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A Charming Guest: Translating the *Mabinogion*¹

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Introduction

In 1916, Sir T. H. Parry-Williams adjudicated a competition at the National Eisteddfod in Aberystwyth in which the challenge was to translate Catullus from Latin into Welsh. As a preface to his adjudication, he outlines his translation theory:

Beth bynnag a ddywedir am ddoethineb cyfieithu barddoniaeth, gwaith anodd ydyw. Y mae gan bawb ei syniad am gyfieithu – rhai yn credu mewn bod dipyn yn hy, eraill yn dal mai glyn y dyn wrth y gwreiddiol sy'n iawn, serch i'r cyfieithiad fod yn afrosgo a garw. Ond, yn sicr, y gamp yw gallu trosi'r meddwl yn hollol onest a chlir a chyfan o un iaith i'r llall, heb i'r neb a'i darlleno feddwl am foment mai cyfieithiad ydyw.²

Whatever is said regarding the wisdom of translating poetry, it is difficult work. Everyone has his own idea about translation – some believe in being rather daring, others maintain that adhering firmly to the original is right, though the translation be clumsy and crude. But, certainly, the feat is to be able to transfer the meaning quite honestly, clearly and completely from one language to the other, so that no one who reads it thinks for a moment that it is a translation.

Throughout his life (1887–1975) Parry-Williams was involved in translation, mainly for the Eisteddfod – words of songs and oratorios, over one hundred in all, and from various languages. In 1921, however, he ventured into the world of prose and translated *Ystoriau Bohemia* (Stories of Bohemia) from a German translation, into Welsh. In his preface he tells us:

Ni chymerodd y cyfieithydd ei ryddid, ond glynodd yn weddol glos wrth ieithwedd y cyfieithiad Almaeneg. Ni adodd allan bethau y gallesid yn hawdd eu hepgor mewn cyfieithiad Cymraeg heb niweidio'r ystori, ond dododd bopeth i mewn yn ei grynsyth. Effaith y ffyddlondeb hwn ydyw bod y cyfieithiad yn aml iawn yn bur anystwyth a thywyll, fel y gwêl y darllenydd. Nid anturiwyd ychwaith gyfieithu i iaith lafar unrhyw

¹ An earlier version of this article formed part of the T. H. Parry-Williams Memorial Lecture, delivered in Aberystwyth, 1999.

² T. H. Parry-Williams, 'Beirniadaeth ar gyfieithu

Caneuon Catullus o'r Lladin i'r Gymraeg' in *Cofnodion a Chyfansoddiadau Eisteddfod Genedlaethol 1916* (Cymdeithas yr Eisteddfod Genedlaethol, 1916), 61–3 (61).

ranbarth arbennig o Gymru. Effaith hyn eto ydyw'r anystwythter a deimlir yn yr ymddiddanion. Ni newidiwyd enwau priod am rai Cymreig neu Gymraeg rhag andwyo'r awyrgylch.³

The translator did not take liberties, but adhered fairly closely to the idiom of the German translation. He did not leave out things which could easily have been omitted in a Welsh translation without damaging the story, but included everything in its entirety. The result of this fidelity is that the translation is very often quite rigid and obscure, as the reader will see. Neither was an attempt made to translate into the dialect of any particular region of Wales. The effect of this again is the rigidity felt in the dialogues. Proper names were not changed for Welsh ones for fear of spoiling the atmosphere.

Hardly an incitement to read on! Unfortunately, Parry-Williams offers no explanation at all for his decisions, which seem at odds with his comments in the 1916 adjudication. In 1937, he published a 'modernized' version of the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, in modern orthography, and also modernized the vocabulary. In this he faced problems similar to those of a translator, as he outlines in his introduction:

Yr anhawster mawr . . . ydyw bod yn gyson (heb sôn am ryngu bodd i bawb) a gwybod pa bryd i ymatal cyn colli blas a sawyr y gwreiddiol . . . Gellid diweddarau llawer mwy, o ran hynny, ond y perygl fuasai dileu gormod o awyrgylch y testun gwreiddiol.⁴

The great difficulty . . . is to be consistent (let alone try to please everyone) and to know when to stop before losing the taste and flavour of the original . . . One could modernize much more, if it came to that, but the danger would be to remove too much of the atmosphere of the original text.

Parry-Williams was born in 1887, when Charlotte Guest was 75 years old. He actually wrote a few lines about her for he is the author of the extract in the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* which tells us that she translated and edited *The Mabinogion*, with the comment: 'In this work she was aided by Thomas Price (Carnhuanawc), John Jones (Tegid) and others'.⁵ It would seem that Parry-Williams, like other male Welsh scholars of his time, had doubts regarding Lady Charlotte Guest's claim to be the sole translator of *The Mabinogion*.

Who was Lady Charlotte Guest?

In a fascinating biography, Angela John and Revel Guest explore the life of this most extraordinary woman whose life spanned the nineteenth century, from 1812 to 1895.⁶ Charlotte Guest grew up at Uffington House near Stamford, Lincolnshire. Her father, the ninth earl of Lindsey, was 68 when she was born, and died when she was 6 years old. This

had a profound effect on the young child, especially since her mother remarried a cousin, the Reverend Peter Pegus, a seemingly difficult character who was rather fond of his drink. Lady Charlotte spent a miserable childhood, and as a refuge turned to books and languages, confessing in her journal: 'I have affection for certain books and certain copies stronger than for any human beings'.⁷ She learned French and Italian, and studied Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Persian; Charles Kingsley, author of *The Water Babies*, taught her how to etch. In 1833, when she was 21 years old, she married the widower Josiah John Guest (who was more than twice her age), owner of the Dowlais Iron Company.⁸ As noted by Guest and John, it was an unconventional marriage – he was a dissenter and 'in trade' in Wales while she was of the best blood in England!⁹ Having settled at Dowlais, she set about learning literary Welsh, taking lessons from the local rector, Mr Evan Jenkins, a mere eight days after her arrival at Dowlais. She quickly came into contact with the local gentry, people such as Sir Benjamin and Lady Hall of Llanover, and Sir Richard Bosanquet of Dingestow Court while at the same time she mixed with Welsh literary figures of the period – Thomas Price (Carnhuanawc), John Jones (Tegid), Gwallter Mechain and Taliesin Williams (Iolo Morganwg's son).

During her nineteen-year marriage to John Guest, Lady Charlotte not only gave birth to ten children, and translated *The Mabinogion*, but also took a very active part in her husband's affairs at the iron works, taking over completely and running the works after his death. She also helped him promote schools for the education of the working classes in the Dowlais area (for both male and female pupils). Indeed, it has been claimed that the Guest schools 'were the most progressive in the industrial history not only of south Wales, but of the whole of Britain during the nineteenth century'.¹⁰ The first school was opened in 1828 with 110 pupils but by 1892, 2,492 pupils were being educated in the area (excluding evening schools). Indeed, it was Lady Guest who promoted the enlargement of the schools, and created a more liberal and balanced curriculum.¹¹

In 1855, three years after Sir John Guest's death, Lady Charlotte caused rather a scandal by marrying a man much younger than herself, namely Charles Schreiber, her eldest son's tutor. Then began a new phase in her life. She left Dowlais and the iron works, made her home in London and with her new husband travelled the Continent, collecting eighteenth-century ceramics, together with fans and playing cards, as witnessed today in the prestigious Schreiber Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

The reason why so much is known about Lady Charlotte Guest is that she kept a detailed journal for almost seventy years, from 1822 to 1891 (thirty-one volumes in all).¹² It would seem that she first turned to journal writing as a result of her misery in childhood and adolescence – she could pour out her grief to her journal and it served as an outlet for her frustrations.¹³ Throughout her long life her journal entries give a fascinating insight into the world of the nineteenth century, from Uffington to Dowlais, from Grosvenor Square to Milan. And interwoven with the descriptions of balls at Buckingham Palace and

⁷ Ibid., 7–8.

⁸ Lady Charlotte always refers to her husband by his nickname – 'Merthyr' (he was Merthyr Tydfil's first MP).

⁹ Guest and John, *Lady Charlotte*, 20.

¹⁰ Leslie Wynne Evans, *Education in Industrial Wales, 1700–1900* (Cardiff, 1971), 95.

¹¹ See Guest and John, *Lady Charlotte*, 62–74.

¹² The journals are currently on loan to the

National Library of Wales. Extracts have been edited by the earl of Bessborough, *Lady Charlotte Guest: Extracts from her journal 1833–1852* (London, 1950), and *Lady Charlotte Schreiber: Extracts from her journal 1853–1891* (London, 1952). See also D. Rhys Phillips, *Lady Charlotte Guest and the Mabinogion* (Cardiff, 1921). All extracts in this article are taken directly from her journals, unless otherwise noted.

¹³ Guest and John, *Lady Charlotte*, pp. xvii–xviii.

³ T. H. Parry-Williams, *Ystorïau Bohemia* (Cardiff, 1922), p. xi.

⁴ T. H. Parry-Williams, *Pedair Cainc y Mabinogi* (Cardiff, 1937), 9.

⁵ *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography down to 1940*, ed. John Edward Lloyd and R. T. Jenkins (London, 1959), 322.

⁶ Revel Guest and Angela V. John, *Lady Charlotte: A Biography of the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1989). I am greatly indebted to their work for details regarding Charlotte Guest's life, and in particular to Angela John for comments and insights.

riots at Merthyr are the tensions, the questions, the doubts and the joys of an extraordinary woman.

Why Translate The Mabinogion?¹⁴

Sherry Simon in her *Gender in Translation* emphasizes that 'the intentions of translation can never be understood in isolation, but always in relation to a social, political or intellectual framework ... Translation belongs to a world of roles, values and ideas'.¹⁵ Charlotte Guest's *Mabinogion* was certainly of its period.¹⁶ With the Romantic Revival of the eighteenth century, and the rediscovery of medieval literature, the intellectual scene was ripe for such a translation, especially since it included Arthurian material. In 1817, Robert Southey had published his manuscript (with Longmans) of Malory's *Morte Darthur*, based on the Caxton publication of 1485, in two deluxe volumes. By the mid-nineteenth century, King Arthur had returned with a vengeance, as it were, and his legend had been revived, or rather reinvented, through Victorian eyes.¹⁷ Writers – and artists too – projected their own ideals and values onto the legendary characters and events so that the chivalric past became a vehicle for educating the present, as reflected in the works of Walter Scott and Tennyson. Romances were seen as a pattern for behaviour, compare the way in which ancient Irish heroes were portrayed 'in a manner that would be inspirational for contemporary readers'.¹⁸ Arthur himself became a symbol of chivalry and of monarchy; English gentlemen saw themselves as medieval knights; 'medieval' balls were held and portraits in costume and in armour became the vogue;¹⁹ and chivalry, honour and bravery were promoted as an ideal for manhood.²⁰

But Charlotte Guest had another reason for wishing to translate these medieval Welsh tales into English. In their discussion of post-colonial translation, Bassnett and Trivedi argue that Edward Lane, in his translation of *The Thousand and One Nights* (1859), and Edward Fitzgerald, in his nineteenth-century translation of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (1899) both saw themselves as belonging to superior cultures – translation was a means of

¹⁴ It should be noted that *The Mabinogion* was not Lady Charlotte's first attempt at translating. *The Western Mail* (29 September 1891) tells us that her first literary effort was a translation of M. Dufresnoy's French work, 'On the Use of Hot Air in the Ironworks of England and Scotland'. This publication appeared in 1836, and the illustrations which accompanied it were etched by the translator. It was in fact a pamphlet, the original having been written by the French Minister of Mines (Guest and John, *Lady Charlotte*, 125). Note that Guest's translation was published anonymously.

¹⁵ Sherry Simon, *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* (London, 1996), 83.

¹⁶ The translation first appeared in seven parts, between 1838 and 1845 (London). It was then published in three volumes, *The Mabinogion from the Llyfr Coch o Hergest, and other ancient Welsh manuscripts with an English translation and notes* (London and Llandoverly, 1849). All references will be to the 1849 edn.

¹⁷ See, for example, Debra N. Mancoff, *The Return*

of *King Arthur: The Legend through Victorian Eyes* (London, 1995).

¹⁸ Michael Cronin, *Translating Ireland: Translation, Languages, Cultures* (Cork, 1996), 152.

¹⁹ See, for example, the portrait of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at the Bal Costumé of 12 May 1842, by Edwin Landseer (in Mancoff, *Return of King Arthur*, 44). Note that Charlotte Guest herself attended balls at the palace of Queen Victoria and even considered entering the Queen's service at one stage (13 May 1840): 'I have had rather a fancy to be about the Queen' (Bessborough, *Lady Charlotte Guest* (1950), 111).

²⁰ Note that Charlotte Guest dedicates her translation to two of her sons, not daughters, hoping that they will become 'early imbued' with a 'chivalric and exalted sense of honour' and 'fervent patriotism'. Compare the dedication of the 1948 translation of *The Mabinogion* (London) by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones: 'It seems to either translator that without the encouragement and furtherance of his wife this work could hardly have been carried through amid the duties and distractions of four troubled years'.

asserting the supremacy of the dominant European culture.²¹ The reverse was true in Guest's case. Her aim was to reveal to the English speaking world the supremacy of the 'ancient' Celtic literature, of the 'venerable relics of ancient lore'.²² She argues in her journal:

Why should we disregard our own traditions ... because they have not been handed down in Greek or Latin? For my own part, I love the old Legends and Romances as they teach us so naturally the manners and opinions of those who were, in fact, much more nearly connected with us of the present day than were any of the heroes of Rome.²³

In her opinion, Welsh literature had an intrinsic worth, and the tales of the *Mabinogion* deserved a place in European literature; indeed, Guest argued that 'the Cymric nation ... has strong claims to be considered the cradle of European Romance'.²⁴ Similar views are expressed by nineteenth-century translators from Irish into English, as outlined by Cronin who argues that 'translation relationships between minority and majority languages are rarely divorced from issues of power and identity'. He continues: 'The differing perceptions of the translator, as a field-worker in the scholarly dig of antiquarianism or as the champion of an imperilled culture, have profound implications for the political appropriation of translated literature in the nineteenth century'.²⁵ In Wales, as in Ireland, associations emerged to promote scholarship in the language – ancient texts were resurrected from manuscripts and translated to show the 'colonizers' that the 'colonized' were civilized and in possession of a noble literary heritage. Indeed, Cronin argues that

many translators in Ireland in the nineteenth century did not see their translations as independent of political and cultural rivalry with Britain. They were somewhat similar to translators in English in the seventeenth century who saw their translations in a competitive light, measuring their excellence against contemporary productions in French.²⁶

What is interesting in the case of Lady Guest, however, is that ironically she was an outsider to Wales, a true 'guest' in a foreign country.

It is certainly no exaggeration to claim that, as a direct result of Guest's translation, medieval Welsh literature was placed on the European stage. Continental scholars became interested in the relationship between the 'romances' and the French metrical romances, and the texts were translated into both French²⁷ and German.²⁸ Campbell compared the Welsh tales with those he had collected in the West Highlands,²⁹ while Alfred Nutt pointed out resemblance between Branwen and the Nibelung and Gudrun sagas.³⁰ Her translation, too, had a direct effect on the literature of the target language, for in 1858 Tennyson founded his poem 'Geraint and Enid' in his *Idylls of the King* on her translation of *Geraint*. Charlotte Guest's journal bears witness to this (17 April 1857): 'Last

²¹ Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (eds), *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London, 1999), 6.

²² See Guest's dedication.

²³ Guest and John, *Lady Charlotte*, 101.

²⁴ Charlotte Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. xxiii.

²⁵ Michael Cronin, *Translating Ireland*, 4.

²⁶ Ibid., 103–4.

²⁷ See Villmarqué (1842) and Joseph Loth (1889).

²⁸ By Albert Schulz (1841).

²⁹ J. F. Campbell, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* (Edinburgh, 1862), p. iv.

³⁰ *The Mabinogion* (London 1902), trans. Charlotte Guest, notes by Alfred Nutt, 325.

Sunday we all went to Little Holland House to meet Tennyson the poet. We were introduced and had a long and interesting talk. He told me that his new unpublished poem was founded on my Mabinogion Geraint and Enid.³¹ The translation also stimulated further scholarship on Celtic literature, such as Ernest Renan's *Essai sur la Poésie des Races Celtiques* (1854) – the first attempt at any kind of comparative study of the Celtic literatures – and Matthew Arnold's *Lectures upon the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867).³² Furthermore, a diplomatic edition of the Red Book text was issued in 1887.³³ So the tales of the *Mabinogion* were given a prestige far beyond that which they might have achieved had they remained in the Welsh language alone, lending support to Lefevere's argument that, 'rewritten texts can be as important for the reception and canonization of a work of literature as its actual writing'.³⁴

*Charlotte Guest as Translatress (1638), Translatrix (1892): A Female Translator*³⁵

18 January, 1838:

After dinner I worked at my translation and finished all that I had received from Tegid. . . went to bed and slept soundly till near two o'clock when I woke and 40 minutes from which time, and long before Mr ? could arrive, I was confined of my fourth child, I may almost say without pain. In the three former cases I have always been very fortunate in this aspect and have gone through very little, but on this occasion my suffering was so very slight that it seemed to me perfectly miraculous. To my great delight the dear little baby is a boy so Ivor will now have a brother to sell the iron for him as fast as he makes it. My room was rather a scene of confusion for the poor nurse who came to attend me was very ill and obliged to go to bed herself and leave me to the servants as soon as the event was over. By 5 o'clock I had the room quiet however and I then went to sleep and finished my nights rest as well as if nothing had happened.

Five days later she was back at work: 'I got permission to set to work with my dictionaries on a fresh sheet of the Mabinogion which I finished'. Indeed, giving birth was 'an almost annual interruption to Lady Charlotte's work':³⁶

March 28, 1839 (Grosvenor Square):

I was all day quite well but woke about 3 o'clock the next morning (Good Friday) in a little pain. And within half an hour had the pleasure of giving birth to my fifth child and third boy, with less suffering than I believed possible . . . This baby was born some little while before Dr Locock arrived, and when they were all quiet I went to sleep again . . .

Lady Charlotte gave birth to ten children in thirteen years, and records the births in her journal. One could agree with Guest and John that

the consciously matter-of-fact descriptions of childbirth as one more facet of a busy and literally productive life perhaps also suggest a hint of bravado, as if she were trying to convince herself (let alone any possible reader) of the ease with which she took to motherhood and its reconciliation with her other roles.³⁷

The journal certainly shows the tension between her desire to be a dutiful wife and mother on the one hand, 'the angel in the house',³⁸ and yet to succeed as an independent, creative individual on the other. Such inner turmoil is reflected in the writings of many a woman of this period as noted, for example, by Deirdre David who argues that the writings of women like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot and Harriet Martineau 'never cease to betray a conflict between female intellectual ambition and dominant Victorian prescriptions for woman's role and function, prescriptions which . . . dictated that female intellect should be placed in the service of male-dominated systems of discourse'.³⁹ When Charlotte Guest completed the translation on 9 March 1843, she heaves a sigh of relief:

I have to-day completed all that is in my power to do towards the Mabinogion. It is a vast weight off my mind . . . And now that my dear seven babies are growing up and require so much of my time and attention, it is quite right that I should have done with authorship. I am quite content with what will have been done when the present work is concluded, and I am sure, if a woman is to do her duty as a wife and mother, that the less she meddles with pen and ink the better.

Robert Southey would certainly have agreed with her, as evidenced by his remarks to Charlotte Brontë in March 1837:

Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation. To those duties you have not yet been called, and when you are you will be less eager for celebrity.⁴⁰

Guest fortunately, like Brontë, defied such patriarchal injunctions against female authorship, and entered a man's world, for writing – and translating – was a man's domain. Coincidentally, Ireland, in 1798, had seen the first substantial body of widely available translated work, namely verse translated from Irish by a woman translator, another Charlotte.⁴¹ Charlotte Brooke, like Charlotte Guest, is conscious of her entry into a domain that had been an exclusively male preserve and compares herself unfavourably to O'Connor, O'Halloran and Vallancey, the antiquarians who helped her in her work, claiming 'My comparatively feeble hand aspires only (like the ladies of ancient Rome) to strew flowers in the paths of these laurelled champions of my country', and drawing attention to the difficulty of 'translating herself into a traditionally male role'.⁴² Even so, women translators had been at work in England in the Middle Ages,⁴³ although it was in the period of the Renaissance that their voice came to be heard clearly, when the world

³¹ Bessborough, *Lady Charlotte Guest* (1952), 68.

³² See Rachel Bromwich, 'The Mabinogion and Lady Charlotte Guest', *THSC* (1986), 127–41 (141).

³³ John Rhys and J. Gwenogvryn Evans (eds), *The Text of the Mabinogion and other Welsh Tales from the Red Book of Hergest* (Oxford, 1887).

³⁴ André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (London, 1992), back cover.

³⁵ See the *Oxford Historical Dictionary*.

³⁶ Bessborough, *Lady Charlotte Guest* (1950), 87.

³⁷ Guest and John, *Lady Charlotte*, 34.
³⁸ See Coventry Patmore's poem, which describes the ideal Victorian wife in *The Angel in the House* together with *The Victories of Love*, intro. Alice Meynell (London, 1908; first published 1903).

³⁹ Deirdre David, *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy* (New York, 1987), p. viii.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (London, 1908), 102–3.

⁴¹ Charlotte Brooke (trans.), *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (Dublin, 1789).

⁴² See Cronin, *Translating Ireland*, 99–100.

⁴³ A. Barratt, *Women's Writing in Middle English* (New York, 1992), 13.

of letters was otherwise closed to them. As noted by Simon, 'translation offered women an involvement in literary culture . . . that did not directly challenge male control of that culture. It provided a camouflage for involvement in text production and an opportunity for some degree of creativity.'⁴⁴ Indeed, translations, like women, have been traditionally regarded as inferior – one could argue, therefore, that a woman translator is doubly inferior.⁴⁵ This belief in the intrinsic inferiority of the female is probably one reason why so many later male critics have been very suspicious of the extent of Guest's knowledge of Welsh, and hence her claim to be the sole translator of *The Mabinogion*.⁴⁶

The text that Lady Charlotte chose to translate appealed to her for several reasons, as we have already seen. However, as a woman, the very act of translating meant that she could distance herself, albeit for short periods of time, from her husband's control – she could seek refuge in her library and her books, and enter into the male-dominated literary world of nineteenth-century Wales. Also, by choosing to translate a text far removed chronologically from her own time, she could transpose herself into the remote past, into the romance world of *The Lady of the Fountain*. Indeed, both worlds seem to merge at times, as reflected in her journal entry for September 1838: while in Milan, attending the Coronation ceremonies of the Emperor Ferdinand I, she remarks

At night we went to a Ball at Court . . . All the tables presented a beautiful appearance . . . I know that the brilliancy of these tables put me in mind of that at which Owain was entertained in the Castle of the Yellow Man. Only that there 'as ariant oedd y bwodd' [sic], which certainly beat the Emperor, for although covered with linen as fine as that which Owain describes, yet I rather doubt whether the table was of silver. We were all to be presented to the Empress.⁴⁷

She obviously felt particularly attracted to the female characters in the medieval Welsh tales – one of her daughters she named Enid,⁴⁸ the other Constance Rhiannon. And in those two characters we see reflected yet again Guest's inner struggle: Enid, 'an ancient role model for the ideal Victorian wife',⁴⁹ who sacrifices for the sake of her husband's trust, and loves, honours and obeys him, without question; Rhiannon, an independent and strong individual who, like Guest herself, refuses to marry her parents' choice of husband. Whether Guest translated her source language text as a woman remains to be seen.

Guest's Theory of Translation

Translating, like editing, is a manipulatory process – the translator decodes and recodes. As emphasized by Susan Bassnett-McGuire, the translator is doing more than the reader of the source language text alone – he/she is approaching the text through more than one set of systems.⁵⁰ Also, of course, when a text belongs to a cultural system distanced in time

⁴⁴ Sherry Simon, *Gender in Translation*, 45–6.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of critiques of Guest's translation, see Sioned Davies, 'Cyfieithu'r Mabinogion', in J. E. C. Williams (ed.), *Ysgrifau Beirniadol XXIII* (Denbigh, 1997), 16–30.

⁴⁷ Bessborough, *Lady Charlotte Guest* (1950), 80.

⁴⁸ See the journal entry for 22 July 1843: 'Enid is such a favourite character with the elder children (as well as with myself) that they begged hard that she might be called so'.

⁴⁹ Mancoff, *Return of King Arthur*, 82.

⁵⁰ See Susan Bassnett-McGuire, *Translation Studies* (revised edn, London, 1991). First published 1980.

from our own, there are further complications, for example the significance of the text and its context is often unknown, without research, while etymological expertise is also needed. The interlingual translation is, therefore, bound to reflect the translator's own interpretation of the source language text, determined largely by the concept of the function both of the translation and of the original text.⁵¹ Indeed, one could argue that there is no single right way of translating a text.

Unfortunately, Charlotte Guest has very little to say, either in her preface or in her journals, regarding her own theory of translation. She does note, on 7 February 1838, that Mr Price (Carnhuanawc) visited:

He arrived by the Mail . . . We had a great deal of conversation and after dinner we polished my Translation slightly for the Press. But being willing to keep very rigidly to the original very little alternation could be made in my version which will I fear appear rather clumsy English.

As regards the function of the translation, many have taken it for granted that Guest was translating largely for the benefit of her children: she dedicated the work to her two eldest sons, hoping they would emulate the qualities found therein; her journal refers to reading the tales aloud to the children;⁵² she omits certain passages which she probably felt to be too indelicate for a young audience.⁵³ However, as argued by White,⁵⁴ the first edition is a huge bilingual multivolume work with detailed scholarly notes. Guest presents the first part of her *Mabinogion* to 'the Public', while in the preface to her second edition she notes how 'my "Mabinogion" have found their way into the hands of the learned both among ourselves and on the Continent'. Indeed, the reason for publishing this second edition is to target a new and not so learned audience – the publication of the 'Idylls of the Kings', and among them 'Enid', 'has interested a much wider circle of readers . . . and there has arisen a demand for a new and more popular edition of my work'.⁵⁵ The Welsh text is omitted, as are Welsh quotations in notes, and the French 'Chevalier au Lion', while notes relating to versions of the tales in other European languages have been condensed. In other words, the text became appropriated by the culture of the target language. There is no evidence, therefore, that she intended the translation to be read primarily as stories for children. Certainly, she read the tales out aloud to them, but she would also read out Chaucer and Shakespeare; her omission of certain indelicate passages were as much to do with the notion of Victorian decorum as anything. The idea that the tales were for children originated with William Owen-Pughe who defines *Mabinogion* as 'Juvenile Romances' in his *Dictionary*.⁵⁶ But nowhere does Charlotte Guest reiterate this definition.

Guest was not, of course, the first to make an attempt at translating tales from the *Mabinogion*. In 1802, a translation of part of the first branch had been included in Edward Jones's *The Bardic Museum* – the translator is anonymous. William Owen-Pughe published a translation of *Pwyll* in *The Cambrian Register* (1796, 1799 and 1818) and in *The*

⁵¹ For example, a line by line crib for students will differ greatly from a translation aimed at children.

⁵² See, for example, the journal entry for 18 February 1843, and 3 February 1844.

⁵³ For example, the bedroom scene between Pwyll and Arawn's wife in the First Branch of the *Mabinogi*.

⁵⁴ Donna R. White, 'The crimes of Lady Charlotte

Guest', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium XV* (1995), 242–9 (245).

⁵⁵ Charlotte Guest, *The Mabinogion* (London, 1877), preface to this 2nd and highly condensed edn.

⁵⁶ See Rachel Bromwich, 'The Mabinogion and Lady Charlotte Guest', 131.

Cambro-Briton (1821),⁵⁷ while he published a translation of *Math* in *The Cambrian Quarterly Magazine* in 1829. His intention was to publish all eleven tales that are known today as *The Mabinogion* – indeed, he was the one who first used this collective title and popularized it among his English friends. The work was actually finished in manuscript form, three hours before the end of the century!⁵⁸ But sadly, William Owen-Pughe was side-tracked, and died in 1835, before the work could be published. Three years later Charlotte Guest published the first of seven instalments which were to contain her *Mabinogion*. Then in 1849 they were all published (by Rees of Llandovery and by Longmans) in three luxurious volumes. They included the texts and translations of the eleven tales, together with the tale of Taliesin, notes and variant versions in other languages of the three Arthurian romances, either in full or summary, illustrations and facsimiles from the Red Book and from manuscripts of other versions. Not only was this a translation, therefore, but until 1887 with the publication of a diplomatic text of *The Mabinogion from the Red Book of Hergest* edited by Rhys and Evans, her Welsh-language text was the only complete text in print. As emphasized by one of her earliest reviewers: 'The present collection of the *Mabinogion* is undoubtedly an acquisition to English literature, but to the Welsh the gift has been most valuable.'⁵⁹

The Critics

Guest's translation was certainly well received. Tennyson told her that her style was 'the finest English he knew, ranking with Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*'.⁶⁰ Sidney Lanier was so impressed that in 1881 he published *The Boy's Mabinogion*, a re-edition of these 'curious old products of Welsh fancy', so that boys could identify with the young boy knight and his rise to fame.⁶¹ He adds:

Though not so rich as the *Arabian Nights*, they are more vigorous, and their fascination is of a more manful quality. Moreover, they are in comparison open-air tales, and do not move in that close, and, if one could think such a thing, gas-poisoned, temperature which often renders the atmosphere of the Eastern tales extremely unwholesome.

Lanier twice uses the word 'charm' in connection with the *Mabinogion*, referring to 'the intrinsic charm of the stories themselves' (p. iv), and the 'charm' of the book, which presumably refers to Guest's translation (p. xix). Indeed, this is the word most often associated with her work. In 1867, Matthew Arnold had referred to the work as 'that charming collection',⁶² while Nutt, in 1902, recognizes 'the charm and splendour of

⁵⁷ For a discussion, see Arthur Johnston, 'William Owen-Pughe and the Mabinogion', *National Library of Wales Journal*, X (1957–8), 323–8, and Sioned Davies, 'Cyfieithu'r Mabinogion', 16–17. For a full discussion of the life and works of William Owen-Pughe, see Glenda Carr, *William Owen Pughe* (Cardiff, 1983).

⁵⁸ NLW 13244B, p.117. Indeed, Pughe's translations are stacked in a box, all neat and tidy, ready for the press.

⁵⁹ George Clark, *The Monthly Review* (1843), 467.

⁶⁰ Bessborough, *Lady Charlotte Guest* (1952), 111.

⁶¹ *The Boy's Mabinogion being The Earliest Welsh Tales*

of King Arthur in the famous Red Book of Hergest, edited for boys with an introduction by Sidney Lanier (London, 1881). The Arthurian legend certainly played a distinctive role in the construct of Victorian childhood, and clubs for boys such as the Boys' Brigade (1883) and the Boy Scouts (1900) helped to promote these ideals. See, for example, Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven, 1981).

⁶² See Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature and Other Essays*, intro. Ernest Rhys (London, 1976; first published 1910), 49.

her translation'.⁶³ Owen Edwards is a little more critical of 'the charming translation that has become a classic of the English language', saying that 'her transcript of the Red Book of Hergest was not perfect, she found the meaning of many a Welsh phrase obscure, but her rendering is generally very accurate'.⁶⁴ T. P. Ellis and John Lloyd, translators of the 1929 edition of *The Mabinogion*, refer to the 'charm and literary qualities' of Guest's translation,⁶⁵ while to Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, translators of the classic Everyman edition, Guest's work, although lacking in strict scholarship, was 'a charming and felicitous piece of English prose'.⁶⁶ They, like Ifor Williams,⁶⁷ and Parry-Williams,⁶⁸ refer to the tales as having been translated by Lady Charlotte Guest, with the help of Tegid, Carnhuanawc and others, while W. J. Gruffydd is quite vehement in his belief 'that the main credit for this work should go to the two scholars who "devilled" for her, the Rev. John Jones (Tegid) . . . and the Rev. Thomas Price (Carnhuanawc)'.⁶⁹

In his 1889 French translation, Joseph Loth concedes that Guest's was a remarkable translation – it is not without its faults, yet at the end of the day 'c'est une œuvre dont l'apparition marque une ère nouvelle dans l'histoire de la littérature galloise et l'étude des traditions bretonnes'.⁷⁰ However, in the preface to his revised 1913 edition, Loth is much more critical. He goes as far as to say that Guest hardly knew Welsh and that she had at hand a literal translation made by a Welsh scholar (presumably male!); even so, she succeeded in producing a translation of great 'charm' (pp. 6–7). It is unclear what induced him to change his mind between the first and second editions. However, one fact emerges, namely that such critics seem to want it both ways: the translation is not scholarly and the fault lies with Lady Charlotte; on the other hand, she was heavily indebted to excellent Welsh scholars such as Carnhuanawc, Tegid and others, in which case surely some of the criticism should be directed at them! Moreover, the adjective 'charming', used so often in connection with her work, is of course loaded, applied more often than not to a woman, and suggesting a fascinating quality, an attractiveness. The word carries with it certain undertones, and is used by the critics in a patronizing way towards Guest, reminding the reader that the translator is, after all, merely a woman.

D. Rhys Phillips puts his finger on the problem:

But unlettered gossips and certain village writers⁷¹ have always found it difficult to believe that an English lady could effectually surmount the difficulty of rendering into English a series of texts written in early Mediaeval Welsh, which none but a capable Welsh scholar could at that time read with intelligence, and which but few then living had ever actually seen.⁷²

⁶³ See Charlotte Guest (trans.), *The Mabinogion*, notes by Alfred Nutt (London, 1902), 324.

⁶⁴ Charlotte Guest (trans.), *The Mabinogion*, ed. Owen Edwards (London, 1902), 9–10.

⁶⁵ T. P. Ellis and John Lloyd (trans.), *The Mabinogion* (Oxford, 1929), p. viii.

⁶⁶ Jones and Jones, *The Mabinogion* (1949), p. xxxi. This was first published in 1948 by the Golden Cockerel Press.

⁶⁷ Ifor Williams, 'A new translation of the Mabinogion', *Welsh Outlook* XVI (1929), 210.

⁶⁸ See his extract on Charlotte Guest in *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography* (see note 5 above).

⁶⁹ W. J. Gruffydd, *Rhiannon: An Inquiry into the Origins of the First and Third Branches of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff, 1953), 1.

⁷⁰ Joseph Loth, *Les Mabinogion* (Paris, 1889), 1–2.

⁷¹ And I would add 'certain Celtic scholars'.

⁷² D. Rhys Phillips, *Lady Charlotte Guest and the Mabinogion* (Cardiff, 1921), 9.

Charlotte Guest certainly did not fit the mould – she was not a native Welshman with formal university training and, as such, perhaps it was to be expected that ‘male, Oxford trained scholars from working class backgrounds resented this highborn, privately educated, English female’.⁷³ How indeed could a woman be capable of such an accomplishment? She must have received help. Yes, of course, but so did Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, as they note in their preface, and no one has ever suggested that the translation is not theirs:

No translation of a Welsh classic has received warmer and more ample aid than this. We have three major obligations. Professor J. Lloyd-Jones, of the Department of Welsh at the National University of Ireland, and our colleague Professor T. H. Parry-Williams, of the Department of Welsh at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, have read and commented minutely on the bulk of our versions. Professor Sir Ifor Williams, of the Department of Welsh at the University College of North Wales, Bangor, has submitted gracefully to our questionings upon many an awkward passage, and we have made full use of his editions of our texts . . . What their united help has meant in terms of applied scholarship needs no words of ours to stress: our merits are often of their cultivation, our failings are entirely our own. (pp. xxxii–xxxiii)

Just as Jones and Jones received help and advice, so did Charlotte Guest. She acknowledges the contribution of Tegid who transcribed the Red Book version of the tales for her, while Carnhuanawc (Thomas Price) is thanked twice in the notes. Her journals give further evidence of his input: he would be a guest at Dowlais House for a few days after the completion of the first draft of a translation and would read the notes aloud, adding his criticism, while together they would ‘polish (her) Translation slightly for the Press’, making few alterations.⁷⁴ A further journal entry, for 15 May 1839, implies again that she received limited help from him:

Mr Price of Crickhowel came to look over part of my translation in the evening. Mr Price spent with us this and the 2 following days and gave me much assistance in reading out and criticizing – Peredur is now I may say quite ready for the press. Only a few pages of translation remain incomplete – I do think it has been got up and brought (almost) through the press with great speed considering that seven weeks ago I never dreamt of printing anything but Geraint – since that time I have transcribed it, translated it, written the notes, provided all the decorations and brought it almost out of the Printers hands. I have had the interruption of my confinement and of watching two sick children during the time – and have not had the slightest assistance except Mr Price’s criticism during the short visit he paid on Wednesday.

However, apart from visiting Dowlais House, it should be noted that Carnhuanawc corresponded with Charlotte Guest within the context of what seemed a pupil/teacher relationship, for he would comment on her translation, and answer enquiries as she prepared her notes.⁷⁵ He was quite a firm teacher, for example he writes to her on 13 March 1843: ‘I am quite disappointed in your treatment of the *Teir Gormes* . . . by your way of telling it you deprive it of much of the interest which it would possess if given as a

⁷³ Donna R. White, ‘Crimes of Lady Charlotte Guest’, 247.

⁷⁴ See journal entry for 7 February 1838.

⁷⁵ Guest and John, *Lady Charlotte*, 113.

literal translation’.⁷⁶ However, he is not pedantic. There is room for dialogue as he adds: ‘So now I shall leave it entirely to your own discretion having stated so much respecting it’. Her Deed Box, now in the National Library of Wales, is truly a treasure chest – it contains copies of the Welsh text, much in her own hand, pages of translation with corrections in her own hand, together with earlier drafts in some instances, notes on the text, and various letters showing that she corresponded with Carnhuanawc, Tegid, Williams Rees (her publisher), Gwallter Mechain (the Reverend Walter Davies of Llanrhaeadr), asking their advice or approval, especially on questions of a topographical nature.⁷⁷ What becomes clear is that she herself was widely read,⁷⁸ and merely sought the advice of experts, of the best, as did Jones and Jones, almost one hundred years later.

The claim that Charlotte Guest hardly knew Welsh is certainly unfounded. She modestly says in the preface to her first edition (p. viii): ‘It may be considered rash in one who has but recently become acquainted with the Principality and its Literature, to engage in a work like the present, while there are so many others, by whom it would be much more ably executed’, but such a plea of inadequacy is a common topos. Guest was certainly not aspiring merely to ‘strew flowers in the paths of the laurelled champions of her country’, as was her Irish counterpart! She started having Welsh lessons eight days after arriving at Dowlais in August 1833, and a year later was still having lessons,⁷⁹ determined to learn this new language: ‘Baby leaves but little time for anything, and that time must be spent on Welsh’ (3 September 1834). She would even attend the Welsh-language Sunday service, for example: ‘Everybody went to church at Merthyr except myself and I walked alone to the Chapel here to hear Tegid preach in Welsh’.⁸⁰ On 18 November 1836, on a journey from Chippenham to Marlborough, she notes: ‘The last stage was in the dark and I amused myself by attempting an English versification of Tegid’s “Ymweliad y Bardd”’. She must have known it by heart, and was later to publish a translation of the poem.

However, the translating was not without its difficulties. On 6 January 1838 Guest admits: ‘I worked busily at my Translation which is rather difficult for me, being so little conversant with Welsh and the Mabinogion being in such a cramped and ancient style’. By 21 July, however, she was far more confident, reading *Geraint*, on her way to Newbridge, without a dictionary, ‘surprised to find that I could understand the old Welsh words without one’. However, *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* was a different matter: ‘It is very tiresome and difficult Welsh, and I did not get on much with it’ (8 March 1839). Certainly, there is no evidence that Charlotte Guest could talk Welsh – she never attempted to address the girls at the local school in Welsh, even though she found their English poor – nor is there reason to believe that her written Welsh was fluent.⁸¹ However, such skills are not necessary in order to be a competent translator, from Welsh *into* English. One must remember that Charlotte Guest, from her childhood, was interested in languages, and proved herself to be an accomplished linguist. She was fluent in French, Italian,

⁷⁶ NLW, Guest’s Deed Box.

⁷⁷ A journal entry for 8 March 1843 tells us that she is forced to obtain such material from those who know the localities, ‘but which take only a very short time for me afterwards to throw together’ (D. Rhys Phillips, *Lady Charlotte Guest*, 35–6).

⁷⁸ This is reflected in the list of some of the books she possessed in 1852, as noted by Guest and John, *Lady Charlotte*, 269–70.

⁷⁹ See journal entry for 3 December 1834.

⁸⁰ Journal entry for 29 October 1836. See also the entry for 5 November 1836: ‘Merthyr and I were at Welsh Services in the evening’.

⁸¹ One letter (in rather elementary Welsh) has survived, written in 1837 to the Liverpool Cambrian Society, see Guest and John, *Lady Charlotte*, 112.

Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Persian – her Persian was good enough to qualify her for membership in the Oriental Translation Committee.⁸² Moreover, she was extremely disciplined in everything that she did, as reflected in her journal entry for 5 July 1838: 'Worked very hard at my book forgetting all that had to be done yesterday and giving all my attention to the Mabinogion, with that versability of mind which I have always found useful to me'. She was single-minded, dedicated, and wanted to 'reach an eminence' in everything that she did:

I cannot endure anything in a second grade. I am happy to see we are at the head of the iron trade. Otherwise I could not take pride in my house in the City and my Works at Dowlais, and glory (playfully) in being (in some sort) a tradeswoman. Then again, my blood is of the noblest and most princely in the Kingdom, and if I go into Society, it must be the very best and first. I can brook no other. If I occupy myself in writing, my book must be splendidly got up and must be, as far at least as decoration and typography are concerned, at the head of literature . . . (27 April 1839)

Guest's Translation

In the nineteenth century many translators, such as F. W. Newman, Carlyle and William Morris, believed in a theory of 'a separate translation language'.⁸³ Indeed, some translations of the period are so deliberately archaic that they are extremely obscure and difficult to read. Guest, although wishing 'to keep very rigidly to the original', and fearing therefore that her version 'would appear rather clumsy English',⁸⁴ certainly does not belong to this category. In spite of some archaisms, her translation is seemingly fluent and effortless; as noted by Rachel Bromwich, 'those years of diary-writing must have contributed towards the ease and fluency of Lady Charlotte's style'.⁸⁵ Guest herself was very much a creative writer, as reflected in passages of her journal. For example her arrival at Dowlais for the first time on 15 August 1833 is described thus:

The mellow evening light gave even an increase of beauty to the already lovely valley of the Taff through which our route lay. The mountains /not barren rock but beautifully wooded/ quite came up to my very wildest expectations . . . By the time we reached the house it was quite dark, and the prevailing gloom gave full effect to the light of the blazing furnaces which was quite unlike all I had ever before seen or even imagined.⁸⁶

Guest also possessed astute powers of observation, together with the ability to communicate such powers effectively, as reflected in her first ever meeting with Carnhuanawc (August 28 1833):

Another character at Llanover gave me pleasure – Mr Price – clergyman at Crickhowel. He seems to possess a sort of universality and was conversant on what ever subject was

⁸² See Bessborough, *Lady Charlotte* (1950), 35.

⁸³ Bassnett-McGuire, *Translation Studies*, 67.

⁸⁴ See her journal entry for 7 February 1838.

⁸⁵ Bromwich, 'The Mabinogion and Lady Charlotte Guest', 138.

⁸⁶ A rather different atmosphere to that presented by Edwin Roberts who on his visit to the area in 1852

sees only 'a grim and ashy blackness' and 'a black inky vault with moon and stars extinguished by the lurid fires of the flame-belching furnaces' (p. 30). My thanks to Dr E. Wyn James for drawing my attention to this volume (*A Visit to the Iron Works and Environs of Merthyr-Tydfil in 1852*, London, 1853).

started, yet requiring encouragement to enter into discussion and to throw off the extreme reserve which veiled his acquirements. Mrs Hall [i.e. Lady Llanover] and he were praising Wales and the Welsh and maintaining the language as beautiful. Evelyn Waddington attacked. The discussion interested me extremely – it displayed many shades of character – the calm deliberate reasoning of Mr Price when roused. The feminine volubility of Mrs Hall's enthusiasm /full of naivety and good humour/ The witty sneers of Evelyn's detraction of what he confessed (and at every word proved) to know nothing about. Trifling as was the occasion of the argument, unimportant as the result, these traits highly amused me.

Another reason, surely, for her fluent style was the fact that she would read out her translation – to Carnhuanawc himself, and also to her children, just as her own mother had read out the *Arabian Nights* to her as a child:

I have been reading the first number of my *Mabinogion* . . . to Ivor and Maria, and I never saw anything equal to their delight. (18 February 1843)

I have finished the story of *Pwyll* to the children this evening after tea. They delight in these *Mabinogion* readings. (3 February 1844)

In this, her translation fulfilled a similar function to that of her source language text; after all, the tales of the Red Book of Hergest were written down with oral delivery in mind.

Rather than generalize about the strengths and weaknesses of Guest's translation, I now propose to examine one brief passage from the text to see what this reveals about her as a translator, and above all, as a woman translator. To this end, her work will be compared and contrasted with three other translations – those of William Owen-Pughe,⁸⁷ Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, and Jeffrey Gantz – so as to highlight the choices that are made when decoding and recoding the source language text.

A Case Study

The opening of the tale commonly known as *Culhwch ac Olwen* has been chosen for the case study in translation. As way of context, what was happening in Charlotte Guest's life while she was translating this tale (i.e. 1839–40)? The Chartist Riots in Merthyr (1839), and the opening of Lord Bute's Ship Canal at Cardiff (8 October 1839) as vividly described in her journal:

My own steamer, my namesake the Lady Charlotte, was just going to enter the inner dock. It was too tempting to resist. With Merthyr's arm I sprung upon her. They gave me a round of cheers and the gates opened and we proceeded into the inner harbour. The incident pleased the spectators, and hundreds, I may almost say thousands, crowded after me. I believe we were in consequence in a situation of some danger. For there was no ballast in the steamer and the numbers upon the decks made her top heavy.

Then, on 12 August 1840, came the birth of her sixth child.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ According to Guest's journal (17 October 1837), the barrister Arthur Johnes promised to try to obtain Owen-Pughe's manuscripts and notes for Guest. It seems unlikely that this happened – there is no reference in the journal, and the two translations differ, as we shall see.

⁸⁸ Note that some of the translating was undertaken at the Pyle Inn near Margam while her husband visited his Newton properties (Guest and John, *Lady Charlotte*, 107).

First and foremost, a comparison of all four translations foregrounds the choices that a translator has to make when translating from a medieval text. One of the problems facing a translator of the *Mabinogion*, and of any text where multiforms exist, is to decide what exactly is the 'original' text – the problems are similar to those facing the modern-day editor. Indeed, is there such a thing as an 'original' text? Should the oldest manuscript version be translated, together with any inaccuracies and inconsistencies, or should 'improved' readings be introduced with the help of other manuscripts, so creating a 'standard text'?⁸⁹ William Owen-Pughe and Charlotte Guest translate the versions found in the Red Book of Hergest while Jones and Jones base their translation on the White Book of Rhydderch since it is 'the older and truer manuscript'. However, they turn to the Red Book whenever there are omissions in the White Book, claiming that their method 'can best be described as the preparation of a critical text based on the White Book, with a collation of all other MSS., and the translation of that text' (p. xxxii). Jeffrey Gantz does not specify his manuscript sources.

Once the translator has decided on which medieval version is to be his/her source text, then decisions have to be made regarding orthography of proper names. William Owen-Pughe is inconsistent in this matter: both Kilyd and Cilyd appear in his translation while Culhwč appears with an initial <C> in the tale title and in the text itself. A breve is placed above <c> to denote /x/ as in Culhwč, while a dotted *d* represents /ð/, as in Cilyd. Guest modernizes the orthography but retains the initial <K> in Kilydd and Kilhwch throughout, perhaps to avoid confusion with the English /s/ (as represented by the <c> in 'cinder', for example). Jones and Jones modernize the forms of all personal and place-names 'in orthography but not in phonology' (p. xxxii), while Gantz again is inconsistent, retaining the initial <K> in Kilydd but not in Culhwch. It could be argued that modernizing the orthography creates less distance between the modern reader and the text, and that retaining the orthographical forms implies a scholarly translation, accessible to a learned minority or elite.⁹⁰

One of the problems facing any translator or editor of the *Mabinogion* is the question of titles – the title for the collection itself and for individual tales. The misnomer, *Mabinogion*, was first used by William Owen-Pughe, but it was through Guest's translation that the term became popularized. Such a title is misleading, in that it suggests a certain degree of unity between the tales; however, it has become so well-established that it would now be extremely difficult to replace it with anything else. When choosing a title for the individual tales, the White and Red Books give limited help.⁹¹ In the case of the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, for example, the first and fourth branches are commonly referred to by their incipit – *Pwyll Prince of Dyfed*, and *Math son of Mathonwy*.⁹² The third

⁸⁹ See Jerry Hunter, 'Testun Dadl', *Tu Chwith III* (1995) for a discussion of the major theoretical arguments. Peter Wynn Thomas surveys in detail the practices of editors of medieval Welsh prose texts in his recent edn of *Peredur* (www.caerdydd.ac.uk/cymraeg/peredur).

⁹⁰ A reader unfamiliar with modern Welsh orthography may still find the personal and place-names strange, hence Gantz's pronunciation guide which he hopes 'should render the Welsh names in the text less formidable' (34).

⁹¹ As noted by Walter Ong, sophisticated titles are

not common in oral cultures, and even when oral tales are transmitted to manuscript, titles are not prevalent (*Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London, 1982), 117–38).

⁹² For a detailed discussion, see Sioned Davies, 'Ail Gainc y Mabinogi – Llais y Ferch', *Ysgrifau Beirniadol XVII* (1990), 15–20. Note that Guest translates 'ceinciau o'r Mabinogi' as 'portions of the Mabinogi'. For a discussion of *cainc* ('branch'), see Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'The branching tree of medieval narrative: Welsh *cainc* and French *branche*' in Jennifer Fellows et al. (eds), *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays*

branch is, in reality, a continuation of the second, and no proper name appears in the opening lines. However, Manawydan is central to the plot, and it could thus be argued that *Manawydan son of Llŷr* is a suitable title. The second branch begins with the words 'Bendigeidfran fab Llŷr ...', and William Owen-Pughe took this *incipit*, or at least another version of the name Bendigeidfran, namely Brân, as the title for his translation of this tale. Indeed, it would seem that, until the middle of the nineteenth century, the second branch was commonly known in scholarly publications as *Brân* or *Mabinogi Bendigeidfran*. However, the tale is commonly known today as *Branwen Daughter of Llŷr*. I have argued elsewhere that the second branch was first given this title by Charlotte Guest.⁹³ From her textual notes, it would seem that Branwen had captured Guest's imagination, and especially the 'discovery' of her grave in 1813.⁹⁴ To William Owen-Pughe it was the male character, the king, who was central to the tale. To Guest, however, it was the 'unfortunate heroine', Branwen. One could surmise whether Guest felt some sort of empathy with Branwen who, like her, had left her homeland for foreign parts, in order to get married. Guest was indeed happy at the family home in Dowlais, but not at Sully where her husband had bought a property near the sea. Indeed, she hated going there, and confides in her journal:

At dusk I went out and walked upon the beach. It was quite hushed and the tide came in very quietly. The light was gleaming from the flat Holmes – all seemed very melancholy. An old man was embarking with all his furniture in a small boat, just below our windows, to go to England! I felt almost inclined to wish I were going there too. The change to me from Dowlais to this place is dreadful. [24 November 1840]

Note that she was translating *Branwen* at the very beginning of the following year. I would argue that the change in title from *Bendigeidfran* to *Branwen* was a conscious effort on the part of Guest – indeed, she went against the male scholars of her time. Perhaps she was trying to make a statement concerning the role of women along the centuries. One could certainly argue that hers is our first feminist reading of the tale, and that she is responsible for bringing the female voice into the second branch.⁹⁵ As for the title of the tale under consideration, Guest recognizes the importance of the Wild Boar in its narrative structure and names it *Kilhwch and Olwen or the Twrch Trwyth*; indeed, in her papers, the tale is subtitled 'The Burrowing Boar' which, for some reason, was replaced by the 'Twrch Trwyth' in her published translation. Jeffrey Gantz opts for *How Culhwch won Olwen*, which is a more accurate reflection of the main plot and echoes the closing lines of the tale.⁹⁶

The selection and addition of punctuation is a problem common to the editor and to the translator of a medieval text. As noted by Fulton,⁹⁷ the code of punctuation constructs

on medieval narrative (Cardiff, 1996), 36–50, and Davies *Crefft y Cyfarwydd*, 47–8 and 50–53.

⁹³ Davies, 'Ail Gainc y Mabinogi'.

⁹⁴ A report of the discovery was published by Sir R. C. Hoare in the *Cambro-Briton* (1821) under the title 'Tomb of Branwen' (71–3). Guest incorporated the information into her textual notes.

⁹⁵ Note that she also uses the title *The Lady of the Fountain*, rather than the *Owein* of the later male editors, again perhaps as a means of foregrounding the female character. However, in this instance it

should be noted that her title also occurs in a colophon at the end of the Red Book of Hergest version of the tale.

⁹⁶ 'Ac uelly y kauas Kulhwch Olwen merch Yspadaden Pennkawr' (Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans (eds), *Culhwch and Olwen: An Edition and Study of the Oldest Arthurian Tale* (Cardiff, 1992), 42).

⁹⁷ Helen Fulton, 'Punctuation as a semiotic code: the case of the medieval Welsh *cywydd*', *Parergon* XIII/2 (January 1996), 21–35 (21).

'not only grammatical meaning . . . but also cultural meaning'. Guest, Jones and Jones, and Gantz confine the opening section of *Culhwch and Olwen* to one single paragraph, one complete entity. William Owen-Pughe, on the other hand, presents four very short paragraphs; as a result the material is visually dissected, giving the impression of discontinuity. Guest and Jones and Jones both succeed in communicating a fast-moving and dramatic story: Jones and Jones do so by their sparse use of the comma, while Guest conveys the same by repeating the conjunction 'and' – her translation contains eleven examples, compared to William Owen-Pughe's five and Jones and Jones's six. Guest's translation actually uses far more instances of 'and' than does the source language text. Note also that, by the use of punctuation, she isolates the phrase 'And they had a son through the prayers of the people', perhaps the most important event in the passage, for her. This raises the question as to whether women translate differently to men, and whether female, or feminist, principles are reflected in their translations. After all, as argued by Simon, women 'can use language as cultural intervention, as part of an effort to alter expressions of domination, whether at the level of concepts, of syntax or of terminology'.⁹⁸

A close comparison of the choices made in the verbal domain highlight major differences between the four translations under discussion. A selection of examples will suffice:⁹⁹

(g)wledic: Guest and Pughe's choice of 'prince' may well reflect the social and political context of nineteenth-century England, when Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were on the throne.

a wynnei: Gantz's 'wanted' is stronger and more aggressive than the neutral 'desire' and 'wish' of the other three translations.

kynmwyd: Jones and Jones provide the most 'correct' reading here – 'a table-companion, an equal'. Guest's 'helpmate', however, gives us an insight into her Victorian views regarding the proper role of a wife. An obituary to Sir John Guest, in 1852, notes that he was 'ably seconded' by his wife;¹⁰⁰ indeed, her whole life shows how they worked together as a team.

a ffynnuys: Although mynnu means 'to wish, to desire' (see above), not one of the four translations offers this sense. Jones and Jones's choice of 'took' implies force, while Owen-Pughe's 'fixed his mind upon' has rather sinister connotations; Guest and Gantz's choice of verb reflects a more neutral position.

gwedy y west genti: The idea of 'spending the night' is uppermost here. Jones and Jones's 'his stay with her' is rather ambivalent, while Owen-Pughe's 'his cohabiting with her' is rather vague. Note, too, that both translations adhere closely to the original where the woman is portrayed in the passive role. Guest, on the other hand, includes both partners in the act and, for once, she is far more specific than her male counterparts, 'their union' implying a sexual act. In point of fact, this is rather out of character for Guest. On every other occasion, when the original text uses the phrase 'cysgu gan' (to sleep with), as in the case of the marriages of Rhiannon, Branwen and Olwen, Guest translates this ambiguously as 'she became his bride'. Here, however, a literal translation is required, for as a result of the copulation 'the people put up prayers that they might have an heir'.

⁹⁸ Simon, *Gender in Translation*, 9.

⁹⁹ For the Welsh texts, see Appendix 1, and for the translations in full, see Table 1.

¹⁰⁰ Guest and John, *Lady Charlotte*, 43.

TABLE 1: Comparison of translations

	CHARLOTTE GUEST <i>Kilhwch and Olwen or the Turch Trough</i>	WILLIAM OWEN-PUGHE <i>Culhwch son of Cilyd and Olwen daughter of Estryladan</i>	JONES AND JONES <i>Culhwch and Olwen</i>	JEFFREY GANTZ <i>How Culhwch won Olwen</i>
1	Kilydd the son of Prince Kelyddon desired a wife as a helpmate, and the wife that he chose was Goleuddydd, the daughter of Prince Anlawdd.	Kilyd the son of prince Kelydon desired to have a wife jointly faring with him; so the wife he fixed his mind upon was Goleudyd, the daughter of Prince Anlawd.	Cilydd son of Cyleddon Wledig wished for a wife as wellborn as himself. The wife that he took was Goleuddydd daughter of Anlawdd Wledig.	Kilydd son of the ruler Kelyddon wanted a wife as well-born as himself, and the woman he chose was Goleuddydd daughter of the ruler Amlawdd.
5	And after their union, the people put up prayers that they might have an heir.	//After his cohabiting with her, and the country joining in prayer, that he might obtain an heir, thus by the prayer of the country they had a son.	After his stay with her the country went to prayers whether they might have offspring, and they got a son through the prayers of the country.	After he had slept with her the country went to pray for the couple to have children, and because of these prayers a son was born.
11	And they had a son through the prayers of the people.	From the hour of her pregnancy the mother became frantic and wild, avoiding her home;	But from the time she grew with child, she went mad,	Once she had become pregnant Goleuddydd went mad
13	From the time of her pregnancy Goleuddydd became wild, and wandered about, without habitation;	but when her parturition came, then she recovered her right reason.	without coming near a dwelling. When her time came upon her, her right sense came back to her;	and would enter no house, but when her time came her senses returned;
17	but when her delivery was at hand, her reason came back to her.	//It was thus: there was a mountain whereon a swineherd kept a herd of swine; and being frightened at the swine, the queen was delivered;	it came in a place where a swineherd was keeping a herd of swine, and through terror of the swine the queen was delivered.	she was near a swineherd and his herd of pigs, and out of fear of the pigs she delivered.
19	Then she went to a mountain where there was a swineherd, keeping a herd of swine.	and the swineherd took care of the child until he was brought to the court.	And the swineherd took the boy until he came to the court.	The swineherd kept the boy until he came to court,
22	And through fear of the swine the queen was delivered.	//Then the child was baptised, and the name of Culhwch was imposed upon him, from his having been found in the track of a sow.	And the boy was baptised, and the name Culhwch given to him	where the lad was baptized and given the name Culhwch,
24	And the swineherd took the boy, and brought him to the palace;	The child was of noble lineage nevertheless; for he was cousin to Arthur.	Nonetheless the boy was of gentle lineage: he was first cousin to Arthur.	because he had been found in a pig-run;
26	and he was christened, and they called him Kilhwch,	And then the child was given to be nursed.	And the boy was put out to nurse.	nevertheless he was a well-born lad, Arthur's first cousin, and he was sent out to be nursed.
29	because he had been found in a swine's burrow.			
31	Nevertheless the boy was of gentle lineage, and cousin unto Arthur;			
34	and they put him out to nurse.			

etiuied: Owen-Pughe's 'he might have an heir' is certainly not inclusive! Guest's translation perhaps reflects her preoccupation with the political context of nineteenth-century England – her journal entry for 11 May 1840, notes that she attended a 'Ball at the Palace. The Queen looked well but danced little. There is now no doubt of her being likely in due time to give an heir to the throne . . .'

Ac or awr y delis beichogi: Guest, Owen-Pughe and Gantz choose to ignore the *ac* at the beginning of the sentence, while Jones and Jones translate the conjunction as 'but' which immediately presents a negative image. They then opt for the more discreet 'grew with child' while the other translators are more specific in their use of 'pregnancy/pregnant'. This choice is particularly interesting in the case of Guest since, in her journals, she does not use the word 'pregnant' but refers instead to 'delicate' or 'weak' health, in common with her contemporaries.¹⁰¹ Does this imply that her translation gave her an opportunity to use another voice? Moreover, she personalizes the experience by using the proper name 'Goleuddydd' rather than the literal 'she' in the following clause.

aeth hitheu ygywlldawc: Owen-Pughe goes to extremes, using a doublet – 'frantic and wild'. Guest's 'wild', on the other hand, as opposed to the 'mad' of Jones and Jones and Gantz, reflects a more sensitive, and perhaps empathetic, reaction to Goleuddydd's predicament. She herself, as we recall, gave birth to ten children in thirteen years, and records the occasions in her journal. Although her deliveries may have been relatively easy, she certainly suffered from sickness during her pregnancies, and was sometimes quite ill. She also became especially frustrated and sometimes depressed during pregnancy, and often bemoans the injustices of being a woman at these particular times.¹⁰²

Pan dyuu ythymp idi: Jones and Jones and Gantz offer a literal translation, while Owen-Pughe chooses the technical term 'parturition'. Guest opts for the more common 'delivery'. Again, this term is not used by her in her journals; rather, she uses the term 'confine', for example a journal entry for 22 November 1840 notes: 'The Queen was yesterday confined of a girl – all doing well thank God'.

mynydd oed: Note that both Owen-Pughe and Guest mistranslate here.

llys: 'Palace' and 'court' are used fairly indiscriminately by Guest. Note that she uses King Arthur, not emperor, in the 'three romances', although the literal translation 'emperor' appears in her first drafts. Was 'emperor' a reminder of Napoleon and his threat to British peace? Or perhaps she was influenced by Malory's 'Prince Arthur, King of Britain'. Owen Edwards 'corrects' Guest in his 1902 edition of her translation.¹⁰³

A gyrru kulhwch arnaw . . . A rodi y mab a orucpwyd ar ueithrin: The male translators adhere to the passive forms of the Middle Welsh while Guest, on the other hand, by choosing 'they called him Kilhwch' and 'they put him out to nurse', leads us back to the opening lines of the tale and personalizes both acts.

A brief comparison between the four texts suggests that Jones and Jones present the most correct and literal translation in terms of scholarship. William Owen-Pughe's attempt demonstrates certain idiosyncrasies, and lends support to the view of his contemporaries that a more 'flowing' style was called for.¹⁰⁴ Gantz is certainly 'readable' if not

always accurate – his aim to 'sound natural' to the modern reader by reworking sentence patterns succeeds, but often at the expense of losing the energy and dynamism of the source language text. Charlotte Guest's prose, on the other hand, is direct, and it flows, especially when read out aloud.¹⁰⁵ Above all, however, the comparison reveals how she draws on her everyday experiences as a woman, and as a mother. No 'she grew with child' or 'when her time came' for her – 'pregnancy' and 'delivery' are the realities of a woman's life. She tends to use inclusive language and is more neutral in her recoding of the source language text. Indeed, through her work as a translator, or rather a translatrix, she succeeds in bringing the female voice into the *Mabinogion*. Her translation can be viewed as part of her struggle for equality, the struggle that tortured her throughout her life. It is only appropriate that she should have the last word:

How deeply I have felt this inferiority of sex and how humiliated I am when it is recalled to my mind in allusion to myself! Knowing that most wives are but looked upon as nurses and housekeepers (very justly too) I have striven hard to place myself on a higher level – and dear Merthyr, who knows how sensitive I am on this point, and who really does think that some women are rational beings – has always aided and encouraged me – I have given myself almost a man's education from the age of twelve when I first began to follow my own devices – and since I married I have taken up such pursuits as in this country of business and ironmaking would render me conversant with what occupied the male part of the population – Sometimes I think I have succeeded pretty well – but every now and then I am painfully reminded that toil as I may, I can never succeed beyond a certain point and by a very large portion of the community my acquirements and judgements must always be looked upon as those of a mere woman.¹⁰⁶

A woman? – yes. A 'mere' woman? – never!

¹⁰⁵ Theatre texts can not be separated from performance, and the same is true, surely, of the *Mabinogion* tales – we must take into account the function of the source text as an element for and of performance, we must try and *hear* the voice that reads the original, and take into account the cadence rhythm and pauses that occur when the written text is

read out aloud. For a discussion on translating dramatic texts, see Susan Bassnett-McGuire, *Translation Studies*, 120–32.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Guest and John, *Lady Charlotte*, 31. The passage reveals her ambivalences as she reflects on her reading of Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 284, n. 4.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 25–45.

¹⁰³ Charlotte Guest, *The Mabinogion*, i, ed. Owen Edwards (London, 1902), 15.

¹⁰⁴ See George Ellis's letter to Owen-Pughe (31 March 1803), quoted in Arthur Johnston, 'William Owen-Pughe and the Mabinogion', *National Library of Wales Journal*, X (1957–8), 323–8 (325).

*Appendix 1**The White Book of Rhydderch version*

Kilyd mab kyledon wledic a uynnei wreic kynmwyd ac ef. Sef gwreic a ffynnwys goleudyt merch anlawd wledic. Gwedy y west genti. mynet y wlad y gwedi malkawn a geffynt ettiued. A chaffael mab o honu trwy weti y wlad. Ac or awr y delis beichogi. yd aeth hitheu ygwylldawc heb dygredu anhed. Pan dyuu ythymp idi. ef a dyuu y iawn bwyll iti. Sef y dyuu mynyd oed meichad yn cadw kenuein o uoch. A rac ouyn y moch engi a oruc y urenhines. A chymryt y mab a oruc y meichad hyt pan dyuu yr llys. A bydydyaw y mab a orucpwyd. A gyrru kulhwch arnaw dy wrth y gaffel yn retkyr hwch. Bonhedic hagen oed y mab. keuynderw dy arthur oed. A rodi y mab a orucpwyd ar ueithrin.

The Red Book of Hergest version

Kilyd mab kelydon wledic a uynnei wreic kynmwyd ac ef. Sef gwreic a vynnawd goleudyd merch anlawd wledic. Gwedy y west genthi. mynet y wlat yg gwedi malkawn a geffynt ettiued. A chaffel mab o honunt trwy wedi y wlat. Ac or awr y dellis beichogi. yd aeth hitheu yggyylltawc heb dy gredu anhed. Pan dyuu y thymp idi. ef a dyuu y hiawnbwyll idi. Sef y dyuu. myn yd yd oed y meichat yn kadw kenuein o uoch. Ac rac ouyn y moch engi a oruc y vrenhines. A chymryt y mab a oruc y meichat hyt pan dyuu yr llys. a bedydyaw y mab a wnaethpwyd. a gyrru kulhwch arnaw. wrth y gaffel yn retkyr hwch. Bonhedic hagen oed y mab. keuynderw y arthur oed. A rodi ymab awnaethpwyd ar ueithrin.