

Copyright Notice

Staff and students of this University are reminded that copyright subsists in this extract and the work from which it was taken. This Digital Copy has been made under the terms of a CLA Licence which allows you to:

- Access and download a copy
- Print out a copy

This Digital Copy and any digital or printed copy supplied to or made by you under the terms of this Licence are for use in connection with this module or course of study. You may retain such copies after the end of the course, but strictly for your own personal use.

All copies (including electronic copies) shall include this Copyright Notice and shall be destroyed and/or deleted if and when required by the University.

Except as provided for by copyright law, no further copying, storage or distribution (including by e-mail) is permitted without the consent of the copyright holder.

The author (which term includes artists and other visual creators) has moral rights in the work and neither staff nor students may cause, or permit, the distortion, mutilation or other modification of the work, or any other derogatory treatment of it, which would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author.

Title of extract: **Traditional Tales and the Harmonizing of Story in Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet**

Name of Author: **Welsh, A.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable):

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable): **Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies Vol 17 Summer 1989**

Publisher: **CMCS**

Pages scanned: **15 - 41**

Course of Study (Module name and number): **Y Mabinogi CYCS7015**

Name of Designated Person

authorising scanning: *E.L. Ham*

Date authorised: 22.02.17.

Moodle/Powerpoint

Traditional Tales and the Harmonizing of Story in *Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet*

Andrew Welsh

Rutgers University

IN *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition*, Kenneth Jackson added a new field of inquiry to the study of medieval Welsh narrative.¹ His discussion of *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi* in particular demonstrated that a number of narrative elements in that work were familiar elements of traditional storytelling, recognizable forms of the migrating 'motifs' of the international popular tale. Jackson's book stood out at the time, as it still does, against a background of scholarship primarily concerned with the uniquely Celtic provenance of *The Four Branches*, studies engaged for the most part in recovering from the Welsh narratives some earlier body of distinctly Celtic material—usually a lost Celtic mythology. That scholarly tradition stretches back through the work of W. J. Gruffydd and John A. MacCulloch earlier in this century to that of Sir John Rhys (1840–1915), the philologist and folklorist who held the chair of Celtic literature when it was first established at Oxford in 1877.² As Jackson pointed out, it is an orientation toward traditional narrative that goes back as well to the Grimm brothers, who believed that the 'household tales' in their famous collection were corrupt descendants of Indo-European myths, and to those followers of the Grimms who 'were not slow to seize on this as a field for delightful speculation about the supposed "meaning" of a given tale'.³ Applied to *The Four Branches*, this meant that the only 'meaning' available in those stories is the mythological meaning, which has to be reconstructed from the debris (as it was often called) of the lost myths in the stories themselves.

¹Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition*, The Gregynog Lectures, 1961 (Cardiff, 1961). ²W. J. Gruffydd, *Math vab Mathonwy: An Inquiry into the Origins and Development of the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff, 1928); and *Rhiannon: An Inquiry into the Origins of the First and Third Branches of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff, 1953); J. A. MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts* (Edinburgh, 1911), Chapter 6; John Rhys, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by Celtic Heathendom*, The Hibbert Lectures, 1886, second edition (London, 1892); Rhys, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1901). ³*International Popular Tale*, p. 39.

The fundamental assumption of such an approach, that *The Four Branches* make no sense as they stand, or at least not enough sense, usually implies that the medieval Christian author was working with much older material—specifically, fragments of a vanished native religion—which he had inherited but did not understand.⁴ Thus to John MacCulloch the tales of *The Mabinogi* were ‘relics of a dead past, as defaced and inexplicable as the battered monuments of the old religion’.⁵ The figure of Rhiannon, for example, who is prominent in the First Branch and also appears in the Third Branch, was interpreted as the euhemerized form of a Celtic goddess. In fact, in W. J. Gruffydd’s elaborate argument she was regarded as embodying the remnants of several Celtic goddesses: *Rigantona, a ‘Great Queen’ goddess of the early British; Epona, a Gaulish horse-goddess who is named in inscriptions and represented on monuments from Britain to Rome; and Modron (Gaulish and British ‘Matrona’), mentioned in *Culhwch ac Olwen* as a mother whose son was stolen when he was three nights old, and believed by Gruffydd to be a ‘Great Mother’ like the ancient Phrygian nature-goddess Cybele and a fertility-goddess like the Greek Demeter. Gruffydd saw traces of Rhiannon’s myth as a horse-goddess, for example, in the First Branch’s motifs of her magic horse that cannot be overtaken and her penance of offering to carry riders on her back, and in her punishment in the Third Branch by having the collars of she-asses hung round her neck.⁶

⁴Critics and scholars writing on *The Four Branches* have used the term ‘author’ with a wide range of meanings—along with ‘final redactor(s)’, ‘compiler(s)’, and ‘scribe(s)’—reflecting various views of the text and its composition. In this study I use ‘author’ to refer to one person, probably male, who both shaped and wrote the work (as distinct from the manuscripts) we have—an hypothesis the study attempts to justify. ⁵*The Mythology of All Races*, III, *Celtic, Slavic*, by John Arnott MacCulloch and Jan Máchal (Boston, 1918), p. 20. In Celtic studies this approach derives in large measure from Matthew Arnold’s ‘On the Study of Celtic Literature’, four lectures delivered at Oxford in 1865–66, in which Arnold spoke of the medieval Welsh storyteller as someone ‘pillaging an antiquity of which he does not fully possess the secret; he is like a peasant building his hut on the site of Halicarnassus or Ephesus; he builds, but what he builds is full of materials of which he knows not the history, or knows by a glimmering tradition merely;—stones “not of this building”, but of an older architecture, greater, cunninger, more majestic’ (*The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, III, *Lectures and Essays in Criticism*, edited by R. H. Super (Ann Arbor, 1962), p. 322). John MacCulloch elsewhere wrote of medieval Welsh narrative: ‘Like the wreckage of some rich galleon, the *débris* of the old mythology has been used to construct a new fabric . . .’ (*The Religion of the Ancient Celts*, p. 95)—an elegant variation on Arnold’s image. See Patrick Sims-Williams’s essay on the ideological formation underlying Arnold’s views of Celtic literature, ‘The Visionary Celt: The Construction of an Ethnic Preconception’, *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 11 (Summer 1986), 71–96. ⁶*Rhiannon*, pp. 90–108; see also Patrick K. Ford’s Introduction to his translation, *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales* (Berkeley, 1977), pp. 4–15.

Reconstructing *The Four Branches* in the light of Celtic mythology is an approach that relies heavily on a Celtic mythology which must itself be reconstructed. Kenneth Jackson was sceptical: ‘the supposed myth is a fantasy’, he wrote of Gruffydd’s version of the horse-goddess.⁷ ‘In any case’, he argued, ‘no theory involving the supposition of a myth should even be advanced until one has made sure that the motif one is studying is not an international one’ (p. 129). For if a narrative element appearing in *The Four Branches* was also known in ancient Egypt, Persia, and India, and is still known today in the folktales of Germany, Norway, or Russia, it is not likely to have descended from Celtic mythology.⁸ And yet Jackson, much like the myth-critics, accepted the necessity for extensive scholarly reconstruction of *The Four Branches*, for he accepted the idea that ‘if there is one thing on which most students of the Mabinogion are agreed it is that the plots of the *Four Branches*, to mention no others, are extraordinarily confused and incoherent’. In some instances, he said, the whole sense of the plot ‘has been violently distorted and even completely destroyed . . . so that it is sometimes scarcely possible now to discover what the original tale must have been’ (pp. 124–25). Thus the ‘final compilers’ of *The Four Branches*, he surmised, were likely to have been not professional storytellers (*cyfarwyddiaid*) but literary men who were good prose stylists but lacked the traditional training required to construct a tale that hangs together: ‘They are perhaps to be regarded as antiquarian literary men rather than as courtly *cyfarwyddiaid*, and their work as the product of the study rather than the mead-hall, however much it may contain of the ancient traditional stories of the Welsh, of the Celts, and of early civilized man in general’ (p. 130). Even though the mythologist and the folklorist have differed widely on the origins of the story-material, then, they have agreed on the decrepit state of that material in the text we have, and on the need to recover from the text an earlier, presumably better, form of the work: ‘what the original tale must have been’.

More recent studies of *The Four Branches* have suggested instead that they are the work of a storyteller, literary rather than oral, who was in control of his craft, a work of coherent artistry which explores and develops various major themes important to the author and his society. Within the past fifteen years several essays have revealed a number of such themes running through *The Four Branches* and organizing them into a complex unity. The tales, it has been shown,

⁷*International Popular Tale*, p. 133. ⁸Such a narrative element *may* have descended from Celtic mythology, of course—or from Hindu mythology—but only as another story-element: the mythological contexts and religious conceptions, which tend to be culture-bound, have not descended with it.

are an 'interlace' of the themes of friendships, marriages, and feuds, as well as ideas of councils and counselling.⁹ Taken together, the tales balance a world of good against one of evil: human actions governed by good will, sacrifice, friendship, and fairness against those governed by treachery, self-interest, greed, and betrayal.¹⁰ The First Branch has been seen as belonging to the 'education of a prince' genre, and its central theme as that of attaining the qualities of effective sovereignty—heroism, justice, and fertility.¹¹ The Second, Third, and Fourth Branches have been seen as presenting a sequence of the themes of insult, friendship, and shame.¹² These studies have helped to complement what has been called, with some justification, the 'atomistic' perspective of Jackson's motif-analysis.¹³ All of them, moreover, imply that *The Four Branches* as we have them are worth serious critical reading.

The emphasis on thematic coherence and artistry in *The Four Branches* does not, however, completely answer Jackson's objections, which were directed at the plots—the structure—of the tales. The idea of 'interlace', for example, is an analogy from the decorative arts, and is by nature visual and spatial: a conception of the tales as a simultaneous pattern of juxtaposed incidents and themes. Its wide application to medieval narratives is due mainly to the influence of Eugène Vinaver, who used it for the loosely structured Arthurian romances of the thirteenth-century Vulgate Cycle, which try to keep track of the individual adventures of several knights errant at once.¹⁴

⁹J. K. Bollard, 'The Structure of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1974–75, pp. 250–76; Bollard, 'The Role of Myth and Tradition in *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', *CMCS*, 6 (Winter 1983), 67–86. ¹⁰Jeffrey Gantz, 'Thematic Structure in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *Medium Ævum*, 47 (1978), 247–54. ¹¹Catherine A. McKenna, 'The Theme of Sovereignty in Pwyll', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 29 (1980–82), 35–52. ¹²Brynley F. Roberts, 'From Traditional Tale to Literary Story: Middle Welsh Prose Narratives', in *The Craft of Fiction: Essays in Medieval Poetics*, edited by Leigh A. Arrathoon (Rochester, Michigan, 1984), pp. 211–30. ¹³See Alwyn D. Rees's attack on 'the Motif-Index School' in 'Modern Evaluations of Celtic Narrative Tradition', in *Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Celtic Studies* (Cardiff, 1966), pp. 31–61; a similar critical point is made in McKenna, 'The Theme of Sovereignty in Pwyll', pp. 35–38. Both argue, in different ways, that mythological themes provide the necessary coherence for the tales. ¹⁴See, for example, Vinaver's *The Rise of Romance* (Oxford, 1971), Chapter 5 ('The Poetry of Interlace', pp. 68–98). Vinaver took the idea of narrative *entrelacement* from Ferdinand Lot's *Étude sur le Lancelot en prose* (Paris, 1918), Chapter 2 ('Du principe de l'entrelacement', pp. 17–28). Morton W. Bloomfield, in '“Interlace” as a Medieval Narrative Technique with Special Reference to “Beowulf”', in *Magister Regis: Studies in Honor of Robert Earl Kaske*, edited by Arthur Groos and others (New York, 1986), pp. 49–59, rejected 'interlace' as a metaphor for narrative structure, writing that 'the iron rule of narrative' is that 'two lines of action cannot be presented to the reader or listener at the same time. Verbal art cannot indicate simultaneity simultaneously' (p. 52; Bloomfield's emphasis).

Applied to *The Four Branches*, it has been a particularly helpful way of thinking about the recurring themes that link one 'branch' to another. But the individual tales, the narratives themselves, are not like the episodic French romances; they are for the most part linear and sequential. It is difficult to deny the impression that the author intended his rich thematic patterns to be carried by a coherent story. And is there likely ever to have been a storyteller or an audience with no desire for structure in a tale and no satisfaction in the harmonizing of its elements, or with no sense that the tale, however fantastic those story-elements might be, meant something? Can we conceive of a storyteller—oral or literary—who could not understand his tale and yet persisted in telling it, or an audience who persisted in listening to what it could not comprehend?

Consider the following summary of a modern folk legend from Norway. It was widely known there well into this century, and at least 150 variants of it were collected. This particular version came from oral tradition in 1912 or 1913 in the mountainous Telemark region of south-western Norway. The legend tells the story of a man who married a woman of the *huldre*-folk, the 'hidden people' who are the Norwegian version of the British and Irish fairies.

One summer a man named Olav Lonar was fishing far into the northern mountains. On a certain evening, he stepped over without knowing it one of those invisible boundaries that criss-cross our world, and suddenly he found himself in the richly furnished room of a fairy family. They had a beautiful daughter, whose name was Torgun. She offered him food and drink 'of the very best sort', but Olav was too stunned, too careful, or too frightened to accept the hospitality or to converse with the fairy folk, and he was soon returned to his own world. But he could not stop thinking of Torgun. The next summer he was back in the mountains, and he found her again. This time, he brought her back to his parish and married her. 'At the wedding', the story says, 'people noticed that she had a long tail, and then they understood who she was. But when she went in through the church door, the tail fell off, and Olav never saw anything of it again'. After that, Torgun became essentially a human wife, though she was distinguished by her kindness and generosity to poor people, and by the exceptional prosperity of Olav's farm after she arrived there. In the words of the story, 'The cows gave more milk and were so fat and sleek that no one had ever seen anything like it'.

So human did she seem that Olav, forgetting both courtesy and caution, became bad-tempered and quarrelsome with his wife. Torgun bore it humbly and quietly—until one Sunday before church, when Olav was wildly cursing and swearing out in the yard because he could not get a horseshoe to fit his horse properly. Torgun, who did not like swearing, took the horseshoe from him, wadded it up with her bare hands, then straightened it out and fitted it properly to the horse's hoof. '“This is the way a horseshoe should fit”, she said, and looked sharply at Olav.' Olav

was a gentler man after that, and the farm continued to prosper. The legend concludes: 'Their descendants were also rich, and have lived in Lonar parish until now, and Torgun's name has remained in the family'.¹⁵

The first point to make about this tale concerns the story-elements. The legend, like all legends, is 'localized' in a particular time and place, attaching itself to the specific settings and practices of Norwegian country-life. But it is of course a very familiar story outside Norway as well. The legend of Olav and Torgun is a Fairy Mistress tale, a story known in the traditional literatures of all Europe from classical Greece to Lapland and Iceland, and also known in storytelling traditions as distant as those of Hawaii, Indonesia, and India. And it is also the tale which dominates the central episode of the First Branch of *The Mabinogi*, in which Pwyll and Rhiannon meet and are married. For Rhiannon, no less than Torgun, is a fairy mistress: she mysteriously appears to Pwyll three days in a row, riding a white horse that cannot be caught by the fastest horse of his court—even though Rhiannon's horse appears never to change its slow gait. And later in this episode, when Pwyll is prevented from marrying Rhiannon by the appearance of a former suitor, it is she who solves the problem by providing him with a magic bag in which to trap the suitor until he relinquishes all claim on her. Rhiannon's mysterious appearance, her white horse, its magic speed, the marvelous bag—these and more are signs given in the story that Rhiannon is an Otherworld being. In short, the Welsh Rhiannon, like the Norwegian Torgun, is a very well-known figure, the Fairy Mistress of international folklore.

A further point to make about our Norwegian tale concerns its plot, the story-structure. Even in this simple tale there are both form and meaning. Details which at first seem inconsequential sooner or later find their place in the structure of beginning, middle, and end. And marvellous incidents beyond human experience, when combined with that structure, carry the audience not away from their own experience but closer to it. The legend tells a familiar story of an invitation refused because of caution and timidity, then a quest boldly undertaken and triumphantly accomplished, then a relaxing into habit and a forgetting—in the midst of daily tokens meant to remind us—of the adventure and its lessons. Finally a dénouement recalls the terms of the quest, re-establishes its values, and (in this variant, but not all) brings the story of Olav and Torgun to a happy ending. No one in the story, we notice, seems to think that Torgun is a Celtic horse-goddess—even though she has a tail. In the structure

¹⁵*Folktales of Norway*, edited by Reidar Christiansen, translated by Pat Shaw Iversen (Chicago, 1964), pp. 110–13.

of the story, her long tail (probably a cow's tail, anyway) makes more sense as a sign of Torgun's 'otherness', as a fairy but also simply as a newcomer to the parish. Her decaudalization at the church door is then a kind of naturalization ceremony, a sign of her crossing the threshold into a fully human existence and becoming a participating member of a human family and human society. In a similar way, her trick with the horseshoe recalls no lost hippomyths but functions simply and directly as the climactic incident in a story about the continuing unfamiliarity between members of those human families and societies, and particularly between marriage partners—a strangeness (the story cautions) we do well to keep in mind.

The Four Branches of the Mabinogi are, as far as we know, the most significant prose fiction produced in medieval Britain before the romances of Malory four centuries later. As with Malory, genetic and generic questions must be faced before the work of literary interpretation can proceed—questions which all seem to turn on our sense of the knowledge and skill of the author. If the story-material did in fact come to him from myths—Celtic, Hindu, or bedrock Indo-European—but he did not understand that material or what he was doing with it, then the coherence and significance of the myths must be reconstructed from the fragments surviving in his confused story. This is the great tradition of scholarship on *The Four Branches*. If, on the other hand, he did understand the myths, then either he was functioning more as a priest than as an artist,¹⁶ or else he was reworking his culture's sacred stories in the manner in which other writers have rewritten Greek, Christian, and Scandinavian myths into literature.¹⁷ The latter approach does open the way for literary interpretation, but a necessary consequence of taking it is that any real meanings of the myths themselves—their connections with social ritual, their claims on communal belief—are lost just as surely as if the author had never understood them, for they have been replaced with a new kind of meaning, literary and individual. If the story-material came to the author not from mythology but from the popular tale, but he was unclear about the tales and confused about basic principles of storytelling, then his work does not cohere and we again take the road of reconstruction—this time of the original folktale

¹⁶Patrick K. Ford's analysis of a hippomorphic fertility-myth in the First and Third Branches may be an example of this approach: 'The basic assumption about the tales must be, it seems to me, *a fortiori*, that they did have a meaning for the scribe as well as for his audience, whoever and whatever that was' ('Prolegomena to a Reading of the *Mabinogi*: "Pwyll" and "Manawydan"', *Studia Celtica*, 16/17 (1981–82), 110–25 (p. 113)). ¹⁷Proinsias Mac Cana: the author 'is not a mythographer conscientiously recording the traditions of the gods for their own sake, but a gifted writer shaping the shattered remains of a mythology to his own literary ends' (*The Mabinogi* (Cardiff, 1977), p. 54).

plots and motifs.¹⁸ Conversely, if he did understand those old tales and how they were made, we should expect a structural as well as thematic coherence in his tales, and literary criticism of the work he gave us is possible.¹⁹ The traditional material of *The Four Branches*, its nature and provenance, is still a necessary concern of such an approach, but with the goal of understanding how well the author used and transformed that material in making his story.

In the rest of this paper I focus on the story-material and structure of the First Branch, but the conclusions appear to apply to the other branches as well. Kenneth Jackson gave the First Branch his closest attention, and he was able to document thirteen international popular motifs which appear in it. He also pointed out three 'Celtic' motifs—incidents such as that of a mortal going to the Otherworld to aid a fairy king in a war, which is known in Irish literature and folklore as well as in Welsh.²⁰ Another look at that material allows us to triple the number of international motifs in *Pwyll*, and to add four or five more Celtic motifs—and that is essentially all the story.²¹ Traditional motifs do seem to constitute the story-material of *Pwyll*.

But listing isolated motifs, Celtic or international, does not tell us enough about either the sources of the story-material or the uses to which it was put. Recurring motifs are not proof of direct transmission or influence; many are simple enough to arise independently, and in some cases obviously have done just that. The more complex structures of complete tales, on the other hand, are assumed to be matters of transmission rather than of independent invention. Tales, moreover, because they are structured, show us how the motifs traditionally have been put together. It is necessary, then, to go beyond the individual motifs and look for clusters of associated motifs, linked sequences of motifs—and where possible, whole plots.

¹⁸Examples are Jackson, *International Popular Tale*, and 'Some Popular Motifs in Early Welsh Tradition', *Études celtiques*, 11 (1964–65), 83–99; Seán Ó Coileáin, 'A Thematic Study of the Tale *Pwyll Pendueic Dyuet*', *SC*, 12/13 (1977–78), 78–82. Both Jackson and Ó Coileáin leave open the possibility of the author's intentional modification of the original tales. ¹⁹As J. K. Bollard writes, 'The discovery of meaning is dependent to a large degree on an understanding of the structure of a work, although, to be sure, a knowledge of origins is often invaluable in elucidating details' ('The Role of Myth and Tradition in *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', p. 70). ²⁰*International Popular Tale*, p. 122; 'Some Popular Motifs in Early Welsh Tradition', pp. 84–88. The specific motif is F394.2 'Mortals aid fairies in war'. Traditional motifs are indexed in Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, revised edition, 6 vols (Bloomington, Indiana, 1955–58); all motif references are to this work. For Celtic motifs Thompson's revised edition drew heavily on Tom Peete Cross, *Motif-Index of Early Irish Literature*, Indiana University Folklore Series, 7 (Bloomington, Indiana, 1952). ²¹I list the motifs in 'The Traditional Narrative Motifs of *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', *CMCS*, 15 (Summer 1988), 51–62.

These provide stronger arguments for the traditional nature of both the author's story-material and his principles of story-structure.

The most interesting results of such inquiry probably arise in those instances in which the narrative is *like* the traditional motifs and tales we know, but not exactly like them. No one will argue that the materials of the First Branch are original; the author's original *use* of those materials, however, shows that he did not simply assemble them mechanically. It implies that he had an organizing vision of the story as a whole, structurally and thematically. It is possible to be both traditional and original: it was from the traditional tale, I will suggest in concluding, that he learned how to do that.

There are three main episodes in the First Branch. The first tells how Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed, went hunting and had an encounter in the woods with the Otherworld king Arawn. He saw the dogs of another hunter overtake a stag and bring it down, but he drove off that pack and baited his own dogs upon the stag. To redeem that insult to Arawn, he agreed to Arawn's demand that the two of them exchange shapes for a year and a day, and rule each other's domain. As part of the bargain, Pwyll would have Arawn's beautiful wife to sleep with each night. But at the end of the year he would fight a duel with Hafgan, an enemy who had been oppressing Arawn. As the story unfolds, he does defeat Hafgan—striking one blow only, as Arawn warned him to do. But during the year, when he is in bed with Arawn's wife, he chastely turns away from her and does not even speak to her all night long.

The opening episode uses a number of motifs widely known in traditional storytelling. Pwyll meets Arawn when he becomes separated from his companions in the woods of Glyn Cuch. The prince lost on a hunt (motif N771) has long been a favourite device for beginning an adventure—in Icelandic sagas, oral folktales of India, Italian novelle, Irish hero-tales, Grimms' tales, medieval romances, and elsewhere. As in other tales, Pwyll is led from familiar paths while pursuing an animal: in some tales it is an enchanted animal (N774) specifically sent to guide, or to lure, the hero (the white boar in the Third Branch, for example, which leads Pryderi to the enchanted fort), in others an animal that carries no special enchantment (N774.3) other than being quarry fit for a prince. The idea of atonement or payment for insult (P535.0.1), which is the reason Pwyll agrees to fight Arawn's enemy Hafgan in Arawn's place, is a legal institution of early Celtic society, appearing in the medieval Welsh Laws, in Irish tales, and elsewhere in *The Four Branches*.²² The period of 'a year and a day' (Z72.1) is a legal formula familiar

²²Motif P535.0.1 is taken from Cross's index of Irish motifs; it is not included in Thompson's *Motif-Index*.

to Celtic story, international folktale, and medieval romance. In Welsh fairy-legends which were collected in the nineteenth century, a person trapped in a fairy-ring could be freed only after a year and a day;²³ in an Irish hero-tale collected in 1934 from oral tradition in Co. Donegal, the young Conn engages to serve Fionn without fault for a year and a day;²⁴ in medieval romance, knightly encounters such as that of Gawain and the Green Knight are often scheduled for a year and a day. Pwyll's 'year and a day' adventure, we notice, has elements of all three: an Otherworld sojourn, service to a lord, an appointment for combat. The duel with Hafgan is a 'fight at a ford' (H1561.2.3), a well-known Celtic motif and also a favourite of medieval romance from Chrétien to Malory.²⁵ The prohibition against striking more than one blow (C742) is very widespread, known (as Kenneth Jackson pointed out) 'in folklore from Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, the Caucasus, Russia, and Lapland in the east to Ireland and Iceland in the west, being especially common in the Near East and in eastern Europe, and occurring in literature in the Arabian Nights tale of Saif al-Muluk and in the Middle English poem of "The Turke and Gawain"',²⁶

The image of Arawn and his pack of hunting dogs comprises an interesting group of motifs in the opening scene. Arawn rides a horse of the same 'dapple-grey' (*erchlas*)²⁷ colour as horses seen beneath fairies centuries later in English ballads and folktales (F241.1.1.2). And among the Welsh fairy-legends collected by John Rhys we meet in one a troop of fairies hunting on grey horses, and in another a fairy coming 'on a fine grey steed' to fetch a human midwife to assist his wife in childbirth.²⁸ It is, however, Arawn's dogs that Pwyll notices most (though he seems not to notice them enough): 'The colour that was on them was a brilliant shining white, and their ears red' (*Sef lliw oed arnunt, clauerwyn llathreit, ac eu clusteu yn goch-yon—PKM 1.21–23*). The Otherworld associations of those colours are deeply rooted in Welsh folk tradition. Red is particularly associated with Otherworld beings, and in the legends fairies appear in red caps, red coats, or completely dressed in red. (A race so clever will of course dress variously, and green is also highly favoured.) White is another sign of the presence of the Otherworld, and the

²³Elias Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore: A Collection of the Folk-Tales and Legends of North Wales* (Oswestry and Wrexham [1896]), pp. 40 and 46; Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, I, 194, 200, 223, and 249. ²⁴'The King Who Could Not Sleep', in *Folktales of Ireland*, edited and translated by Sean O'Sullivan (Chicago, 1966), p. 24. ²⁵See R. S. Loomis, 'The Combat at the Ford in the "Didot Perceval"', in *Wales and the Arthurian Legend* (Cardiff, 1956), pp. 91–104. ²⁶*International Popular Tale*, p. 84. ²⁷*Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, edited by Ifor Williams, second edition (Cardiff, 1951), 2.4; all references are to page and line numbers of this edition, subsequently abbreviated PKM. Translations are from *The Mabinogion*, translated by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, Everyman's Library, 97 (London, 1949). ²⁸*Celtic Folklore*, I, 83 and 98.

same legends tell us of fairy women 'dressed gorgeously in white', and of 'comely milk-white' fairy-cattle.²⁹

Some readers of the First Branch have also seen in this opening scene early versions of the Wild Hunt, legends of which appear all over Europe, and of Welsh legends of the Hounds of Hell (*Cŵn Annwn*).³⁰ Legends of the Wild Hunt tell of a spectral hunting party encountered on a dark night deep in the forest, or even seen crossing the night sky. In some the huntsman is the ghost of some historical figure (Sir Francis Drake, for example, in Devon), and in others he is the Devil himself, hunting souls. The Hounds of Hell are regarded as death omens: they are more often heard than seen, and they are said to be pursuing the doomed souls of persons dying unbaptized or unshriven.³¹ Although there may well be some connections between those tales and Arawn and his pack, the huntsman and dogs of the First Branch finally do not seem to be versions of either group of legends. Arawn is neither phantom nor Devil, and Pwyll is not a lost soul pursued as quarry for eternal damnation: both are noblemen hunting a stag. Pwyll meets Arawn in broad daylight, and he drives Arawn's dogs away from the stag. The later legends of the Devil's ghostly pack may in fact be 'mythologized' versions of Arawn's dogs, but the dogs themselves are tangible figures from a parallel world which their colours plainly manifest.

When the year is over Pwyll meets Arawn again in Glyn Cuch, and his own form and kingdom are returned to him. When Arawn himself returns home he learns from his wife that Pwyll had turned his back to her every night, neither speaking to her nor touching her through the night, though in the morning he would be as courteous

²⁹*Celtic Folklore*, (red:) I, 44, 133, 139, and 185; (green:) I, 143, 145, 200, and 245; (white:) I, 143 and 250. The relevant motifs are F241.6 'Fairy dogs', F178 'Colours of the otherworld', F178.1 'Red as otherworld colour', D1293.1 'Red as magic colour', D1293.3 'White as magic colour'. See also the references in Osborn Bergin, 'White Red-Eared Cows', *Ériu*, 14 (1943–46), 170. ³⁰Gruffydd, *Rhiannon*, p. 28 (Arawn as the Wild Hunt); Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore*, pp. 127–28, and Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, I, 216 (Arawn's pack as the Hounds of Hell); Claude Luttrell, 'Folk Legend as Source for Arthurian Romance: The Wild Hunt', in *An Arthurian Tapestry: Essays in memory of Lewis Thorpe*, edited by Kenneth Varty (Glasgow, 1981), pp. 83–100 (identifies the Wild Hunt with the *Cŵn Annwn*, and both with Arawn and his pack). ³¹For the Wild Hunt see Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (New York, 1946), p. 257; *Motif-Index*, E501ff.; Luttrell, 'Folk Legend as Source for Arthurian Romance'. A good modern version of the legend from Somerset can be found in *Folktales of England*, edited by Katharine M. Briggs and Ruth L. Tongue (London, 1965), pp. 52–54. For the Welsh Hounds of Hell (cf. motifs A673 'Hound of hell' and E752.5 'Hell-hounds accompany soul to lower world') see Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore*, pp. 125–29 and 135; Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, I, 143–44 and 215–16; T. Gwynn Jones, *Welsh Folklore and Folk-Custom* (1930; repr. Cambridge and Woodbridge, 1979), pp. 46–47 and 202–3. In the south-west of England the dogs have been known as Yeth ('Heath') Hounds, Wish Hounds, Gabriel Ratchets, the Devil's Dandy Dogs—and one of their number, of course, as the Hound of the Baskervilles.

and affectionate toward her as ever. Arawn is far more impressed by this than by Pwyll's defeat of Hafgan: 'O Lord God', he says (to himself), 'a man steadfast and unswerving of his fellowship did I find for a comrade' ('Oy a Arglwyd Duw', heb ef, 'cadarn a ungwr y gydymdeithas, a diffleeis, a geueis i yn gedymdeith'—PKM 7.21–23).

Like Gawain of the Middle English romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Pwyll has faced two tests: one which he knew about and one which he did not. Both Gawain and Pwyll had their thoughts fixed on meeting a fearsome opponent at the end of a year, but for each a more serious test—unexpected and unrecognized—came from meeting the beautiful wife of his host.³² There can be no doubt that this was in fact a test for Pwyll: there is no other reason for him to have Arawn's shape for the entire year. Although Arawn explicitly offered his wife to Pwyll, he is much moved by Pwyll's discretion, sense of honour, and firm restraint. Pwyll has preserved Arawn's honour privately (by being chaste with his wife) as well as publicly (by defeating Hafgan). And he has repaired his failure in the hunt: the usurpation of the hart is a mistake he does not repeat.

The sexual possibilities inherent in the motif of taking another's shape (D40) have undoubtedly helped to make it a favourite of traditional storytelling. The idea of shape-shifting, or transformation, is of course as universal in wonder tales as any element can be, and the specific motif of taking another person's form in order to sleep with his wife (D658.2) is also well known. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's tale of the conception of Arthur, Uther Pendragon is able to sleep with Igrerna (Malory's Igraine) because Merlin has put her husband's form on him. An early Irish version of this motif in the *Conception of Mongán* tale has the Otherworld shape-shifter Manannán mac Lir take the shape of a woman's husband in order to beget on her the hero Mongán. W. J. Gruffydd radically reconstructed the First Branch to make it conform to that Irish tale, believing that *Pwyll* and the *Conception of Mongán* were 'variations of an identical original', with the Irish tale 'nearer the source than the Welsh'.³³ In *Pwyll*, however, no 'conception' takes place. We have instead the story of a test—of honour, fidelity, friendship, self-restraint, the guest-host relationship, and social judgment. Moreover, in neither of the two versions of the *Conception of Mongán* used by Gruffydd do we have an *exchange* of shapes. In one, no shape-shifting at all occurs: the Otherworld lover uses extortion rather than magic. In the other, the lover does take on the husband's shape to deceive the wife, but the husband, who is at a distant battle,

³²Motif H1556.2 'Test of fidelity through submitting hero to temptations'. ³³*Rhiannon*, pp. 24–46 (p. 32); Gruffydd notes that the motif of an Otherworld figure visiting a woman in the guise of her husband is of great antiquity and goes back at least to Herodotus.

does not take on the lover's shape—there being no narrative reason for him to do so.

Much closer to the events in *Pwyll* are two well-known incidents in the Icelandic *Völsunga saga* which do involve an actual exchange of shapes. In the first, Signy exchanges shapes with a beautiful sorceress in order to sleep with her twin brother Sigmund and conceive the avenging hero Sinfjotli, while the sorceress takes Signy's place with her hated husband. A generation later, Sigmund's other son Sigurd exchanges shapes with Gunnar so that he can ride through the wall of flames and win the valkyrie Brynhild for Gunnar. Sigurd sleeps with her for three nights, but each night he lays his sword Gram naked between them.

All those stories—the conception of Mongán, the conception of Arthur, the conception of Sinfjotli, and the wooing of Brynhild—connect the motif of taking another's shape with sexual deception and seduction, and it is understandable that Gruffydd thought this was the story told as well by the First Branch. But there is no seduction in *Pwyll*, and it is only the second incident from the *Völsunga saga*, that containing the 'sword of chastity' motif (T351), that comes close to our tale. Both are very likely to be literary developments of the old and widespread folktale called 'The Twins', 'The Blood-Brothers', or 'The Two Brothers', which is known all over Europe and has spread as well to the oral tales of Africa, the Far East, and the American Indians.³⁴ It is a tale, moreover, which appears in unmistakable form in the Old Norse *King Hrólf's Saga* (*Hrólf's saga kraka*, which has the motif of 'chaste sleeping together' (T350) without the sword) and in the Old French *chanson de geste* of *Ami et Amile* (which does use the sword motif, but 'rationalizes' the identical twin brothers into two close friends who just happen to look alike in every way). *Ami et Amile* was a story known throughout medieval Europe, including Latin, Anglo-Norman, English, Dutch, Icelandic, and Welsh versions. In the central episode, Ami takes Amile's place in a judicial combat and Amile takes Ami's place at home, but places the naked sword between himself and Ami's wife in bed at night. A similar sequence of motifs—the exchange of roles, the chaste brother or friend, and a duel—thus appears in both the

³⁴See Stith Thompson, *The Folktale*, pp. 24–32. 'The Two Brothers' is Type 303 (AT 303) in the standard classification of European folktales, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*, by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, second revision, Folklore Fellows Communications, 184 (Helsinki, 1961). Grimms' *Household Tales* contains two versions of this tale (nos 60 and 85), the first of which is a very full version in which the tale is combined, as it often is, with 'The Dragon-Slayer' (AT 300, another very old tale, and one which became part of the Tristan story) and 'The Magic Bird-Heart' (AT 567, which became part of the Gwion Bach story in the Welsh *Hanes Taliesin*).

French story and *Pwyll*, and Kenneth Jackson concluded from this that the sequence came to both authors as a unit:

The episode of the exchange of shapes, the Chaste Friend, and the duel must therefore have existed, *already* joined together, as a current popular tale before the latter part of the eleventh century, and this was used independently in France and in Wales.³⁵

And that is just what we find in 'The Two Brothers'. In the relevant episode of that tale (as in the fuller Grimm version, no. 60), one brother is hunting and is lured into a haunted forest by a snow-white hind ('guiding beast' motif), where a witch turns him to stone. His identical twin brother learns that the first is in peril and sets out to rescue him. On the way, he arrives at the first brother's city, where he allows everyone to believe that he is his brother so that he can obtain necessary information about him. He sleeps chastely with his brother's wife, a princess, placing a naked sword between them. He then follows his brother into the forest, defeats the magical defences of the witch, forces her to disenchant his brother, and they kill her. Because the brothers are twins, there is in this tale no need for an exchange of shapes, but we do have the 'sword of chastity' motif followed by a duel with the witch. In *Pwyll*, on the other hand, we have the exchange of shapes, the chaste sleeping together, and the duel, but without the striking image of the sword in the bed—and that may well have been the author's own decision. As Glenys Goetinck has written, *Pwyll* is shown not to need such a 'reminder' of his duty: 'It is his own conception of honour which imposes this discretion on him. . . . he remains chaste during the whole year thanks to a firm will'.³⁶

When *Pwyll* returned to his own realm, of course no one realized he had been gone. He soon began to ask his nobles how they had been ruled during the past year. Better than ever, was the reply. *Pwyll* then revealed that it was Arawn in his shape who had ruled them, and he promised to hold to the standards of discernment,

³⁵*International Popular Tale*, p. 83; pp. 81–84 discuss the relation of *Pwyll* to 'The Two Brothers' and to *Ami et Amile*. See also Glenys Witchard Goetinck, 'La Légende d'*Ami et Amile* et le *Mabinogi de Pwyll*', *Romania*, 86 (1965), 404–8. For 'The Two Brothers' as the basis of *Ami et Amile*, see the thorough study of the sources of the tale by MacEdward Leach in the Introduction to his edition of the Middle English *Amis and Amiloun*, Early English Text Society, original series, 203 (London, 1937), especially pp. xxxii–lxv. William Calin's discussion of the Old French *Ami et Amile* in *The Epic Quest: Studies in Four Old French Chansons de Geste* (Baltimore, 1966), pp. 57–117, lists the traditional motifs in the poem (pp. 60–62), but also argues against any significant influence from folktales (pp. 63–72)—primarily because Calin limits 'traditional' tales to 'oral' tales. The Old French poem is edited by Peter Dembowski, *Ami et Amile: Chanson de Geste*, Classiques français du Moyen Âge, 97 (Paris, 1969). ³⁶*La Légende d'Ami et Amile et le Mabinogi de Pwyll*, p. 407 (my translation).

friendship, and generosity set by Arawn in his place. From that time forth there was also friendship and the exchange of gifts between the realms of Annwn and Dyfed. And because of his adventure *Pwyll* became known by a new name: 'the name of *Pwyll* prince of Dyfed fell into disuse, and he was called *Pwyll* Head of Annwn from that time forth' (*y diffygywys y enw ef ar Pwyll, Penduic Dyuet, ac y gelwit Pwyll Penn Annwun o hynny allan*—PKM 8.24–26).

Thus this entire tale of the 'Otherworld Tests' is presented by the author as essentially an onomastic tale, an elaborate expansion and ornamentation of the type of onomastic digressions scattered throughout *The Four Branches*. But those expansions and ornamentations are what make the tale something far fuller and more interesting than the usual onomastic and aetiological asides: they make it both a complete tale in itself and an integral part of the larger story of *Pwyll* told by the First Branch. The traditional tale of 'The Two Brothers', a story of fidelity and friendship between identical twins, was clearly important to that story. The year's events unite in peaceful concord various realms which begin the year in a state of warring division. Two realms of the Otherworld are brought together under one rule; two realms of this world and the Otherworld establish a close relationship. And two personalities are brought together as well: *Pwyll* and his Otherworld counterpart, who first meet in enmity over the stag, finally join in friendship. In committing himself to live up to Arawn's standards, *Pwyll* in effect promises to hold to the rule of a better self. He returns to his society and his chieftainship a different man, and the story signals this clearly by his new name.

As the first main episode of *Pwyll* is an Otherworld Tests tale, so the second is a Fairy Mistress tale. A tale of courtship and marriage, it tells how *Pwyll* got his wife. It begins with the appearance of Rhiannon on her magic horse, and the futile attempts of *Pwyll* and his men to catch up with her. In addition to the motifs of the magic horse (B184.1), love at first sight (T15), and a woman apparently being forced to marry her father's choice (T131.1.2.1), a number of other elements in this opening scene give us the 'twice-told' feeling of traditional motifs. And where the first episode, as an Otherworld tale, had an unusually large proportion of 'Celtic' motifs, the identifiable elements of this one are all international.

Rhiannon's three appearances on three successive days, for example, and the three attempts to catch her with only the last one successful, follow the familiar narrative pattern of 'folktale threes' (triplication, or triple repetition) which we see again and again in the European folktale: Cinderella's three gowns, for example, and her three flights from the ball on three nights in succession; three brothers who attempt the same adventure (the youngest succeeds), or who follow three different occupations; three tasks to be performed

in three days, and three magic objects to help; three enemies to conquer, three questions to answer, three temptations to resist, three stages of recognizing the true hero. The author of *The Four Branches* was fond of this pattern of storytelling, it appears, and used it often. Indeed, it is a pattern so basic to our tradition of storytelling that it can easily pass unnoticed, until we look at a different tradition such as that of the American Indians, where even the 'folktale threes' of adopted European tales are eventually changed to the 'folktale fours' of the native tradition of storytelling.

There are two marvels involved in Rhiannon's appearance to Pwyll, the specific forms of which may be unique to *The Four Branches* but which clearly are magical motifs belonging to the milieu of wonder tale, legend, and romance. The first is Gorsedd Arberth, Pwyll's hilltop seat which brings to any nobleman who sits there either blows and wounds, or else a wonder. It is obviously similar to other perilous sieges in folktale and romance, and also to the fountains in Chrétien's *Yvain* and its Welsh analogue *Owein*, which bring to any visitor bold enough to pour water from them both a wild thunderstorm to wonder at and a stout knight to give him blows. The second is Rhiannon's elegant magic horse, which stays always ahead of one without changing its slow amble. Its form of 'unnatural motion' is also known in the humbler world of the folk legend. John Rhys recorded two instances from the fairy legends of Wales. In one, we hear of a family of fairies who always remain ahead of one, though never seen to move:

They were very fond of the mountains of Dyfed; travellers between Lampeter and Cardigan used to see them on the hill of Llanwenog, but by the time they had reached there the fairies would be far away on the hills of Llandyssul, and when one had reached the place where one expected to see the family together in tidy array, they would be seen very busily engaged on the tops of Crug y Balog; when one went there they would be on Blaen Pant ar Fi, moving on and on to Bryn Bwa, and, finally, to some place or other in the lower part of Dyfed.³⁷

In another, a shepherd boy who has inadvertently wandered into a region of fairy rings runs away as fast as he can, but gets nowhere:

He hastened away as fast as ever he could, lest he should be ruined like the rest; but, though he exerted himself to the point of perspiring and losing his breath, there he was, and there he continued to be, a long time.³⁸

³⁷*Celtic Folklore*, 1, 152. ³⁸*Celtic Folklore*, 1, 112; see also Owen, *Welsh Folklore*, p. 45. Kenneth Jackson notes in two Irish sagas the impossible 'attempt to catch up with a supernatural being after whom one is sent in pursuit', and suggests that these are obvious analogies to the motif of Rhiannon's horse ('Some Popular Motifs in Early Welsh Tradition', pp. 91-92).

He has experienced, probably, the same incapacity that Pwyll and his men knew pursuing Rhiannon.

Most of all, it is the well-known international theme of the Fairy Mistress that is announced in this opening adventure, and which dominates the second episode of *Pwyll*. Known around the world, it seems to have been a special favourite in the folklore of Ireland, England, and Wales. Elias Owen and John Rhys found version after version of the Fairy Mistress tale in late-nineteenth-century Wales, and both gave pride of place in their collections to the many variants of that tale. (The first fifty pages or so of Owen's *Welsh Folk-Lore* are mainly concerned with versions of this tale, though he treats other motifs along with it. The first chapter of Rhys's *Celtic Folklore*, seventy-four pages, is devoted to the tale, and he returns to it frequently throughout his book.) The main outlines of the Welsh legends follow the same general pattern. A man finds (or is found by) a fairy woman, who in many of the variants appears to him out of a lake. He persuades her to marry him, but she imposes conditions. In one group of variants, he is never to touch her with iron, and in another group he must not give her 'three causeless blows'. They return to his farm and live happily together for many years; many of the tales will mention that she is very good with farm animals and that the farm prospers while she is there. But always the taboo is eventually broken. The iron-taboo is characteristically broken by the husband's accidentally touching his wife with some horse-equipment (a bridle, stirrup, or iron fetter), but sometimes it is some other piece of farm equipment (a reaping-hook, for example). She then returns to her Otherworld home beneath the lake, taking with her the fairy cattle she brought as dowry. Her children stay with the husband, and the legend-tellers often were able to name local families descended from them. In one well-known group, the legend of Llyn y Fan Fach, her eldest son became the first of a long line of famous physicians, with knowledge she had taught him.

This legend goes back in Wales to at least the twelfth century, when Walter Map wrote down a version of it,³⁹ and the many Welsh variants draw our attention to some interesting details of the tale in *Pwyll*. In a typical nineteenth-century version, the fairy woman appears to the young man out of a lake three days in succession. On the first day, struck by her beauty, he offers her his lunch of hard-baked barley bread, which she refuses. On the second day he tries unbaked barley bread, again with no success. On the third day he offers her moderately baked barley bread, which she accepts, agreeing to become his wife. But then her father appears with an identical

³⁹Quoted and translated in Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, 1, 71-72, from Map's *De Nugis Curialium*.

sister, or several of them, and in a 'suitor test' known throughout international folktales the young man must distinguish his beloved from her sister or sisters (H161 and H324). He is unable to do so until she draws his attention by making a slight motion with her foot, and he recognizes some peculiarity of her shoe-tie which he had noticed earlier. Clearly, the fairy mistress in these legends chooses her man (by choosing to appear to him three days in a row), but also makes the man pursue her (by rejecting the bread until the third day, when he offers her bread properly baked for her taste). In a similar way Rhiannon chooses Pwyll, appearing to him three days in a row and defying an attempt (presumably by her father) to give her to another man against her will. She also makes Pwyll pursue her for three days, until he approaches her properly: there is no other narrative reason for the elusive magic of her white horse. Moreover, the fairy mistress of the legends, in addition to making sure that the young man pursues her, makes sure that he catches her—by helping him in the identity-test. The indispensable aid of the girl is an element that frequently accompanies the performance of suitor tasks in the traditional tale, and Rhiannon is no exception. She helps Pwyll to outwit the other suitor who appears at the wedding feast to claim her—though in the hands of our author the point of the test is not 'know thy lover' but 'know thy enemy'.

At the wedding feast a handsome young man entered the hall and asked a boon, which Pwyll granted before he heard what it was. The youth is Gwawl uab Clut, to whom Rhiannon had been promised, and he asks for the wedding feast and her. Rhiannon arranges to put him off for a year, and instructs Pwyll to come to that wedding feast disguised in shabby garments, leaving his men hidden outside. He is to ask Gwawl to fill with food a magic bag which she gives him. But the bag can never be filled, and Pwyll tricks Gwawl into stepping into it, where he is trapped and held until he relinquishes his claim on the bride and the feast.

Pwyll's 'rash boon' (M223) is of course a familiar motif in Arthurian romances, and similar careless promises begin the action of many folktales. Rhiannon's strategem of postponing the unwelcome marriage for a year (T151) is a device known by folktale heroines from Iceland to India, and her having Pwyll appear at the marriage feast in a humble disguise (K1816.0.3.1) when the year is up is another widely known international motif. The two motifs are often linked, and appear together in the ancient 'Dragon-Slayer' folktale (AT 300). In that tale, the hero rescues a princess from a dragon, but then he disappears for a while, leaving the princess to be claimed by an imposter who says that he is the one who killed the dragon. On the day of the princess's wedding to the imposter, the hero returns in disguise. The tale has two means of bringing about his

recognition, and frequently uses both. The hero first attracts attention by requesting or stealing food from the wedding-feast, often by sending helpful animals for it one by one (H151.2). Then he presents proof—often the dragon's tongue (or tongues, for some dragons have seven heads)—that he is the dragon-slayer and rescuer of the princess (H105.1). Then, of course, he marries the princess. The tale was known well in the Middle Ages from the Tristan story, but it has also had a long and vigorous life in oral tradition. (James Delargy noted in 1945, when he was Director of the Irish Folklore Commission, that 108 versions of the tale had been catalogued from Irish and Scottish Gaelic oral and manuscript tradition, and he expected the number to double, at least, when all the Irish material had been catalogued.)⁴⁰ 'The Dragon-Slayer', as we have already noticed, is very often incorporated into the tale of 'The Two Brothers' (AT 303), and several of the motifs used in that tale appear in the first and last sections of *Pwyll*.⁴¹ It seems very likely, then, that the author of *The Four Branches* also knew 'The Dragon-Slayer', either from the Tristan story or from 'The Two Brothers'. In that case, Gwawl fills the traditional role of an 'imposter bridegroom' (K1932)—usually the king's seneschal or marshal, as in the Tristan romances and the Grimm version (no. 60)—though he claims the bride on the basis of Pwyll's rash boon rather than by falsely claiming he killed a dragon.

In the First Branch, however, Gwawl is not simply an imposter who can be exposed but a 'protagonist of malignant cynicism' (as Nerys Patterson has nicely characterized him)⁴² who must be defeated, if it is possible to do so. This battle is won (though the war will go on) not with a dragon's tongue but with Rhiannon's magic bag, another international motif. Kenneth Jackson discussed this motif, writing that the bag which cannot be filled belongs to 'the group of international motifs about impossible tasks'. The beating

⁴⁰J. H. Delargy, 'The Gaelic Story-Teller', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 31 (1945), 177–221 (p. 205); Delargy also noted: 'In *Pwyll*, the incident of the hero at the wedding-feast, dressed as a fool, carrying a bag which is to be filled with food, has a Gaelic counterpart in a modern hero-tale, of which there are many variants' (p. 219). By 1961, according to the Aarne-Thompson *Types of the Folktale*, 527 Irish versions of AT 300 had been found; see also the catalogue of individual versions by county in Seán Ó Súilleabháin and Reidar Th. Christiansen, *The Types of the Irish Folktale*, Folklore Fellows Communications, 188 (Helsinki, 1963). See Thompson, *The Folktale*, pp. 27–32, for some idea, based on more than a thousand oral variants, of the wide international distribution of 'The Dragon-Slayer'. ⁴¹Kenneth Jackson wrote that the author of *The Four Branches* 'must have known' the tale of 'The Two Brothers' (*International Popular Tale*, p. 92). ⁴²'Honour and Shame in Medieval Welsh Society: A Study of the Role of Burlesque in the Welsh Laws', *SC*, 16/17 (1981–82), 73–103 (p. 101); Patterson also suggests here of Gwawl that 'the bag swallows him up in a parody of his own greed'.

of trapped Gwawl by Pwyll's men, he believed, 'can scarcely be independent of a motif which is attached in many versions to the international popular tale known as *The Smith Outwits the Devil*, best known in Britain in the legend of St. Dunstan'—a tale in which the Devil is magically caught in a bag from which he cannot escape and is pounded on an anvil by blacksmiths.⁴³ Both statements need to be qualified. Motifs about impossible tasks (classified in motif-indexes under H1010–H1049) involve tasks contrary to natural laws—making a rope of sand, carrying water in a sieve—rather than tasks made difficult by the presence of magic. Rhiannon's bag which cannot be filled is simply a 'magic bag' (D1193), of which the international folktale knows many forms. The second motif, the trapping and beating of Gwawl, is indeed similar to, but not identical with, the incident in 'The Smith Outwits the Devil' (AT 330)—and also that in another international tale, 'The Magic Providing Purse and "Out, Boy, Out of the Sack!"' (AT 564), which uses a magic bag that either draws an enemy into it or else contains a manikin which cudgels the enemy until it is called off (the function performed by Pwyll's warband in our tale). But if the author of the First Branch knew and used those international tales with their magic bags and cudgelings (and it seems probable that he did), he also changed them slightly but significantly. The magic of Rhiannon's bag lies in its not being able to be filled, not in magically drawing a person into it. That is, Gwawl is drawn into the bag not by magic but by the trickery of Rhiannon and Pwyll. Nor is he kept there by magic, but by Pwyll tying up the neck with thongs. These small changes add to the injury an insult which Gwawl will not forget.

This tale concludes, as many thousands do, with a marriage. Rhiannon has got the suitor she wanted and has got rid of the one she did not want. Pwyll has once again united himself with a better and stronger figure, almost as literally this time (through marriage) as he did before (through transformation). He lives happily ever after with Rhiannon, or at least as much so as men do who wed human wives—for Rhiannon is no longer an Otherworld woman. From this point on she is treated by the story as a human wife, which is the general pattern of those Fairy Mistress tales in which the woman is brought back to this world and married. In the Welsh folk legends this state continues until the taboo is broken and the wife departs, but in many versions outside Wales there is no taboo and the marriage lasts until the husband and wife, she now fully human, die. The tale in *Pwyll* is thus closer to the Norwegian legend than

⁴³*International Popular Tale*, pp. 85–86; Jackson suggested that the relevant motifs are D1412.1 'Magic bag draws person into it' and D1413.9.1 'Wallet (sack) from which one cannot escape'—both international motifs.

to the Welsh, for Rhiannon, like Torgun, remains in this world with her husband and children. Both Torgun and Rhiannon are upon marriage no longer fairy mistresses but human wives, a transformation signalled in the Norwegian legend by Torgun's tail dropping off when she enters the church, and perhaps also by the Christian humility and piety she develops. In the First Branch, Rhiannon, who never did have a tail, similarly develops what may be either Christian humility or pagan stoicism as the story proceeds by quietly transforming itself, and her, from Fairy Mistress to Calumniated Wife.

In the last episode of the First Branch, a child is born to Rhiannon and Pwyll, after a worrisome delay. But on the night of his birth the child is mysteriously stolen, and Rhiannon is accused of killing him. Her punishment is to wait every day for seven years near a horse-block outside the gate, to tell her story to all strangers arriving at the court, and to offer to carry them on her back into the court. In another part of Wales, meanwhile, the chieftain Teyrnnon has been mysteriously losing a newborn colt every May-eve. On this May-eve he keeps watch to guard his latest colt, and sees a giant claw reach in through the window and seize the colt. Teyrnnon cuts off the arm with his sword and rushes out after the monster. When he returns, an infant child is there with the colt. Teyrnnon and his wife, who appear to be childless (we are told they have no son), raise the boy as their own. He grows faster than any other child, and by his fourth year it becomes clear to them that this is the lost child of Rhiannon and Pwyll. They return him, and Rhiannon is exonerated.

All those incidents are known elsewhere in international story. In the first section we have these motifs: a ruler about to abandon a barren wife and marry another (N681.2), in this case because his advisers insist that he be married with children (T64); a child stolen by a fairy (F321), witch (G261), or demon (G442); an innocent woman accused of killing her newborn children (K2116.1.1), with blood smeared on her face and hands to prove the accusation (K2155.1); the accused woman's punishment by being made to do some menial service (Q482). In the second part of the episode are the motifs of a watch for a devastating monster (H1471), a demon hand thrust down a chimney or through a window (G369.5), the demon's arm pulled off or cut off by a defender of the house (G512.6.1), the supernatural growth of a hero (T615), and either the simultaneous birth of an animal and child (T589.7.1) or a 'congenital animal' magically born at the same time as the hero (B311). All are widespread motifs of the traditional tale—a number of them have reached around the world. Several, moreover, were particularly familiar to the Middle Ages, when they consistently appeared together

in Calumniated Wife tales, which is of course exactly what the final episode of the First Branch is.

It has long been recognized that the third episode of *Pwyll* is a Calumniated Wife tale (motif K2110.1; tale-types AT 705–712).⁴⁴ The tale is perhaps known best from Chaucer's 'Man of Law's Tale', but it was one of the most popular stories of medieval literature, was widely known in European folktales (Grimms' *Household Tales*, for example, has no less than six versions), and appears as well in the narrative traditions of India, Africa, the North American Indians, and elsewhere.⁴⁵ The general view of the episode in *Pwyll*, however, has been to regard the Calumniated Wife tale as a late addition to some original tale which is now submerged. W. J. Gruffydd studied at length the story of Rhiannon's accusation and punishment, and argued that the Calumniated Wife was a medieval 'contamination' of a much older myth of Rhiannon 'in which she was the Great Mother who became identified with the Great Horse Goddess, Epona'.⁴⁶ Similarly, Kenneth Jackson concluded that the Calumniated Wife motifs came into the story in its final stage of 'disintegration' from an original tale about a child-stealing monster, traces of which remain visible and baffling in the present tale:

It was the clumsy patching at this stage of the tale, consequent on the violent introduction of the Calumniated Wife, which has left it practically unintelligible in its present form. Who stole the child? What was this mysterious claw? Why did it steal Teyrnon's foals? How did it come to drop the child in Teyrnon's stable and what was it doing there anyway?⁴⁷

In the First Branch, as both Gruffydd and Jackson saw, the Calumniated Wife tale is combined with a Monster Hand tale, a story known most immediately from the Irish hero-tale *Feis Tighe Chonáin* but which also appears in Germanic, Slavonic, and Sanskrit narrative.⁴⁸ Jackson demonstrated that other traditional motifs are present as

⁴⁴Discussions of the Calumniated Wife tale in *Pwyll* extend from G. L. Kittredge's 'Arthur and Gorlagon', [Harvard] *Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, 8 (Boston, 1903), 149–275, to a recent study by Juliette Wood, 'The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature', *CMCS*, 10 (Winter 1985), 25–38. ⁴⁵For the medieval tradition see Margaret Schlauch, *Chaucer's Constance and Accused Queens* (New York, 1927). The Grimms' versions are in 'Our Lady's Child' (*Marienkind*, no. 3), 'The Twelve Brothers' (*Die zwölf Brüder*, no. 9), 'The Maiden Without Hands' (*Das Mädchen ohne Hände*, no. 31), 'The Six Swans' (*Die sechs Schwäne*, no. 49), 'The Carnation' (*Die Nelke*, no. 76), and 'The Three Birds' (*De drei Vügelkens*, no. 96). For the forms and distribution of the folktale see Thompson, *The Folktale*, pp. 110–11 and 120–23, and the Aarne-Thompson *Types of the Folktale*, tale-types 451, 652, 705–8, 710–12. ⁴⁶*Rhiannon*, p. 67. ⁴⁷*International Popular Tale*, p. 93. ⁴⁸Delargy, 'The Gaelic Story-Teller', pp. 215 and 219; Jackson, *International Popular Tale*, p. 90.

well in this episode, though less explicitly. The foal rescued by Teyrnon and raised with the child is probably a 'congenital animal' (B311). The accusation against the mother clearly is that she devoured, as well as killed, her child (K2116.1.1.1), as in two of the Grimms' versions of the tale (nos 3 and 49). Yet the sequence in which these combinations were made remains unproven. If a Calumniated Wife tale is combined with the tale of a monstrous hand that steals children, the first tale is just as likely as the second to be the basis on which the whole has been developed.

The tale of the Calumniated Wife has a simple but consistent structure. The complete form of the tale, unlike the version in *Pwyll*, includes an introductory episode which tells of the accidental meeting of the woman and a king or prince (N711). Often he happens upon her living in the woods, sometimes actually living in a tree or a thicket (N711.1). In many versions she has fled a cruel stepmother, a father who wishes to marry her, or a bargain in which her father promised her to the Devil. The king takes her to his home and marries her. Then comes the main episode of the tale, in which something happens when the woman has children. Either they disappear and she is accused of killing (and sometimes of devouring) them, as in *Pwyll*, or else her husband is away and is given a false message saying that she has given birth to monsters—or changelings, or animals—as in Chaucer, and also in the Grimms' 'The Maiden Without Hands' and 'The Three Birds'. She then suffers a period of punishment. Usually she is banished, either exiled directly by order of her husband (or by means of another false message) or else saved from death by a 'compassionate executioner' (K512) and forced to flee her home. In other versions she is walled up for years in a tower, or about to be burned at the stake when the truth comes out and she is saved. Whatever her punishment, the Calumniated Wife is eventually vindicated and reunited with her husband and children.

Rhiannon's punishment includes offering to carry men on her back, as if she were a horse. This form of punishment is an international motif, but as the punishment in a Calumniated Wife tale it seems to be unique to *Pwyll*.⁴⁹ This detail spurred W. J. Gruffydd's efforts to reconstruct a mythology from the First Branch, leading him back to the ubiquitous horse-goddess Epona. But forms of punishment vary considerably for Calumniated Wives in general, and Rhiannon's is no more unusual than, say, the punishment in an Irish version of the tale, recorded from oral tradition in Co. Donegal in 1946, in which the wife is transformed into a green stone and left outside the door 'where every drop of dirty water from the house

⁴⁹See Thompson, *Motif-Index*, Q493; Brynley F. Roberts, 'Penyd Rhiannon', *BBCS*, 23 (1968–70), 325–27.

would be thrown on top of her'.⁵⁰ Various 'punishment' motifs will fill that slot without disturbing the structure of the tale. We have already seen this principle of traditional narrative in the Welsh Fairy Mistress legends, many versions of which have the husband losing his wife when he touches her with a piece of horse-equipment, accidentally violating a taboo. Taken in isolation, that motif could seem to suggest that there is a significant connection between the Otherworld wife and horses. But other versions of the legend use reaping-hooks or sheep-shears to violate the prohibition. The only significance of horse-equipment is that it brings farm dwellers into daily contact with iron—for in all those versions it is the antipathy between Otherworld beings and iron (motifs C531 'Tabu: touching with iron' and F384.3 'Iron powerful against fairies') which brings the tale to its melancholy close. And even the iron is not essential, for yet other versions use a taboo against 'three causeless blows'. For the Welsh variants of the Fairy Mistress tale, what seems to be significant is taboo itself: the pattern of prohibition and violation. Similarly, it is a false accusation followed by a period of undeserved punishment that is important in a Calumniated Wife tale: the details of the punishment apparently carry little significance for the traditional structure. Rhiannon's punishment of offering to carry men on her back as if she were a horse does not appear in *Pwyll* because it was a necessary element of the traditional tale which the author was constrained to use—for it was not. The only reason for its appearance there must be that the author wanted it there.⁵¹ He liked, perhaps, the poignant irony in the image of Rhiannon punished by a degraded inversion of her first appearance in the story, when, regal and magical, she effortlessly rode beyond the reach of the best horsemen in the court.

What happens to the woman's children also varies widely in Calumniated Wife tales. In the Irish folktale, for example, they are taken and killed by a jealous elder sister. In the Grimms' 'Our Lady's Child' they are abducted by a supernatural figure, the Virgin Mary (who is acting in the place of a fairytale witch—this does not make

⁵⁰'The Speckled Bull', in *Folktales of Ireland*, pp. 117–30 (p. 119); this wonderful folktale combines a Calumniated Wife tale (AT 707) with a Beauty and the Beast tale (AT 425, 'The Search for the Lost Husband'). Juliette Wood points out an analogous punishment in an Arabian Nights tale in which the wife 'is confined at the door of a mosque and everyone who passes is compelled to spit at her', a situation (Wood writes) 'not unlike that in *Pwyll*' ('The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature', p. 30). ⁵¹By contrast, Proinsias Mac Cana writes that the author used this punishment only because he was stuck with it: 'In following the Calumniated Wife theme in *Pwyll* he has to subject Rhiannon to the extreme penance of sitting each day by the gate and offering to carry on her back from there to the court all those who approached. It is hardly the kind of story that he would have invented himself, had he had the choice. . . .' (*The Mabinogi*, p. 47).

the tale a myth). The specific details of how the children are disposed of do not seem important to the tale. 'Who stole the child?', 'What was this mysterious claw?', and the rest of Kenneth Jackson's questions do pick out some loose ends in the text of the story. Nevertheless, these are not the point of a Calumniated Wife tale. The storyteller had to do something with the child of Rhiannon: rather than use a jealous sister or local witch, he came up with the dramatic tale of the Demon Hand, and incorporated it into the story without breaking the basic structure of the Calumniated Wife. And he kept the focus on the central issues of his story: the basic pattern of false accusation and unjustified punishment, and, within that traditional structure, his own concerns in this story—how Rhiannon, Teyrnnon, and most of all Pwyll choose to act in the face of those events and in their dealings with one another.⁵²

The narrative motifs and tales which have been surveyed here are the elements, the building blocks, of traditional storytelling. But the author of the First Branch needed a structure to bind those elements together, to give them form—and that he found in the Calumniated Wife tale. In the final episode, he kept intact the Calumniated Wife structure while adding some flourishes of his own. On a larger scale, he used that same structure as a kind of 'core tale' for harmonizing and unifying the three episodes of the First Branch. That is to say, the structure of the First Branch, like its constituent elements, is traditional.

The third episode of the First Branch is the main part of the Calumniated Wife tale: the abducted child, and then the accusation, punishment, and vindication of the mother. But the author dropped the introductory incidents of the tale, which tell of the meeting and marriage of the woman and the king, and replaced them with an entire other tale—a far more complex Fairy Mistress tale that tells of the same thing and which became the second episode of the First Branch. The first episode introduces the protagonist Pwyll and tells us why he became known as 'Pwyll Head of Annwn' (*Pwyll Penn Annwryn*). The author simply replaced the familiar kind of brief, onomastic digression with yet another complete tale telling of a hero being tested in the Otherworld. We have, then, three traditional tales—the Otherworld Tests, the Fairy Mistress, and the Calumniated Wife—which tell, respectively, how Pwyll got his name, how he got his wife, and how he got his son Pryderi. Each serves as what Vladimir Propp called a 'move' in the larger whole, a more or less

⁵²See J. K. Bollard's discussions of the thematic issues in this episode, 'The Structure of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', pp. 263–66, and 'The Role of Myth and Tradition in *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', pp. 73–78.

complete tale which in one way or another functions as part of a more complex tale.⁵³

Traditional tales are not static but change in the process of moving from teller to teller and culture to culture. The basic structure of a complex tale is extraordinarily stable, particularly in the case of the traditional tales of Europe and Asia, but the text is not fixed. The 'tight-knit plot' of such a tale, Kenneth Jackson noted, 'holds itself together almost automatically because of the logic of its interlocking construction', and 'undesirable "mutations"' which break that logic quickly die out.⁵⁴ But within that structure details may be dropped, added, or changed in the process of transmission, incidents may be repeated, motifs may be borrowed from other tales, and roles may be switched—opposing characters changing places, animals being substituted for humans, and so on.⁵⁵ And of course tales may be combined. One method of doing this which is familiar to folklorists is to string two or more tales together. Another method, well known to medievalists, is to enclose one tale within another, a frame-tale. A third method, already noticed in *Pwyll*, involves substituting an entire tale for a motif in another tale. Certain combinations have been both complex and enduring, such as that of The Two Brothers (AT 303) and The Dragon-Slayer (AT 300) which uses the first as a frame-tale for the second, then substitutes The Magic Bird-Heart tale (AT 567) for the introductory motifs of The Two Brothers, and finally adds the motifs of the Jealous Brother episode (N342.3 and B512) as a coda to the end.⁵⁶ The author of *Pwyll*, then, found in the tale-tradition both the materials of his tales and the principles for harmonizing them. What his artistry added to those principles of structure was insight into the meanings of the tales, the reason for choosing these three particular tales rather than others to tell the story of the First Branch.

Tales of Otherworld Tests, the Fairy Mistress, and the Calumniated Wife hold numerous possibilities of meaning, some of which the author of *Pwyll* unfolded and elaborated. In the course of his story, as others have pointed out, Pwyll's deficiencies of character—personal, social, and political—are repaired as the story develops its

⁵³*Morphology of the Folktale*, translated by Laurence Scott, second edition revised by Louis A. Wagner (Austin, 1968), p. 59: 'many tales are composed of two *series* of functions which may be labelled "moves" (*xody*). A new villainous act creates a new "move", and in this manner, sometimes a whole series of tales combine into a single tale'. In Propp's scheme the 'villainous act' is the incident (or 'function') which follows the preparatory incidents of a tale and begins the actual movement of the plot. ⁵⁴*International Popular Tale*, pp. 56–59. ⁵⁵Thompson, *The Folktale*, p. 436; see also Alan Bruford's study of the changes which took place in Irish literary tales that entered oral tradition, *Gaelic Folktales and Mediaeval Romances: A Study of the Early Modern Irish 'Romantic Tales' and Their Oral Derivatives* (Dublin, 1969), especially Chapters 17–19. ⁵⁶Thompson, *The Folktale*, pp. 24–29.

positive themes of honour and friendship, effective sovereignty and responsible fertility, and the rest. Those dangerous mistakes at the centre of each episode—claiming the stag, the careless boon, the inattentiveness to his wife and newborn son—are not repeated, and there is a sense in which we can say that Pwyll leaves behind a series of flawed selves, always for a better one. The three tales, then, are articulated into one story of growth and development, of initiation and transformation. All this suggests a thematic richness to the story—far too much to pursue here—which is both complex and coherent. It is not surprising that those patterns of meaning are expressed through a tale any storyteller would recognize as well made.