

cyfoethogi ein dealltwriaeth o'r cyfuniad hwn o chwedlau, ac yn cadarnhau, gyda llaw, mai tair elfen (mewn pedair cainc) yw'r cyfansoddiad cyfan. Gogleisiol, hefyd, yw'r drafodaeth ar y gwahaniaethau teimladol rhwng ceinciau'r gogledd a'r de a'r sylw (t. 12): 'Ceinciau'r gogledd piau penllanw gwynfyd a gwae.'

Nid yr un yw'r 'fytholeg newydd' â'r hyn a gyflwynwyd mor frwd gan efrydwyr diwedd y bedwaredd ganrif at bymtheg a dechrau'r ugeinfed. Nid oes llawer o ddadansoddiadau mytholegol modern o'r Pedair Cainc, na'r un sydd wedi'i weithio mor drylwyr a chyda'r fath gyfoeth o gymariaethau a sylwadaeth graff â hwn, ond y mae'r astudiaeth hon yn enghraifft deg (a chynnar yn 1975) o'r ymateb diweddar i'r Pedair Cainc sy'n canfod ynddynt ystyr ac arwyddocâd cymdeithasol ac ymarweddiadol.

This study of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi which first appeared in a private edition in 1975 was written as an antidote to and protest against some then current views, some of which proposed an underlying biographical pattern for them and others which, on the contrary, failed to perceive any logical structure or overall scheme. The late Brinley Rees, co-author with his brother, Alwyn D. Rees, of *Celtic Heritage*, offers here a comprehensive analysis, using the Dumézilian three-functional model, not only relating each branch, its predominant family of protagonists and its regional setting to each separate function, but also elaborating the analysis so that the three aspects are noted throughout the text in a variety of ways. In an appendix (which did not appear in the first edition) the three Welsh 'romances' are examined and each held to be an exemplar of one of the three functions. Though the evidence appears forced at times, there is no doubt that the primary thesis is upheld and that Mr Rees has succeeded in restoring to the Four Branches the depth of meaning and significance which they had been in danger of losing.

*Aberystwyth*

BRYNLEY F. ROBERTS

O. J. Padel, *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature* (Writers of Wales, Cardiff: University of Wales Press 2000). Pp. iv, 140. £15.00 (hbk); £5.00 (pbk). ISBN 0-7083-1689-1, 0-7083-1682-4.

The well-established Writers of Wales series is normally a series of essays on Welsh writers, either individuals or usefully categorized as a group, for example, folk poets, recusant writers, etc. This study by Oliver Padel follows a different model in that the common context of the texts discussed is the central character, Arthur, which they all share, and the differences between the portrayals of Arthur presented by the authors of these stories, poems and histories, and indeed in topographical folklore, are as important as their common ground. Dr Padel is not concerned with a historical Arthur, 'if one ever existed', for, as he makes clear from the outset, his interest lies in Arthur as a literary figure, a folklore character who has become historicized rather than representing a development in the opposite direction. There are, of course, many examples of popular motifs and concepts being used to narrate events or exploits associated with

historical figures, but clearer analogues and examples of the historicizing process would have been welcome here, especially as Arthur occurs in *annales* at an early date. Dr Padel surveys in chronological order a range of texts from the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* to *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, 'variously dated between the late twelfth and the late fourteenth century', and fourteenth-century translations of French romances and to allusions in the poetry of the *cywyddwyr* and later folklore. The survey, constrained by the demands of the format of the Writers of Wales series, moves swiftly and the author makes it clear that his primary interest lies in the nature and purpose of the texts, so that he does not argue questions of date, provenance or manuscript affiliations. Readers, especially those new to the field, whose interest has been stimulated by the discussion will have to seek light on these and similar matters for themselves. There is scope for clearer guidance in the bibliographies to each section; sometimes a commentator is named and it is usually possible to gather where the reference may be found, but others are named without any reference to their work in the bibliographies (for example, Bollard, Rhys) and on occasion we simply have a reference to 'a commentator' or 'critic'.

The evidence for Arthur in medieval Welsh literature has been rehearsed many times and the material investigated here is familiar, though one would have wished for fuller references to and a more extended discussion of later texts which have not received much attention, such as the hunting of the fox of Arllechwedd. Oliver Padel, however, approaches the texts afresh, taking nothing for granted and largely unencumbered by the weight of previous commentaries, though he is obviously familiar with them. He writes very succinctly, leaving much unsaid, but the effect is to make more pointed the hints and suggestions which he makes, and he offers valuable insights on, for example, allusions in the court poetry, the three 'romances', *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* and the *areithiau*. A particular value of this essay is not that it provides a comprehensive introduction to Welsh Arthurian literature but rather that it gives a new and challenging view of the traditional Arthur.

The threads of the argument run through the descriptions of the texts but they are brought together in the final section which poses two related questions. First, was there a fully developed Arthurian legend in Wales or only a range of independent tales and local folklore? Second, in what sense was there actually an 'Arthur of the Welsh' in the Middle Ages, a distinctively Welsh portrayal of Arthur which might have survived his international literary success? O. J. Padel doubts whether such a rounded legend existed. There is, of course, no doubting the vitality of Arthurian folklore on the ground nor the characteristic Arthurian tale as found in *Culhwch and Olwen* and some saints' lives, but he does not believe that such stories require a wider framework, though he acknowledges the possibility of a death (or final battle) story and perhaps a conception and birth tale. The Arthur which he perceives in most of the Welsh stories and poems is a capricious but often well-meaning leader of men, humorously portrayed in a homely fashion and not necessarily evoking a sympathetic audience response. He may have been a giant, traditionally rather slow-witted. True, other stories suggest a more solemn, even tragic figure, but these are not mutually exclusive aspects of the same character. Nor is there a dichotomy between the folklore Arthur of the *mirabilia* and the military leader of the *Historia*; the distinction did not become formalized until the twelfth century. This final section of *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature* is, one feels, its *raison d'être* and the one which will create most debate.

Dr Padel draws attention to some conflicting evidence – the tragic killing of his own son by Arthur, the solemnity of the tone of *Preiddeu Annwn*, the early occurrence of the title *amherawdyr* in the *Gereint* poem, the title *pen teyrnedd yr ynys hon* found in *Culhwch and Olwen* – but believes that they can be accommodated within the over-riding and essentially comic, undignified portrayal of Arthur which characterizes the Welsh Arthur. Perhaps he dismisses these contradictory views, as also Geoffrey of Monmouth's choice (and his audience's acceptance) of this comic giant to be his king-emperor, too lightly. That independent or newly created stories may be attached to existing figures is a truism of folklore – this may explain the dearth of stories about or allusions to Amr and the very different situation of Llacheu – but this is not to say that such characters have no legend of their own, if we take legend, not in the sense of a 'rounded' life story as devised by the literary-trained Geoffrey of Monmouth, but as a context and frame of reference, not specifically defined but always in the consciousness of narrator and audience. The multiplicity of stories associated with Arthur have a consistency in that there are recurring types of adventures; there seems to be more than one freeing-of-a-prisoner tale; he has two companions who have no existence outside of the Arthurian context; his final battle tale and hints of his return have been enduring features. Arthur's status as a giant is to be viewed as being a hero of a past age (a definitive example is Genesis 6: 4) for a giant need not be the same as the bumbling ogre of folklore. No doubt, we have tended to read early Arthurian literature in the light of the later chivalric texts and this essay is a welcome reminder that we may also read some of the literature of the past too seriously, unable to recognize its tone. In a literature which is fragmentary and about whose purpose, context and audience we know very little, a literature which is diverse and sometimes contradictory, the question must be whether we place the comic elements in the Arthurian corpus secondary to the dignified and serious rather than give precedence to the other. This thought-provoking study of Arthurian literature will ensure that we return to read the Welsh poems and stories with a more open mind than familiarity with them might sometimes tempt us to do.

*Aberystwyth*

BRYNLEY F. ROBERTS

Daniel Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Cardiff and Aberystwyth: University of Wales Press and National Library of Wales, 2000). Pp. xvi, 352. £50.00. ISBN 0-7083-1602-6.

The publication of this volume provides impressive testimony to the contribution that Daniel Huws has made to the growth of medieval Welsh studies. Those who have worked on Welsh medieval manuscripts have necessarily relied, for the dating and description of the sources, on J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language* (1898–1910), a work of immense value that scholars have had good reason to respect. Advances have been made in the interval, often reflected in the introductions to the critical editions of literary, legal and historical texts that have been a feature of scholarly effort in the interval. For many years now those engaged in the study of manuscripts have been able to draw upon the recognized authority of Daniel Huws, on occasion including in their discussion his succinct account of the sources. But it has long been