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Prolegomena to a Reading of the *Mabinogi*:

'Pwyll' and 'Manawydan'

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I

IN the Introduction to *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales*, I attempted to give some account of the mythic structure underlying part of the tale of 'Pwyll'.¹ Whatever the merits of that discussion may be, there are a great many other things that remain to be said about the tale of 'Pwyll' and about the remaining branches of the *Mabinogi*, as well as about other medieval Welsh tales. The same may be said of medieval Irish tales, for, in fact, there have been very few attempts to give an extended account and analysis of the levels of meaning in medieval Celtic literatures that venture beyond the historical approach—a notable exception being Tomás Ó Cathasaigh's *The Heroic Biography of Cormac Mac Airt*.² What I wish to do here, then, is to supply some commentary on the *Mabinogi* that will go beyond the standard available treatments and, at the same time, fall short of a definitive attempt. Hence, I suggest the title of prolegomena.

One of the serious difficulties in attempting an analysis of 'Pwyll' and the other branches is that there are no alternative versions, no meaningful manuscript tradition. (Critics will note that I am refusing Lévi-Strauss's dictum that all its versions constitute the myth.³ Therefore, I will not take into account antiquarians' collections, palaeographers' printings, or, for example, Sir Thomas Parry-Williams's rendition of the four branches into modern Welsh, Evangeline Walton's translations, or the colouring books published by Y Lolfa.) That means that, for better or for worse, we are constrained by virtually one manuscript version. But other literary traditions have not been more fortunate, by and large; the *Beowulf* poem exists in a single manuscript, and it was only very recently that

¹ Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1977, esp. pp. 4–12. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text.

² Dublin (Institute for Advanced Studies), 1977.

³ 'The Structural Study of Myth', in *Myth: A Symposium*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington, 1958), 81–106.

a paper manuscript was discovered that provided an alternative version to Caxton's Malory. Such matters are not to be taken lightly, to be sure, for what we may seize upon as an extremely significant motif, lexical item, indeed, grammatical form, may be but a ghost. Still, the only alternative seems to be to wait for future generations in whose lives additional manuscripts may be discovered, and allow them the luxury of making midnight raids into our murky texts. Better for them to have the advantage of our myopic and limited vision.

What I propose to do here is to examine the tales as closely as I can, eschewing any one methodology for an eclectic approach, stating as clearly as I can that which is evident in the text, what its meaning may be first of all in the tradition of Welsh literature and Celtic mythology, then in the wider traditions of Indo-European—where that seems relevant. Wherever possible, I shall argue for inherited Welsh reflexes of Celtic, sprung from Indo-European, traditions, on the theory that one is usually richer in a less encumbered way from an inheritance than from a loan. Furthermore, if the metaphor is valid in this instance, an inheritance can be passed on: a loan cannot, at least not without resistance.

Matthew Arnold's assessment of the four branches of the *Mabinogi* has, no doubt, been a source of consolation for generations of students and scholars who have gone head to head with the tales, seeking to pry a modicum of meaning from their sternly resistant lines. Speaking of the redactor, Arnold supposed that he was pillaging an antiquity of which he scarcely possessed the secret.¹ It will be evident that Arnold meant that some medieval Welsh writer, scribe, author, redactor, or whatever we choose to call him, sat perplexed upon his stool, writing down things (from an informant? from an exemplar or exemplars?) that he did not understand, perhaps for his own puzzlement or for the puzzlement of his patron. Such an activity would have consumed a considerable (albeit immeasurable) amount of time and was executed on costly velum. It seems to me that Arnold's assessment is, *a priori*, untenable. Everything known to me that came from the quills of medieval Welsh scribes served a purpose, be it aesthetic, moral, political, or social in some other context. The same is true for medieval Ireland, and, no doubt, the rest of medieval Europe.²

¹ *The Study of Celtic Literature* (reissued by Kennikat Press, 1970), 51.

² One is reminded here to be sure, of Frank O'Connor's caveat regarding twelfth-century Irish scribal activity *vis-à-vis* secular material, that they went about their work 'in the spirit of a small boy trying to make a bicycle from the wreck of a perambulator' (*The Backward Look* (London, 1967), 70). Very much to the point, however, is Susan Wittig's comment, following Jakobson and Bogatyrev, that 'Community acceptance . . . is the major factor in deciding whether a piece of oral folk literature or popular literature will survive to the point where it may be recorded and brought into the realms of written literatures' (*Stylistic and Narrative Structures in the Middle English Romances* (Austin and London, 1978), 181).

The notion of antiquity pillaged has been more or less pervasive in Welsh scholarship. The most prolific writer on the problems of the *Mabinogi* was W. J. Gruffydd. He concluded that the four branches originally told of the birth, exploits, marriage, and death of Pryderi, the only character to appear in each of the branches. These are stages in the heroic biography pattern that seems to occur virtually throughout the world.¹ Such a pattern occurs in early Irish literature, and one might well expect to find it in Welsh also. But if one considers the Cú Chulainn cycle, which includes extensive narratives concerning the hero's conception, birth, youthful exploits, training in arms, wooing a bride, marriage, mature deeds, and death, it is clear that the *Mabinogi* contains no comparable cycle. The only element of the heroic biography that finds full expression here is the birth tale.

Professor Gruffydd supposed that the myth had become confused. By analogy with certain Irish tales, he suggested that the opening episode originally told how a mortal and an other-worldly figure changed places, in order that the divine hero might be begotten on the mortal's wife.² Subsequently, that theme was eroded so that when Pwyll went off to Annwfn, his activities there were controlled largely by the theme of chastity. Subsequent scholars have shared Gruffydd's view that the tales represent an artistic levelling of earlier traditional material that had become almost hopelessly confused, with the result that readers are frequently offered counsels of despair in their search to understand the tales. In recapitulating Gruffydd's reading, Thomas Jones and Gwyn Jones write, 'In the first section of *Pwyll* we recognize the story of how the king of the Otherworld changes place with an earthly king, in order that he might beget a wonder-child on an earthly mother. But the story as we have it tells rather of the king of Dyfed's sojourn in Annwn, and of his loyalty and chastity there. Consequently no child is begotten, either in Dyfed or Annwn, and a fresh start must be made.'³ Such a process of literary creations, wherein a redactor or storyteller keeps trying various narratives until the right cluster of motifs is achieved, is completely unknown to me.

In discussing the literary merits of the *Mabinogi*, Gwyn Jones is compelled to admit, 'In them we have a broken design and mutilated fragments, great confusions and unanswerable problems.'⁴ Glyn E. Jones, after surveying the views of Professors Kenneth Jackson and Proinsias MacCana, concludes that W. J. Gruffydd's theories still offer the best explanations of the origins and development of the four

¹ For a useful discussion and summary, see Ó Cathasaigh, op. cit. 1-8.

² W. J. Gruffydd, *Rhiannon* (Cardiff, 1953), esp. pp. 41-3.

³ *The Mabinogion* (New York, 1949), p. xv.

⁴ 'Prose Romances of Medieval Wales', in *Wales through the Ages*, i, ed. A. J. Roderick (Llandybie, 1959), 143.

branches.¹ And Jeffrey Gantz asserts that 'such myths as are preserved in these tales are so obscure and fragmentary that restoration [*sic*] is difficult if not impossible.'² The key words, then, are confusion, fragmentation, obscurity, mutilation, and the like. Such formulations of despair are likely to discourage students and scholars alike from seeking new approaches to meaning in the tales.³

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. It is the only assumption, in fact, that in any way justifies our own excursions into their inner and outer meanings, and one that will guide the reflections and observations of this writer. That does not mean, of course, that our attempts to discover meaning will always if ever meet with success; but that is another matter. Out of justice, we might even say that Matthew Arnold's own judgement on the tales was simply another way of saying that *he* could not make head nor tail of the four branches. And we can sympathize with that.

II

The first branch, 'Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed', deals essentially with Pwyll's exchange with Arawn, a king of the other world (Annwfn), and subsequently, the birth, loss, and restoration of his son Pryderi. That is a considerable simplification of the events recorded in the tale, and I stress the phrase 'deals essentially'—I do not say that is what the tale is about. What the tale is about, I would venture, is the

¹ 'Early Prose: The Mabinogi', in *A Guide to Welsh Literature*; i, edd. A. O. H. Jarman and Gwilym Rees Hughes (Swansea, 1976), 196-9.

² *The Mabinogion*, trans. Jeffrey Gantz (Harmondsworth, 1976), 13.

³ Some recently published scholarship indicates a healthy trend in the search for meaning in these stories. J. K. Bollard, in 'The Structure of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi' (*Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1975), 250-76), concludes that the author possessed a deep understanding of the materials which he used in his tales, and he illustrates the point by a thoroughgoing investigation of the themes of friendships, marriages, and feuds. I cannot accept the statement that 'The friendship between Manawydan and Pryderi is the central element of the entire tale' (p. 257), but Bollard argues his case well. Seán Ó Coileáin's 'A Thematic Study of the Tale *Pwyll Pendueic Dyuet*' (*Studia Celtica*, 12/13 (1977-8), 78-82) is rather too short to get the job done, but nevertheless makes some important contributions. His description of the tension that exists between theme and structure is especially good. It strikes me as an alternative way of accounting for what Lévi-Strauss describes as the schemata of narratives. The problem with Jeffrey Gantz's 'Thematic Structure in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi' (*Medium Aevum*, 47 (1978) 247-54) is that it reduces the four narratives to a series of arbitrary parallels, e.g., 'Math punishes Gwydyon [*sic*]'—Llew punishes Goronwy [*sic*]', or again, 'Rhiannon desires Pwyll—Gilvaethwy [*sic*] desires Goewin'. The parallelism of such reductions is specious and contributes precious little to our search for meaning in the stories. Despite the title of the essay and his stated disagreement with those who see the *Mabinogi* as confused and incoherent, Gantz admits that 'the plots of the Four Branches are marred by numerous inconsistencies and oversights . . .' (p. 247). Even so, it appears that at least the idea of structuralist criticism is making some headway in the study of our texts.

issue of the parentage of Pryderi and the joint issues of fertility in the land and among men.

Pryderi is a character of considerable importance in medieval Welsh tradition, though he does not figure largely in the four branches as a whole. He is certainly important enough to have a tale about his birth, and that is to be found in the first branch. Gruffydd was insisting that the entire first branch dealt with the issues of Pryderi's conception and birth, hence he had to posit an original version of the first part of the story that would be more directly relevant to the hero's birth. But I believe that it can be shown that his reconstruction—far from improving the version we have—in fact weakens the meaning of the tale.

The initial episode, consisting of columns 1 to 12. 27 in Evans's edition¹ (pages 37–42 of my translation), tells how Pwyll met Arawn, a king of Annwfn, and exchanged places with him in order to fight Arawn's other-worldly enemy. He successfully accomplished his mission and returned thence to his own kingdom, securing by his actions the everlasting friendship of Arawn. There are a number of literary themes adorning this basic plot, but they need not detain us here. The significant thing about the encounter and the exchange is that Pwyll and Arawn receive each other's form and shape, to the extent that none, either in Pwyll's mortal kingdom of Dyfed, or in Arawn's other world—not even Arawn's wife, with whom Pwyll sleeps every night for a year—knows that their chieftain is absent. Furthermore, at the end of this episode the text has it that, as a result of his successful year in Annwfn, Pwyll's title 'Prince of Dyfed' fell out of use, and he was called 'Pen Annwfn' (Lord of the other world) thenceforth.

The episode establishes that Arawn and Pwyll have each other's shapes and that Pwyll, formerly an earthly, mortal lord, now has a title equal to that of his other-worldly companion. In terms of the mediation of opposites or polarities, the mortal lives in the natural world with the title of the immortal from the supernatural world; Pwyll is now an anomalous character. It is important to note also that the circumstances in which the events of this episode take place are themselves anomalous or liminal. Pwyll is neither here nor there when he meets Arawn; he is lost. The initial encounter, as well as Pwyll's encounter with Hafgan, the other-worldly enemy, takes place neither on one day nor the next, but at night, at the boundary between days. It might at first seem strange to contemplate single combat at night, especially when a year's notice was given, but not, perhaps, when we consider the liminality of the event. Except for the sake of enrichment, there is no need to seek for any meaning in the first

episode other than what we have considered; put simply, the events establish Pwyll's identity with the Head of the other world: Pwyll, Pen Annwfn.

We note that the cast of characters in this episode is very limited: only Pwyll, Arawn, and Hafgan. There is Arawn's wife, but she is given no name. Only one other female in these four branches is nameless, the wife of Teyrnnon Twrf Liant; the reason for her anonymity seems clear to me, and I will offer it later in this essay. For the moment, let me venture to say that when a character has no real and separate identity in these tales, the character is anonymous. Thus the episode is really only about Pwyll, Arawn, and Hafgan. The first of these is a 'mortal' who takes up residence in the other world; the second, an 'immortal' who dwells temporarily in the natural world; the third a doomed 'immortal'. It will be seen that all three are anomalous figures. Furthermore, it is clear from the text that inhabitants of the other world cannot kill one another, and that that is why Pwyll is introduced there.

The usual device for conveying mortals into the Otherworld is an animal (e.g., a pig in the tales of 'Manawydan' and 'Math'). Sometimes the animal is the object of a hunt, as when Pryderi and Manawydan pursue a gleaming white boar while out hunting.¹ In 'Pwyll', the other-worldly animals are coming towards Pwyll, not leading him on. That is, the other world is somewhat aggressively presenting itself to Pwyll, forcing the confrontation, as it were. It will be noticed that there are no special signals nor boundaries to indicate that the other world is at hand—only the colour of the animals. In both medieval Irish and Welsh tales the relationship between the two worlds scarcely—if ever—is articulated, and perhaps is even intentionally obscured. In this instance, Pwyll, hunting in the midst of his own realm, the seven cantrefs of Dyfed, meets a king whom he has never seen before. Arawn personally guides Pwyll to Annwfn, where Pwyll sees the most beautiful buildings he has ever seen, with the finest ornamentation and best-equipped household. The place seems to have been reached after only a very short while, and yet Pwyll registers no surprise at finding such a spot within easy reach of his own kingdom. It is safe to say that space-shifting is as common as shape-shifting in these tales, and that the former elicits no more reaction from the characters involved than does the latter. It would appear that the encounter between Pwyll and Arawn of Annwfn was carefully contrived by the latter, that he had arranged the meeting to make a contract with the mortal.

In his own previous encounters with his enemy, Arawn apparently

¹ For a good discussion of medieval literary conventions for bridging the gap between the worlds of reality and enchantment, see D. H. Green, 'The Pathway to Adventure', *Viator*, 8 (1977), 145–88.

¹ *The White Book Mabinogion*, ed. J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Pwllheli, 1907).

has violated his own magical formula by giving Hafgan more than one blow. He instructs the mortal to give the opponent but a single blow, because 'No matter how many more I would give him, he would attack me the next day as well as before' (p. 38). An easy thing, one would think, for Arawn himself to give the single blow; clearly, it is not only the quantity that counts but the quality: the blow must be delivered by the liminal intruder. Furthermore, while Arawn's encounters seem to have been daily and continuous, the combat between Pwyll and Hafgan is to take place at night and on a single occasion.

Night-time is certainly an auspicious time in Celtic tradition. In 'Pwyll' virtually all the events occur at one-year intervals, and since the only date mentioned in the tale is May eve, the beginning of Summer, the 'light' half of the year, we may assume that all events in the tale occur then. Students of Celtic traditions know that in Irish the other end of the year, 1 November (*samhain*), is the most portentous date. In a well-known passage, Caesar notes that the Celts believed they were descended from Dis Pater, and that therefore they measured time not from the day but from the night, that is, the cycle of time began with the dark half.¹ Indeed, in Welsh still the word for 'week' is *wythnos*, literally 'eight nights', and for 'fortnight' *pythefnos* 'fifteen nights'. In Irish tradition, 1 November is the night when the doors to the other world lie open and there is unimpaired movement between the two worlds. Perhaps in Wales this notion somehow was reversed, so that the ominous period lay at the other end of the year. Whatever the reason may be, the text strongly implies that the events of the tale, in which there is considerable obscurity of the boundaries of the two worlds, took place at night and at one-year intervals. In Eliade's terms, we would say that the scenes are enacted only during sacred time and in sacred place.

The narrative stresses the fact that Pwyll and Arawn are interchangeable. Because of the title of the tale and because Pwyll is the character whose career we follow, we tend to discount the merger of the two characters. But from the time he enters Annwfn, Pwyll is called only 'the man who was in Arawn's place', or some similar locution. When he has defeated Hafgan, he asks his nobles to discover who owes him allegiance. They answer that all do, 'for there is no king over all of Annwfn except you' (p. 40). By the following day, the two realms were in his power, that is, the realm of Hafgan and the realm of Arawn. And from then on Pwyll is *Pen Annwfn*, in spite of taking back his own shape and residing in Dyfed.

There are, then, three heads or kings of Annwfn, and they constitute a trinity that may be realigned as two sets of two with

¹ *De Bello Gallico*, vi. 18.

a common member. The two from the other world are incompatible, whereas one from the other world and one from the natural world are compatible. Arawn is the common member in the sets; he has shared Annwfn with another other-worldly king, and now he shares it with a mortal. The only difference between them is that one dwells thenceforth in the other world, the other in the natural world. The old alliance Arawn-Hafgan, an exclusively other-worldly relationship, is rejected and replaced by a new one, Arawn-Pwyll: 'From that time on, they began to strengthen their friendship, and sent each other horses, hunting dogs, hawks, and treasures of the sort that each supposed would give pleasure to the other' (p. 42). Such a realliance is resisted by Hafgan, who cries in anguish, 'what right did you have to my death? I claimed nothing from you nor do I know any cause for you to kill me . . .' (p. 40).

The encounter between Pwyll and Arawn is fraught with significance for the mortal's people, for it establishes communications between human society and the divine world, which in turn makes possible the acquisition of gifts and treasures of various kinds for human society. One of the gifts was swine. Pigs were a vitally important part of the domestic economy of the Celts, and it is not strange that they should have been provided with a divine origin; there is plenty of evidence to show that they played an important role in the myth and religion of the Celts.¹ When he becomes king, the primary function of Pwyll's son Pryderi is to guard the treasures sent from the other world, and we shall see that, in the fourth branch, Pryderi loses his life for failing to keep the swine in his possession.

The opening episode of Pwyll is, I would suggest, part of the origin legends of the Welsh. It is concerned with the mediation of the two worlds, with bringing god to man and man to god. Just as man cannot do without gods, so gods are imperfect without man. The resolution is that the two are united by a kind of joint appointment: each partakes of both worlds. Pwyll establishes sovereignty in Annwfn, Arawn perfects the secular rule of Dyfed. In any story about Pwyll, this episode might have been adduced as a prelude, or, to borrow an important term from early Irish literary tradition, *fo-scél* 'sub-tale'. The *fo-scél* often establishes the identity of a principal character in the *prim-scél* 'primary-tale'. Alternatively, it may establish conditions relevant to setting, time, topography, or other details incidental to the main tale. Thus, as a prelude to the story about the marriage of Pwyll and the conception and birth of his son Pryderi, the storyteller might well have reminded his audience who Pwyll was and what his credentials were.

Let us turn now to the events surrounding the birth of Pryderi. They may be summarized as follows. Under magical circumstances,

¹ See, e.g., Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (London, 1967), 308-21.

Pwyll encounters Rhiannon, who declares her love for him and apprises him of the existence of a rival. After an interlude in which the rival nearly succeeds in tricking Pwyll out of his bride, Pwyll and Rhiannon are married. After a period of time, the length of which distresses Pwyll's advisers, Rhiannon conceives a child and gives birth. The very night of his birth the child disappears mysteriously. In order to protect themselves from punishment, her ladies-in-waiting accuse her of destroying the child. Rhiannon is found guilty and is consequently compelled to remain beside the horseblock outside the court and to offer a horseback ride to visitors to the court and tell them her story, if she thought they did not already know it.

In the meantime, we learn of a neighbouring lord named Teyrnnon. Teyrnnon has a mare that foals every year, but the foals are lost. On this May eve he decides to discover the cause of his annual loss. As he watches, a demon attempts to steal the newly delivered foal; Teyrnnon cuts off the monster's arm, then pursues the fleeing beast. When he returns to the house, he finds not only the foal he has rescued, but a baby boy. He and his wife (nameless) pretend they are the child's parents, until, hearing of the punishment of Rhiannon, they realize the identity of their charge and restore him to Pwyll and Rhiannon.

On the surface, then, the narrative recounts the marriage of Pwyll and Rhiannon, the conception and birth of Pryderi, and his loss and eventual restoration. But beneath the surface lies an infrastructure rich in details that provide numerous clues to the deeper meaning of those events. I examined some of it—the Adventure of the Boy and the Mare—in the Introduction to *The Mabinogi* (pp. 4–12); I give a summary of the argument here.

With very little difficulty, Rhiannon is to be equated with a goddess worshipped by the Celts of Gaul and, after the Roman conquest of Gaul, by the Romans themselves. Epona, whose name means 'divine horse goddess', is attested in hundreds of statues and inscriptions on the Continent, and was revered even in Rome. She is usually depicted mounted on a horse, surrounded by foals, sometimes with birds, sometimes holding a bag that has been taken to be a symbol of the fertility she represents. The horse on which she sits is usually depicted as being at an amble. Juvenal says images of her were to be seen in stables where asses were kept. One of her epithets is *regina*. The Rhiannon of our tale is first seen mounted on a horse that moves at an amble; even so, the horse cannot be overtaken by Pwyll's swiftest horses. When Pwyll is in danger of losing his betrothed, Rhiannon gives him a bag whose supply of food is unending. When her child is lost, she is punished by being forced to act like a beast of burden, specifically, a horse. In 'Manawydan' she is punished similarly, being compelled to wear the collar of an ass. In the tale of 'Branwen' the survivors of the battle in Ireland sojourn in the other

world and are serenaded by the 'birds of Rhiannon'. In short, there is a considerable body of evidence that compels us to regard Rhiannon as a literary version of the horse goddess, Epona. Even her name derives from a Celtic form meaning 'divine queen', recalling Epona's Latin epithet, *regina*.

But, having established the connection between Rhiannon and the goddess Epona, we are still a long way from discovering meaning in the tale. It is a first step, and its methods are chiefly philology, archaeology, iconography, and epigraphy. For the rest we shall need some new tools.

In a *locus classicus* for the structural study of myth, Claude Lévi-Strauss has shown that the schemata of a tale must be read vertically, as one would read the melodic line and its contrapuntal apparatus in a musical score: 'these sequences [i.e., narrative events] are organized, on planes at different levels (of abstraction), in accordance with schemata, which exist simultaneously, superimposed one upon another; just as a melody composed for several voices is held within bounds by constraints in two dimensions, first by its own melodic line which is horizontal, and second by the contrapuntal schemata (settings) which are vertical.'¹ Thus are the events of 'Pwyll' ordered. And where we find the same characters appearing again, we shall take the events to be part of the 'contrapuntal schemata' of the myth. The present discussion, therefore, would be incomplete if we did not consider the third branch, 'Manawydan'.

'Manawydan' is connected sequentially with 'Branwen', in that the story begins with a reference to the concluding events of the preceding tale. But the continuity is a temporal one only, for the story recounts events of a very different kind. Pryderi encourages his friend Manawydan son of Llŷr ('son of Sea') to return to Dyfed with him and consider marrying his mother, Rhiannon. Manawydan is at first disinclined to do so, but when he sees Rhiannon, he agrees. Thus, Manawydan becomes the stepfather of Pryderi, and the four of them, Manawydan and Rhiannon, and Pryderi and his wife Cigfa, celebrate conjointly the royal feast in the court at Arberth. At night, they go to the magical mound of Arberth, and as they are sitting there is a thunderous clatter followed by a descending mist. When the mist clears, they find themselves completely alone: 'neither house, nor animal, nor smoke, nor fire, nor dwellings, only the court buildings, and those empty, deserted, desolate, without men or animals in them . . .' (p. 77).

The four are content for a while to keep themselves by hunting and fishing, but then decide to go into England and earn their livings by practising crafts. Their work at making saddles, then shields, then

¹ 'The Myth of Asdiwal', in *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*, ed. Edmund Leach (London, 1967), 17.

shoes, is so successful that the other craftsmen conspire to kill them. Rather than fight, they move from place to place, finally giving up the enterprise and returning to Dyfed. There they commence hunting once again. On one of their expeditions they pursue a gleaming white boar who leads them cunningly to a magnificent fort. The boar and the dogs disappear into the fort, and when they do not return Pryderi goes after them. Inside, he sees a fountain atop a marble slab, and over the fountain a finely wrought gold basin secured by four chains that stretch beyond sight into the sky. Pryderi takes hold of the basin, is stuck fast, and loses his power of speech. Manawydan grows tired of waiting for his mate and returns home.

When Rhiannon sees that her son and the dogs have been lost, she chides Manawydan for his faithlessness and goes in search of Pryderi. She comes upon the fort, finds Pryderi, takes hold of the basin, and is stuck fast and rendered speechless. When night falls, there is a thunderous clatter and a mist; when it clears, the fort and its contents have vanished.

Cigfa, wife of Pryderi, and Manawydan are left alone and without the use of hunting dogs. Therefore, they decide to go to England and practice crafts. Manawydan plies his craft of shoemaking again, but the enterprise ends as before. The two return to Dyfed, bringing with them wheat. Manawydan sows three crofts. At harvest time, he discovers that the first croft has been ravaged: the stalks have been bent down and the grain gone. The next day brings the same results to the second croft. He decides to be more vigilant over the third croft, and goes out that night to keep watch. At midnight there is a great commotion as an enormous host of mice descends upon the field. With great difficulty, Manawydan manages to catch one of them, which turns out to be pregnant. He puts her in his glove, ties the top with a string, and returns home. The following day he proceeds to the mound of Arberth, intent on hanging the thieving mouse. A scholar, a priest, and a bishop in turn attempt to ransom the mouse, but Manawydan is adamant in his refusal. The bishop, in desperation, admits that he is Llwyd son of Cil Coed (? 'forest recess, backwoods'), that the pregnant mouse is his wife, and the others members of her court. Ravaging the croft was a punishment, a revenge for the game of 'badger-in-the-bag' played on Gwawl by Pwyll (in the first branch). Manawydan releases the mouse in exchange for the freeing of Rhiannon and Pryderi, the restoration of the land, and the promise that Manawydan's present victory never be avenged on him nor on Rhiannon or Pryderi. During their incarceration, the punishment of the mother and son is described as follows: 'The gate-hammers of my court were around Pryderi's neck, and the collars of asses after they had been hauling hay, were around Rhiannon's neck. Such was their prison' (p. 87).

It is clear that the events of the story of 'Manawydan' have little in common with those of the 'Branwen' story, but a great deal in common with those of the first branch, 'Pwyll'. The paternity of Pryderi is at issue in both branches, as is fertility in general. In 'Pwyll', Pryderi is the son of Rhiannon and Pwyll Pen Annwfn (it is significant that he is known now by his new title, which reflects his other-worldly nature). However, Pwyll's role in the generation of Pryderi is not at all clear. In the opening episode, the adventure of Pwyll, Hafgan, and Arawn, the chastity of Pwyll is emphasized. Although he had the most beautiful woman in the world to sleep with each night, he does not touch her. This fact surprises everyone, Arawn no less than his wife, and—no doubt—the audience. One may view this as contamination by the motif of The Chaste Friend/Brother, as some have, or even as a Christian overlay, although such a view would not be consistent with the overall treatment of traditional material by the scribes of medieval Wales.¹ Furthermore, after Pwyll and Rhiannon are wed, three years pass without issue to them. Pwyll's counsellors are understandably disturbed, and urge Pwyll to put away Rhiannon and take another wife that he might have an heir. His response to them is not a defence of Rhiannon; on the contrary, he says: 'Be patient with *me* until the end of the year . . .' (p. 50). When the child is born, Pwyll is not on hand, nor does he see the child before it disappears. Thus, Pwyll exhibits notoriously asexual and infertile characteristics—and he has no child until Pryderi is delivered to the court as a young boy.

At this point in the story, we are presented with another couple who also suffer from lack of fertility. Teyrnon's wife has never had a child. His mare is fertile, foaling every May eve—but the colts disappear. On this particular May eve, having decided to be vigilant, Teyrnon succeeds in providing both his mare and his wife with offspring. The woman, Teyrnon's wife, has no name and her pretended child has an alias. The superstructure appears to affirm the message of the substructure: the wife in Teyrnon's realm can have no name because she is a shadow of the child's real mother, Rhiannon. The boy, while he dwells in Teyrnon's realm, takes a name other than his 'real'-world name. It is as though a substitute mother had to be found for Rhiannon while she gave simultaneous birth in her hippomorphic aspect, as the mare. Consider the characteristics of the principals:

RHIANNON: fertile, but her offspring disappear. Apparently this

¹ In Gruffydd's account, the storyteller found himself in trouble because the roles of the mortal and the Head of Annwfn had been reversed; he reconciled this by making Pwyll chaste, so that no son could be born in this section of the tale as a result of 'normal marital relations in Annwfn' (*Rhiannon*, 44-5).

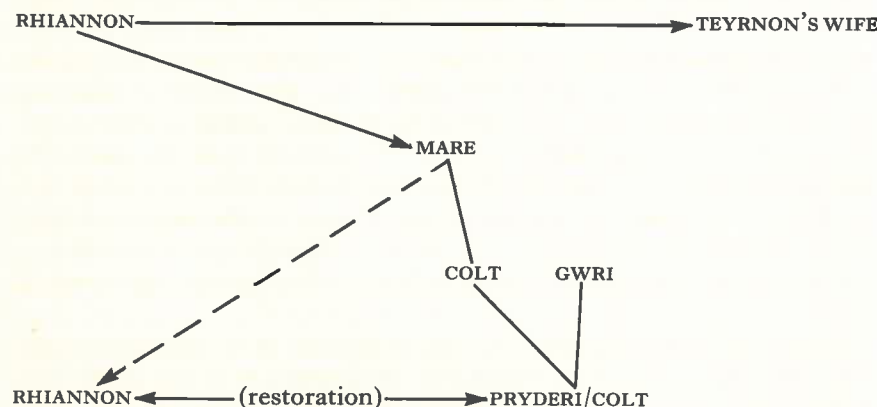
happens periodically, for Pwyll says to her critics: 'I know she has children'—plural (p. 51).

MARE: fertile, but her offspring disappear periodically.

PWYLL: chaste (? = infertile), apparently has no (? = cannot have) children.

TEYRNON: has never fathered children on his wife.

Both Pwyll and Teyrnon are custodians of a mare: Teyrnon literally, Pwyll by virtue of the punishment exacted upon Rhiannon, so that she is only a 'pretend' horse. Meanwhile, her literal son has disappeared, only to reappear as the pretended son of Teyrnon and his wife. Teyrnon himself restores the boy to Pwyll, leaving his mare and his wife behind. Their arrival in Dyfed signals the end of Rhiannon's equine servitude. None will get on her back, and she is welcomed into the court among her own kind again. The structure of the sequences involved might be charted as follows:



Reading the mythic schemata vertically, we might say the following. Rhiannon, partaking of both equine and human nature, must resolve the conflict between them before giving birth. The solution lies in separating the two natures (another joint appointment), bearing a colt on the one hand and a human child on the other. While the two are nurtured, Rhiannon partakes of both equine and human nature, both separately (in the realm of Teyrnon) and conjointly (in the realm of Pwyll). The crisis ends when the boy and the colt are united and both return to Rhiannon.

The tale of Manawydan adds some information to the schema and restates parts of it. Having become stepfather of Pryderi and husband of Rhiannon, his lack of aggressiveness causes him to lose them. In this respect he resembles Pwyll, whose lack of foresight and non-aggressiveness cause him nearly to lose Rhiannon twice. Furthermore, an external force has caused the land to lie barren and then plunders the crofts Manawydan has sown. In this respect, his plight

is akin to Teyrnon's, whose newly born foals are stolen away by some mysterious aggressor. In closely similar language, Teyrnon and Manawydan at last decide to protect their interests and discover the cause of their losses: "'God's vengeance on me", said he, "if I do not find out what destruction is carrying off the colts: tonight is May eve"' (p. 52); "'Shame on me", he said, "if I do not stand watch tonight, and whatever ravaged the other wheat will come to ravage this and I'll know what it is"' (p. 82). As a result of his vigilance, Manawydan captures the mouse, which he puts in his glove, and, as though it were a bag, ties the top with a string. Later he ransoms this creature in the bag for the return of Pryderi and Rhiannon and the freeing of Dyfed from the enchantment upon it; the latter entails restoring the productivity and fertility of the land.

The narrative explains that the mouse's husband, Llwyd, was responsible for the enchantment, and that it had been done to avenge Llwyd's friend Gwawl, for having been the victim of 'badger-in-the-bag' in 'Pwyll'. This seems strange, for one of the conditions for the release of Gwawl on that occasion was that there 'never be redress nor vengeance for it' (p. 48). Let us return to that tale for a moment, and review the events.

At his wedding-feast, Pwyll carelessly but unwittingly granted Rhiannon's former suitor any wish. Naturally, Gwawl's wish was to have Rhiannon for his own wife. Rhiannon told Pwyll to agree since he had no choice, but to return at the end of a year on the occasion of her marriage-feast with Gwawl, and to have with him a bag that she would give him. Disguised as one of the suppliants, he was to ask as his boon from Gwawl that the bag be filled with food. It was a magical bag, of course, and could never be filled. Pwyll followed his instructions, and when Gwawl asked in desperation, 'will the bag never be full?', Pwyll replied that it would not until a nobleman arose and said 'enough has been put in', trampling the food in the bag at the same time. Gwawl arose to perform the act, but as he did so, Pwyll twisted the bag so that Gwawl went into it, whereupon Pwyll quickly tied the top with a string. At a signal from Pwyll, his men descended upon the court, and each in turn struck the bag asking, 'what do we have here?' 'A badger,' replied the others, and that, we are told, was the origin of the game of 'badger-in-the-bag'. Pwyll finally called off the game and spared Gwawl in exchange for a promise that Gwawl would undertake to dispense gifts to suppliants and minstrels and a pledge that he would never seek redress or vengeance.

The similarities between this narrative sequence and the wheat-croft sequence in 'Manawydan' are evident. The issue is food (prosperity) in each instance; the adversary is defeated and ends up in a bag with strings drawn. Each is released in exchange for pledges: no vengeance (both), provisions or productivity (both), and restoration

(of Rhiannon to Pwyll; of Rhiannon and Pryderi to Manawydan). The closeness of the two sequences is affirmed by the fact that Llwyd and Gwawl are friends. But we have to clear up at least one inconsistency; it seems improbable that a society governed so strictly by an honour code would permit vengeance for an act that was said explicitly to be unredressable. Indeed, if we read only horizontally, the narrative is inconsistent. But if we read vertically, there is no inconsistency: the victory over the opponent who is confined in a bag may thus be seen to be motifs of which the episodes recounted in 'Pwyll' and in 'Manawydan' are multi-forms. The adversary so imprisoned is eventually ransomed in such a way that brings well-being and stability to the realm. At the moment he is captured, Gwawl is identical to a badger, an animal defined in Welsh as *pryf llwyd* 'brownish-grey creature' (where *llwyd* means 'brownish-grey').¹ At the moment she is captured, the pregnant mouse is, as it were, Mrs *Llwyd*. There is an unabashed resemblance between the two animals at the moment they are imprisoned: both are animals (literally or functionally), both are in bags, one may be described as *llwyd*, the other actually so named.

It would be perverse to say, as critics were once accustomed to do, that the events we have been examining are one and the same event. But it is important to insist that they must be read vertically as well as horizontally or sequentially. Language and the verbal performance of it can only present material in a linear or horizontal way. But the structure of thought is ideogrammatic and is not restricted to linearity. In this respect, myth and poetry are diametrically opposed. In poetry, each lexical item is polysemic (potentially, at least), and each line, therefore, a complex of meanings reflecting the mathematical product of the potential meanings of each word in the line. Movement of meaning in poetry is from inside out; from a single utterance springs manifold meanings, and its very ambiguity constitutes at once its richness and its meaning. In myth, on the other hand, movement of meaning is from outside in. There is but one meaning, one message, and that derived from a complexity of utterances, manifold, as it were, to guarantee but a single meaning; a single message stated over and over again in a variety of ways to ensure that it will not be misconstrued. It is poetry that makes myth possible: that is, it is the ambiguity of language, its polysemic potential, that generates the necessity for repetition in order to ensure but a single interpretation for the myth. One might, of course, reverse the priorities and say that myth gives rise to poetry, that diversity of expression guarantees ideological exactness; uniformity of

expression, therefore, obscures ideology and thus feeds creative imagination.

The method we have used here is founded on the principal of integrity of the narrative. We need not search for an *ur*-myth, nor need we assume that the text is corrupt or that the medieval redactor and his audience were ignorant of their traditions. The analysis attempted here shows that the first branch and part of the third branch of the *Mabinogi* are concerned, among other things, with the birth of Pryderi and his loss and return, the latter events paralleled by loss and restoration of fertility in the land. Was Pryderi human or divine? Who was his father? Because Pryderi is a divine hero, his father was lord of the other world. In Celtic tradition, the Lord of the other world is pre-eminently the sea-god. When he mates with the Great Queen, he partakes of her characteristic shape, which is equine. Pryderi is a hero among mortal men, though his origins are divine; the narrative concerning his birth reflects, therefore, the natural and supernatural conditions attendant upon that event. He is at once son of the mortal Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed, who is also known as Lord of the Otherworld, the son of Teyrnnon Twrf Liant ('Lord of the Tempestuous Sea'), who is the mare's consort, and the son of Manawydan son of Llyr ('Sea'). And he is the son of Rhiannon, Queen of Dyfed, whose equine nature is skilfully divided among several narrative sequences.

After his birth Pryderi disappears and his mother disappears from the royal couch of Dyfed (that is, as the third branch has it, Pryderi and his mother disappear from the human and mortal environment). Through the vigilance of Pryderi's father (Rhiannon's husband), the enemy who caused their disappearance is overcome and Pryderi and Rhiannon are restored. In the mythic tradition, these events are simultaneous and partake of the same schemata; in the narrative tradition, they cannot possibly occur at the same time and are, therefore, treated more or less sequentially.

This foreword to a reading of the tales is intended to show that meaning may be discovered by the application of methodologies not traditionally applied by Celtic scholars. It is not exhaustive and may not be conclusive, but it argues strongly for the integrity of the text, the only literary artefact we have of the expressive genius of the Celts of medieval Britain concerning their mythological traditions.

¹ *Geiriadur Pryfysgol Cymru*, s.v. *broch*.