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The Meaning of *mabinogi*

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ON 21 October 1845 Lady Charlotte Guest put the final touches to the proofs of the last volume of her *Mabinogion*, ready for the press. She records the moment in her diary:

After this I confined myself steadily in correcting the proof sheets of the Welsh Taliesin — the Mabinogi I have now in press, and about which I have been very idle for some time. I finished my task before the time of starting, having spent three very quiet hours.¹

It would be incorrect to state that since then Lady Guest has received equal amounts of praise and opprobrium for her efforts: her achievement was praised mightily by her contemporaries, and her English translation inspired generations of non-Welsh-speakers to read these stories. Nevertheless, it is correct to state that the praise is heavily weighted to the decades immediately following publication, with the opprobrium arising in the twentieth century and gaining ground as scholars in the newly minted disciplines of Welsh and Celtic studies re-visited the texts with a more critical eye.

I will not dwell on the many criticisms of Guest's work that were made by scholars such as John Rhys, Ifor Williams, and W. J. Gruffydd, as these have been explored already by Rachel Bromwich, Sioned Davies, and Donna White.² Instead, I would like to focus upon a small sub-set of those

¹Quoted in D. Rhys Phillips, *Lady Charlotte Guest and the Mabinogion* (Carmarthen, 1921), p. 38. ²Rachel Bromwich, 'The "Mabinogion" and Lady Charlotte Guest', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1986, pp. 127–42; Donna R. White, 'The Crimes of Lady Charlotte Guest', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 15 (1995), 242–49, and her 'The Further Crimes of Lady Charlotte Guest', *ibid.*, 16/17 (1996/97), 157–66; Sioned Davies, 'A Charming Guest: Translating the *Mabinogion*', *Studia Celtica*, 38 (2004), 159–78. Scholars tended to point out deficiencies in Guest's knowledge due to the lack of any reliable secondary sources upon which she could draw in the absence of Welsh studies as a discipline. Taking a different approach, Judith Johnston, 'Victorian Appropriations: Lady Charlotte Guest translates *The Mabinogion*', *Studies in Medievalism*, 11 (2001), 145–66, takes Guest to task for apparent colonialist tendencies in her translation of the

criticisms, namely, that Charlotte Guest is responsible for coining, or at least popularizing, the incorrect form of the title of her collection, *Mabinogion*; that she is responsible for the incorrect translation of this word as 'juvenile tales' or 'stories for boys'; and that she is to blame for classing all the Welsh tales which appear in her work as 'mabinogion',³ when only the Four Branches should be so considered. In this article I will trace the origins of these criticisms, and return to some of the arguments raised. I hope to demonstrate that while some of Guest's decisions may have been misguided, later scholars may have been too quick to dismiss others, and that if the meaning of *mabinogi* was not clear to Guest and others of her generation, this is not necessarily due to the passage of time: it is due to the nature of the evidence.

THE MEDIEVAL 'MABINOGI'

Questions about the origin, form, and meaning of the word *mabinogi* have been dealt with several times in the past.⁴ The primary evidence for the interpretations offered lies in the texts themselves. The first attestation of the word *mabinogi* in manuscript occurs not in relation to the Four Branches, but rather in reference to the Welsh translation of the Gospel of pseudo-Matthew (*De Infantia Iesu Christi*).⁵ The earliest copy of this text is found in the second part of Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 14 which has been dated by Daniel Huws to the last quarter of the fourteenth century.⁶ The text begins with the formulaic introduction, 'llyma vabinogi Iesu grist' ('this is the Mabinogi of Jesus Christ'). In this case *mabinogi* appears to be a rendering of *infantia*, and to mean something like 'youth' or 'boyhood deeds'. The texts of the Four Branches in NLW Peniarth MS 4 (the White Book of Rhydderch) end with a formulaic phrase proclaiming the end of this branch of the 'mabynnogyon' at the end of the First Branch, while the other three branches end with the same formulaic phrase announcing the end

Four Branches. ³This includes the Chrétien de Troyes-inspired *Iarllles y Ffynnon* (Vol. i) and *Peredur* (Vol. ii), the similarly-inspired *Geraint* (Vol. iii), as well as *Culhwch ac Olwen* (Vol. iv), and *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* (Vol. v, which also contains the First Branch), and (in Vols vi and vii) the Second, Third, and Fourth Branches, *Breuddwyd Macsen*, *Cyfranc Lludd a Llefelys*, and *Hanes Taliesin*. ⁴See *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, edited by Ifor Williams (Cardiff, 1930), pp. xlii–liii; Thomas Jones, 'The "Mabinogion" and "The Four Branches of the Mabinogi"', *Journal of the Chester and North Wales Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society*, 50 (1963), 3–14; Eric P. Hamp, 'Mabinogi', *THSC*, 1974–75, pp. 243–49; idem, 'Mabinogi and Archaism', *Celtica*, 23 (1999), 97–110; *Manawydan uab Llyr*, edited by Ian Hughes (Cardiff, 2007), pp. v–viii. ⁵For an edition of this text see Mary Williams, 'Llyma Vabinogi Iessu Grist', *Revue celtique*, 33 (1912), 184–207. ⁶Daniel Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Aberystwyth and Cardiff, 2000), p. 59.

of this branch of the 'mabinogi' ('ac yuelly y teruyna y geing honn or mabinogi', 'so ends this branch of the mabinogi'). The texts in Oxford, Jesus College, MS 111 (the Red Book of Hergest) include these formulaic endings along with titles in red ink introducing each branch ('llyma dechreu mabinogi', 'llyma yr eil geinc or mabinogi', 'llyma y dryded geinc or mabinogi', 'honn yw y bedwared geinc or mabinogi').⁷ In addition, the Third Branch ends with the assertion that during their captivity in that story, Pryderi had been restrained with 'gate-hammers' around his neck, while Rhiannon had been held by means of 'the collars of the asses', and for that reason that 'cyfarwyddyd' ('lore' or 'story') was called 'Mabinogi Mynweir a Mynord' ('the "Mabinogi" of the Collar and the Hammer').⁸

The word also occurs twice in medieval poetry. In what is probably the earliest actual usage of the word, *mabinogi* is used in a set of englynion in praise of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth (c. 1173–1240) by Llywarch ap Llywelyn (Prydydd y Moch). The poem does not appear in manuscript until the seventeenth century, in NLW 4973B in the hand of John Davies of Mallwyd. It is found in a section of that collection which is believed to be a copy of the now-lost pages from the late-thirteenth-century Hendregadredd manuscript.⁹ The poet describes his youthful subject in a series of stanzas beginning with words derived from *mab*, each referring to some element of childhood or boyhood: *mabolaeth* ('boyhood'), *mabddysg* ('boyhood education'), *mabynogi*, *mebyd* ('boyhood'). The third term (*mabynogi*) has been subject to emendation; the form that actually appears in the manuscript is 'mamynogi'.¹⁰ *Mabinogi* is also used by Lewys Glyn Cothi (fl. 1447–86) in a touching tribute to his son who has died (*Marwnad Siôn y Glyn*), referring to him as '[p]enâig mabinogi'.¹¹ This is the sum total of the usage of the word *mabinogi* in the medieval period, and all the evidence later scholars have had upon which to base their interpretations of the meaning of the word, its proper form, and to what it refers. Many such interpretations have been proposed, but, despite their present-day obsolescence, none more influential or long-standing than those put forth by Charlotte Guest.

⁷For a treatment of these formulaic openings and closings see Sioned Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd* (Cardiff, 1995), pp. 45–49. ⁸Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 46. ⁹I am grateful to the reviewer of this article for pointing this out. For treatments of John Davies's copy of this manuscript see Nerys Anni Jones, 'Ffynonellau Canu Beirdd y Tywysogion', *SC*, 37 (2003), 81–125, and Nerys Ann Jones and Morfydd E. Owen, 'John Davies and the Poets of the Princes: *Cognoscere, Intellegere, Scire*', in *Dr John Davies of Mallwyd: Welsh Renaissance Scholar*, edited by Ceri Davies (Cardiff, 2004), pp. 171–207. ¹⁰For this poem see *Gwaith Llywarch ap Llywelyn 'Prydydd y Moch'*, edited by Elin M. Jones and Nerys Ann Jones (Cardiff, 1991), 162–69. ¹¹*Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi*, edited by Dafydd Johnston (Cardiff, 1995), pp. 512–13.

MABINOGION: THE CANON

The idea that Charlotte Guest was responsible for popularizing the usage of the word *mabinogion* in reference to the medieval Welsh prose tales in general arises with Sir John Rhys. In the introduction to his and J. Gwenogvryn Evans's edition of the Four Branches from the Red Book of Hergest, Rhys claims that 'since the publication of Guest's *Mabinogion*, the idea seems to prevail that any Welsh tale of respectable antiquity may be called a mabinogi, plural mabinogion'.¹² In 1912, W. J. Gruffydd went a step further by claiming that Guest was responsible for coining this usage: 'The term "mabinogion" was first used in its present sense by Lady Charlotte Guest to designate all the prose stories which she had so admirably translated'.¹³ This idea has since become commonplace, such that modern-day scholars often repeat it without question.¹⁴ In actual fact, while Guest's work was by far the most popular on the subject, the use of the word *mabinogi* to refer to any medieval Welsh prose tale was widespread long before she published her work under that title in 1838.

As Rachel Bromwich pointed out many years ago, the idea seems to have originated with William Owen Pughe.¹⁵ Pughe's definition of the word *mabinogi* in his 1803 *Dictionary of the Welsh Language* gives one of its meanings as 'the title of some ancient tales', without specifying which tales those might be.¹⁶ Pughe's views were extremely influential, and he was sought out as an expert on Welsh texts, and on medieval Welsh literature in particular. His concept of *mabinogion* as a large collection of tales is evident in his correspondence with other scholars.¹⁷ In a letter to the Revd William

¹²*The Text of the Mabinogion from the Red Book of Hergest*, edited by John Rhys and J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Oxford, 1887), p. viii. This assertion was repeated verbatim by Rhys in his *Studies in the Arthurian Legend* (Oxford, 1891), p. 1. ¹³W. J. Gruffydd, 'The Mabinogion', *THSC*, 1912–13, pp. 14–80 (p. 39). ¹⁴Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones claim that the title *Mabinogion* 'is a modern one' in their *Everyman Mabinogion* (London and New York, 1949), p. ix. In his *Penguin Mabinogion* (Harmondsworth and New York, 1976), p. 31, Jeffrey Gantz ascribes to Guest an etymology, tracing the word *mabinogi* to the word *mab*, which appears nowhere in Guest's work. ¹⁵Bromwich, 'The "Mabinogion" and Lady Charlotte Guest', p. 131; White, 'The Further Crimes', p. 158. ¹⁶William Owen [Pughe], *A Dictionary of the Welsh Language*, 2 vols (London, 1803), s.v. ¹⁷Pughe made known his intention to publish an edition and translation of the *Mabinogion* in his edition of the First Branch which appeared in the *Cambrian Register*. This prompted many scholars to write to him inquiring after the work's progress. The edition never appeared, although NLW 13,242 in Pughe's hand contains revised versions of the texts prepared for the press in 1826–34. For a study of Pughe's planned edition and translation of the *Mabinogion* see Glenda Carr, *William Owen Pughe* (Cardiff, 1983), pp. 115–20, and Arthur Johnston, 'William Owen-Pughe and the *Mabinogion*', *National Library of Wales Journal*, 10 (1958), 323–28.

Gunn, published in the introduction to his 1819 edition of *Historia Brittonum*, Pughe sets out in print his view of the nature of 'mabinogion' for the first time, dividing the tales into two groups.¹⁸ The first group contains *Cyfranc Lludd a Llefelys*, *Breuddwyd Macsen*, and the Four Branches. These are classified together 'because they contain not one incident connected with the adventures of Arthur and his warriors, who are the actors in the following class of tales'.¹⁹ The second class contains *Peredur*, *Culhwch ac Olwen*, *Gereint*, and *Iarlles y Ffynnon*, all of which concern Arthur and his court.²⁰ It is clear from Pughe's treatment of these texts that he considered them all to be 'mabinogion'.

¹⁸*The Historia Brittonum commonly attributed to Nennius*, edited by William Gunn (London, 1819). This section of the introduction is repeated in the review of that volume which appeared in *The Cambro-Briton*, 2 (1820), 28–36. ¹⁹Gunn, *Historia Brittonum*, p. xxxv. ²⁰The Arthurian *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is notably absent from this list. Pughe provides a slightly different classification in a letter to Thomas Croker, published in 1828 in Volume III of his *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* (London, 1828), pp. 163–76. Here he places the Four Branches in a class apart because they are found together in the manuscripts, and because they 'abound with invisible agencies of various kinds, with many allusions to mythological persons and things of remote antiquity' (p. 172). His second class contains tales of the knights of King Arthur and includes *Iarlles y Ffynnon*, *Peredur*, and *Gereint*. He describes the third class, containing *Cyfranc Lludd a Llefelys*, *Breuddwyd Macsen*, *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, and *Hanes Taliesin*, as 'miscellaneous'. *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*'s connection with Arthur seems to have been forgotten here, and *Culhwch ac Olwen* does not appear in any class at all. This reflects Pughe's classification of the texts in his translation of them in NLW 13,242, with the Four Branches in the first class, *Culhwch ac Olwen*, *Peredur*, and *Gereint* in the second, and *Breuddwyd Macsen*, *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, and *Cyfranc Lludd a Llefelys* in the third. Here it is *Iarlles y Ffynnon* that is missing, although the text does appear in the manuscript after *Cyfranc Lludd a Llefelys*. Pughe's classification is reflected in Rhys and Evans's 1887 edition which, despite purporting to be a diplomatic edition of the Red Book, presents the texts under three categories rather than as they actually appear in the manuscript. The Four Branches appear first under the heading 'Mabinogion', followed by a section of 'Tales' including *Breuddwyd Macsen*, *Cyfranc Lludd a Llefelys*, *Culhwch ac Olwen*, and *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, and ending with 'Romances'. See their *The Text of the Mabinogion*. This is also the system adopted by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones for their 1949 *Everyman* translation, who label the second group 'Four Independent Native Tales', as well as by John Bollard, who calls this group 'Companion Tales to the Mabinogi'. See *The Mabinogion*, translated by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (London, 1949); Gwyn Jones, 'The Golden Cockerel *Mabinogion*, 1944–1948', *THSC*, 1989, pp. 181–210; *The Mabinogi: Legend and Landscape of Wales*, translated by John Bollard (Llandysul, 2006), and his *Companion Tales to the Mabinogi: Legend and Landscape of Wales* (Llandysul, 2007). Rhys and Evans dismiss *Hanes Taliesin* 'because it has no claim to rank with the Mabinogion and other tales of the same epoch' (p. vii), a decision followed by all later translators except Patrick Ford, who included this text in his *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales* (Berkeley, CA, 1977).

Guest's treatment of the texts in the introduction to the first volume of her edition shows that, like Pughe, she considered *mabinogion* to refer to a wider group of texts than the Four Branches alone. Indeed, her classification of 'mabinogion' is similar to Pughe's but not identical. She too divides the texts into two groups, but her categorization is based on her perception of the age of the texts rather than their content. The older texts, she claims, show little evidence of Norman influence, while later texts 'are full of such allusions, and of ecclesiastical terms'.²¹ She gives *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* and *Culhwch ac Olwen* as examples of the first class, and *Iarllles y Fynnon*, *Peredur*, and *Gereint* as examples of the second. In her use of the word *mabinogion* Charlotte Guest followed the authoritative opinion of the time, that of William Owen Pughe, as did scholars writing both before and after the publication of Guest's *Mabinogion*. In 1809 Edward 'Celtic' Davies refers to an onomastic tale about a lake near Hay-on-Wye as 'evidently contain[ing] the substance of one of those tales, which we call Mabinogion'.²² In the same publication he mentions 'a Mabinogi or mythological tale' connected to a lake near Brecon.²³ It is obvious that Davies is not referring to the Four Branches in these two examples, but rather to a larger category of stories. Scholars writing after the appearance of Guest's *Mabinogion* continue this usage: Albert Schultz refers to *Peredur* as a *mabinogi*;²⁴ Thomas Price Carnhuanawc claims that the name of Owain ab Urien is often mentioned in the *mabinogion*;²⁵ David Nash writes about 'The Romance or Mabinogi of Taliesin';²⁶ Owen Wynne Jones publishes *Iarllles y Ffynnwawn* with the explanatory note 'Hen Fabinogi Gymreig'.²⁷ These scholars may well be using the word in its generally accepted sense at the time to refer to a body of Welsh texts including but not limited to the Four Branches, rather than following Guest.

Indeed, it may be the case that Guest's use of the title *Mabinogion* for her collection actually had the effect of limiting the scope of its usage. Some nineteenth-century authors referred to texts that Charlotte Guest specifically excluded from her canon, as 'mabinogion'. Guest lays out the criteria for her

²¹Guest, *Mabinogion*, III, xvii. ²²Edward 'Celtic' Davies, *The Mythology and Rites of the British Druids* (London, 1809), p. 147. ²³*ibid.*, p. 155. ²⁴Albert Schulz, *An Essay on the Influence of Welsh Tradition upon the Literature of Germany, France, and Scandinavia, which obtained the prize of the Abergavenny Cymreigyddion Society at the Eisteddfod of 1840*, translated by Charles Sullivan (Llandovery, 1841), p. 71. ²⁵Thomas Price (Carnhuanawc), *Hanes Cymru a Chenedl y Cymry o'r Cynoesoedd hyd at Farwolaeth Llewelyn ap Gruffydd* (Crickhowel, 1842), p. 284. ²⁶David William Nash, *Taliesin, or, the Bards and Druids of Britain* (London, 1858), p. xii. ²⁷Owen Wynne Jones (Glasynys), *Cymru Fu, yn cynnwys Hanesion, Traddodiadau ynghyda Chwedlau a Demmegion Cymreig oddiar Lafar Gwlad a Gweithiau y Prif Awduron* (Wrexham, 1862), 'Cynnwysiad'.

canon (that is, those texts she has chosen to include in her *Mabinogion*) in the introduction to the first volume of her edition:

there are a few tales, as *Amlyn and Amic*, Sir Bevis of Hamtoun, the Seven Wise Masters, and the story of Charlemagne, so obviously of foreign extraction, and of late introduction into Wales, not presenting even a Welsh name, or allusion, and of such very slender intrinsic merit, that although comprised in the *Llyvr Coch*, they have not a shadow of claim to form part of the Canon of Welsh Romance.²⁸

Guest's criterion for inclusion rests on the 'Welshness' of the texts, that is, their use of Welsh characters and settings.²⁹ Not all writers shared this exclusive view of the nature of 'mabinogion'. In 1815 the books and manuscripts of John Lloyd (1749–1815), 'philosopher' of Hafodunos and Wigfair, Flintshire, were catalogued by John Broster of Chester to be sold at auction the following January.³⁰ The collection included a large number of Welsh printed books and manuscripts. Unable to catalogue these items on his own, Broster turned to the poet and antiquarian Walter Davies (Gwallter Mechain) for information on these items. In that catalogue, lot 1984 is described as follows: 'MS. XVI. Juvenile Tales, or Mabinogion: Selyf a Marcolf, Peredur ap Efrog Jarll, Bown o Hamtwn, Sir Bevis'.³¹ The second

²⁸Guest, *Mabinogion*, I, xviii. ²⁹As Bromwich points out, Guest was the first person to recognize the relationship between the 'romances' *Iarllles y Ffynnon*, *Peredur*, and *Gereint* and their French counterparts (Bromwich, 'The "Mabinogion" and Lady Charlotte Guest', p. 137). Bromwich conjectures that it was Guest's fascination for medieval romance that inspired her interest in the *Mabinogion*. ³⁰*Bibliotheca Llwydiana: a catalogue of the entire library (near ten thousand volumes) ... late the property of John Lloyd, Esq. ... which will be sold by auction, without reserve, at his seat at Wygfair, near St. Asaph, Denbighshire, on Monday, January 15th, 1816 ... by Mr. Broster, of Chester* ([Denbigh], [1816]). For a treatment of this sale see Gwynfryn Walters, "'Bibliotheca Llwydiana': Notes on the Sale Catalogue (1816) of John Lloyd's Library", *NLWJ*, 10 (1952), 185–204. ³¹This manuscript was written by the prolific manuscript copyist John Jones of Gellilyfdy in 1608. Angharad Llwyd referred to the same manuscript rather cryptically as 'item 3. Mabinogion. Iarll Wrangon, and some others' in the collection of Edward Pryce Lloyd of Pengwern (1768–1864) in her 1828 'Catalogue of Welsh Manuscripts, etc., in North Wales', *Transactions of the Cymmrodorion or Metropolitan Cambrian Institution*, 2 (1828), 36–58. According to D. R. Thomas the manuscript was sold by William Dew and Son at the Bronwylfa sale in 1875, where it was also catalogued as 'Mabinogi, or Juvenile Tales'. See his edition of *Y Cwta Cyfarwydd* (London, 1883), p. ii. It was bought by the antiquary Edward Breese (1835–81), and passed from there into the possession of J. Gwenogvryn Evans. It is now catalogued as NLW 19,900B (Gwenogvryn Evans 1A). For texts edited from this manuscript see 'Ystoria Ysgan ab Asgo Arglwydd Bodeugan', edited by E. D. Jones, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 9 (1937–39), 219–21, and 'Copi Ychwanegol o Ddechrau Ystoria Bown de Hamtwn', edited by Nesta Lloyd, *ibid.*, 23 (1968–70), 17–26.

of these texts fits Guest's conception of a 'mabinogi' but the others do not. Angharad Llwyd, in describing NLW MS 3043B (Mostyn 135) for her 1826 catalogue of North Wales manuscripts, lists the contents as 'Tri Ystoria o Mabinogi'. The three stories are *Bown de Hamptwn*, *Peredur*, and the First Branch.³² D. Silvan Evans includes texts such as *Ystoria Dared* (a translation of *De Excidio Troiae Historia*) and *Chwedlau Saith Doethion Rhufain* (a version of the *Dolopathos* or *Seven Sages of Rome* collection of moral tales) under the sub-title 'Mabinogion' in *Y Brython*.³³ He refers to the medieval Welsh translations of texts dealing with Charlemagne as 'Mabinogion Carlymaen' in an article in the same volume, where he also refers to Amlyn and Amic as 'characters who are to be found amongst our unpublished Mabinogion'.³⁴ Howel W. Lloyd refers to 'Canon Williams' valuable publication of the Mabinogi *Bown o Hamtwn*' in an 1879 article for the Powysland club,³⁵ and Charles Wilkins refers to the *araith* 'Breuddwydd Gruffydd ab Adda' as 'a tale or Mabinogi of considerable interest' in his 1884 *History of the Literature of Wales*.³⁶

This is not to say that the usage is necessarily appropriate. John Rhys, in criticising Guest, goes on to state that 'of the eleven stories contained in Lady Charlotte Guest's collection, only four are entitled to be called mabinogion'.³⁷ This point was first made by Thomas Stephens, who claimed in his 1849 *The Literature of the Kymry*, that 'the term Mabinogion is applied indifferently to all the tales; but that is not strictly proper'.³⁸ Stephens

³²Llwyd, 'Catalogue', p. 50. ³³'Ystoria Dared', edited by D. Silvan Evans, *Y Brython*, 2 (1859–60), 97–99, 113–15, 131–32, 147–49, 164–66, and 'Ystori Doethion Rhufein', edited by D. Silvan Evans, *ibid.*, 3 (1860), 81–94. For an edition of the text see *Chwedlau Saith Doethion Rufein*, edited by Henry Lewis (Wrexham, 1925). ³⁴D. Silvan Evans, 'Charlymaen', *Y Brython*, 3 (1860), 98. For editions of the texts referred to see *Ystoria de Carolo Magno*, edited by Stephen J. Williams, second edition (Cardiff, 1968), and *Kedymdeithyas Amlyn ac Amic*, edited by Patricia Williams (Cardiff, 1982). ³⁵Howel W. Lloyd, 'Antient Welsh Poetry, illustrative of the History of Powys-Land', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 12 (1879), 29–52 (p. 52). ³⁶Charles Wilkins, *The History of the Literature of Wales from the Year 1300 to the Year 1650* (Cardiff, 1884), p. 23. ³⁷Rhys and Evans, *Text of the Mabinogion*, p. viii. This is a departure for Rhys, who had not objected to Guest's use of the term in his *Lectures on Welsh Philology* (London, 1877), where he describes the 'mabinogion' as 'romances ... which consist mostly of tales respecting Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table' (p. 145) and refers to the 'Mabinogi of Iarlles y Ffynnwain' (p. 157). ³⁸Thomas Stephens, *The Literature of the Kymry, being a Critical Essay on the History of the Language and Literature of Wales* (Llandovery, 1849), p. 417. Stephens's opinion was endorsed by William Skene in *The Four Ancient Books of Wales* (Edinburgh, 1868), pp. 27–28, and by Robert John Pryse (Gweirydd ap Rhys) in his 1885 Eisteddfod-winning essay *Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymreig o'r flwyddyn 1300 hyd y flwyddyn 1650, gan "Llywelyn Fychan", sef, R. I. Prys* (Gweirydd ap Rhys) ([London], [1885]), p. 271.

goes on to classify the texts as 'Mabinogion, or Juvenile Tales', 'Breuddwydion, or Dreams', and 'Ystoriau, or Stories'. Stephens's 'Mabinogion' contains the Four Branches as well as 'Mabinogi Taliesin'.³⁹

This reflects the generally accepted view today (except for the inclusion of *Hanes Taliesin* — see n. 20 above). It also reflects the usage of an earlier generation of scholars, who used the word *mabinogi* to refer to the Four Branches exclusively. Edward Lhuyd describes *mabinogi* as a book divided into four parts in his entry for the term in *Archaeologia Britannica*, an obvious reference to the Four Branches:

Mabinogi. L.K.H. 710. Hoc vocabulum quid sibi velit, hodiè non constat. Libellus autèm sic inscriptus fabulosas quasdam Historiolas tradit de Optimatibus aliquot Britannis antiquioribus. Quod vidimus exemplar in quatuor partes distributum est, quas totidem Mabinogii sui Ramos appellat author vel exscriptor.⁴⁰

The meaning of this word is not well understood today. However a little book with this title contains certain fabulous short accounts concerning a number of members of the ancient nobility of the Britons. We saw a copy of it divided into four parts, which the author or scribe calls Branches of that Mabinogi.

This is also the substance of Lewis Morris's entry on the word in his *Celtic Remains*. Here the entry for *mabinogi* describes it as 'the name of an ancient MS. of British history once in Hengwrt Library'.⁴¹ Henry Rowlands similarly refers to 'a very ancient British manuscript, called Mabinogion' in his *Mona Antiqua*.⁴² John Davies of Mallwyd includes *Histori Owain ap Vrien*, *Histori Beredur*, and *Histori Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed* as different items in the 'Index Auctorum' to his 1632 *Dictionarium Duplex. Histori Pwyll* seems to be doing duty for the Four Branches in this 'Index', but lexical items in the *Dictionary* proper contain citations from *Mabin.*, as distinct from *Hist. Ber.* (*Peredur*), *Hist. Geraint*, and *Breuddwyd Maxen*.⁴³ Davies's *Mabin.* refers to the Four Branches alone. Similarly in Davies's Welsh–Latin vocabulary in NLW Peniarth 229, 'Casglfa o'r geiriau arbennic o Istoriae y xii gogyfurdd ac Istori Giwn a Bown, Pwyll Pendefig Dyvet, ar

³⁹Stephens's list of 'ystoriau' appears to be based on the texts mentioned in Edward Lhuyd's *Archaeologia Britannica*. It contains an eclectic collection of texts including the three romances and *Culhwch ac Olwen*, as well as *Ystoria Bown de Hamtwn*, *Ystorieau Seint Greal*, *Ystoria Dared*, *Ystoria Gwlat Ieuan Vendigeit*, *Ystoria Adrian ac Ipotis*, and *Transitus Mariae*. ⁴⁰Edward Lhuyd, *Archaeologia Britannica* (Oxford, 1707), p. 262. ⁴¹Lewis Morris, *Celtic Remains*, edited by D. Silvan Evans (London, 1878), p. 286. ⁴²Henry Rowlands, *Mona Antiqua Restaurata: An Archaeological Discourse on the Antiquities, Natural and Historical, of the Isle of Anglesey*, second edition (London, 1766), p. 166. ⁴³Mary Burdett-Jones, "Index Auctorum" Henry Salesbury ac "Auctorum Britannicorum Nomina" John Davies', *NLWJ*, 26 (1990), 353–60.

Mabynnogion' ('A collection of the special words from the Stories of the Twelve Peers [i.e. the Charlemagne romances], and the Story of Giwn and Bown [i.e. Bown de Hamtwn], Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed, and the Mabinogion'), the item 'Pwyll Pendefig Dyvet, ar Mabynnogion' refers to the Four Branches alone. Moses Williams refers to the Four Branches exclusively as 'mabinogi' in the tables of contents for his two copies of the texts from the Red Book in NLW Llanstephan 90 and 126, as does William Thomas in his index of Welsh manuscripts in Cardiff, Central Library, MS 4.20.

The expansion of the term *mabinogion* to refer to a wide range of (mostly but not exclusively) medieval prose texts besides the Four Branches seems to have been an innovation of William Owen Pughe's. This usage had become commonplace before Charlotte Guest took it up in her edition and translation of the Four Branches and other tales. In using the term *mabinogion* to refer to her entire corpus, Charlotte Guest followed the accepted usage of the time, as did many scholars writing both before and after the publication of her *Mabinogion*. The ubiquity of the wider usage of the term in the nineteenth century is telling, as it indicates that there was a need for such a word. It shows that a new category of text had arisen which could not be described satisfactorily using existing literary terms (*ystoria*, *rhamant*, *araith*). Despite the need for this term, in the nineteenth century there was little agreement about which texts could be contained in this new category, and even less agreement about the form and origin of the word, and what it actually meant.

MABINOGION: THE FORM

As there has been limited agreement about the correct referent of the word *mabinogion*, there has also been little agreement about its proper form. Charlotte Guest chose to refer to her collection of texts as *Mabinogion* taking this to be the plural of a singular *mabinogi*. This choice was also criticised by later scholars. It was John Rhys who first suggested that Guest was incorrect in this usage, claiming that it was more appropriate to refer to the texts as parts of a singular *mabinogi* and coining the phrase 'The Four Branches of the Mabinogi'.⁴⁴ But once again, rather than innovating incorrectly, it is evident that Guest was simply following the accepted usage of her time. William Owen Pughe's dictionary entry for *mabinogi* states that the plural ending for that word is *-ion*, and thus that *mabinogi* is a singular form with *mabinogion* as the plural.⁴⁵ Nineteenth-century scholars accepted this

⁴⁴Rhys and Evans, *The Text of the Mabinogion*, p. viii. ⁴⁵Pughe, *Dictionary*, 'Mabinogi'.

usage: Edward Davies, Joseph Loth,⁴⁶ David Nash, Thomas Price Carnhuanawc, Rice Rees,⁴⁷ Albert Schulz, Thomas Stephens, Sharon Turner,⁴⁸ and Charles Wilkins all refer to Welsh prose tales in the plural as 'mabinogion', most likely on the authority of Pughe's *Dictionary*.

In this case, Pughe is not responsible for coining the usage: it was in use among some earlier writers as well. Iolo Morganwg refers to 'y Mabinogion' in the directions for reading that precede the main text of the *Myvyrian Archaiology*.⁴⁹ As mentioned above, John Davies of Mallwyd refers to the Four Branches as 'Pwyll pendefig Dyvet ar Mabynnogion' ('Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed and the Mabinogion') in Peniarth 229. This formulation may reflect a scribal usage. The copy of the texts found in NLW 3043B in the hand of Roger Morris of Coed-y-Talwrn (fl. 1590)⁵⁰ contains a table of contents in the hand of Thomas Evans of Hendreforudd (fl. 1596–1633).⁵¹ The contents are described there as 'ystoria Pwyll a Mabinogion', 'ystoria Bendigeidfran a Mabinogi', and 'ystoria Math ap Mathonwy a mabinogi'.⁵² These titles are repeated by Lewis Morris in his 1764 description of the contents of that manuscript in London, British Library, Additional MS 14,924.⁵³ This combination of 'mabinogion' and 'mabinogi' forms being used apparently interchangeably by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scribes and commentators reflects the usage of the White Book of Rhydderch and the Red Book of Hergest with their formulaic endings mentioned above, declaring the end of this branch of the 'mabynnogyon' or 'mabinogi'. Both terms are used in both manuscripts, seemingly interchangeably.

⁴⁶*Les Mabinogion*, translated by Joseph Loth (Paris, 1889). ⁴⁷Rice Rees, *An Essay on the Welsh Saints or the Primitive Christians* (London, 1836). ⁴⁸Sharon Turner, *A Vindication of the Genuineness of the Ancient British Poems of Aneurin, Taliesin, Llywarch Hen, and Merdhin* (London, 1803). ⁴⁹Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwg), 'Cyfarwyddyd i Ddarllen yr Hen Gyfansoddiadau Cymraeg sydd yn y gwaith hwn', *Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales*, 1 (London, 1801), p. xxvi. Note, however, that he corrects Owen Jones on the compound word 'llathr-gein-dlos-fwyn' with reference to the 'Mabinogy' in a letter. See *The Correspondence of Iolo Morganwg*, 1, edited by Geraint H. Jenkins and others (Cardiff, 2007), p. 120. It is unclear what Iolo means by *mabinogi* here, however, as this phrase does not appear in the Four Branches. ⁵⁰Morris, Roger, of Coed-y-talwrn, *Dictionary of Welsh Biography down to 1940* (Cardiff, 1949), pp. 665–66. ⁵¹Evans, Thomas, or Thomas ab Ifan, *ibid.*, p. 252. ⁵²Note that the Third Branch is missing from this description. This may be because the break between the Second and Third Branches is not as clear as that between the rest of the branches. The formulaic ending 'a llyna ual y teruyna y geing honn o'r mabinogy' is followed by a summation of the preceding story, which leads directly into the Third Branch. Roger Morris's source, the White Book, does not include titles indicating the beginning of each branch, as the Red Book does. ⁵³For a treatment of this description see Diana Luft, 'Lewis Morris and the *Mabinogion*', forthcoming in the *Electronic British Library Journal*.

The form 'mabynnogyon' was dismissed as a simple copying error by Ifor Williams, who pointed out that in the White Book the word 'dyledogyon' appears two lines above it and thus presumably had an influence upon it.⁵⁴ This is the view which still prevails. And yet, if this form is the obvious result of a copying error, it is strange that it has not been corrected by any of the later scribes who copied it. As Simon Rodway has recently shown, Hywel Fychan, the scribe of the Red Book, is a correcting scribe, frequently altering his text to make sense of unclear passages.⁵⁵ And yet he did not correct the form 'mabynnogyon'. It may be that he did not see it as an error, either because it is not an error, or because Hywel Fychan himself could not be sure of the correct form, presumably because the word was unfamiliar to him. Roger Morys of Coed-y-Talwrn is also a non-passive scribe: he systematically modernized the orthography of his copy of the texts, yet he did not interfere with the form *mabynnogyon*. Similarly, Thomas Evans of Hendreforudd, John Davies of Mallwyd, and Lewis Morris did not question or correct the form *mabynnogyon*, rather, they accepted the usage of this form and *mabinogi* interchangeably without demur. Whether the form *mabynnogyon* was originally the result of a copying error or not, apparently it was not recognized as such by later scribes and commentators, including medieval scribes. This suggests that the word was unfamiliar to them. It suggests that the confusion about the correct form is not something that arose out of the ignorance of nineteenth-century scholars or their linguistic distance from the medieval scribes whose texts formed the object of their study. It seems, rather, that confusion has dogged this word from its earliest occurrences.

MABINOGION: ORIGIN AND MEANING

The exact meaning of the word 'mabinogi' and its derivation have exercised scholars for many years, and many definitions have been proposed. The most long-standing of these analyses it as having some relation to the word 'mab' ('boy'), and proposes a meaning of something like 'stories for boys'. This is the substance of one of the definitions proposed by William Owen Pughe in his 1803 *Dictionary of the Welsh Language*:

Mabinogi, *s.m.* — *pl. t. ion* (mabinawg) Juvenility; juvenile instruction; the amusement of youth; the title of some ancient tales. *Mabinogi Iesu Grist*, The infancy of Jesus Christ, the title of an ancient tract giving some account of St. Mark.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Williams, *Pedair Keinc*, p. xlii. ⁵⁵See his 'The Red Book Text of "Culhwch ac Olwen": A Modernising Scribe at Work', *Studi Celtici*, 3 (2004), 93–161. ⁵⁶William Owen Pughe, *Dictionary of the Welsh Language*, s.v.; in the second edition (London, 1832), II, 314, the entry is changed to '... title of one of the spurious gospels'.

Pughe conceives of 'mabinogi' as being formed of an adjective 'mabinawg' (according to his Dictionary a term meaning 'having youth, juvenile') plus a noun-forming suffix. This definition lies behind the title of his edition and translation of the First Branch which appeared in the *Cambrian Register*⁵⁷ as well as the definition he supplied to Thomas Crofton Croker.⁵⁸ It soon became the most often quoted explanation of the word. Rice Rees refers to 'the "Mabinogion," or Juvenile Tales' in his 1836 *Essay on the Welsh Saints*;⁵⁹ Albert Schulz quotes Pughe in his 1840 *Eisteddfod* essay;⁶⁰ and Thomas Stephens refers to them as 'tales written to while away the time of young chieftains, to be repeated at the fire side'.⁶¹ In his edition of the works of Huw Morus, Walter Davies titled the section dedicated to poems written in the poet's youth 'Mabinogion',⁶² and Robert John Pryse, in an anti-Catholic conspiracy theory, proposed that the name was meant to be an insult. Following Iolo Morganwg's theory that the poets only wrote about truthful matters, Pryse surmised that the crafty monks, noting a gap in the market, decided to write fanciful prose stories to entertain an easily-led public and introduce Catholic doctrines by stealth. The poets, unimpressed by these prose offerings, referred to them scornfully as 'mabinogion' meaning 'chwedlau mabanaidd neu blentynnaidd' ('boyish or childish stories').⁶³

John Rhys described the texts as 'romances' in his 1877 *Lectures on Welsh Philology*,⁶⁴ but by 1887 he had proposed a new definition deriving the word *mabinogi* from **mabinog* which he described as 'a term belonging to the bardic system meaning a sort of literary apprentice'. On this basis he defined *mabinogion* as 'the collection of things which formed the Mabinog's literary training', that is, works of juvenile instruction.⁶⁵ Rhys's theory gained acceptance for a short time before falling out of favour.⁶⁶ Albert

⁵⁷'The Romantic Tales called Mabinogion, or Juvenile Amusements, being Ancient Welsh Romances', edited and translated by William Owen Pughe, *The Cambrian Register*, 1795, pp. 177–87; 1796, pp. 322–27; 1818, pp. 230–46. ⁵⁸'The Welsh word Mabinogion (in the singular Mabinogi) may be rendered by juvenilia, and signifies any thing that appertains to youth' (Pughe, 'Mabinogion', in Croker, *Fairy Legends*, p. 167). ⁵⁹Rees, *Essay on the Welsh Saints*, p. 80. ⁶⁰Schulz, *Influence of Welsh Tradition*, p. 71. ⁶¹Stephens, *Literature of the Kymry*, p. 411. ⁶²Huw Morus, *Eos Ceiriog, sef Casgliad o Bêr Ganiadau*, edited by Walter Davies, 2 vols (Wrexham, 1820–23), I, xxxv. Davies specified that the 'Mabinogion' poems were written 'cyn i'r Bardd gyrhaedd addfedwch pwyll' ('before the poet reached the age of sense'). I am grateful to Dylan Foster Evans for this reference. ⁶³Pryse, *Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymreig*, p. 281. ⁶⁴Rhys, *Lectures on Welsh Philology*, p. 145. ⁶⁵idem, *Text of the Mabinogion*, p. ix. ⁶⁶It was repeated by Joseph Loth in his 1889 *Mabinogion*, p. 8 and by Alfred Nutt in the notes to his 1902 edition of Charlotte Guest's translation of the tales, *The Mabinogion: Mediaeval Welsh Romances*, with notes by Alfred Nutt (London and New York, 1902).

Schultz posited that the Red Book of Hergest was 'a guide for the instruction of young bards',⁶⁷ while Eliezer Williams posited that the texts formed the basis of the second part of the education of more mature 'Druidical pupils', the first part being supplied by the 'Damhegion' (that is *Chwedlau Odo*, the Welsh translation of the fables of Odo of Cheritôn).⁶⁸ The idea that the stories were aimed at the young, either for instruction or entertainment, may have inspired Charlotte Guest to dedicate her volumes to her children. Publishers were quick to take advantage of the potential appeal of these stories to children. In 1881 the American poet Sidney Lanier produced the first edition of the *Mabinogion* specifically aimed at children by adapting Guest's English translation. It was published by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1881 as *The Boy's Mabinogion* and again in 1884 as *Knightly Legends of Wales*.⁶⁹ The first Welsh-language adaptation for children appeared in 1896 with J. T. Edwards's *Mabinogion (o Lyfr Coch Hergest)*, with illustrations by Eirian E. Francis. The industry of promoting the *Mabinogion* to children is still going strong in Wales, with new illustrated versions, colouring books, pantomimes, and other consumer goods aimed at the young being produced every year.

A related stream defined *mabinogion* as Welsh romance, without suggesting a derivation. Lewis Morris referred to the Four Branches as 'romance' and 'wild romance' in his 1764 description of them in BL Add. 14,924. Sharon Turner rendered *mabinogion* as 'old Welsh romances' in his 1803 *Vindication*.⁷⁰ Thomas Stephens referred to them as 'Kymric Romances',⁷¹ while David Nash defined them as 'fairy and romance tales of the Welsh'.⁷² Charlotte Guest used the introduction to her edition of the tales to make a case for the Celtic origin of romance, perhaps under the influence of William Owen Pughe who argued in the introduction to his *Dictionary* that these tales represent 'the origin of romance in Europe'.⁷³ The theory that European romance originated in Celtic tales was first put forth by Daniel Huet in his 1670 *Traité de l'origine des romans* and was later taken up by Evan Evans in his correspondence with Thomas Percy.⁷⁴ Iolo Morganwg

⁶⁷Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwg), *Iolo Manuscripts*, edited by Taliesin Williams (Llandovery, 1848), p. 356; Schulz, *Influence of Welsh Tradition*, p. 72. ⁶⁸Eliezer Williams, 'An Historical Essay on the Taste, Talents, and Literary Acquisitions of the Druids, and the Ancient Celtic Bards', *Cambrian Register*, 3 (1818), 87–113 (pp. 97–98). On Williams see Thompson Cooper, 'Williams, Eliezer (1754–1820)', revised by Dylan Foster Evans, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29502, accessed 20 Sept 2010]. ⁶⁹For a discussion of the *Mabinogion* in English-language children's literature see Donna R. White, *A Century of Welsh Myth in Children's Literature* (Westport, CN, 1998). ⁷⁰Turner, *Vindication*, p. 281. ⁷¹Stephens, *Literature of the Kymry*, p. 319. ⁷²Nash, *Taliesin*, p. 34. ⁷³Pughe, *Dictionary*, second edition, I, xiv. ⁷⁴For this correspondence see *The Percy Letters: The Correspondence of Thomas Percy and Evan Evans*,

apparently agreed, criticising Pughe for classifying the texts as 'Dramatic Tales' claiming 'If any epithet besides that of romantic be applied, let it be epic'.⁷⁵ For Isaac Foulkes, it was these very romantic qualities that made the texts so appealing to a young audience. He claimed, in his 1880 Welsh-language edition and modernization, that the texts were 'especially appropriate for reading in elementary and primary schools, and their wonder and adventure are bound to appeal to the young person's mind'.⁷⁶

In practice, there was little to choose between defining *mabinogion* as juvenilities and defining them as romances. In the eighteenth century, the word romance was commonly used to refer to medieval tales, especially those involving a high degree of fantasy.⁷⁷ From their first appearance in sumptuous manuscripts for fashionable noble men and women and the luxury printed editions that entertained their wealthy descendants, medieval romances had been gradually 'trunched down' in William St. Clair's phrase, that is, produced in a variety of cheaper formats to appeal to the pockets of less wealthy — and less sophisticated — readers until ceasing production altogether, and eventually becoming the object of academic study in the nineteenth century.⁷⁸ By the eighteenth century it was generally assumed that the primary audience for medieval romance was children, its purpose to teach moral lessons while engaging young minds by invoking the fantastic.⁷⁹ This does not mean it was believed that the texts were necessarily written for children, rather that stories written to entertain the more credulous audiences

edited by Aneirin Lewis ([Baton Rouge], 1957). On the eighteenth-century debate over the origin of Romance see Arthur Johnston, *Enchanted Ground: The Study of Medieval Romance in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1964). ⁷⁵For this note see Ffion Mair Jones, 'The Bard is a Very Singular Character': *Iolo Morganwg, Marginalia and Print Culture* (Cardiff, 2010), p. 122. ⁷⁶'Y maent yn odiaeth o gyfaddas i'w darllen mewn ysgolion elfennol a chanolradd, ac y mae'r swyn a'r antur sydd ynddynt yn rhwym o apelio at feddwl yr ieuanc' (*Y Mabinogion Cymreig: Sef Chwedlau Rhamantus yr Hen Gymry yn yr Hen Gymraeg a'r Gymraeg Bresennol*, edited by Isaac Foulkes (Liverpool, 1880), llyfbrwyf). This is the first Welsh-language edition of the texts. Foulkes goes on to claim that the tales also deserve a primary place in the Welsh education system 'because they are an integral part of our national endowment' ('yn rhan hanfodol o'n cynysgaeth fel cenedl'). ⁷⁷John M. Ganim, 'The Myth of Medieval Romance', in *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, edited by R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore and New York, 1996), pp. 148–68 (p. 149). ⁷⁸On the descent of medieval romance from fashionable reading material of the wealthy to stories fit for children see William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge, 2004), and Siân Echar, *Printing the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2008). ⁷⁹Margaret Kinnell, 'Early Texts used by Children', *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, edited by Peter Hunt and Sheila Ray (Routledge, 1996), pp. 141–51 (p. 142); F. T. Harvey Darton, *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life*, third edition (Cambridge, 1982), p. 39.

of the past would be fit only for the children of the present. Charlotte Guest in her dedication of the *Mabinogion* to her sons Ivor and Merthyr specifically presents the texts as instructional tales, hoping that through them the children might learn the virtues of chivalry and patriotism:

May you become early imbued with the chivalric and exalted sense of honour, and the fervent patriotism for which its sons have ever been celebrated. May you learn to emulate the noble qualities of Ivor Hael, and the firm attachment to your Native Country; which distinguished that Ivor Bach, after whom the elder of you was named.⁸⁰

While the term romance implied that the texts were medieval, it also implied that their primary audience would be young people.

A third stream saw the term *mabinogi* as meaning not stories for children but rather stories about children. This sense is reflected in Pughe's *Dictionary* definition, and is based on the apparent use of the term *mabinogi* to translate the Latin *infantia* ('childhood') in the medieval text *Mabinogi Iesu Grist* mentioned above. From 1809 the Calvinistic Methodist periodical *Y Drysorfa* carried a feature called 'Mabinogion' in each issue, containing stories about the virtuous lives and early deaths of pious children, such as 'Ychydig hanes am Susannah merch i Hugh a Sarah Jones o'r dref newydd, yn swydd drefaldwyn, yr hon a fu farw Mai 10, 1817, yn y 12fed flwyddyn o'i hoed' ('A short history of Susannah, daughter of Hugh and Sarah Jones of Newtown in Montgomeryshire, who died on May 10, 1817, at 12 years old').⁸¹ In the introduction his 1907 diplomatic edition of the White Book of Rhydderch, J. Gwenogvryn Evans suggested a derivation for *mabinogi* from *maban*, a diminutive of *mab*, and translated it as 'any narrative which treats of early life'.⁸² W. J. Gruffydd proposed a similar definition ('a tale of youth').⁸³ Gruffydd saw Pryderi as the hero of the Four Branches, and interpreted the texts as a late and garbled version of his *infantia*, although he was forced to re-write them substantially to make this theory work.

Eric Hamp proposed a similar theory for the nature of the texts. Based on a linguistic analysis Hamp claimed that *mabinogi* could not be a derivative of *mab* or *maban*, but rather that it had to be based on *maponos*, that is, the Celtic word for the holy son, a divine child character, who is mentioned in *Culhwch ac Olwen*.⁸⁴ In this theory, the texts as they stand are a confused late

⁸⁰Guest, *Mabinogion*, 1, dedication. ⁸¹*Y Drysorfa* (January, 1819), p. 26. For a treatment of these types of texts see Siwan Rosser, 'Thomas Jones, Dinbych, a'i Anrheg i Blentyn', *Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymdeithas Hanes y Methodistiaid Calfinaidd*, 32 (2008), 44–73. ⁸²*The White Book Mabinogion: Welsh Tales & Romances Reproduced from the Peniarth Manuscripts*, edited by J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Pwllheli, 1907), p. xxvi. ⁸³Gruffydd, 'The Mabinogion', p. 40. ⁸⁴'The real problem of course is that a truly old Welsh word with later Medieval *i* cannot appear

retelling, not of the story of Pryderi, but of the Celtic god Maponos, a character who is not even mentioned in the Four Branches. Hamp makes his case by appealing to historical linguistics and tracing *mabinogi* to its Old Welsh and Celtic roots. The problem with this theory is that it assumes that the word actually *has* Old Welsh and Celtic roots and thus is amenable to analysis using the sound-change laws deduced for those languages, rather than being a more recent or idiosyncratic coining. It assumes that the word makes sense linguistically and semantically, when all the evidence seems to suggest it does not. This theory has also been challenged on linguistic grounds,⁸⁵ but nevertheless it is still widely accepted today, perhaps because of the positivistic language employed.

A fourth tendency saw *mabinogi* as meaning simply a story or a specific type of story. A copy of the apocryphal text of the Gospel of Nicodemus (*Efengyl Nicodemus*) in the hand of Iolo Morganwg in NLW MS 13,141 (Llanover C.54) makes the claim that the title *Mabinogi Iesu Grist* can also refer to that text.⁸⁶ The claim is also made in this text that it has been translated from Latin into Welsh by Dafydd Fychan of Morganwg, presumably the same individual named as the Welsh translator of *Itinerarium Odorici*.⁸⁷ J. E. Caerwyn Williams classes this version of *Efengyl Nicodemus* as unique. This uniqueness may be due to the influence of Iolo Morganwg. The attribution of an otherwise unattributed text to a known Glamorgan translator looks like a typical Ioloish attempt to gain local kudos for a text; it may be that the appropriation of the otherwise-attested title *Mabinogi Iesu Grist* to refer to this text is also an innovation of Iolo's. Whatever the source of this claim, the sense of *mabinogi* here seems to be story rather than *infantia*, as the text does not treat Jesus's youthful exploits, but rather those of his afterlife, specifically the Harrowing of Hell. Thomas Price proposed a definition of 'hen draethodau ffugiol Cymraeg' ('old fictional Welsh tales').⁸⁸ Joseph Loth states that while *mabinogi* may be equivalent to the French *enfance* in the case of *Mabinogi Iesu Grist*, this is a late usage. In the case of the Four Branches, 'the *Mabinogi* represents a dedicated genre, a type of classic, admitting nothing but traditional material, long since fixed,

with *a* in the immediately preceding syllable A form such as *mabinogi* is *sensu stricto* quite unjustified phonologically in Welsh or in any British Celtic for that matter. We see that we cannot derive the *-i-* of such an isolated term directly from a Proto-Celtic **i*, i.e. an original IE **i* or **e*' (Hamp, 'Mabinogi and Archaism', p. 107). See also his 'Mabinogi'. ⁸⁵Paul Russell points out that the offending *-i-* could be orthographical. See his *Celtic Word Formation: The Velar Suffixes* (Dublin, 1990), p. 61. ⁸⁶J. E. Caerwyn Williams, 'Efengyl Nicodemus yn Gymraeg', *BBCS*, 14 (1950–52), 108–12. ⁸⁷*Ffordd y Brawd Odrig*, edited by Stephen J. Williams (Cardiff, 1929), p. 57. ⁸⁸Price, *Hanes Cymru*, p. 284.

at least in their major storylines'.⁸⁹ Ifor Williams proposed that the word *mabinogi* originally referred to the First Branch alone, and referred to a story about the youth of the hero (Pryderi), but later became generalized to mean 'a story of youth' and then simply 'a story'.⁹⁰

Other definitions and other derivations for *mabinogi* have also been put forward, some more far-fetched than others. John Lloyd-Jones proposed that the word had been borrowed from the epithet for the Irish hero Oengus 'mac ind óc', but did not offer an explanation of what such a word might mean.⁹¹ Timothy Lewis suggested that it was derived from the root *henog*, a form of (*r*)*hiniog* ('doorpost'), and proposed that it was an official title referring to a person. He conceived of the 'Henog' as a figurative doorpost, an upholder of the nation's history and traditions: 'Historian swyddogol Cymru Fu ydoedd yr Henog' ('the Henog was the official historian of the Wales in the past').⁹² Edward Davies defined *mabinogion* as 'institutional tales', presumably because they contain information necessary for the institutions of druidry and bardism.⁹³ This definition was endorsed by Taliesin Williams, who referred to Guest's edition and translation of the 'Mabinogion, or Institutional Tales' in his notes to the collection of Iolo Morganwg's texts published in the *Iolo Manuscripts*.

In reality there are problems with all proposed explanations of *mabinogi*. Analyses of the word based around *mab* require the texts to have some connection with boyhood, either being written for (a) boy(s), or about (a) boy(s), which do not seem to reflect the content of the texts, or which can be made to reflect them only by altering them radically, as per W. J. Gruffydd, or by proposing a radical shift in the meaning of the word itself, following Ifor Williams. Analyses which propose other root elements such as Hamp's require an even greater alteration in the contents, or imply a greater level of disconnection between the texts and their apparent title. Nevertheless, definitions not based on an analysis of the elements of the word such as those of Edward Davies, Thomas Price, and the 'Welsh romance' strain can never progress beyond being guesswork.

The variety of definitions and derivations proposed for *mabinogi* does not

⁸⁹...tandis que le *Mabinogi* représente un genre consacré, et en quelque sorte classique, dans lequel ne rentraient que des récits traditionnels, depuis longtemps fixes, au moins dans leur grandes lignes': Joseph Loth, *Contributions à l'étude des romans de la Table Ronde* (Paris, 1912), p. 31. ⁹⁰Williams, *Pedeir Keinc*, p. 1. ⁹¹John Lloyd-Jones, 'Mabinogi', *Y Beirniad*, 4 (1914), 106–11. This theory was supported by T. Gwynn Jones in his 'Bardism and Romance', *THSC*, 1913–14, pp. 205–310 (p. 284). ⁹²Timothy Lewis, *Mabinogi Cymru* (Aberystwyth, 1930), p. 18. He had originally mooted this theory in his *Beirdd a Bardd-Rin Cymru Fu* (Aberystwyth, 1929). ⁹³Edward 'Celtic' Davies, *Celtic Researches on the Origin, Traditions & Language of the Ancient Britons* (London, 1804), p. 175.

necessarily arise because the original, common meaning of the word *mabinogi* has been mislaid over time. Rather, it represents the variety of ways in which the word was used in the medieval period. As well as being used to refer to the Four Branches and the *infantia* of Jesus, it was also used to refer to other types of stories or lore. In the Third Branch reference to 'Mabinogi Mynweir a Mynord', it is not clear to what 'Mabinogi Mynweir a Mynord' refers. Ifor Williams took it to be an alternative title for the Third Branch.⁹⁴ This explanation is problematic because it implies that *mabinogi* can be used to refer to both the Four Branches as a whole, and to a single branch. But 'Mabinogi Mynweir a Mynord' could also refer to an episode or part of that tale.⁹⁵ If this is the case then we are left with a paradoxical conception of the nature of a *mabinogi*, as it seems possible to fit an entire *mabinogi* (that of the Collar and the Hammer) into a single branch of another *mabinogi*.

The use of the word in medieval poetry is also problematic. It was noted above that the form that appears in Prydydd y Moch's set of englynion to Llywelyn ap Iorwerth has been emended: the form that actually appears in the manuscript is 'mamynogi'. There is little to argue with the emendation, which was originally proposed by Ifor Williams.⁹⁶ Nevertheless it is strange that John Davies himself did not catch or note it. Davies was familiar with the Four Branches: he had used them as a source for his dictionary. He was also familiar with poetic device of *cymeriad* whereby a series of lines or stanzas begin with the same word or sounds, which would also argue for a form *mabinogi*.⁹⁷ But not only did Davies *not* emend 'mamynogi', he entered it into his *Dictionary*, although without offering a definition. The meaning of *mabinogi* in this poem is also difficult. The englyn containing the word begins 'Mabynogi draig, drud — yw i gymwyll'. The poem's modern editors have rendered this phrase in their rewording of the text as 'Hanes plentyndod ymladdwr, gwyh yw sôn amdano' ('the youthful exploits of a warrior, it is excellent to speak of him'),⁹⁸ taking *mabinogi* to mean 'youthful exploits', presumably based on context of the poem, the fact that the subject

⁹⁴Williams, *Pedeir Keinc*, pp. 248–49. ⁹⁵The question rests upon the exact meaning of 'cyfarwyddyd', which has itself been the subject of debate. For this debate see Brynley Roberts, 'Oral Tradition and Welsh Literature: A Description and Survey', *Oral Tradition*, 3 (1988), 61–87; Sioned Davies, 'Storytelling in Medieval Wales', *ibid.*, 7 (1992), 231–57. ⁹⁶Ifor Williams, 'Mabinogi', *Y Beirniad*, 7 (1917), 189–90. Gwynn Jones had proposed that 'mamynogi' was an attempt by the poet to analyse *mabinogi* as a compound of *mab* ('boy') and *mynogi* ('grandeur'). See his 'Bardism and Romance', p. 305. ⁹⁷He defines *cymeriad* in his *Dictionary* as *epanaphora*: *Antiquae Linguae Britannicae et Linguae Latinae Dictionarium Duplex* (London, 1632). ⁹⁸Gwaith Llywarch ap Llywelyn, p. 166.

seems to have been a young man, and the authority of the use of the word in *Mabinogi Iesu Grist* where it seems to mean something like 'boyhood deeds'. This usage itself is based on the presumption that *mabinogi* can be equated with *infantia* based on the contents of that text. Without that supporting text, such an interpretation would not necessarily have presented itself.

Lewys Glyn Cothi's use of *mabinogi* is similarly problematic. The poet describes his son as '[p]enâig mabinogi'.⁹⁹ If this is a similar case to Llywarch ap Llywelyn's usage, a meaning something like 'a chieftain of boyhood deeds' can be proposed. But once again this is based on context, the presumed age of the subject, and previous usage: it does not represent an independent example giving a concrete meaning to the word. The poem's editor proposes that the word may be being used in its 'original sense', that is, to mean *mebyd* ('boyhood'), giving an interpretation of something like 'a chieftain of boyhood' for this phrase, but he does not rule out the idea that the word is a reference to the Four Branches.¹⁰⁰ 'Childhood, youth' are two definitions provided for the word in the *Dictionary of the Welsh Language*, but it is not clear upon what authority: there are no instances of the word being used in this way in the dictionary entry. The possible range of meanings for *mabinogi* in Lewys Glyn Cothi's poem may have been intentional: it may reflect several accepted usages for the word. Or it may be a further indication that the word was unfamiliar, the poet uncertain of its correct usage, using it idiosyncratically, or referring to the texts known as *mabinogi*, which is of no help in trying to offer an interpretation of it. In both of these cases, the word *mabinogi* is used in such a way that a meaning can be provided for it based only on context and previous usage.

The uncertainty about this word extends to its usage too. Later scribes were unsure of its place in the sentence, and treated it in a variety of ways. In the early seventeenth century Thomas Evans of Hendreforfudd refers to the Four Branches as 'ystoria Pwyll a Mabinogion' ('the story of Pwyll and Mabinogion'), 'ystoria Bendigeidfran a Mabinogi' ('the story of Bendigeidfran and Mabinogi'), and so on.¹⁰¹ Edward Jones (Bardd y Brenin) in a list of manuscripts in his possession in 1788 includes a quarto manuscript containing 'Ystori Culhwch ... ac Olwen, ac ystori Mabinogi' ('the story of Culhwch ac Olwen and the story of Mabinogi').¹⁰² Angharad

⁹⁹Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi, pp. 512–13. ¹⁰⁰...mewn gwirionedd ystyr wreiddiol y gair oedd "mebyd": *Galar y Beirdd: Marwnadau Plant*, edited by Dafydd Johnston (Cardiff, 1993), p. 101. ¹⁰¹NLW MS 3043, p. 268. ¹⁰²NLW MS 172, p. 9. This is most likely a reference to NLW 42B, a manuscript in the hand of Richard Thomas (1753–80), curate of Llanegryn and Ruthun, containing 'Ystori Culhwch mab Celyddon Wledic' and the First Branch titled 'Llyma Ddechrau Mabinogi'. Both

Llwyd, as mentioned above, describes the contents of NLW 3043B as 'Tri Ystoria o Mabinogi' ('three stories of Mabinogi'). In the early nineteenth century Mair Richards of Darowen (1787–1877)¹⁰³ noted in the back cover of her notebook (now NLW Cwrtmawr 269) that she had copied the following words from the book of Sir Thomas Llwyd: 'E Mab Enogi a wnaeth dri ffug Lyfr Ynys Brydain' ('the boy Enogi made the three fictitious books of the Island of Britain').¹⁰⁴ Richards has analysed *mabinogi* as a person, the author of the three fictitious books of the Island of Britain. These are educated individuals well versed in their own literature, but none of them is sure how to treat the word or to what it properly refers: is it a person, a literary genre, a title?

The variety of definitions or translations proposed for the word *mabinogi* from the nineteenth century to the present day is not an accident. Rather it reflects the fact that there was no earlier definition or explanation forthcoming. Earlier lexicographers such as Thomas Wiliems of Trefriw, John Davies of Mallwyd, and Thomas Richards did not include entries for this word in their dictionaries. Edward Lhuyd had to admit defeat: 'Hoc vocabulum quid sibi velit, hodiè non constat' ('The meaning of this word is not well understood today').¹⁰⁵ If the meaning of the word was opaque to Edward Lhuyd, one must ask the question: was it ever well understood? Was it ever actually a viable word? Or was it simply an unsuccessfully coined term which had a limited usage before dropping out of use?

If poets such as Llywarch ap Llywelyn, scribes such as Hywel Fychan, and scholars such as John Davies of Mallwyd cannot be sure of the correct form and meaning of the word *mabinogi*, can anyone be sure? Is there a correct form and meaning?

CONCLUSIONS

The word *mabinogi* seems to have baffled scribes and scholars from its earliest recorded instances. The confusion over the proper form of the word in the White and the Red Books is matched by uncertainty about its correct

texts follow the versions found in the Red Book of Hergest, which had been kept at Jesus College, Oxford since 1701. Thomas may have copied the manuscript while he was a student there: 'Thomas, Richard', *Dictionary of Welsh Biography down to 1949*, pp. 961–62. ¹⁰³For Mair Richards see Sioned Davies, "'Far from the madding crowd": A Montgomeryshire Lady in London', *THSC*, new series, 13 (2007), 74–93, and references therein. ¹⁰⁴She describes Llwyd as the parson of Cemmaes and goes on to state that he was supposed to have lived about the year 1580, and that his book had been in the possession of Angharad Llwyd, although its present-day whereabouts are unknown. Mair Richards also quotes a manuscript of Sir Thomas Llwyd, 'Person Cemmes, Sir Drefaldwyn' as a source in NLW Cwrtmawr MS 276B. ¹⁰⁵Lhuyd, *Archaeologia*, p. 262.

referent and meaning in all medieval contexts. The uncertainty about the word seen in later ages is not necessarily due to distance in time; rather, it represents a continuous tradition from the fourteenth century to the present day. The history of the interpretation of *mabinogi* matters because this word has often been used in the past as a key to interpreting the texts, and the meanings proposed for it used to support readings of the Four Branches themselves. Thus Edward Davies's definition of *mabinogion* as 'Institutional Tales' props up his interpretation of the texts as mystical explications of the religion of the ancient Celts. Timothy Lewis's derivation of the word from *henog* supports his reading of the texts as historical documents on par with the Norse sagas. Eric Hamp's derivation of the word from 'maonos' underpins a conception of the texts as remnants of an ancient tale cycle dealing with the Celtic god 'Maonos'. W. J. Gruffydd's interpretation of *mabinogi* as a tale of youth buoys up a complete re-imagination of the texts, replacing Matthew Arnold's 'peasant's hut' with a development of off-plan luxury flats. In each case the interpretation of *mabinogi* has conveniently fallen into place with a theory about the nature of the texts, or has suggested that theory. And in each case the texts must be twisted out of all recognition, taken out of their known context, time-warped back to ancient civilisations, to support these interpretations.

The point of this history of confusion has not been to criticise scholars' usage and interpretation of the word *mabinogi*. Rather, it is a warning about the pitfalls of making positivistic statements about the form, referent, and meaning of this term. It is also an argument in favour of a wider usage which better reflects the historic treatment of the word. Charlotte Guest and her contemporaries were not necessarily misguided. By the nineteenth century, it was generally agreed (if not actually stated) that there was a category of prose texts, mostly medieval, sufficiently concrete to require a specific name. Far from introducing or spreading error about its correct usage, Guest's use of the word *mabinogion* to refer to her collection of Welsh prose tales is eminently sensible. It reflects earlier and contemporary tradition, and there is no evidence that it is incorrect. In 1815 Walter Davies was called upon to catalogue for sale a manuscript of John Jones of Gellilyfdy (NLW 19,900, mentioned above). He called that manuscript 'Mabinogion, or Juvenile Tales'. Some two hundred years earlier Jones had also given his compilation a name, in his usual fashion. He called it 'Llyfr Sion ap Wiliam ap Sion o hen storïae' ('John ap William ap John's book of old stories'). Old

stories, romances, juvenile tales, *mabinogion*: there is very little to choose between any of these terms, and it is unlikely that a new or more subtle interpretation of the form, etymology, and meaning of the word *mabinogi* will prove the skeleton key to unlock the secret of the Four Branches.¹⁰⁶

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