the context of the work to which it belongs. It is a prosimetric composition as it now stands and in this it is quite typical of how literary features are treated in the compilation. It occurs surprisingly early in the collection and belongs to a section in which various belongings of the Fianna are listed, usually in verse form. Thus while the tale itself recounts the British origin of the horse breed used by the Fianna, from this genre perspective the point of the tale seems to be a way of introducing the final poem that gives the names of all the warriors' mounts. The poem, however, has no direct link to the tale in that the verse does not say that the original breeding pair are from Arthur. Instead a number of sources for the horses are mentioned: Fionn's own horse, Concenn, is said to come from Saxon lands and another horse is called Francán, 'little Frankie'. The name of Arthur's father, Beinne Brit, is a name that has currency in other Irish saga traditions: Benne Brit figures in the account of the Battle of Crinna;⁵⁰ he also occurs in *Cath Maige Mucrumma* (The Battle of Mag Mucruma), as the British ally of the Irish hero Mac Con.⁵¹ This latter text has been dated by its editor to the early ninth century with some archaic features which suggest an even earlier stratum from the beginning of the eighth. Most suggestive is the editor's idea that the Mac Con may well be an Irish mutilation of Brittonic Mapon and O'Daly notes as well the presence of Mac Con's *rechtaire* (steward), Nechtan, a Pictish name that occurs in the Irish Annals at 717 and 726. I have already suggested a series of historic points when a British influence is strong or at least palpable – where recurrent dipping into a British name-pool was also evident in the genealogical 'real name' tradition. It is still noteworthy that in the *Acallam* the name Artúir should here be identified as British and, as British, that it be assumed he should fit in to the kin of Benne Brit, himself associated in main-line Irish saga with a generalized cluster of heroic figures from the island of Britain.

The text of the tale betrays other aspects of a pre-*Acallam* history. Towards the end of the tale, when Artúir is brought back captive to Finn the slight confusion of narrator Cailte about his designated audience (Patrick or Finn?) would strongly imply that there was a ballad-type Arthur poem already in existence of which Cailte recites a few lines. The starting point for the tale's genesis may lie in the Irish tradition of the *Historia Britonum*.

⁵⁰ Fol. 328 f 1; CGH, 403.

⁵¹ M. O'Daly, *Cath Maige Mucrumma. The Battle of Mag Mucrumma* Irish Texts Society 50 (Dublin, 1975).

Although the Irish translation (*LB*) does not choose to include what it most likely had, the name of Arthur's dog, Cafal, the equine associations of the animal may have provided the key for the Fenian retelling of a tale that exchanges dogs and horses. However, when this tale is placed beside the earlier evidence for the Irish circulation of an Arthurian story on Arthur's feasting and inter-insular hunting, then one may perhaps assume that traditions about an unstable and uncouth Arthur, a grabber of other people's property is also filtering in to Ireland from Britain in the twelfth century.⁵²

The immediate internal context for this tale of a Fenian Arthur can also be explained along these lines. The *Acallam*, I would argue, is a work that is deeply engaged with the immediate social issues of concern to the ecclesiastical world of the late twelfth century. In this sense the placement of the tale would seem to be deliberate. Its theme of the uncouth young prince chimes with the Fenian tale of the boorish young Mac Lugach told a little later on. Mac Lugach is a young recruit who is so impetuous and gauche in chivalric matters that he needs quite specific instruction and correction from his mentors at arms. So too, Arthur must be taught a lesson, must be seen to compensate for his theft and lack of any sense of communal solidarity within his warrior peer group. Taken as a whole, the tale reflects the increasing importance to Irish kings in the period to have the means to create units of mounted cavalry for their increasingly militarized ambitions. This is the time when military service loan words like *ridire* (knight), *cnicht* (Old English 'knight') and *searsún/seirsénach* (mercenary) are entering the language for the first time. One may also note that the scene is set in East Leinster and Wales directly across the Irish Sea. Do we also see in this little drama of ethnic hostility a kind of racial typing, a way of gauging the measure of the new Cambro-Norman arrivals in Ireland and a pious wish on the part of engaged Irish clerics that they might learn to behave themselves when firmly subordinated to strong Irish leaders? However, like the potential for an Irish legendary of a young Arthur, which would seem to have held such considerable literary promise at the outset, the pious clerical wish and the political will were as stillborn as the genre that never came to be. The Arthur of the Irish is then a *rex quondam*, but definitely not a *rex futurus*, at least not the English *rex* which they received.

⁵² In the Old Welsh poem *Preiddeu Annwfn* (in the Book of Taliesin) where Arthur crosses the sea to seize a marvellous sword and cauldron, it is possible that this land is Ireland. Cf. M. Haycock, *Studia Celtica* 18–19 (1983–84), 52–78. I am most grateful to Dr Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan for this suggestion.

ACALLAM NA SENÓRACH: TEXT AND TRANSLATION⁵³

“Óclách do bui ac Finn .i. Artuir mac Benne Brit, 7 ba hedh a lin, tri naenbair. Ocus dorónad sealg Benne hEdair le Finn, 7 ba tuillmech toirtech in tshealg soin, 7 do scáilset dá conuibh 7 do shuidh Finn i Carn in fhéinnedha idir Beinn Edair 7 muir, 7 ba maith leis a menma ag éisdecht re raibcedaigh⁵⁴ na ndam ndíscir ndásachtach ic a luathmarbadh do conuibh na Fénne.

Is ann doralá d’Artúir mac Benne Brit beith ic coimhet in mara idir an (fhi)agach 7 muir cu nach snáimhdís in (damhrad) uatha; 7 mar do bhí Artúir amuich i cind in chuain atconnaic trí coin do chonuib Finn .i. Bran 7 Sceolaing 7 Adhnuai. Ocus as í comairli arar’ cinn (Artúir mac) Benne .i. é féin 7 a trí nónbair d’imthecht tar muir 7 na coin sin do breith leis ‘na tír féin; 7 do críchnaiged in comairle sin. Dóigh ámh dochuatar-som tar muincinn mara 7 na trí coin sin leo, 7 ro gabsat cuan 7 calad ac Innber Mara Gainiach⁵⁵ i crích Breatan, 7 tiagait a tír, 7 lotar rompa co Sliabh Lodáin meic Lir, 7 dorónad sealg in tshleibi sin acu.

“Dála na Fénne iarsin, tairnic leo a bhfiagach 7⁵⁶ a bhfianchoscar do dhénam, 7 ro gabsat longport ag Benn Edair meic Etghaeith in fhéinnetha, 7 ro háirmhit coin tighi Find annsin amail ba gnath aca; 7 ba himdha a coin-siumh, amail atbert an file:⁵⁷

Airim craeibhi ar conuibh Finn . Cona chuanairt bláith bhithbhinn,
trí cét gadhar, comhull nglé . Ocus da cét gaidhrine.

“Ba mór do dhaínibh icá rabhutar sin,” ar Patraic. “As fíir ámh duithsi sin,” ar Cáilte, “ór ba hé so in lín no bídh i tigh Finn:

Trí coecait ro bui i tigh Find . Do tháisechaibh Fiann firgrinn
is trí cét gilla grádha . Dá chét dalta dingbhála.”

“Ar n-áirimh na gcon fríth móiresbaidh forro .i. Bran 7 Sceolaing 7 Adnuall, 7 ro hindised d’Fhind. “Sírter,” ar sé, “trí catha na Fénne.” Ocus gia ro sireadh ní fríth na coin. Is ann sin tucad loingshithal bánóir cum Find, 7 ro nigh a ghnúis ríghda, 7 tuc a ordain fô a dét fis, 7 do faillsiged firinne dhó, 7 adubairt, “Ruc mac righ Bretan bhar coin uaibh, 7 toghuidh nónbar do dhul

⁵³ The standard edition of *Acallam na Senórach* is that of Whitley Stokes, *Irish Texts*, ed. Stokes and E. Windisch, vol. I (Leipzig, 1900); for a translation of the work see A. Dooley and H. Roe, *Tales of the Elders of Ireland* (Oxford, 2000). I supply a fresh diplomatic text here from the Book of Lismore (Library of the Duke of Devonshire). For further information on the manuscripts of the text see *Tales*, xxxi–xxxiii.

⁵⁴ *Raibhcedaigh*, Fr. 4a, *raibchedaigh*, Stokes. The earlier forms of this word do not have lenited c. From this point I silently correct Stokes’ readings of L in minor details.

⁵⁵ Recte Gainmech? Geniath Fr. 4b.

⁵⁶ us, L.

⁵⁷ Fergus Fínbél, R. 13a 1.

dá n-iarraidh.” Ocus ro toghad amlaid, 7 ba hiat so a n-anmana .i. Diarmaid mac Duinn, meic Donnchada, meic Dhubáin, do Ernaibh Muman an[d]jeas 7 Goll mac Mórna. “In mac rígh Goll,” ar Patraic, “nó in mac óglaich?” “Mac rígh immoro⁵⁸,” ar Cáilte, 7 atbert:

“Goll mac Morna Moir, maic Garuid Glunduibh, maic Aedha Cinnclair, maic Conaild, maic Shainbh, maic Ceit, mac Maghach,⁵⁹

Mac Taidgh meic Mórna don muig . Meic Faeláin, meic Feraduigh,
meic Fiach, meic Airt don mhuigh . Meic Mair(edhaig), meic E(oghain).”

“Ocus Caol Cródha cétghuinech ua Nemhnain (.i. cur) conáich co neimh ro bhúi ac Finn, 7 ba hí so neimh ro bhái fair; nír’ dhibraic a lám urchar n-imroill riam 7 nír’ fuiligh a lám ar dhuine riamh nach bhud marbh ria cinn nómaide. Ocus Oisín mac Finn inté nár’ ér duine riamh acht gu mbeth cenn re caithimh neich⁶⁰ aigi 7 cosa re himthecht.” “Is mór in teisd sin, a Cáilte,” ar Patraic. “As fír cidh sin,” ar Cáilte, 7 adubairt:

“Nír’ ér Oisín duine riamh . im ór ná im aircet ná im biagh
Ní mó do chuinnigh ní ar nech . gémad innrígh a oinech.”

“Ocus Oscar mac Oisín .i. in mac rígh ba ferr lúth 7 lámach ro báí a nEirinn, 7 Ferdhoman mac Buidhbh Deirg meic in Daghdha, 7 Raighne Roisclethan mac Finn, 7 Caince Corcairderg mac Finn, 7 Glas mac Eincherda Bera, 7 Mac Lugach, 7 mhisi féin,” ar Cáilte. “Ocus ba hí ar cétfuidh dhin féin, a naemhPatraic, co nach raibhi ó Theprofane co Garrdha na n-Isperda a n-airrther in domain ceithre cét laech nach dingébhmais a láthair chatha 7 chomlainn. Óir ní raibh guala gan gelsciath, ná cenn gan cathbarr, ná desdorn gan dá manáis móirleabra.

“Ocus luidhsium romhainn fón réim sin cu ráncamar Sliabh Lodáin meic Lir, 7 nír’ chian dúin ann cu cualamar dluthchomhradh na bhfer ag dénam shealga ar in muigh. Dála Artúir meic Benne Brit, do eisidh ina dhumha shealga ann sin cona mhuintir. Indsaighter linne iat co hathlamh 7 ro mharbhsam muintir Artur uili, 7 iadhus Oscar a dá láimh um Artur 7 ainices hé, 7 tucsam ar trí coin lind. Ocus déchuin ro dhéc Goll mac Mórna secha con-faca in t-ech bocóidech dubhgorm co srian co cumdach óir fria, 7 in décsain ro dhéc dá láimh clí con-faca in n-ech ndonn ndóghabh(á)la 7 srian línaidi láingeal d’airget aith(legtha) fria co mbéilgibh óir fris, 7 g(abus G)oll ind each sin 7 cuiris hí i láim Oisín, 7 cuiris Oisín il-láim Dhiarmada í Dhuibhni, 7 táncamar romuinn iar mbuaidh coscair 7 commáidme, 7 cinn na trí naonbar sin⁶¹ linn, 7 ár coin 7 ár n-eich 7 Artúir féin a láim co hairm i mbúi Find, co Senmagh n-elta nEdair.

⁵⁸ *Immoro*, omitted in Stokes’ edition.

⁵⁹ This first section of the genealogy is not found in Lismore. It is here given from the Rawlinson text (BL MS Rawlinson B 487).

⁶⁰ *Neith*, L.

⁶¹ *Sin* omitted by Stokes.

“Ocus táncamar isin pubaill i raibhe in ríghfheinnind, 7 atbert Cáilte:

“Doratsamar Artúir lind . co nderna a cura re Finn
cur‘ba óglách d’Fhinn iar sin . cusin laithi luid d’écoibh.”

7 tucsam in dana ech sin d’Fhinn .i. in feirech 7 in bainech, 7 is da shíl sin do bhí echradh na Fénne uili, ór nír‘ cleachtsat eich co sin. Ocus ruc in bainech ocht tairberta 7 ocht serraig gacha tairberta 7 tucadh do dronguibh 7 do deghdáinib na Fénne na serraigh sin, 7 dorónta carpuid acu iarsin.”

(“There was in the *Fían*, at that time, a warrior named Artúir. He was the son of Benne of the Britons and had a retinue of twenty-seven. Finn had arranged a hunt on *Benn Étar* ‘the Peak of Étar’ (Howth) and it was most successful. The hounds were set loose and Finn himself sat at *Carn in Féinneda* ‘the Cairn of the *Fían*-Warrior’, between Howth and the sea and revelled in the sounds of the frenzied deer swiftly brought down by the hounds of the *Fían*. Artúir, son of Benne of the Britons, was stationed on the coast, between the hunt and the sea, so that the deer might not escape by swimming away, and, while he was out by the edge of the water, he saw three of Finn’s hounds, Bran, Sceolaing and Adnuall. Artúir, son of Benne, decided then upon a plan. He, with his twenty-seven companions, would cross over the sea and take the hounds with them to their own land. They carried this out and, together with the three hounds, crossed the expanse of the sea. They took land at *Inber Mara Gainmech* ‘the Estuary of the Sandy Shoal’, in the territory of the Britons, and went ashore. They then went off to *Slíab Lodáin meic Lir* ‘the Mountain of Lodán, son of Lir’, and hunted there. The *Fían*, in the meantime, having ceased their hunting, made camp at the Peak of Étar, son of Étgáeth the Warrior (Howth), and began their customary tally of the hounds of Finn’s household, so that not a hound would be left behind in a thicket or on a mountain, or in any wood or hollow of the five great provinces of Ireland. Great was the number of the hounds, as the poet, Fergus Finbél ‘Wine-Mouth’, said:

Finn’s hounds, as many as the branches of a tree,
A pack of three hundred, with two hundred young.

“Great was the number who owned them,” said Patrick. “You are right about that,” said Cáilte, “for this was their number in the house of Finn:

“In Finn’s house, thrice fifty chiefs of handsome bands,
Two hundred fosterlings, three hundred servants.

“When they counted the hounds they discovered a great loss, that of Bran, Sceolaing and Adnuall, and this was reported to Finn and he ordered the three companies of the *Fían* to search for them. Though a search was made, the hounds were not found. A narrow basin of bright gold was then brought to

Finn. He washed his royal face and put his thumb under his Tooth of Wisdom so that the truth of the matter appeared to him. ‘It was Artúir, son of the King of the Britons,’ he said, ‘who took your hounds from you. Take nine men and go after them.’ “Nine were chosen, and these were their names: Diarmait, son of Donn, son of Donnchad, son of Dubán, of the *Érainn* from Munster in the south; and Goll, son of Morna.” “Was Goll the son of a king?” asked Patrick, “or the son of a warrior?” “The son of a king,” answered Cailte, and recited the following lines:

“The son of Tadg, son of Morna from the plain, son of Fáelán, son of
Feradach,
Son of Fiacha, son of Art from the plain, son of Muiredach, son of Eogan.

“A warrior skilled at magic was also in household of Finn, Cael Cródae Cé McGuinech ‘the Brave, Quick-Wounding’, the descendant of Nemnán. The strength of his magic was such that he never missed a cast, and any man that his hand bloodied died within nine days, if not at once, and no man he killed ever escaped from the house of Hell.

“O Cael, do not cast your spear, its shaft against me in the trees.
Each is powerless before it, his posterity tastes no food.
“My Tooth of Wisdom spoke to me, the first day you came.
He whose blood you shed, comes not again from Hell.

“Likewise Finn’s own son, Oisín, who never refused hospitality to anyone with a mouth for eating or legs for travelling.” “This is great praise, Cailte,” said Patrick. “It is true all the same,” said Cailte, and recited the following lines:

“Oisín never refused any man gold, silver or food,
And never asked a favour of those as great as kings.

“There also was Oisín’s son, Oscar, the king’s son who was the greatest man in Ireland in agility and weapon-handling, and Ferdoman, son of Bodb Derg ‘the Red’, son of the Dagda, Finn’s other sons, Raigne Rosclethan ‘the Wide-Eyed’ and Caince Corcairderg ‘the Purple-Red’, Glas, son of Aencherd Bérra, Mac Lugach and I,” said Cailte. “We were, Patrick, in our own estimation, such that, from Ceylon in the east to the Gardens of the Hesperides in the western part of the world, one could not find four hundred warriors that we would not trounce in battle or in combat. A white shield on each shoulder, a helmet on each head and two thrusting spears, with thongs of sturdy rope on their shafts, in each right hand.

“We continued on our journey until we came to the Mountain of Lodán, son of Lír, and before long heard voices close by of men hunting on the plain. Artúir, son of Benne of the Britons, was sitting there on his hunting mound with his retinue. We attacked them at once and killed all of his men, but Oscar with his two hands seized Artúir and spared him. We also recovered

our three hounds. Then Goll, son of Morna, looked around him and saw a dappled stallion, lustrous black, with a gold-ornamented bridle. To his left he saw a spirited, chestnut mare with a bridle of bright silver, textured and refined, and a bit made of gold. Goll captured both horses and entrusted them to Oisín, who gave them in turn to Díarmait, the descendant of Duibne. After celebrating our victory and triumph we returned with our hounds and horses, the heads of the twenty-seven retainers, and with Artúir himself as a captive to the Peak of Étar, son of Étgáeth the Warrior. From there we went to meet Finn at *Senmag nElta nÉtair* ‘the Old Plain of the Flocks of Étar’ and entered the chieftain’s tent. Caílte recited the following lines [to Patrick]:

“We brought Artúir here to make his peace with Finn.
He remained Finn’s warrior till the day he died.

“We presented the two horses, both stallion and mare, to Finn, and from this stock have come all of the horses of the *Fían* who had no horses before. The mare had eight foalings and bore eight foals on each occasion. These foals were given to the warriors and nobles of the *Fían*, who then built chariots.”

II

PERFORMING *CULHWCH AC OLWEN*

Sioned Davies

Culhwch ac Olwen, it has been said, is ‘a tale to be heard’.¹ Indeed, from the outset it would seem that, more than any other tale of the *Mabinogion* corpus, it was composed with a vocalised performance in mind. Of course, most medieval literature was ultimately written ‘to be heard’ – manuscript texts would be read out aloud to a listening audience. The demands of such a practice, together with the influence of the oral storytelling tradition, has certainly left its mark on the style and structure of the native tales of medieval Wales, as I have shown elsewhere.² Without a doubt, *Culhwch ac Olwen* needs to be performed if one is to do justice to the tale – as I hope to show in the course of this chapter, the voice is deeply inscribed into the work, and vocality is central to our understanding of the text.³

The essence of the tale is the international theme of the Giant’s Daughter: the hero seeks the maiden but her father is unwilling to give his consent and threatens to kill the hero or attempts to prove him by setting him difficult, if not impossible tasks.⁴ With the maiden’s help, or sometimes with the assistance of magical helpers, the hero succeeds and ultimately kills the giant. In the Welsh version of the tale, the theme is linked with that of the Jealous Stepmother – it is she who places a curse on the young hero, Culhwch, stating:

Tyghaf tyghet it na latho dy ystlys vrth wreic hyt pan geffych Olwen merch
Yspadaden Penkawr. (lines 50–51)⁵

¹ B. F. Roberts, ‘Tales and Romances’, in *A Guide to Welsh Literature I*, ed. A. O. H. Jarman and G. R. Hughes (Swansea, 1976), pp. 203–43 (p. 219). See also B. F. Roberts, ‘*Culhwch ac Olwen*, The Triads, Saints’ Lives’, in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. R. Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman and B. F. Roberts (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 73–95.

² S. Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd: Astudiaeth o dechnegau naratif yn Y Mabinogion* (Cardiff, 1995); S. Davies, ‘Written Text as Performance: The Implications for Middle Welsh Prose Narratives’, in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, ed. H. Pryce (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 133–48.

³ For discussions on the voice in medieval literature, see for example P. Zumthor, *La poésie et la voix dans la civilisation médiévale* (Paris, 1983) and *La lettre et la voix: De la ‘littérature’ médiévale* (Paris, 1987); D. H. Green, *Medieval Listening and Reading: The Primary Reception of German Literature 800–1300* (Cambridge, 1994). Issues related to performance in particular have recently been raised by E. B. Vitz, *Orality and Performance in Early French Romance* (Cambridge, 1999), and E. B. Vitz, N. F. Regalado, M. Lawrence, eds., *Performing Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

⁴ For an edition and discussion of the tale, see *Culhwch and Olwen: An Edition and Study of the Oldest Arthurian Tale*, ed. R. Bromwich and D. S. Evans (Cardiff, 1992).

⁵ Bromwich and Evans, *Culhwch and Olwen*. All quotations are taken from this edition. All translations are my own. For a translation of the complete text see, for example, *The Mabinogion*, trans. G. Jones

(I will swear a destiny upon you, that your side shall never strike against a woman until you win Olwen daughter of Ysbaddaden Chief Giant.)

These words act as a catalyst, and the young man sets off in search of his bride. The underlying structure of the tale is, therefore, quite simple. However, this basic pattern has been used as a framework to gather together an assortment of independent episodes, as well as a host of traditional characters.⁶ Moreover, Arthur and his men intrude in the form of Culhwch's helpers, and the young hero disappears, only to claim his bride in the last few lines of the tale. We are therefore presented with an inconsistent, undisciplined,⁷ and lengthy composition – *Culhwch ac Olwen* is one of the longest of our native medieval Welsh tales, approximately 12,700 words in the complete Red Book version.⁸ The main flaw in the structure, according to many critics, is that the listing of the tasks and their ultimate completion do not form a balanced unity – of the forty tasks that are set by the giant Ysbaddaden, only twenty-one are accomplished. But was there ever a version of the tale in which all forty tasks were successfully executed? Indeed, if we are to accept Carol Clover's theory, the long prose form never existed at all in the oral medium, and only came into being with the development of literary writing. She argues, with Kellogg, Finnegan and others, that the all-important unit in oral performance was the episode, which members of the audience could fit into the immanent 'whole', depending on their knowledge of that tradition.⁹ We would do well to consider this theory in the case of *Culhwch ac Olwen*. It would seem that there are two possibilities: firstly, the tale existed originally as a simple, straightforward folktale, with Culhwch accom-

and T. Jones (London, 1974, 2nd edn); *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales*, trans. P. K. Ford (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1977).

- 6 Indeed, much discussion has focused on the tale's motifs and conventions, together with its place in the international folktale repertoire. See, for example, K. Jackson, *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff, 1961); D. Edel, *Helden und Freierrfüßen: 'Tochmarc Emire' und 'Mal y kavas Culhwch Olwen'* (Amsterdam, 1980); Bromwich and Evans, *Culhwch and Olwen*, pp. xxvi–lxx. Particular emphasis has been placed on motifs and themes which can be paralleled in Irish literature. However, as argued convincingly by P. Sims-Williams, 'direct influence from Ireland to Wales or vice versa cannot be proved, still less knowledge of Irish literature on the part of the author of *Culhwch*' ('The Significance of the Irish Personal Names in *Culhwch ac Olwen*', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 29 (1982), 600–20 (p. 601)).
- 7 J. N. Radner, on the other hand, proceeds on the basis that the tale is a self-consciously composed text, and suggests that it is full of parody and humour. See 'Interpreting Irony in Medieval Celtic Narrative: The Case of *Culhwch and Olwen*', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 16 (1988), 41–59.
- 8 The Red Book of Hergest version (Jesus 111) is dated 1382 x c. 1410. An incomplete version has survived in the earlier White Book of Rhydderch (Peniarth 4 and 5), dated c. 1350. Bromwich and Evans date the earliest redaction of the tale to about 1100, and suggest tentatively that it could have been written at Carmarthen (*Culhwch and Olwen*, pp. lxxvii–lxxxiii). In a recent paper, presented at the 12th International Congress of Celtic Studies, Aberystwyth, 2003, Simon Rodway argued for a date of about 1150 at the earliest, based mainly on linguistic features.
- 9 C. J. Clover, 'The Long Prose Form', *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 101 (1986), 10–39; R. L. Kellogg, 'Varieties of Tradition in Medieval Narrative', in *Medieval Narrative: A Symposium*, ed. H. Bekker-Nielsen et al. (Odense, 1979), pp. 120–9; R. H. Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 109–10. In the context of the *Mabinogion*, see S. Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd*, pp. 37–9.

plishing all the tasks, perhaps with Olwen's help; Arthur and his men then intervened, and took ownership of the events. An alternative possibility is that the male and female protagonists – Culhwch and Olwen – were a deliberate creation on the part of the redactor as a vehicle to bring together numerous episodes that were already in circulation concerning Arthur and the Arthurian world.¹⁰ The fact that there are hardly any references to the hero and heroine outside the tale itself lends support to this second theory. Moreover, the title of the tale is revealing – although commonly known as *Culhwch ac Olwen* ('Culhwch and Olwen'), no title exists in the manuscript tradition, as indeed is the case with so many medieval texts. Very often the tale title, or a thematic label, is incorporated into a colophon,¹¹ and such a 'title' exists in this instance: 'Ac uelly y kauas Kulhwch Olwen merch Yspadaden Pennkawr' (And that is how Culhwch won Olwen, daughter of Ysbaddaden Chief Giant): this is no love story between a Romeo and his Juliet, but rather a tale that focuses on how the union itself was accomplished. When the text was first published in English, in the nineteenth century, Lady Charlotte Guest, the translator,¹² recognised the importance of the wild boar hunt in the narrative structure by naming the tale 'Killhwch and Olwen or the Twrch Trwyth'.¹³ Indeed, in her personal papers, the tale is sub-titled 'The Burrowing Boar'.¹⁴ There is no doubt that the hunt of the Twrch Trwyth lies at the core of the tale. According to Ford, this nucleus 'attracted other traditions that once were part of the lore concerning the Celtic swine god; no doubt the name Cul-hwch '-swine, -pig' was once part of these traditions'.¹⁵ Or was this onomastic merely another creation on the part of a redactor so obviously obsessed with word-play?¹⁶

An analysis of the narrative structure clearly reveals the episodic nature of *Culhwch ac Olwen*. The tale falls into three major sections, reflected in manuscript layout where a two- or three-line capital together with a new line occur at the beginning of Sections II and III:

¹⁰ Note that reference to Arthur's hunting of the mythical boar Twrch Trwyth is made in the *Mirabilia* of the *Historia Brittonum*, in the context of an onomastic tale related to Carn Cabal. Allusions in medieval poetry also show that traditions concerning the animal were well-known all over Wales. For further details on the Twrch Trwyth, see Bromwich and Evans, *Culhwch and Olwen*, pp. lxxv–lxxvii, and pp. lxxiv–lxxv for a discussion of the relationship between Arthurian material and the folk-tale framework.

¹¹ For a discussion of closing formulae in the *Mabinogion*, see Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd*, pp. 134–7.

¹² For a detailed discussion of Charlotte Guest as translator, or rather translatrix, see S. Davies, 'A Charming Guest: Translating the *Mabinogion*', *Studia Celtica* (forthcoming).

¹³ Literally translated the 'Boar Trwyth'. The original form of his name was *trwyd*, cognate with Irish *triath* 'king/boar'. See Bromwich and Evans, *Culhwch and Olwen*, pp. lxxv–lxxvi and 131.

¹⁴ Lady Guest's papers are currently held at the National Library of Wales.

¹⁵ Ford, *The Mabinogi*, p. 119.

¹⁶ See Bromwich and Evans, *Culhwch and Olwen*, pp. 46–7, and below, p. 50.

Kilyd mab Kelydon Wledic a uynnei wreic kynmwyd ac ef. Sef gwreic a uynnwys, Goleudyt merch Anlawd Wledic. Gwedy y west genti, mynet y wlat y gwedi malkawn a geffynt etiued. A chaffael mab ohonu trwy weti y wlad.

(lines 1–4)

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Arthur's men, and the list of tasks set by the Ysbaddaden, both of which are discussed in detailed below.¹⁹

Manuscript layout divides the tale into further sub-sections, by means of two- or three-line capitals and a new line in the text:

White Book

Section I

lines 1–113

1. Culhwch's birth
Stepmother's curse
Culhwch's journey to Arthur's court

lines 114–74

2. Ac y dyuu Glewlwyd y'r neuad. Amkawd Arthur vrthaw
...
(And Glewlwyd came into the hall. Arthur said to him . . .)
The porter Glewlwyd's oration
Arthur welcomes Culhwch to court

lines 175–357

3. Asswynaw y gyuarws ohonaw ar Kei a Bedwyr . . .
(He invoked his gift from him in the name of Cai and
Bedwyr . . .)
Culhwch lists Arthur's men

lines 358–73

4. Y am Wenhwyuar, Penn Rianed yr Ynys honn . . .
(As well as Gwenhwyfar, the Leading Lady of this Island
. . .)
Culhwch lists the ladies at court

lines 374–411

5. Arthur a dywawd, 'Ha unben . . .' (Arthur said, 'Well,
chieftain . . .')
Arthur sends messengers to seek Olwen
Attributes of Cai, Bedwyr, Cynddilig, Gwrhryr, Gwalchmai,
Menw

Section II

lines 412–758

1. Mynet a orugant hyd pan . . . (They travelled until . . .)
Custennin the Shepherd
Meeting with Olwen
Ysbaddaden sets the tasks

Section III

lines 759–824

1. Kerdet a orugant wy y dyd hwnnw educher . . .
(That day they travelled until evening . . .)
The Sword of Wrnach and the naming of Goreu

(Red Book)

lines 825–928

2. Dywedut a wnaethant y Arthur y ual y daruu udunt.
Arthur a dywawt, 'Pa beth yssyd iawnaaf ygeissaw gyntaf of
annoetheu hynny?'

¹⁹ See pp. 37–41.

- (They told Arthur what had happened to them.
Arthur said, 'Of those wonders, which is it best to seek first?')
- The freeing of Eiddoel
The Oldest Animals
The freeing of Mabon son of Modron
- lines 929–41 3. Dywedut a oruc Arthur, 'Beth iawnhaf weithon y geissaw yn gyntaf or annoethau?'
(Arthur said, 'Which of the wonders is it now best to seek first?')
- The Bitch of Rhymhi and her pups
- lines 942–52 4. Ac ual yd oed Gwythyr mab Greidawl dydgweith . . .
(And one day, as Gwythyr son of Greidawl was . . .)
The Lame Ant
- lines 953–84 5. Pan yttoed Gei a Bedwyr yn eisted ar benn Pumlumon . . .
(As Cai and Bedwyr were sitting on top of Pumlumon . . .)
The beard of Dillus the Bearded
- lines 985–1022 6. 'Ac yna y dywawt Arthur, 'Beth iawnaf weithon y geissaw o'r annoethau?'
(And then Arthur said, 'Which of the wonders is it best to seek now?')
- Gwyn ap Nudd and Gwythyr fight for Creiddylad
The slaying of Ysgithrwyn Chief Boar
- lines 1023–57 7. A gwedy llad Ysgithrwyn Benn Beid yd aeth Arthur a'e niuer . . .
(And after killing Ysgithrwyn Chief Boar, Arthur and his retinue went . . .)
The wounding of Menw son of Teirgwaedd
The cauldron of Diwrnach the Irishman
- lines 1057–1204 8. Ac yna y kynnullwys Arthur a oed o gynifywr . . .
(And then Arthur gathered together every warrior . . .)
Hunting of the Twrch Trwyth
- lines 1205–29 9. Dywedut o Arthur, 'A oes dim weithon or anoethau heb gaffel?'
(Arthur said, 'Are there any of the wonders still unobtained?')
- The blood of the Very Black Witch
- lines 1230–46 10. Ac yna y kychwynnwys Culhwch a Goreu . . .
(And then Culhwch set out, and Gorau . . .)
Killing of Ysbaddaden, and Culhwch marries Olwen

A comparison of the manuscripts versions shows that there are two major differences regarding layout. Firstly, in the Red Book, the list of Arthur's men (Section I.3) directly follows the preceding section, while Section II is divided into *two* sub-sections in the Red Book, by means of a new line and a two-line capital at the beginning of Ysbaddaden's list of tasks. Such a structural analysis gives us a better picture of how the redactor combined his sources, and of the very nature of those sources. We are also able to see how a scribe treats a long prose tale, a process influenced perhaps by the redactor himself.²⁰ As is apparent above, the sub-sections of Sections I and II are generally of a considerable length. However, those in Section III are very short, the exceptions being the seeking of Mabon (which includes the theme of the Oldest Animal) and the Hunting of the Twrch Trwyth.²¹ Section III is, therefore, extremely disjointed and fragmented, reflecting the redactor's attempt to draw together all kinds of independent episodes from different traditions. Indeed, some sub-sections are narrated in summary form – see, in particular, the two tasks at the end of sub-section 6:

A gwedy kymot y gwyrd a hynny uelly, y kauas Arthur Mygdwn march
Gwedw, a chynllyuan Cors Cant Ewin. (lines 1005–6)

(And having reconciled those noblemen in that way, Arthur secured
Myngddwn, Gweddw's steed, and the leash of Cors Hundred-claws.)

Some scholars have seen a similarity between this 'summary style' and that found in Old Irish tales, where the storyteller would expand when performing in front of an audience;²² others would argue that this reflects the difficulties of transcribing from an oral performance, and that 'several of the best manuscript texts begin well, but tail off badly as the story proceeds.'²³ *Culhwch ac Olwen* is certainly different to the other tales of the *Mabinogion* in this respect. Perhaps, as argued by Roberts, the redactor had taken too much on board – he was too ambitious, so that by the time he came to the kernel of his tale he had overspent himself;²⁴ perhaps he was running out of parchment; or

²⁰ The notion of scribe as performer has been explored by scholars such as A. N. Doane, 'The Ethnography of Scribal Writing and Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Scribe as Performer', *Oral Tradition* 9/2 (1994), 420–39. See also K. Busby, 'Mise en texte as Indicator of Oral Performance in Old French Narrative', in *Performing Medieval Narrative*, ed. Vitz, Regalado and Lawrence (forthcoming).

²¹ Note that there is no evidence of symmetrical composition, a feature apparent in other texts of the corpus (see Davies, 'Written Text as Performance', pp. 141–2). For examples of this feature in other traditions see, for example, P. Zumthor, *Histoire littéraire de la France médiévale* (Paris, 1954); H. Eggers, *Symmetrie und Proportion epischen Erzählens* (Stuttgart, 1956); J. D. A. Widdowson, 'Language and Performance: Dialect and Verbal Art in Newfoundland Oral Narrative', in *Fields of Folklore: Essays in Honor of Kenneth S. Goldstein*, ed. R. D. Abrahams (Bloomington, 1995) pp. 311–29 (p. 313).

²² See J. H. Delargy, 'The Gaelic Story-Teller', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 31 (1945), 172–221 (p. 206); Bromwich and Evans, *Culhwch and Olwen*, p. lxxi.

²³ E. Knott and G. Murphy, *Early Irish Literature* (London, 1966), pp. 98–9.

²⁴ B. F. Roberts, 'Tales and Romances', pp. 215–16.

he may have felt that certain episodes were better-known than others, and that there was no need to write them out in full.

One can certainly argue that the first two sections of the tale are more ‘fixed’ with a chronological, rational structure to the narrative. The redactor is here at his most creative, pushing conventional storytelling techniques to their limit. Several passages draw attention to themselves, in particular Glewlwyd’s oration, and the two long lists. There is no doubt that these, together with the descriptions of Culhwch and of Olwen, demand a voiced performance: they are reminiscent of the ‘runs’ of Irish story-telling, and also draw on conventions of the rhetorical tradition. The porter’s oration as he conveys to Arthur the nature of the young Culhwch, is characterised by repetition, alliteration and rhyming pairs; carefully structured, it is reminiscent of metrical verse in the Black Book of Carmarthen. In both manuscripts, the passage is set out in continuous prose, as is the case with all medieval Welsh poetry. I have chosen to follow the methodology of Dell Hymes and others in the field of ethno-poetics,²⁵ and have divided the prose into ‘lines’ in an attempt to transmit the rhythm and essence of the oral performance to the printed page:

Deuparth uy oet a dodyw
 a deuparth y teu ditheu.
 Mi a uum gynt yGhaer Se ac Asse,
 yn Sach a Salach,
 yn Lotor a Fotor.
 Mi a uum gynt yn yr India Uawr
 a’r India Uechan.
 Mi a uum gynt yn ymlad deu Ynyr
 pan ducpwyd y deudec gwystyl o Lychlyn.
 A mi a uum gynt yn yr Egrop,
 a mi a uum yn yr Affric,
 ac yn ynysoed Corsica,
 ac yGhaer Brythwch a Brythach a Nerthach.
 Mi a uum gynt pan ledeist ti teulu Gleis mab Merin,
 pan ledeist Mil Du mab Ducum.
 Mi a uum gynt pan wereskynneist Groec vrth parth y dwyrein.
 Mi a uum gynt yGhaer Oeth ac Anoeth,
 ac yGhaer Neuenhyr Naw Nawt:
 teyrndynyon tec a welsam ni yno,
 ny weleis i eirmoet dyn kymryt a’r hwnn yssyd yn drws y porth yr awr
 honn. (lines 116–28)

²⁵ See, for example, D. Hymes, ‘Ways of Speaking’, in *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*, ed. R. Bauman and J. Sherzer (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 433–51, and ‘Discovering Oral Performance and Measured Verse in American Indian Narrative’, *New Literary History* 8 (1977), 431–57. The ‘Mi a uum . . .’ (‘I have been . . .’) formula occurs elsewhere in Welsh: see, for example, a poem from the Black Book of Carmarthen, edited and discussed by B. F. Roberts, ‘Rhai o Gerddi Ymddiddan Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin’, in *Astudiaethau ar yr Hengerdd*, ed. R. Bromwich and R. B. Jones (Cardiff, 1978), pp. 311–18.

(Two thirds of my life have gone
and two thirds of your own.
I was once in *Caer Se and Asse*,
 in *Sach and Salach*,
 in *Lotor and Fotor*.
I was once in *India the Great*
 And *India the Lesser*.
I was once in the battle of the two *Ynyrs*
 when the twelve hostages were taken from *Llychlyn*.
And I was once in *Europe*,
 I was in *Africa*,
 and the islands of *Corsica*,
 and in *Caer Brythwch and Brythach and Nerthach*.
I was once there when you killed the warband of *Gleis son of Merin*,
 when you killed *Black Mil son of Dugum*.
I was once there when you conquered *Greece in the east*.
I was once in *Caer Oeth and Anoeth*,
 and in *Caer Nefenhyr Nine Streams*:
 fair kingly men did we see there,
 I never saw in my life a man as handsome as the one who is at the
 entrance to the gate this very moment.)

A similar principle is at work in a poem in the *Book of Taliesin*, where the lands conquered by Alexander are listed – some are identifiable, while others have probably been created to meet the demands of alliteration and internal rhyme. As noted by Haycock, ‘whether or not they actually existed was presumably of little consequence, for it was the aura of “foreign parts” which mattered above all’.²⁶

Turning to the two catalogues, it becomes apparent that both exist within a frame, where the opening words are repeated in the closing lines, a technique found in Welsh poetry of the period. Before the list of warriors at court, Arthur tells Culhwch:

‘Not a notty, a thi a’ e keffy, a notto dy benn a’ th dauawt.’ (line 171)

(‘Name what you will, and you shall have it, whatever your mouth and tongue may name.’)

to which Culhwch replies:

‘Nodaf arnat kaffel im Olwen merch Yspadaden Penkawr; ae hasswynaw a wnafar dy uilwyr.’ Asswynaw y gyuarws ohonaw ar Kei a Bedwyr . . .
(lines 173–5)

²⁶ M. Haycock, ‘“Some Talk of Alexander and Some of Hercules”: Three Early Medieval Poems from the *Book of Taliesin*’, *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 13 (1987), 7–38 (pp. 12–13). For parallels in Old English, see P. Sims-Williams, ‘The Significance of the Irish Personal Names in *Culhwch ac Olwen*’, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 29 (1982), 600–20 (p. 602), and Bromwich and Evans, *Culhwch and Olwen*, pp. 58–9.

(‘I ask that you get me Olwen daughter of Ysbaddaden Chief Giant; and I invoke her in the name of your warriors.’ He invoked his gift in the name of Cai and Bedwyr . . .)

The end of Culhwch’s catalogue echoes these opening lines:

Arnadunt oll y hasswynwys Kulwch mab Kilid y gyuarws. (line 373)

(In the name of all of them did Culhwch son of Cilydd invoke his gift.)

One could agree with Sims-Williams that the name-list may have existed as a ‘pre-existing composition’, or that sections may have been ‘lifted from other lists’.²⁷ Indeed, one can surmise that new names were added to the list at every stage up to the writing of the surviving manuscripts, in order to bring as many characters as possible under the umbrella of the Arthurian court.²⁸ In this passage, with its patronyms and epithets, alliteration and rhyme predominate; a definite beat or pulse emerges when the catalogue is read out aloud, so facilitating the mnemonic processes.²⁹ Indeed, one could argue that we have here the remnants of a catalogue poem, not unlike the *Pa gur yv y porthaur?* (‘What man is the gatekeeper?’) of the Black Book of Carmarthen with its rhyming couplets.³⁰ The long list certainly ‘brings the fiction to a standstill’.³¹ However, the listener’s imagination runs at full speed as the author presents visual images of the heroes at Arthur’s court, drawing on a wide range of traditions and bearing witness to the intertextuality of medieval narrative. Although some of the characters are merely named, such as Cai or Bedwyr, many carry epithets which conjure up a tantalising image – Canhastyr Canllaw (Canastyr Hundred-hands), Samson Finsych (Samson the Dry-lipped) – while the attributes of others are described in detail, for example:

- ²⁷ Sims-Williams, ‘The Significance of the Irish Personal Names’, p. 606. This article discusses in particular the significance of Irish personal names in the list, and in *Culhwch ac Olwen* in general. Name-lists, of course, are a common technique in several cultures, compare for example the Catalogue of Ships in the *Iliad*, the list of helpers in the *Argonautica* or Wolfram von Eschenbach’s list of names in his *Parzifal*.
- ²⁸ It is worth noting that Hywel Fychan, one of the main scribes of the main scribes of the Red Book of Hergest, had access to the White Book and inserted a passage on Gweff son of Gwastad into a blank space left in the text of *Culhwch* in that earlier exemplar. On the scribes of the Red Book, see G. Charles-Edwards, ‘The Scribes of the Red Book of Hergest’, *National Library of Wales Journal* 21 (1980), 246–56.
- ²⁹ Compare the ‘hwyl’ of the Welsh Nonconformist preaching tradition. See S. Davies, ‘Performing from the Pulpit: An Introduction to Preaching in Nineteenth-Century Wales’, in *Identifying the ‘Celtic’: CSANA Yearbook 2*, ed. J. F. Nagy (Dublin, 2002), pp. 115–40 (pp. 136–40). For a discussion of the importance of sound and memory processes, see D. C. Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions: The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-out Rhymes* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 65–89.
- ³⁰ For an edition of this poem, see B. F. Roberts, ‘Rhai o Gerddi Ymddiddan’, pp. 296–309. For a translation and detailed discussion, see P. Sims-Williams, ‘The Early Welsh Arthurian Poems’, in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. R. Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman, B. F. Roberts (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 33–71 (pp. 38–46).
- ³¹ Sims-Williams, ‘The Significance of the Irish Personal Names’, p. 602.

Moruran eil Tegit – ny dodes dyn y araf yndaw yGhamlan rac y haccred, pawb a tybygnt y uod yn gythreul canhorthwy; blew a oed arnaw mal blew hyd.

(lines 225–8)

(Morfran son of Tegid – no-one laid his weapon in him at Camlan because he was so ugly, everyone thought he was a demon helping; he had hair on him like a stag.)

Rather than note the characteristics of these heroes in abstract terms, the author chooses to do so by means of concrete images:³²

Drem mab Dremidydd, a welei o Gelli Wic yGherniw hyt ym Penn Blathaon ym Predein pan drychauai y gwydbedin y bore gan yr heul. (lines 261–3)

(Drem son of Dremidydd, who could see from Celli Wig in Cornwall as far as Pen Blathaon in Pictland when the fly would rise in the morning with the sun.)

Clust mab Clustueinat – pei cladhet seith vrhyt yn y dayar, deng milltir a deugeint y clywei y morrugyn y bore pan gychwhynnei y ar lwth. (lines 347–9)

(Clust son of Clustfeinad – were he to be buried seven fathoms in the earth, fifty miles away could he hear the ant stirring from its couch in the morning.)

Sometimes, however, as in the case of the place-names discussed earlier, the acoustic dimension takes over completely, as names are fabricated solely for the purpose of rhythm and sound. Again, I have divided the prose into ‘lines’ in an attempt to highlight the repetitive, alliterative and rhyming elements of the passage:

Bwlch a Chyuwlch a Seuwlch,
meibion Kledyf Kyuwlch,
vyron Cledyf Diuwlch.
Teir gorwen gwen eu teir yscwyd,
tri gouan gwan eu tri gwayw;
tri benyn byneu eu tri chledyf;
Glas, Glesic, Gleissat eu tri chi;
Call, Kuall, Kauall eu tri meirch;
Hwyr Dydwc a Drwc Dydwc a Llwyrr Dydwc eu teir gwraged;
Och a Garym a Diaspat eu teir vyryon;
Lluchet a Neuett ac Eissywed eu teir merched;
Drwc a Gwaeth a Gwaethaf Oll eu teir morwyn. (lines 333–40)

(Bwlch and Cyfwlch and Syfwlch,
sons of Cleddyf Cyfwlch,
grandsons of Cleddyf Difwlch.
Three gleaming glitterers their three shields,

³² Visual imagery is, of course, a widespread factor in mnemonic systems, as noted by Rubin and others – Homer, he notes, ‘has only concrete examples of heroism, wisdom and justice, not abstract statements’. See Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, p. 11.

Three stabbing strokes their three spears;
 Three keen carvers their three swords;
 Glas, Glesig, Gleisad their three hounds;
 Call, Cuall, Cauall their three horses;
 Hwyr Ddyddwg and Drwg Ddyddwg and Llwyrr Ddyddwg their three wives;
 Och and Garym a Diaspad their three grandchildren;
 Lluchet and Neuad ac Eisywed their three daughters;
 Drwg and Gwaeth and Gwaethaf Oll their three maidservants.)

Many of these proper names are no more than a play on words, for example Drwg, Gwaeth and Gwaethaf Oll are adjectives, translated as ‘Bad, Worse and Worst of All’, while Och, Garym and Diaspad are nouns meaning ‘Alas, Scream and Shriek’.³³ Passages such as this certainly highlight the challenges – and nightmares – that face a translator!

Turning to the second catalogue, namely Ysbaddaden’s tasks, we find once again that the redactor makes use of an external frame – the list opens and closes with words that strongly echo each other:

‘Pan gaffwyf inheu a nottwyf arnat ti, titheu a geffy uy merch.’ (lines 567–8)

(‘When I myself have got what I shall name to you, then you shall have my daughter.’)

‘Keis hynny. A ffan gaffer hynny, vym merch inheu a geffy.’ (lines 757–8)

(‘Seek those things. And when you get those things, my daughter, too, you shall have.’)

We are also reminded of the first catalogue, for Culhwch’s reaction to Ysbaddaden is:

‘Nod a nottych.’ (lines 568–9)

(‘Name what you will.’)

The tasks are listed within a dialogue, each one introduced by the same formula:

‘Hawd yw genhyf gaffel hynny, kyd tybyckych na bo hawd.’ ‘Kyt keffych hynny, yssyd ny cheffych.’ (lines 576–8)

(‘Easy for me to get that, though you may think it’s not easy.’ ‘Though you get that, there is something you won’t get.’)

which is then summarised in both the Red and White Books, in various permutations, until it is eventually reduced to two words:

³³ For further details, see Bromwich and Evans, *Culhwch and Olwen*, p. 102.

Hawd. Kyt.

(Easy. Although)

When reading the text aloud to an audience, the performer may well have been expected to learn this formula verbatim. Indeed, such a practice is seen in early Irish tales, where runs are often given in full the first time they occur, but are identified on later appearances with ‘a cue word or two and an etcetera’.³⁴ A second formula follows the naming of several tasks, when Ysbaddaden says:

‘Ny daw ef oe uod genhyt ti ny elly ditheu treis arnaw ef.’ (lines 480–1)

(‘He will not come willingly; nor can you force him.’)

followed by the formula ‘Hawd. Kyt.’ This section is, therefore, linked together by verbal repetition which functions as a chorus of sorts; as suggested by Matchak – ‘the formulas act as structural conjunctions which ease the process of listing the anoetheu’ – and, I would add, the process of listening to them.³⁵ It could be argued that formulae of this kind were an important part of the oral storyteller’s technique, giving the performer a chance to pause before proceeding with his list. Indeed, one could even envisage a situation where the audience would join in the repetition, and so become active participants in the performance itself.

A formula is also employed to narrate the accomplishing of the tasks. When Arthur first hears of the tasks, his words are:

Arthur a dywawt, ‘Pa beth yssyd iawnaſ y geissaw gyntaf o’r annoetheu hynny?’ ‘Iawnaſ yw,’ heb wynteu, ‘keissaw Mabon uab Modron . . .’

(lines 826–7)

(Arthur said, ‘Of those wonders, which is it best to seek first?’ ‘It is best,’ they said, ‘to seek Mabon son of Modron . . .’)

The formula occurs after the rescuing of Modron:

Dywedut a oruc Arthur, ‘Beth iawnaſ weithon y geissaw yn gyntaf o’r annoetheu?’ ‘Iawnaſ yw keissaw . . .’ (lines 929–30)

(Arthur said, ‘Which of the wonders is it now best to seek first?’ ‘It is best to seek . . .’)

and again after the episode of Dillus Farfog:

Ac yna y dywawt Arthur, ‘Beth iawnaſ weithon y geissaw o’r annoetheu?’ ‘Iawnaſ yw keissaw . . .’ (lines 985–6)

³⁴ A. Bruford, *Gaelic Folk-Tales and Mediaeval Romances* (Dublin, 1969), p. 47.

³⁵ S. Matchak, ‘Aspects of Structure and Folklore in *Culhwch and Olwen*’ (MA dissertation, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1975), p. 113.

(And then Arthur said, 'Which of the wonders is it best to seek now?' 'It is best to seek . . .')

At the end of the tale, having hunted the *Twrch Trwyth*, a variation on the formula occurs:

Dywedut o Arthur, 'A oes dim weithon o'r anoethau heb gaffel?'
(lines 1205–6)

(Arthur said, 'Are there any of the wonders still unobtained?')

It is evident, therefore, that this formula functions as a boundary between major episodes in the accomplishing of the tasks. Widdowson's analysis of Newfoundland narrative tradition points to a similar technique, where formulaic elements in the body of the tale can be regarded as 'focal points with which the audience can identify, and which the narrator may well use as markers on the cognitive map necessary for remembering and telling the tale'.³⁶

When Arthur himself is not involved in the action, the redactor employs a phrase related to time, together with the name of the main protagonist, to introduce a new episode, for example:

Ac ual yd oed Gwythyr mab Greidawl dydgweith yn kerdet dros vynydd . . .
(line 942)

(And one day, as Gwythyr son of Greidawl was travelling over a mountain . . .)

The episode concerning Dillus the Bearded begins in a similar fashion, the location – 'on top of Pumlumon' – fulfilling the same function as 'one day' in the previous opening-formula:

Pan yttoed Gei a Bedwyr yn eisted ar benn Pumlumon . . . (line 953)
(As Cai and Bedwyr were sitting on top of Pumlumon . . .)

The remaining three sub-sections are introduced by means of the 'journey' technique, that is, a change of location signals a new episode:

A gwedy llad Ysgithrwyn Ben Beid, yd aeth Arthur a'e niuer hyt yng Kelli Wic yng Kernyw. (lines 1023–4)

(And having killed Ysgithrwyn Chief Boar, Arthur and his host went to Celli Wig in Cornwall.)

Ac yna y kynnullwys Arthur a oed o gynifwr yn Teir Ynys Prydein . . . Ac yd aeth a'r niuerod hynny oll hyt yn Iwerdon. (lines 1057–60)

³⁶ J. D. A. Widdowson, 'Language and Performance', p. 314. He also points out that many of these formulaic elements 'are uttered with a markedly strong rhythm'.

(And then Arthur assembled every warrior there was in the Three Islands of Britain . . . And he took all those hosts to Ireland.)

Ac yna y kychwynnwys Culhwch . . . hyt y lys. (lines 1230–2)

(And then Culhwch set out . . . for his court.)

According to Rubin, invoking a highly developed spatial-memory system increases memorability – ‘if all the actions occurred at one place, more confusion and interference might occur’.³⁷ Indeed, later in the tale a series of images are tied to the wild boar hunt, together with associated onomastics, and as a result the order of events become much more stable.

It would seem, therefore, that formulae were extremely useful to the redactor as he attempted to link together the diverse material; at the same time, they provide a clear signal to a traditional audience and guide them through the narrative.³⁸ As noted earlier, Sections I and II are chronological and linear, focusing on Culhwch himself; however, when the narrative moves to describe the accomplishing of the tasks, the episodes are self-contained to a large extent, and focus on a range of protagonists. The narrative performance becomes much more flexible, for the episodes do not have to be presented in the same order with each retelling; indeed, the same episodes may not necessarily have been included in each performance.

Apart from linking separate episodes within the macro-structure of tales, verbal repetition is employed in varying degrees throughout the *Mabinogion* corpus to describe common events such as physical appearance, combat, horses, approach to a building, feasting, transition from one day to the next, openings and endings of tales. Such phrases suggest that the redactors were drawing on a common pool of formulae or traditional patterns.³⁹ Much has been written on the significance of the formula in oral poetry, ever since the work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord on Homeric diction and South Slavic heroic songs.⁴⁰ Although metre is an integral part of the Parry-Lord formula, many scholars have shown that formulae, or stereotyped forms of expression, are also a distinctive feature of orally transmitted *prose*.⁴¹ Thus, although our medieval Welsh tales are written compositions, formulae facilitated the retention, and therefore the reception, of the read or heard written text.⁴² However, in spite of *Culhwch ac Olwen*’s acclaimed ‘oral’ features, the tale

³⁷ Rubin, *Memory in Oral Tradition*, p. 62.

³⁸ For a detailed analysis of the strategic importance of formulae in the structure of other tales in the *Mabinogion* corpus, see Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd*, pp. 45–97.

³⁹ For a full discussion, see Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd*, pp. 104–88.

⁴⁰ M. Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. A. Parry (Oxford, 1971); A. B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960).

⁴¹ See, for example, R. H. Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford, 1970); Bruford, *Gaelic Folk-tales*; B. Rosenberg, *Can These Bones Live? The Art of the American Folk Preacher* (revised edn Urbano and Chicago, 1990).

⁴² See F. H. Bäuml, ‘Medieval Texts and the Two Theories of Oral-Formulaic Composition: A Proposal for a Third Theory’, *New Literary History* 16 (1984), 31–49.

contains surprisingly few examples of such formulae, reflecting perhaps the redactor's desire to break away from certain traditional techniques and become more creative and imaginative.⁴³ Greetings and oaths are kept to a minimum, partly due to the nature of the dialogue in the text which tends to be grandiose and pompous rather than informal. 'Henpych gwell' (Hail) is used twice, while oaths are limited to 'duw a wyr' (God knows), 'yr Duw' ('for God's sake'), 'myn y gwr an gwnaeth ni' (by Him who made us) and 'myn llaw uykgyueillt' (by the hand of my friend) which may well be a reference to Bedwyr who he is described as 'unllofyawc' (one-handed) in line 396. As we have seen, the tale does not open or close in the traditional way, while formulae commonly used to describe combat, or the approach to a building are again absent. As in most oral or orally derived tales, the day is the all-important unit in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, too: the narrative is set in the remote past but within this framework we have an inner framework where time is all-important and events are related to a very human time-scale. However, when the need arises to describe the transition from one day to the next, as in the account of the warriors' visits to Ysbaddaden's court, the redactor does not fall back on traditional formulae, but rather summarises events:

Gwest a orugant vy y nos honno yn ty Gustenhin. A'r eil dyt . . . y doethant y'r neuad . . . Kerdet a orugant wy y eu bwyd. A dyuod y trydydyt y'r llys . . . Mynet onadunt y eu bwyd. Tranhoeth y deuthant y'r llys. (lines 529–59)

(They feasted that night in Custennin's house. And the second day . . . they came into the hall . . . They went to their food. And they come the third day to the court . . . They went to their food. The next day they came to the court.)⁴⁴

Formulae are also commonly employed to describe horses and persons in the native medieval tales, and indeed, in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, Goreu is described as 'gwas pengrych melyn' (a yellow, curly-haired lad) following the traditional pattern. However, the description of Culhwch (together with his horse), and of Olwen are unusual, and lend themselves to a vocalised performance. The description of Culhwch, totalling some 220 words, makes an immediate impact:

Mynet a oruc y mab ar orwyd penlluchlwyd pedwar gayaf gauylgygwng carnragen . . . (lines 60–61)

⁴³ I have put forward similar arguments in my article 'O Gaer Llion i Benybenglog: Testun Llanstephan 58 o "Iarlles y Ffynnon"', in *Cyfoeth y Testun: Ysgrifau ar Lenyddiaeth Gymraeg yr Oesoedd Canol*, ed. I. Daniel, M. Haycock, D. Johnston and J. Rowland (Cardiff, 2003), pp. 326–48.

⁴⁴ Compare other tales in the corpus, where often every second is accounted for, e.g. 'Dilit y gyuedach a wnaethant ac ymdidan. A phan welsant uot yn well udunt kymryt hun no dilyt kyuedach, y gyscu yd aethant . . . A thrannoeth, kyudi a orugant pawb o niuer y llys.' (They continued the feasting and conversed. And when they saw that it was better for them to go to sleep than to continue with the feasting, to sleep they went . . . And the next day everyone in the court got up.) See I. Williams, ed., *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* (Cardiff, 1930), p. 31.

(Off went the boy on a steed with light-grey head, four winters old,
well-jointed stride, shell-like hoof . . .)

As noted by Roberts, ‘*gorwydd* “steed” has four compound adjectives, each with the same rhythm of a central stressed syllable flanked by unstressed syllables, *pennllùchlwyd*, *pedwargàfaf*, *gauylgýgwng*, *carngràgen*’.⁴⁵ Such a rhythmical pattern is employed consistently when horses are described in the native tales, reflecting an energy and dynamism.⁴⁶ Culhwch’s horse is the only animal in the *Mabinogion* referred to as a ‘*gorwydd*’, a term rare in medieval Welsh prose, but common in the poetry of the period. No details are given regarding the hero’s own appearance – everything is implied through his trappings, his weapons, his dogs, and of course his horse. The young animal – four winters old – reflects Culhwch’s youth and freshness; its hoof is hollow, like a shell – ‘*carngragen*’ is a word not attested elsewhere in Middle Welsh, but found in some later sources, although ‘*carngrwn*’ (round-hoofed) occurs in a dialogue poem in the Black Book of Carmarthen,⁴⁷ and ‘*llydangarn*’ (wide-hoofed) in *Geraint vab Erbin*,⁴⁸ while the sixteenth-century *Llyfr Marchwriaeth* (Book of Horsemanship) includes ‘broad-hollow’ hoofs among the traits of an ideal horse.⁴⁹ Two conventional formulae are embedded in the description:⁵⁰

Cledyf eurdwrn ar y glun (line 67)

(A gold-hilted sword on his thigh)

Llenn borfor pedeir ael ymdanaw, ac aual rudeur vrth pob ael iti (lines 76–7)

(A purple four-cornered mantle about him, with a reddish-gold apple at each corner)

However, the emphasis is on the exceptional and the extraordinary, and the continuous movement around Culhwch – ‘two spotted, white-breasted greyhounds’ play around him ‘like two sea-swallows’, while the clods of earth thrown up by the horse’s hoofs resemble four swallows in the sky. The hero, however, remains motionless – not even ‘a hair-tip stirred on him’.

Olwen, too, is vibrant, as suggested at the outset by the ‘flame-red’ of her robe. Once again the prose can be shown to fall easily into ‘lines’, based on repetition of syntactical patterns:

⁴⁵ B. F. Roberts, *Studies on Middle Welsh Literature* (Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter, 1992), p. 87.

⁴⁶ For a discussion on the description of horses in the *Mabinogion*, see S. Davies, ‘Horses in the *Mabinogion*’, in *The Horse in Celtic Culture: Medieval Welsh Perspectives*, ed. S. Davies and N. A. Jones (Cardiff, 1997), pp. 121–40, and Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd*, pp. 140–43.

⁴⁷ A. O. H. Jarman, ed., *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* (Cardiff, 1982), p. 71.

⁴⁸ R. L. Thomson, ed., *Ystoria Gereint uab Erbin* (Dublin, 1997), p. 39, line 1081.

⁴⁹ See C. O’Rahilly, ed., ‘A Welsh Treatise on Horses’, *Celtica* 5 (1960), 145–60, translated in part from L. Mascall’s *The First (Second, Third) Booke of Cattell* (London, 1587).

⁵⁰ For a discussion of descriptions of people in the *Mabinogion* corpus, see Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd*, pp. 144–58.

A'e dyuot hitheu a chamse sidan flamgoch amdaneî,
 a gordtorch rudeur am y mynwgyl y uorwyn,
 a mererit gwerthuawr yndi a rud gemmeu.
 Oed melynach y fenn no blodeu y banadyl.
 Oed gwynnach y chnawd no distrych y donn.
 Oed gwynnach y falueu a'e byssed
 no chanawon godrwyth o blith man grayan fynhawn fynhonus.
 Na golwc hebawc mut, na golwc gwalch trimut,
 nyd oed olwg tegach no'r eidi.
 No bron alarch gwynn oed gwynnach y dwy uron.
 Oed kochach y deu rud no'r fion.
 Y sawl a'e gwelei kyflawn uydei o'e serch.
 Pedeir meillonon gwynnyon a dyuei yn y hol myn yd elhei.
 Ac am hynny y gelwit hi Olwen. (lines 487–98)

(And she comes with a robe of flame-red silk about her,
 and a torque of red gold about the maiden's neck,
 studded with precious pearls and red jewels.
 Yellower was her hair than the flowers of the broom.
 Whiter was her flesh than the foam of the wave.
 Whiter were her palms and her fingers
 than moist cotton grass amidst the fine gravel of a bubbling spring.
 Neither the eye of a mewed hawk, nor the eye of a thrice-mewed falcon,
 No eye was fairer than hers.
 Than the breast of a white swan were whiter her breasts.
 Redder were her cheeks than the foxglove.
 Whoever saw her would be filled with love for her.
 Four white clover grew behind her wherever she went.
 And for that reason she was called Olwen.)⁵¹

She is described more fully than any other female character in the *Mabinogion*, and although the colour-comparisons are conventional,⁵² the careful structuring of the passage immediately sets it apart from anything else in medieval Welsh prose. As noted by Bromwich and Evans, both descriptions are examples of rhetoric or *araith*: 'passages of heightened prose in rhythmical periods, in which substantives may be welded into unfamiliar compounds and governed by a series of alliterating compound adjectives'.⁵³ The most developed examples of this style in Welsh can be found in the

⁵¹ Olwen literally means 'white track'. Bromwich and Evans (*Culhwch and Olwen*, p. lxxiii) note that the 'four white trefoils' left behind by Olwen recall the 'four sods' thrown up by Culhwch's horse. However, there may well be a play on words here, for the sods are compared to swallows – 'gwennawl' (Modern Welsh 'gwennol') – which is Olwen's name transposed. Moreover, Welsh 'gwennawl' is also the name for 'frog', that is the soft part in the middle of the horse's hoof, which may well have been the inspiration behind the redactor's comparison.

⁵² Compare Chrétien de Troyes's portraits. Note that he gives very few physical descriptions of his male protagonists, apart from Cligès. See J. J. Duggan, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (New Haven and London, 2001), pp. 196–303, and A. M. Colby's classic study, *The Portrait in Twelfth-Century French Literature: An Example of the Stylistic Originality of Chrétien de Troyes* (Geneva, 1965).

⁵³ Bromwich and Evans, *Culhwch and Olwen*, pp. lxxiii–lxxiv.

Areithiau Pros ('Prose Orations') preserved in manuscripts from the sixteenth century,⁵⁴ while parallels also occur in the later Middle Irish sagas and the rhetorical 'runs' of Gaelic folk-tales.⁵⁵ In all cases, a voiced performance is essential to do justice to the descriptions.

It would seem, then, that *Culhwch ac Olwen* has been composed with an oral performance very much in mind. The redactor's use of dialogue patterns in the tale bears further witness to this. When telling a story, the performer can choose whether to use direct or reported speech to recount events, the former creating a higher degree of involvement between the storyteller and his audience.⁵⁶ In eight of the eleven tales of the *Mabinogion*, statistics show that approximately 40 per cent of the narrative is in direct speech.⁵⁷ In *The Dream of Maxen*, *The Encounter of Lludd and Llefelys*, and *The Dream of Rhonabwy*, on the other hand, the average is halved, suggesting perhaps a greater distance between these texts and an oral performance – they are literary, artistic developments, intended for a different readership. Dialogue is used to various effects in the different tales – in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, for example the author introduces subtleties and witty exchanges into the characters' conversations. *Culhwch ac Olwen*, however, is extraordinary in that the redactor makes use of direct speech in a wide range of contexts, demanding a whole array of distinctive voices, from the long rhetorical outbursts of the porter, Glewlwyd, to the highly stylised dialogue in which Ysbaddaden lists the tasks; from the short, sharp exchange between Culhwch's stepmother and the old woman, to the formulaic exchanges between Arthur's men (who speak collectively)⁵⁸ and the Oldest Animals. The normal practice is to identify the speaker by means of a speech tag or lexical marker (e.g. pronoun/proper name + 'said') which often occurs in conjunction with the name of the person being addressed, or a reference to his/her status:⁵⁹

Amkawd y urenhines, 'Ha wrach, a dywedy di imi y peth a ouynnaf it yr Duw?' (lines 35–7)

⁵⁴ D. G. Jones, ed., *Yr Areithiau Pros* (Cardiff, 1934). One of these, 'Araith Iolo Goch' (The Oration of Iolo Goch), contains echoes of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, and is generally held to be a parody on the medieval tale. See also Roberts, 'Tales and Romances', p. 241.

⁵⁵ See Bruford, *Gaelic Folk-tales and Mediaeval Romances*.

⁵⁶ See, for example, W. L. Chafe, 'Integration and Involvement in Speaking, Writing and Oral Literature', in *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy*, ed. D. Tannen (New Jersey, 1982), pp. 35–53, and D. Tannen, 'Oral and Literate Strategies in Spoken and Written Narratives', *Language* 58 (1982), 1–21. For a discussion of dialogue in the *Mabinogion*, see Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd*, pp. 189–229.

⁵⁷ See my discussion in *Crefft y Cyfarwydd*, 198–99. Forty-five per cent of the Red Book text of *Culhwch ac Olwen* is in direct speech, or 43 per cent if one omits the two long catalogues which are both mediated via the characters' words.

⁵⁸ Tannen uses the term 'chorus dialogue', see her 'Introducing Constructed Dialogue in Greek and American Conversational and Literary Narrative', in *Direct and Indirect Speech*, ed. F. Coulmas (Amsterdam, 1986), pp. 311–32 (p. 314).

⁵⁹ See Bauman, *Story, Performance and Event*, pp. 66–7. For a detailed analysis of the speech tags in the *Mabinogion*, see Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd*, pp. 200–27.

(The queen said, ‘Hey old woman, will you tell me what I want to know, for God’s sake?’)

However, quotative frames are relatively scarce in *Culhwch ac Olwen*.⁶⁰ They are not essential in the case of recognizable conversational structures such as question and answer, and would certainly impede the rhythm of the formulaic dialogue between Ysbaddaden and Culhwch, for example. In the absence of textual markers, such passages are therefore only comprehensible by vocal differentiation, demanding mastery of intonation, pitch and accent.

Although prolonged dramatic scenes are embedded into *Culhwch ac Olwen*, it is not known whether the performer would have played all the roles and voices himself, or whether he would have been helped by fellow performers acting out the narrative in some way. There is certainly no direct evidence of this. However, it is clear that the tale invites gestures on the part of any performer.⁶¹ When Cai meets Custennin’s wife, he quickly sticks some wood from the woodpile into her open arms – ‘she squeezed the log until it was a twisted mass’.⁶² Similarly, Culhwch’s first meeting with Ysbaddaden lends itself to dramatic performance.⁶³ Firstly, he commands his servants to prop up his eyelids with forks so that he may see his prospective son-in law; then, every day for three days, he hurls a poisoned stone spear at the warriors;⁶⁴ they throw each one back at him and strike him through the middle of his knee-cap, in the middle of his breast, and finally through his eyeball ‘so that it comes out through the nape of his neck’. Each time, Ysbaddaden curses them as he reels in pain:

⁶⁰ Just as we today use typographical conventions to differentiate between speakers, so some medieval scribes use rubrication, in the absence of speech markers, to highlight character switching. See, for example, *The Dream of Rhonabwy* in the Red Book of Hergest where, in the absence of identification tags, the copyist often uses a rubricated capital to mark the new speaker’s words. These are noted in bold in the following example: ‘Idawc heb y ronabwy pwy y marchawc gynneu. **Y** gwas ieuanc kymhennaf a doethaf a wneir yn y teyrnas honn. Adaon uab telessin. Pwy oed y gwr . . . **G**was traws fenedic. Elphin uab gwydno’ (*The Text of the Mabinogion and Other Welsh Tales from the Red Book of Hergest*, ed. J. Rhŷs and J. G. Evans (Oxford, 1887), p. 150). For a discussion of dialogue in medieval French romance, see P. Zumthor, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’un style médiéval?’, in *Pour une anthropologie des voix*, ed. N. Revel and D. Rey-Hulman (Paris, 1993), 35–47, and Vitz, *Orality and Performance*, pp. 139–63.

⁶¹ On the significance of gestures in the *Mabinogion*, see S. Davies, ‘“He was the best teller of tales in the world”: Performing Medieval Welsh Narrative’, in *Performing Medieval Narrative*, ed. Vitz, Regalado and Lawrence (forthcoming).

⁶² See lines 458–64.

⁶³ See lines 521–58.

⁶⁴ The episode is centred on tripartite repetition. Repetition is generally regarded as one of the main characteristics of oral literature – this makes sense, in practice, because of the ephemeral nature of oral prose or poetry. See, for example, R. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 126–9; W. J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York, 1982), pp. 39–41; A. Olrik, ‘Epic Laws of Folk Narrative’, in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. A. Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1965), pp. 129–41. With particular reference to the *Mabinogion* corpus, and especially tripartite repetition, see Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd*, pp. 40–42.

Emendigeit anwar daw, hanbyd gwaeth yd ymdaaf gan anwaeret. Mal dala cleheren y'm tostes yr hayarn gwenwynic. Poet emendigeit y gof a'y digones a'r einon y digonet arnei, mor dost yw. (lines 525–8)

(Cursed, savage son-in-law, all the worse shall I walk down the slope. Like the sting of a gadfly has the poison iron pained me. Cursed be the smith who forged it and the anvil on which it was forged, it is so painful.)

Emendigeit anwar daw, mal dala gel bendoll y'm tostes yr hayarn dur. Poet emendigeit y foc yt uerwit yndi. Pan elwyf yn erbyn allt hatuyd ygder dwy uron arnaf, a chyllagwst, a mynych lysuwyd. (lines 540–44)

(Cursed, savage son-in-law, like the bite of a horse-leech has the hard iron pained me. Cursed be the furnace in which it was heated, and the smith who forged it, it is so painful. When I go up a hill I shall have a tight chest, and belly-ache and frequent nausea.)

Emendigeit anwar daw, hyt tra y'm gatter yn uyw hanbyd gwaeth drem uy llygeit. Pan elwyf yn erbyn gwynt berw a wnant; atuyd gal penn a ffendro arnaw ar ulaen pob lloer. Poet emendigeit foc yt uerwid yndi. Mal dala ki kyndeiravc yw genhyf mal y'm gwant yr hayarn gwenwynic. (lines 543–58)

(Cursed, savage son-in-law, as long as I live my eyesight shall be the worse. When I walk against the wind, they will water; I shall have a headache and giddiness with each new moon. Cursed be the furnace in which it was heated. Like the bite of a mad dog has the poison iron pierced me.)

There is a strong sense of the dramatic here, and a clear tendency towards the theatrical. Such passages invite immediate audience response and the written word comes alive, not only with the performer's voice but with the listeners' reactions.⁶⁵

Recourse to gesture and physical action are, of course, important factors bearing on memorability and memorisation – body movements such as rocking and swaying, for example, have long been recognised as common among oral performers.⁶⁶ The text of *Culhwch ac Olwen* is 'memory-friendly'⁶⁷ in other ways too, as we have already seen, with regard both to the structure of the narrative and the linguistic features: 'linking' formulae play an integral role in the make-up of the tale, providing markers on the

⁶⁵ On the general significance of reading out aloud, and the idea of 'interactive parchment', see J. Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge, 1996), and D. H. Green, *Medieval Listening and Reading*. Regarding the reading aloud of texts in medieval Wales, see S. Davies, 'Written Text as Performance'.

⁶⁶ In the context of medieval French romance, see Vitz, *Orality and Performance*, pp. 257–8. Compare the performances of Welsh dramatic preachers (see S. Davies, 'Performing from the Pulpit', p. 135), or the description of a congregation in Mississippi in the nineteenth century: 'The company has long been swaying back and forth in the rhythm of the preacher's chant' (B. Rosenberg, *Can These Bones Live? The Art of the American Folk Preacher* (Chicago, 1988), p. 15).

⁶⁷ Vitz's term, see *Orality and Performance*, p. 228. For general discussions, see F. A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, 1966), M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), and Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*.

cognitive map; rhythm and pulse facilitate the mnemonic processes; dramatic monologue and dialogue are more memorable than indirect discourse, especially, of course, if the characters involved are bizarre and extraordinary:⁶⁸ whether giant or witch, boar or herdsman, these all conjure up strange visual images that are likely to be remembered for a long time.⁶⁹ As noted by Ong, ‘colorless personalities cannot survive oral mnemonics’.⁷⁰ Of course, some of the characters would have been well-known to the audience – Arthur, Bedwyr and Cai, for example. Others, such as Culhwch and Olwen themselves, it has been suggested, were not traditional figures, and thus needed to be anchored mnemonically in the minds of the listeners. The redactor did this by supplying an etymological explanation on their names – Culhwch (meaning ‘pigsty’ according to the onomastic tale) is named after the place where the hero was born,⁷¹ while Olwen (‘white track’) owes her name to the flowers that bloom in her step. Place-names, too, have a direct link with the memorability of tale elements, the itinerary of the Twrch Trwyth being commemorated in toponyms spread over the southern half of Wales; as emphasised by Honko, place-names constitute a powerful guarantee for the perpetuation of tradition – they are a constant reminder of the significance of the place and the legends connected with it.⁷²

An attempt has been made to gauge the performability of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, not the ‘orality’ of the surviving text so much as ‘the degree to which the text promotes – and its readership continues – a tradition of reception’.⁷³ The audience must be able to recognise the signals, listen to the cues, in order to recover the performance-derived resonances of this medieval Welsh tale. Voice, or rather voices, are inscribed into the text, and the acoustic dimension is all-pervasive. We know very little of how the tale would have been performed publicly. Indeed, there was probably more than one mode of performance – we should be thinking in terms of a continuum from recitation from memory to public reading, and from ‘festive’ events to ‘ordinary’ moments.⁷⁴ It is unclear whether *Culhwch ac Olwen* would ever have been performed as a complete entity, even when read from a manuscript – the

⁶⁸ See Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, pp. 134–5, drawing on Cicero’s *Ad Herennium*.

⁶⁹ Vitz, *Orality and Performance*, p. 232. See also Rubin’s discussion on imagery and memory, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, pp. 39–64.

⁷⁰ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 70.

⁷¹ Lines 5–11. However, Bromwich and Evans argue that *cul* in this context means ‘lean, slender’, a meaning attested in poetry preserved in the Black Book of Carmarthen. See *Culhwch and Olwen*, p. 46–7.

⁷² L. Honko, ‘Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition’, *Studia Fennica* 26 (1981), 19–33, p. 22. See also J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1973), p. 38. For a discussion of onomastic material in the *Mabinogion*, see T. G. Hunter, ‘Onomastic Lore in the Native Middle Welsh Prose Tales’ (MPhil dissertation, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1988).

⁷³ J. M. Foley, ‘Oral Tradition and the Homeric Hymn to Demeter’, in *Hommage à Milman Parry: Le style formulaire de l’épopée homérique et la théorie de l’oralité poétique*, ed. F. Létoublon (Amsterdam, 1997), pp. 201–13 (p. 202).

⁷⁴ Compare Vitz’s discussion on the ‘modalities of performance’ in *Orality and Performance*, pp. 164–227.

notion of the ‘immanent’ whole may have existed, but individual episodes, rhetorical orations or even formulaic dialogues may well have been narrated independently, with no recourse to a ‘complete’ text – the responsibility for fitting the performance into the wider tradition lay with members of the audience. Likewise they were expected to contextualise references such as:

Teithi Hen mab Gwynhan a weryskynnwys mor y kyuoeth, ac y dihengis ynteu
o ureid ac y doeth ar Arthur. (lines 245–6)⁷⁵

(Teithi the Old, son of Gwynnan, whose kingdom the sea overcame, and he
escaped with difficulty and came to Arthur.)

One could argue that the same is true of many of the monologue and dialogue poems found in manuscripts such as the mid thirteenth-century Black Book of Carmarthen.⁷⁶ Some scholars have argued that these represent the remnants of Welsh narratives whose prose setting has been lost – indeed, their context is often unclear.⁷⁷ However, as argued by Roberts, ‘it may not always be necessary to postulate a narrative setting in a strict sense, but rather the context of an established character or role within the story tradition’.⁷⁸ *Culhwch ac Olwen* is essentially a prose tale: in its present form it contains just one overt example of poetry, in the form of a single three-line *englyn*. Yet, the tale’s rhetorical style is reminiscent of the elaborate diction of the Gogynfeirdd, the court poets of medieval Wales, while it shares many of its themes with the Arthurian poems of the Black Book of Carmarthen and the Book of Taliesin – the slaying of witches and giants, the hunting of malevolent beasts, the freeing of prisoners, the winning of magical objects. Indeed, in *Culhwch ac Olwen* we have a fusion of the world of the poet and that of the storyteller, culminating in a unique theatrical experience.

⁷⁵ Many medieval Welsh sources allude to the inundation of land, especially of the coastal areas. See Bromwich and Evans, *Culhwch ac Olwen*, pp. 87–8.

⁷⁶ For an edition, see Jarman, *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*. The manuscript is discussed by D. Huws in *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Cardiff and Aberystwyth, 2000), pp. 70–72.

⁷⁷ The theories are discussed and the dialogue poems edited by Roberts, ‘Rhai o Gerddi Ymddiddan Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin’.

⁷⁸ B. F. Roberts, ‘From Traditional Tale to Literary Story: Middle Welsh Prose Narratives’, in *The Craft of Fiction*, ed. L. A. Arrathoon (Rochester, 1984), pp. 211–30 (p. 212).

III

COURT AND CYUOETH: CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES' *EREC ET ENIDE* AND THE MIDDLE WELSH *GEREINT*¹

Helen A. Roberts

Much of the criticism surrounding the three romances of Chrétien de Troyes in relation to their Middle Welsh counterparts has concerned itself with according precedence to one text over the other. The similarity of plot in the three pairs of texts has encouraged this trend, and the texts are often compared with little concern for the fact that Chrétien's romances and the Middle Welsh tales belong to very different literary traditions. Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide*, *Le Conte du graal* (*Perceval*) and *Le Chevalier au lion* (*Yvain*), composed in the last quarter of the twelfth century, belong to a continental tradition of romance. Their Middle Welsh counterparts, *Gereint*, *Peredur* and *Owein*, on the other hand, display the characteristic features of a Middle Welsh prose tradition.² The three Middle Welsh tales, of uncertain authorship, have traditionally been referred to as 'the three romances' because of their connection with their French counterparts, a designation which overlooks this generic difference. The ongoing debate, the *Mabinogionfrage*, has been especially concerned with the romance of *Erec et Enide* and the Welsh *Gereint*, being the most similar pair.³ The most

¹ An earlier version of this paper was read at the conference of the British Branch of the International Arthurian Society in Bristol in September 2001. All references are to the following editions: Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, ed. J.-M. Fritz (Paris, 1992); *Ystoria Gereint Uab Erbin*, ed. R. L. Thomson (Dublin, 1997). All translations are my own.

² On the characteristics of the Middle Welsh prose tradition, see Sioned Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd: Astudiaeth o dechnegau naratif yn Y Mabinogion* (Cardiff, 1995), esp. pp. 78–93, 209–19; R. M. Jones, 'Narrative Structure in Medieval Welsh Prose Tales', in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Celtic Studies* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 171–87.

³ For a summary of early opinions on the *Mabinogionfrage*, which makes particular reference to *Erec et Enide* and *Gereint*, see J. D. Bruce, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance*, 2 vols. (Göttingen, 1928), II, 59–74. More recent surveys of the *Mabinogionfrage* can be found in R. M. Jones, 'Y Rhamantau Cymraeg a'u Cysylltiad â'r Rhamantau Ffrangeg', *Llên Cymru* 4 (1957), 208–71; R. Bromwich, 'First Transmission to England and France', in *The Arthur of the Welsh: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature*, ed. R. Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman and B. F. Roberts (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 273–98, esp. pp. 282–90. On *Gereint* and *Erec et Enide*, see further R. Middleton, 'Studies in the Textual Relationships of the Erec/Gereint Stories', 2 vols. (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1976).

obvious difference between the Old French romances and their Middle Welsh counterparts is stylistic: Chrétien's tales are written in octosyllabic rhyming couplets, whereas the Welsh narratives are in prose. However, *Gereint* and *Erec et Enide* share an almost identical episodic structure based on six principal episodes:

1. Departure – the hero departs from Arthur's court for the hunt of the white stag and subsequently seeks out the knight who insulted the queen
2. Combat – the sparrowhawk contest, in which the hero succeeds in overcoming his enemy
3. Marriage and return to father's lands
4. Crisis and Forest episode
5. Reconciliation
6. The *joie de la cour* ('joy of the court')/ *cae niwl* ('hedge of mist') episode⁴

A further episode in *Erec et Enide*, the coronation of the hero at Nantes, is absent from *Gereint*. Other than this minor difference at the end of the text, the tales differ only in respect of the formal prologue to Chrétien's romance, which is absent from the Welsh *Gereint*. However, whilst the plot of the two tales may be almost identical, the two redactors make very different narratives of their material. This paper will examine the different settings of the two narratives, Chrétien's court and the Middle Welsh redactor's *cyuoeth* (possessions, lands, domains), evaluating the bearing which these have on meaning in the texts.

Erec et Enide, in common with Chrétien's other romances, centres on the Arthurian court. The formula here is repeated in *Le Chevalier au lion* and *Le Chevalier de la charrette*: the narrative opens in Arthur's court, the knight departs in search of an *aventure*, and significantly, the narrative ends at Arthur's court. There is little sense of realistic depiction in the Arthurian court; although at the beginning of the romance, Arthur holds court in *Caradigan(t)*, the whereabouts of this town in West Wales, is never explicitly stated.⁵ Moreover, in so far as it would have been completely unfamiliar to Chrétien's audience it is as unreal as the fictional cities of *Lalut* (v. 6241 etc.) and *Carrant* (v. 2311). Nor is an explanation given for the mobility of the court; later in the narrative, Arthur may be found in Tintagel, Rohais, Carduil or Nantes. The geography of Arthur's Britain in *Erec et Enide* is extremely vague. The distinctions made between 'Logres' and 'Gales' or between 'Breteigne' and 'Engleterre' in Chrétien's later romances are absent from

⁴ Thomson gives a detailed summary of *Erec et Enide* and *Gereint* alongside the Norse and German versions of the tale in his edition, *Gereint*, pp. xxv–li.

⁵ The choice of Cardigan here is interesting, as the town was called *Din Gereint* (the town of Gereint) in medieval Wales, suggesting a possible link with the Middle Welsh *Gereint*, or reliance on a Welsh source. See *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads*, ed. R. Bromwich (Cardiff, 1961), pp. 359–60 and n.

Erec et Enide.⁶ When Erec ultimately leaves for his father's court, we might well ask where precisely this is. Erec himself refers to 'la terre/ Qui mon pere est et moie après./ Loign est de ci, non mie pres' ('the land which belongs to my father and will come to me afterwards. It is far from here, not at all near'); the redundancy of the statement captures the sense of the lack of a precise location. The later precision that Lac's realm is situated in 'Outre Gales' (v. 1870) ('Beyond Wales') is hardly more revelatory. None of the 'riches citez' (v. 3878) ('wealthy cities') in his kingdom are named. Elsewhere in the narrative, the geography is equally as vague, with Erec taking part in a tournament at an imprecise location somewhere between *Danebroc* (Edinburgh) and *Eüroc* (York), a considerable geographical space.

Where place names are given, they are typically used descriptively. Provenance is often used to indicate the value of a high-status item: thus Erec arms himself on a 'tapiz de Lymoges' ('a rug from Limoges') (v. 2624) and mounts a 'bai de Gascoigne' ('a Gascon bay') (v. 2659). Similarly, place names are used to evoke occasions of high ceremony; the grandeur and importance of an occasion is signalled by the presence of people from different areas. Thus, at the very end of the text, we find the home countries of those present at Erec's coronation detailed:

De mainte diverse contree
 I ot contes et dus et rois,
 Normanz, Bretons, Escoz, Irois;
 D'Engleterre et de Cornuaille
 I ot mout riche baronaille;
 Et des Gales jusqu'en Anjou,
 Ne ou Mainne ne en Poitou
 N'ot chevalier de grant affaire
 Ne riche dame debonaire,
 Que les meillors et les plus gentes
 Ne fussent a la cort a Nantes (vv. 6636–46)

(There were present counts and dukes and kings from many different countries, Normans, Bretons, Scots, Irish; there were very rich noblemen from England and from Cornwall and from Wales to Anjou, nor was there any knight of great estate or any wealthy and noble woman from either Maine or Poitou, that the best and the most worthy amongst them was not present at the court at Nantes)

The precision of a location here along with the timing of the event at Christmas is perhaps motivated by a topical event in the rule of Henry II, namely the coronation of his son Geoffrey in 1169; as Topsfield notes, the

⁶ See, for example, the prologue to *Cligès* which speaks of 'Engleterre./ Qui lors estoit Breteigne dite' ('England, which was then called Britain'): Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, ed. C. Méla and O. Collet (Paris, 1994), vv. 16–17. The greater geographical precision to be found in the later romance suggests that Chrétien may have been familiar with England: see C. Bullock-Davies, 'Chrétien de Troyes and England', *Arthurian Literature* 1 (1981), 1–63.

guests all hail from the lands of this king.⁷ However, the possible allusion does not lead to a greater sense of realism in the depiction of the court. The scale of the event transcends the boundaries of realism as is consistently underlined by the narrator:

Or ne porroit langue ne boche
De nul home, tant sache d'art,
Deviser le tierz ne le quart
Ne le quint de l'atornement
Qui fu a son coronement. (vv. 6694–8)

(Neither the tongue nor the mouth of any man, however gifted, could describe a third or a quarter or a fifth of the preparations for his coronation.)

The occasion ultimately becomes an excuse for a meditation on the abstract virtues which characterise Erec in the description of his robe. The interest is in the sense of occasion rather than in a precise location.

The Arthurian court exists simply as a setting for the narrative, providing the impetus for chivalric endeavour. As Jackson comments,

At this court, two situations predominate, intimately connected with each other – love service and adventure. These two are entirely personal matters, affairs which cannot by any means be called public or have any social significance in normal society. Yet, the Arthurian court, as it is portrayed in the fully developed romance, exists only as a stage for these exploits, not as a political entity. It does not rule a land – or if it does, that rule is of no significance. It fights no wars, it has no political enemies.⁸

This is equally true of the courts of those who inhabit the nebulous lands surrounding Arthur's kingdom. Enid's father may say that he has been 'toz jors en guerre' (515) ('always at war'), but this is simply offered by way of explanation of his poverty and is not a primary interest in the narrative, nor is war an immediate threat. His lack is swiftly resolved by Erec with the gift of the two castles of Roadan and Montrevel, whilst Enide is to be made queen over three cities. Later, we are told of the fortifications surrounding Evrain's castle, Brandigan,

Mais fermer ne le fist il mie
Por ce qu'il dotast nules genz,
Mais li chasteax en est plus genz (vv. 5400–402)

(But he did not have it fortified because he feared anyone, but because the castle is the more beautiful for it.)

⁷ L. T. Topsfield, *Chrétien de Troyes: A Study of the Arthurian Romances* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 57–8.

⁸ W. T. H. Jackson, 'The Nature of Romance', *Yale French Studies* 51 (1974), 12–25 (p. 18). The siege at Windsor in *Cligès* is of course an exception to the general lack of warfare in Chrétien's romances.

Defence is not a necessity but an ornament, and political struggles lie outside the scope of Chrétien's romance.⁹

In depicting life at the court, Chrétien's interest is in the 'colourful surface'¹⁰ of ceremonial occasions rather than with reflecting contemporary reality. In *Erec et Enide*, the Arthurian court is defined from its first appearance by the qualities of the knights and ladies who are in attendance, with little sense of the impact of exterior events:

Onc si riche ne fu veüe,
Car mout i ot boens chevaliers,
Hardiz et corageus et fiers,
Et riches dames et puceles,
Filles de rois, gentes et beles. (vv. 30–34)

(Never was [a court] so rich seen, because there were present many worthy knights, bold and brave and proud, and noble ladies and maidens, daughters of kings, gracious and beautiful.)

A showcase for chivalric virtues, it deals in abstract qualities and superlatives, presenting us with an ideal cast of knights, from which one will be selected. The chivalric and amatory spirit of the court in *Erec et Enide* is immediately captured by the hunt for the white stag. The hunt, we are told, is a custom at Arthur's court: whoever should kill the stag may bestow a kiss on the most beautiful lady at the court. Already, then, the link between chivalry and love is emphasised. The knights undertake the *aventure* of the white stag as a form of love service.

Although the knight is nominally part of a fellowship of knights at the court, it is clear that the ideal of love service threatens this; as Gauvain's warning to Arthur indicates, the custom of the white deer is potentially divisive:

Maus en porroit avenir granz:
Encor a il ceanz .v^c.
Damoiseles de hanz parages,
Filles de rois, gentes et sages,
Et n'i a nule n'ait ami
Chevalier vaillant et hardi,
Que chascuns desranier voudroit,
Ou fust a tort ou fust a droit,
Que cele qui lui atalante
Est la plus bele et la plus gente. (vv. 49–58)

(Great evil could come of it: in this court there are five hundred maidens of noble birth, daughters of kings, gracious and wise, and there is none who

⁹ Cf. Guivret who asserts that he fears none of the neighbours whose lands border his, vv. 3865–71.

¹⁰ E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. W. R. Trask (New York, 1957), p. 136.

has not a valiant and brave knight for a lover, of whom each would wish to defend, whether it be justified or not, that she who is dear to him is the most beautiful and the most worthy.)

Arthur, however, rejects Gauvain's warning, asserting instead the priority of the *costume*, which will be upheld 'que que il m'an doie avenir' (v. 1810) ('whatever the consequences of it for me'); the rules governing behaviour at the Arthurian court are not subject to rational or logical order.

The contest which Erec undertakes against Yder, like the hunt for the white stag, is based entirely on the idea of the lady's beauty as a motivation for chivalric action. Chrétien subscribes to a concept of idealised love service where Enide is both the motivation for chivalric action and its reward. The image of the mirror in Enide's description depicts the ultimately narcissistic quality of the love ethic in *Erec et Enide*:

Ce fu cele por verité
Qui fu faite por esgarder,
Qu'en li se peüst on mirer
Ausi con en un mireour. (vv. 438–41)

(Her beauty was such that it was created to be gazed at, so that one could look on her as in a mirror.)

Enide is entirely constructed by Erec's gaze and denied any independent significance. The mirror conveys an image which is out of reach, the goal for which Erec strives. Enide is a silent figure, an image rather than a real person.¹¹

If Erec had left Arthur's court in order to serve his queen, Guenièvre, this motivation is soon displaced by his love for Enide, both in the sparrowhawk contest and in the narrative which follows. Indeed, the decisive blow is struck when the hero looks on his lady, demonstrating the interrelationship of love and chivalry:

Erec regarde vers s'amie
Qui mout doucement por lui prie.
Tot maintenant qu'il l'a veüe,
Li est mout grant force creüe.
Por s'amor et por sa beauté
A reprise mout grant fierté.
Remembre li de la roïne,
Cui il ot dit en la gaudine
Que il la honte vengeroit
Ou il encor l'a[n]grigneroit. (vv. 911–20)

¹¹ On the use of the image of the mirror in Chrétien's romances see further H. A. Roberts, 'Romance Idealism and Insular Realities: Chrétien de Troyes, the Middle Welsh 'Romances' and the English Tradition' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Reading, 2002), pp. 48–51.

(Erec looks towards his friend who prays most sweetly for him. As soon as he saw her, he was filled with great strength. Because of her love and her beauty he regained very great valour. He remembers about the queen, to whom he had pledged that he would avenge her shame or that he would make it greater.)

His thoughts of the queen are secondary to his love of Enide, which is the immediate motivation for his renewal of strength. The theme of the love of Erec and Enide and the marriage preparations subsume the memory of the blow struck by Yder's dwarf. The Arthurian court, more concerned with aesthetics than legalities, swiftly pardons Yder and moves on to the *costume* of the hunt of the white stag.

Like the sparrowhawk contest, the custom of the white stag is a competition to find 'la plus bele', a distinction which is once more awarded to Enide. The discord which Gauvain had feared is averted as all assert this univocally, 'Tuit l'otroient comunemant' (v. 1824); the dissenting voices are silenced. The primary function of the Arthurian court is seen to be narrative rather than social: to gather together a store of chivalric protagonists. Whilst all present at Arthur's court are distinguished for their beauty, the romance narrative demands the elevation of the main protagonists above all others. Thus the marriage celebrations at the court confirm the surpassing beauty and worthiness of Erec and Enide.¹²

Erec is one of Arthur's knights, one protagonist among a group of potential candidates. There is little sense of his having a political role or an individual identity away from Arthur's court. Although identified by the patronymic *fils Lac* there is no perceptible change in his status when he does return to his father's court; he is simply a satellite of the Arthurian court, his status defined by the king, who both presides over his marriage and, at the end of the narrative, his coronation. Divorced from the setting of Arthur's court, married to Enide, the impetus for chivalric endeavour is lost; the formula is incomplete. This entails an end to chivalry, and consequently the stagnation of narrative, leading to a crisis, to which I shall return after examining the setting of *Gereint*.

Whilst the narrative of *Gereint*, in common with *Erec et Enide*, begins in Arthur's court, it has a very different place in the Welsh narrative. If the narrative of romance is set against a fictional landscape, then the Welsh tale is far from conforming to this expectation; the Welsh redactor endows the description of Arthur's court with a wealth of realistic detail which stands in contrast with the vague backdrop of Chrétien's romance. The Arthur of *Gereint* holds his court at Kaerllion ar Vysc (Caerleon-on-Usk),¹³ a location

¹² Both Erec and Enide are described as being beautiful *a desmesure* ('to excess'/'immoderately') (v. 1480 and v. 5512).

¹³ This follows Geoffrey of Monmouth as opposed to the Welsh tradition, as seen in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, which locates Arthur's main residence in Celli Wig in Cornwall. On the possible debt of the opening

which is not simply stated, as is Chrétien's *Caradigan*, but one which is rationalised, 'canys hygyrchaf lle yn y gyuoyth oyd Gaerllion y ar uor ac y ar dir' (lines 3–4) ('because it was the most accessible place in his *cyuoeth*, over sea or land'). In contrast with the abstract court of the French romance, the idea of *cyuoeth* refers to the concrete and substantial, hence the abundance of topographical detail with which the redactor of the Welsh tale provides us. The audience of the tale would have concurred with the redactor that Caerleon was 'accessible by sea and land' in its location near to the modern day border between England and Wales, close to the Severn estuary.

The action of the tale is localised in a fairly small geographical area, unlike Chrétien's tale which ranges from Nantes to Edinburgh with barely a nod to the vast distances which would have been covered. The Welsh redactor must have had knowledge of the locality and seems to expect such knowledge on the part of his audience too.¹⁴ This is especially clear in the first part of the tale and the narration of the hunt where the stag is said to have been sighted close by in the forest of Dean, as distinct from the unidentified *forest adventurous* (v. 65) ('forest of adventure') of Chrétien's romance; the course of the hunt follows the Roman roads which made Caerleon so 'accessible' in Arthur's estimation.¹⁵ The river Usk is referred to frequently as Arthur's men, and later Gereint, journey through the surrounding countryside.¹⁶ Later in the narrative, when Gereint returns to take up rule in Cornwall, he is said to cross the *Hafren* (line 621) (Severn). The competition to win the sparrowhawk takes place in *Cayrdyf* (Cardiff), a location which would have suggested itself to the audience of the tale in its proximity to Caerleon. The fact that the narrator introduces this part of the narrative with the words 'Sef ford y kerdassant' (line 164) ('this is the way they travelled') focuses the audience's attention on the detail in the depiction of the journey. Indeed, the Welsh redactor seems to play on this local knowledge by only identifying the town retrospectively in the mouth of Edern who, states that the competition took place in 'y dref a elwir yrawron Cayrdyf' (line 457) ('the town that is called Cardiff nowadays'). The use of the word *yrawron* ('nowadays') appeals to the modern audience rather than the audience

passage of *Gereint* to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, see R. Middleton, 'Studies in the Textual Relationships of the Erec/Gereint Stories', 2 vols. (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1976), I, 187–200.

¹⁴ The three Middle Welsh 'romances' have traditionally been thought to have been composed in the border region in South Wales. However, more recently, it has been argued that *Peredur* may have been composed in the North of the country. See P. W. Thomas, 'Cydberthynas y Pedair Fersiwn Ganoloesol', in *Canhwyl Marchogyon: Cyd-destunoli Peredur*, ed. S. Davies and P. W. Thomas (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 10–49.

¹⁵ See *Gereint*, pp. 64–5 on the topography here.

¹⁶ Middleton suggests that the Welsh redactor may not have had 'first hand' knowledge of the area because he incorrectly refers to the crossing of the Usk through a ford: see R. Middleton, 'Chwedl Gereint ab Erbin', in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. Bromwich et al., pp. 147–57 (pp. 150–51).

addressed by Edern as this is ‘an impossible expression in the mouth of one of the characters’.¹⁷

Arthur himself is a much more active figure than his counterpart in Chrétien’s romance. Whilst our first introduction to Chrétien’s Arthur is to a figure who imposes the arbitrary rule of *costume*, in the Welsh tale, Arthur takes a very different view of the hunt. Unlike Chrétien’s Arthur, who has his authority compromised by Gauvain’s intervention, in *Gereint*, Arthur’s authority is appealed to as a forester requests his *cyghor* (line 43), or judgement, in the matter of the hunt for the white stag. The king is described as an *amherawdyr*, a title which connotes military leadership and overlordship over conquered lands.¹⁸ The Welsh redactor shares with Geoffrey of Monmouth (and other narrative and pseudo-historical sources) this conception of Arthur as a kind of overlord or *bretwalda*, with lesser kings subject to him. The details given in depiction of his court with which the narrative opens support this status. The practice of overlordship over lesser kings is attested in historical documents from the period and as such the attendance of kings and lesser rulers at Arthur’s court is rationalised. The redactor of the Welsh tale provides us with an inventory of all those present at the court, detailing the roles of those in Arthur’s *teulu*, or immediate household circle, for example, his *distein* (‘steward’) and *swydogyon* (‘officers’). These roles correspond to those set out in the list of officers of the court in the Welsh laws.¹⁹ He also takes care to distinguish between the ranks and positions of those present, drawing a distinction between those who are his subjects, for example, his *mylwyr* (‘soldiers’) and his guests.

The Welsh redactor creates a hierarchical image of Arthur’s court in the arrangement of the ‘teir eglwys ar dec’ (line 9) (‘thirteen churches’):

sef ual y achubid, eglwys y Arthur a’y deyrned a’y wahodwyr, a’r eil y
Wenhwyuar a’y rianed, a’r trydet a uydei y’r distein a’r eircheid, a’r bedwared
y Odyar Franc a’r swydogyon ereill. Naw eglwys ereill a uydei y’r naw
penteulu, ac y Walchmei yn bennaf . . . (lines 9–14)

(This is how they were occupied: a church for Arthur and his kings and his guests, and the second for Gwenhwyfar and her women, and the third would be for the steward and the petitioners, and the fourth for Odyar Franc and the other officers. There would be nine other churches for the nine commanders of the warband and for Gwalchmai above all . . .)

¹⁷ *Gereint*, p. 91.

¹⁸ This is also the title given to Arthur in an early Welsh poem which connects Gereint with the king, ‘Gereint fil’ Erbin’: see ‘Gereint fil’ Erbin’, in *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*, ed. A. O. H. Jarman (Cardiff, 1982), pp. 48–9, lines 22–4.

¹⁹ For a list of the twenty-four officers of the court, see *The Law of Hywel Dda: Law Texts from Medieval Wales*, ed. and trans. D. Jenkins (Llandysul, 1986), p. 5. On the officers and laws of the court, see the recent volume *The Welsh King and his Court*, ed. T. M. Charles-Edwards, M. E. Owen and P. Russell (Cardiff, 2000).

Fairly sophisticated distinctions are brought into play in this description of Arthur's court at the beginning of the tale. The Welsh redactor appears to distinguish between the role of *distein* and that of *ystiward*, which are generally used synonymously in the Welsh laws.²⁰ Thus Odyar Franc, later named as 'ystiward llys Arthur' ('the steward of Arthur's court', lines 608–9) is here placed with the *swydogyon* ('officers'), as distinct from the *distein*, who is grouped with the *eircheid* ('petitioners').

Gereint's own relationship to Arthur is likewise clearly defined; he is described as a 'macccwyf gwineu ieuanc eskeirnnoyth teyrneid' ('a dark, bare-legged, princely young man') as he first approaches Gwenhwyfar in the forest. Arthur is his *arglwyd* ('lord') and Gwenhwyfar (the Welsh Guinevere) his *arglwydes* ('lady') – she herself refers to him as *gwas ieuanc* ('young man'). The terms *macccwyf* and *gwas* generally refer to 'youths of noble lineage, serving as pages at court, the first step to attracting favourable notice and future preferment', as Thomson notes.²¹ The two terms also come to mean 'youth', and this additional sense is significant in terms of the Welsh narrative. Gereint's depiction in every way conforms to the expectation aroused by reference to contemporary practice. Whilst Erbin, Gereint's father, may be immediately subject to Arthur, he is also his uncle, and the words of his message, addressing Arthur 'mal y dyly ewyrthyr annerch y nei, ac ual y dyly gwr annerch y arglwyd' (lines 563–4, 'as an uncle ought to address his nephew, and as a man ought to address his lord'), bear witness to the complexity of the relationship. Gereint, as Arthur's cousin, is of privileged status, as the queen implies in welcoming him as her escort. Thus, in the sparrowhawk contest, his primary motive is to avenge the *sarhaed* (insult) to the queen, perpetrated by Edern, and as such, he fulfils his duty to the king.

The legal question of *sarhaed* ('insult') animates the first part of the narrative in contrast with Chrétien's romance where the vengeance quest is superseded by the love of Erec and Enide. It is the thought of the insult to his queen which is uppermost in Gereint's mind throughout the episode. He consults Yniwl, Enid's father for advice regarding the 'syrrhaet a geueis gan y corr ac a gauas morwyn y Wenhwyuar, wreic Arthur' (lines 251–2) ('the insult which I received from the dwarf and that which the maiden of Gwenhwyfar, Arthur's wife received'). It is his later recollection of this *sarhaed* that motivates his onslaught against Edern (lines 319–321), unlike Erec who is roused by his love for Enide. According to the Welsh laws, to break the protection of the queen is one of the three ways in which *sarhaed* is perpetrated against her; a second is to strike her.²² Thus, in allowing his dwarf to strike

²⁰ See Middleton, 'Studies', p. 181.

²¹ *Gereint*, pp. 61–2. Thomson points out that the Welsh *macccwyf* is once found translated as 'filii optimatis', i.e. 'the sons of noblemen'. On *macccwyf* and their position in the Welsh court, see further T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Food, Drink and Clothing in the Laws of the Court', in *The Welsh King and his Court*, ed. Charles-Edwards et al., pp. 319–37 (p. 327).

²² See *The Law of Hywel Dda*, ed. Jenkins, p. 6.

Gwenhwyfar's maiden, Edern insults the queen herself. The matter is further complicated by the fact that Edern's dwarf has also insulted Gereint himself in striking him. The payment or vengeance exacted must be equal to the crime itself, hence the use of the same word, *sarhaed*, meaning both 'insult' and 'insult-price'.

Edern's appearance at Arthur's court occasions a debate on the satisfaction of his *sarhaed* against Gwenhwyfar. Whilst Gereint feels that he has achieved adequate redress in overcoming Edern in the sparrowhawk context, the matter of the insult to Gwenhwyfar must still be satisfied. As the queen herself points out, an insult to her person also rebounds against the king himself. However, the king deems that 'gormod uyd agheu gvas kystal ac Edern yn syrhaed morwyn' (lines 482–3) ('the death of a young man as good as Edern is too much to satisfy the insult of a maiden'). It is in the light of Gereint's duty towards his king and queen that his behaviour is evaluated. Enid herself, although later praised for her beauty, is first presented to Gwenhwyfar as 'y uorwyn y keueist ti dy warthrud o'e hachaws' (lines 511–12) ('the maiden because of whom you received redress').²³ In the Welsh tale, Arthur's court deals in measurable status rather than in abstract codes of behaviour.

The summons of Gereint by his father, Erbin, to rule over his *cyuoeth* marks a point of rupture with the recreational activities which he has enjoyed as a *macchwyl* in Arthur's *cyuoeth*. With age comes responsibility; Gereint's place at the king's court is only tenable until he comes of age to inherit land, and it is here that the secondary sense of *gwas* or *macchwyl* is significant. The position of page belongs to a young nobleman, that is to say, a youth who has not yet inherited land, as the laws emphasise:

The edling and those whom we named above [that is to say the king's members: his sons, nephews and cousins] will be of that status until they take land, and after that their status will follow that of the land they take . . .²⁴

According to Welsh law, the status of a *marchog* (knight) was explicitly connected with ascension to rule over lands and not based on an abstract chivalric code.²⁵ With Gereint's accession a concrete sense of responsibility replaces the diversions of the Arthurian court and a duty, of which his father's message reminds him,

y gadw y gyuoeth ac y vybot y deruyneu. A menegi y may idaw bod yn well itaw treulaw blodeu y ieuengtut a'e dewred yn kynhal y deruyneu e hun noc yn tornemeint diffwrth, cyt caffo clot yndunt²⁶ (lines 569–72)

²³ On these lines, see Roberts, 'Romance Idealism', pp. 131–2.

²⁴ *The Law of Hywel Dda*, ed. Jenkins, p. 7.

²⁵ See *The Law of Hywel Dda*, ed. Jenkins, p. 131: 'no one will be a knight until he ascends'; M. Phillips, 'Defod a Moes y Llys', in *The Welsh King and his Court*, ed. Charles-Edwards et al., pp. 347–61 (pp. 360–1): 'In *Gereint* the protagonist is only referred to as a *marchog* after he has inherited land.'

²⁶ The same duty to protect the boundaries of his *cyuoeth* is reiterated in the instructions of Ondyaw when Gereint takes up his lands, lines 674–7 and in the description of Gereint's actions, lines 678–80.

(to guard his *cyuoeth* and to know his boundaries. And he indicates to him that it is better for him to spend the flower of his youth and his prime in maintaining his own boundaries than in fruitless tournaments, even though he may win fame from them.)

Erbin's message forms a striking echo with the cautionary tale of Efwawc at the beginning of the Middle Welsh *Peredur*:

Ac nyt o'e gyuoeth yn benhaf yd ymborthei Efwawc, namyn o twrneimeint ac ymladeu a ryueloed. Ac ual y may mynych y'r neb a ymganlyno a ryuel, ef a las, ac ef a'y chwemeib.²⁷

(But Efwawc did not sustain himself primarily from his *cyuoeth*, but through tournaments and battles and wars. And as it often happens to he who deals in war, he was killed, he and his six sons.)

Unlike Chrétien, the Welsh redactors rarely intrude into the narrative to make an explicit comment, and as such the *Peredur*-redactor's comment is particularly significant. It is noteworthy that in neither case is the practice of participating in tournaments explicitly condemned. Such diversions have a place, but one which is secondary to the demands of rule over a *cyuoeth*.

The ruler's duty to his *cyuoeth* consists of knowing and guarding the physical boundaries of his lands, as Gereint is frequently advised. The concern of the narrative at this point is with the extent of the hero's lands and his protection of them against those who attempt to 'camderuynu arnaw' (line 567).²⁸ Gereint's lands are formally conferred on him by his father who gives them *y'th law* ('into your hands').²⁹ Gwalchmei, the Welsh counterpart of Gauvain, acts as Gereint's advisor in the matter of protocol, suggesting that he first satisfy his suitors and then take homage (*gwrogaeth*) from his men. The Welsh narrative goes on to describe in detail the procedures which the new ruler must follow in taking possession of his *cyuoeth*. Henceforth this sense of duty towards his *cyuoeth* is the yardstick against which Gereint's actions are judged. It is with Gereint's accession to his father's lands that the

²⁷ *Historia Peredur vab Efwawc*, ed. G. Goetinck (Cardiff, 1976), p. 7, lines 2–9. A similar condemnation of tournaments is found in the Welsh *Y Seint Greal* in a significant departure from its source, *Perlesvaus*: 'A vyny di ymlad ac ef. ac a wyt chwannawc di yth lad ual y llas dy vrodyr oc ou hymladeu ac twrneimeint. Ac iawn yw yth gendyl di oth ledir ual y llas wynteu. . . . (And do you wish to fight with him? And are you anxious to be killed like your brothers were killed with their battles and tournaments? And it will be well for your kin if you are killed as they were killed)'. Quoted in C. Lloyd-Morgan, 'Perceval in Wales: Late Medieval Welsh Grail Traditions', in *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance: Essays on Arthurian Prose Romances in Memory of Cedric E. Pickford*, ed. A. Adams, A. H. Diverres, K. Stern and K. Varty (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 78–91 (p. 90).

²⁸ As Thomson notes (*Gereint*, p. 567), 'the etymology [of camderuynu] suggests "define a boundary wrongly" '; Gerald of Wales refers to similar practices in his *Description of Wales*, saying that the 'lust for possession' amongst the Welsh is so great that 'they are prepared to dig up boundary ditches, to move stones showing the edges of fields and to overrun clearly-marked limits': Gerald of Wales, *The Journey through Wales and The Description of Wales*, trans. L. Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1978), pp. 160–1.

²⁹ Cf. the formal giving of Enid *y'th uedyant* (line 392) ('into your possession') by Yniwl.

first part of the narrative can be seen to culminate as opposed to the emphasis which we find on marriage in *Erec et Enide*. Gereint's marriage is treated relatively cursorily and may be considered as a step towards the responsibility which his duty demands; in this light, his concern to restore the *cyuoeth* or lost inheritance of Enid's father is surely significant: in so doing, he assures his own inheritance. Indeed, Yniwl's experience provides an example against which we can evaluate Gereint's actions. Yniwl's own mistakes had led to the loss of his *cyuoeth* to his brother; the hero's actions following the restoration of Yniwl's lands to him in ensuring *tyngneued* (line 387) ('peace'/'reconciliation') by having Yniwl's men pay homage to him (*gwrhaed*, line 386) show the good kingship which is subsequently to characterise his own behaviour.

Gereint's return to his father's land to take up his duty is at first marked by a period of success, setting out the paradigm for successful rule:

Ac yna y kyrchawd Gereint eithauoed y gyuoeth, a chyuarwydyt hyspys gyt ac ef o oreugwyr y gyuoeth, a'r amcan pellaf a dangossed idaw a gedwis ynteu ganthaw. Ac ual y gnotayssai tra uu yn llys Arthur, kyrchu tornemeint a wnaey, ac ymwybot a'r gwyr dewraf a chadarnaf, yny oed gloduawr yn y gyueir honno ual y lle y buassei gynt, ac yny gyuoethoges y lys a'e gydymdeithon a'e vyrd a o'r meirch goreu a'r arueu goreu ac o'r eurdlysseu arbenniccaf a goreu. Ac ny orfywyssawd ef o hynny yny hedawd y glot dros wyneb y dynas.

(lines 678–87)

(And then Gereint set out for the farthest reaches of his *cyuoeth*, with a knowledgeable guide with him, of amongst the best men of his *cyuoeth*, and the furthest reach that was shown to him he kept that as his own. And as he had done when he was in Arthur's court, he went to tournaments, and made himself known to the bravest and strongest men, until he was as famous in that region as he had been in the place where he was formerly, and until he enriched his court and his companions and his men with the best horses and the best arms and with the best and most outstanding jewels. And he did not rest from that until his fame had travelled across the face of the realm.)

The principal reason for Gereint's participation in tournaments is in order to strengthen the bond with his retainers by distributing treasure. Gereint's behaviour here contrasts sharply with the indolence which characterises him subsequently. It is the loss of the heroic bond between lord and retainer that is lamented when Gereint, falling short of his duty as ruler, prefers his wife's company to that of his men. Unlike Erec, whom we are told continues to distribute treasure amongst his followers, Gereint's indolence is explicitly *contrasted* with his earlier gift-giving. It is this disregard for his duty towards his *cyuoeth* which arouses Enid's sorrow:

'Gway ui,' heb hi, 'os o'm achaws i y mae y breicheu hyn a'r dwyuron yn colli clot a milwryaeth kymeint ac a oed eidunt!' (lines 712–14)

('Woe is me,' she said, 'if it is because of me that these arms and this breast are losing fame and bravery as great as they had formerly.')

Enid's reference to *clot* and *milwryaeth* (fame and bravery) as characteristics of the good ruler creates an apparent symmetry with the qualities which are praised in Chrétien's hero. The winning of glory and martial excellence denoted by *clot* and *milwryaeth* find an echo in the *pris* or *los* and *chevalerie* of the court in Chrétien's romance. However, this suggestion of symmetry is illusory.

A brief analysis of the forest episode in the two texts, will illustrate the different meaning which the two redactors attach to Erec's self-imposed exile.³⁰ This meaning is inextricably linked with the conception of court and *cyuoeth* in *Erec et Enide* and *Gereint* respectively. Whilst Chrétien's hero seeks glory in a demonstration of his valour in the forest, the concepts of *clot* and *milwryaeth* in the Welsh narrative are only meaningful in relation to the hero's *cyuoeth*.

In the light of the ideal of chivalry projected by Chrétien thus far, Erec's voluntary exile of himself and Enide into the forest can be seen as an attempt to reinstate the ideal which he had attained at Arthur's court. If Arthur's court represents a literary device to provide an impulse for chivalry, then Erec's move to his father's lands creates a rupture with *chevalerie*. Moreover, Erec's marriage to Enide, far from fulfilling the aims of chivalry, leads to its collapse. *Chevalerie* centres on the interrelationship of prowess and love as the knight seeks to win his lady. However, when the lady has been won, the impulse for chivalry disappears. As Enide laments,

Bien me devroit sorbir la terre,
Quant toz li mieudres chevaliers,
Li plus hardiz et li plus fiers,
Li plus beax et li plus cortois,
Qui onques fust ne cuens ne rois,
A de tout en tout relinque
Por moi tote chevalerie (vv. 2494–500)

(The ground should by rights swallow me up, when the best of knights, the bravest and most proud, the most loyal and the most courtly who has ever lived, be he count or king, has given up chivalry altogether because of me.)

Instead of contributing to the ennoblement of the hero, his marriage leads to a conflict with the aims of chivalry. The sentiment here is strikingly similar to that expressed by Gauvain following Yvain's marriage to Laudine in *Le Chevalier au lion*:

«Comment? Seroiz vos or de chix,
Che disoit mesire Gavains,
Qui pour lor femmes valent mains?

³⁰ For a comparative analysis of *Erec et Enide*, *Gereint* and the German version of the tale which focuses on the motivation of the forest episode, see N. Thomas, 'Gereint and Erec: A Welsh Heroic Text and its Continental Successors', *Trivium* 22 (1987), 37–48.

Honnis soit de Sainte Marie
 Qui pour empirier se marie!
 Amender doit de bele dame
 Qui l'a a amie ou a femme,
 Ne n'est puis drois qu'ele l'aint
 Que ses pris et ses los remaint.»³¹

(‘What?’ said Gauvain, ‘will you then be counted amongst those who are worth less because of their wives? By Saint Mary, shame to he who marries in order to degenerate! [A knight] should be improved by a beautiful lady, whether he has her as a lover or a wife, nor is it just that she should continue to love him unless his valour and renown endure.’)

Enide’s is a double fault, both in being the reason for Erec’s chivalric lapse and in being forced by her husband’s *recreantise* (‘weakness’) to step outside her voiceless role to accuse him. Whilst Erec may acknowledge the need to recapture his *premier los* (‘former renown’), Enide is not portrayed as entirely blameless. Her initial reaction when Erec awakes to question her is to lie and to claim that Erec has misheard her. The lesson learnt is silence as Enide blames her own *orguil* (v. 2603) (‘pride’) for speaking against her husband.

The remainder of the narrative is concerned with the struggle to reinstate the conventional relationship which was celebrated at Arthur’s court. Significantly, the hero of the French romance orders his wife to wear her best dress for the journey together into the forest:

Levez de ci, se vos vestez
 De vostre robe la plus bele
 Et faites mettre vostre sele
 En vostre meillor palefroi (vv. 2576–9)

(Arise now from here, and attire yourself in your most beautiful dress, and have your best palfrey saddled.)

The superlative quality of Enide’s dress and mount is clearly significant, as the same adjectives (*meillor* and *plus bele*) of Erec’s instruction are reiterated in the description of Enide’s preparations.³² Erec himself likewise rewrites himself symbolically as a valorous knight in arming himself on a rug which features the image of a leopard. In reinstating these superlatives, Erec literally recreates the scene of his ‘*premier los*’. Enide is once more to be seen as ‘*la plus bele*’ as she was in the sparrowhawk contest and on her return to Arthur’s court with Erec. Enide’s function is dual, as Noble comments, ‘She is not then only tempting bait, likely to provoke the sort of incidents which

³¹ Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier au lion ou Le Roman d’Yvain*, ed. D. F. Hult (Paris, 1994), vv. 2484–92.

³² *Erec et Enide* vv. 2607–16.

will allow Erec to prove himself, but a visible symbol of his status.³³ The hero's command, 'chevauchiez tot a seür' (v. 2771) ('ride on in safety'), places him in the position of the defender of his lady. However, Enide's failure to adhere to his command of silence problematises this relationship. Enide's solicitousness for her husband's life undermines the 'los' which he attempts to recapture. As E. Jane Burns comments, Enide's constant intervention to warn her husband of the dangers ahead 'deflate Erec's skill', 'her narrative directly undermines the essence of the adventure story by substituting for the necessary "unknown" a description of what is ahead'.³⁴ The romance narrative demands that this 'disruptive' voice be silenced, as was the division of Arthur's knights in the matter of the *costume* of the white stag.

With the journey into the forest we move once more into the abstract landscape of the Arthurian world, and away from the potential realism of marriage and rule. Significantly, when husband and wife are reconciled, without further crisis, the impulse for chivalry and therefore the impetus for the narrative itself, is once more lost. The achievement of that which is sought paradoxically entails a departure from the world of romance; the interest of the romance narrative lies in the pursuit of the ideal and not its possession.

The Welsh narrator depicts the forest episode in a very different light, making the political consequences of Gereint's actions felt. As has been seen, the consistent awareness in the text of the physical limits of Gereint's possessions remind us of the existence of enemies which threaten his *cyuoeth*. *Gereint* recalls the geography of an earlier period, with Cornwall occupied by a Welsh king bordered by the traditional enemies of the Welsh in *Lloegr* (England). The crossing of these borders would have been regulated; the tenth-century Dunsæte ordinance details an agreement made between English and Welsh neighbours in Herefordshire, requiring a guide when crossing the border.³⁵ Read against Gereint's own earlier concern to assure himself of the boundaries of his *cyuoeth*, accompanied by a guide ('cyuarwydyt hyspys'), his decision to cross the border into *Lloegr* with neither guide nor men displays a disregard for his *cyuoeth* in leaving himself open to attack.³⁶ This finds emphasis in Erbin's concern for his son, warning him of the 'llawer dyn a'y hawl arnat yn Lloygyr' (lines 741–2) ('many a man with a claim against you in England'). Erec's father, on the other hand, had urged his son to take companions with him not because of a concern for his safety but out of concern for appearances, because 'ne doit aler seus filz de roi' (v. 2706) ('the son of a king ought not to travel alone').³⁷ The absence

³³ P. S. Noble, *Love and Marriage in Chrétien de Troyes* (Cardiff, 1982), p. 19.

³⁴ E. J. Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia, 1993), p. 173.

³⁵ The Dunsæte ordinance is edited in *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. F. Liebermann, 2 vols. (Halle, 1903–16), I, 374–9.

³⁶ Earlier in the narrative, Gereint had been accompanied to his lands by Arthur's men.

³⁷ Erec's father's assumption that the departure is to pursue single combat with another knight (vv. 2700–701) also contrasts with Erbin's view of Gereint's journey as a dangerous enterprise.

of topographical detail in this part of the narrative in contrast with the accuracy we have seen earlier is significant. In going beyond the boundaries of his own *cyuoeth* and that of Arthur, Gereint foolishly enters an unknown world, deliberately choosing the worst path. The forest into which Gereint journeys is inhabited by thieves and plunderers ('lladron . . . a herwyr', line 750) rather than by the errant knights of the conventional romance space.

In contrast with Erec, then, whose status leaves him free to depart from his father's court in search of single combat, Gereint's behaviour is seen as nothing short of madness in view of his neglect of his duty towards the *cyuoeth* which he has been summoned to protect. Thus, in the Welsh narrative, Gereint is portrayed as being blameworthy. It is Enid, rather than Gereint, who is seen to act rationally, as is emphasised in the fact that Erbin seeks her advice on her husband's behaviour. Repeated references are made to Gereint's mental turmoil ('aflonyddwch', line 990) in this part of the narrative in a reversal of that which occurs in *Erec et Enide* where Chrétien had concentrated on Enide's mental state and her repeated blame of herself. Erec himself had shown himself rational in his departure in taking assurance from his father that he would continue to provide for Enide should he die.³⁸ In contrast with the earlier part of the narrative where Gereint was said to 'cymryt kyghor yn y uedwl' (line 152) ('take counsel in his mind') before attacking Edern, and was praised by Gwenhwyfar for being 'doeth a fwyllawc' (line 155) ('wise and prudent'), he is later subject to mental disquiet. His agitation, which leads him to misunderstand Enid's words, is rendered by the narrator's 'a medwl arall a'e kyffroes ynteu' (line 717) ('another thought excited him') and the later reference to 'antagneuedu yn y uedwl' (line 721) ('become unsettled in his mind').

Gereint's behaviour is characterised by *llid* ('anger'), aroused by his belief that Enid had contemplated adultery,³⁹ a state which blinds him to the injustice of his treatment of his wife, as the narrator comments: 'a thost oed ganthaw edrych ar drwthret kymeint a honno ar uorwyn gystal a hi . . . bei ys gattei lit idaw' (lines 861–3) ('and he would have been distressed to see such suffering inflicted on a maiden as good as her . . . if anger had permitted him'). The Welsh redactor provides a clear indication of Gereint's motivation here in his words to Enid:

'A meuhl i mi,' heb ef, 'o deuy di yma yny vpych di a golleis i uy nerthoed yn gyn gwplet ac y dywedy di, ac y gyt a hynny o byd kyn yscafalahet it ac yd oed dy damunet y geissaw yscaualwch am y neb y medyllyt ymdanaw.'

(lines 726–730)

³⁸ *Erec et Enide*, vv. 2721–7.

³⁹ The motivation suggested for the departure in the Welsh tale, namely the hero's jealousy at the thought that his wife might be unfaithful, is explicitly rejected in *Erec et Enide*: 'Erec ne fu mie jalous' (v. 3300) (Erec was not at all jealous). The later assertion, 'Or ot Erec que bien se prueve/ Vers lui sa fame lealment' (vv. 3482–3) ('Then Erec hears from his wife proof of her loyalty to him') seems to refer to the fact that Enide has proved her love for him, a fact which she had cast into doubt through her earlier criticism.

(‘And shame on me,’ he said, ‘if you come here until you know if I have lost my powers as completely as you say, and what is more, if it will be as leisurely for you as was your wish to seek pleasure with the person you were thinking about.’)

Gereint’s treatment of Enid may be viewed in the legal context of bringing shame on a woman who had committed adultery. The question of Enid’s *diweirdeb* (chastity) had already been raised in relation to Gereint’s bargain with Yniwl, the hero assuring him that if he lost the contest, Enid would be as chaste as before. Later, Enid herself persuades the earl that he should take her as if by surprise ‘rac gyrru arnaf i mwy no messur o aniweirdeb’ (lines 985–6) (‘lest I be accused of an excessive degree of faithlessness’). The *aniweirdeb* of which Gereint suspects Enid could be prosecuted by law, as could the fact that she appears to cast aspersions on his masculinity.⁴⁰ Thus, it is significant that the Welsh hero makes Enid wear her worst dress in contrast with Chrétien’s Enide, depriving her of her status as Gereint’s wife. A parallel is offered in *Peredur*, where Syberw Llanerch’s similar treatment of his lady is also motivated by *llid* occasioned by the belief that she has been unfaithful to him.⁴¹

The journey of the couple through the forest, occasioned by a transport of rage on Gereint’s part, provides us with a parody of the meaninglessness of chivalric endeavour, which depends on the contrast between the abstract code and the realistic background with which the Welsh redactor provides us. The negligence of Gereint’s abandonment of his *cyuoeth* is emphasised in the theme of gift-giving. In contrast with his position as ideal ruler in the first part of the tale, where Gereint distributed gifts among his men, the forest episode shows him giving away eleven horses and sets of arms of great value to a stranger as payment for a small service. Whilst Gereint had earlier proceeded ‘yny gyuoethoges y lys a’e gymdeithion a’e vyrda o’r meirch goreu’ (lines 683–6) (‘until he enriched his court and his companions and his men with the best horses’), his generosity is later directed elsewhere:

‘a vdost to pa amken a dylyy di y mi?’ ‘Ychydic a debygaf i y dylyu i ti, vrda,’ heb ef. ‘Beth bynnac nu a dylyych, kymer yr un march ar dec a’r un arueu ar dec.’ ‘Dyw a dalho it, arglwyd,’ heb ef, ‘ac ny threuleis i vrthyt ti gwerth un o’r arueu.’ ‘Pathawr?’ heb ynteu; ‘henbydy *kyuoethogach!*’ [emphasis mine]
(lines 1003–7)

(‘do you know the extent of my debt to you?’ ‘It seems to me that your debt to me is small,’ he said. ‘Whatever you are owed, take these eleven horses and eleven sets of arms.’ ‘God repay you, lord,’ he said ‘and I have not spent on

⁴⁰ See *The Law of Hywel Dda*, ed. Jenkins, pp. 45–61. On the law of women, see further *The Welsh Law of Women: Studies presented to Professor D. A. Binchy*, ed. D. Jenkins and M. E. Owen (Cardiff, 1980).

⁴¹ *Peredur*, p. 11, lines 16–18. Like Enid, the lady is forced to ride ahead of her companion so that Peredur, when he later encounters the pair, sees the lady first. Redactions of the Welsh laws give three different options for the punishment of a wife’s deception: he can ‘freely leave his wife’, ‘freely repudiate her’ or he may beat her. *The Law of Hywel Dda*, ed. Jenkins, pp. 49 and 53.

you the value of one of these sets of arms.’ ‘Why should that concern you?’ he said; ‘you will be the richer for it’.)

The comparison between the two situations is reinforced by the use of the verbal and adjectival forms of *cyuoeth* here: *cyuoethogi* (‘to enrich’), which denotes the practice of gift giving, or literally, endowing with possessions and the comparative *kyuoethogach* (‘richer’). The concept of entitlement, *dylyyed* (‘entitlement’, ‘obligation’), raised in the conversation as Gereint questions how much he owes (‘pa amken y *dylyy* di y mi’) emphasises the excessive nature of the gift. Previously in the tale, as we have seen in the negotiation of Edern’s *sarhaed*, obligation has been strictly measured.

The structural difference between the two texts here is clear: whereas Erec’s journey into the forest marks an attempt to recapture his *los*, and thus a move away from the crisis point, in the Welsh narrative, the journey represents the crisis itself as the hero neglects his duty. But there is more than a structural point at stake here, the entire ethos and ethical system of the two narratives turns on the distinction between the values of court and *cyuoeth*. The difference is epitomised by the divergent endings of Chrétien’s romance and the Middle Welsh Gereint. *Erec et Enide* ends with the hero’s return to Arthur’s court symbolising his embracing of the values of *chevalerie* once more. It is here that the role of Arthur is most clearly shown, as Jackson comments on Arthur’s place in medieval romance, ‘His function is basically that of an arbitrator of individual prowess. In other words, he is a literary king.’⁴² Arthur invests Erec with the outward signs of kingship (‘real ensaigne’, line 6546) with little concern for the realities of rule. The final episode of the romance is an emphatic reassertion of the absolute worthiness of Erec and Enide as their coronation is celebrated. By contrast, the Welsh narrative ends with Gereint’s return with Enid to prosperous rule over his *cyuoeth*:

aeth Gereint parth a’e gyuoeth e hun, ac y gwledychu o hynny allan yn llwydannus, ef a’e uilwryaeth a’e wychdra yn parhau gan glot ac edmic idaw ac y Enyt o hynny allan. (lines 1451–4)

(Gereint went away to his own *cyuoeth* and to rule from then on successfully, he and his bravery and his valour enduring with fame and admiration for him and for Enid from then on.)

In conclusion, the different settings of the two tales, the court of *Erec et Enide* and the *cyuoeth* of the Welsh tale, lead to very different value systems in the texts. Whereas Chrétien’s *Erec et Enide* is set against the abstract landscape of romance, a greater sense of realism characterises the Welsh narrative. Whereas the world of *Erec et Enide* depends on the ethics of chivalry

⁴² Jackson, ‘The Nature of Romance’, p. 19.

and love, the Welsh tale depends on an economy of possession, or *cyuoeth*, where behaviour is evaluated in relation to the duty of the ruler. Although the two texts may display superficial similarity in terms of plot or *matiere*, their *san* or meaning is very different.

IV

OWEIN, YSTORYA BOWN AND THE PROBLEM OF 'RELATIVE DISTANCE': SOME METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND SPECULATIONS

Erich Poppe

Die Erforschung des Verhältnisses von Vorlage und deutscher [und kymrischer und altnordischer etc.] Aneignung – eine nicht abschließbare Aufgabe, weil sie sich unter den sich ändernden Perspektiven zweier Literaturgeschichten immer wieder neu stellt.¹

The Concepts of Relative Distance and Translatio

The relationship between *Ystorya Bown o Hamtwn* (henceforth *Bown*) and its Anglo-Norman source, the *Geste de Boeve de Haumtone* (henceforth *Boeve*), has played a minor, but methodologically not insignificant role in recent discussions of the relationship between the Middle Welsh *Owein* (or *Chwedyl Iarllles y Ffynnwawn*) and Chrétien's *Yvain* (*Le chevalier au lion*). In the introduction to his edition of *Owein*, R. L. Thomson suggested that the relative distance between *Boeve* and *Bown* could be taken as a yardstick for a medieval Welsh translator's treatment of a foreign narrative source:

In case it should be suggested that this degree of difference between the French text (F) [i.e., Chrétien's *Yvain*] and the Welsh (W) [i.e., *Owein*] is merely a normal difference between any Welsh translation and its original, i.e. that Welsh translators never did follow their original closely, it may be as well to add that the validity of our argument may be established by taking for comparison another Welsh prose text that is certainly a translation from French verse, and of which Norse prose and English verse translations also exist. Such a text is *Ystorya Bown de Hamtwn* [. . .]. A comparison of these versions [i.e., of the various narratives about Boeve . . .] gives a clear indication that in this case the Welsh version is based directly on the French, for it shows no variations of any significance, and is about equally as close to the French as the Norse version is.²

¹ C. Cormeau and W. Störmer, *Hartmann von Aue: Epoche – Werk – Wirkung* (Munich, 1993), p. 170.

² *Owein or Chwedyl Iarllles y Ffynnwawn*, ed. R. L. Thomson (Dublin, 1975), pp. xxviii–xxix.

Thomson restricts his analysis of relative distance to differences and deviations on the level of the development of the plot. These then become central for his argument that the source of Chrétien's *Yvain* was an early form of the Welsh *Owein*.³ B. F. Roberts, while accepting Thomson's analysis of the relative distance between *Bown* and *Boeve*, still arrives at a radically different conclusion with regard to the relationship between *Yvain* and *Owein* by subverting Thomson's use of the term 'translation'. He argues that the Welsh *Owein* is indeed based on Chrétien's *Yvain*, but not through a process of 'translation', but of *translatio*:

Owein, of course, cannot be a translation of *Yvain*. R. L. Thomson's comparison of the two texts has established that the degree of difference between them is far greater than between, for example, the Welsh *Ystoria Bown de Hamtwn* and the corresponding Anglo-Norman *Boeve de Haumtone* which may be taken to represent a norm. It is not easy to find the precise word which can convey the process by which a text or literary genre is transmitted from one culture and linguistic environment to another, or to judge what the result of such transplanting into the alien soil of a different socio-political group might be. One such word is *translatio* which is used for translation, transmission, paraphrase, but which may also refer to the broader process of adaptation both to a new language and a new culture. Translating here will mean the choice of texts judged to be relevant to the receiving culture and the modification they undergo to become acceptable in whatever their new role may be. [. . .] Chrétien's romances, *Yvain*, *Erec*, *Perceval*, were the ones selected (unconsciously) for putting into Welsh because they were the only ones which could be accommodated (in varying degrees and ways) within the Welsh tradition.⁴

However, this wider concept of *translatio* would seem to undermine the very applicability of the central notion of the 'norm' implicitly derived from Thomson's analysis and introduced by Roberts more or less incidentally – the idea that *Bown* reflects the relative distance between sources and their Welsh adaptations which would 'normally' be expectable. If *translatio* is taken seriously as a critical concept, it implies a scalar and multicausal view

³ *Owein*, ed. Thomson, pp. lxxi and xcvi. In fairness to Thomson it must be pointed out that between his editions of *Owein* (1975) and of *Gereint* (1997) he appears to have modified his views about the implications and methods of textual comparisons of these texts with Chrétien's corresponding romances: He now seems to be inclined to take more account of narrative strategies and techniques, at least in the case of *Gereint*, and says (*Ystoria Gereint uab Erbin*, ed. R. L. Thomson (Dublin, 1997), p. lxxiv) that '[t]he differences revealed by an analysis of the text of F [= Chrétien's *Erec*] and W [= *Gereint*], so far from requiring the assumption of a common source to explain them, or being themselves the justification for such an assumption, would be adequately explained by the transformation wrought in the process of adapting the outline of F to the native narrative technique of W'. Altogether he is cautious: 'Like most answers to the Mabinogionfrage, this is probably unprovable, and there will be varying estimates of its likelihood.'

⁴ B. F. Roberts, 'The Welsh Romance of the Lady of the Fountain (*Owein*)', in *The Legend of Arthur in the Middle Ages*, ed. P. B. Grout et al., Arthurian Studies 7 (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 170–82 (pp. 181–2).

of the processes by which foreign sources will be adapted to suit a new social, cultural, and literary milieu and should include 'translations' such as *Bown* as well. 'Norm' is a relational notion and requires comparison with other instances of the same, or of a different, norm. Here at least one would need to ask if *Bown* is a representative instance of the medieval Welsh norm of transcultural literary adaptations and if only one such norm exists, but also why this text should be relevant for a better understanding of *Owein* in the first place. Superficial answers may refer, for example, to *Owein*'s and *Bown*'s Old French background – putative only in the case of *Owein* – and their secular narrative genre. Strictly speaking, the relative distance between *Boeve* and *Bown* characterises one particular instance of *translatio*, and a conscious or subconscious norm at best for its redactor, but whether it reflects the norm for a genre or period could only be established on the basis of further comparative research. Taking full account of Roberts' very useful notion of *translatio* I believe that the question has remained unanswered so far if the comparison between *Bown*, *Owein*, and their source or analogue on the level of the plot, as conducted by Thomson, supplies sufficient criteria to describe the norm, or norms, which their redactors may have followed, consciously or subconsciously, with regard to the expected and typical relative distance of a translation or adaptation from its foreign source.

Modern translators strive to convey in a different language both the substance and the form of their source texts, whereas medieval translators, particularly of secular narrative texts, were primarily interested in 'acceptability (to the recipients) rather than adequacy (to the original)'.⁵ Therefore they were prepared to change their sources dramatically in style, narrative strategies, and even intention, if this was necessary to achieve their overall objective, namely acceptability to the new recipients. Relative distance thus involves more than differences on the level of the plot, and is conditioned by a set of factors which require further research within the wider context of an assessment of the approaches of medieval Welsh translators/redactors to their sources in relation to, for example, types of text, source languages, and the time and environment in which they were active. The only comment of a medieval Welsh translator on his approach currently known to me, is Gruffydd Bola's, in the context of his translation of the Creed – a central religious text whose right understanding is vital – for Efa, daughter of Maredudd ab Owain (d. 1265),⁶ which is interesting in itself, but has probably only restricted immediate applicability to other types of texts.

⁵ I. Djorđević, 'Mapping Medieval Translation', in *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation*, ed. J. Weiss et al. (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 7–23 (p. 9).

⁶ He defines his purpose as 'y gellych ti y darllein a'e dyall' (Henry Lewis, 'Credo Athanasius Sant', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 5 (1929–31), 193–203 (p. 195)) ('that you may read and understand it'), and his procedure with reference to the topos *verbum ex verbo, sensus ex sensu* and in relation to the structural and idiomatic possibilities of Welsh: 'y troes i weithau y geir yn y gilyd, a gveith ereill y dodeis synnvyr yn lle y synnvyr heruyd mod a phriodolder yn ieith ni' (Lewis, 'Credo', p. 196) ('sometimes I turned the word into the corresponding one and at other times I gave the sense for the

In my contribution I will present some methodological reflections on the notion of 'relative distance' between two versions of one *sujet* (or *Stoff*), by attempting a preliminary investigation of the relationship between *Bown* and *Boeve* and between *Yvain* and *Owein* respectively, but also between the Old French *Chanson de Roland* and *Cân Roland* and, very briefly, between Chrétien's *Yvain* and its Middle High German version, Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein*. I hope to establish some parameters of transcultural literary adaptations beyond the development of the plot line, which may then help to take a fresh look at the problem of the 'relative distance' of *Owein* to Chrétien's version of the same *sujet*. I do not believe that I will be able to contribute to a solution of the so-called *Mabinogion-Frage* – in a nutshell and much simplified, the vexed and somewhat tired question whether Chrétien's *Yvain*, *Erec*, and *Perceval* are based on the medieval Welsh *Owein*, *Gereint*, and *Peredur*, or whether Chrétien's works are the Welsh texts' sources or at least their starting points, or whether the corresponding pairs of texts each independently go back to a common source. I would hope, however, to bring some concepts of this discussion, and also of the analysis of Middle Welsh translation literature, into a more critical perspective.

*The Geste de Boeve de Haumtone and Ystorya Bown o Hamtwn*⁷

The Welsh *Bown*, which may be dated to not long after the middle of the thirteenth century, is clearly based on the Anglo-Norman *Boeve*. The latter text has been assigned by some scholars to the genre of 'ancestral romance', in which Anglo-Norman families in England were supplied with 'interesting legends of the past glories of the new home [. . . and which] even suggest a connection with some famous figure of the past'.⁸ Others, however, have stressed the importance of a more basic narrative structure, departure-and-return, which is specified to dispossession-and-reinstatement, in order to apply to the situation of Anglo-Norman society at large:

The narrative pattern of departure and return that characterizes these works is typically incorporated in a pattern of dispossession and reinstatement, the hero regaining through his admixture of courage and legal knowledge a rightful inheritance wrongfully seized from him.⁹

sense, according to the nature and diction of our language'). For further comments compare C. Lloyd-Morgan, 'French Texts, Welsh Translators', in *The Medieval Translator II*, ed. R. Ellis (London, 1991), pp. 45–63 (pp. 55–6).

⁷ For detailed discussions of *Bown* and the processes underlying its adaptation see Watkin's introduction to *Ystorya Bown de Hamtwn*, ed. M. Watkin (Cardiff, 1958), pp. xxi–clxxii, as well as E. Poppe and R. Reck, *Processes of Medieval Translation: A French Romance in Wales* (forthcoming in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*), on which the summary here is based.

⁸ M. D. Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background* (Oxford, 1963), p. 141.

⁹ S. Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1986), p. 18. For her discussion and criticism of the

Contained within an over-arching pattern of departure/expulsion-and-return are a series of individual episodes, often punctuated by violent encounters. *Boeve* is thus structurally close to popular and folk genres (*Volksmärchen*) and may indeed be rooted in a more popular tradition than the epic cycles of the Old French *chansons de geste*, such as the Charlemagne cycle. This episodic structure within a larger framework is also vaguely reminiscent, within the Welsh literary context, of the quest for the *anoethau* ('marvels') in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, and even of the departure from Arthur's court, the final return to security, and the intervening quests for *aventures* in *Owein*, and similarly in *Gereint*. Probably because of the use of basic narrative patterns and the amount of colourful incidents in it, the story of Boeve had a strong appeal for audiences outside the immediate Anglo-Norman and medieval English cultures, as is evidenced by the interest it found in Wales, Ireland, and Scandinavia. The setting of *Boeve* and *Bown* alternates between an exotic, pagan East and a more homely Christian Europe, which is nonetheless at least as violent as the East. Central themes are rehabilitation and the righting of wrongs, reflected in acts of loyalty and treachery and acted out in combats and martial exploits; there is a sustained love-interest and also a slight amount of humour. A presentation of the values of the Christian warrior-knight is clearly integrated into, and subordinated to, the development of the plot, and Boeve/Bown is its prime representative. He is explicitly called 'the best knight in Christianity',¹⁰ and a type of hero who, in the words of Susan Crane, is 'not self-reflective but active; his life is a series of encounters through which he defines his effectiveness as conqueror, father, defender of land and nation, defender of faith, and so on'.¹¹ He and the other protagonists remain stereotypes, and there is no psychological interest or development – as is to be found, to some extent at least, in *Pwyll* and probably also in *Owein*.

The plot of *Boeve* and its details are faithfully preserved in *Bown*. Any changes in *Bown* on the level of content are minor and do not impinge on its basic concerns. The interests of the Anglo-Norman author and the Welsh redactor in the *sujet* would thus appear to be very similar, with regard to their perception both of society and of the ingredients of a successful narrative. The transposition of the set of literary and social values transported in *Boeve* from the Anglo-Norman context to its new Welsh cultural environment obviously did not create any major problems. However, the Welsh redactor of *Boeve* implemented major transformations, and these concern the levels of

concept of ancestral romance see pp. 16–18, 86; for a detailed discussion of *Boeve* and the Middle English *Sir Beues* see pp. 59–91, 104–5.

¹⁰ Compare 'y marchawc goreu o gret' (*Ystorya Bown*, ed. Watkin, lines 3075–6) ('the best knight in Christendom') and the same phrase again in *Ystorya Bown*, lines 3549–50, corresponding to 'nostre meilur amis / ke ore seist en cristiente' (*Der anglonormannische Boeve de Haumtone*, ed. A. Stimming (Halle, 1899), lines 2641–2) ('our best friend who ever was in Christendom') and 'meilur home en cristiente' (*Der anglonormannische Boeve*, ed. Stimming, line 3097) ('the best man in Christendom') in the Anglo-Norman text.

¹¹ Crane, *Insular Romance*, p. 82.

narrative structure and style. Here the changes are far-reaching, intended to accommodate the foreign plot to Welsh literary conventions and to the expectations of its new audience. They can be traced on all levels of the text, from the macro-form and its syntactic organisation down to the micro-level of the use of specific tenses and idiomatic phrases. A few examples must suffice here. The Anglo-Norman *Boeve* is in verse, whereas *Bown* is in prose – narrative verse not being available within the Welsh literary tradition as a genre. The narrator of *Boeve* makes his presence constantly felt, by generously commenting on the events; *Bown* is characterised by a (near complete) absence of such an intrusive narrator – again in accordance with native narrative norms. A common stylistic device of native medieval Welsh narratives is the so-called narrative verbal noun. Here a non-finite form of the verb is employed instead of a finite past-tense form. This use is similar to the narrative (or historic) infinitive in Latin and may explain the rarity of the narrative present in main clauses. However, the narrative present occurs quite frequently in subordinate clauses introduced by conjunctions which require a finite verb. Both the narrative verbal noun and the narrative present in subordinate clauses are regularly found in *Bown*, very much under the same conditions as in the native Middle Welsh narratives. Many further examples of how the Welsh redactor interfered with his source could be adduced. They give a clear indication that he consciously or subconsciously aimed at its thorough transformation, in order to accommodate it to its new literary environment. However, the redactor also sometimes lapsed, in the sense that he was led by his source to employ a device foreign to his own narrative conventions. These instances are particularly interesting in our context, since they reflect the source's influence, be it directly or indirectly, that is, with or without a motivation in the extant versions of *Boeve*. We are faced with a methodological problem here, in that the three extant incomplete texts of *Boeve* are close to *Bown*, but none of these probably represents *Bown*'s immediate source; furthermore, the influence of the source appears to be unevenly distributed in the extant text of *Bown* since the last third of the text is generally closer than the first two thirds to the corresponding text of *Boeve*, but also shows some other linguistic and stylistic peculiarities. Obvious lapses are, for example, the explicit authorial marking of a transition from one scene or protagonist to another,¹² occasional authorial intrusions,¹³ and the faithful translation of the Anglo-Norman exclamation 'par mun chef' ('by my head') as 'myn vymphen' ('by my head'). Such lapses are infrequent, and

¹² For example 'Tewi weithon a wnawn am Bown, a dywedut am Sabaot' (*Ystorya Bown*, ed. Watkin, lines 3162–4) ('we will now be silent about Bown and talk about Sabaot') = 'Ore lerrom de Boun le marchis, / e dirrom de Sabaot le floriz' (*Der anglonormannische Boeve*, ed. Stimming, lines 2729–30) ('now we will leave Boun the count, and talk about grey-haired Sabaot').

¹³ For example 'Ac yna y gellygawd Bown ef o'y wlat, a guaethiroed nas lladawd' (*Ystorya Bown*, ed. Watkin, lines 662–4) ('and then Bown let him go to his land, and a pity that he did not kill him') = 'A, dieus! quel damage, que il ne l'ut fet tuer!' (*Der anglonormannische Boeve*, ed. Stimming, line 649) ('O God, what a pity that he did not have him killed').

do not distract from the overall impression that the redactor's primary aim on the level of form was the thorough literary accommodation and acculturation of his source text. With regard to the relative distance between *Boeve* and *Bown* it can be said that he followed the general principle *sensus de sensu* – in the words of his (near-)contemporary Gruffudd Bola, but with reference to the translation of a religious core text, the Creed, 'synnvyr yn lle y synnvyr heruyd mod a phriodolder yn ieith ni'¹⁴ ('the sense for the sense, according to the nature and diction of our language') – in that his version is resolutely based on the foreign source on the levels of the *sujet* and narrative intention, but intimately informed and moulded by his own literary traditions on the levels of narrative performance, technique, and strategy.

The Chanson de Roland and Cân Rolant

At this point one may ask how representative is the performance of the Welsh redactor of *Bown*, since this is relevant for the question of the 'norm' that his approach may, or may not, reflect. For a very tentative answer, in the absence of a comprehensive analysis of the approaches and working methods of medieval Welsh translators,¹⁵ it may be worthwhile to look briefly at another, near-contemporary Welsh adaptation of a French narrative text – namely *Cân Rolant*, the Middle Welsh version of the Old French *Chanson de Roland*. This text is now only incompletely transmitted as part of a cyclic compilation about Charlemagne, called conveniently, but without manuscript support, *Ystorya de Carolo Magno*. Here the extant text is inserted into the Welsh translation of the Latin Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle and covers the first part of the narrative up to, and including, the beginning of the Battle of Roncevaux. But it is most likely that there was once a Welsh translation of an entire Anglo-Norman text of the *Chanson*. This translation was dated by Annalee Rejhon to the first half of the thirteenth century.¹⁶ There appears to be scholarly agreement that *Cân Rolant* is based on a now lost assonanced Old French version of the *Chanson de Roland*, quite close to the texts of the *Chanson* transmitted in the Oxford and Venice 4 manuscripts.¹⁷ The two

¹⁴ Lewis, 'Credo', p. 196.

¹⁵ Note, for example, the remarks by Lloyd-Morgan, 'French Texts, Welsh Translators', p. 58, that 'most Welsh translators of the later medieval period have chosen, no doubt consciously, to adopt a prose style as close as possible to that found in native Welsh prose', and by B. F. Roberts, 'Tales and Romances', in *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, vol. 1, ed. A. O. H. Jarman and G. R. Hughes (Cardiff, 1992), pp. 203–43 (p. 235), on 'translations in the medieval sense, fairly free renderings, sometimes corresponding closely to the original, at others paraphrasing, condensing or adding material. The structure of the tale is not affected but the translator's forms of expression and his narrative ideal are derived from his experience of the [Welsh] prose tradition.'

¹⁶ *Cân Rolant: The Medieval Welsh Version of the Song of Roland*, ed. A. C. Rejhon (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1983), p. 89.

¹⁷ E. F. Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland* (Copenhagen, 1959), p. 273, and *Cân Rolant*, ed. Rejhon, p. 67.

published Welsh versions from MS Aberystwyth, NLW, Peniarth 10 and MS Oxford, Jesus College, 111 – the so-called Llyfr Coch Hergest / Red Book of Hergest – often differ in actual wording. The text in Peniarth 10 is probably closer to the original translation than the one in the Red Book, which is in Rejhon's view 'the most abridged version of the archetype'.¹⁸ Again according to her, the archetype's translator 'appears to have done a careful and accurate job of rendering his Old French model into Middle Welsh [. . .] The Welsh translation is sometimes so close to a given assonanced text as to permit one to trace what words the model had at the assonance.'¹⁹

The source of *Cân Rolant* is a *chanson de geste*, and this French genre offers its audience an interpretation of the world and images for self-identification which connect the idea of Christian salvation, specifically in the concepts of the Christian warrior and the crusades against pagan enemies, with a political discussion of the proper relation between a king and his vassals. Defining elements of its ethos are physical strength and martial prowess, as well as loyalty and honour within a Christian and feudal frame of reference. The narrative progresses episodically and in one strand, with an alternation of scenes of counsel, which highlight the socio-political theme, and of combat, where the focus is on the image of the Christian warrior. Dialogue is an important structural feature. The emphasis is clearly on the action, with little interest in the characters' motivations and psychology. In many formal aspects of narrative strategy, the *chanson de geste* and Middle Welsh tales conform; and in some details, the former is even closer to Welsh conventions than is *Boeve*, especially in the relative absence of narrator's intrusions.²⁰

A central theme of both the *Chanson de Roland* and *Cân Rolant* are the heavenly rewards of the Christian warrior. If the Welsh redactor added specific nuances, then these may be perhaps best detected in chapter LXX (in Rejhon's edition) which is most probably his addition, because it has no parallels in the French texts in the Oxford and Venice 4 manuscripts versions, and also none in the Old Norse translation of the *Chanson de Roland*, *Af Rúnzívals bardaga* – which is part of a cyclic compilation, *Karlamagnús Saga*, and seems to be based on a French text very close to the source of *Cân Rolant*. In this extra passage, Oliuer is presented as inciting the French knights to battle, and he emphasises the eternal rewards of adhering to Christian martial values, of 'fighting for the kingdom of heaven, for it is by abandoning transitory life that eternal life is attained'.²¹ The narrator stresses the existing strength of the social ties of loyalty between the knights, 'the

¹⁸ *Cân Rolant*, ed. Rejhon, p. 94.

¹⁹ *Cân Rolant*, ed. Rejhon, p. 89.

²⁰ However, there are some instances, for example *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. and trans. H. W. Klein (Munich, 1963), pp. 42.608, 46.716 and 72.1185, that have no points of correspondences in *Cân Rolant*.

²¹ *Cân Rolant*, ed. Rejhon, p. 200.LXX.11–12: 'yn emlad dros wlat nef, canys gan ymadaw a buched amharaus y kefir buched dragwyd'. The translations follow Rejhon's, with some changes.

compassion and love and good will of every one of them for the other',²² and Oliuer similarly urges the knights to 'forgive each other and be reconciled as common friends and common foes'²³ – an idiomatic phrase which also occurs in *Brut y Brenhinedd* when Maxen and Conan make peace with each other.²⁴ Later in the text in a similar scene, archbishop Turpin explains the Christian knights' obligation to compensate Christ for his death for them on the cross, and the insistence on the social concept of gift and counter-gift, from which arises *kedymdeithas* 'companionship' with its duties and obligations, is absent from the parallel passages in the French versions in the Oxford and Venice 4 manuscripts as well as in the Old Norse version.²⁵ The importance of companionship and solidarity between the warriors is again highlighted in a situation when Rolant feels that *kymydeithas* 'companionship' and *vnolder* 'unity' between himself and Oliuer are threatened,²⁶ and such a discussion of their relationship is absent from the relevant passages in the French versions in the Oxford and Venice 4 manuscripts as well as in the Old Norse version.²⁷ Interestingly, the most striking innovation in this respect would appear to occur in the scenes depicting the forging of the alliance between the Spanish pagans and Gwenlwyd with the aim to destroy Rolant. References to gifts and the obligations arising from their acceptance abound and make explicit the socially binding powers of such arrangements.²⁸ There is furthermore at

²² *Cân Rolant*, ed. Rejhon, p. 200.LXX.3: 'o warder a chareat a rybuchet pawb onadunt y'w gilyd'.

²³ *Cân Rolant*, ed. Rejhon, p. 200.LXX.9–10: 'ymvadeuwch, a chymodwch yn vn gar vn esgar'.

²⁴ *Brut y Brenhinedd. Cotton Cleopatra Version*, ed. J. J. Parry (Cambridge, Mass., 1937), p. 100.15–16: 'ac yna y[d] aethant yn vn gar vn esgar'.

²⁵ Compare 'cofewch [. . .] pan yw yrawch y diodeuawd ef [Crist] agheu; uelly y dylywch chwitheu dioddef agheu yrdaw ynteu, ac uelly keissiaw kedymdeithas Grist oc awch agheu vegis y paratoes ynteu y chwi y gedymdeithas drwy y ageu ehun' (*Cân Rolant*, ed. Rejhon, p. 206.LXXIV.3–6) ('remember that it is for you that he [Christ] suffered death: so you ought to suffer death for him and seek the companionship of Christ by your death, as he prepared for you his companionship through his own death'). Contrast *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. and trans. Klein, p. 89.1128–9, *Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland. La Version de Venise IV*, ed. R. Mortier (Paris, 1941), p. 87.1060–1, and *Karlamagnús saga og kappa hans*, ed. C. R. Unger (Christiania, 1860), ch. 22.

²⁶ *Cân Rolant*, ed. Rejhon, p. 198.LXVIII.15–16. Note that in her ambitious attempt to identify in *Yvain/Erec* and *Owein/Gereint* respectively differences in 'the production of social subjectivity within specific cultural contexts', Helen Fulton ('Individual and Society in *Owein/Yvain* and *Gereint/Erec*', in *The Individual in Celtic Literatures*, ed. J. F. Nagy, *CSANA Yearbook* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 15–50) has suggested that 'the Welsh romances privilege collectivism and the strength of the group above the behaviours or desires of its individual members, who are discouraged from acting outside the social boundaries of the *teulu*' (p. 24).

²⁷ Compare *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. and trans. Klein, p. 85, *Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland*, ed. Mortier, p. 83, and *Karlamagnús saga*, ed. Unger, ch. 21.

²⁸ Compare *Cân Rolant*, ed. Rejhon, pp. 162.XLI.3–6, 162.XLII.2,7–8, 164.XLIII.12–14, and 166.XLV.1–2. Gwenlwyd is addressed by the two Spanish knights Maldebrwn and Kilbrwn as *gwareanc*, which Rejhon translates as 'vassal', probably because of its similarity to *gwarogaeth* 'homage'; this word is, however, only attested significantly later, from the sixteenth century on, and probably derived from *gwarrog* 'bow, yoke', also in figurative sense. It is more likely therefore that *gwareanc* is a variant of *gwreanc* 'young man, esquire', which is also the term used in one instance in the text in the Red Book, see *Ystoria de Carolo Magno*, ed. S. J. Williams (Cardiff, 1930), p. 130.11. The only problem is that Gwenlwyd is no longer a young man, but emphasis may be more on status than on age.

least one passage in which the Welsh text is more explicit on the meaning of vassalage. In the French versions, Gualters describes himself simply as Roland's *hom/homo*,²⁹ but in *Cân Roland* the narrator gives what one could call a definition of this term: 'y Wallter o Oreins, y fydlonaf ef herwyd y ymdirieit ac yr ymrwymassei o wryogaeth idaw' ('Gwallter of Oreins, his most faithful one in regard to his reliance/trust, and who had bound himself by an oath of allegiance to him').³⁰ It should be noted in this context that Watkin argued that the more extended description of the knightling of Bown in *Bown* is related to the Welsh redactor's concern with Anglo-Norman customs and institutions, as something which he felt had to be introduced to his audience³¹ – although of course the idea of the mutual obligations of lord and warrior arising from gifts and their acceptance permeates Welsh poetry from the *Gododdin* onwards.

On the level of narrative structure and style the differences between the *Chanson de Roland* and *Cân Roland* are probably similar to the ones between *Boeve* and *Bown*. Relevant features are, for example, the use of prose as the macroform of narrative instead of verse and the employment of the narrative verbal noun and of the narrative present in temporal clauses,³² also noted above for *Bown*. In her Ph.D. thesis, to be presented in 2004, Regine Reck will argue that both the *Chanson de Roland* and *Cân Roland* use formulaic phrases in their accounts of combat, but that in the latter Welsh formulae are substituted for the French ones.³³ Since the narrative strategies of the *chanson de geste* are closer to Welsh narrative conventions than the ones of French/Anglo-Norman romances such of *Boeve*, it is perhaps no surprise that obvious 'lapses' identified above in *Bown*, such as the authorial marking of some transitions, the rendering of some authorial intrusions, or the faithful translation of some Anglo-Norman exclamations, do not occur in *Cân Roland*. There are in *Cân Roland* a few additional authorial explanations of the motivation of protagonists, for example in chapters XVII,³⁴

²⁹ *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. and trans. Klein, p. 52.801, and *Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland*, ed. Mortier, p. 22.741.

³⁰ *Cân Roland*, ed. Rejhon, p. 182.LVI.1–2. Compare perhaps similarly also *Cân Roland*, ed. Rejhon, p. 190.LXIII.4–5, versus *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. and trans. Klein, p. 62.1010, 'Pur son seignor', and *Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland*, ed. Mortier, p. 28.946, 'Per so seignor'; nothing corresponding in *Karlamagnús saga*, ed. Unger, chap. 21.

³¹ *Ystorya Bown*, ed. Watkin, p. lxxvii.

³² Compare, for example, the following passage from a scene of combat, *Cân Roland*, ed. Rejhon, p. 222.LXXXVI.1–3: 'ac a hwnnw taro Mawstaron ar awch y helym yny blyca yn y benn ac yny vyd y emennyd a'e lygeit o'e benn' ('and with it [a broken piece of his spear-shaft] he struck Mawstaron on the point of his helmet so that it bent right into his head, and his brain and his eyes come out of his head').

³³ I wish to thank R. Reck for kindly allowing me to refer to her research in progress.

³⁴ Contrast *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. and trans. Klein, p. 24.277, *Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland*, ed. Mortier, p. 7.210–11, and *Karlamagnús saga*, ed. Unger, ch. 6 with Roland's speech only. Similar explanations are of course also given the *Chanson de Roland* and reproduced in *Cân Roland*: compare *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. and trans. Klein, p. 44.674–6 = *Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland*, ed. Mortier, p. 19.607–8 and *Cân Roland*, ed. Rejhon, p. 168.XLVI, 5–6.

XXI,³⁵ and LV.³⁶ The most striking passage is perhaps the Welsh narrator's emotional and highly rhetorical outburst in chapter XCI – which, of course, may have been prompted by a comment and/or an exclamation of the French narrator, similar to manuscript O's 'Tant bon Franceis i perdent lor juvente'³⁷ ('some many good Frenchmen lost their young lives there') or its 'Karles li magnes (en) pluret, si se demente./ De ço qui calt?'³⁸ ('Charlemagne cries and laments it. But what does it avail?'):

Och a Duw! mawr a gollet anescor a doeth y'r Freinc yn y lle hwnnw o golli y gniuer canorthwywr a golles y Brenin Chiarlymaen yn y lle hwnnw. Y mae oleu y colledeu a doethant o anffydlonder Gwenlwyd yn emdangos ettwan. Och a Duw! mor da y talud idaw ynteu yn y diwed pwyth y wratwreaeth. Yn y diwed yn y wlat a'e vedeant ehun y barnwyt y groc ar y decuet ar rugeint o'e oreugwyr. A'r brenin, kyt bai trist ganthaw a gwrthwynep, a gwplaaud y vrwat honno. Ac uelly y digolledut o gollet arall y gollet, ac y didanut o dolur arall y dolur ynteu.³⁹

(O God! great the irremediable loss that came to the Franks in that place on account of losing so many helpers, that Chiarlymaen lost in that place! The consequences of the losses which came from the faithlessness of Gwenlwyd still manifest themselves. O God! how well would You pay him back, in the end, for his treachery. In the end, in his country and his own fief, he was judged to be hanged with thirty of his best men. And the king, although it was sad and odious to him, carried out that judgement. And thus would You compensate his loss by another loss, and console his grief by another grief.)

This passage is considerably shortened, and its subjectivity toned down, in the abbreviated version of *Cân Rolant* in the Red Book.⁴⁰ Similar narratorial intrusions occur in texts translated from Latin, for example in the Welsh *Cronicl Turpin*,⁴¹ which forms part of the cycle about Charlemagne, but is

³⁵ Contrast *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. and trans. Klein, p. 26.333, and *Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland*, ed. Mortier, p. 8.257–8, as well as *Karlamagnús saga*, ed. Unger, ch. 6, all with unevaluated descriptions. Note that in both the Welsh and Norse versions the relevant object is a letter, rather than a glove.

³⁶ Contrast *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. and trans. Klein, p. 52.792–807, *Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland*, ed. Mortier, p. 22.731–47, and *Karlamagnús saga*, ed. Unger, ch. 16; the emphasis in the Welsh version is again on social implications.

³⁷ *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. and trans. Klein, p. 84.1401.

³⁸ *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. and trans. Klein, p. 84.1404–5; compare also *Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland*, ed. Mortier, p. 39.1314, 'Tant bon François perdre lor juent!'.

³⁹ *Cân Rolant*, ed. Rejhon, pp. 228–30.XCI.1–8.

⁴⁰ 'Och a Duw! mawr a gollet anescor a deuth y Ffreinc yn y lle hwnnw o golli y geniuer gwrda o wyr Chyarlys a gollet yno. Yma y mae goleu y colledeu a deuthant o anffydlonder Gwennwlyd yn ymdangos etwa. Ac ys da y talwyd idaw ynteu y uradwryaeth.' (*Ystorya de Carolo Magno*, ed. Williams, p. 150.22–8) ('O God! great the irremediable loss that came to the Franks in that place on account of losing so many nobles of Chyarlys's men as were lost there. The consequences of the losses which came from the faithlessness of Gwenlwyd still manifest themselves here. And it was well how his treachery was repaid to him.')

⁴¹ Compare 'Oia Duw! mor anhawd ymordiwes a brodyeu Duw, ac ymganlyn a'e fyrd' (*Ystorya de Carolo Magno*, ed. Williams, pp. 24.27–25.2) ('O God, how difficult to understand the judgements of God and to follow his ways'), rendering literally the Latin source's 'Quam incomprehensibilia sunt

thought to postdate *Cân Rolant* (it was probably translated into Welsh sometime before 1282)⁴² and in the thirteenth-century *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan*, which has convincingly been argued to be a translation of a Latin text.⁴³ Another unusual device is the following inexpressibility topos which has no counterpart in the French text: ‘A’r sawl a ladei ef nyt oed hawd y vynegi, namyn bit dogyn hynn o vynac yn awr’ (‘and the number he killed is not easy to relate, but let it suffice to say this now’).⁴⁴

In comparison with *Cân Rolant* it seems fair to suggest in summary that the relative distance between *Bown* and *Boeve* may well reflect the approach of (some) early- to mid-thirteenth-century Welsh redactors of Old French narrative sources and the freedom with which they treated them. Their strategies include the preservation of the foreign plot, the addition of at best marginal nuances on the level of contents, but major adaptations of narrative presentation, form, and style, in order to accommodate the expectations of the new native audience with regard to the conventional mode of narration. However, a few narrative lapses – in the sense of obvious deviations from these conventions – would appear to reflect the immediate influence of the source and, in the case of the emotional outburst of the narrator of *Cân Rolant*, the mixed literary background of the mediators of the transmission, i.e., their experience with other narrative traditions and genres in which such devices are more firmly rooted. It is therefore possible to talk, albeit tentatively and with all due caution, of a specific and probably predominantly subconscious norm which the redactors of *Boeve* and of the *Chanson de Roland* followed in their approach to transcultural literary adaptations and which is reflected in their versions’ relative distance to the sources that they, the redactors, permitted themselves.

iudicia Dei et investigabiles viæ eius’ (*Historia Karoli Magni et Rotholandi ou Chronique du Pseudo-Turpin*, ed. C. Meredith-Jones (Paris, 1936), p. 146); similarly in direct speech, *Ystoria de Carolo Magno*, ed. Williams, pp. 162.22–163.5, and *Historia Karoli Magni*, ed. Meredith-Jones, p. 204.

⁴² *Cân Rolant*, ed. Rejhon, p. 89.

⁴³ Compare ‘O wi a Duw, y gnifer gweith ydd arfaethassant yeirll Kaer gwrthwynebu y Ruffudd, ag nys gallasant! A’r gnifer gweith gwyr Powys, ag nys gallasant! A’r gnifer gweith gwyr Trahaearn twyllwr, ag nys gallasant eissyoës y ddwyn ar gwbylder!’ (*A Mediaeval Prince of Wales: The Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan*, ed. and trans. D. S. Evans (Lampeter, 1990), pp. 49–50) (‘O God, the number of times the earls of Chester tried to oppose Gruffudd, and they could not do it! And the number of times the men of Powys, and they could not do it! And the number of times the men of the deceiver Trahaearn, and they could not bring it to fulfilment.’)

⁴⁴ *Cân Rolant*, ed. Rejhon, p. 222.LXXXV.1–2; compare *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. and trans. Klein, p. 80.1340 ‘Des Sarrazins lur fait mult grant damage’ (‘he inflicts great losses on the Saracens’) and *Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland*, ed. Mortier, p. 37.1258, ‘De qui de Spagna el fa si gran dalmaçe’ (‘on those from Spain he inflicts so great losses’).

Chrétien's Yvain and Hartmann's Iwein

Chrétien has often been credited with the creation of the genre of Arthurian chivalric romance of extended size, which combines traditions about the pseudo-historical Arthur with elements of the *Märchenroman* within a bipartite structure, the so-called *Doppelweg*.⁴⁵ Among the characteristics of Chrétien's romances are said to be a new balance of plot, description, and meaning, as well as a changed image of Arthur. He is the non-active centre of a court that defines the norms of behaviour; the resulting activity of the individual active members of Arthur's court is the *aventure* which follows these norms. The macro-form of this genre and its theme(s) are constituted by a meaningful sequence of *aventures*, in which the main hero proves himself and which derive their ultimate significance from the end of the romance. The individual episodes are integrated into a larger structure of two corresponding major sections in the biographical development of the hero. Here, one decisive difference from the fairy tale (*Märchen*) emerges, namely that the crisis which ends the first section, is caused by the hero, not by some external event – in Yvain's case that, diverted by chivalric activities, he forgets the deadline set by Laudine for his return, and with it his new social and personal responsibilities.⁴⁶

Chrétien composed his *Yvain* around 1177; Hartmann von Aue's Middle High German *Iwein* has been dated to the period after 1191 and before 1203. In comparison with the Welsh redactors of *Boeve* and the *Chanson de Roland*, Hartmann approached his source in a very different manner. The macro-form and poetics remain the same, as well as the basic narrative strategies, such as the strong presence of the narrator's voice. Although his version is about twenty per cent longer, Hartmann generally follows Chrétien closely with regard to the sequence of events and to their significance, but he takes the liberty to shift some nuances and concerns – for example, aspects of the characterisation of Laudine, and also of Lunete, the final reconciliation between Iwein and Laudine, and the discussion of the social role of knight-hood.⁴⁷ In the context of my primarily methodological reflections on the

⁴⁵ For the concept of the *Doppelweg* and Chrétien's claims to primacy see, for example, H. Fromm, 'Doppelweg', in *Werk – Typ – Situation: Studien zu poetologischen Bedingungen in der älteren deutschen Literatur*, ed. I. Glier et al. (Stuttgart, 1969), pp. 64–79 (I am indebted to Dr Bernadette Smelik for this reference); for the general characteristics of the genre compare, for example, Cormeau and Störmer, *Hartmann von Aue*, pp. 167–8 and 174–8.

⁴⁶ In this respect the Arthurian *Doppelweg* of *Yvain/Iwein* is significantly different from, for example, the more common and popular (also in the sense of *volkstümlich*) bipartite structure of *Boeve/Bown*: the hero is not responsible for his second expulsion, and the text's two sections are not structurally related to each other, but simply enhance narrative suspense and intensity.

⁴⁷ Compare Cormeau and Störmer, *Hartmann von Aue*, p. 199: 'Der um 20% größere Umfang ist hier vor allem auf das generelle Problem des Übersetzens, nicht auf umfangreiche Ergänzungen zurückzuführen. Die weithin genaue Entsprechung hinderte Hartmann dennoch nicht, sich frei mit seiner Vorlage auseinanderzusetzen und Akzente zu verschieben' 'That Hartmann's work is about twenty percent longer is mainly to be attributed to the general problem of translation, rather than to

notion of relative distance from a source it is not necessary to discuss Hartmann in any great detail; here I am only concerned with trends in his treatment of Chrétien and the alternative model of *translatio*, of transcultural literary accommodation that his approach represents. The relative distance between *Yvain* and *Iwein* is small, at least in comparison with the distance between *Boeve* and *Bown* and the *Chanson de Roland* and *Cân Rolant* respectively, particularly since the formal and narrative parameters of the presentation are little changed. Alois Wolf has called Hartmann's *Iwein* a 'höfische Variation', a courtly variation, on *Yvain*,⁴⁸ indicating that Hartmann's text remains within the same socio-conceptual sphere as its source. If one accepts, for example, Tony Hunt's view that Chrétien's romances are casuistical, and often playful and ironic⁴⁹ – and even that *Yvain* is 'a playful subversion of the whole romance genre'⁵⁰ –, then Hartmann's treatment of Iwein emerges as clearly more serious and didactic,⁵¹ and committed to the endorsement of courtly and political values: 'love and chivalry are united in the political responsibilities of the hero, who is shown to depart from and subsequently return to the value of *triuwe*, moral commitment'.⁵²

Chrétien's *Yvain* and *Owein*

It is finally time to return to the relative distance between Chrétien's *Yvain* and the Middle Welsh *Owein*, in an attempt to identify a preliminary first set of relevant criteria beyond deviations in the development of the plot. Without committing myself at this stage to any firm views on the relationship between *Yvain* and *Owein*, I consider it fruitful to bear in mind recent methodological advances in the analysis of medieval translation literature which insist on seeing differences between versions as stemming from differing narrative intentions.⁵³

extensive additions. The faithful reproduction [of the source] overall does not prevent Hartmann from treating it freely and changing emphases'; for discussions of differences between Chrétien and Hartmann compare Cormeau and Störmer, *Hartmann von Aue*, pp. 198–200 and 217, W. Mohr, *Hartmann von Aue. Iwein. Mit Beobachtungen zum Vergleich des 'Yvain' von Chrestien von Troyes mit dem 'Iwein' Hartmanns* (Göppingen, 1985), and O. Kratins, *The Dream of Chivalry: A Study of Chrétien de Troyes's 'Yvain' and Hartmann von Aue's 'Iwein'* (Washington, 1982). For the importance of the theme of knighthood see specifically W. H. Jackson, *Chivalry in Twelfth-Century Germany: The Works of Hartmann von Aue* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 210–81.

⁴⁸ A. Wolf, 'Die "Adaptation courtoise": Kritische Anmerkungen zu einem neuen Dogma', *Germanisch-Romanische Monatschrift* 27 (1977), 257–83 (p. 283).

⁴⁹ T. Hunt, *Chrétien de Troyes. Yvain (Le Chevalier au Lion)* (London, 1986).

⁵⁰ T. Hunt, 'Beginnings, Middles, and Ends: Some Interpretative Problems in Chrétien's *Yvain* and its Medieval Adaptations', in *The Craft of Fiction: Essays in Medieval Poetics*, ed. L. A. Arrathoon (Rochester, 1984), pp. 83–117 (p. 84).

⁵¹ For an instructive comparison between three passages of Chrétien's and Hartmann's texts respectively compare Hunt, 'Beginnings'.

⁵² Hunt, 'Beginnings', p. 110.

⁵³ Following, for example, Cormeau and Störmer, *Hartmann von Aue*, p. 168: 'neuere Vergleiche versuchen Abweichungen zunächst als Teil einer veränderten Erzählintention zu sehen, die dann

As is characteristic for Middle Welsh narratives, *Owein*'s macroform is prose, rather than verse. Thomson's comparison of the development of the plots of *Yvain* and *Owein* establishes that the latter follows 'the same sequence of events for the most part';⁵⁴ however, he insists that there are so many significant deviations and divergences between the two texts that a detailed summary of the one will not adequately represent the other. This does not apply to the relationship between *Boeve* and *Bown* and establishes the greater relative distance between *Yvain* and *Owein* in this regard. It is perhaps instructive to contrast here Thomson's summaries of the beginning of the two texts:⁵⁵

Yvain

Arthur, king of Britain, holds court at Whitsuntide at Carduel in Wales. After dinner he retires to his chamber, followed by the queen, and falls asleep. Outside the door Dodinel, Sagremor, Kay, Gawain and Yvain gather listening to a tale told by Calogrenant; the queen overhears it and comes out. Kay rails at Calogrenant for showing prompter courtesy than the rest. The queen begs him to continue and take no heed of Kay. He demurs, but Kay charges the queen on her allegiance to command him, and Calogrenant reluctantly agrees. He appeals for an attentive and sympathetic audience.

Owein

The emperor Arthur was holding court at Kaerllion ar Wysc; sitting in his chamber with Owein, Kynon, and Kei, Gwenhwyuar and her maidens sewing – Glewlwyd Gouaeluawr was acting as porter – Arthur proposes to take a nap before the meal, leaving the others to entertain themselves by conversation, and promising that Kei will provide a snack for them. Kynon demands the fulfilment of the promise from Kei, who demands the story first. They promise the story and Kei goes for the food. When they have eaten Kei demands the promised tale in exchange. Owein bids Kynon tell the best he knows.

He notes as the relevant differences:

Different location of events; perhaps different date; before dinner in W, after elsewhere; story begun and interrupted in F, queen present throughout in W; Kei's part very different. In W only speaking characters are named; elsewhere Dodinel, Sagremors, Gawain 'walk on'.⁵⁶

wahrscheinlich dem Nachdichter zuzuweisen ist, ehe sie Motiveinflüsse anderer Quellen veranschlagen' 'In more recent comparisons [critics] have tried to envisage deviations as the result of a different narrative intention, which is probably to be attributed to the redactor, before suggesting the influence of motifs from other sources'.

⁵⁴ *Owein*, ed. Thomson, p. xxviii.

⁵⁵ *Owein*, ed. Thomson, pp. xxix–xxx; for the detailed comparison of the complete text compare pp. xxix–lvi.

⁵⁶ *Owein*, ed. Thomson, p. xxx. T. Hunt, 'Some Observations on the Textual Relationship of Li Chevaliers au Lion and Iarlls y Ffynnwawn', *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 33 (1974), 93–113 (pp. 98–9), remarks on the same passage: 'Two details (the taking of meat and the emperor's sleep) in the Welsh text appear singular and yet purposeless. In the French they are natural and *functionally indispensable*, being intimately linked to narrative requirements. In other words, their occurrence in

The overarching development of the plot of *Owein*, in spite of differences in its time scale, is parallel to *Yvain*, with its two corresponding main sections and the intervening crisis caused by the hero. This specific structure, the *Doppelweg*, is thought to be characteristic of Chrétien's romances – and would support the first part of Oliver Padel's contention that '[t]he Welsh romances are thus structured as if written within the same new genre as Chrétien's romances, but omitting the primary purpose of that genre'.⁵⁷ His statement, however, raises the two vexed questions of the appropriate generic classification of *Owein* and of its narrative purpose. I think that most critics would nowadays agree that *Owein* does not belong to the same genre of 'romance' as *Yvain*. However, it seems much more difficult to define its genre within the Welsh context in positive terms. Hunt has suggested that the method of story-telling employed in *Owein* is basically that of the European *Volksmärchen*, and displays features of 'both the oral tale and the *Buchmärchen*', as well as the influence of Chrétien.⁵⁸ He describes its redactor nicely and somewhat paradoxically as 'an antiquarian entertainer', who was 'inspired by the popularity of the continental romances to refurbish the originally native tale of Owein'.⁵⁹ Roberts, however, has tried to vindicate the label 'romance' by establishing a special category of 'Welsh romance' for *Owein* and its companion texts *Gereint* and *Peredur*, which share with *Owein* their correspondence to Chrétien's romances:

They are firmly in the Middle Welsh prose narrative tradition as that developed in its written form. They are restrained, formal, sparse in description, and objective in their characterisation: there is no analysis of the hero's feelings or motives. But the authors take the essence of the idea of romance and express it in terms of the idea of that Welsh narrative tradition and 'Welsh romance' is a reasonable name for the result.⁶⁰

His classification is based on the assumption that these three texts 'contain features which we associate with the romance genre, a genre based not on form and structure but on ethos and authorial intentions',⁶¹ and this emphasis on the text's underlying ideology and its narrative meaning to justify the generic label, may encounter some serious difficulties, not only in the case of *Owein*. Most recently, Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan has reviewed the complexities relating to the genre of, and terminology for, *Owein*, *Gereint*, and

the *mabinogi* cannot readily be accounted for without reference to putative sources. In Chretien their presence seems to require no explanation other than internal necessity. This statement of facts is consonant with the view that the Welsh text, in its surviving form, has been influenced by Chretien's version.'

⁵⁷ O. J. Padel, *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 79.

⁵⁸ T. Hunt, 'The Art of *Iarllles y Ffynawn* and the European *Volksmärchen*', *Studia Celtica* VIII/IX (1973/1974), 107–20, the quotation at p. 111.

⁵⁹ Hunt, 'The Art', p. 111.

⁶⁰ B. F. Roberts, 'The Idea of a Welsh Romance', in idem, *Studies on Middle Welsh Literature* (Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter, 1992), pp. 133–46 (p. 141).

⁶¹ Roberts, 'The Idea', p. 143.

Peredur.⁶² As she points out these three texts were not perceived or presented as a coherent group by the scribes of the White Book of Rhydderch and the Red Book of Hergest respectively; the label 'the three romances' is therefore modern, not medieval, and gives a false impression of their generic coherence. The application of the term 'romance', or Welsh 'rhamant', has no medieval authority either and is a modern borrowing from Chrétien's corresponding romances, for which this term has established and well-defined critical validity. Concentrating then on *Peredur*, Lloyd-Morgan argues convincingly that the definition as romance applicable to the *Roman de Perceval* cannot in its entirety be applied to *Peredur*, since important elements of romance are non-existent, for example Chrétien's focus on exegesis, the constant analysis of ideas and feelings. She concludes that the 'essence of romance lies not in the narrative alone but in the treatment of the story itself, and this is precisely where some of the chief differences lie between *Peredur* and its French counterparts' and she therefore prefers to call *Peredur* 'a tale with romance elements'. This, in my view, would be an appropriate and convenient term for *Owein* as well: on the negative side exegesis is an element also lacking in *Owein* – the narrator's focus being very much on the actions and events, as it is in the tales of the *Mabinogion*-corpus with native themes –, on the positive side we may note, for example, its overarching bipartite structure, its Arthurian setting, and its hero's quest which leads to some form of maturity.

Owein takes its hero and his crisis seriously, as does Hartmann's *Iwein*. Roberts is inclined to see both chivalric and personal elements in *Owein*'s development:

The theme of the romance is Owain's coming to know himself, and to recognize the immaturity in his character which led him to spend three years at the fountain unmindful of Arthur and the court, and three further years at court forgetful of his wife. He achieves *moderatio* (*mesure*) when he keeps in balance the delights and responsibilities of his calling as knight, companion and husband.⁶³

He also insists on the importance of 'the sophisticated chivalric themes of the tensions arising from the topos of courtly love and the hero's self-knowledge', which for him makes it likely that the author of *Owein* was aware of the developed forms of French romance, but at the same time he stresses that '*Owein* consistently plays down explicit chivalric features'.⁶⁴ However, if one looks more closely at the relationship between *Owein* and Iarlles y Ffynnawn, who is never given a personal name in the Welsh text, it emerges that theirs is a rather impersonal relation, at least as it is presented by

⁶² C. Lloyd-Morgan, 'Medieval Welsh Tales or Romances? Problems of Genre and Terminology' (forthcoming in *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*). I wish to thank Dr Lloyd-Morgan for giving me access to her as yet unpublished paper.

⁶³ Roberts, 'The Welsh Romance', p. 179.

⁶⁴ Roberts, 'The Welsh Romance', p. 180.

the narrator. There is no discussion of the possible amatory or social implications of Owein taking leave from her and her realm,⁶⁵ and no persuasion is necessary – this is, of course, three years and three months after their marriage, not more or less immediately after it as is the case in *Yvain*; Arthur simply asks her for permission to present Owein to his noblemen and their ladies ('y dangos y vyrda Ynys Prydein a'y gwagedda').⁶⁶ There is no confrontation or reconciliation when Owein finally returns to her, as could perhaps be expected if courtly, or personal, love were a central issue; he simply arrives in her realm and takes her with him to Arthur's court, and 'she was his wife as long as she was alive' ('a hi a uu wreic [idaw] tra uu vyw hi').⁶⁷ Contrary to Roberts's suggestion, Hunt has argued that in *Yvain* '[l]ove and chivalry are not depicted, in the final analysis, as mutually enriching' and that the two themes are not brought together.⁶⁸ This may be reflected in the Welsh author's treatment of the personal relations between Owein and Iarlles y Ffynnwawn, or he may simply have had no special interest in this aspect of his *sujet*. In her forthcoming PhD thesis Regine Reck will argue on the basis of a close analysis of the scenes of combat in the second part of *Owein* that Owein's development is neither chivalric nor social, but individual, in that he achieves some kind of personal prudence – to be more thoughtful about what he says and what he promises, and that in certain situations it is best not to talk at all – perhaps best to be compared to the development of Pwyll in the first branch of the *Mabinogion* to become a worthy bearer of his name – *pwyll* as a common noun meaning 'understanding, common sense, wit(s)'.⁶⁹ In conclusion, whatever its exact purpose,⁷⁰ *Owein* is neither predominantly

⁶⁵ For an instructive discussion of the differences between Chrétien and Hartmann in this scene compare Hunt, 'Beginnings', pp. 92–101.

⁶⁶ *Owein*, ed. Thomson, lines 558–9.

⁶⁷ *Owein*, ed. Thomson, lines 780–1. Fulton, 'Individual and Society', p. 31, similarly argues that 'the discourses of courtly love and chivalric honour [. . .] are virtually absent from the Welsh romances', compare *ibid.*, pp. 31–7.

⁶⁸ Hunt, 'Beginnings', p. 104.

⁶⁹ Again I have to thank Regine Reck for kindly allowing me to refer to her research in progress.

⁷⁰ Fulton, 'Individual and Society', p. 25, insists that *Yvain/Erec* and *Owein/Gereint* respectively represent 'different models of noble individualism and lordship', related to 'the different economic and political structures of the two countries [France and Wales] in the twelfth century'. In her discussion of the relations between the Welsh *marchogyon* and Arthur (*ibid.*, pp. 25 and 45–9) she would seem to underestimate the importance of the fact that at least according to the Red Book of Hergest (the other two medieval manuscripts have lost the relevant portions of the text), Owein finally departs from Arthur's court for his own domain, after having been there for some time as captain of Arthur's household troops and as his friend ('Owein a trigwys yn llys Arthur o hynny allan yn pennteulu, ac yn annwyl idaw, yny aeth ar y gyfoeth e hun', *Owein*, ed. Thomson, lines 817–19 ('Owein stayed at Arthur's court from then on as captain of the household troop and as a friend of his, until he went to his own dominions')). Owein may possibly recognize Arthur's overlordship, but his exact status is nowhere made explicit. Thomson (*Owein*, ed. Thomson, p. 61) suggests that the circumstances of Owein's departure may be similar to Gereint's reasons for leaving Arthur's court, namely his father's age and infirmity and his inability to defend his dominions. This must remain hypothetical, but I still think that Fulton's conclusions ('Individual and Society', p. 47) may require some textual qualification: 'In *Owein*, the hero returns finally to live at Arthur's court with the Lady of the Fountain, apparently abandoning his lordship of the Lady's land. His final adventure in which he kills Du Traws (The Black Oppressor) is undertaken as Arthur's man and he is rewarded for it by being made captain of

chivalric in outlook, nor a romance in the narrow sense, and the relative distance between *Yvain* and *Owein* is considerable here, whereas with regard to meaning and generic conventions it is small in the cases of *Boeve* and *Bown* and the *Chanson de Roland* and *Cân Rolant* respectively.

As to the narrative strategies and techniques employed in *Gereint* and also in *Owein*, Thomson has stressed that it seems 'to be generally agreed that the narrative method of the romances is thoroughly in harmony with that of the prose tales whose matter is drawn from native tradition'.⁷¹ Roberts has placed *Owein*'s 'anonymous author who never intrudes or intervenes' and the concomitant absence of a separate narrator's voice firmly within the context of 'this 'epic' convention of the Welsh prose tradition'.⁷² In her comprehensive discussion of the narrative strategies of Middle Welsh narrators and their foundation in an preponderantly oral-vocal⁷³ tradition, Sioned Davies⁷⁴ has treated *Owein*, as well as *Gereint* and *Peredur*, on a par with the texts which derive their *sujets* more immediately from the native tradition. It is therefore no surprise that it contains no narrative lapses, as do *Bown* and *Cân Rolant*. *Owein* has thus become one of the texts which serve as a yardstick for assessing the performance of redactors of texts ostensibly based on foreign sources. Since the accommodation to native narrative conventions was their guiding principle, it is here, rather than in the exact reproduction of the sequence of events or of the text's meaning, that the relative distance between *Yvain* and *Owein*, although considerable, is not much different from the one between *Boeve* and *Bown* or between the *Chanson de Roland* and *Cân Rolant*.

As in the case of the relative distance between *Boeve* and *Bown* it is again necessary to ask how representative the relative distance between *Yvain* and

Arthur's retinue, the highest position in a Welsh princely court. In *Yvain*, however, the hero remains with Laudine, in the land that he now rules. He has fully established himself as a powerful land-owning baron of high personal honour, whereas the Welsh Owein gives up his claim to non-Welsh lands in order to remain in the service of his Welsh lord.' According to Thomson (*Owein*, ed. Thomson, p. x) the later medieval and early modern manuscripts 'agree in ending at our line 819, omitting any reference to Owein's ever leaving Arthur's court again' (I wish to thank Regine Reck for this reference), so there may have been an alternative textual tradition which supports Fulton's interpretation. C. Lindahl ('Yvain's Return to Wales', *Arthuriana* 10,3 (2000), pp. 44–56 (p. 51)) states that 'in *Owein* the hero brings the Lady with him back to Arthur's court, thus leaving her realm behind. The last specific thing we hear about Owein's whereabouts is that he has finally settled on his own lands.' But Regine Reck kindly points out to me that the phrase 'y gyfoeth e hun' may be ambivalent and could refer to either Owein's inherited lands or to the lands of Iarlls y Ffynnwawn which became Owein's by marriage. Furthermore, the text does not state explicitly that Owein killed the Du Traws 'as Arthur's man' as Fulton believes; this may simply be another chance adventure, perhaps on his way back to Arthur's court, as Thomson (*Owein*, ed. Thomson, p. 60) suggested on the basis of lines 813–14: 'ac y kerdwys ac wynt gyt ac ef hyt yn llys Arthur' ('and he journeyed, and they [the women freed by Owein from the Du Traws] with him, to Arthur's court'). The sequence of events makes it unlikely that Owein already acted as Arthur's man here.

⁷¹ *Ystorya Gereint*, ed. Thomson, p. lxxiii.

⁷² Roberts, 'The Welsh Romance', pp. 180–81.

⁷³ I have borrowed the concept 'vocal' here from U. Schaefer, *Vokalität: Altenglische Dichtung zwischen Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit* (Tübingen, 1992).

⁷⁴ S. Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd: Astudiaeth o dechnegau naratif yn Y Mabinogi* (Cardiff, 1995).

Owein may be. A very tentative comparison with the relative distance between Chrétien's *Erec* and its medieval Welsh counterpart *Gereint* would seem to indicate that *Owein* and *Gereint* are quite similar on at least two counts, first with regard to the observable deviations from the sequence and details of Chrétien's plots,⁷⁵ and second in their adherence to the same basic norms and conventions of narrative strategies and presentation.⁷⁶ However, there are differences in degree, Proinsias Mac Cana has stressed that *Owein* is 'less frugal and restrained in its use of description [than the *Four Branches*], though still more sparing of ornate, adjectival language than either *Geraint* or *Peredur*'.⁷⁷

Norms of Relative Distance and Translatio?

From the foregoing discussion three major complexes of criteria to measure relative distance between two versions of the same *sujet* have tentatively emerged. The first complex concerns the sequence and the details of the plot's development, the second, which cannot really be separated from the first, the intended purpose and meaning of the text and its adherence to generic conventions (for example the issues of knighthood and courtly love in the case of *Yvain* and *Owein*), and the third relates to narrative strategies and techniques of presentation. On all three counts *Owein* is relatively distant from Chrétien's *Yvain*,⁷⁸ and thus overall more distant from *Yvain* than *Bown* is from *Boeve*, which is close to *Boeve* with respect to the first two, i.e. plot and meaning, and distant only with respect to the third, i.e. narrative strategies. This brings up the methodological issue of whether relative distance may be a flexible concept rather than a fixed one. It is striking that *Owein* and *Gereint* both score similarly, as do *Bown* and *Cân Rolant*, and that both pairs of texts are basically consistent in their scoring with regard to the three criteria. This is probably the intuitive basis for Roberts's introduction of the concept of a 'norm', of an expectable relative distance, which then results in his contrast of 'translation', in the case of *Bown*, with *translatio*, in the case of *Owein*. For a more explicit analysis, however, it will be necessary to identify how representative individual texts are in their realisation of relative distance. As I have suggested above, it may be useful to envisage a scalar

⁷⁵ Compare Roberts, 'Tales and Romances', p. 229: 'The Welsh and French versions are close to each other in their sequence of episodes.' For a detailed comparison with comments see *Ystoria Gereint*, ed. Thomson, pp. xxv–lxiii.

⁷⁶ Compare Roberts, 'Tales and Romances', p. 223: 'Linguistically and stylistically, the three romances are firmly in the *cyfarwydd* tradition as it appears in the written literature. The authors use the same vocabulary and formulas as the other tales, they show the same ability to write concisely and smoothly, varying their syntax and their tempo.'

⁷⁷ P. Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi* (Cardiff, 1992), p. 101.

⁷⁸ The distance between *Yvain* and *Owein* with regard to the sequence and details of the plot is clearly smaller than with regard to meaning and narrative strategies, so even this statement requires qualification.

concept of transcultural *translatio* to capture the possibility of different strategies followed by medieval Welsh redactors when they adapted foreign sources to their own textual culture and its literary milieu. But at this stage a further methodological problem arises, which concerns conceptual implications of this wider notion of *translatio*. It already implies some kind of dependence between the two texts compared, whereas the concept of 'relative distance' does not and can be restricted as a descriptive critical parameter to the analysis of any two versions of the same *sujet*. In the case of the Welsh texts under discussion here and their inextricable link to the *Mabinogion-Frage*, it is difficult to keep these two aspects apart!

Bearing all this in mind, we can now attempt to contrast *Owein* and *Gereint* on the one hand with *Bown* and *Cân Rolant* on the other, in order to suggest a set of hypotheses concerning features which may have had an impact on these texts' relative distance to the other versions of the same *sujet*, to either Chrétien and their indisputable sources respectively.⁷⁹ *Bown* and *Cân Rolant* both have a foreign *sujet* and are set in a foreign social and cultural milieu. In spite of the radical stylistic acculturation of the Welsh versions, their *sujets* remain foreign, and no attempts are made to accommodate it – probably because the redactors and their audience and patrons had an interest in topical foreign *sujets*. All deviations on the level of purpose and meaning of the texts, Christian in *Bown* and social in *Cân Rolant*, remain incidental and develop possibilities already inherent in the sources. On the other hand, from a Welsh perspective *Owein* and *Gereint* have basically native *sujets*, Arthur and his knights being well established in the (pseudo-)history and the literary tradition of Wales. As argued above, *Owein* is relatively distant from *Yvain* in the area of the ideology transported and of its narrative purpose; and whatever its exact purpose in the final analysis, it is certainly not another courtly variation on (the *sujet* of) *Yvain*, as is Hartmann's *Iwein*. Thus the character of the *sujet*, for example foreign versus native or chivalric versus heroic, to name just two options, may influence relative distance, and this is intimately connected with the ease of adaptability of generic conventions and narrative intentions. The type of text, e.g. narrative versus didactic or secular versus religious, will also play a major role, but is probably less relevant here, since all four texts considered belong to the larger genre of basically secular narratives. Another important aspect concerns the medial background of the redactors, whether they are steeped in the vocal tradition of the *cyfarwyddiaid*⁸⁰ ('story-tellers') or in a more written-based and international tradition – in view of the stylistic similarities

⁷⁹ For many useful suggestions on *Owein* compare Roberts, 'The Welsh Romance'.

⁸⁰ For a detailed discussion of this tradition compare Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd*. Compare also D. Edel, 'The "Mabinogionfrage": Arthurian Literature between Orality and Literacy', in *(Re)Oralisierung*, ed. H. L. C. Tristram (Tübingen, 1993), pp. 311–33 (p. 333), who argues that '*Peredur* is the result of a process of *Entschriftlichung*, of the transmission of a work of a highly elaborated literacy, a work with the sophisticated theme of a chivalric quest for self-knowledge and spiritual purification, to a linguistic and socio-cultural environment still heavily influenced by oral concepts'.

between the *Four Branches* and *Bown*, for example, it remains of course doubtful to what extent the two traditions can be meaningfully separated. Again the differences are best considered as gradual and scalar. What is probably indicative of a different background for *Bown* and *Owein* is the absence of narrative lapses in the latter. Related to this complex of the intellectual and cultural background of the redactors may be their date and the possibility of changing fashions in their approach to adaptations. Thus it is tempting to speculate that, if *Owein* in the form that we have it is indeed derived from *Yvain* through a process of transcultural *translatio* and must in this case be dated to some time after 1177 and perhaps to about 1200, and if *Bown* and *Cân Rolant* can be dated to the middle/second half of the thirteenth century, then the differences in approach may either be related to their chronology⁸¹ and to a change in the approach to *translatio*, or simply to cultural, social, or intellectual differences in their redactors' background.

In conclusion, I feel that *Bown* as well as *Cân Rolant* may well represent some yardstick for the performance of medieval Welsh redactors of secular French narratives from perhaps the middle to the late thirteenth century, for the norms they had in mind about the appropriate relative distance from their sources, and for the liberties they felt they were entitled to take in the process of transcultural *translatio*. It should also have become clear from the foregoing discussion that there are many significant differences between these texts and *Owein* – and probably also *Gereint*, though this requires further scrutiny – with regard to the factors which may influence their relative distance from other versions of the same *sujet*. Any comparison of *Bown* with *Owein* is therefore fraught with methodological dangers. However, if one is prepared to believe that *Owein* is derived from *Yvain*, one could go as far as to argue that the genre of Arthurian adaptations may represent one norm for its times and its cultural and literary milieu in the same way as the later adaptations of French *chansons de geste* may reflect such a norm, albeit a different one. 'Relative distance', attractive and useful as it may appear to be as a critical concept, is problematic because of the difficulty of controlling the factors that influence its realisation in the actual processes of *translatio* of individual texts within their specific historic and cultural contexts.⁸²

⁸¹ Note, however, that A. H. Diverres ('*Iarllles y Ffynnawn* and *Le Chevalier au Lion*: Adaptation or Common Source?', *Studia Celtica* XVI/XVII (1981/1982), 144–62) suggests a later date, between 1250 and 1284, on the basis of legal evidence, which would make *Owein* roughly contemporary with *Bown* and *Cân Rolant*.

⁸² I wish to thank Dr Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan for her generous advice and valuable suggestions from which my presentation has greatly benefited. All remaining imperfections are my own responsibility.

V

NEITHER FLESH NOR FOWL: MERLIN AS BIRD-MAN IN BRETON FOLK TRADITION

Mary-Ann Constantine

Merlin Merlin pelac'h etu, hio! hio! – aman-han. En devez el evoa bet da chassee, eur loenanic enoua tapet. Pa voa tapet, tapet evoa, lacet e groë da lardet. Breman e vo tenet en den emez deuz e groë; Voeda evo glascet eur higer da e lahet. Pehoa ed de glasque eur hicher da lahet, goulez digan an ani gos a gué vige ed dober tan dindan an dour, et pevoa ed dober tan dindan an dour emen a voa ed quid. Ti un ini goz evoa ed goulén logo (?) – Mi so aouache evit ho logo, bouët da roy dach ne meus quet, me emeuz pem queneg deuz me argant et pempe guennecguet bara en neveux prenet ha ho daou he deveus coainnet. mam gos mar caret ma credet, ebars en allé eus un galompadec. mam gos roit din ho eubel me a ia ive dar galompadec. ray a ra den hy heubel dont dar galompadec. lacquet he voua den ouarnou plouse. eur garlheden plouse hac eur bride plouse. breman hema ha ya gant he varch da dal an allée hac e voua laret an ini a nige lampet dreiste ar barrier bras ha nigné bet merche ar roué. breman he heont tout an eille vouar lerche éguilée da gavet ar roué, ar roué a goulet digant he verche: hémé hé! hémé hé! ac é voua losquet eur banach goat dean gant ar sabren. ar roue a lavaras dean mar a nigné quet digasset violence merlin vras dean, he nigné laghet a nezan. neuse ha ia da galsque ar violans a ve satgeut gant pider chaden aour heuse de vélé, hac en hac he trocho an diou anzéz ha he honnet dar bot sco ac he laret: cant, hac en trocho an diou alle ha he honnet en dro dar bot sco ac he lavaret: cant, hac en hen é vonet da gavet ar roué. ar roué a lavaras dezan mar ne nigné quet gallet digas Merlin vras da gavet an nezan en nige lazet an nezan. ac hen ac he tapout ar charraban da vonet da gavet ha nezan. hac he lavaret dezan ha na névoûa quet goulet un den he passeal enan ha merche ar roué gantan – Leou, émezan, me meus goulet un den he tremen aman a merch ar roué gantan, ha ma violence a zo eat gantan. hac eman hac he lavaret dezan: – deus geneme ebars ma charaban ac he éfompe hon daou da glasque a nezan, hac hen ac en bacquet an nezan ebars en eur cachet houarne ac alchouhey ar nezan var néan, hac e vonet dar borse ar roué ac he tisquëe an nezan dean ha pa voua guelet an nezan he voua losquet quite.¹

¹ The text is given as published by Donatien Laurent, *Aux Sources du Barzaz-Breiz: la mémoire d'un peuple* (Douarnenez, 1989), p. 289. All translations are mine unless otherwise stated; in this instance I

(Merlin, Merlin, where are you going? hio! hio! – he-ere! One day when he went a-hunting/ He caught a wren/ When it was caught, caught it was/ Put in a stable to fatten up./ Now they will pull the man out of his stable/ Then they'll fetch a butcher to kill him. When he had gone to find a butcher to kill him, he asked the old woman if she would go and put the water on to boil, and when she went to put the water on, he got away. He went to an old woman's house to ask for lodging (?) – I am willing to lodge you, but have no food to give you, I have five sous of my money and he bought five sous worth of bread and the two of them had supper. granny if you believe me there's a horse-race down the lane. granny give me your foal I too shall go to the horse race. she gives him her foal to go to the horse-race. they put straw horse-shoes on him. a halter of straw and a bridle of straw. now he goes off with his horse towards the lane and they said that whoever jumped the big fence would have the king's daughter. now they go one after the other to find the king, the king asked his daughter: it's him! it's him! and one drop of blood was let from him with the sword. the king said to him if he didn't fetch the violin of Merlin Vras he would kill him, so he goes to look for the violin which was hung from four golden chains above his bed, and he cut two of them [?] and he went to the elder bush and he said: a hundred, and he cut the other two and he went back to the elder bush and he said: a hundred, and he went to find the king. the king said to him if he could not bring back Merlin Vras for him he would kill him. and he took a cart to go and get him. and he said to him have you not seen a man pass this way and the king's daughter with him – Indeed, he said, I have seen a man pass here with the king's daughter, and he took my violin. and he says to him: – come with me in my cart and we'll both go and look for him. and he put him into an iron cage and turned the key on him, and he went to the king's castle and he showed him to him and when he had been seen he got away.)

This peculiar text, collected in Brittany sometime in the 1830s, captures the essence of the Merlin figure in Breton folk tradition. Like him it is a hybrid, in a state of generic in-betweenness: neither flesh nor fowl. Exploring the piece and its closest analogues involves unpicking a knot of associations that link Merlin's name to the story of a wild man, or creature, or bird, who must be tricked into captivity and brought to the king. This piece adds an extra twist, since the image at the heart of the story, of wildness caged, has pulled in a fragment of song about the hunt and capture of a wren. The poetic exactness of that collision is irresistible: it invites speculation. The Celtic Merlin/Myrddin material is, as many readers will know, extremely rich and complex, and any discussion involving wild men, prophets and birds is liable to turn into the familiar Arthurian quest for parallels, developments and connections between sources far apart in time and language and culture. I want as far as possible to avoid writing that kind of article here. I am more interested in how and why certain narrative elements seem to 'cohere' the

have followed the punctuation of the original except in the opening lines, where I have signalled the metrical nature of the Breton.

way they do, and in the explanations that have been offered to account for that cohesion. In other words, it is the *nature* of the associations, both conscious (within the scholarly community) and subconscious (within the cultural community), that concerns me here, more than when and how they were made.

This discussion of the Breton Merlin cannot claim to be presenting new material, or even new research. The rarest texts involved (this piece and the related ballad, discussed below) have been readily available since 1989, when they were edited and translated into French with a discussion by Donatien Laurent; since then, I have translated the ballad into English and briefly commented on the Merlin question in a study of the Breton song tradition.² But reviewing the subject does create an opportunity to ask new questions, and if this helps to nudge some fascinating material into more general consideration in the wider field of Arthurian studies, so much the better.

Before exploring the ‘jumbled’ Merlin text, some scene-setting is required. In 1839, a young Breton viscount, Hersart de La Villemarqué, published an influential volume of ‘popular songs of Brittany’, the *Barzaz-Breiz*. The book filled a frustrating gap in the sources for medieval Brittany: in the absence of surviving manuscripts, it summoned oral tradition to throw direct light on the culture and events of Brittany’s past. Using genuine folk songs which he collected from his home territory around Kemperle in Kerne (Quimperlé in the region of Cornouaille), La Villemarqué, then a student at the École des Chartes in Paris, created poetic texts, buffered with scholarly footnotes, covering everything from bardic prophecy to chivalric romance. In a second edition in 1845 he added several more songs and notes; a third edition in 1867 brought three more songs and further revisions. By the time of this third edition, critical opinion of the *Barzaz-Breiz* had swung from enthusiasm to scepticism and in some cases angry disillusion: yet it is noteworthy that, perhaps because of the author’s privileged status, and probably more because the need to believe in it was so strong, outright criticism of the *Barzaz-Breiz* was a long time in coming. When later collectors of folk-song, having looked in vain for Arthur and other heroes, began to voice their doubts, La Villemarqué retreated into a silence that he never broke. Opinion as to the authenticity of his texts remained bitterly divided for decades after his death.³

² Laurent, *Aux Sources du Barzaz-Breiz*; M.-A. Constantine, *Breton Ballads* (Aberystwyth, 1996), pp. 74–80 and pp. 241–50.

³ The fullest study is that of Francis Gourvil, *Théodore-Claude-Henri Hersart de La Villemarqué (1815–1895) et le “Barzaz-Breiz” (1839–1845–1867): origines, éditions, sources, critiques, influences* (Rennes, 1960) (cited hereafter as *La Villemarqué*). See also Laurent, *Aux Sources du Barzaz-Breiz*, and B. Tanguy, *Aux Origines du nationalisme breton*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1977).

The gwerz of Merlin the Bard

Two songs about Merlin were among the easiest targets for critics. ‘Merlin-Diwinour’ (‘Merlin the Prophet’) and ‘Merlin-Barz’ (‘Merlin the Bard’) offered perfect examples of ‘Celtic’ texts created to fill the vacuum in Breton sources.⁴ The accompanying notes show that the young author was familiar both with the prophet-figure Merlin-Ambrosius and with the character of the ‘wild’ Myrddin from early Welsh sources, which he knew through the *Myvyrian Archaiology* and the recently edited French version of Geoffrey’s *Vita Merlini*.⁵ The 1867 edition of the *Barzaz-Breiz* added two more ‘fragments’ of what La Villemarqué claimed was an Armorican Merlin-cycle. These conveniently fleshed out the sage’s biography with accounts of his miraculous birth and his conversion to Christianity in the final years of his life, the first in the form of a lullaby sung by the somewhat reluctant mother of the miraculous child, the latter as a dialogue with Saint Kado. Five years before the last edition, La Villemarqué’s fascination with Merlin appeared in all its tangled glory in *Myrdhin ou l’Enchanteur Merlin* (1862), a study of the figure’s legendary, historical, mythological and poetic aspects, which gave considerable prominence to his own texts. For Francis Gourvil in 1960 as for F.-M. Luzel and R. F. Le Men a hundred years before, the Merlin material, with no obvious correlation in the known song tradition, was readily classed among the ‘chants inventés’.⁶

The picture changed sharply in 1975 when Donatien Laurent submitted a doctoral thesis based on La Villemarqué’s collecting notebooks, which he had rediscovered, transcribed and studied in depth. In this and the subsequent publication in 1989, Laurent clearly demonstrated that one text of the four, the long narrative ‘Merlin-Barz’, was based very closely on a genuine collected ballad or *gwerz* (pl. *gwerziou*). Linguistic analysis even made it possible to suggest a probable, if surprising, singer: Annaïg Le Breton (1759–1839), from the hamlet of Kerigazul in Nizon, described on her death certificate as a ‘mendiante’ (beggar woman). The first section of the manuscript ballad is missing (lost after collection), but the sequence of events can be reconstructed from La Villemarqué’s *Barzaz-Breiz* version which, as far as the narrative goes, follows the rest of the collected text fairly reliably. It

⁴ All the Merlin poems can be found in the 1867 *Barzaz-Breiz* (the edition most readily available), pp. 56–78.

⁵ *Galfridi de Monemuta Vita Merlini* (Paris, 1837), ed. F. Michel and T. Wright. I am currently examining La Villemarqué’s debt to Welsh scholarship as part of a project on the Welsh bard and antiquarian Edward Williams (‘Iolo Morganwg’), based at the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, Aberystwyth.

⁶ Gourvil, *La Villemarqué*, p. 389; cf. F.-M. Luzel, *De l’Authenticité des chants du Barzaz-Breiz de M. de la Villemarqué* (Saint-Brieuc, Paris and Brest, 1872).

tells the following story (the missing section appears here in square brackets):⁷

[The king organizes a competition for his knights, and the hero obtains reluctant permission from his mother to attend. He arrives on his russet pony, learns that the prize is the king's daughter, and wins. The king is not happy and imposes further tasks on the hero, the first being to obtain the harp of Merlin (which he does with his mother's help, and the aid of a magic hammer), the second to obtain his ring]. The hero returns to complain to his mother, who offers more help:

	- Ma mab bihan na chiffet k[et] gan kement zé, tap eur skoultrik a zo aze;	My child, don't worry about it take the branch which is over there.
20	tap ar skoultrik zé an derven a zo enen tregont dellien, a zo enhen tregont delien, ken kaer egh[] aour melen	Take that branch, the third one, on which there are thirty leaves. On which there are thirty leaves as fair as yellow gold.

He must wait for the cock to crow at midnight and then his little horse will take him to Melin's⁸ house where he will be fast asleep: it will be easy for him to take the ring from Melin's right hand. The deed is accomplished, and the hero goes back to the king. The king predictably demands 'one more thing' – that Melin be brought into the court to glorify the wedding. A voice now breaks in addressing Melin himself:

65	Melin Melin pleac'h et-hu, toulet ho dillad an dou tu? P[aour]kes Melin pele[c'h e]tu, saotret ho bragou gant ludu, Gant ludu, gant pl[]aboulen, plech etu, ta, dieerien;	Melin, Melin, where are you going, your clothes torn on both sides? Poor Melin, where are you going, Your breeches dirtied with ash With ash with [-] where are you going then barefoot
70	evel eur paourkez dier méz hag en ho torn eur vas kelen, Pelech et hu ta evelhen; [Pelech . . . din evelhen] keler en tu benak va delen;	Like a poor countryman with a holly stick in your hand? So where are you going like that? Where am I going like this? To look for my harp somewhere
75	Klasket tu ben[ak] ma delen, ha dallé he poez argant guen	To seek my harp somewhere which was worth its weight in white silver

The voice, that of the hero's mother, reassures him, and persuades him to come into the house to rest. When her son (now named as Rafelik) returns he is astonished to find Merlin [*sic*] snoring by the fire. [The singer appears to have lost her thread here,

⁷ The following summary is taken (with minor changes) from my *Breton Ballads*, pp. 75–7.

⁸ The collected text in the notebook calls him *Melin* up to line 98. La Villemarqué possibly did not recognise the name until then.

and La Villemarqué notes in brackets ‘boemet oa bet gant tri avalik ru’ (‘he had been bewitched by three red apples’)].

The scene shifts to the palace, where the queen and her attendants wonder why there is so much noise in the streets of Quimper. It is Merlin in a cart pulled by two dazzlingly harnessed horses, one black, one white, and accompanied by Rafelik and his mother, ‘an old lady dressed in white’. The king leaps from his bed to meet them, Rafelik declares his victory, and a crier is sent out to proclaim the wedding. There follow some fifty-five lines of invitation to rich and poor to attend the festivities, described in glorious detail: they will kill eighteen boars, eighteen oxen and eighteen heifers (of the latter, nine white and nine black); there will be jewels and a variety of garments as gifts, and plenty of bread and wine. The crier concludes his invitation on a note of ‘gauloiserie’. The day arrives and there is another detailed account of the crowds, their colours, clothing and accoutrements. Rafelik and his bride leave for Vannes with his mother:

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|-----|--|--|
| 245 | et int rach kuit a galon vat,
gant benos roué hag he kimiat, | They all left with a good heart,
with the blessing and goodwill of
the king, |
| | et int et oll kuit ha laouen m[eu]rbet
nemet ar roue ne de ket; | They have all left joyfully,
but the King is not happy. |
| | ar roue a zo gul glaharet, | The king is deeply upset |
| 250 | Merlin a zo arre kollet, | Merlin is lost again: |
| | Terchet choas eur wech en deus gret,
wier darre pelech e oet. | he has escaped once more.
No-one knows where he has gone. |

The ballad’s length, purity of language and its clever mixture of dialogue and narration (the latter including several descriptive ‘set pieces’, like the wedding festivities, which are highly unusual in the *gwerziou*), make it exceptional in Breton oral tradition. Only a handful of *gwerziou*, as we know them from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, can be said to reflect specific themes and motifs from Celtic or Arthurian literature: one must look hard, at least as regards content, for putative descendants of the elusive *lai Breton*.⁹ But this piece does look like a ‘survival’. It contains a number of rare archaisms – some of which La Villemarqué unwittingly removed in his tidied-up version for the *Barzaz-Breiz* – including the word *kemengader* (‘messenger’), only paralleled in the fifteenth-century *Catholicon*, or *ken* (like Welsh ‘cain’) meaning ‘fair’.¹⁰

This *gwerz* is also, clearly, a longer, metrical version of the prose piece (‘prose’ is used here for convenience only) set out above. What then is the

⁹ For the debate about the ‘lost’ Breton literature of the Middle Ages see Y.-B. Piriou ‘Contribution à une histoire de la “littérature bretonne perdue”’, 2 vols. (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université de Haute-Bretagne, Rennes, 1982); C. Brett, ‘Breton Latin Literature as Evidence for Literature in the Vernacular AD 800–1300’, *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 18 (Winter 1989), 1–25. See Constantine, *Breton Ballads*, pp. 61–5, for a brief overview.

¹⁰ Laurent, *Aux Sources* pp. 292–3; P.-Y. Lambert notes further examples in his review of Laurent’s book, *Etudes Celtiques* 27 (1990), 395–9.

relationship between the two? The prose-text was found amongst La Villemarqué's papers with the ballad, but it is not in his hand. Laurent suggests, following hints in the *Barzaz-Breiz*, that this may be one of the 'fragments' communicated to La Villemarqué by Barbe-Emilie de St-Prix, who had been collecting songs from the 1820s in the Morlaix region and around Callac. The handwriting is not conclusive, but the language suggests a context in Kerne-Uhel (Haute-Cornouaille): Mme de Saint-Prix's residence at Kerbournet, near Callac, would be a plausible link to the area.¹¹ Whoever collected it, the authenticity of the piece is beyond question: it is hard to imagine any literate Celtophile of the 1830s successfully imitating its breathless compression.

Read side by side, the ballad and the prose piece are mutually supportive: the latter offers reassurance about the worryingly *sui generis* status of the song, and confirms or adds details from the opening narrative sequence known only from the *Barzaz-Breiz* version, such as the hero's rustic appearance at the joust (the pony with the straw halter and shoes), and the harp (nicely transformed into a violin) suspended by four gold chains. The ballad for its part sheds considerable light on the squashed narrative of the prose piece, and particularly helps elucidate the confusion of pronouns ('and when he showed him to him he was let go'), while the first line, 'Merlin Merlin pelac'h etu?' would appear to be a direct echo of the song. The 'jumbled' prose Merlin reads like a summary, though whether of a song or a folk tale it is impossible to say. Taken together it seems likely that a long narrative, probably in verse form, about the capture of Merlin existed in Brittany well before it surfaced in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Thus, though this is, first and foremost, a *nineteenth-century* text, it is tempting to speculate about the period of genesis of such a piece. Is it also, in some sense, 'medieval'?

After all, this Breton Merlin has various 'medieval' features. There are several interesting details, such as the *Perceval*-style opening of the unlikely hero on his comical mount; or the sleep-inducing magical branch (replaced by an obscure elder-tree spell in the prose piece) which has parallels in Irish saga.¹² And, as Donatien Laurent remarks, the combination of harp and ring, and the fact that Merlin is referred to as Merlin *varz* (cf. Welsh *bardd*: bard, poet) may bring to mind the strictures about the entitlements of court poets in medieval Welsh law.¹³ From a narrative point of view, however, one of the

¹¹ Laurent *Aux Sources*, p. 290. See also A. Le Braz, 'Mme de Saint-Prix et La Villemarqué', *Le Fureteur breton* (1912), 95–7. Thanks to Diarmuid Johnson for comments on the dialect of the piece.

¹² K. Hollo, 'Conchobar's "Sceptre": The Growth of a Literary Topos', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 29 (Summer 1995), 11–25.

¹³ Laurent, *Aux Sources*, p. 296. The entitlements of the *bardd teulu* vary slightly in the three redactions of the laws but both the Blegywryd and Cyfnerth texts agree that he receives a ring from the queen and a harp from the king (a throwboard from the king in the Iorwerth text). For full references and a detailed discussion see D. Jenkins, 'Bardd Teulu and Pencerd', in *The Welsh King and his Court*, ed. T. M. Charles-Edwards, M. E. Owen and P. Russell (Cardiff, 2000). Thanks to Sara Elin Roberts for

closest analogues of the capture and chaining of an unwilling Merlin is Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* (1150–51).¹⁴ Here Merlin, living wild in the Caledonian woods after the battle of Arfderydd, spends much of his time resisting attempts to bring him back into the orbit of court and family. In fact he is captured twice before finally returning to the woods, the first time by a messenger with whom he initially goes willingly. Once in court, he immediately tries to escape again. Failing to persuade him with gifts of clothes, food and treasure, the king orders him 'to be stoutly chained to prevent him setting off for the forest wilderness'.¹⁵ Merlin retreats into silence, broken only by enigmatic laughter: he is offered his freedom in return for an explanation (in this instance, the queen's adultery, revealed by a stray leaf in her hair). The pattern of capture and release is then repeated in a different narrative context, this time involving Merlin's estranged wife and the man she intends to marry. Merlin finally recovers his sanity, but chooses to return to the forest with his widowed sister Ganiada and his fellow seer Taliesin.

Unlike Geoffrey's earlier and hugely successful *Historia Regum Britanniae*, the *Vita Merlini* was not a widely disseminated text, and was most likely intended for an intimate readership. Because it was the *Historia* which provided the main channel for the development of the character in later Continental romance, Merlin became best-known in his role as magician and advisor to King Arthur. In consequence, the wild man version of Merlin has retained a distinctively 'Celtic' flavour, virtually restricted as it is to Geoffrey's *Vita* and the small complex of narratives in Welsh and Scottish on which he drew.¹⁶ That the Breton piece should follow this capture-of-Merlin scenario is highly suggestive and, for some commentators, entirely natural: Brittany, like Wales, has preserved (but orally, rather than in manuscript) a vestige of the earlier wild man narrative, the 'original' Myrddin story. It is worth noting here that there is at least one other striking connection between the *gwerz* tradition and early medieval Welsh literature. The ballad of 'Skolan' is clearly related to the enigmatic 'Ysgolan' poem in the thirteenth-century *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* ('The Black Book of Carmarthen'), a manuscript which also happens to contain the earliest Myrddin material.¹⁷

this reference. Note that the Breton prose piece calls him Merlin *Vraz* (Merlin the Great): one can easily imagine the substitution of *braz* for the rarer *barz*.

¹⁴ *The Life of Merlin: Vita Merlini*, ed. B. Clarke (Cardiff, 1977).

¹⁵ *The Life of Merlin*, p. 65.

¹⁶ See Clarke's analysis of Geoffrey's Celtic sources, *The Life of Merlin*, pp. 1–5. For the Welsh Myrddin see A. O. H. Jarman, 'The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy', in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. R. Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman and B. F. Roberts (Cardiff, 1995), pp. 117–45; for the Irish analogue see *Buile Shuibhne (the Frenzy of Suibhne) being the Adventures of Suibhne Geilt*, ed. and trans. J. G. O'Keefe (London and Dublin, 1913); Seamus Heaney's *Sweeney Astray* (1983) is a fine adaptation. Oliver Padel recently re-examined the relationship between the Welsh material and the *Vita* in a paper delivered to the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, Aberystwyth, in March 2002.

¹⁷ Donatien Laurent, in 'La *gwerz* de Skolan et la légende de Merlin', *Éthnologie française* 1:3–4 (1971), 19–54, plausibly identifies the Welsh 'Ysgolan' as a wild-man type, thus linking it to the Myrddin

Our Breton Merlin cannot be a direct descendant of the Welsh Myrddin poems, however, since the captive's name is a post-Geoffrey 'Merlin' and (though this is less significant) the young hero has a French name, 'Raphael': La Villemarqué was well aware of this problem and changed his bard's name to a more Celtic-sounding 'Marzin' in the second edition of the *Barzaz-Breiz*. With the *Vita* as the closest relation to the nineteenth-century Breton ballad, embarking on the traditional Arthurian game of hypothesising routes of transmission and development looks daunting enough. There is another close analogue, however, to complicate things further. Merlin also figures as a captured wild man in the 'Grisandole' story, which appears in the Continuation of the French Vulgate *Merlin* (probably composed before 1230) and in a Middle English *Prose Merlin* composed around 1450.¹⁸ The story can be summarized as follows:

Avenable, the daughter of a banished duke, enters the service of Julius Caesar at Rome, disguised as a squire named Grisandole. Merlin, who knows the Emperor has been troubled with a dream, runs through the court in the shape of a stag and tells him that only the wild man can explain this dream. The emperor offers the hand of his daughter in exchange for the capture of the wild man. Many knights set out but soon give up: only Grisandole remains hunting through the forest. One day as she is praying, the stag appears and tells her how to capture the wild man with food and a fire. She succeeds, and the wild man is bound and brought to court, laughing enigmatically at various points on the way. In front of the emperor he explains the dream and his laughter, revealing in the process that the queen is an adulteress and that Grisandole/Avenable is a woman. The emperor has his wife burned and marries Avenable, giving his daughter to Avenable's brother. The wild man disappears, leaving a mysterious inscription on the door which explains that he and the stag were one and the same person, Merlin.

The affiliations with the *Vita Merlini* are clear enough, but this is obviously not just a reworking of Geoffrey's narrative. Lucy Paton's comparative analysis of 1907 attempts to trace the genesis and relationship of the two texts, drawing on a wide range of parallels in Indian, Talmudic, and 'Celtic' material (her examples are from Irish sagas and folk tales) to suggest that, like the *Vita* but independently of it, Grisandole 'clearly preserves the story of Merlin, the wild-man and shape shifter, coming in pursuit of his truant love'.¹⁹ The 'Oriental elements' (the queen's adultery and the prophet's laughter) are deemed later accretions to this core. The analysis is compli-

material. In the Breton *gwerz* Skolan is a penitent soul returning to beg his mother's blessing: his story is not directly relevant to the present discussion.

¹⁸ *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, ed. H. O. Sommer, 7 vols. (Washington, 1908–13) II (*Lestoire de Merlin*), 281–92; for the Middle English text see *The Romance of Merlin: An Anthology*, ed. P. Goodrich (New York and London, 1990), pp. 152–62.

¹⁹ L. Allen Paton, 'The Story of Grisandole: A Study in the Legend of Merlin', *PMLA* 22 (1907), 234–76. The episode is also discussed by Aileen Ann Macdonald in *The Figure of Merlin in Thirteenth Century French Romance* (Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter, 1990), pp. 98–101.

cated, and fraught with *a priori* notions about the nature of plot development; it is happily not necessary to explore this issue at length here. What is important is that Paton's discussion of the Grisandole episode draws heavily on an international folk tale: and here the last group of Breton Merlin texts needs to be introduced.

The Folk Tales

A number of traditional tales collected in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Brittany tell the story of the capture of a character – sometimes a man, sometimes a bird or beast – known as 'Merlin', or a related form. There are about a dozen published versions: the French tale-type index established by Paul Delarue and Marie-Louise Tenèze notes four from Breton-speaking Lower Brittany (Breizh-Izel), two from French-speaking Upper Brittany (Breizh-Uhel), and three Canadian versions; to this may be added a further French-language version published in 1878, a twentieth-century Breton version, and a related tale from Luzel.²⁰ Though they develop in radically different ways, all begin with the central idea of the capture and containment of the Merlin figure. A couple of examples will give a sense of the narrative range. In François Cadic's version, published in 1922, Merlin is a bird:²¹

In a clump of trees near a castle, a bird is singing beautifully. The Master of the castle longs to have it closer to him, and the bird is eventually captured. It is given a superb cage with a golden trellis, food and fresh water in crystal goblets, but it will not sing. The Master still wishes to keep it and threatens death to anyone who releases it. One day his little son George is playing near the cage and the bird persuades him to unlock it. Before flying off, it rewards the boy with a magic feather, saying: 'If you need my help, all you need to do is shake this and cry "Merlin, Merlin! Help, quickly!"' George is forced to flee from his angry father and sets off on various adventures with Merlin's help.

In J. L. Rolland's lively account, Merlin is not identified by 'species', as it were – he is simply 'Merlin a zo er c'hoad du-se' (Merlin who is in the wood yonder) – but he acts like a person:²²

²⁰ P. Delarue and M.-L. Tenèze, *Le Conte populaire français: catalogue raisonné des versions de France*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1976–85), II, s.v. Type 502. For the other published versions see J. Foulon-Ménard, 'La Tradition de Merlin dans la forêt de Brocéliande', in *Mélanges historiques, littéraires, bibliographiques publiés par la Société des Bibliophiles Bretons* (Nantes, 1878), 10–21; 'Kontadenn Jozebig', in J. Philippe, *War roudoù Merlin e Breizh* (Lezvenen, 1986), pp. 23–72; 'Le Capitaine Lixur ou le satyre', in F.-M. Luzel, *Contes populaires de la Basse-Bretagne*, ed. F. Morvan (Rennes, 1996), II, 235–52. Donatien Laurent has also collected further versions of the tale.

²¹ F. Cadic, 'Georgic et Merlin', *Contes et légendes de Bretagne* (Paris, 1922), pp. 207–16. Two other versions (10 and 11) in Delarue and Tenèze's index also have a bird instead of a wild man.

²² 'Kontadenn Jozebig', see n. 20 above.

The daughter of a famous general has dressed as a man to take her aged father's place in battle. 'He' is so successful in the military campaign that jealous rivals, including the queen, plot his downfall, and tell the King that the young general has boasted he could even catch Merlin. The King insists that the boast is made good. With a little help from a talking horse, the disguised girl succeeds in capturing Merlin with a tempting selection of food and drink and an elaborate iron bed which locks its victim in. After this success the queen is exposed and killed, the girl's true identity is revealed, and she marries the king. It is their son Jobic, ten years later, who, having lost several golden balls in Merlin's cage, is persuaded by the captive to steal his mother's keys and release him. Incurring his father's wrath, Jobic flees: but Merlin is deeply grateful, and gives him a magic whistle, which gets him through his subsequent adventures.

In a version collected by F.-M. Luzel (who subsequently changed his mind about the absence of Merlin from Breton folklore), the 'Murlu' is a stranger beast altogether:²³

One day out hunting the king's courtiers notice an extraordinary animal; they are afraid and tell the king, who sends his magician out with an armed guard to examine it. Sire, he says, it is a Murlu, a most redoubted beast. The king insists on capturing it, and so a special cage is devised with a catch door, and filled with meat, cakes and wine. The beast is captured, the cage loaded onto a cart and the king has his prize. He slips the key into his pocket and says that anyone who releases the Murlu will be put to death. One day his own son, playing by the cage, loses a golden ball. The Murlu asks for his liberty in exchange and tells the prince how to steal the key while his father is asleep. The Murlu is released and he and the boy flee together and begin a new set of adventures.

And so on, with each story ringing the changes round a cluster of elements. Even in these three examples one can see how such story-elements can be reworked in quite different ways without losing their symbolic effectiveness: how the beautiful cage and tempting food and drink designed to raise the spirits of the bird-captive in the first example recombine in the description of the 'Murlu-trap' in the third. There are several echoes too of the ballad: Jobic stealing a ring while his father sleeps, the lively description of the feast, the cage loaded onto the cart bringing the captive to court. J. L. Rolland's story, with its prefatory episode of the cross-dressed heroine, is one of a subgroup that comes closest to the story of Grisandole. These folk tales, and the variations they display, again support the idea that a narrative about the capture of Merlin was established in Breton oral tradition well before the nineteenth century. Indeed, taking all the Breton evidence together, one might see the tales as a later stage, reflecting a shift in genre from verse to prose for this

²³ 'Le Murlu ou l'homme sauvage', *Contes populaires de la Basse-Bretagne*, II, 221–33. For Luzel's change of mind see Laurent, *Aux Sources*, p. 296, n. 26.

type of fairy-tale narrative, with the jumbled Merlin hovering obligingly somewhere in between.

The picture is complicated however, by the fact that very similar stories of the capture of wild men have long been widespread right across Europe. The basic plot of the Breton tales corresponds to an international folk-tale type (Aarne-Thompson Index no. 502), often exemplified by the tale of *Der Eisenhans* in the Grimm collection, in which a king captures a wild man, and the little prince, in exchange for the return of a lost toy, frees him; the boy incurs his father's anger, but is helped by the wild man in subsequent adventures. Various versions also incorporate the episode of the cross-dressed heroine and the enigmatic laughter of the captive. This is the tale used by Paton in her analysis of 'Grisandole', where she argues from the geographical spread of the versions collected, and their intrinsic narrative 'coherence', that the wild man story was in existence *before* the author of the Arthurian episode used it. Because Paton is only aware of one of the Breton tales (Luzel's 'Le Capitaine Lixur'), and because this has an unnamed 'Satyr' in the wild man's role, she is not faced with the problem of a distinctive Breton Merlin cluster. But it is striking that none of the other European versions equate the wild man with Merlin.

For Emmanuel Philipot in 1927, this broader folk-tale context proved that the Breton Merlin tales (of which he only had three examples, and only one naming Merlin directly) were not 'indigenous' products: 'ce sont trois articles d'importation, venus de l'Europe orientale, sans doute par des intermédiaires français: ils n'ont rien de celtique dans leur fond ni dans leur forme.' ('These are three imports which have come, via French intermediaries, from eastern Europe: there is nothing Celtic about them either in content or form').²⁴ Philipot's arguments, not unusually for the time he was writing, are based on a number of questionable assumptions about the nature of folk tale, chief among which is that the development and spread of a story-form is somehow calculable from the way individual tellers cope with the intricacies of the plot. Weak motivation, non-sequiturs, and unexplained episodes (anathema to generations of Aristotelian-minded critics) are all perceived as products of 'degeneration', which in turn is taken as indicating temporal and geographical distance from the ideal proto-form. The Breton tellers, by these rules, did not make much of a fist of Aarne-Thompson 502, whose narrative proved 'so complicated' that in one case the teller's 'memory collapsed under its weight and all he could produce was an incoherent muddle'.²⁵ Except to insist that the name-form 'Merlin' must come from France, Philipot does not tackle the problem of the identification of the wild man with the Arthurian wizard. Admitting the numerous points of contact between the folk tale and the capture of Merlin stories in the *Vita*

²⁴ E. Philipot, 'Contes Bretons relatifs à la légende de Merlin', *Annales de Bretagne: Mélanges Bretons et Celtiques offerts à J. Loth* (Rennes and Paris, 1927), 349–63 (p. 350).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

Merlini and ‘Grisandole’, he rejects the notion of any direct filiation between them. Instead he hypothesises a pre-existing body of Merlin folklore in French, now dimly reflected in the Breton tales.

Philipot was working from a very small number of tales and (having understandably dismissed La Villemarqué’s published contribution to the Merlin debate) he did not know about the ballad. In the light of what we know now, we can say at least that the Breton Merlin material forms an intriguing group. Its closest known relatives are medieval: a twelfth-century British Latin poem, a thirteenth-century French romance, and an (undatable)²⁶ international folk tale about the capture of a wild man. Beyond that is all speculation. A tentative scenario might offer the following: at some point before the mid-thirteenth century, the international capture-of-the-wild man story was combined with the figure of Merlin (who, thanks to Geoffrey’s *Vita*, was now seen to fit the *silvestris* type) to produce the French ‘Grisandole’. At some point between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries – either because of or independently of the French romance – Breton oral tradition also made and maintained that identification. Whether this identification was strengthened by knowledge of pre-Geoffrey Celtic traditions about an elusive, guilty, tree-dwelling Myrddin/Suibhne figure is, I suspect, unknowable.

There are many other narratives to which this cluster of stories could be compared. Indeed, one has the span of Western literature to play with, since the relationship between a wild man and a king is at the heart of the earliest literary epic, the Babylonian story of Gilgamesh. The biblical account of Nebuchadnezzar’s madness, or the story of King Midas’s capture of the satyr Silenus (also trapped with wine, and also initially reluctant to share his wisdom with the king), and the Talmudic story of the captive Ashmodeus (thought to be the prototype of the sardonic prophetic laughter) offer other useful points of contact.²⁷ In Brittany itself, there are further intriguing medieval parallels: Basil Clarke has drawn attention to the opening episode of the *Life of St Gurthiern*, in which the saint kills his sister’s son and, like Geoffrey’s Merlin, retires in his grief to live wild.²⁸ Indeed, the earliest surviving Breton literary text, *An Dialog Etre Arzur Roe d’an Bretounet ha Guinglaff* (‘The Dialogue between Arthur King of the Bretons and Guinclaff’), dated to 1450, begins with the king’s capture of an unwilling prophet lurking in the woods; the capture of a hairy, forest-dwelling being is also central to the story of *Valentin et Orson*, which was immensely popular throughout Europe from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. In fact, from the fifteenth century, both literary and visual depictions of wild men are so

²⁶ The first recorded version seems to be included in Giovanni Francesco Straparola’s *Piacevoli Notti* (1550–5).

²⁷ For analogues and discussion see *The Life of Merlin*, pp. 11–15, and Paton ‘The Story of Grisandole’. See also P. Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar’s Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature* (New Haven, 1974).

²⁸ *The Life of Merlin*, p. 3.

widespread in Europe (and beyond), that the possibilities for comparison become dizzying.²⁹

Any single example of the wild man figure, or any group of texts or images, offers a potentially enlightening slant on the Breton Merlin texts, whether through direct connection and influence (though these things are almost impossible to prove) or simply by offering different cultural treatments of similar themes. The problem, as always, is deciding where legitimate or useful comparison ends. For all the objective language of scholarship, comparative analysis remains a highly subjective, and usually tendentious, affair.

The Wren Song

Exploration of the narrative bones of the ballad and the related prose text involve us in a time-honoured, if frustrating, method of discussing Arthurian narrative, one principally dependent on form. But the 'jumbled' text also demonstrates another kind of connection, a form of association that is much closer to metaphor. After all, the wren song at the beginning not only offers a nutshell resumé of the narrative to come, but is loaded with symbolic significance. The hunting of the wren is a custom known across Europe, and though it was never recorded in Brittany, the presence of the song (which is well-attested in the tradition) suggests that a similar custom may have existed there as well. This twentieth-century version collected by Daniel Giraudon from François Richard (1893–1988) at Ploezal, is very close to the version in the Merlin text:³⁰

Pa oan bet o vale, 'm a tapet ul laouenan,	When I went out walking I caught a wren
Pa oa tapet, tapet a oa	When he was caught, caught he was:
Lakaet 'm oa neañ n 'ur c'hraou da lardañ.	Put him in a stable to fatten up
Pa oa lardet, lardet a oa.	When he was fattened, fattened he was
Klasket 'm oa ur boucher d'en lac'hañ.	I went to fetch a butcher to kill him
Pa oa arriet ar boucher du-mañ	When the butcher arrived here
A oa an dour komañs tommañ	The water was beginning to heat up

²⁹ For the *Dialog* and associated material see G. Le Menn, 'Du nouveau sur les prophéties de "Gwenc'hlan": du texte moyen-breton (XVe s.) aux traditions populaires modernes', *Bulletin de la Société d'Emulation des Côtes-du-Nord* 111 (1982), 45–71; M.-A. Constantine, 'Prophecy and Pastiche in the Breton Ballads: Groac'h Ahès and Gwenc'hlan', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 30 (Winter 1995), 87–121. For a general overview of the figure in Europe see R. Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952); T. Husband, *The Wild Man: Medieval Myth and Symbolism* (New York, 1980).

³⁰ D. Giraudon, *Traditions populaires de Bretagne: du coq à l'âne* (Douarnenez, 2000), pp. 117–18.

A oa an dour komañs tommañ
Ha gwad al laouenan o yenañ.

The water was beginning to heat up
And the wren's blood to cool.

Na daouzek oant o terc'hel mat,
O terc'hel mat al laouitenn

There were a dozen holding tight
Holding the wren down.

Ha c'hoazh a grient bouez o fenn.
Oant ket evit derc'hel al laouitenn

And yet they were yelling out loud
And couldn't hold the wren down.

Na c'hwec'h karr bras zo houarnet,
Evit kas e bluñv da Naoned.

Six carts were prepared
To carry his feathers to Nantes

Ha c'hoazh oa manet 'barzh ar gêr,
Evit goarnisañ c'hwec'h gwele sklaer.

And there was still plenty back home
To fill six feather beds easily.

As Giraudon shows, most of the wren-lore in Breton is ludic (as befits the bird's commonest name: *laouenanic* means 'little happy one'),³¹ and, as in this song, plays exaggerated variations on the theme of the wren's size – it takes 'a dozen men' to hold him down, he produces six cart-loads of feathers and so on. But the well-documented presence in Ireland, the Isle of Man, Wales, England, France and Spain of a distinct ritual involving the capture and caging and (usually) killing of the bird gives the Breton song a more literal force.³² A central element in these rituals was the parading of the wren's little body in an elaborately constructed, often beribboned, house or cage. The element of joyous exaggeration is also present: near Marseille, two men would carry the bird on a pole 'as if it were a heavy burthen', while at Mardillon in the Val de Loire, 'the wren was brought to the seigneur tied with strong new ropes in a wagon drawn by four black oxen.'³³ In Wales too, the wren song that accompanied the hunt (usually held around St Stephen's day) indulges in a carnivalesque description of the size and amount of equipment needed to capture and kill it.³⁴ As most commentators point out, the word for wren in a large number of European languages (though not, as noted below, in the Celtic ones) is 'King', from *basileus* in classical Greek to *korólyk* in Russian, *Zaunkönig* and *roitelet* in German and French. Given the relatively rich and varied information to hand, it does seem likely that these different wren ceremonies reflect a much earlier ritual, perhaps a form of Winter sacrifice or a fertility rite. What most interests me here, though, is the fact that the singer/reciter of the 'jumbled' text has associated the capture of the wren

³¹ For an alternative name, *drev*, see below; for variant names and further wren lore see Giraudon, *Traditions populaires*, pp. 110–23.

³² The literature on this subject is extensive, but for wren traditions across Europe see E. A. Armstrong, *The Folklore of Birds*, 2nd edn (New York, 1970), pp. 141–66. For the Irish material, which is especially well attested, see S. Muller, 'The Irish Wren Tales and Ritual: To Pay or not to Pay the Debt of Nature', *Béaloideas* 64–5 (1996–97), 131–69.

³³ Armstrong, *The Folklore of Birds*, p. 144 and p. 147.

³⁴ This song is printed and briefly discussed in Ph. Kinney and M. Evans, eds., *Canu'r Cymry* (Cymdeithas Alawon Gwerin Cymry/ Welsh Folk Song Society, 1984), p. 11 and p. 61. For the ritual in Wales see T. M. Owen, *Welsh Folk Customs* (Cardiff, 1959), pp. 63–8.

with the capture of Merlin. This is wonderfully apt: after all, one of the most curious features of the Merlin legend is a persistent association with birds. Analyzing that association is a disconcerting business, for reasons which will become clear.

Geoffrey of Monmouth is usually thought to have changed the *dd* in Myrddin to a more mellifluous *l* to avoid, as Philipot delicately put it, ‘une consonance on ne peut plus malheureuse’ (‘a truly unfortunate association’, i.e. the French/Latin *merde*, *merda*).³⁵ But it must be said that his choice was inspired. What is known of the pre-Galfridian Myrddin (and more so his Irish counterpart Suibhne) strongly suggests that their madness, their wildness, was decidedly bird-like. While the non-narrative Myrddin poems do not go beyond a persistent association with trees, Suibhne levitates and grows feathers, and spends much of his time perching and shivering on branches, as the souls of the dead do elsewhere in Breton folklore.³⁶ Was it really just a desire to spare Norman blushes that caused Geoffrey (if indeed it was he) to light on a word evoking both the ‘merlin’ falcon (Norman French *esmerilun*, *merilon*) and the blackbird (*merle*, *merlion*)? This is just one of several happy coincidences associated with the name.

Philippe Walter, though unaware of the Breton material discussed here, also makes much of the ‘ornithomorphous’ nature of Merlin in his introduction to recent French translations of the *Vita Merlini*, *Buile Suibhne* and the related Lailoken material.³⁷ His approach, a kind of archaeology of myth, is certainly more alert to metaphor than old-fashioned *Quellenforschung*, but in many ways it is no less literal-minded. In seeking to uncover the underlying mythic structure of the Merlin material (‘myth’ is defined as a pre-Christian religious ritual) Walter is similarly faced with the problem of explaining that the evocative French/Latin name ‘Merlin’ does not apply to the earliest known, Celtic, layer of the myth. His first solution, which is to admit that the association between *Merlin* and *merle* is ‘une confusion secondaire et sans doute tardive’ (‘a secondary and doubtless late confusion’), is somewhat spoiled by a subsequent claim that ‘le folklore du merle confirmerait [. . .] la relation mythologique, probablement ancienne, entre Merlin et cet oiseau.’ (‘The folklore associated with the blackbird tends to confirm a mythological connection, probably ancient, between Merlin and this bird’).³⁸

There is much to be said for a critical procedure that is sympathetic to the process of analogy, and to the creative power of words and images. But the trouble with myth-hunting is that it treats different manifestations of the ‘raw material’ indiscriminately as a means to an end, rather than exploring the particularities of time and place, how different writers and tellers and singers

³⁵ ‘Contes Bretons’, p. 363. Philipot finds the argument (which seems to have wide acceptance) unconvincing.

³⁶ For the Breton belief see Laurent, ‘La gwerz de Skolan’, p. 39.

³⁷ *Le Devin maudit: Merlin, Lailoken, Suibhne: Textes et étude*, ed. Ph. Walter (Grenoble, 1999).

³⁸ *Le Devin maudit*, pp. 12, 13.

and redactors may have used it. And one does not really need to hypothesize hidden rites or calendrical patterns, as Walter does, to see how the name Merlin might become subconsciously productive in a French context. One medieval author put the subliminal associations of the name to good use in the haunting episode at the end of the *Didot-Perceval*. After the passing of Arthur, Merlin explains his own intention to withdraw from the world:³⁹

Et lors vint Merlins a Perceval et a Blayse son maistre, et prist congié a els et lor dist que nostre Sire ne voloit que il se demostrast au peule, ne il ne poroit morir devant le finement del siecle; ‘mais adont arai jou la joie parmenable, et je volrai faire defors te maison un abitacle, et la volrai converser, et si profetiserai çou que nostre Sire me commendera. Et tot cil qui men abitacle verront, si le clameront l’esplumoir Merlin.’

(Afterward Merlin came to Perceval and to his master Blaise and took his leave of them, saying that Our Lord no longer wished him to show himself to men, but neither could he die before the end of the world: ‘But then will I have eternal joy’, he said. ‘And I would like to build a hermitage beside your house, where I will live, prophesying what Our Lord commands me to. And everyone who sees my hermitage will call it the Esplumoir of Merlin.’)

It hardly seems necessary to interpret the *esplumoir* (surely ‘a cage to hold a moulting falcon or other hunting bird’) as some kind of Shamanic dressing-room to feel the force of the metaphor.⁴⁰ This voluntary caging, a retreat into a hunched and brooding silence, is an evocative counterpart to the image of the newly captured, uncooperative, and equally silent Merlin brought in from the wild.

Some special pleading is needed, however, to make the linguistic connection work in a Breton context: *merle* and *merlin* are only suggestive through French after all. One could, at a pinch, argue for a bilingual awareness of the connotations of the name, or for an association that has somehow survived translation (though it is worth remembering here that the French versions of the wild man folk tale do *not* call him Merlin). In the Breton version of the tale where Merlin actually is a bird (‘Georgic and Merlin’, summarized above), the significance may not go beyond a natural analogy generated by the story itself: the capture and caging of a wild being. The collision of wren-hunt and Merlin-hunt in the jumbled piece could be similarly explained.

Recent research into the metaphorical and connotative nature of song idiom may be helpful here: the language of traditional song, rooted as it is in

³⁹ *The Didot Perceval according to the Manuscripts of Modena and Paris*, ed. W. Roach (Philadelphia, 1941), MS E, lines 2661–8; translated by Nancy Marie Brown in Goodrich, *The Romance of Merlin*, p. 127.

⁴⁰ Translator’s definition in Goodrich, *The Romance of Merlin*, p. 127. Cf. W. A. Nitze, ‘The Esplumoir Merlin’, *Speculum* 18.1 (Jan. 1943), 69–79, who also thinks this is a pun. The Shamanic option is pursued by both Walter, *Le Devin maudit*, pp. 12–13 and N. Tolstoy, *The Quest for Merlin* (London, 1985), pp. 145–6.

culturally ‘loaded’ images, often allows whole narrative contexts to be invoked from a couple of lines. Thus in the right context, an apparently ‘broken’ bit of song may have as much narrative force as a twenty-stanza ballad: as Barre Toelken demonstrates in his study of erotic folk song, what matters is that singers and listeners know how to work the nexus of associations.⁴¹ An appropriate example here is the remarkable three-stanza version of the ballad known as ‘Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight’ (Child 4), sung by the Kentish traveller Nelson Ridley in the 1970s. His crushed, apparently inscrutable, version of the song also focuses on the image of a bird in a cage: only when viewed in its wider narrative context can it be seen that this image condenses, and metaphorically represents, the situation of the heroine, tempted from the gilded cage of her father’s castle by an unscrupulous suitor. For the singer and his immediate audience, that wider story would not need telling.⁴² Given that we know of at least three Breton versions of the folk tale (see above) where the role of the wild man is taken by a bird, it may be that the nexus of ideas ‘bird – cage – wild man – Merlin’ formed an associative cluster of this type within the idiom of the tradition. Bringing the two together may not exactly have been a conscious act on the part of the person who sang or recited the ‘jumbled’ Merlin text, but nor, I would argue, is it likely to have been an entirely unconscious (and hence, to the speaker, meaningless) utterance of an aspect of some long-defunct myth.

Resisting the unscholarly notion of an inherent and ancient ‘birdness’ in the figure of Merlin expressing itself over the centuries through oral and written literature, we are left with an assortment of possible reasons for the association, some accidental (Geoffrey’s happy choice of name) some linguistic (the subsequent French connection), some metaphorical (images of wildness caged). In each case the connection is rooted in a specific cultural context, and the creation of meaning lies with the makers rather than being carried passively, unconsciously, from the far depths of the past. This is not to deny the possibility of any inherited traditions connecting wild men with birds, merely to emphasize that in ‘folk’ as in ‘high’ literature, poetic connections can be actively forged. It is vital, too, to remember, how much of that cultural context is missing: whether we are talking about Breton oral tradition before 1800, or the oral-literate interactions of Geoffrey’s twelfth-century Britain, so much background is absent that what now look like curious flashes of coincidence may have been quite evidently linked in a wider allusive web. Scholarship can and should only go so far in trying to join the dots. Yet the accumulation of such coincidences is disconcerting, and none more so than this: the Welsh word for wren (*dryw*, cf. Irish *dreán*) is an apparently unrelated homonym of a word for seer or druid (*dryw*).⁴³ Through the Breton

⁴¹ B. Toelken, *Morning Dew and Roses: Metaphor and Meaning in Traditional Songs* (Illinois, 1995).

⁴² Ridley’s songs and the allusive nature of the genre as a whole are discussed in M.-A. Constantine and G. Porter, *Fragments and Meaning in Traditional Song* (Oxford, 2003).

⁴³ *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, s.v. *dryw*. I am grateful to Britte Schulze-Thulin for looking into earlier forms of the word for me.

form *drev* (noted alongside *laouenan* in the Treger region),⁴⁴ the wren and the seer of the jumbled text suddenly seem to have a philological link, albeit a rather submerged one. But this, I suspect, is one leap too far. While a medieval Welsh author could be forgiven for having fun with the connection, it might be more difficult for conventional scholarship to admit the ghostly presence of a twice-removed pun in an undefinable nineteenth-century oral text.

Ways of Connecting

Given that the *gwerz* of ‘Merlin the Bard’ sung by the beggar-woman Annaig Le Breton to the young La Villemarqué is one of the real jewels of the Breton folk tradition, it may seem rather perverse to have focused on the figure of Merlin through the twisted lens of a kind of textual Murlu. But the very hybridity of the jumbled piece is, I suggest, helpful. It opens onto two ways of thinking about the story, one structural, to do with the sequence of narrative, and one metaphorical, to do with its imagery. Each has generated its own kind of criticism, and each kind of criticism has its failings. While neither is currently an overwhelming force on Arthurian studies, some of the more dubious preconceptions they embody do inform certain contemporary approaches: ‘Celtic’ material still seems particularly vulnerable in this respect. The chief failing of both sides is that the notion of the story, whether tracked sequentially or associatively, quickly becomes divorced from those who both carry and recreate it at any given point.

Peter Goodrich, also faced with the need to introduce the Grisandole episode with reference to its various analogues, concluded that the ‘significant motifs’ of the story of Merlin’s capture were simply ‘“too good” to be used only once!’ – which seems as tactful a way of bowing out of the tricky business of untangling narrative threads as any.⁴⁵ It is clearly impossible to offer a comprehensive account of how the associations Merlin-bird-wildness-capture have been made manifest in different places and languages over the last thousand years. The very fact that medieval texts operate in ways that are closer to oral forms is part of what makes the Arthurian material an endlessly renewable subject for discussion: its fluidity, its language of basic symbols, permits the narrative clusters – the myth, perhaps – to be reinvested with new meanings in different cultural contexts and periods.

A comparative approach such as this sacrifices the specificities of time and place: there is another article to be written here, about nineteenth-century Brittany. But it would have to begin with a coincidence as extraordinary as

⁴⁴ Giraudon, *Traditions Populaires*, p. 110.

⁴⁵ *The Romance of Merlin*, p. 148.

any yet discussed, and tell how a rich young Viscount with a head full of Celtic studies came home from college in Paris to spend the holidays on the family estate; how he collected songs from the servants for his great project, a poetic history of Brittany, a '*Barzaz-Breiz*'. How he met an old woman from the village, a woman who spent much of her time walking the roads and who sometimes came to the manor house for charity. How he had sat with his notebook, writing as fast as he could, while she sang him exactly what he wanted to hear.

VI

NARRATIVES AND NON-NARRATIVES: ASPECTS OF WELSH ARTHURIAN TRADITION

Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan

Writing in his *Tours of Wales*, published in 1781, the renowned traveller and scholar Thomas Pennant, of Downing in Flintshire, gives an account of various places he had seen in Anglesey, including the following brief but telling reference:

Above Llanddona is a high hill, called *Bwrdd Arthur* or *Arthur's* round table; the true name was probably *Din*, or *Dinas Sulwy*; for a church immediately beneath bears that of *Llanfihangel Din Sulwy*.¹

Pennant notes that the hill, a limestone pavement, provides natural defences and that these were enhanced by building ramparts, but it is his comments on the place-name that are particularly significant. In a single sentence he notes that the spot now has an Arthurian name, but demolishes any idea of its antiquity and authenticity. *Bwrdd Arthur* is tersely and correctly dismissed as a late accretion. Today we might characterise this Arthurianisation of a non-Arthurian Welsh place-name as an example of the persistent popularity of Arthurian tradition in Wales, or with a slightly different emphasis, a reflex of a late, learned tradition ousting a 'genuine' native tradition. Here, as so often, we may blame Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose Arthurian narrative first enchanted Welsh audiences in the twelfth century, presenting as it did an irresistible image of a heroic past when, as descendants of Brutus, their ancestors the Brythoniaid or Brythons ruled the entire island of Britain, an image which was to shape Welsh political attitudes and provide virtually the only political discourse for centuries. As late as 1716, only sixty-five years before Pennant with his educated and critical mind visited Llanddona, Theophilus Evans published his *Drych y Prif Oesoedd*, a history of Wales which retained intact the Galfridian vision of early British history.² Untroubled by Polydore Vergil's devastating demolition of this myth two centuries

¹ Thomas Pennant, *Tours in Wales*, ed. Sir John Rhŷs (Caernarfon, 1883) III, 42.

² The only modern edition is that of G. H. Hughes (Cardiff, 1961).

previously, Evans clung to the comforting illusion of the Welsh nation as a heroic people robbed of their birthright through treachery alone. The renaming of Din Sulwy may not be directly due to Evans, but it is consistent with the mood of early modern rural Wales.

This small reference by Pennant thus raises some important questions about the nature of Welsh Arthurian traditions, about the interplay of oral and written traditions, about the constant evolution of individual traditions, about narratives and about non-narrative, which may conceal narratives (as in the *Bwrdd Arthur* example), about the relationship between the local and the national (and even the international, as we shall see), and between past and present.

Another Arthurian site visited by Pennant, this time in Caernarfonshire, was Ffynnon Cegin Arthur (the Spring of Arthur's Kitchen),³ still visible, if overgrown, when I last visited it in the 1970s, but now, as I understand, virtually untraceable. Pennant hints at the possible, non-Arthurian, origin of the name when he states that the spring was the source of the river Cegin which reaches the sea at what is now Port Penrhyn, on the edge of Bangor.⁴ But the story of how this chalybeate spring with its healing powers came by its Arthurian name persisted into modern times and was recorded in 1908 by Myrddin Fardd in his collection of Caernarfonshire folklore entitled *Llên Gwerin Sir Gaernarfon*:

Y mae hon ar fferm a elwir Hendref, yn mhlwyf Llanddeiniolen. Bernir ddarfod iddi dderbyn ei henw oddiwrth y dyb mai brasder hyddgig oedd yr irad a nofiai ar ei gwyneb, yr hwn, fel y tybid, a ddygid yno gan y ffrydiau oedd yn rhedeg drwy gegin yr enwog Dywysog Arthur, un o arwyr dychymmygol yr hen Gymry, ac oddiar hyny priodolir iddi, hyd heddyw, lawer o rinweddau meddyginiaethol.⁵

(This [spring] is on a farm called Hendref in the parish of Llanddeiniolen. It is considered that it received its name from the belief that the oil which floated on its surface was venison fat, which, it was thought, was brought there by the streams which flowed through the kitchen of the famous Prince Arthur, one of the imaginary heroes of the Welsh of old, and from then down to today, many healing virtues are imputed to it.)

It is worth noting that Arthur, although grudgingly allowed the adjective 'famous', is now downgraded to 'prince', perhaps influenced by the contemporary celebrity of the 'Prince of Wales', eldest son of the English king. The

³ Ibid., p. 323.

⁴ That the source was at the spring may not be strictly true, for the Ordnance Survey map shows that Afon Cegin is fed by several separate streams, one of which passes close to Ffynnon Cegin Arthur but whose source is higher up, on the lower slopes of Moel Rhiwen, about a mile south-east of the spring. However, it has traditionally been regarded as the source and still is, as witness the Penisarwaun community website (<http://www.cynnal.co.uk/einbro/pen/page14.html>).

⁵ J. Jones, 'Myrddin Fardd', in *Llên Gwerin Sir Gaernarfon* (Caernarfon, [1908]), pp. 169–70. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

author, perhaps keen to distance himself from earlier, more credulous generations, goes so far as to describe Arthur as ‘un o arwyr dychymmygol yr hen Gymry’ (‘one of the imaginary heroes of the Welsh of old’). Was this the end of the line for Arthur in Caernarfonshire? Perhaps so, for in my village in the 1950s when we children were told exciting tales about the warrior who slept under the hill by the lake called Marchlyn Mawr (now, alas, demystified by its incorporation into the Llanberis hydroelectric scheme), the sleeper ready to awake and restore to Wales its rightful independence was identified as Owain Lawgoch (Owen red-hand), not Arthur. Sir John Rhŷs in his *Welsh Folklore, Welsh and Manx*, published in 1901, records this same story of the redeemer hero sleeping in his underground cavern with his warriors, again by Marchlyn Mawr, but his version names Arthur, not Owain, as the sleeper.⁶ Yet by the 1950s, just a few miles away, Owain had replaced Arthur in the local tradition. One possible explanation might be that the original story had been about Owain, and had been arthurianised later, perhaps under learned influence, but with the Owain tradition persisting amongst the local people.⁷ Rhŷs did not meet his informant face-to-face but received details of the story by post, from a Mr Evan Lloyd Jones of Dinorwig, near Llanberis, who had published a series of articles on Caernarfonshire *llên gwerin* (folklore) in a periodical called *Llais y Wlad*, which was published nearby in Bangor, and in the north-American Welsh paper, *Y Drych*. Mr Lloyd Jones was thus an educated man and an antiquarian, who made ‘use of the frequent opportunities he has in the Dinorwig quarries for gathering information as to *what used to be believed* by the people of Arfon and Anglesey’ (my emphasis).⁸ The fact that the information was mediated by an enthusiastic ‘antiquarian’ rather than collected directly by Rhŷs, leads one to question the status of the Arthurian aspect of the story.

But to return to Ffynnon Cegin Arthur: Myrddin Fardd may have chosen for his book a title suggesting popular beliefs drawn from oral tradition, but in fact he was drawing heavily on written sources. Much of his information about the healing spring is borrowed from an earlier booklet devoted to the history and virtues of Ffynnon Cegin Arthur. This was written, in Welsh, by a London-based qualified doctor, Arthur Wynn Williams MD, MRCS, LSA (1819–86), and possibly first published as early as 1860, a new edition appearing about 1886.⁹ After explaining how patients may find their way to

⁶ Sir John Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore, Welsh and Manx* (Oxford, 1901), pp. 235–8.

⁷ This may have been a common phenomenon in various parts of Wales as I have argued elsewhere. See C. Lloyd-Morgan, ‘Qui était l’Arthur des Gallois?’, *Pris-Ma* 11 (1995), 149–58.

⁸ Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, p. 234.

⁹ A. Wynn Williams, *Ffynnon Cegin Arthur, sef Ffynnon Ddurlyd yn Llanddeiniolen* (Caernarfon, n.d.). The National Library of Wales catalogue of printed books supplies the date 1860, but the copy in my own possession is in a printing style postdating 1860; moreover it refers to Lord Edward Gordon Douglas Pennant, 1st baron Penrhyn (1800–86), as ‘y diweddar Arglwydd Penrhyn’ (‘the late Lord Penrhyn’), p. 20. An English version of the booklet had been published as early as 1858, presumably for a very different audience.

the spring, he devotes the next chapter to explaining who Arthur was, ‘gan na fyddai yn annyddorol i rai o fy narllenwyr wybod pwy ydoedd y Brenin Arthur’ (‘since it may not be without interest for some of my readers to know who King Arthur was’).¹⁰ This comment indicates that Dr Wynn Williams believed that King Arthur would be an unfamiliar figure to many of his readers. Those readers were by definition Welsh-speakers, many of them would have had little or no English but were highly literate in their own language. To explain why he did not expect them to be familiar with the story of Arthur, we need to look more closely at those readers. Not only were they literate Welsh-speakers, they also needed to have money in their pockets if they were to spend 6d (2.5 p) – quite a large sum at the time – on Dr Wynn Williams’ pamphlet. They apparently needed instructions to find the place (directions from Bangor, Llanberis and Caernarfon are given), so they lived within easy travelling distance but they did not know the area intimately. All these clues suggest the newly mobile industrial working class, more specifically quarrymen, the slate quarries within that radius being then at the height of their success. As the demand for labour increased and the wages compared favourably with those received by agricultural labourers, large numbers of men had left their native parishes, from other parts of Caernarfonshire but also from Anglesey, where many had been brought up in farming communities, and had come to take up waged work in the slate quarries of Bethesda, Llanberis or Dyffryn Nantlle. They were thus transplanted from a rural community, where traditions of all kinds might be preserved and transmitted orally, to an urbanised and more mixed one, where workers from many other districts came to settle in the new terraced houses in the quickly expanding villages and small towns, where social life revolved around the poles of chapel and tavern as much as around fairs and firesides. Increasingly the Welsh-speaking population of north-west Wales, whilst retaining and consolidating its language, was being cut off from centuries of tradition, a pattern repeated in other parts of Wales.

Faced with the need to reintroduce the story of King Arthur to his readers, Dr Wynn Williams, did so, perhaps unexpectedly, by providing a Welsh translation of extracts from Robert Fabian’s *Chronicle*, a sixteenth-century chronicle, including a brief account of the exhumation of the bones of Arthur and his wife at Glastonbury in reign of Henry II, a narrative well known from the accounts given by Giraldus Cambrensis.¹¹ Dr Wynn Williams then quotes a further source for the exhumation, whom he names as Caradog of Llancarfan, but this cannot be true as Caradog would have been dead long before the exhumation took place. In fact the doctor’s second source is very likely to have been David Powel’s *Historie of Cambria now called Wales*

¹⁰ Wynn Williams, *Ffynon Cegin Arthur*, p. 4. Readers were expected to know about Lord Penrhyn (see note 9 above) but not King Arthur!

¹¹ R. Fabyan, *New Chronicles of England and France*, ed. H. Ellis (London, 1811). The portions translated into Welsh are caps. Civ, Cvi.

(1584), a much-expanded and embellished version of Humphrey Llwyd's English translation of *Brut y Tywysogion*, the Welsh chronicle then attributed to Caradog of Llancarfan, left unpublished at Llwyd's death; Dr Wynn Williams could also have been misled by a comment in Theophilus Evans' *Drych y Prif Oesoedd* which refers the reader to Caradog's work.¹²

The learned Dr Wynn Williams, whose antiquarian research evidently rivalled his medical studies, goes on to investigate how Arthur came to be connected with the healing spring. He quotes a series of *englynion* (four-line stanzas in strict metre), whose authorship he could not establish, but which do not bear any signs of great age, though I too have as yet failed to trace their origin. These stanzas, he explains, reflect an old tradition that it was not through fighting with Mordred that Arthur met his end, as Robert Fabian's account states, but that he had withdrawn from centre stage. Sickened by the deceitful behaviour of his relatives and vassals ('ei berthynasau a'i ddeiliaid', p. 8), he and his famous knights retired to the mountains of Snowdonia where they lived in caves or underground dwellings, which Myrddin (Merlin) showed them. There they lived, spending their time feasting on venison and other good things. Dr Wynn Williams suggests that the fat from the venison was thought to be the thickness on the surface of the water, brought there by streams flowing through the kitchen, and that natural gases rising from the spring were identified as smoke from the kitchen fire. This is that same tradition to which Myrddin Fardd also refers briefly, as we have seen. Before returning to his medical theme and a scientific analysis of the chalybeate spring, the doctor first discusses the antiquities of the district, perhaps giving a hint that a pilgrimage to Ffynnon Cegin Arthur might be conveniently combined with seeing other local sights. By the 1880s, for waged workers in a rapidly industrialising and urbanising society, history and tradition were not so easily picked up from relatives or neighbours and the printed word, purchased with cash, was increasingly taking the place of oral tradition.

Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that until the nineteenth century Wales, even rural Wales, had depended only or even mainly on oral transmission to preserve its local and national traditions. From the Middle Ages onwards written texts played a crucial role in the development of Arthurian tales and traditions in Wales. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it was not uncommon for poets to be fully literate,¹³ even if they still sang for their supper at the homes of the gentry, and the last remnants of that tradition of

¹² For the account of the supposed exhumation see D. Powel, *The Historie of Cambria now called Wales* (repr. London, 1811), p. 173; for Theophilus Evans' comment: 'Y sawl a chwynnycho hanes gyflawn am helynt tywysogion Cymru, darllened Groniel Caradoc o Lancarfan' ('He who wants the full story of the troubles of the Welsh princes, let him read Caradoc of Llancarfan's chronicle'), see *Drych y Prif Oesoedd*, ed. G. H. Hughes (Cardiff, 1961), p. 95. The ultimate source for the exhumation story was Giraldus Cambrensis in his *De Principis Instructione*, where details of the king's wounds and the discovery of the bones of the queen are given.

¹³ Fifteenth-century examples include Lewys Glyn Cothi and Gutun Owain, both of whom are also noted for their scribal activity.

the wandering poet dependent on the generosity of temporary patrons were still visible into the early years of the eighteenth century. The increasing pull of London, which was to lead to the formation of London-based Welsh societies such as the Gwyneddigion and the Cymmrodorion, helped to sound the death-knell of the old order. Many of those best placed to act as patrons for the last generations of wandering poets left their native land for England and turned to publishing texts they found in Welsh manuscripts, in a symbolic shift from voice to print, from a living present to a half-dead, and often only half-understood past. The abandonment of the poets by their former patrons is denounced in graphic terms by Sion (John) Powel (d. 1767) of Llansannan in 1766, following the return of his bardic teacher Evan Evans, ‘Ieuan Fardd’ from north Wales to his native Cardiganshire:

. . . i ba beth y Canaf Gywydd mwy yngwynedd, oddieithr galarnad iradus am nas gwelaf athraw na bardd yno mwy, nag un a edwyn gywreindeb Cerdd nag a gâr ddatcan gorchestawl gowydd o Gyfrodedd iaith Gomer. o bleid haws Cael gan Gymru ynfyd yr oes hon oganu’r Fruttanjaith, a chablu gwaith ei hên Feirdd, a chanu rhigymau Penrhyddion o Gymysgedig jeithoedd na cheisiaw cadw yn ddi lwgr jaith eu gwlad. – Mae’r Bonedd hefyd me[g]is tramor estron genedl, yn anghydnabyddus a diystyrlyd o jaith eu hên deidiau, yn Baldordd Saesonaeg, yn Codi ar eu tiroedd, yn gwasgu ar eu deiliaid, yn gorthrymu’r Tylodion, yn Preswyliaw yn Nghaerludd, yn cadw Putteiniaid, y[n] meddwi ag yn godinebu: au hen Balasdaï au Llysoedd gynt, yn anghyfanedd yn ogofau Gwilliaid a lladron, yn Gorlanau Geifr a Bychod. lle clywid ynddyn gynt blethiadau soniarus Telynau a phibau pereiddlais a phob offer Cerdd: haws yn awr yw clywed y Dylluan yn Canu a Chathod yn Cymmaru, a phob pryfaid drwg yn nythu, lle bu lawer hardd Balasdy mae’n awr yn waeth na beudy, heb Ddyn yn Cyfaneddu, i roi na bwyd na Gwely, ys mae’n haws i Fardd neu ymdeithydd yn awr, yn un o’r hongl-dai pen agored hyn dorri ei wddf na thorri ei newyn . . .¹⁴

(. . . what is the use of my singing a cywydd in Gwynedd any more, other than a sad lament, since I no longer see any teacher or poet there, nor anyone who might recognize the skilfulness of a poem nor recite a masterly cywydd in the intricate language of Gomer, for sooner does one get from the foolish Welsh of today the defamation of the British tongue, blaspheming against the work of the old bards, singing sloppy rhymes in a mixture of languages, rather than trying to preserve the purity of their national language. The nobility are like a foreign nation from overseas, ignorant and careless of their ancestors’ tongue, babbling in English, mortgaging their land, squeezing their tenants, oppressing the poor, living in London, keeping prostitutes, getting drunk and committing adultery, whilst their ancient palaces and courts of yesteryear are deserted, are caves for bandits and thieves, enclosures for goats and bucks; where once was heard the tuneful harmonies of harps and sweet-voiced pipes and all kinds of musical instruments, now sooner may one hear the owl calling and cats

¹⁴ ‘Llythyrau at Ddafydd Jones o Drefriw’, ed. G. J. Williams, supplement to *The National Library of Wales Journal* series iii no. 2 (1943), 22.

copulating, and all kinds of horrible beasts nestling, where once was many a beautiful mansion it is now worse than a byre, without any man living there to provide food or a bed for the night, now it's easier for a poet or a traveller, in one of these dilapidated hovels, to cut his throat than to break his fast . . .)

This process was undoubtedly accelerated, from the late eighteenth century onwards, by the rise of new Nonconformist sects whose acolytes regarded traditional music, poetry and dance, as at best a distraction from higher things and at worst the work of the devil. The rapidity of the decline of these pursuits and the less colourful society which emerged were much regretted by Edward Jones (1752–1824), known as ‘Bardd y Brenin’ (the king’s bard) from his appointment as harpist to George IV, in his book, *The Bardic Museum*, published in 1802. In terms more moderate but still echoing those of Sion Powel a few decades earlier, he denounced the changes which had taken place, though, given the circles in which he moved, it is not surprising that, unlike Powel, he laid the blame entirely at the door of the Nonconformists rather than the aristocracy:

This sudden decline of the national Minstrelsy, and Customs of Wales, is in a great degree to be attributed to the fanatick impostors, or illiterate plebeian preachers, who have too often been suffered to over-run the country, misleading the greater part of the common people from their lawful Church; and dissuading them from their innocent amusements, such as Singing, Dancing, and other rural Sports, and Games, which heretofore they had been accustomed to delight in, from the earliest time.¹⁵

Yet during the same period, whilst the old ways were being lost, a new history was being created. With Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams, 1747–1826) a new step was taken: the deliberate reinvention of the past.¹⁶ Much work remains to be done to establish exactly whether his researches were based on genuine written or oral sources then available and how much should be regarded as the product of an opium-inspired imagination, but there is no doubt that he himself embellished traditional material which he did find and it was certainly he who devised the history, regalia and rituals of the modern *gorsedd* of bards and the ceremonies of the *eisteddfod*. By promoting the use of a special bardic alphabet he had devised, based on authentic runes, he even reinvented a writing tradition as well as a written tradition. To reinvent the past for the greater glory of Wales might seem a radical and revolutionary act, consistent with the outlook of a man who fraternised with supporters of the French Revolution. But it was also an act which had medieval precedent, for Iolo could plausibly be described as the

¹⁵ E. Jones, *The Bardic Museum* (London, 1802), p. xvi.

¹⁶ See P. Morgan, *Iolo Morganwg* (Cardiff, 1975), and idem, ‘From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period’, in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 43–100. A research project to reassess the work of Iolo Morganwg is currently under way at the University of Wales Centre for Higher Welsh and Celtic Studies in Aberystwyth.

Geoffrey of Monmouth of his day, in so far as his romanticised vision of an early Wales of druids, bards and heroes with unbroken traditions stretching back into the mists of time, provided his readers with a positive and comforting view of the past at a time when to be Welsh in an increasingly anglicised environment was becoming ever more problematic.¹⁷ Like Geoffrey's vision, his too was not total invention but had some genuine traditional material at its core.

Iolo Morganwg's activity contrasts sharply with that of an earlier antiquarian, Lewis Morris (1701–65), whom Iolo once described, with breath-taking prejudice if not hypocrisy, as 'no better than a very shallow Coxcomb . . . and a man of infinite falsehood'.¹⁸ In fact Morris, a trained surveyor from a family with serious scientific interests, was very much an empiricist and seeker after truth. He took advantage of the travel necessary for his professional duties to record poems, stories and traditions from all classes of society, and his manuscripts and his voluminous correspondence with his brothers and with other Welshmen who shared his interests provide invaluable information about Welsh life in those last decades before the religious revivals of the late eighteenth century destroyed with their new puritanism so much of the old, admittedly often drink-fuelled, traditions. Fortunately for us, Lewis Morris was interested in Arthurian traditions and so records a number of snippets, both narrative and non-narrative, which he had picked up either directly from the *werin*, the labouring classes, or from other collectors. One of the latter was Dafydd Jones of Trefriw (?1708–1785), one of the first legally sanctioned printers in Wales and a man who shared with Morris a passionate and informed interest in Welsh poetry and traditions.

In a series of letters written between March and June 1757 the two men discussed Arthurian stories connected with Ynys Enlli (*anglice* Bardsey), the island off the western tip of Caernarfonshire, once home to a monastic settlement, separated from the mainland by such dangerous seas that three pilgrimages to Bardsey were said to be worth one to far distant Rome. That tradition began early, for in the *Liber Landavensis* the island is described as 'Roma Britanniae, propter longinquitatem et periculosum transitum mare' (Britain's Rome, because of the long and dangerous sea crossing).¹⁹ Lewis Morris first turns to this topic in the context of the discussion of the name Dewi, the name of the patron saint of Wales, a form for which Dafydd, his correspondent's

¹⁷ On negative English attitudes towards Wales and the Welsh at this period, expressed through both visual and literary images, see P. Lord, *Words with Pictures: Welsh Images and Images of Wales in the Popular Press, 1640–1860* (Aberystwyth, 1995), and M. Dearnley, *Distant Fields: Eighteenth-Century Fictions of Wales* (Cardiff, 2001).

¹⁸ In Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, NLW MS 13118B (*olim* MS Llanover C.31), p. 93, c. 1805, quoted in H. Owen, *The Life and Works of Lewis Morris (Llewelyn Ddu o Fôn)* (n.p., 1951), pp. xcix–c.

¹⁹ Quoted in B. F. Roberts, 'Enlli'r Oesoedd Canol', in *Enlli*, ed. R. G. Jones and C. J. Arnold (Cardiff, 1996), pp. 21–48 (p. 36).

name, provides a doublet. Morris then refers to a tradition which he had picked up:

... y Brenin Arthur neu ei dad Uthur a ddygodd ei gâr Dewi St gydag ef o Lydaw, ag ai gwnaeth yn Archesgob Cymru yn lle'r Hên *Ddyfrig* yr hwn a aeth i Ynys Enlli i orphen ei oes.²⁰

(King Arthur or his father Uthur brought his relative St David with him from Brittany, and made him bishop instead of the aged Dubricius who went to live out his final years on Bardsey Island.)

Two days later, in his next letter, Morris expands on his theme:

... fe fu lawer Dewi heblaw Dewi'r Archesgob, ag ni wyddom ni'n dda pa fath fuchedd a ddilynodd hwnnw. fe allai nad anhebyg i Esgobion Cymru yn ein dyddiau ni. oni ddaeth ef gydag Uthur o Lydaw i gael bywoliaeth yma? ag oni throes Arthur yr Hen Ddyfrig Archesgob oi le a gorfu arno fynd i orphen ei oes i Fanachlog Enlli fal y cae *Ddewi* oedd yn gâr i'r *Brenin* fod yn archesgob Cymru? Nid seintiau oedd pob un a elwid yn seintiau gwedi hynny gan Bab rhufain. Dynion fal ninneu oeddynt, rhai'n dda a rhai'n ddidda.²¹

(... there was many a Dewi besides Dewi the Archbishop, and we do not know for certain what kind of life he led; perhaps not so different from the bishops of Wales in our days. Did he not come with Uthur from Brittany to make his living here? and did not Arthur turn the aged Dubricius out of his post and force him to live out his last years in the monastery on Bardsey, so that Dewi, who was related to the king, could become Archbishop? Not every one who was later called a saint by the Pope of Rome was a saint. They were men like us, some good, some not good.)

Where then did Lewis Morris find this material? One likely source is the work of the late-medieval Welsh poets, which was still a subject of great interest in Wales thanks to the labours of generations of manuscript collectors and copyists. At this time Wales had no university and therefore no major library, so Welsh manuscripts which had not left the country were perforce in private hands, but it was widely known who had what manuscripts, and it was often possible to borrow manuscripts or to consult and copy them in their owner's house.²² Lewis Morris himself in about 1740 drew up a list of all the people in Wales he knew of who had manuscripts in their

²⁰ G. J. Williams, 'Llythyrau at Ddafydd Jones o Drefriw', p. 3, letter dated 14 March 1757.

²¹ Ibid., p. 5.

²² This practice is reflected in another letter from Lewis Morris to Dafydd Jones, dated 27 February 1757; see 'Llythyrau at Ddafydd Jones o Drefriw', pp. 1–2. An earlier example is provided by the lexicographer Dr John Davies, Mallwyd, who was apparently able to transcribe the entire contents of Llyfr Taliesin (the Book of Taliesin, now National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 2) at the private library at Hengwrt in Meirionnydd between 1631 and 1634: see M. Hayock, 'Llyfr Taliesin', *National Library of Wales Journal* 25 no. 4 (1988), 357–86 (p. 370 and n. 127). Similarly William Maurice (d. 1680) spent much time working on the Welsh manuscripts at Hengwrt (see *Dictionary of Welsh Biography down to 1940* (London, 1959), p. 625).

possession.²³ The story of Dewi succeeding Dyfrig as Arthur's Archbishop is referred to by the poets Gutun Owain and Lewis Glyn Cothi in the late fifteenth century, but the latter is the more likely to be the source used by Lewis Morris, for he himself owned a manuscript of the poet's works.²⁴ It should be noted, however, that neither poet mentions that Arthur had Dyfrig ousted against his will, but a variant narrative of Dyfrig's retirement to Enlli is evoked in the *Liber Landavensis*, where he hands over his episcopacy to St Teilo, not to David.²⁵ The Life of St Teilo, however, maintains that Dyfrig retired from his post as archbishop of Caerleon [*sic*] in order to make way for St David.²⁶ But in view of the fact that Thomas Pennant, visiting Bardsey some forty years later than Lewis Morris, records that Dyfrig 'almost worn out with age, resigning his see to St David, retired [t]here', it is likely that this was the local version of the story in the eighteenth century and that Morris was not dependent on his manuscripts alone for this tale.²⁷

The tradition which Morris mentions, that King Arthur was related to St David, is an ancient one, for *Bonedd y Saint* makes the saint Arthur's great nephew.²⁸ One Welsh version of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, NLW MS 3036B (*olim* Mostyn MS 117), copied in the early fourteenth century²⁹ echoes this, making Non, David's mother, the daughter of Anna, daughter of Uthyr Pendragon, this time making the saint the king's nephew. However, *Brut Dingestow* (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, NLW MS 5266B) follows the *Historia* in referring to David as the king's uncle.³⁰ As Elissa Henken has pointed out:

It would seem that there was a need felt to have the two great men related, that the traditionally most important relationship of nephew and uncle was maintained, but that there was some uncertainty as to which man held which position in the relationship.³¹

²³ Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, NLW MS 604D, p. 83; an annotated transcript, made in 1788 by the Rev. David Ellis (1739–95) when curate of Amlwch, is now NLW MS 17B, pp. 82–3. See also H. Owen, *The Life and Works of Lewis Morris*, pp. 181, 213.

²⁴ In a letter to Dafydd Jones, dated 18 November 1757, he states: '... mae gennifi yn agos i drichant o Gywyddau ac owdlau y Bardd hwnnw mewn un llyfr, a llawer ohono gwedi ei sgrifennu allan o lyfr oi law ei hun' ('I have nigh on three hundred *cywyddau* and *awdlau* by that poet in one volume, many of them written out from a book in his own hand'). See 'Llythyrau at Ddafydd Jones o Drefriw', p. 11 and p. 33, n. 30. G. J. Williams suggests that this was London, British Library, MS Add. 14871, a copy made by Dr John Davies, Mallwyd, from two earlier manuscripts, Peniarth 70 and Peniarth 109, the latter being in the hand of Lewys Glyn Cothi. Lewis Morris, he adds, had bought Dr Davies's copy for a shilling in 1728.

²⁵ See Elissa Henken, *Traditions of the Welsh Saints* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 130, and further references given there.

²⁶ *Lives of the British Saints*, ed. S. Baring-Gould and J. Fisher, 4 vols. (London, 1907–13), II, 310–11.

²⁷ Pennant, *Tours*, II, 370.

²⁸ See P. C. Bartrum, *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (Cardiff, 1966), pp. 54–5.

²⁹ J. G. Evans, *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language* (London, 1898–1910), I, 62, states that it was copied in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, but I have followed the dating given by Daniel Huws in *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Cardiff and Aberystwyth, 2000), p. 59.

³⁰ *Brut Dingestow*, ed. H. Lewis (Cardiff, 1942), p. 161.

³¹ *Traditions of the Welsh Saints* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 32.

The detail in Morris's letter that Dewi had come from Brittany with Uthyr is more puzzling, but may represent a confusion with the Breton associations of Dyfrig, who appears in the Breton Life of St Samson, where he ordains Samson; a similar tradition is preserved in the *Liber Landavensis*.³² Although the cult of both Dewi and his mother, Non, is attested in Brittany from at least the thirteenth century and still persists, according to Rhigyfarch's *Vita* Dewi was born and bred in Wales, spending most of his life there, although he did travel on the continent.³³

Lewis Morris's narrative, in his letter to Dafydd Jones, of how Dyfrig came to Enlli thus brings together elements which, in variant forms, can be easily traced back to the early written sources, and we may note that whilst the earliest of those sources, which are in Latin or Welsh prose, provide us with at least the bare bones of the narrative, links in the chain of tradition are often provided by non-narrative sources, notably the work of the poets. It is not always realised by scholars from outside Wales that Welsh traditionally made a sharp distinction between poetry and prose, with prose alone being used as a vehicle for narrative, and whilst poetry might refer to narrative traditions, the narrative poem did not fully develop until the early modern period and forms such as the ballad were late arrivals in Wales.³⁴ Medieval Welsh poetry might refer to a narrative, or assume familiarity with a narrative, but it would not itself tell the story. Yet all too often the lack of a surviving written prose version means that we are reliant on the often less comprehensive sources of poetry, and of oral traditions where recorded.

The story of Dyfrig, Dewi and Arthur was not the only Arthurian narrative connected with Bardsey that had caught the interest of Lewis Morris, and, indeed of his friend Dafydd Jones of Trefriw. In 1737 Lewis Morris, whose first profession was as a land surveyor, had been appointed by the navy office in London to undertake a hydrographic survey of some of the Welsh ports. The work got underway in earnest in 1741 and the fruits of his work would be published in 1748 under the slightly misleading title *Plans of Harbours, Bays, and Roads in St George's and the Bristol Channels*.³⁵ In May 1742, Morris wrote to William Fychan or Vaughan:

Off of Bardsey I observe a great overfall of the sea on a Bank never observd. by any Hydrographer in any Chart, But the place is so well known amongst the

³² Ibid., p. 103.

³³ See *Rhigyfarch's Life of St David*, ed. J. W. James (Cardiff, 1967). On the Breton cult of Dewi and Non, see Y. Le Berre, B. Tanguy and Y.-P. Castel, *Buez Santez Nonn, Mystère breton: Vie de sainte Nonne* (Treflevez and Brest, 1999).

³⁴ The development of narrative poetry is first seen in the free-metre forms from the Elizabethan period onwards and owes much to English influence. See, for example, T. Parry, *Baledi'r Ddeunawfed ganrif* (Cardiff, 1935); T. H. Parry-Williams, *Canu Rhydd Cynnar* (Cardiff, 1932); C. Davies, 'Early Free-Metre Poetry', in *A Guide to Welsh Literature c. 1530–1700*, ed. R. G. Gruffydd (Cardiff, 1997), pp. 75–99, and N. Lloyd, 'Later Free-Metre Poetry', in *ibid.*, pp. 100–27.

³⁵ Published in digital form on the website of the National Library of Wales, at <http://www.llgc.org.uk/drych.lem/lem001.html>. A second printed edition of the *Plans* was issued by his son, William Morris, in 1801.

neighbours that it has acquired a name among the Antient Britons which it keeps to this day.

That name was Gorffrydau Caswennan.³⁶ Morris continues:

. . . and one of the antient Poets describing the positiveness of his mistress,
most Elegantly says

Os anodd o Gaswennan
Droi ar Lif or dwr i'r Lan
Dau anos na mynd yno
Troi Bun or Natur y Bo.

(If it was hard from Caswennan to turn to windward from the water to the shore, twice as hard as that is to change a girl's nature.)

These four lines Lewis Morris elsewhere attributes to a poet called Robert Leiaf, about whom little is known, but Morris confidently dates the poem around 1450.³⁷ This is repeated in the transcripts of Lewis Morris's manuscripts made by Edward Jones ('Bardd y Brenin').³⁸ Robert Leiaf may be related to the fifteenth-century Denbighshire-born poet Gruffudd Leiaf, in which case Morris's date is entirely plausible.³⁹ The poem in which these lines occur is, however, also attributed to other and more famous poets, including Bedo Aeddren, Bedo Brwynllys, Ieuan Dyfi, Llawdden and Dafydd ap Gwilym. Apart from Dafydd ap Gwilym, who flourished in the mid-fourteenth century, these poets all lived in the fifteenth century, and Ieuan Dyfi was still alive in the early sixteenth. The uncertainty of attribution and the variant readings within the poem are typical of the manuscript tradition of Welsh poetry in the early modern period. What is also characteristic is that the poem itself gives no further detail, for the audience is assumed to be familiar with the story to which the poet alludes. The fact that many of the poets to whom the manuscripts attribute the poem are not from Pen-llŷn – the mainland region nearest to Enlli – hints that the dangers of Caswennan were well known to audiences outside the immediate local area. This poem is a *cywydd* without any given title but which starts 'Y ferch a'r ael wine fain' (The girl with the thin reddish eyebrows).⁴⁰ Here the poet, whoever he is, refers in passing to the story of Caswennan, following the common practice among Welsh poets of drawing on well-known narrative material to supply

³⁶ University of Wales, Bangor, MS Mostyn 7585, quoted by D. Wyn Wiliam in 'Caswennan', *Tlysau'r Hen Oesoedd. Cymdeithas Morrisiaid Môn* 9 (April 2001), 10–13 (p. 10). For a fuller discussion of the Caswennan material, see N. Bullinga, 'Arthurs schipbreuk', in *Arthur, Brigit, Conn, Deirdre . . . Verhaal, taal en recht in de Keltische wereld. Liber amicorum voor Leni van Strien-Gerritsen*, ed. I. Genée, B. Jaski and B. Smelik (Nijmegen, 2003), pp. 51–61.

³⁷ *Plans of Harbours*, p. 11.

³⁸ Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, NLW MS 37B, p. 128.

³⁹ See *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, s.n. Gruffudd Leiaf.

⁴⁰ This poem is found in its entirety in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, NLW MS 3037B (*olim* Mostyn 129), p. 134.

metaphors or comparisons in poems on quite other themes. The poem, in its extant exemplars at least, makes no mention of Arthur. Yet Lewis Morris in his published *Plans of Harbours* explicitly links the story with Arthur in a note on his chart of the north entrance to Bardsey sound:

There is a Bank of Sand about a mile W.S.W. of Bardsey, on which you have not two Fathom at Low Water.
King Arthur (as is reported) had a ship called Gwenan Cast away there, Hence the Place is called Gorffrydau Caswenan.

He repeats this in his *Celtic Remains*, a dictionary of Welsh place-names richly annotated, left unpublished at his death:⁴¹

Caswennan; a sunken bank near Bardsey Isle, where King Arthur's favourite ship called Gwennan was cast away. The overfall there is called *Gorffrydau* or streams of Caswennan to this day.⁴²

From this evidence it appears that by Lewis Morris's day, that is by the 1740s, Gorffrydau Caswennan, where a sunken bank and strong currents constituted a danger to shipping, was linked in the local tradition with king Arthur. Arthur had a ship called Gwennan, so Caswennan can be interpreted as 'hateful to Gwennan', hateful because she was cast away there. Again in transcripts from Lewis Morris's manuscripts, this time in the hand of Evan Evans ('Ieuan Brydydd Hir' or 'Ieuan Fardd', 1731–88), we find the following note:

Caswenan, lle atcas i Longau rhwng Enlli â Llyn; yno torrodd Llong i Arthur a elwid Gwennan o hynny y gelwir y lle Ffrydiau Gwennan.⁴³

(Caswenan, a hateful place for ships, between Bardsey and Llyn (i.e. the Llŷn peninsula); it was there that was broken a ship belonging to Arthur, called Gwennan [the white one] because of which the place was called Ffrydiau Gwennan [Gwennan's streams or currents].)

But Morris had added:

This is a mistake of David Jones for Ffrydiau Caswennan (rightly called Gorffrydiau Caswennan) lie between Ynys Enlli and the Channel and is a great overfall. It is sometimes mentioned by one of the Poets and is noted for its strong tides.

⁴¹ The first part, contained in London, British Library, MS Add. 14910–11, was published by Daniel Silvan Evans (London, 1878); a copy made from the same manuscript exemplar by Lewis Morris's nephew, Richard Morris, is now Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, NLW MS 1735D; the second part, NLW MS 1680A, still unpublished, was preserved among the manuscripts of Gwallter Mechain who had been asked to edit the work for publication but failed to do so. See 'Llythyrau at Ddafydd Jones o Drefriw', pp. 30–2.

⁴² BL, Add. MS 14910, p. 149; quoted in Dafydd Wyn Wiliam, 'Caswennan', p. 11.

⁴³ Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, NLW MS 1668B, p. 3.

This comment shows that Morris had been discussing this tradition in his correspondence with Dafydd Jones of Trefriw, but there is little doubt that he had heard this onomastic tale from local people who knew the tricky sea-roads between Bardsey and the mainland, for he continues:

It hath been shewed m[e] by the Natives of Llyn and Bardsey, in my survey of the coast. Lewis Morris.⁴⁴

In the tradition collected by Lewis Morris, Caswennan was a toponym, with the Gwennan element identified as the name of Arthur's ship, but there is no authority for this in the medieval sources. Apart from the *cywydd* discussed earlier, there are two other poems, both of the fourteenth century, one by Gruffydd Gryg and one by Hywel ab Einion Lygliw, which mention Caswennan,⁴⁵ apparently as a place-name, presumably the same sunken bank off Bardsey, well known as a danger to shipping. Hywel ab Einion Lygliw's reference to 'berw Caswennan' (the 'boiling' or 'turmoil' of Caswennan) is consistent with this. But in none of these references is there any mention of Arthur, nor of his ship Gwennan.

A further twist in the evolution of this tradition comes to light in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, this time in north-east Wales. In the 1580s the important collector and copier of manuscripts, Roger Morris of Coed-y-Talwrn in the parish of Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd, recorded the following tale in what is now Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Cwrtmawr MS 530 (p. 150):⁴⁶

Madoc ap Owain gwynedd oedd voriwr mawr a chwannoc i drafel ac am na alle o vodd arall entrio ir Sygnedd gwneuthur ac adeilad a wnaeth long heb hayarn ond i hoylio a chyrn keirw rhac llyncku or mor hwnnw hi ai galw oi gwneuthuriad Gwennangorn ac ynn honno i nofiodd y moroedd wrth i blesser ac i trafaeliodd i lawer o wledydd tra mor yn ddiarswyd ond wrth ddymchwelyd adre ynn gyfagos at Ynys Enlli yr yskyttiodd phrydie yno hi yn greulon ac ai hamharodd ymhell ac am hynny uyth hyd heddiw i gelwir y mann hwnnw ar y mor phrydie kaswennan[.] Yr ystori honn a ddoeth o law bwy

⁴⁴ NLW MS 1668B, p. 4. That the tradition remained current is shown by the reference to it in Appendix III to Richard Fenton's *Tours in Wales*, ed. J. Fisher (London, 1917), p. 329: 'There is to the West of [Bardsey] a reef of Sand, dry at low Ebbs, which at full tide causes a heavy sea, which makes a dreadful noise, and is very dangerous. It is called Gorrffrydau Caswennan, the Torrents of Caswennan, which tradition says took its name from a ship of Arthur's of that name lost there.' This information was acquired by Fenton from a manuscript dated 1814, compiled by the quarry official and antiquarian, William Williams (1738–1817) of Llandygái, see Fisher's introduction to *Tours*, p. vii. On William Williams, see D. G. Jones, *Un o wŷr y Medra – Bywyd a Gwaith William Williams, Llandygái* (Denbigh, 1999).

⁴⁵ See Dafydd Wyn Wiliam, 'Caswennan', p. 10, and p. 12, notes 1–2, where bibliographical references are given.

⁴⁶ Formerly MS Llanwrin 1, under which title it is described by J. G. Evans, *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language*, II, 367–70. Roger Morris adopted the system of representing Modern Welsh /w/, /ll/ and /dd/ by under-dotting /u/, /l/ and /d/, but I have standardised, using the more familiar graphs for these in my transcript.

gilydd dann warant gredadwy o hynny hyd heddiw/ Velly i dyvod Edwart ap Sion wynn i mi 1582 y 13 o vis Mawrth[.]

(Madog ab Owain Gwynedd was a great sea-voyager and eager to travel and because he could by no other means enter the Sugnedd, he did make and build a ship without iron, but nailed it with stag's horn so that that sea would not swallow her; and called her Gwenangorn [the white one of horn] because of the way she was made; and in her he sailed the seas at his pleasure and travelled to many lands across the sea without any fear, but on returning home, near Bardsey the currents (ffrydie) shook her cruelly and threw her far off course and for this reason that place in the sea has ever since been called Ffrydie Caswenan. This story came from one hand to another under credible guarantee down to this day. So it was told to me by Edward ap Sion Wynn the 13 of March 1582.)

Sugnedd can mean a quagmire, a quicksand or a whirlpool, literally a place that sucks one in, but in this account the importance of building a ship without iron suggests that it was a place with some kind of magnetic field which would draw down into it anything containing iron. This reflects a very ancient tradition among seafaring peoples: it is attested in the *One Thousand and One Nights*, for example, where a loadstone mountain draws out the nails from any ship in its vicinity so that the vessel's structure falls apart, whilst in the Welsh context it is found in *Branwen*, the second of *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* (the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*), where the river Llinon in Ireland is said to have loadstones on its bed so that no boats or other craft will venture upon the water.⁴⁷ This detail of how and why the ship was built without iron, carefully recorded by Roger Morris, is missing from the other sources relating to Caswennan, although the ship is still called Gwenan as in the story known to Lewis Morris. But instead of Arthur, the owner and captain of the ship is Madog ab Owain Gwynedd. Owain Gwynedd, who lived from about 1100 to 1170 was king of Gwynedd. According to the genealogies, Owain Gwynedd had a large progeny by various mothers, and one of his sons was called Madog.⁴⁸ It is to this Madog that the myth of Prince Madog, the supposed early discoverer of America, came to be attached, and in some very late versions of the story his ship was again called Gwennangorn, perhaps under the influence of Roger Morris's story.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ In the *Stories from the Thousand and One Nights* the Third Calendar's tale relates how as the ships drew near to the mountain, the current carried them towards it and when the ships were close to it, they fell apart, and all the nails, and everything else that was of iron, flew from them towards the loadstone. For *Branwen*, see *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, ed. I. Williams (Cardiff, 1930), p. 40: 'A mein sugyn yssyd ygwaelawt yr auon, ny eill na llong na llestyr arnei.' ('And there are loadstones at the bottom of the river, so that no ship nor vessel can go upon it.')

⁴⁸ The offspring of Owain Gwynedd are listed in *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* ed. P. C. Bartrum (Cardiff, 1966), pp. 96–8, where Madog appears under [m].

⁴⁹ The pioneering work on the Madog tradition is Thomas Stephens' posthumously published *Madoc* (London and New York, 1893), which used modern critical tools to demolish the contention that the legend had any historical basis. For a more recent study, see G. A. Williams, *Madoc: The Making of a Myth* (London, 1979). The earliest known reference to the story is in David Powel's *Historie of*

Roger Morris had access to a wide range of manuscripts from which he copied a variety of prose and verse texts, and this particular manuscript includes transcripts from earlier manuscripts,⁵⁰ but in the colophon to this particular tale he states unequivocally that this was a tale from oral tradition. He stresses that it has come down through the years thanks to reliable story-tellers, his authority here being the name of his direct informant, Edwart ap Sion Wynn (*anglice*, Edward son of John Wynn), whose precise identity is difficult to establish in view of the plethora of Wynn families in north Wales. It is tempting, however, to imagine a connection with the John Wyn of Bodwrda who was known to the authorities as ‘the captain of the pirates of Ynys Enlli’ and is named in a comment on the sin of piracy in a manuscript of Roger Morris’s contemporary, the Catholic Robert Gwyn (*fl.* 1568–91).⁵¹ Roger Morris, in the firmest possible authority *topos*, gives us the exact date on which he was told the story, 13 March 1582. So far I have traced only one other exemplar of the tale linking Madog ab Owain Gwynedd with the Caswennan story, and this is a direct transcript from Morris’s manuscript, made by that other important north-eastern collector and copier of manuscripts, John Jones of Gellilyfdy in Flintshire (born some time between about 1578 and 1583, died ?1658). John Jones includes Roger Morris’s colophon, which he attributes to Morris himself before dating his own transcript October 1607.⁵² In his many surviving manuscripts John Jones reveals a considerable interest in Arthurian material, often recording texts not otherwise attested or a version significantly different from those found in earlier manuscripts. He must therefore have had access to many manuscript sources now lost to us.⁵³ Had John Jones come across an Arthurian version of the Caswennan onomastic tale, he would surely have recorded it, but as far as I can establish, no such version can be found in his manuscripts.

Cambria now called Wales of 1584 (repr. 1811), pp. 166–7, see pp. 118–19 and note 12 above. The fact that Roger Morris, who acquired the story of Madog two years before the publication of Powel’s work, does not refer to the discovery of America nor to a number of details in the later Madog tradition suggest that these were not known to him. Morris, like Humphrey Llwyd, was from Denbighshire and seems to have lived there all his life, unlike Llwyd: it seems unlikely, therefore, that Llwyd was evoking a local popular tradition. Powel’s claim that Gutun Owain, a poet and copyist associated with Basingwerk abbey in neighbouring Flintshire, referred to the Madog story, is not borne out by Gutun’s surviving manuscripts.

⁵⁰ The Life of St Martin, the text immediately preceding the Madog ab Owain Gwynedd tale in Roger Morris’s manuscript (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Cwrtmawr 530), was copied from National Library of Wales, NLW MS 3026C (*olim* Mostyn 88), a manuscript in the hand of the poet Gutun Owain and dated 1488–89: see J. G. Evans, *Reports*, II, 369.

⁵¹ Cardiff, Central Library, MS Hafod 14, see G. Bowen, ‘Roman Catholic Prose and its Background’, in *A Guide to Welsh Literature c. 1530–1700*, ed. R. G. Gruffydd, pp. 210–40 (p. 228), and G. Bowen, *Welsh Recusant Writings* (Cardiff, 1999), p. 41.

⁵² Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 216B, pp. 59–60. It is worth noting that John Jones seems not to have known the story of Madog discovering America, otherwise he would surely have mentioned it here.

⁵³ This is true, for example, of his account of the Birth of Arthur in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 215B, which appears to be independent of the narrative in NLW MS 1A, a subject to which I hope to return elsewhere. See also note 57 below.

The pattern that emerges, therefore, is of an onomastic tale, originally without any Arthurian connections, but which by the first half of the eighteenth century had been drawn into the Arthurian orbit and properly Arthurianised. Why this should happen cannot be proven, but one possible reason is the existence of other Arthurian traditions connected with Bardsey, such as Arthur sending Dyfrig (Dubricius) there to retire, which we have already discussed, and also that of Myrddin/Merlin having his treasures there, kept in a Tŷ Gwydr (house of glass). The latter was a story known to Lewis Morris in the first half of the eighteenth century, for he recorded it in his *Celtic Remains*.⁵⁴ The earliest extant source in Welsh to record this tradition dates, however, from the mid-sixteenth century, being a marginal note in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 147. This states that Myrddin took *Tri Thlws ar Ddeg Ynys Brydain*, the Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain, with him to his Tŷ Gwydr.⁵⁵ This is not however, the earliest source to connect Myrddin with Enlli/Bardsey. The poet and herald Gruffudd Hiraethog (d. 1564), states in his expanded version of *Enweu Ynys Prydein* in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 163 that Myrddin was buried on the island,⁵⁶ but already in the fifteenth century poets such as Huw Cae Llwyd (*fl.* 1431–1504) and Huw Rheinallt (*fl.* c. 1471–94) were referring to Myrddin's Tŷ Gwydr. The poets of that period did not, however, specify where that house was localised, and they link Myrddin's retirement not with his curatorial duties with respect to the Thirteen Treasures, as the scribe in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 147 and Lewis Morris do, but with a love affair – a clear echo of the French *Prose Merlin*, which was by then known in Wales.⁵⁷ But the tradition of Myrddin living out his last days on Enlli and being buried there is recorded in a still earlier and perhaps unexpected source, Ranulf Higden's Latin chronicle, the *Polychronicon* completed in 1340.⁵⁸ Exactly how the chronicler acquired this information is not clear, but since he was a monk in Chester, a stone's throw from the Welsh border, it need not surprise us.

The pattern that emerges from studying these few particular examples, chosen more or less at random within an area well-known to me, would be

⁵⁴ For references to Myrddin and his treasures see Silvan Evans' edition of the *Celtic Remains*, pp. 170, 326.

⁵⁵ The note is on p. 14: see J. G. Evans, *Reports*, I, 911, where the date of the manuscripts is given as c. 1566. For the *Tri Thlws ar Ddeg* see *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, ed. R. Bromwich, 2nd edn (Cardiff, 1978), pp. 474, 560, also B. F. Roberts, 'Enlli'r Oesoedd Canol', p. 43, and further references there given.

⁵⁶ '... ac yn yr ynys honn y kladdwyd Merddin vab Morfrynn' (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 163, pt 2, p. 8), see J. G. Evans, *Reports* I, 950, and cf. B. F. Roberts, 'Enlli'r Oesoedd Canol', p. 42.

⁵⁷ For the references by the poets see Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, pp. 474, 560; evidence of the *Prose Merlin* circulating in medieval Wales can be found in the prose fragment relating the Birth of Arthur found in NLW MS 1A, copied in the second half of the fifteenth century, see J. H. Davies, 'A Welsh Version of the Birth of Arthur', *Y Cymmrodor* 24 (1913), pp. 247–64, and note 53 above.

⁵⁸ *Polychronicon* i. 38 (Rolls Series, London, 1865), I, 416–18, quoted in B. F. Roberts, 'Enlli'r Oesoedd Canol', p. 42, see also Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, p. 560. On the date of the *Polychronicon* see A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England* (London, 1982), pp. 44–5.

repeated, I believe, if we took examples from elsewhere in Wales. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries traditions had become increasingly fragmented, and those which did survive did so because they were either straightforward onomastic tales, providing a brief narrative explanation for a local place-name, or because they were attached in some other way to a specific feature in the landscape. It is, of course, a truism within studies of oral tradition that stories are more likely to survive if firmly linked with a specific place such as a rock, a tree, a lake, or an early fortification, than if they lack a specific geographical location. But the antiquity of such stories is not always certain, as witness Bwrdd Arthur and Ffynnon Cegin Arthur which provide examples of a probably late Arthurianisation which, in the case of Bwrdd Arthur, ousted an older place-name. Yet older Arthurian traditions did survive, though often in a form rather different from that preserved in the medieval sources or those of the sixteenth century.

The split in Welsh tradition between poetry and prose, with prose as the exclusive medium for narrative, must be one of the reasons for the gradual disintegration of the vast stock of narrative material which must have been common knowledge amongst the Welsh in the Middle Ages. As long as oral tradition retained its vitality, as it did for long after the advent of the written word, stories about king Arthur and his warriors, to take only one strand from this complex fabric, could flourish and poets could assume that their audience, in whichever part of the country they found themselves, would pick up on the briefest of references, would experience a wide range of resonances from a line or half a line evoking a particular individual or a particular incident. From our very earliest surviving complete texts in Welsh, the *Hengerdd*, or Old Welsh poetry, it is evident that the amount of narrative material which has been lost far outweighs that which has survived. Very occasionally sources from elsewhere can provide the necessary background: the classic example is that of 'Cerdd Ysgolan', an Old Welsh poem preserved in the thirteenth-century Black Book of Carmarthen. 'Cerdd Ysgolan' clearly refers to some narrative known to the poet but which was not otherwise attested in Welsh sources except for even briefer passing references. It was only when Donatien Laurent collected a new, fuller version of the Breton *gwerz* about Ysgolan which at last provided that narrative in its entirety, that the full significance of the Welsh poem was revealed.⁵⁹ But this was an exceptional case. All too many of the Arthurian references in the poems in the Black Book of Carmarthen and the Book of Taliesin, such as the *Pa gur*. . . poem and *Preiddeu Annwfn*, not to mention the Myrddin poems,

⁵⁹ D. Laurent, 'La gwerz de Skolan et la légende de Merlin', *Ethnologie française* i 3-4 (1971), 19-54, cf. A. O. H. Jarman, 'Cerdd Ysgolan', *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* 10 (1977), 51-78. Versions of the same *gwerz* had been collected in the nineteenth century by Villemarqué, who recognised the affinities between them and the Welsh poem in the Black Book of Carmarthen, but these were incomplete compared with those collected by Donatien Laurent in the 1960s.

remain unexplained because the stories that lay behind them have been lost.⁶⁰ Despite many optimistic attempts at exegesis over the last century, not least by *arthuromanes*, at present we can do no more than speculate as to the precise shape these stories once took.

If the earliest sources in Welsh are poetry and therefore non-narrative, what of the earliest prose? Here the problem is a lack of material, for comparatively little narrative prose is Arthurian. The Arthurian tale regarded as the earliest in Welsh, and certainly the only Arthurian narrative which seems to have reached something like its present form before the intrusion of Geoffrey of Monmouth, is *Culhwch ac Olwen*. It has been plausibly argued that the story as it has come down to us represents a comparatively late Arthurianisation of what was not originally an Arthurian narrative. As it stands the tale provides us with a wealth of information but like an iceberg conceals a greater mass that lies beneath the surface. In the lists of the knights at Arthur's court, for instance, or in the list of tasks to be performed by the young hero if he is to win the hand of the giant's daughter, we find countless throw-away references to individuals, to incidents or to triads, which hint at what we have lost. Occasionally we can glean enough information from the context and, if we are lucky, combine it with brief references elsewhere, to allow us to guess at the rough outline of the story that informed one line or one phrase, a story which would have enhanced the contemporary audience's appreciation of the tale as a whole. One example, chosen at random is the story of Mabon fab Modron and Eiddoel fab Aer, the prisoners of Caer Loyw.⁶¹

Apart from *Culhwch* the only other Arthurian narratives preserved in the two main manuscript compendia, the White Book of Rhydderch and the Red Book of Hergest, are the tales of *Geraint*, *Owain* and *Peredur*, which were undoubtedly influenced as they are by the *Erec*, *Yvain* and *Perceval* of Chrétien de Troyes and by other French romances of the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, and finally *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, found only in the Red Book and which, I have argued elsewhere, probably postdates those three; moreover, whilst it reveals familiarity with earlier narrative traditions, it is a conscious literary composition rather than the kind of narrative which has evolved over time as it passed down generations of story-tellers, as *Culhwch ac Olwen* or *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* did. To these rather sparse prose records we may add material in Latin texts, from the *Historia Brittonum* to saints lives, which incorporate elements from the vernacular tradition. These may range from the briefest references, to Carn Cafall in the *Historia Brittonum*, for example, to proper narratives, such as that of Arthur

⁶⁰ See, for example, P. Sims-Williams, 'The Early Welsh Arthurian Poems', in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. R. Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman and B. F. Roberts (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 33–71.

⁶¹ See *Culhwch ac Olwen*, ed. R. Bromwich and D. S. Evans (Cardiff, 1997), pp. xliii–l (in Welsh); a briefer account is given in their English edition (Cardiff, 1992), pp. lx–lxi.

and Melwas in the *Vita* of St Gildas by Caradog of Llancarfan.⁶² Here the native, vernacular, orally transmitted traditions speak through the Latin, written versions, demonstrating that during the Middle Ages those two traditions were not separate but overlapping, and that those compiling Latin texts, for all their book-learning, had not become separated from their native culture, any more than were those who first set down in writing the early Welsh poems or prose tales.⁶³ And although Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* is undoubtedly a composed work, it draws on at least some older Welsh traditions, which must have facilitated its re-translation into Welsh.

Another major vernacular source is of course the Triads, that invaluable short-hand collection of traditions, grouped conveniently in threes as a mnemonic device.⁶⁴ Here again, however, this source constantly reminds us that it is only the tip of the iceberg which is visible. Occasionally a helpful redactor, especially in the later manuscripts, will flesh out the bones with explanatory notes, but all too often, if a tradition is not attested elsewhere, we are left with little more than evidence for the existence of a story we no longer possess in its entirety. The Triads give us a checklist of what traditions were considered worthy of preservation but they do not provide a full taxonomy of those traditions. Nevertheless, the Triads are a useful reminder of the constant interplay between the oral and the written. In their earliest written form they transferred into that newer medium traditions taken directly from oral tradition, but as time goes on written sources begin to feed back into the oral tradition. In the early fifteenth century, for instance, new Triads were composed drawing on a written Welsh translation of French grail romances, and references to this newer, imported material quickly began to find their way into the orally performed work of the poets.

This movement between written and oral transmission, the reciprocal influence of one on the other, was to continue for centuries. There gradually emerged a class of literate, educated Welshmen [*sic*] who took an antiquarian interest in stories preserved locally in oral tradition as well as in book learning. Elis Gruffydd, in the first half of the sixteenth century, had his feet in both camps. He had had access to manuscripts in Welsh, French, Latin and English, as well as early printed books, but in compiling his chronicle of the history of the world, based mainly on such written sources, he could not resist the temptation to introduce folktales and snippets of traditional lore,

⁶² On Carn Cafall, see, for example, B. F. Roberts, 'Culhwch ac Olwen, the Triads, Saints' Lives', in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, pp. 73–95 (pp. 90–1), and O. J. Padel, *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 7–8; on the Arthur and Melwas story, see B. F. Roberts, 'Culhwch ac Olwen', pp. 83–4, P. Sims-Williams, 'The Early Welsh Arthurian Poems', in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, p. 60, and O. J. Padel, *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature*, pp. 43–6.

⁶³ A similar phenomenon may be observed in Brittany: see Caroline Brett, 'Breton Latin Literature as Evidence for Literature in the Vernacular, A.D. 800–1300', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 18 (1989) 1–25.

⁶⁴ See Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*.

including onomastic tales, which he had undoubtedly acquired from oral tradition, not from books.⁶⁵ His English contemporary, Leland, found evidence that in his day the Welsh were still well-versed in the history and geography of their native land, hinting at the prevalence of stories linked with specific locations:

... The nature of the Welsh is, and always has been, to regard it as manifestly contemptible to know about outside matters and not about their own. From youth, therefore, they religiously learn first the genealogies of their ancestors and then the antiquities of their homeland. I might venture to claim that there is no race which can so easily give information on the topography of surrounding places, on its cities, its mountains, its lakes, its rivers and their courses. I should never have been prepared to believe that the Welsh were so well versed in their local affairs if I had not in person heard their communications everywhere throughout Wales.⁶⁶

By the seventeenth century Welsh antiquarian scholars realised the importance of combining research in books and manuscripts with field work. Edward Lhuyd (1660–1709) through his *Parochial Queries* questionnaires and his own travels with his trained assistants acquired valuable evidence of locally preserved traditions.⁶⁷ His method acknowledges a realisation that by Lhuyd's day oral traditions were becoming essentially local. The breakdown of the bardic world must have been a significant factor here, for the poets who had treated large swathes of the country as their constituency would have exerted a powerful unifying force, reminding audiences from Anglesey to Cardiganshire or from Radnorshire to Glamorgan of their common inheritance of story-material and other traditional lore. Lewis Morris a few decades later was perhaps even more successful than Lhuyd, although the loss of so many of Lhuyd's manuscripts through fire in the nineteenth century renders fair comparison impossible. But whereas Edward Lhuyd lived most of his life outside Wales, and his life was one of the town-based scholar, Lewis Morris lived and worked mainly in rural Wales, and his occupations as surveyor, lead mine developer and farmer, brought him constantly into contact with those ordinary working people who come so vividly to life in his correspondence and from whom he learned so much. We owe a debt of gratitude to

⁶⁵ C. Lloyd-Morgan, 'Oral et écrit dans la chronique d'Elis Gruffydd', *Kreiz 5, Études sur la Bretagne et les Pays Celtiques* (1995), 179–86; eadem, 'Elis Gruffydd a Thraddodiad Cymraeg Calais a Chlwyd', *Cof Cenedl* 11 (1996), 29–58.

⁶⁶ Translation by J. P. Carley from Leland's account of Dafydd Morgan of Llandaff in his *Commentarii de Scriptoribus Britannicis*, ed. A. Hall (Oxford, 1709), cap. DLXXIII, 'De Davide Tavensi', pp. 464–5. I am most grateful to Professor Carley for drawing my attention to this account and for permission to quote from his translation. It is worth noting that one of the copies of Hall's edition now held at the National Library of Wales (shelfmark W.s. 1709 (8)) contains autograph annotations by Lewis Morris.

⁶⁷ On Edward Lhuyd see, for example, *Life and Letters of Edward Lhuyd, Second Keeper of the Museum Ashmoleanum*, ed. R. T. Gunther (Oxford, 1945); for further bibliographical references see T. Parry and M. Morgan, *Llyfryddiaeth Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg* (Cardiff, 1976), pp. 153–4, and G. Watts, *Llyfryddiaeth Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg, Cyfrol 2* (Cardiff, 1986), pp. 117–18.

those both within Wales and outside it, who secured the preservation of our early literary and historical manuscripts, but in acknowledging the inestimable value of those formal records of our poetry and prose, our narratives and non-narratives, we should not underestimate the value of the less imposing manuscripts and publications of more recent times, compiled from local informants. The material collected and preserved by Edward Lhuyd, Lewis Morris, Thomas Pennant and others may represent but the locally preserved *disjecta membra* of a once great tradition shared by a wider population, but taken with the material recorded in written form these fragments provide a far fuller picture than we would otherwise have. But they also show us, as does the testimony of much later sources such as the publications of Dr Wynn Williams and Myrddin Fardd, that tradition is never static, that stories are constantly recycled, replenished from other sources, sometimes oral, sometimes written, and adapted to suit new circumstances, new audiences. Change is the only constant.

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