

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: **Folklore Studies and the Mabinogion**

Name of Author: **Nagy, J.F.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): **150 Jahre Mabinogion Deutsch**

Walisische Kultturbeziehungen. Maier, B. et al editors

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

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable):

Publisher: **Max Niemeyer**

Pages scanned: **91 - 100**

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

Name of Designated Person

authorising scanning: *E.L. Harris*

Date authorised: 06.03.17.

Moodle/Powerpoint

Folklore Studies and the *Mabinogion*

The connection between folklore studies and the study of the eleven medieval Welsh tales known as the *Mabinogion* has been a long and fruitful one. While traditional Welsh literature did not form one of the pillars upon which the earliest generation of folklorists, such as the Brothers Grimm, built their edifices of theory and method, scholars of the *Mabinogion* up to the modern day have evinced admirable sensitivity to developments in what is now often called "folkloristics", even if there has been the inevitable time-lag between the trends of thought in folklore studies and their application to the Welsh texts. For instance, as we shall see, some of the best-known and most influential "folkloristic" approaches to medieval Welsh literature of this century took as their models the scholarship of folklorists of the previous century, or from the early part of this one.

It would be helpful to clarify at the outset what I mean by "folklore" and the "study of folklore". Definitions of these key terms have, not surprisingly, changed dramatically over the past two hundred years, and it is precisely by means of tracking these changes that we can adumbrate the major shifts in the application of folkloristic theory, methods, and assumptions to the *Mabinogion*. If, as many scholars have in the past and continue to do so in the present, we define folklore as "oral tradition", and its study as at its heart the systematic attempt to represent that tradition in a scholarly, textual form, and subsequently to interpret its "texture", "subtext", and "context", then folkloristics has been with us much longer than two hundred years. Indeed, the compilers of the *Mabinogion* then were themselves folklorists, if Professor Sioned Davies is correct in her surmise that much of this corpus is directly inspired by, and modelled on the performative genres of, oral tradition. I will return to this point, about the producers of the texts of the *Mabinogion* as folklorists themselves, at the end of this paper.

The scholarly study of folklore, however, as part of the larger humanistic project resulting in modern academic discourse, ought to be traced back to Jacob Grimm, who along with his brother Wilhelm bequeathed to us moderns the basic conceptualization, tinged by the thinking of Herder and other eighteenth-century thinkers, of folklore as the *voice of the people*: a body of verbal lore that conveys in a poetic way the

essential identity of a nation.¹ Moreover, it is important for us to realize and appreciate that for the Grimms, as for their tradition-seeking intellectual forebears and epigones, Homer's epics and texts of that ilk, the very foundations of the Western literary heritage, were an important part of what constituted folklore. Hence it should not surprise us that when ostensibly literary texts such as the *Mabinogion* were made available in Lady Guest's translation to a wider readership, they along with kindred texts were seized upon (by Ernest Renan, Matthew Arnold, and others) as key witnesses to a Celtic "folk" sensibility.²

An even more important and distinctive contribution made to nascent folklore studies by the Grimms was their analysis of the narrative component of this "voice of the people" into three parts: folktale (*Märchen*), legend (*Sage*), and mythology (*Mythologie*). Admittedly, since the time of the Grimms' publications this tripartite division has been challenged, with some latter-day scholars (such as the American anthropologist William Bascom) suggesting that the Grimm schema assumes a European understanding of generic distinctions among narratives that does not obtain universally.³ Whatever the global validity of the folktale-legend-myth threeway split, it has formed the basis of most scholarly discussion of the morphology of the narrative repertoire of the *Mabinogion*, from W. J. Gruffydd's search for the encrusted sherds of myth in the Four Branches (see below), to Kenneth Jackson's inventory of folktale types and motifs therein (*idem*), and even to John Koch's recent attempts to adumbrate history in the "legendary" figures of the Four Branches, such as Bran and Manawydan.⁴

The search for legend and history in the *Mabinogion*, has, however, not proved exhaustive so far, even though the legendary background to figures such as Macsen Wledig and Owain have always been acknowledged. This lack of scholarly enterprise in regard to exploring the legendary aspects of the *Mabinogion* is all the more surprising given the implicit historical framework of the Grimms' tripartite narrative division. If we look at the three major publications that flesh out the Platonic "ideas" of folktale, legend, and myth – namely, the *Deutsche Kinder- und Hausmärchen*,

¹ Johann Gottfried Herder's influence on the course of folklore studies is the subject of William A. Wilson's: Herder, Folklore and Romantic Nationalism, *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: A Reader*, ed. Elliott Oring (Logan UT, 1989) pp. 21–35.

² On Renan's cultivation of the notion of Celtic primitivism (particularly as expressed in *La poésie des races celtiques* [1854]) and Arnold's kindred ideas (*The Study of Celtic Literature* [1866–67]), see Patrick Sims-Williams, *The Visionary Celt: The Construction of an Ethnic Preconception*, *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 11 (1986): 71–96, and *The Invention of Celtic Nature Poetry*, pp. 97–124 in *Celticism*, ed. Terence Brown (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA, 1996); also, Malcolm Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture* (London, 1978), 81–112.

³ William Bascom: *The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives*, pp. 6–29, in *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, ed. Alan Dundes (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984).

⁴ John T. Koch: A Welsh Window on the Iron Age: Manawydan, Mandubracios, *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 14 (1987): 17–52; Bran, Brennos: An Instance of Early Gallo-Brittonic History and Mythology, 20 (1990): 1–20.

Deutsche Sagen, and *Deutsche Mythologie*⁵ – we find that the first, devoted to the folktale, contains mostly texts collected from living informants by the Grimms and members of their circle, or texts from eighteenth-century storytellers as redacted and published by earlier collectors. *Deutsche Sagen*, while still relying to some extent on the fieldwork conducted by the Grimms among their contemporaries, represents a definite shift toward the middle ages, with a preponderance of texts drawn from medieval or early modern literature. (We should also keep in mind that for the Grimms as for other nineteenth-century folklorists, the category of *Sage* was intertwined with that of the *Legende* [*legendum*], the pious legend about the wondrous deeds of saints, a genre that achieved its critical mass in the setting of medieval Christianity.) *Deutsche Mythologie*, on the other hand, instead of featuring texts from contemporary oral tradition or earlier literature, deals in what we could call *proto-* or *metatexts*, attempts to reconstruct the sacred narratives peopled with pre-Christian gods, which may lie behind folktales and legends, but primarily behind textual witnesses of narratives, beliefs, and customs that would have been construed by the Grimms, in terms of their chronology, worldview, and socio-cultural conditions of production, as distinctly *premedieval*.

It is a fact for us to contemplate that over the past one hundred and fifty years the preponderance of scholarly approaches to the narrative content of the *Mabinogion*, particularly of the Four Branches, have in effect been offshoots of the approach pioneered by Jacob Grimm in *Deutsche Mythologie*, and that attempts to analyze the *Mabinogion* vis-à-vis the categories of folktale or legend have not really generated schools, or have even met with stiff resistance, although the continuing contributions of Juliette Wood and Jessica Hemming give strong testimony to the value of applying notions (primarily grounded in folktale/legend studies) of "tale type" and "motif" to these materials.⁶ But is the preeminently mythic "take" on the *Mabinogion* a function

⁵ On the provenance of the texts included in the Grimm's *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (first edition, 1812–15; ed. Heinz Rölleke with Ulrike Marquardt, 3 vols. [Göttingen, 1986]), see *The Brothers Grimm and Folktales*, ed. James M. McGlathery et al. (Urbana and Chicago IL, 1988), especially Donald Ward, *New Misconceptions about Old Folktales: The Brothers Grimm*, pp. 91–100. Ward's "Epilogue" to his translation of the Grimms' *Deutsche Sagen* (*The German Legends of the Brothers Grimm* [Philadelphia, 1981], Vol. 2, pp. 381–41) contains useful information about the sources tapped by the brothers for the texts included in this collection (published in 1916–1918, ed. Rölleke [Frankfurt am Main, 1994]). Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* first appeared in 1835. (The fourth edition was reissued, under the supervision of Elard Hugo Meyer, in three volumes in 1875–1878.) Curiously, John Rhŷs's *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx* (2 vols., Oxford, 1901), a work strikingly similar in its scope and in its ambition to establish a continuum between "mythology" and "folklore" to Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie*, cites the Grimms nowhere in either its "List of Bibliographical References" or the index.

⁶ I am thinking here of, for instance, Jessica Hemming's recent contribution, *Reflections on Rhiannon and the Horse Episodes in Pwyll*, *Western Folklore* 57 (1998): 19–40, and Juliet Wood's study, *The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature*, *The Mabinogi: A Book*

of the texts themselves, which, perhaps, invite such readings and are less friendly to searches for folktale or legend? Or is it a function of the intellectual background of the scholarship itself, of a deep-seated desire to designate the *Mabinogion* as a cultural "spokestext"? After all, for the Grimms as well, myth, though the most elusive or recondite of narrative genres, stood closest to the wellsprings of the poetic imagination of *Das Volk* – the ultimate reality in folklore as understood by the Grimms, and the ultimate object of the folkloristic quest, as they saw it. Or, is the long-lived tilt toward myth in scholarly readings of the *Mabinogion* to be attributed to a resistance, readily to be seen in Lady Guest's introduction, to viewing these Welsh texts as medieval, and a desire to have them be the *sources* of continental medieval texts, such as the Arthurian romances of Chrétien de Troyes?⁷ In any case, it is undeniable that the framing of our scholarly discourse on the *Mabinogion* and its raw materials (myth, legend, or folktale) is part of the intellectual inheritance left to us by the Grimms, and many of the assumptions about the nature of, and distinctions among, the different types of traditional narrative that inhabited their work, still inhabit ours.

Of course, for the Brothers Grimm the boundaries among folktale, legend, and myth were permeable, just as, perennially looming behind the reconstructions of a German(ic) *Volk* profile alongside other European national characters as expressed through other bodies of culturally, linguistically, or regionally defined bodies of folklore, there was the monolithic prospect of an Indo-European past, a paradoxically unifying or even levelling factor that could upset the visions of cultural diversity (of "your" folkloric equivalent of Homer versus "my" folkloric Homer – both, needless to say, versus the "real" Homer of the Greeks), centrifugal visions that beckoned the Grimms and Herder before them, but that ultimately gave way to the centripetal, unitary theory that came to dominate in nineteenth-century thinking about folklore. One of the great exponents of the specifically philological and Indo-European vision of primal unity behind the folklore of peoples speaking kindred languages was the Indologist Friedrich Max Müller, son of the poet Wilhelm Müller.⁸ According to Müller *filis*, as for most other scholars working on the theory of Indo-European

of *Essays*, ed. C. W. Sullivan III (New York and London, 1996), pp. 61–78 (originally published in *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 10 [1985]: 25–38). See also note 22 below.

⁷ "It might, I think, be shown, by pursuing the inquiry, that the Cymric nation is not only [...] an early offshoot of the Indo-European family, and a people of unmixed descent, but that when driven out of their conquests by the later nations, the names and exploits of their heroes, and the compositions of their bards, spread far and wide among the invaders, and affected intimately their tastes and literature for many centuries, and that it has strong claims to be considered the cradle of European romance" (from Lady Guest's introduction, *Everyman's Library* 1906 edition [London and New York], pp. 11–12).

⁸ Insightful evaluations of Müller's assumptions and theories are to be found in Gregory Schrempff, *The Re-education of Friedrich Max Müller*, *Man* 18 (1983): 90–110; Ivan Stenski, *The Rise of Ritual and the Hegemony of Myth: Sylvain Lévi, the Durkheimians, and Max Müller*, *Myth and Method*, ed. Laurie L. Patton and Wendy Doniger (Charlottesville, VA, and London, 1996), pp. 52–63.

cultural as well as linguistic inheritance, the process linking the prehistoric Indo-European past with the cultures stemming from it and leaving traces of themselves in the ancient, medieval, and even modern periods, was essentially entropic, or, to use Müller's term, a function of the "disease of language", whereby original *mythopoesis* loses its metaphoric value, and myths lose their reference, becoming self-referential and thereby problematic as carriers of meaning and of systematic thought. For Müller, the British Folklore Society, and many other late nineteenth-century folklorists who adopted into their agenda Müller's devolutionary notions,⁹ the point of studying traditions ancient and modern was to find the original referents (which, as this game was played by many of Müller's followers, often turned out to be the sun and other celestial phenomena), and with this discovery to restore the systematic to a broken-down system.

The hermeneutic method I have just described in connection with Müller's contributions is clearly the same as that to be found in the controversial and admirably ambitious work of W. J. Gruffydd, whose work on the *Mabinogi* reflects in many respects a twentieth-century continuation of Müllerian agenda.¹⁰ Pinpointing the life and adventures of Pryderi as the basic "signifieds" behind or linking the "signifiers" of the Four Branches,¹¹ identifying Matrona or Epona as the referent for Rhiannon,¹² and reading the Fourth Branch in terms of the significance of the pan-Celtic god Lugus,¹³ brought it all together for Gruffydd, who argues in a very seductive way for privileging these subtexts in our understanding of what is "really" going on in the

⁹ The achievements of the founding and other early members of the British Folklore Society are examined in Richard Dorson, *The British Folklorists: A History* (Chicago and London, 1968). Shedding light on the topic of the intellectual links between this group and Welsh scholarship is Juliette Wood's paper entitled *The High Noon of the Celtic Twilight: Alfred Nutt and W. J. Gruffydd*, which was delivered at the annual meeting of the Celtic Studies Association of North America, New York, April, 1999.

¹⁰ Gruffydd's most substantial contributions to the study of myth in the *Mabinogion* are the two books, *Math fab Mathonwy: An Inquiry into the Origins and Development of the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi, with the Text and a Translation* (Cardiff, 1928); and *Rhiannon: An Inquiry into the Origins of the First and Third Branches of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff, 1953). See also the article *Mabon vab Modron, Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* 42 (1930), 129–47, and the published lecture, *Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion* (Cardiff, 1958), discussed below.

¹¹ Gruffydd, *Math*, pp. 322–47; *Rhiannon*, p. 10–19. Cf. Proinsias Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, second edition (Cardiff, 1992), pp. 23–29, and Sioned Davies, *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi: Pedair Keinc y Mabinogi* (Llandysul, 1993), pp. 18–19.

¹² Gruffydd, *Rhiannon*, pp. 90–108. On the Rhiannon/Epona/Matrona complex, see now Juliette Wood: *The Horse in Welsh Folklore: A Boundary Image in Custom and Narrative*, in *The Horse in Celtic Culture*, ed. Sioned Davies and Nerys Ann Jones (Cardiff, 1997), pp. 168–73.

¹³ Gruffydd, *Math*, pp. 55–112. On the resemblances between the Welsh Family of Dôn, and the Irish Túatha Dé Danann, see Alwyn Rees and Brinley Rees, *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales* (London, 1961), pp. 50–53.

Mabinogi. Of course, the disadvantage to Gruffydd's approach, as to the approaches of the "mythological" folklorists of the nineteenth century in general, is that it renders the traditional text a ruin in its wake, demoted in literary or aesthetic terms to a botched job, resulting from recent or long-standing misunderstandings. The redactors of the stories in the Four Branches, in other words, did not know what we supposedly know, and were trying to put together and make sense of the material as best they could – a difficult task, given both their own lack of connection with the original *mythopoesis*, and the material's presumably already having suffered the indignities of misinterpretation through several generations. Fortunately, most modern folklorists and literary critics would join their Celticist colleagues in finding this radical diminution of authorial control and competence to be highly unappealing, even offensive.

Let us go back to the nineteenth century, for Müller's vision of an original Indo-European totality, wherein signifier and signified had not yet parted company, was not the only unitarian theory inspiring and informing the work of folklorists (and medieval Welsh scholarship). Equally powerful, and even triumphant as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, was the scholarly myth of origins according to which, what united peoples historically was not a common cultural, linguistic or racial, matrix but a primal stage of human intellectual development, the *primitive*. The process by which successive cultures developed out of this primal, rather brutish scene was not a matter of epistemological entropy, as was the case for the Müllerians, but in fact the opposite, a development of a kind of logical positivistic thinking. Primitive man, like Müller's Proto-Indo-European, was unhampered by any sense of a divide between signifier and signified, but in the view of this school of anthropological and folkloristic thought, the lack was a handicap to be overcome. As described primarily by British scholars, such as Robertson Smith, Tylor, Lang, and Frazer but also by an important school of French scholars that included Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl, and van Gennep,¹⁴ primitive man's confusion of categories was and is (insofar as there still are "primitives") not grounded in his use of language. In fact, it is prelinguistic, having to do with his inability to differentiate between cause and effect, and his awarding primacy to action over word. The Primitive, as hypothetically reconstructed and projected onto non-European peoples and even European peasants by scholars of this persuasion, is essentially a man of action and a ritual being, who, once, he starts talking about ritual and telling stories about what the ritual is about, begins to move *beyond* his supposedly muddled thinking. The brave march of humankind toward enlightenment, celebrated encyclopedically by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*¹⁵ and

¹⁴ The contributions of these schools to the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, comparative religion and mythology, and folklore are described in Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mythe et société en Grèce ancienne* (Paris, 1974), pp. 219–37. See also Robert Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer: His Life and Work* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 70–94.

¹⁵ The first edition of *The Golden Bough* appeared in 1890 (two volumes). The third edition, in twelve volumes, appeared between 1911 and 1915.

fleshed out by Bronislaw Malinowski with his South Seas fieldwork,¹⁶ progressed from "magic" to "religion", and climaxed triumphantly with "science" – a transition in fact from ritual to narrative (particularly to myth as religious charter), and then to the interpretation of narrative, that is, science and philosophy (and even folklore studies!). It is surely not coincidence that Frazer and others (such as the so-called Cambridge School¹⁷) who focussed on the primitive and the ritualistic in the study of traditions, were trained as classicists, given that the trajectory of classical Greek literature gave a similar impression of stories following in the footsteps of ritual, and of language as a device for freeing humanity from a stultifying routine of prescribed action. Plato's *logos* is not all that different from Frazer's "science", nor is Frazer's continuing fascination with the primitive despite its purported outmodedness far removed from Plato's resorting to the rhetorical seductions of *muthos* when he had an important point to make.¹⁸ And if we have gone so far as to make Frazer and Plato intellectual bed-fellows, surely we should take the next step and induct Gruffydd into this august company as well. One of his most breathtaking reconstructive moves, most crisply presented in his published lecture *Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion*, has to do with the trials and tribulations of Branwen and her son Gwern in the Second Branch:

Now this episode [of the burning of Gwern] is a confused version of the procedure for testing a Fairy Child or, in [traditional Welsh] communities where the Fairies are definitely identified with Evil Spirits, a child of the Devil. There were two main tests – you either threw the child into water, and if he swam, then he was a changeling, a fairy child, or you held him in the fire and if he was burnt, then he was not a fairy; if he did not burn then he certainly was a fairy. Branwen had been charged with being a fairy, though the test of striking her with iron [here Gruffydd refers to the box on the ear given Branwen by the butcher] had apparently not been successful in driving her away, but the charge was still maintained and with special vigour against her son Gwern who was by this time in the royal succession. In order finally to refute the charge, Branwen herself held Gwern in the flames, where everyone saw that he was *poeth*, 'burnt', and so Branwen was vindicated.¹⁹

We note that the effect of Gruffydd's analysis is both to award primacy of place to ritual and primitive, magical beliefs in the historical reconstruction of the elements that went into the making of this story, and simultaneously to link this primal, primitive layer with ongoing Welsh "folk" custom and worldview, which preserve the vestiges of a savage past: all in all, a very Frazerian project, co-existing not

¹⁶ Malinowski's fieldwork-based theorizing is on display in his *Magic, Science and Religion, and Other Essays* (Boston, 1948).

¹⁷ See *The Cambridge Ritualists Reconsidered*, ed. William M. Calder III (Atlanta, 1991), and Robert Ackerman's *The Myth and Ritual School: J. G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists* (New York and London, 1991).

¹⁸ Marcel Detienne examines Plato's use of myth in *L'invention de la mythologie* (Paris, 1981), pp. 155–89.

¹⁹ *Folklore and Myth*, p. 17. Compare *Rhiannon*, pp. 61–64.

altogether comfortably with the Müllerian agenda that also drive Gruffydd's analysis. The author-redactor of the *Mabinogi* alternates between being a reasonable fellow who is trying to do the best he can with rather crude material, and a bungler who just doesn't get it.

Emerging toward the end of the nineteenth century in the midst of these competing schools of folkloristic thought, which carried more of an ideological burden than many folklorists cared to bear, was yet another stream of scholarship, focussing on questions about the nature and origins of folk traditions, a school already breeding in the Indo-European researches conducted on the sources of popular tales by Cosquin and Benfey, nurtured in the critical examination of Elias Lönnrot's construction of a Finnish epic (the *Kalevala*), and bursting upon the scene in the early twentieth century with the production of monographs tracing the historical itineraries of folktales, and the production of the prototype for what would become the invaluable Tale Type Index. I am referring of course to the so-called "Finnish" or historic-geographic method as pioneered by Julius and Kaarle Krohn (father and son), and by Antti Aarne, and then advanced well into the twentieth century by Kurt Ranke, Carl von Sydow, Reidar Christiansen, and Stith Thompson (who compiled the definitive version of the aforementioned Index, as well as the even more magisterial *Motif Index of Folk Literature*).²⁰ What united these great folklorists into a school was a desire to set up agenda for folklore studies that would be particular to it as a *discipline*, and that would help to differentiate folkloristics from other academic endeavors intellectually and methodologically. With the eventual canonization of the historic-geographic method during the inter-war period, folklorists discovered in effect their own "source" for the materials on which they worked, a theory or scholarly myth of origins that was not part of some larger theory about the beginnings or nature of humanity. This wellspring to which folklorists of the "Finnish" school traced back folklore was simply "the folk", an international community that despite geographic, cultural, political, economic, and historical factors, worked very well as a channel of internal communication ("folk" conveying their traditions to other "folk"). Even though concepts such as *oicotypification* were introduced to modify the theory of folk and folklore as human universals,²¹ the impression left by most historic-geographic studies is of folk narrative elements, whether mythic, legendary, or pertaining to the *Märchen*, existing as items of an internationally accepted currency, devoid of any profound reference to primal

²⁰ The *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folk-Tales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*, in six volumes, originally appeared in 1932–36. A revised and enlarged edition was published in 1955–58 (Bloomington). Indiana University Press introduced a CD-ROM version of this edition in 1993. Thompson's survey *The Folktale* (originally published in 1946; reprinted Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1977) presents a detailed history of folktale scholarship, from the Grimms to the Finnish school (pp. 367–461).

²¹ The term *oicotype* was coined by Carl W. von Sydow (see his *Selected Papers on Folklore*, ed. Laurits Bødker [Copenhagen, 1948], pp. 11–59).

human traits, or to the loss thereof (as in evolutionary theories about the rise of scientific thinking).

It is within this intellectual stream of folklore studies, dominant into the second half of our century, that we ought to situate that flashing gem of a book, the late Kenneth Jackson's *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition*,²² in which Jackson does his best to shoot out the tires of the powerful notion of the *Mabinogion* as a vehicle for primal Welshness or Celticity, and for the waifs and strays of ancient myth or primitive thought. Alternating almost casually among references to his own fieldwork with the Dingle storyteller Peig Sayers, to the traits of Scottish tradition-bearers, to stories exchanged at academic dinner-parties, and to the medieval Welsh texts themselves, Jackson opens up the comparative sensibility that is already clearly to be found in Gruffydd's work, and presents us with the useful model of the medieval *cyfarwydd* as a Lévi-Straussian *bricoleur*,²³ making use of whatever narrative props lie at hand. (This is not to say that Jackson was aware of the work of the great French anthropologist.) Of course, as others have noted, the troubling weakness in Jackson's approach is his clinging to the image of the author(s) of the *Mabinogion*, particularly of the Four Branches, as incompetent in trying to retell stories which were supposedly not the apex of the storyteller's art in the first place. Moreover, it is not at all clear in Jackson's reconstruction of the process of transmission just why the *cyfarwydd* or literate antiquarian would have bothered to tell, record, or stitch together these stories, or what he (or she) as *bricoleur* engaged in maintaining an ideological system would have been hoping to "repair" with them.

The history of folkloristics, I hope I have shown, sheds light on trends in *Mabinogion* scholarship, and it continues to inspire some of the most exciting recent contributions, such as Professor Sioned Davies' applications of Milman Parry and Albert Lord's model of oral formulaic composition to the Welsh texts and to hypothetical scenarios of their composition, performance, and transmission.²⁴ Since the

²² Cardiff, 1961. Andrew Welsh's *The Traditional Narrative Motifs of The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 15 (1988): 51–62, provides an inventory of the motifs that Jackson and others have found in these texts, as well as a brief history of scholarly motif-hunting in the Four Branches.

²³ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage* (Paris, 1962), pp. 4–47. The most ambitious attempts to analyze medieval Welsh tales from a Lévi-Straussian perspective to date remain Patrick K. Ford's two articles, *Prolegomena to a Reading of the Mabinogi: 'Pwyll' and 'Manawydan'*, and *Branwen: A Study of the Celtic Affinities*, *Mabinogi*, ed. Sullivan, pp. 165–216, 99–119 (originally published in *Studia Celtica* 16–17 [1981–82]: 110–25; 22–23 [1987–88]: 29–41).

²⁴ *Creft y Cyfarwydd: Astudiaeth o Dechnegau Naratif yn Y Mabinogion* (Cardiff, 1995), particularly pp. 104–188. See also Professor Davies' *Storytelling in Medieval Wales*, *Oral Tradition* 7 (1992): 231–57. The *locus classicus* of the Parry-Lord approach remains Albert B. Lord's *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA, 1960). Sean Ó Coileáin applies a different strand of twentieth-century folkloristic method to the study of the *Mabinogion* in *A Thematic Study of the Tale Pwyll Pendueic Dyuet, Mabinogi*, ed. Sullivan, pp. 145–51 (originally published in *Studia Celtica* 12–13 [1977–78]: 78–82).

sixties, the trend in folklore studies has been to allow folklore to speak for itself, to pay closer attention to the "native" taxonomies, performative cues as they are observable both in text and context, and the tradition-bearers' own notions of what their tradition is all about – in other words, to focus on what Alan Dundes has called the *metafolklore* of folklore.²⁵ The folk, which of course can include us, are themselves folklorists, highly self-conscious about many aspects of the traditions they create and sustain. In this respect, then, the authors of the *Mabinogion* are both folk and folklorists, and the folklore and metafolklore of the *Mabinogion* invite us to explore them on their *own* terms.

²⁵ Metafolklore and Oral Literary Criticism, *Analytic Essays in Folklore* (The Hague and Paris, 1975), pp. 50–58 (originally published in *The Monist* 50 [1966]: 505–516). For a survey of recent trends in folkloristics, see *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*, ed. Richard Bauman (New York and Oxford, 1992).