

Peredur, Owain, and Geraint: Violence and Aggression in Fantasy Landscape.

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1710014

2021

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Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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Abstract

The storylines of *Peredur son of Efrog*, *The Lady of The Well*, and *Geraint son of Erbin* evolve around journeys full of efforts and self-sacrifice, misunderstanding, and violent transgressions. Aggressive encounters are endemic. They take place within the artificial binary landscape which divides the perceptive world into safe and unsafe areas. Through defining the main aspects of these areas, the medieval authors attempt to prime the audience into accepting the idea that aggression is a variant of the norm and may be productive and beneficial. Aggressive outbreaks are presented as mostly initiated by intruders or strangers outside of the defined social group. Feuds that result from unrestrained alien strife for aggression must be stopped by an authoritative intervention and various conventions. The thesis explores the concepts of fantasy landscape and its main constructs and describes the social and psychological aspects of aggression within this landscape.

Introduction

Aggression is usually perceived by the modern audience in a strictly negative way as destructive. In scholarly terms, this view is based on the very complex and largely abstract Freud's concept of the 'death instinct' (or Thanatos theory) and the so-called frustration-aggression theory. In simplified terms, yearning to achieve the main aim in life – that is death – is seen as the reason for repetitive aggression. The frustration-aggression theory states that aggression is a result of frustration caused by various obstacles. Once the obstacles are removed, aggression ends. It is, therefore, assigned with the secondary role. This theory also implies that destruction is an unavoidable consequence of aggression.¹ Even though this theory is not supported by biological research, in common view, mass media, TV it still discreetly prevails.

In *Peredur son of Efrog*, *The Lady of The Well*, and *Geraint son of Erbin* aggression, on the contrary, is portrayed as productive. It helps to construct and maintain a solid social order that is rooted in superiority, group bonds, and group identification, and territorial convention. This concept fixes the primary focus of all three narratives on the evolution of heroes' actions while making their personal moral qualities irrelevant. At the same time, it elevates the importance of creating a memorable fantasy landscape. The space in the stories is divided into two parts (inside and outside the castle) and marked by several spatial, stationary *loci* (castles) which serve as anchors, easy to remember and navigate. The same type of *loci* can be used multiple times to realise different themes and assist the audience in remembering different details. To enhance memorising, they are personalised, or 'embodied' with various characters who help in the revelation of didactic rules through achievements, efforts, and

¹ A. Storr, *Human Aggression*, (Penguin Books, 1968), pp.15-25;< <https://www.verywellmind.com/life-and-death-instincts-2795847>> [accessed 14/10/2021].

suffering, and who implicitly coerce the reader into accepting various truths through their aggressive behaviour. The multiple violent drives embedded into the fantasy landscape create a bulk of artificial memory. It is not a historical memory and it does not necessarily have anything to do with reality. It may be seen, though, as an instrument of social control by creating the ‘imprint’ of ‘image of virtues and vices, made vivid and striking following the classical rules, as ‘memorial notes.’²

The main aims of the thesis are, therefore, to demonstrate how the concept of violence and aggression is realised in connection with the fantasy landscape, and to establish the role of the background and supportive figures in memorising violent endeavours of the main characters.

² F. Yates, *The Art Of Memory*, Kindle edn. (Random House Books, 1966), loc. 1234.

Sources.

- Sources and the main research trends.

The main sources for the thesis are *Peredur son of Efrog*, *The Lady of The Well*, and *Geraint son of Erbin*. They referred tentatively to as ‘the three romances’³ because they stand out amongst the other, much earlier, tales in *The Mabinogion*. They are considered to have close affiliations with the continental French romances, primarily, Chrétien de Troyes’ *Erec and Enide*, *The Knight with the Lion*, *The Story of the Grail*⁴ but also other stories as the theme of the Quest in search of the Holy Grail were especially popular and as a result, Perceval’s story developed into multiple continuations throughout the 13th c.⁵ In the vast pool of sources, the Welsh stories are usually analysed within the general frame of the *Mabinogionfrage*⁶, and often seen as ‘hybrid’, schematic, simplistic versions of their more complicated and detailed counterparts.⁷

Peredur son of Efrog is usually paired with Chrétien’s *The Story of the Grail* (mid. 1180s). It is also likened to its continuations, and other continental variations of the same theme – the story of the Grail. *Peredur*’s story consists of four parts, each describing his knightly endeavours. The fourth part has a short inclusion about Gwalchmai venturing on a quest for King Arthur and himself. In essence, *Peredur*’s travels are a conflation of quests and pilgrimage, and structurally, they follow a ‘back and forth’ travel pattern. The theme of the

³ C. Lloyd-Morgan, E. Poppe, ‘The First Adaptations From French: History And Context Of A Debate’, in *Arthur In The Celtic Languages*, ed. by C. Lloyd-Morgan, E. Poppe (Cardiff: University Of Wales Press, 2019), pp.110-116 (p. 110, p. 113).

⁴ Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, tr. by W. Kibler and C. Carroll (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

⁵ *The Complete Story Of The Grail*, tr. by N. Bryant, Kindle edn. (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2016); *The High Book Of The Grail. A Translation Of The Thirteenth-Century Romance Perlesvaus*, tr. by N. Bryant (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007); *Merlin And The Grail. Joseph Of Arimathea. Merlin. Perceval. The Trilogy Of Prose Romances Attributed To Robert De Boron*, tr. by N. Bryant (Boydell & Brewer, 2005); *The Quest Of The Holy Grail*, tr. by P.M. Matarasso (London: Penguin Books, 1984).

⁶ J.K. Bollard, ‘Theme And Meaning In "Peredur"', *Arthuriana*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Fall 2000), 73-92 (p. 73) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27869565>> [accessed 19/10/2021].

⁷ *The Mabinogion*, tr. by S. Davies, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. xxiv.

Holy Grail is not conspicuous which led most researchers to account *Peredur* as a ‘blunder’ version⁸ of Chrétien’s text. As a consequence, the much-speculated puzzle of the ‘head on the salver’⁹ in the concluding paragraphs of *Peredur*, for example, is represented as a sign of the compiler’s confusion about the French text and the meaning of the Grail.¹⁰

Up to now, *Peredur* is seen as a downgraded derivative from the French narrative shaped up for the ‘Welsh consumption’ and, therefore, dispersed with typical Welsh folk tales’ motifs (e.g., black sheep changing colour as they cross the river or the witches of Caerloyw).¹¹ It is accepted amongst scholars that the accent in *Peredur* is made on ‘the transformation of the protagonist from ignorant hobbledehoy to Arthurian knight’¹² with the Grail theme and the chivalric topic diminished. The story is considered to be rooted in the Welsh oral tradition. It is argued, that it evolves around the tropes of *Peredur*’s evolution, the sovereignty of the land¹³, vengeance, honour, and disgrace.¹⁴ The research of extant manuscripts suggests that the earliest version of *Peredur* was compiled in the north of Wales possibly in the late 13th c. *Peredur*’s lineage links him to the North of Britain.¹⁵

⁸ I.L. Foster, ‘Geraint, Owain, And Peredur’, in *Arthurian Literature In The Middle Ages. A Collaborative History*, ed. by R.S. Loomis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 193–205 (p. 202). Ian Lovcey, however, argues that Chrétien took ‘at least some elements’ for his version from the Welsh tale. See I. Lovcey, ‘Historia Peredur Ab Efwarg’, in *The Arthur Of The Welsh. The Arthurian Legend In Medieval Welsh Literature*, ed. by R. Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman, B. Roberts (Cardiff: University Of Wales Press, 1991), pp. 171–182 (p. 171).

⁹ The search for literary and straightforward parallels lead G. Goetinck to link it to Celtic head cult, simultaneously, to note common traits with Christian iconographic motif (John the Baptist), and to posit that it may represent loss of sovereignty and ecclesiastical independence. See G. Goetinck, ‘Peredur...Upon Reflection’, *Etudes Celtiques*, Vol. 25 (1988), 221-232 (p. 229).

¹⁰ Alternatively, this motif may be considered as a reflection of iconographic trope of Christian suffering (i.e., victim transformation into victor) which has been known from the late antiquity. Then it could mean that the focus was deliberately shifted from the theme of the Grail (the story which was well-known at the time of *Peredur*’s compilation) onto the theme of emerging of a martyr and his suffering. See *The Art of Empire: Christian Art In Its Imperial Context*, ed. by L. M. Jefferson, R. M. Jensen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), p. 119.

¹¹ C. Lloyd-Morgan, ‘Historia Peredur Ab Efwarg’, in *Arthur In The Celtic Languages. The Arthurian Legend In Celtic Literatures And Traditions*, ed. by C. Lloyd-Morgan, E. Poppe (Cardiff: University Of Wales Press, 2019), pp. 145–157 (p. 148).

¹² Ibid. p.145.

¹³ Lovcey, p. 173.

¹⁴ Lloyd-Morgan, ‘Historia’, pp. 151-152.

¹⁵ Foster, p. 204; Lloyd-Morgan ‘Historia’, p. 146.

The earliest suggested date for the second tale of the three, *The Lady of the Well*, is in the middle or the end of the 12th c., however, the 1220-1230s is proposed as the more reasonable time frame.¹⁶ It is usually contrasted to *The Knight with the Lion* (approx. 1177 and before 1180). Owain himself, like Peredur, is linked to the genuine historical figure in the North of Britain.¹⁷ The tale consists of five parts with the last one possibly being a later addition.¹⁸ Owain's adventures revolve around the themes of the vanquished, sovereignty, and the sacrificial nature of suffering. Structurally, they stick to a 'story within a story' scheme. The extent of the relationship of Owain's story with its continental counterpart is disputable.¹⁹ However, there are well-attested Welsh motifs and features such as, for example, the Giant Herdsman.²⁰ The main points of scholarly research include also a topic of military prowess and progression from immaturity to a chivalric knight, defender of the oppressed.²¹

While the first two stories differ from their continental counterparts, it is agreed that *Geraint son of Erbin* episode by episode follows Chrétien's *Erec and Enide* (late 12th c.). Besides, it possibly has some vestiges of the earlier Breton origin.²² The dating of *Geraint's* manuscripts is not precise but is unlikely earlier than 13th c. As with the other two stories, Geraint of the Welsh tale is probably a genuine historical figure.²³ The tale consists of five parts with the last part being the longest. The tale itself is the most linear out of all three and 'novel-like' in

¹⁶ R. Reck, 'Owain Or Chwedyl Iarlles Y Ffynawn', in *Arthur In The Celtic Languages. The Arthurian Legend In Celtic Literatures And Traditions*, ed. by C. Lloyd-Morgan, E. Poppe (Cardiff: University Of Wales Press, 2019), pp. 117–131 (p. 117).

¹⁷ Reck, pp. 118–119; R.L. Thomson, 'Owain: Chwedl Iarlles Y Ffynnon', in *The Arthur Of The Welsh. The Arthurian Legend In Medieval Welsh Literature*, ed. by R. Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman, B. Roberts (Cardiff: University Of Wales Press, 1991), pp. 159–169 (p. 160); E. Poppe, 'Chrétien's British Yvain In England And Wales', in *Arthurian Literature XXXIII* ed. by E. Archibald, D. Johnson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2016), pp. 29–69 (pp. 35–36).

¹⁸ *The Mabinogion*, p. 255.

¹⁹ Poppe, 'Chrétien's British Yvain', p. 34.

²⁰ Foster, p. 197.

²¹ Reck, pp. 123–126.

²² R. Middleton, 'Chwedl Geraint Ab Erbin', in *The Arthur Of The Welsh. The Arthurian Legend In Medieval Welsh Literature*, ed. by R. Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman, B. Roberts (Cardiff: University Of Wales Press, 1991), pp. 147–157 (pp. 147–148).

²³ *Ibid.*

style. Apart from featuring a hunt, tournaments, and a customary procedure of gift-giving, it also touches upon the issues of gendered attitudes. The style of the tale is presumably Welsh and possibly betray connections to the earlier oral tradition. It is implied that thematically, it explores the ‘discourse of counsel on conduct and manners’, and the acceptable behaviour, unlike Chrétien who focuses more precisely on the conduct within the court itself.²⁴

Despite being grouped together, the tales are different in style, structure, and twists within the storylines. Yet, they share a common heritage, both Celtic and Christian, motifs and anchor personae such as King Arthur, Gwenhwyfar, Cai, and Gwalchmai. The relationship with continental romances is far from straightforward and extremely difficult to disentangle.²⁵

Discussions on the mysterious nature of Celtic and rational nature of Christian elements, their mutations, and combinations in both traditions, unfortunately, do not make it any easier.²⁶

Most of the available research of the three Welsh romances is concentrated on the investigation of the dating, structure, similarities, and discrepancies between the Welsh tales and continental romances, as well as linguistic and literary assessment, and textual analysis of the manuscripts.²⁷ In the attempts to reconstruct, as J.K. Bollard puts it, ‘a linear temporal continuum’²⁸ and the hidden meaning of the recurrent themes, scholars adopt different approaches, for instance, semantic analysis, isolation of intertextual components for cultural comparison(Celtic-Christian, Irish-Welsh, etc.) or comparative ‘micro-perspective’.²⁹ Some of them have been utilised in this thesis, however, the tales are not analysed one by one and

²⁴ E. Poppe, ‘Ystorya Geraint Fab Erbin’, in *Arthur In The Celtic Languages. The Arthurian Legend In Celtic Literatures And Traditions*, ed. by C. Lloyd-Morgan, E. Poppe (Cardiff: University Of Wales Press, 2019), pp. 132–144 (p. 135).

²⁵ B. Roberts, ‘“Peredur Son Of Efwarg”: A Text In Transition’, *Arthuriana*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Fall 2000), 57-72 (p. 59) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27869564>> [accessed 19/10/2021].

²⁶ For example: S. Knight, ‘Celticity And Christianity In Medieval Romance’, in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England* ed. by R. Field, P. Hardman, M. Sweeney (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), pp. 26-44.

²⁷ For example: C. Lloyd-Morgan, ‘Migrating Narratives: Peredur, Owain and Geraint’, in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature* ed. by H. Fulton (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwall, 2009), pp. 128-41 <<https://r1.vlreader.com/Reader?ean=9781118234303#>> [accessed 18/10/2021].

²⁸ Bollard, ‘Theme And Meaning’, p. 78.

²⁹ Poppe, ‘Chrétien’s British Yvain’, pp. 37-38.

they are not compared to each other. The focus is on the functionality of the landscape, a pattern of aggression, its psychological projection, and the possible semantic meaning of the Celtic and Christian motifs attached to it.

Apart from the three romances, other sources for the thesis include episodes from Welsh and Irish narratives. They are used selectively for argumentative purposes. Tales from *The Mabinogion* (How *Culhwch won Olwen*, *The First Branch*, *The Third Branch*) alongside the comments of the translator S. Davies have been used in the exploration of the traditional Celtic motifs in the fantasy landscape. Small extracts from the Irish sources in regards to the legendary battles of *Partholon* and *Moytura* and the destruction of *Da Derga's* hostel are utilised for the same purpose. The Welsh text of *The Lady of the Well* (*Chwedyl Iarlles y Ffynnawn*) is used in connection to the description of Arthur's retinue. A fragment of article 3 from *The Law of the Court* in *Hywel Dda* is used in referral to the description of traditional practices in the court of the Welsh kings.

The continental romances have been extensively explored during the initial stage of preparation for the thesis. However, they have been eventually dropped out because the comparison of aggression in fantasy landscape across continental and Welsh tales would involve a massive volume of primary sources far exceeding the scale of the thesis, and, most importantly, would require a major shift in focus and an entirely different approach.

Therefore, they are not included in the list of primary sources but acknowledged in a separate referential group. The only source out of the bulk of continental tales, *The Elucidation Prologue*, is used for illustrative purposes in connection to wells and features in the footnotes.

- *The topic of aggression and landscape in Peredur, Owain, and Geraint stories.*

Aggression in the three Welsh romances has been investigated in terms of vengeance and honour with a direct connection to extant law texts and common Celtic heritage. For instance, R.S. Loomis writes about healing and vengeance in the course of the general Grail narrative. He promotes the idea of Alfred Nutt that the roots of vengeance reverberate from the vendetta theme in Irish mythology, thus identifying vengeance in the Welsh tales as the Celtic component within the Grail discourse.³⁰

M. Cichon in his article about insult and redress elaborates on transgression and violence as the driving forces in all three stories. He examines how feuds were reflected through legal references in the Welsh romances and considers the feud ‘a ritualised form of conflict’, driven by the primeval desire to retain honour. It cannot be finished through reconciliation, so the process of the feud is interminable. He writes: ‘In the ritualised game, the object of which was dominance through honor, status and advantage, return matches were expected - sureties and compensation were more often than not the impetus for retaliation’.³¹ He contemplates vengeance (physical aggression) as an accepted form of redress apart from monetary compensation. Cichon pays a lot of attention to Owain’s story, portraying him as an ‘emasculated’ warrior who has gone through the process of losing and not reclaiming his masculine social identity.³² In the concluding paragraph, M. Cichon notes the regulating element in violent discourses and stresses ‘that both Welsh law and literature contain similar precepts concerning the regulation of society’.³³

³⁰ R.S Loomis, ‘Manessier’s Sequel And Peredur: The Mission Of Revenge’, in *The Grail. From Celtic Myth To Christian Symbol* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 82-96 (p. 94).

³¹ M. Cichon, ‘Insult And Redress In "Cyfraith Hywel Dda" And Welsh Arthurian Romance’, *Arthuriana*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Fall 2000), 27-43 (p. 29).

³² Ibid. p. 41.

³³ Ibid, p. 43.

In another article about insults in medieval Welsh literature, the same author ‘explores the gesture of insult in medieval Wales through a detailed examination of the intersection of literature, law, and art.’³⁴ He suggests that behind the treatment of an insult there is a mentality of talion which is supposed to protect honour, power and induce appropriate social action.³⁵ In his opinion, conflicts in the Welsh tales are based on the feud mentality as well. The assault on Gwenhwyfar is paired with the ‘near-exact’ gesture of throwing water on the stone slab in *Owain*. Both episodes, in his opinion, mark the beginning of a feud and are linked to the Celtic and, especially, Irish theme of contested sovereignty.³⁶ He implies that the anchor motifs of Irish mythology can be directly applied to the understanding of Welsh tales. The author goes into a detailed explanation of the possible connotations of ‘snatching and spilling’ such as that it may be a metaphor of a sexual assault (rape), breaking of hymen on the consummation night of marriage, and the spilling of semen.³⁷ In *Owain*, throwing water on a stone slab equals ‘laying claim to the woman of the land and the land itself by taking the object of power and symbolically mating with the sovereignty figure, or at the very least, announcing one's intention to do so’.³⁸ The author notes that the details of insult repeat Welsh law, and this ‘shows that the redactor and audience were both familiar with their native law and heightens the import of the offence<...>’.³⁹

H. Roberts also touched upon the theme of vengeance in her comparative analysis of the Welsh and French story of Geraint. She believes that the vengeance quest is more prominent in the Welsh tale while its French counterpart concentrates on the love story. Also, she insists that vengeance is proportionate to the crime: ‘The payment or vengeance exacted must be

³⁴ M. Cichon, ‘Mishandled Vessels: Heaving Drinks And Hurling Insults In Medieval Welsh Literature And Law’, *Canadian Journal of History/Annates Canadienne d'histoire XLIII* (Autumn 2008), 227-240.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 229.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 233.

³⁷ Ibid. pp. 234-235.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 235.

³⁹ Ibid. p. 231.

equal to the crime itself, hence the use of the same word, *sarhaed*, meaning both ‘insult’ and ‘insult-price’.⁴⁰

A. Byrne investigates the conflict and tension through the lens of the motif of ‘intruder at the feast’. She suggests that within the literary discourse it introduces the wider tropes of order/civilisation/centre and chaos/wild/ margin; it also starts the adventure. She explores the representation of this motif in Irish narratives and the Arthurian tradition. Although she barely touches upon the Welsh material, she manages to show that this rather popular and universal motif is not just a necessary aggressive impetus for the story. It also reveals the complexity of the relationship between the ‘uncouth’ and the court.⁴¹ However, her main point is that the threat coming from the intruder is ‘a necessary means of purifying and securing the existing order.’⁴²

The motif of locked spaces and their transgression is explored by S. Lasman. In his opinion, it ‘highlights a dialectic of interior and exterior that emerges as a key theme’⁴³ in the Welsh narratives. Transgression is an inward process involving magical elements, wonder, and adventure. In *Owain*, though, the author sees this motif in connection to the loss of ‘knightly identity’.⁴⁴

The legal element of violence including its connection to kingship and power is analysed by R. Chapman Stacey. She supports the ideas of S. Aronstein that the defensive epic heroism of the short version of *Peredur* and the assertion of the male kingly order in the long version of

⁴⁰ H. Roberts, ‘Court And Cyuoeth: Chrétien De Troyes’ Erec Et Enide And The Middle Welsh Gereint’, in *Arthurian Literature XXI. Celtic Arthurian Material* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 53-72 (p. 63) < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt820dt.7> > [accessed 20/10/2021].

⁴¹ A. Byrne, ‘The Intruder At The Feast: Negotiating Boundaries In Middle Insular Romance’, in *Arthurian Literature XXVII*, ed. by E. Archibald, D. Johnson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), pp.33-57 (p. 46).

⁴² Ibid. p. 56.

⁴³ S. Lasman, ‘Prison, Porter, And Transgressive Narration In Medieval Welsh Tales Of The Past’, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, Vol. 37 (2017), 185-202 (p.190).

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 197.

this story marks a process of transition and consolidating of power in Anglo-Norman Wales. Thus, Stacey implies that violent discourse in literary narratives may be used as an instrument of post-colonial adaptation.⁴⁵

She also investigates in great detail the conception of imaginative landscape in law books which correlates to the literary narratives. She notes that artificially constructed landscapes act as ‘thematic and structuring devices’ within the discourse.⁴⁶ She specifically points out the landscape division within the law books into court (*llys*) which is always in the centre, country (*gwlad*), and the lands outside the country (*gorwlad*).⁴⁷ *Gwlad* and *gorwlad* have political connotations: the former is associated with home - native and safe, the latter is a hostile ‘un-home’.⁴⁸ Movement across these ‘jurisdictional’ areas – is a ‘binding’ social force.⁴⁹ Stacey also elaborates on the embodiment of the landscape, i.e. bodies and body parts within the landscape that have symbolic meaning and are linked with boundaries of political power, principles of sovereignty, and societal division.⁵⁰ This is so far probably the most deliberate and thoughtful research of the idea of the landscape in the Welsh medieval narratives altogether. Other researchers in their description of the landscape in the romantic narratives mostly concentrate on separate motifs and their Celtic-specific and realistic implications. For example, E. Poppe writing about *Geraint* notes the story’s consistent geographical orientation in southeast Wales. He calls it ‘geographical realism’ set up ‘in a realistically imagined world’⁵¹ and goes on to the assessment of the court description. He also notes that the depiction of the court ‘is informed by Welsh legal concepts and customs’.⁵²

⁴⁵ R. Chapman Stacey, *Law And The Imagination In Medieval Wales* (University Of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), p. 210.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p.30.

⁴⁷ Ibid. pp. 31, 36, 57.

⁴⁸ Ibid. pp. 59-60.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 63.

⁵⁰ Ibid. pp. 91-127.

⁵¹ Poppe, ‘Ystorya Geraint’, pp. 133-134.

⁵² Ibid. p.134.

So, the research on the theme of aggression in the three tales has been focused specifically on vengeance and feud. Scholars dig deep in the historical and semantic analysis and come up with very interesting ideas. The establishment of the direct correlation between the law texts and the literary narrative, however, leads to the circular argumentation that literary discourse may have a regulating social function because it is closely connected to the law. Yet, it may be argued that the close parallels between the law and literary composition show definitively only that the authors of the stories are aware of the legal rationale. The exact extent of the mutual interdependence between the law and romantic discourse is, therefore, open to hypothesising. It is difficult to demonstrate accurately that referrals to the law have been included in the narrative with precise instructive purposes. Direct connection between the law tractates and the text of the tales also leads to the literal application of the judicial principles of proportionality and justification to vengeance in the narratives. But in some cases, for instance, when Geraint suspects adultery, and therefore, is taking his revenge on Enid, it is on the contrary disproportionate, unfair, and is based on a thorough misunderstanding. Finally, from the perspective of literary criticism, setting up tight links between the romances and real-life law texts may serve the historical investigation but, at the same time, it may undermine the core of romance as a genre. Literature altogether is devoid of accuracy and is based on a set of hypothetical conventions, and romances are more so.⁵³ In romances, heroes act in the universe where ordinary laws are suspended, and where they rely on unusual powers and magic. Violations also contain a miraculous element. Despite parallels with legal practices or inclusion of real names and places, romances are stories, not manuals. The whole idea of romance as a genre is to transform the harsh realities of life into tangible, acceptable categories (e.g., fear becomes adventure or a marvel).⁵⁴ But the whole mechanism of this

⁵³ N. Freye, *Anatomy Of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp.75-76.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 34, 37.

transformation remains hidden with only some traces picked up through the detailed autopsy of the content. Even if we assume that romances represent an attempt of primitive media morphosis and de-sensitising, the mental anchors which would strike a certain response in the audience are so inhibited and severely mythologised that, unfortunately, it is virtually impossible to detangle. Therefore, all hypotheses have to remain assumptions.

To summarise, mainly scholarly research meticulously concentrates on the dating, structure, themes, and comparison with continental counterparts. Violence and aggression have been investigated largely in connection to the legal context. Modern scholars point out the individuality of the Welsh tales, but their arguments still fall into the analysis of comparisons with continental stories and assigning value tags to either stories or their elements. The rigorous specification of motifs and linguistic discrepancies enables a deeper understanding of the stories which dramatically differ from modern literature and modern pre-conceptions. But dissection of each episode into traceable pieces for the sake of the scholarly argument - does not matter how productive it is - may be detrimental to the value of the stories themselves.

Chapter 1. *Castles of imagination.*

The fantasy landscapes in all three stories are built on the structural juxtaposition of the castle and the wilderness. Whenever characters travel, their journeys and experiences alternate between castles and ‘uninhabited’ land: from the desolate forest into a castle, and back from a castle to remote regions. This division is a distinctive common denominator for all three romances. In a broader sense, it rests on the deeper questions of epistemology such as perception of defined spaces as possible sources of knowledge or threat, specific collective memories, and beliefs attached to them. These, in turn, are essentially based on the ancient belief that the centre of the universe/kinship is *ipso facto* surrounded by hostile forces. This anthropocentric vision is supported by the evidence in Welsh law where the land of the kingdom is divided into safe (court and country) and unsafe (lands outside the country) spaces.⁵⁵ The ritualised territorial convention is set up to test various forms of transgression by defining the living space as the arena of perpetual struggle and display of aggression. Celtic board games (e.g., *Brandub*) where the king is in the centre and, surrounded by enemies, has to get to the edge of the game, maybe counted as a material reflection of these ideas.⁵⁶ Magic *gwyddbwyll* in *Peredur* features two opposing sides contesting the power, and on one occasion (in the scene with Gwalchmai)⁵⁷ it is used literally to stop violent transgression.

In the three romances, the castle/court is attributed with centrality and uncontested authority. This is typical for most post-Norman Conquest narratives. After the Conquest, castles acquire the essential quality. ‘There were men who believed that no matter how brave its soldiers, a

⁵⁵ See fn. 42, 43.

⁵⁶ A. Rees, B. Rees, *Celtic Heritage. Ancient Tradition In Ireland And Wales* (Thames & Hudson, 1961), p. 154.

⁵⁷ ‘Peredur’, p.96.

land without castles was virtually indefensible'.⁵⁸ The castle becomes the main part of a defence and expansion concept where it is seen as a political symbol of lordship and a centre of localised territorial gains.⁵⁹ On a wider scale of medieval eschatology, however, it is also ascribed with a mnemonic function of delivering the ideas of safety, stability, and place of salvation. For stronger impact and response from the prospective audience, the castle is symbolically compared to the protective body of the Virgin Mary and the positivity of the three biblical virtues: a ditch to humility, a wall on the ditch to chastity, and a tower to charity.⁶⁰ Robert Grosseteste, medieval philosopher and the Bishop of Lincoln, describes Virgin Mary as 'the beautiful 'castellum' in which God takes up residence'.⁶¹ This vision of a castle as a shielding and safe body, compared to a divine womb where people are free from violent tendencies, is devoid of a life dynamic utopia where people do not exhibit aggression.⁶²

Despite their important role as safe *loci*, the descriptions of castles in the three romances are quite generic. After travelling through a forest, Peredur finds by the lake a 'large court and a fine fortress around it'.⁶³ He travels further and comes 'to a great forest, and at the far end of the forest he came to a level meadow, and beyond the meadow, he could see a great fortress and a beautiful court'.⁶⁴ Geraint's story features an urban castle, that he discovers after he has travelled 'along a fair plain, very high and elevated'. The castle is within the walled town-

⁵⁸ J. Gillingham, 'An Age Of Expansion c.1020 -1204', in *Medieval Warfare. A History*, ed. by M. Keen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 59-69 (p. 73).

⁵⁹ C. Platt, *The Castle In Medieval England And Wales* (London: Chancellor Press, 1982), p. 1; Gillingham, p.70.

⁶⁰ A. Wheatley, *The Idea Of The Castle In Medieval England* (York: York Medieval Press, 2004), pp. 28-30.

⁶¹ J. Mann, 'Allegorical Buildings In Medieval Literature', *Medium Ævum*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (1994), 191-210 (p. 198).

⁶² The comparison is drawn upon A. Storr's idea. See Storr, *Human Aggression*, p.84.

⁶³ 'Peredur Son Of Efrog', in *The Mabinogion*, tr. by S. Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 65 – 102 (p. 71).

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 72.

fortress.⁶⁵ Cynon's description of the castle, that he comes across during his travel, sums up the general principles of castle representation:

*'Eventually, I came across the most beautiful valley in the world, with trees all the same height; and there was a river flowing swiftly along the valley, and a path alongside the river. And I travelled along the path until midday and travelled on the other side until late afternoon. Then I came to a great plain, and at the far end of the plain I could see a great, shining castle and an ocean close to the castle.'*⁶⁶

The picture is idealised to perfection. There are no unique or distinctive details. The author seeks to create a mental picture, maybe even a tactile feeling, evoking an emotional response by painting a bucolic scene and an impression of tranquillity. The water source is possibly inserted to create the 'white noise' effect and, as a result, the ultimate feeling of relaxation. The feeling of safety is enhanced by indicating that the rider travels along the same path in the open space for quite some time without any kind of disturbance. This is a 'sunlit' picture, symmetric and balanced, opposite to the forest or 'uninhabited' regions which are represented as gloomy at best. Essentially, the castle's spatial descriptions follow the same still pattern: open space (valley/plain/meadow) – solid architectural structure (walled and shining castle) – water source (ocean, river, lake). Castles in the tales are stationary permanent pieces. The static quality is further enhanced with allegorical names - the court of the Black Oppressor, the Fortress of Wonders, the castle of the Sons of the King of Suffering, the court of the Countess of the Feats, etc. These names break the symmetry of generic perfection but, at the same time, make them alive, useful, and memorable. This tactic of assigning allegorical

⁶⁵ 'Geraint Son Of Erbin', in *The Mabinogion*, tr. by S. Davies (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 139-178 (p. 143).

⁶⁶ 'The Lady Of The Well', in *The Mabinogion*, tr. by S. Davies (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 116-138 (p. 117).

names to places in medieval narratives is not exclusive. It goes back to the Biblical tradition and Ezekiel's visionary re-incarnation of Solomon's temple.⁶⁷ In contrast, Arthur's court at his castle is assigned with a real geographical position in Caerllion ar Wysg.⁶⁸ It may be argued that it is done to bring a sense of reality into the narrative. But from a genre perspective, though, this suggestion may be questionable. It may be proposed that by attributing Arthur's castle with geographical certainty in a fantasy setting, authors attempted to create a non-typical focal point beyond time and place, the faultless template of a castle. Indeed, Arthur's castle is 'the most accessible place in his territory, by sea, and by land.'⁶⁹ In all three romances, the journeys start there, and it constantly features throughout the storylines as a desirable point of return. The easy accessibility implies safety: a safe passage, no threat to life, stability, etc. It is an elevated ideal of a castle and an ideal court.

Despite the generic representation, there are a few distinctive aspects that ascertain the non-specific castle as a place of safety. For example, the accent on strong fortifications and intact walls in portrayals of castles signifies a strong kingdom that is defended with military might and weapons.⁷⁰ On the contrary, walls covered with overgrown vegetation, especially around the gates, like the ivy-covered fortress in *Peredur*,⁷¹ is a signal of trouble and instability. Gates of castles are guarded by gatekeepers which reflects the real-life practice. In reality, gatekeepers played an important part in the defensive system of a castle. As gates were the most vulnerable part of the fortification, the system of securing them could be quite complex. Gates were heavy, reinforced with thick nails and portcullis inside and sometimes outside the main door.⁷² They also worked as a point of taxation and sorting out the visitors. But in

⁶⁷ Mann, 'Allegorical Buildings', pp. 192-194.

⁶⁸ 'Peredur', pp. 82, 86, 94.

⁶⁹ 'Geraint', p. 139.

⁷⁰ 'The Lady Of The Well', p. 126.

⁷¹ 'Peredur', p. 74.

⁷² F. Ratté, 'Architectural Invitations: Images Of City Gates In Medieval Italian Painting', *Gesta*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (1999), 142-153 (p. 146).

imagery, both visual and literary, it has been argued, castle gates serve neither defensive nor excluding purposes because they are often left open.⁷³ Indeed, in the three romances, they welcome visitors, and heroes often just wander in. ‘What might the open gate undefended by symbolic decoration have signified in the mind of the medieval viewer? It was certainly a utopian image, a signifier of a clearly-ordered society free from the necessity of constant vigilance, defense, and taxation <...> The open gate is, thus, not only linked to an ideal peaceful city but also, perhaps, with the holy city.’⁷⁴ The motif of ‘free entrance’ may be as well a reference to the Biblical allegory of Jesus’ entry into Mary’s womb.⁷⁵ Whichever allegory may be assumed more appropriate, open gates are a positive sign of stability, good rule, and tranquillity. Closed or compromised entrance, on the contrary, may be interpreted as a marker of vulnerability and duress.⁷⁶

The impression of strength, prosperity, safety, spiritual and physical healing associated with a castle is further enhanced by the proximity to water sources. In *The Lady of the Well*, the ability to defend the water source is directly linked to the authority and the strong kingdom.⁷⁷ *The Elucidation Prologue*⁷⁸ to Chretien’s story of the Grail may give an interesting insight in connection to wells as a symbol of stability. It states that wells are inhabited with maidens with golden vessels who perform ‘a vital service’ of providing a traveller with anything they might need.⁷⁹ When maidens were abused and robbed of their golden vessels, the kingdom fell into decline, roads were no longer safe, and the passage to the castle of the Fisher King was lost. But the knights of the Round Table ‘swore an oath to protect the maidens with

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 148.

⁷⁵ Mann, ‘Allegorical Buildings’, p. 198.

⁷⁶ Ratté, ‘Architectural Invitations’, p. 149.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 127.

⁷⁸ The referral to the continental source is used here to demonstrate the connectivity of the motifs across different sources.

⁷⁹ *The Complete Story Of The Grail*, ed. and tr. by N. Bryant, Kindle edn. (D.S. Brewer, 2015), p. 557.

might and main so that they'd come from the wells with their vessels once more.'⁸⁰ Wells, as maidens and their golden vessels, form a part of a very popular motif 'peace of roads'. It features, for example, in the Middle English romance *Havelok the Dane* where it is used to construct 'the legal Golden Age' in the reign of Athelwold.⁸¹ Hanging golden bracelets and rings on a tree, or gold left on the road and untouched by no one, are markers of safe travel and 'rex pacificus' in *Annales de Wintonia*.⁸² The same motif reverberates in Bede's account, and essentially, goes back to the pre-history of European literary culture.⁸³ In *The Lady of the Well*, it may be suggested, the protected well also symbolises the guaranteed right of safe passage, peaceful travel which, in turn, signifies the strong ruler.

Overall, in Celtic culture, the water motif has a similar positive meaning: it is associated with life-giving, druidic, and divine knowledge and regenerative powers.⁸⁴ The latter feature in *Peredur*, when the hero witnesses the reviving ritual at the court of the Sons of the King of Suffering: the corpses of dead knights are brought back to life after being washed in 'a tub of warm water' and covered with precious ointment.⁸⁵ The tub may be loosely connected to the Cauldron of Rebirth in the Second Branch of *The Mabinogion* which also has reviving powers.⁸⁶

Despite generic descriptions laden with universal motifs, castles in the fantasy landscape retain their lifelike functionality as administrative centres, places of residence and refuge, and hubs for the retinue.⁸⁷ Accordingly, castles in the three Welsh romances are linked not only to

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 558.

⁸¹ R. Rouse, *The Peace Of The Roads: Authority And Auctoritas In Medieval Romance*, in *Boundaries In Medieval Romance*, ed. by N. Cartlidge (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 115-127 (p. 116).

⁸² Ibid. p. 125.

⁸³ Ibid. pp. 119-120.

⁸⁴ M. Aldhouse-Green, *The Celtic Myths. A Guide To The Ancient Gods And Legends*, Kindle edn. (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2015), loc. 319.

⁸⁵ 'Peredur', p. 88.

⁸⁶ 'The Second Branch', in *The Mabinogion*, tr. by S. Davies (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 22-34 (p. 32).

⁸⁷ Platt, *The Castle*, pp. 1-3.

safety and strong authority but also to hospitality, lodgings, and provision. They are welcoming places for guests and travellers who, once they arrive, are honoured, and are told about the court customs and conventions. Predictably, interiors of the castles, as much as their exteriors, lack individual traits: they usually include a large hall, with a fireplace and tables set out, and plenty of food and drink. Knights are helped to take off their armour; they wash, eat and rest. Guests are entertained with a good talk, and ‘the greatest fault of the court’ is that courtiers may be ‘poor conversationalists.’⁸⁸

In Peredur’s and Owain’s stories castles are also associated with the acquisition of knowledge and with personal transformation. At his uncle’s castle, Peredur receives advice and learns about his strength.⁸⁹ At the witches’ castle, he stays to learn the art of war.⁹⁰ Owain transforms into the Black Knight defending the well when he defeats his predecessor, enters his castle, marries the Lady of the Well, and becomes the new well-keeper.⁹¹

As social constructs, castles are associated with the tradition of gift-giving and establishing of the vassalage,⁹² and the place of the retinue congregation. The retinue, especially a larger one, offered a considerable political advantage and protection in real life, and ‘the maintenance of a great household was a demonstration of largesse’.⁹³ This is reflected in *Owain*, for example, where the author of the story pays attention to the size of Arthur’s retinue presumably to demonstrate his power. When Arthur goes to look for Owain, he takes ‘the men of his household with him,’ ‘three thousand’ in total, ‘not counting the retainers’⁹⁴, and relies on the provision from the castle in his domain. In the Welsh text, the word used for Arthur’s

⁸⁸ ‘The Lady Of The Well’, p. 118.

⁸⁹ ‘Peredur’, pp. 72-73.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 79.

⁹¹ ‘The Lady Of The Well’, pp. 124-128.

⁹² ‘Geraint’, pp. 156-157.

⁹³ Platt, *The Castle*, p. 96.

⁹⁴ ‘The Lady Of The Well’, p. 128.

force is *nifer*,⁹⁵ which means ‘number’ in modern Welsh but in the context of the tale may as well stand for the extended Arthur’s household host. Its exact size, even approximately, is difficult to pinpoint, and the terminology itself is ambiguous and semantically fluid. In other Welsh sources, it is closely connected to *teulu* - the militarised elite force of the household, or even *llu* – the extended military company.⁹⁶ The realistic estimate of the former is around 50 people, and the latter – around 300 – 500.⁹⁷ However, the exact number in the romantic context is probably not as important as the idea and the impression of military might and unity which is promoted as a feature of Arthur’s court and castle.

It is worth noting that although the ideological concept of the castle as a safe place has both male and female connotations to strong kingship/lordship and authority, and the holy body of the Virgin Mary respectively, threats to a castle or transgressions of castle walls are often narrowed down to the allusions of a female violation, both metaphorical and literal. In the ivy-covered fortress, already mentioned above, Peredur meets a beautiful maiden who wears an old dress that is so tattered that ‘her flesh could be seen through it.’⁹⁸ The clothing here performs the same protective function as the castle walls. Accordingly, when its integrity is compromised so is the solidity of the castle and vice versa. The symbolic connection between the clothing and the idea of safety suggests that body exposure is not just a sign of personal distress; it is a marker of the political vulnerability of the maiden and her castle. On the contrary, stability is linked to male authority and, precisely, to marriage. Rejection of a marriage proposal exacerbates the volatility of the maiden’s situation. So, when she refuses to marry an earl, the borders of her realm are violated, and her position both in a personal and

⁹⁵ *The White Book Of Mabinogion: Welsh tales And Romances Produced From The Peniarth Manuscripts* (Pwllheli, 1907), p. 123 c. 245 <<https://archive.org/details/whitebookofmabin00evan/page/122/mode/2up>> [accessed 01/09/2021].

⁹⁶ S. Davies, *War And Society In Medieval Wales 633-1283* (Cardiff: University Of Wales Press, 2004), pp. 20-22, 26.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 26, 54.

⁹⁸ ‘Peredur’, p. 75.

political sense is severely compromised. Her precarious situation is further strengthened by the threat of violation that potentially can come from inside the castle (where she is supposed to be safe) from her foster brothers. Yearning for the protection of their lands, they threaten to leave her to her enemies if she does not acquire the security from a male guarantor. Remarkably, this protection may come not just in the form of marriage as they tell her to offer herself to Peredur ‘however he wants, either as his wife or his mistress.’⁹⁹ There is no courtliness, and marriage not only guarantees protection but also implies a constraint. It is negotiated through force, blackmail, and arms, not a social contract. In this prequel to Lanval’s dream of possession,¹⁰⁰ there is no happiness and no secret, and the story of love is already ruined even before it has a chance to start. After all, it indirectly confirms H. Bloch’s notion that courtliness is only ‘the expression of a collective literary daydream of escape from the reality of medieval marriage.’¹⁰¹ The story of the maiden in the ivy-covered fortress is echoed in the episode with the widowed countess in *Owain*. The countess’ defencelessness and exposure to violence are determined by her widow’s status, i.e., by the absence of the authoritative male figure as in the case with the maiden. It is interesting that the allusion of a castle under duress to the vulnerability of a widow is employed, for example, by *John Gower*. In his poem, *Vox Clamantis* he compares London – a New Troy – that is under threat from peasants’ revolt to a ‘powerless widow’.¹⁰² As an example of gendered symmetry, the countess’ defenceless predicament is mirrored to the vulnerability of Owain’s dishevelled state (disintegrated clothes, emaciated weak body, long hair) and the loss of typical human behaviour (associating with animals).¹⁰³ As it has been suggested by M. Cichon,¹⁰⁴ Owain’s

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ R.H. Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny And The Invention Of Western Romantic Love* (University Of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 167.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p. 173.

¹⁰² Wheatley, *The Idea Of The Castle*, p. 75.

¹⁰³ ‘The Lady Of The Well’, pp. 131-132.

¹⁰⁴ See fn. 27.

condition after spending some time in the wilderness may also represent a case of efemination and losing masculine identity.

To summarise, the concept of a castle is based on the idea of the positivity of static perfection. Despite retaining the realistic functional traits, the mental construct of a castle is portrayed as a symbol of safety, giving, and positive acquisition/ achievement, empowered in a wider perception by the theology of divine protection. Representation of violence within the protection of castle walls, accordingly, is diminished to manageable forms and is dealt with by using licit forms of reconciliation protocols. Most commonly it is exhibited in micro-aggression: non-deadly blows, verbal assaults, or threats which may be classified as warnings. Fights happen outside the castle walls. Inside, aggression rarely spills out into a full-scale fight (e.g., as in the case when Geraint kills earl Limwris in his castle¹⁰⁵).

Every attempt is made to re-channel potential armed aggression away from the castle or mitigate the impact of the brewing conflict with various, rather creative, means. When Gwenhwyfar is assaulted by an outsider, no one volunteers to challenge him in fear that the assailant is too powerful or possesses magical qualities. The severity of the assault combined with the refusal of the retinue (which normally has to protect the king and the queen) to confront the perpetrator immediately draws the line between the laws accepted in the social group inside the castle and outside its perimeter. It is implied that the threat of assault or feud comes from the outside and belongs to the hostile exterior, attributing it with a 'primitivist aura' of bold and backward behaviour.¹⁰⁶ However, the 'shameful' timidity of the retinue to act against the intruder may be explained by the reluctance to take on the responsibility for

¹⁰⁵ 'Geraint', p. 174.

¹⁰⁶ J.D. Niles, 'The Myth Of The Feud in Anglo-Saxon England Authors', *The Journal Of English And Germanic Philology*, Vol. 114, No. 2 (April 2015), 163-200 (p. 172).

initiating the fight and, most importantly, the feud. In the romantic violent discourse, this responsibility always falls on the one who returns the blow literally and figuratively.

Returned blows start a feud that thrives on individual differences of strength, prowess, and material input that are normally suppressed inside the group. At the same time, it effectively kills the solidarity and hierarchy of the pecking order at all levels of closed social formation. So, the threat of a fight and subsequent feuds inside the castle walls may put the retinue's integrity and the castle's internal safety in jeopardy.

When Peredur enters the scene, the attention is swiftly re-directed onto him and the dwarves. Despite residing in the castle, dwarves represent the designated outcasts. Their silent demeanour within a year after receiving lodgings in the castle intensifies the impression of their non-belonging. The dwarves, triggering verbal altercation and personal feud between Peredur and Cai, further stress the idea that violence is mainly started by people who do not belong to the social group. The tension then is focused on Peredur being challenged to a fight with the assailant in return for the ordination into the group as a knight. It has to be noted, that at this point Peredur also has a status of a stranger, an 'intruder at the feast'.¹⁰⁷

On the one hand, this scene represents a series of micro-deflections that result in a fight between two outsiders and *out* of the castle, i.e., a positive outcome in terms of keeping the status quo inside the castle. On the other hand, the scene promotes a paramount idea coming from the authority of the king himself that feud is prohibited within the castle. So, when Arthur reprimands Cai for challenging Peredur and driving him away, he, thus, accepts Peredur's claims as just but, at the same time, exhibits his will to end the feud.¹⁰⁸ Peredur's subsequent reminders, which reinstate his desire for revenge, may have some similarities to

¹⁰⁷ A. Byrne, 'The Intruder At The Feast'.

¹⁰⁸ P. Hyams, 'Feud And The State In Late Anglo-Saxon England', *Journal Of British Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Jan., 2001), 1-43 (p.14).

the Anglo-Saxon practice of the legal ‘cool-off’ procedure in the ongoing feud, i.e. when the aggrieved party is allowed to formally warn of their intentions before resorting to open violence. This period also allows more chances for reconciliation.¹⁰⁹

Cai’s role in this episode is controversial: he is instrumental in both conflict deflection away from the retinue, and, at the same time, starting the feud with Peredur. The message behind his meddling may be a complex one. Firstly, it highlights the precarious position of a negotiator trying to mitigate the outcome of violence. Secondly, it elevates the primary role of kingly authority in the settlement of a feud. Cai may be seen as a foil to Arthur,¹¹⁰ made to contrast and outline the differences in conflict management. Arthur’s status and power attribute him with impartiality in litigation of fair disputes and claims. For example, he acts as a judge when he refers to the possibility of accepting death from wounds as equal to a payment of ‘the insult-price’, *sarhaed*, in the decision on the case of Edern’s assault of Gwenhwyfar and her maiden.¹¹¹ Cai’s methods lack the grandeur of Arthur’s approach and are relegated to the very basic level.

To conclude the settlements of the internal conflicts between the members of Arthur’s retinue, the motif of ‘magic touch’ is effectively inserted into narratives. Gwalchmai negotiates with Peredur on behalf of Arthur and embraces him. Then Peredur puts on ‘the same kind of garment that Gwalchmai wore’.¹¹² The custom of giving away clothes between the members of the retinue is reflected in *Hywel Dda*, which states that they need permission from the *penteulu* (i.e., Gwalchmai who is described as the *penteulu* – chief captain of the bodyguard¹¹³) to do this.¹¹⁴ After Owain is recognised in the fight with Gwalchmai, Arthur

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 12.

¹¹⁰ Cai is also a contrasting figure in comparison to Gwalchmai.

¹¹¹ ‘Geraint’, p. 152.

¹¹² ‘Peredur’, p. 81.

¹¹³ ‘Geraint’, p. 139.

¹¹⁴ *The Law Of Hywel Dda. Law Texts From Medieval Wales*, ed. by D. Jenkins (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986), p. 10.

takes their swords ‘and then neither will have defeated the other’, and Owain then embraces Arthur.¹¹⁵ The ‘magic touch’ motif is employed to wipe out the differences, and enhance the sense of belonging to the king and his court.

Deep-ingrained, ongoing feuds with unjust claims about the castles and the lands which have already spilled over into military clashes are regulated through jousts, followed by arbitration and compromise. The physicality of *mêlées* in these episodes is absent. Indeed, in line with one of the medieval concepts, any discomfort or failure of the body is a sign of a fall.¹¹⁶ So, the details are dropped, and all attention is focused on the practicality and business-like manner of conflict settlement. There is no ‘cooling-off’ period, the arbitration has an immediate effect. Through the series of fights and the procedure of tribute and submission, Peredur manages to settle the return of the lands to the maiden in the ivy-covered fortress from the vengeful earl who has taken her lands for refusal to marry him.¹¹⁷ In return for his miraculous treatment, Owain settles the deal between the earl and the widowed countess. He kidnaps the earl and forces him to agree to his terms in return for life and freedom.¹¹⁸ This forceful diplomacy is not peace-making in a conventional sense. The threat of death or harm goes along with an offer that benefits the more powerful and aggressive side. The terms of the social contract are rather forced on the recipient than negotiated, and the winner has everything. As a result, the rather bullish tactic of negotiating is presented as reasonable. Geraint’s arbitration, though, has more in common with peace-making as a legal procedure when he settles earl Ynywl’s claims without a fight.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ ‘The Lady Of The Well’, p. 130.

¹¹⁶ J. Rogge, Introduction, in *Killing And Being Killed: Bodies In Battle. Perspectives on Fighter In The Middle Ages*, ed. by J. Rogge, Transcript, Vol.38 (Mainz Historical Cultural Sciences, 2017), pp. 9-13 (p. 9).

¹¹⁷ ‘Peredur’, p. 76.

¹¹⁸ ‘The Lady Of The Well’, pp. 132-133.

¹¹⁹ ‘Geraint’, p. 149.

Apart from straightforward negotiating techniques, there may be an example of an alternative reconciliation of the feud through penance.¹²⁰ When Owain kills the Black Knight, he is forced to handle the conflict on his enemy's side through penance. When he gets stuck between the gates, he loses his horse, which is cut in half by a portcullis. He is saved then by Luned and her magic ring of invisibility. The scene may be interpreted in terms of comparison to a penance ritual. First, he is forcefully stripped of his horse which may symbolise pride, vanity, and vices. Then he accepts his predicament together with miraculous help and enters a castle, invisible and humiliated. By marrying the Lady of the Well and taking her husband's place, he compensates her for the loss of her husband and the status he used to provide her as a part of the reconciliation process. It is concluded after he goes through a series of fights with Cai, then with the whole of Arthur's retinue, and then Gwalchmai. He does not, though, fight with Arthur, because it is the king who may grant him pardon and end his penance.

Finally, gift-giving may be seen as a strategy of avoiding conflicts within an extended social group affiliated with a castle by appeasement the potential and existing opposition. With benevolent reciprocity as the core idea,¹²¹ it is aimed at establishing a status quo based on the system of personal obligation¹²² between the king and his vassals. As such, in theory, at least, it should reduce the possibility of reciprocal violence by offering peaceful solutions and benefits. When Geraint comes back to Cornwall, gift-giving is described as a way of attesting and serving *mutual* interests. 'And Arthur's retinue began to give gifts. And immediately the men of Cornwall came and they too gave. <...> Of those who came there to ask for gifts, not

¹²⁰ Hyams, 'Feud And The State', p. 15. Horse in medieval bestiary was not just a symbol of power but also of vanity, and sometimes it is depicted even as an epitome of vices. See C. Heck, R. Cordonnier, *The Grand Medieval Bestiary. Animals In Illuminated Manuscripts* (New York, London: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2011), p. 308.

¹²¹ A. Cowell, *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy: Gifts, Violence, Performance, And The Sacred* (D.S. Brewer, 2007), p. 16.

¹²² Davies, *War And Society*, p. 65.

one left there without getting what he wanted.’¹²³ The mediation within the system of gift-giving may be associated with tighter, more valued social order.

So, within the castle, aggression is practically ‘for display only’: it is either muted or slowed down to match the castle’s general static quality. It is conceptualised as a force that can be culled and controlled through established procedures. Even though there may be connotations to real legal customs, the main aim of the narrative of violence inside the castle is to create ‘fictional truth’ of a ‘legal illusion’¹²⁴ rather than directly to reflect real-life practice. All methods of deflection and mitigation envisage the idea that military conflicts associated with a castle can be won strategically, *before* clashes, battles, and major loss of life,¹²⁵ thus, enhancing the belief that the largess and ideological power of the castle, as a memorable construct, may suppress the potential conflict on its own.

¹²³ ‘Geraint’, p. 156.

¹²⁴ Enders, *The Medieval Theater*, p. 26, 37.

¹²⁵ This reflects the real state of affairs in 12-13th cc., when commanders would be reluctant to proceed with an armed challenge, and the defending side ‘would rather avoid it, preferring to suffer humiliation <...> than risk potential disaster’ in Gillingham, pp. 78-79.

Chapter 2. *The wild terrain.*

The concept of the wild terrain in the three romances is based on the perception that any un-walled and borderless space is a hostile and dangerous environment. In contrast to the safety and stillness of the castle, the outside space is desolate and uneasy: no tracks, ‘only thickets and vegetation’.¹²⁶ There are realistic geographical details in the place names (e.g., in *Geraint*)¹²⁷ but overall, the descriptive quality of space is very basic. Even though navigation seems quite easy, there are no defined routes, and not many details of the travels are listed. On more than one occasion heroes set off and immediately come to the point of destination. Travel in these cases, therefore, is not a process, it is just a theatrical scene. Journeys, overall, do not follow the continuous line, they are instead divided into a series of trips. This creates an impression of a longer expedition without the need to set up a definitive time frame with life-like validity. It is tempting to assess the lack of travel descriptions as the consequence of a deliberate reduction and simplification of the more sophisticated continental romantic narratives. However, the lack of details goes along with the concept of the wilderness as a dangerous place. It is instrumental in creating the impression of a formless, borderless, and unpredictable void where the knights wander at their own risk. So, it may have been done deliberately for conceptual purposes.

Without the realistic time frame, the longevity of journeys is revealed through the description of heroes’ faltering appearance or disintegrating clothes. This way of focusing on the journeys’ longevity introduces the postulate that chasing real and imaginary pursuits in the wilderness is fraught with the risk of self-destruction and metamorphosis of identity. Whilst inside the castle, individual identity is absorbed by the group (court, the retinue), every move away from the group is problematic: ties of interdependence erode, and individual traits

¹²⁶ ‘Peredur’, p. 74.

¹²⁷ For example, ‘Geraint’, p.141, 143,151, etc.

become more prominent. So, in other words, an individual becomes more prone to changes that may not be always positive. A social group, thus, is discreetly promoted as a guarantee of collective and individual integrity. Wilderness, in contrast to the social environment within the castle, aggressively strips a person of solidity and takes away the sense of togetherness, dignity, power, face. Peredur's long journey results in his clothes and appearance so worn out that nobody recognises him.¹²⁸ When he returns to Arthur's court, he has to 'renew' his friendship (i.e., his unity) with the retinue.¹²⁹ While travelling in 'remote regions' and 'desolate mountains', Owain's 'clothes disintegrated and his body all but gave out a long hair grew all over him'.¹³⁰ The idea of physical and moral fall is intensified by describing Owain leading animal existence. These episodes, at the same time, trod on the theme of suffering and the efforts of the main heroes to overcome physical pain and mental anguish. Looking ahead at the subject of violence in the wilderness, suffering is ascertained as another, 'creative', side of the violent discourse contributing to the making of a virtuous hero¹³¹ and his achievements in various quests. Inevitably, it creates an aura of martyrdom which attributes the aggression with the image of passive self-sacrifice. As a result, aggression acquires an element of positivity and value through strife to achieve the next level of personal and social development.

Back to the description of the landscape, the limitations of the generic outlay of the wilderness are counterbalanced by features assigned to it. For example, to underline the alien quality of the landscape outside the castle, it is described as 'uninhabitable'. Yet, this does not mean that any given space is deserted by humans or animals. It implies, though, that characters belonging to the safety of the castle have no connection and no common ground

¹²⁸ 'Peredur', pp. 84 -85.

¹²⁹ Ibid. p. 86.

¹³⁰ 'he Lady Of The Well', p. 131.

¹³¹ L. Ashe, 'The Hero And His Realm In Medieval English Romance', in *Boundaries In Medieval Romance*, ed. by N. Cartlidge (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 129-147.

with creatures who occupy the wilderness. The ‘otherness’ of the terrain, its unpredictable quality is amplified by unusual demonic creatures that are placed there. As a general rule, they are different in appearance, size (or both), colour, and behaviour or beliefs (when it concerns human-like creatures). Most of the outsiders are well-attested figures in Celtic lore, and some have wider cultural connotations.

- *Giants*. Giants form the absolute majority amongst the discursive outsiders. They are usually pictured black, huge in size, violent in temper, or rude, and having single features. Their outlandish quality and propensity to trespass are strengthened by their links to the mounds of magical Otherworld (or world of the dead), borders of which they cross. Giants are widely represented across the three tales. Before saving Luned from being burned at a fire stake, Owain with the help of his lion-companion successfully fights with a cannibal monster, who looks like a human but ‘is as big as a giant.’¹³² Geraint nearly dies fighting three giants who were ‘larger than three men’, each with a club on the shoulder.¹³³ In *The Lady of the Well*, a keeper of the forest is an enormous black-haired man’ with one foot, one eye, and a heavy iron club, with which he subdues his animals.¹³⁴ Another oppressive giant ‘who is violent and malicious towards his neighbours’¹³⁵ is also depicted as black-haired and one-eyed. S. Davies draws parallels between the black-haired man and Celtic god *Cernunnos*, and Fer *Calliu* (‘Man of the Wood’), a giant ‘rough and bristling’ man from *The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel*.¹³⁶ Indeed, ‘singleness’ is a common motif of outlandish beings in Irish mythology. It features in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* in the description of the magic battle in Slemne of Mag Itha which lasted for a week and was fought ‘on single legs

¹³² ‘The Lady Of The Well’, p. 135

¹³³ ‘Geraint’, p.172.

¹³⁴ ‘The Lady Of The Well’, p. 119.

¹³⁵ ‘Peredur’, p.86.

¹³⁶ *The Mabinogion*, p. 254; *Early Irish Myths And Sagas*, tr. by J. Gantz (London: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 71.

and with single arms and single eyes.’ In another redaction of the battle’s description, single limbs are a hallmark of demons.¹³⁷

In *The Battle of Moytura*, Balor of The Piercing Eye has one ‘evil ‘and ‘poisonous ‘eye which is detrimental to the whole army on the battlefield. When his lid was raised, Lugh threw a stone at him and Balor’s eye was carried through his head right in the direction of Lugh’s army: ‘And it fell on the host of the Fomorians, and thrice nine of them died beside it so that the crowns of their heads came against the breast of Indech son of Dé Domnann, and a gush of blood sprang over his lips.’¹³⁸

It may be suggested that depicting the giants with single features and black colour of hair or body can be a manifestation of belligerent strangers contesting the authority and sovereignty of the land. Indeed, the existence of the inauguration ritual of the 12th c. Uí Néill in Co. Tyrone which involved ‘the rite of the single shoe in which one shoe was placed on the foot of the chief-elect and also cast over his head’¹³⁹ may confirm this connection to sovereignty up to a certain degree.

Mounds associated with some of the giants also have specific connections. In Celtic mythology, a mound (*sidhe* or *gorsedd*) is a place of dwelling for otherworldly creatures and fairies. It is a point of trespass between two worlds: Rhiannon first appears by the mound,¹⁴⁰ and when the enchantment falls on Dyfed, and when it is lifted, both Pryderi¹⁴¹ and Manawydan are on the mound.¹⁴² It is from the woman on the mound Peredur gets a magic stone that enables him to fight the Black Serpent of

¹³⁷ *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, Part 3, p. 13, 216 <<https://archive.org/details/lebor-gabala-erenn-part-3-translation-macalister/page/12/mode/2up?q=balor>> [accessed 23/09/2021].

¹³⁸ *The Second Battle of Moytura*, p. 101 <<https://celt.ucc.ie/published/T300011.html>> [accessed 23/09/2021].

¹³⁹ J. Waddell, *Myth and Materiality* (Oxbow books, 2018), p.106.

¹⁴⁰ ‘The First Branch’, in *The Mabinogion*, tr. by S. Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 3-21 (p. 8).

¹⁴¹ ‘The Third Branch’, in *The Mabinogion*, tr. by S. Davies, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 35-46 (p. 36).

¹⁴² *Ibid.* p. 43.

the Cairn.¹⁴³ The Mound of Mourning featuring in *Peredur* may have affiliations to a ‘play mound’ which used to be found near graveyards in Wales.¹⁴⁴ This particular mound is a hiding place of the Black Serpent of the Cairn which possesses a magic wealth stone. In *Culhwch* mound is a symbolic execution place where the giant *Ysbaddaden Bencawr* is killed, and his head is stuck on the post.¹⁴⁵

The outlandish quality of the giants (singleness, huge size, black colour, magical connections) is further enhanced by the alien religious beliefs that are attributed to some of them. Giants in the Round Valley are non-Christian in their faith and hostile to Christians.¹⁴⁶ However, ahead of their baptism and conversion, the chief giant is pictured in grey, not the definitive black like other giants.¹⁴⁷

- *Witches*. Nine witches of *Caerloyw* from *Peredur* are responsible for the desolation of the land, deception, illness, and murder. Peredur learns from them the art of fight and horsemanship staying in their castle for three weeks, but he also is the one who brings them down eventually.¹⁴⁸ There might be some connections to the motif of a ‘Man who braves a Witch in her hut’ from Gaelic mythology. ‘There are six versions of a tale of a man, who, disguised as a beggar, visits a witch in her den, nominally for the purpose of curing her of stinginess, but really in order to ridicule her pretensions to the supernatural and of proving her to be a sham<...>they show hard-headed common-sense in the very act of conquering magic and superstition’.¹⁴⁹ Number nine implies a team of eight members and a leader and is often associated with magical knowledge,

¹⁴³ ‘Peredur’, p. 89.

¹⁴⁴ Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, p. 183.

¹⁴⁵ ‘How Culhwch Won Olwen’, in *The Mabinogion*, tr. by S. Davies, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 179-213 (p. 213).

¹⁴⁶ ‘Peredur’, p. 84.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. pp. 82-84.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. pp. 79, 102.

¹⁴⁹ W. M. Hennessy, ‘On The Goddess Of War Of The Ancient Irish’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, Vol. 10 (1866 - 1869), 421-440 (p. 158).

wisdom, and the whole. The *Chief Of Annwn*'s cauldron which is situated in the Four-Cornered Fort is kindled 'from the breath of nine maidens'.¹⁵⁰ In the Irish myth of *Connla's Well* and '*Salmon of Knowledge*' (*Eo Feasa*) nine hazel trees growing by the well produce magic crimson nuts which have a power of knowledge. When they fall into the well, salmon consume them and whoever manages to catch and eat this salmon would acquire knowledge as well.¹⁵¹

- *Human 'others'* outside the castle are described in a way similar to the giants' portrayal as black-haired or black-faced, and possessing disturbing or rough features. But unlike giants, they are not as unnatural as they form a minority of lower social status. There is a black-haired man with rusty armour and mounted on a scraggy horse.¹⁵² There is also an 'ugly' looking maiden with black curly hair, black face, and hands.¹⁵³ G. Goetinck cited by S. Davies, identifies this particular character with the 'hideous side of sovereignty'.¹⁵⁴ Alternatively, she may have a remote resemblance to Irish *Morrigan*. In *Táin* she is the one 'whose presence intensifies the hero' and who, at the same time, acts as a messenger of Fate.¹⁵⁵ The ugly maiden in this episode likewise is instrumental in making Peredur set on a journey of his own, apart from the rest of the retinue, to the Fortress of Wonders. She may be seen as a precursor of perilous encounters and more fighting. Whatever the interpretation is, her face

¹⁵⁰ 'Preideu Annwfn', in *The Celtic Sources For The Arthurian Legend*, ed. by J. Coe, S Young (Llanerch Publishers, 1995), pp. 135-143, (p. 137).

¹⁵¹ E. O'Curry, *On The Manners And Customs Of The Ancient Irish* (London: Scribner, 1873), p. 143
<<https://archive.org/details/onmannersandcus03ocugoo/page/n168/mode/2up?q=hazel>> [accessed 30/09/2021].

¹⁵² 'Peredur', p. 101.

¹⁵³ Ibid. p. 94.

¹⁵⁴ *The Mabinogion*, pp. 248-249.

¹⁵⁵ Hennessy, 'On The Goddess Of War', pp. 429-435.

disfigurement signals her ruined social status, compromised integrity, and propensity to transgress.¹⁵⁶

Dwarves form another group of outsiders with lower social status. In *Geraint*, a raging dwarf who gives blows to Gwenhwyfar's maiden and Geraint himself¹⁵⁷ is an outright mockery of a knight who can attack a weak woman and a knight with no armour but wouldn't be able to withstand a real conflict. With their small features and bold but not dangerous behaviour dwarves counterweight the huge strangers of the wild terrain.

- *Non-human magic and mute creatures* are also not friendly. Their hostility is paired with huge size, black colour, and negative qualities such as deceit. Stag – the oppressor of the forest – is a giant creature who can eat ‘the tops of the trees’ and who is fit with a single feature: ‘one horn in his forehead, as long as a spear-shaft, and as sharp as the sharpest thing.’¹⁵⁸ Deer is a very popular creature in Celtic tradition. In Irish and Scottish Gaelic mythology, for example, gigantic deer is a sort of God, a ‘divine messenger’ and, simultaneously, a magic creature.¹⁵⁹ However, despite the commonality of the motif, the magic deer of the Highlands is always feminine, benevolent, and associated with the ancient Deer-Goddess.¹⁶⁰ In this case, the deer-oppressor is a male. Gender-wise it probably has more in common with the image of Cernunnos, the ancient Celtic god who is depicted with antlers or with horns.¹⁶¹ Hypothetically, Stag-the oppressor can be interpreted as an alter-ego of the black-

¹⁵⁶ P. Skinner, *Living With Disfigurement In Early Medieval Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 145.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Geraint’, pp. 142-143.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Peredur’, pp. 100-101.

¹⁵⁹ J. G. McKay, ‘The Deer-Cult And The Deer-Goddess Cult Of The Ancient Caledonians’, *Folklore*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Jun. 30, 1932), 144-174 (p. 147).

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. pp. 148-149.

¹⁶¹ Aldhouse-Green, *The Celtic Myths*, loc. 1902.

haired giant keeper of the forest, even though there is no apparent connection in the text.

The serpent which lays on the golden ring is aggressive as well: it destroys all buildings ‘for seven miles around.’¹⁶² The Black Serpent of the Cairn fights the Black Oppressor giant who tries to take the magic stone from his tail, and he loses his eye as a result. Symbolic of the serpent is an ambiguous one. In the medieval mind, it is a hybrid, generic creature. Whichever way is chosen to depict it, it is usually associated with either deceit or wisdom.¹⁶³ The Black Serpent of the Cairn is a perfect example: it is cunning as it kills from behind the pillar when the opponent cannot see him. At the same time, it guards a stone that would provide the owner with gold, i.e., wealth and power. The ‘knight fighting the serpent’ is a common motif well-attested in hagiography that introduces the all-time popular allegory of the fight between good and evil.

Huge lion, the gatekeeper, in *Peredur*, is also painted in a negative light. It is a cannibal: when Peredur comes closer, he can see a sleeping lion and a deep pit below him ‘filled with the bones of men and animals’¹⁶⁴ However, the depiction of a sleeping lion differs from the usual portrayal of this animal in medieval bestiary as it usually sleeps with its eyes open.¹⁶⁵ Another lion this time featured in *Owain*, however, is a positive character. It is painted white - a colour that is not routinely used to describe the outlandish creatures. Owain saves the lion from the snake and it proves himself to be a valuable companion. This motif is not unique.¹⁶⁶ But in terms of beastly

¹⁶² ‘Peredur’, p. 84.

¹⁶³ Heck, Cordonnier, *The Grand Medieval Bestiary*, pp. 526-536.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Peredur’, p. 82.

¹⁶⁵ M. McMunn, ‘Bestiary Influences In Two Thirteenth-Century Romances’, in *Beasts And Birds Of The Middle Ages: The Bestiary And Its Legacy* (University Of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), pp. 134-144, (p. 137).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 139.

allegories, each one should be interpreted individually as they do not have a uniform meaning. The possible interpretation of this unusual tandem may be that white lion is an allegory of Owain's extraordinary vigilance, inner strength, a revival of his energy and spirits in crucial moments. He may be also a sort of a talisman – a symbol of divine protection and invincibility.

Despite offering a vast range of possible interpretations in every episode, the outlandish creatures in the romantic discourse pursue two aims. Firstly, as a sublimation of an artificial enemy, they help to define the lands outside the castle as an epitome of 'cultural terror'¹⁶⁷ and existential threat. This portrayal, in turn, implies that the rules of law, diplomacy, and peace-making do not apply to them, therefore, the lands out there may be subjugated by force. This apocalyptic militancy has grown out of a wider binary eschatology adopted by the Christian world much earlier than the dating of the three romances, in late antiquity. It ascertains Christians in aggressive opposition to their enemies, i.e., to anyone else.¹⁶⁸ Yet, in the discourse of the three Welsh tales, Christian militancy instead of developing into crusading fervour, remains within the frame of more general topics (e.g., boundaries, gender disparity, a socio-psychological outlay of aggression, etc.). Secondly, embodying the space with giants, beasts, and human-like strangers serves the purpose of inserting memorable anchors in a formless area without borders. The alien creatures of the wild terrain are de-humanised through exaggerated or weird features and can be apprehended with no reprisals for those who attack them. This helps to bring the trope of aggression into the foreground of the narratives. It is direct, personal, and not masked with warnings or consent. Violence is closely

¹⁶⁷ The term is borrowed from B. Hudson, 'Time Is Short: The Eschatology Of The Early Gaelic Church', in *Last Things. Death And The Apocalypse In The Middle Ages*, ed. by C. Walker Bynum, P. Freedman (University Of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), pp.101-123, (p.101).

¹⁶⁸ C. Straw, 'Settling Scores: Eschatology In The Church Of The Martyrs', in *Last Things. Death And The Apocalypse In The Middle Ages*, ed. by C. Walker Bynum, P. Freedman (University Of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), pp. 21-40, (p.23).

linked to movement, action, and travel. Every conquest and achievement come together with some sort of acquisition (e.g., magic stone, strength, wife), and, simultaneously, with taking away someone's life, dignity, or even self-confidence.¹⁶⁹

The realism of warfare also helps to elevate the theme of violence above the fantasy landscape, and connect it with action, effort, and pain. The most important arms in the warfare of the 12th c. were a sword, dagger, and lance,¹⁷⁰ all of which require minimal distance between the opponents and eye contact. In the three tales, characters fight with the butt of the spear or with the sharp point of the spear, and with swords. Helmets with their very narrow eye-slits severely impaired fighters. It is not surprising that Owain is recognised by Gwalchmai only when his visor is lifted.¹⁷¹ He is not using any coat of arms and is identified as the Black Knight by the colour of his cloak and horse. This detail corresponds with the earlier period of warfare when knights were not yet using coats of arms consistently.

Tournaments which took a form of a friendly contest, a mock battle with certain rules, or joust (individual encounter) were common, unlike large-scale battles. Well-disciplined and organised armies were unknown. Indeed, what the three romances are dealing with is a much smaller number - retinue, i.e., militarised members of the lord's household. The intensity of clashes also reflects historical reality. Early tournaments were more violent and very real in terms of lethality, despite being not real battles as such. Only by the 15th c., they became a 'theatrical spectacle.'¹⁷² In the three romances, any type of military engagement including tournaments and mock battles, despite their deadly outcome, is trivialised as a way of life.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ On violence of taking away in Cowell, *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, pp. 52-63.

¹⁷⁰ It is noteworthy that lance (or pike) retained the veil of knightly 'nobility' until the 17th c. when the muskets were already widely used. Pikemen, therefore, were paid more and were regarded as more 'honourable' than musketeers. Those who 'rose from the ranks' did it 'form the pike up' rather than from a musket. See P. Wilson, *Europe's Tragedy. A New History Of The Thirty Years War*, Kindle edn. (Penguin Books, 2009), p. 122.

¹⁷¹ 'The Lady Of The Well', p. 130.

¹⁷² Porter, *Medieval Warfare*, pp. 15-17.

¹⁷³ In real life, rules of a battlefield in terms of demanding ransom or capturing arms did apply to mock tournaments or *mêlées*. See P. Porter, *Medieval Warfare In Manuscripts* (British Library, 2000), p. 16.

The propensity to become engaged in conflicts is inherited and passed on from father to son.¹⁷⁴ The lifelike cyclic nature of military aggression is enhanced through semantic allegories such as when corpses in saddles are revived time after time only to be killed again by a cave monster.¹⁷⁵ The sinister aspect of its continuity is promoted by advocating the principle of interchangeability between the aggressor and the victim (e.g., Owain taking place of his victim).¹⁷⁶

The nature of wounds from slashing and thrusting fighting techniques is pictured with realism as well. R. Middleton in his assessment of *Geraint* argues that there is a discrepancy between the length of Geraint's treatment at Arthur's court and his departure with his wounds supposedly healed, and the fact that when he fights the giants, his wounds re-open.¹⁷⁷ Yet, in real life, it could be possible due to the nature of wounds and treatment. It has to be taken into consideration that deep penetrating trauma from spear and sword were extremely serious and would carry a mortality rate of approximately as high as 80% and 100% respectively.¹⁷⁸ Cases of survival were attributed more to the depth of the wound rather than the fact of the injury itself.¹⁷⁹ It is often presumed that the better was the armour, the more protected the fighter was. Yet, there certainly were cases when it failed.¹⁸⁰ The assumption may be that if wounds from the impact need treatment, they are grave, otherwise, the combatant would recover himself. Geraint needs quite a long treatment and care, so, presumably, his wounds are far from superficial. As for the wound treatment, the drainage and external fixation were

Participating in all sorts of military engagements could be a way of making a living and of losing it like Earl Efrog.

¹⁷⁴ 'Peredur', p. 65.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 88.

¹⁷⁶ 'The Lady Of The Well', p. 128.

¹⁷⁷ Middleton, p. 152.

¹⁷⁸ M. M. Manring and others, 'Treatment of War Wounds. A Historical Review', *Clinical Orthopaedics And Related Research*, Vol.467 (8) (2009), 2168-2191 (p.2169).

¹⁷⁹ I. MacInnes, 'One Man Slashes, One Slays, One Warns, One Wounds': Injury And Death In Anglo-Scottish Combat, c.1296-c.1403, in *Killing And Being Killed: Bodies In Battle. Perspectives On Fighter In The Middle Ages* ed. by J. Rogge, Transcript, Vol.38 (Mainz Historical Cultural Sciences, 2017), pp. 61-77 (pp. 65- 67).

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. p.67.

known since the time of Hippocrates but the main principles would not be established until the 14th c.¹⁸¹ Salve or ointment could be effective as a topical medicine, but it was still far from adequate, especially in terms of deeper wounds. For example, salve described much later, in the treatise of the 16th c., consisted of egg yolk, rose oil, and turpentine.¹⁸² This was better than nothing but far from very efficient. So, the counterargument would be that in the case of survival composite, and especially deep slash and blunt force trauma, there would be a high chance of wounds' re-opening due to intensive movement. Besides, leaving realism aside, the opening of the physical wounds preceded by combat and victory may be the metaphor of the complex process of spiritual struggle.¹⁸³

Aggression is made to look true to life by matching its cyclic mode with nature's outbursts. Cynon, Owain, and Arthur with his men, all experience a terrible shower of hailstones at the well by the tree – the shower which they start by throwing water on the slab of stone. The showers are unforgiving: 'not one hailstone would stop for skin or flesh until it reached the bone'. If Cynon and Owain barely survive them, many of Arthur's men die. Every case of horrendous experience with the hailstone shower concludes with a fight. Cynon and Owain fight the Black Knight in consecutive altercations. Episodes of severe weather become an allegory and a structural part of a cycle of violence. The hailstone shower resembles the battle clash in intensity, force, and the slashing nature of the wounds. Morphing together the aggressive environment with violent behaviour implies the idea that both are uncontrollable. So, aggression is conceptually promoted as part of the 'natural' cycle too. This postulate, in turn, suggests that it is a variant of the norm. In a broad sense, the scene replicates the natural cycle of life and death, and violence is conceptualised as the moving force.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. pp. 2173-2174.

¹⁸² Ibid. p. 2174.

¹⁸³ M.C. Gaposchkin, *Invisible Weapons: Liturgy And The Making Of Crusade Ideology* (Cornell University Press, 2017), p. 52.

The rhythmic cyclicity of aggression is further strengthened through the repetitive structure of heroes' travels and movement. The portrayal of violence outside the castle as a recurrent phenomenon, however, does not come without drawbacks. For instance, it causes a lack of originality. Constant re-enactment reduces the individual traits and forces the details out. At the same time, the less detailed the story is, the more obscure, more thinly veiled, more trivial, and more base is the aggression. The gory details of Geraint's fight with giants¹⁸⁴ - split heads, entrails, and blood spilling out - sure enough, are horrifying but they are added for persuasion, dramatic effect, and memorising.¹⁸⁵ Besides, the detailing of physical injuries in the giants may signal their descent and inferiority. While Geraint's severe wounds may be also seen as a fall and limitations of the physical body, they are played out in the subsequent scene as a motif of 'death by rebirth.'¹⁸⁶ So, in the end, Geraint's physical pain and injuries unlike the giants' become a virtue. In contrast, a simple statement of the fact of killing (e.g., 'Peredur killed three men and then went into the pavilion'¹⁸⁷) revamps violence in its extreme form into a mundane episode barely worthy of any attention. The audience, thus, is manipulated into accepting aggression as a typical phenomenon through the scarcity in description: as long as you do not see the details, the whole image cannot harm you. Violence against giants or any other outsiders bears a hallmark of a 'good cause': it is justified by their cruelty, rudeness, hostility, etc. while the main character's violent outbursts are always right and persuasive.

As inside the castle, micro-aggression is present outside of the castle as well. In the wilderness, it becomes a part of the hero's journey. When Geraint misinterprets the reasons for Enid's anxiety, instead of confronting her, he demonstrates his feeling of being

¹⁸⁴ 'Geraint', pp. 172-173.

¹⁸⁵ Enders, *The Medieval Theater*, p. 66.

¹⁸⁶ This motif is connected in Christian thought to Passion of Christ and the idea of resurrection. In detail see J. Enders, *The Medieval Theater*, pp. 65-66.

¹⁸⁷ 'Peredur', p. 94.

underappreciated and cheated (as he mistakenly thinks) by showing hostile and cynical resentment towards her. He drags her with him on a strenuous and dangerous quest, makes her keep a night watch and tend to captured horses, forbids her to speak, and intentionally mistreats her. What makes this remarkable is that Enid's plight goes unnoticed by anyone, and she neither counter-responds to mistreatment nor questions it. Instead, she restrains herself, channels her resentment inside, and blames herself for 'wrongdoing' and the abuse she suffers. Enid's reaction possibly reveals a private sacrificial element in her emotional self-castigation. The public side of the sacrificial element may be also present in another episode - when Luned is about to be burnt because 'Owain has failed her'.¹⁸⁸ Both women's roles may be seen as the ones similar to the role played by hagiographical martyrs. Sacrificial aspects could be, as M. Anspach puts it, a 'way out of the 'continuum of reciprocity',¹⁸⁹ a way of mediation out of a conflict. At the same time, an implicit reference to martyrology supports the theme of vengeance as a just requital (i.e., vengeance as the legal form of punishment). In the Christian mind, martyrs are eventually avenged by God and become victors for enduring unfair treatment.¹⁹⁰ Both Enid's and Luned's cases exhibit typical for violent discourse misunderstanding, deflection of the blame, and substitution (i.e., they serve as substitutes for the initial target of violence). The theme of suffering is elevated once more but here within a misogynistic perspective. Even though it is these women who go through torturous experiences, their suffering contributes to the virtuous portrayal of a male hero. Despite the initial roles' assignment - a man is a perpetrator and a woman is a subject of aggression – the gendered aspect in violent discourse is not always straightforward and sometimes is convoluted. Women are symmetrically included in the cycle of violence as

¹⁸⁸ 'The Lady Of The Well', p. 136.

¹⁸⁹ M. Anspach, *Vengeance In Reverse: The Tangled Loops Of Violence, Myth And Madness* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2017), p. 5.

¹⁹⁰ Straw, pp. 21-23.

much as men, i.e., female and male roles counterbalance each other: both sexes play an equal part in exhibiting aggression and suffering.¹⁹¹ Enid acts as the aggressor towards herself. Luned is verbally aggressive to her mistress. Gwenhwyfar does not show any direct and personified aggression although she does express a desire to participate in a hunt which is a theatrical and regulated surrogate for armed violence. Peredur's mother, despite being a victim of violence which deprived her of most of her family, instructs him to act aggressively towards women. In their aggressiveness, females mirror male characters. This kind of symmetry promotes the idea of identity destruction in cases where the roles of aggressor and victim are swapped or not clearly defined. It conforms to the discursive theme of personal descent in evolutionary theory which implies that forest/wilderness which is associated with a female body 'of a rather sinister kind'¹⁹² may consume masculine identities.

Unlike in the castle, where aggression is dealt with through arbitration and compromise, the only practical way to mitigate the impact of violence in a space with no borders is the chivalric code of conduct. In the virtual absence of medical treatment, it would be a viable, albeit not always fruitful, attempt to somehow reduce the loss of life. Asking for and granting mercy, together with the agreement to pay homage, is a possibility of exiting the fight with a greater chance of survival. However, chivalry does not acknowledge that life is priceless, and it remains a blunt tool for peace-making at the discretion of each individual. Although chivalric rules do not extend to the inhabitants of the wilderness, there is an example of spiritual reconciliation when non-Christian grey-haired giants go to Arthur's court, pay homage, and get baptised.¹⁹³ In other cases, 'others' are treated with the deception

¹⁹¹ N. Patterson, *Woman As Vassal: Gender Symmetry In Medieval Wales*, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, Vol. 8 (1988), 31-45.

¹⁹² N. Freye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study Of The Structure Of Romance* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, And London: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 104.

¹⁹³ 'Peredur', p. 84.

typical for violent discourse.¹⁹⁴ For example, Peredur first grants mercy to the black-haired giant who is ‘violent and malicious to his neighbours’, but then withdraws it, citing his previous oppressive habits, and kills him. The giant is granted mercy in a personal fight as an equal participant. Then he is served with the death sentence for consistently raging violence onto his neighbours and for not recompensating them before. At a first glance, and especially within the perspective of the law, the giant’s treatment may resemble a legal prosecution, similar to the one where a career criminal is served with justice. However, Peredur’s role in this scene is not straightforward and quite sinister. When he receives the information about the serpent and the stone, there is no need to kill the giant: he is defeated already. Yet, Peredur kills him exhibiting unnecessary cruelty and outright hatred¹⁹⁵ rather than justice. He becomes an aggressor. This episode demonstrates that vengeance outside the safety of the castle is not so much based on the measured vindictory justice of the law which seeks to stop violence and reciprocal feuds for good. It is founded on the unrestrained desire to reverse the past to revenge and reimburse for the past humiliations.¹⁹⁶ Simply, it is just vengeance for the sake of revenge.

Repetitive past-orientated vindication effectively triggers a constant pre-emptive mode, which may be counted as a primitive way of conflict management. Everyone tries to act first out of fear to be killed. When Geraint comes to the land of *Y Brenin Bychan*, he is told that there is a custom ‘to fight every knight that comes on to his land’.¹⁹⁷ Anticipation of violence sends Peredur’s mother into the uninhabited wilderness in a desperate attempt to buy time for her son to get ready for any aggressive encounters. Peredur often is seen as an awkward youth who represents ‘state of wildness’ in its comic side.¹⁹⁸ But in the forest, he is trained to

¹⁹⁴ Anspach, *Vengeance*, p. 13.

¹⁹⁵ On aggression turning into hatred in Storr, *Human Aggression*, p. 126.

¹⁹⁶ More about the theory of vengeance in Anspach, *Vengeance*, pp. 17-30.

¹⁹⁷ ‘Geraint’, p. 167.

¹⁹⁸ Byrne, ‘The Intruder At The Feast’, p. 48.

fight for real. He engages himself with throwing holly darts, and the countess's servants would teach him how to fight with sharp spears. When he is attacked by the Gwenhwyfar's assailant with the butt of the spear as it would be in a mock tournament, Peredur notes that it 'is not how my mother's servants would play with me.'¹⁹⁹ The subsequent description of his restless and impulsive behaviour full of rage is quite far from the one of a country bumpkin. On the contrary, it is rather similar to what S. Davies and other scholars refer to as *ynfydion* or 'imbeciles': 'an aristocratic surplus' - young men 'desperate for a lord and desperate for patronage, in other words, men without teulu'.²⁰⁰

Instructions²⁰¹ which Peredur's mother gives him usually are either represented as a satiric 'outsider's' view of chivalric themes (B. Roberts²⁰²) or a reflection of 'at least some of the qualities a knight should possess' and an introduction of the subsequent themes of the knightly conduct (J.K. Bollard²⁰³). Due to their abrupt and somewhat awkward wording, they may even look misplaced at first, but with the change of perspective, they also seem to bear a warning to be always one step ahead of anyone. Hence, they practically set up a challenging pre-emptive mode for the rest of the story. The instructions can be divided into two sub-groups: strategically sound social directives and tactical military ones. The first sub-group includes three stipulations. First, the countess urges Peredur to attend Arthur's court where he will be able to 'find the best men and most generous and most brave.' The implicit message underlines the primary necessity for a young man not yet belonging to any social structure, to identify himself with a socially strong group that would be able to provide status and protection. This instruction is further strengthened by the suggestion that outside of fights, quests, and knightly endeavours Peredur should build up social connections through

¹⁹⁹ 'Peredur', p. 69.

²⁰⁰ Davies, *War And Society*, p. 48.

²⁰¹ 'Peredur', pp. 66-67.

²⁰² B. Roberts, 'Tales And Romances', in *A Guide To Welsh Literature*, Vol.1, ed. by A.O.H. Jarman, G.R. Hughes (Swansea: Christopher Davies Ltd., 1976), pp.203-243 (p. 226).

²⁰³ Bollard, 'Theme And Meaning', p. 79.

participating in the ritual of gift-giving: ‘If you see a fair jewel, take it and give to someone else, and because of that you will be praised.’ The social ‘package’ also includes the instruction to chant/pray every time he sees a church. It is way too far from an explicit religious fervour of the Crusades but it is quite likely a gentle reminder to seek the approval of the Church for participating in quests and engaging himself in fights. Honouring the faith provides a knight with a much-needed spiritual and moral ground for any future endeavours. The second sub-group of instructions is aimed at shaping Peredur’s behaviour in a military altercation. First, the countess encourages him to secure provisions – ‘If you see food and drink<...> help yourself’ - a well-known tactic used to destroy the enemy. Forceful withdrawal of supplies would result in territorial devastation, general destabilisation, and political collapse. With the development in tactical warfare, it proved efficient in the Hundred Years War, for example.²⁰⁴ The next command is: ‘If you hear a scream, go towards it, and a woman’s scream above any other scream in the world.’ It may be argued that rather than being guided by the concerns for the welfare of a woman, it is a blunt directive to proactively search for signs of distress and fights. Instead of waiting to be dragged into an unexpected dangerous and possibly deadly clash, Peredur should look for them first. This should give him the advantage to engage or not out of his own volition. Further on, he is told, in case he sees a beautiful lady, he should ‘make love to her even though she does not want you – it will make you a better and a braver man than before.’ By advocating violence and encouraging rape, this particular instruction lays out the principle of no obligation to protect non-combatants, show no mercy to them, and accordingly, express no shame for aggression. There is no need for a knight to control behaviour during his military escapades. This is a common view on the conduct in warfare in the Middle Ages, and therefore, cannot be used as

²⁰⁴ T.R. Smith, ‘Willing Body, Willing Mind: Non-Combatant Culpability According To English Combatant Writers, 1327-77’, in *Killing And Being Killed: Bodies In Battle. Perspectives On Fighter In The Middle Ages* ed. by J. Rogge, Transcript, Vol.38 (Mainz Historical Cultural Sciences, 2017), pp. 79-107 (p. 82).

proof of some kind of excessive brutality.²⁰⁵ It may be suggested that essentially, the second sub-group of countess's advice lays out the main principles of aggressive practical warfare²⁰⁶ rather than the rules for knightly conduct. It is striking that the words of the countess, a woman, represent a male, misogynistic military perspective. Violence towards non-combatants was considered immoral²⁰⁷ but, in these instructions, it is portrayed as totally acceptable. It is interesting that unlike the later accounts of combatants that often exclude non-combatants from their narratives or stick to formulaic representation,²⁰⁸ this fantasy account coming from an imaginary character clearly defines the category of non-combatants and legitimises violence against it.

Overall, the instructions lay bare the fact that violence is endemic. It is further enhanced by the swap in the assignment of the landscape qualities. Taking into account the way fantasy background is organised, the countess's move to leave the safety of a castle and escape to the wilderness is extremely unusual. The landscape structure is turned upside down: the uninhabited land is a refuge in comparison to a dangerous civilised region. The protection offered by the forest, however, is poor and temporary. Hence, it may be argued that the shift in landscape structure is supposed to underline the innate nature of aggression and its everlasting presence, wherever the characters go.

To summarise, the hostile environment outside the castle despite all negative connotations offers endless opportunities for the main characters. With no strings of shame or guilt attached they are enabled to release their anger away from the castle and in a way that does not jeopardise the social integrity of the court. Their violent strife dangerously exposes their own identities but, in a society, where group cohesion is more valuable, this is only collateral

²⁰⁵ Davies, *War and Society*, pp. 218-220.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. pp. 90-91.

²⁰⁷ Smith, 'Willing Body, Willing Mind', pp. 82-83.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. pp. 91-96.

damage. The violence of the wilderness is portrayed as an unregulated force, prompting the characters to act in the constant pre-emptive mode and thus giving them justification for aggression.

Conclusion.

The concept of violence is based on the schematic two-fold fantasy landscape which bears the hallmark of general medieval anxieties regarding boundaries between the familiar and the unknown. It represents a digestible mnemonic structure, a 'locational memory'²⁰⁹ based on a mixture of ancient and contemporary beliefs of good/evil. The artificial territorial convention defines the castle as the space where outright aggression is for display only and where slaughter is prohibited. It is bound together by on-site group identification. Castle, therefore, is represented as a social body that is created through compromising efforts and controlled by authority. Outbound space, embodied with created enemies, is pictured as a source of instability and innate aggression. The authors employ highly selective memorising²¹⁰ while associating the stillness of architectural bodies with safety and peace-making and deliberately assigning the background with unappealing fluidity and imminent threat. The ideas of the safe and the unsafe environment are promoted through the distinctive colour palette (white/light/shiny - grey -black/dark), the typical single features, and the exaggerated sizing assigned to the inhabitants of the wild terrain. Despite the negativity, the artificial borderless space is a memorable and functional background for the violent pursuits of the main heroes. It is a formative space where experiencing violence assists in building the virtuous hero, and helps to overcome physical and mental anguish through efforts, and suffering. As such it serves an educating purpose.

²⁰⁹ M. Carruthers, 'The Poet As Master Builder: Composition And Locational Memory In The Middle Ages', *New Literary History*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Autumn, 1993), 881-904 (pp. 881 -882).

²¹⁰ On selective memorising and forgetting: M. Carruthers, 'Ars Oblivionalis, Ars Inveniendi: The Cherub Figure And The Arts Of Memory', *Gesta*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2009), 99-117.

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