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Learning Lordship: The Education of Manawydan

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MANAWYDAN, a figure who appears in the second of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, is featured so prominently in the third that modern scholars commonly refer to this branch as *Manawydan*, even though it is in fact the only one of the four that does not open with a personal name.¹ The Third Branch opens with an adverbial phrase that links it to the

1 The Red Book of Hergest (Jesus College MS. cxi) has *llyma dechreu mabinogi* at the head of the First Branch; *llyma yr eil geinc or mabinogi* at the head of the Second; and *llyma y dryded geinc or mabinogi* and *honn yw y bedwarded geinc or mabinogi* in the appropriate places. See John Rhys and J. Gwenogvryn Evans, eds., *The Text of the Mabinogion and Other Welsh Tales from the Red Book of Hergest* (Oxford, 1887), pp. 1, 26, 44, 59. But descriptive titles appear to apply to sections of the stories only, as in the case of the claim that *o achaws y carchar bwnnw, y gelwit y kyuarwydyt bwnnw Mabinogi Mynweir a Mynord* at the end of the Third Branch, which has for the most part been taken to refer only to the final episode of the tale, the imprisonment in the Otherworld of Rhiannon and Pryderi. See Sioned Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd* (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1995), p. 57. The standard edition of the Four Branches, PKM, employs the titles *Pwyll Penduic Dyuet*, *Branwen uerch Lyr*, *Manawydan uab Llyr* and *Math uab Mathonwy*. Sir Ifor's usage may be taken as the charter for later editors, translators and critics.

preceding tale: *Guedy daruot y'r seithwyr a dywedysam ni uchot . . .* It is Manawydan, however, who is the subject of that sentence: *. . . edrych a wnaeth Manawydan ar y dref yn Llundain.*²

And Manawydan is indeed the principal character in the Third Branch, which begins with his receiving the unexpected gift of a very illustrious bride and concludes with his restoration of fertility to the kingdom of Dyfed and of freedom to his wife and son-in-law. Recent scholarship has even proposed that Manawydan is in a sense the most important character in the Four Branches as a whole. Abandoning the emphasis of W. J. Gruffydd and Ifor Williams on Pryderi, later scholars have seen in Manawydan the thematic, moral, and psychological centre of the collection, the figure with whom the author of the Four Branches identified most closely. Proinsias Mac Cana writes that

as one reads the Four Branches one can hardly avoid the conclusion that the author has created in Manawydan a reflection of his own personality and a vehicle for his own philosophy of life. . . . Vengeance and feud were part of the pattern of medieval life, but Manawydan shows how they may be rejected and circumvented by the exercise of fortitude and prudence.³

Brynley Roberts too has praised Manawydan, calling him 'astute, loyal and deep-thinking'.⁴ And J. K. Bollard writes that, 'From the very beginning of the enchantment Manawydan takes control of the situation, and he supplies the knowledge, counsel, and craftsmanship by which they are able to survive'.⁵

John T. Koch appears to be the lone dissenting voice. In a densely argued study of the origins of the Third Branch, Koch claims that Manawydan is no 'paragon of Christian patience' but rather 'the complete Un-King'.⁶ Manawydan, measured against the standards of kingship set forth in such Celtic texts as the Old Irish *Audacht Morainn*⁷ and *Críth Gablach*,⁸ is an abject failure; furthermore, the author has so constructed Manawydan's experience and behaviour that a reader versed in Celtic traditions will inevitably perceive him as a kind of anti-hero of the

2 PKM, p. 49.

3 Mac Cana 1992, pp. 47-8.

4 'Characterization in *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', in Roberts 1992, 105-113, at p. 111.

5 Bollard, p. 175.

6 Koch, p. 36.

7 Ed. Fergus Kelly (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1976).

8 Ed. D.A. Binchy. *Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 11* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1941).

paradigmatic Celtic sovereignty myth.⁹ 'Manawydan', he argues, 'can be read as a prolonged exemplary tale of Unrightful Kingship'.¹⁰

Koch's assessment of the figure of Manawydan is bound up with his argument that the Third Branch represents the survival of traditions concerning a British prince of the first century BC. It is not a simple argument, and Koch's observations about the character of Manawydan might be overlooked by a reader absorbed in following and evaluating its individual postulates and its overall import. However, the validity of the observations is independent of the historical argument, and they provide a useful counterweight to the adulation that Manawydan has otherwise enjoyed in the commentary of the last two decades.

Even Koch, though, admits that, 'At the end . . . the redactor would wish us to feel that Manawydan has been vindicated in full for his Job-like patience'.¹¹ This sympathy he attributes to the formulation of a complete post-heroic ideal which led the author of the Four Branches to celebrate a figure that tradition had originally portrayed as craven and ineffectual, the epitome of 'Unrightful Kingship' — but all the while working within the narrative confines of that very tradition:

Though clearly siding with Manawydan, he has preserved every episode so that the protagonist has remained in every wise the exact antithesis of the rightful king of the older value system.¹²

From one perspective, Manawydan appears to be a pusillanimous, déclassé tormentor of small animals; from another, he is the astute and long-suffering lord of a land restored to peaceful prosperity. I would argue that Koch's is not the only way to resolve this paradox. Another is to read the Third Branch as a narrative of moral education, to focus on Manawydan as a character in the process of learning and changing, rather than as an *exemplum* of post-heroic Christian virtues. My reading involves a 'synchronic' approach to the text of the Third Branch, rather than the kind of 'diachronic' study that Koch's essay represents.¹³ It assumes that the author of the Four Branches was deliberately infusing traditional story materials with his own purposes, values, and meanings. I also accept the now conven-

9 Koch, pp. 31-40.

10 Koch, p. 42.

11 Koch, p. 36.

12 Koch, p. 36.

13 A number of recent scholars have pointed to the division of commentaries on the *Mabinogi* into these two categories, and have discussed the different assumptions and strategies of each. Particularly cogent is the review of critical literature by Andrew Welsh, pp. 121-27; another can be found in Mac Cana 1992, pp. 28-38.

tional view that one writer is responsible for the existing text of all four branches, and thus assume at least the possibility of thematic relationships among them.¹⁴

Some years ago, I suggested that the First Branch of the *Mabinogi* can be read as a story of the development of wisdom and good sense by its protagonist, Pwyll, whose name is in Welsh a common noun meaning 'prudence, judgement, common sense'. I would like to contend here that the Third Branch too is concerned not only with the appropriate exercise of lordship, but also with development of the prudence and self-restraint that must inform that lordship. In developing this theme, the tale of Manawydan echoes certain aspects of the tale of Pwyll, knowingly and tellingly. And like *Pwyll*, *Manawydan* reflects a sense of the mythical import of some of its material; it depends for the articulation of its meaning upon a fairly complex set of relationships with both the narrative traditions out of which it is built and with the other branches of the *Mabinogi*.

Although the immediate chronological relationship of the Third Branch is with the Second, the reader is likely within moments to be reminded rather of the First, for in the very first lines, Pryderi offers to Manawydan both his mother, Rhiannon, and governance of the seven cantrefs of Dyfed (*medyant y seith cantref [Dyuet]*). Thus the *Mabinogi* returns from the north, where Bendigeidfran held court in Harlech at the start of the Second Branch, to Dyfed, in south-west Wales. At the opening of the first branch, the reader recalls, *Pwyll Pendewic Dyuet a oed yn arglwyd ar seith cantref Dyuet*, so the movement is a return not only geographically, to the setting of the First Branch, but verbally and textually, to its opening sentence.

The second major chapter, so to speak, of the First Branch concerns the courtship and marriage of Pwyll and the otherworldly horsewoman, Rhiannon. Thus, Pryderi's presentation of Rhiannon as a bride for Manawydan also recalls the First Branch. Moreover, it is with this reintroduction of Rhiannon that the mythic substratum of the *Mabinogi* becomes visible in the Third Branch; the relationship

¹⁴ These assumptions about single authorship, interrelationship, and fully realised rhetorical intention are shared, for example, by Brynley F. Roberts, who has written that 'It seems generally to have been accepted that individually (or collectively in the case of *The Four Branches*), these tales are the work of single authors' (1988, p. 11), and that

In the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* we are aware of a consistent attitude and a thematic unity. The material which these stories use is the most obviously naive and traditional of all the chwedlau, and yet from it the medieval author has produced a work unparalleled in Middle Welsh literature. His moral view of life, tempered by his compassion for human frailty, has taken up the *cyfarwyddyd* which he found and has given it significance beyond that of his own time, not along the way of accepted contemporary literary conventions but along the road of personal conviction shaping a unique narrative form. (1984, p. 228; pp. 102-3 of reprint)

of the story of Manawydan to the setting, plot, and underlying tradition of the First Branch is immediately manifest on multiple levels.

I have previously argued with regard to the First Branch that the author of the *Mabinogi* probably had some sense of the paradigmatic Celtic myth of the sovereignty goddess.¹⁵ His parallel but different deployment of Rhiannon in the Third Branch persuades me more surely than ever that he was far from 'pillaging an antiquity of which he [did] not fully possess the secret', as Matthew Arnold famously put it.¹⁶ Rather, he had some notion of the traditional import of the figure of Rhiannon. He is unlikely to have accepted the ancient sovereignty myth as a sacred narrative in any literal sense. That would not necessarily have prevented him, however, from exploiting its inherent semiotic value.

The tradition of allegorising pagan mythology and poetry, of reading narrative such as Vergil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in terms of ethics, stretched back as least as far as the sixth century. This practice was essentially an aspect of the art of grammar — the glossing of texts in order to elucidate the underlying meanings that validated the work of pagan poets for the Christian reader. It led to a habit among many medieval writers of investing their stories with secret lessons for those wise enough to discern them, or at least of claiming to have done so. In Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes, for example, the claim of hidden meaning is explicit.¹⁷ The absence of any such assertion in medieval Welsh narrative is one of the factors that has enabled the ongoing debate between those who read the Four Branches, and some of the other 'native tales', as *cyfarwyddyd*, traditional narrative preserved in writing in order to rescue it from oblivion, and those who regard some or all of them as consciously crafted works of literary fiction. As Brynley Roberts has put it,

[W]hat is difficult to resolve are questions such as whether these authors may be regarded as *cyfarwyddiaid*, whether the stories are oral traditional tales which have been given written form or whether they were conceived as written compositions which may have taken elements from a number of sources, and what changes may have occurred in the change of medium from spoken to written.¹⁸

¹⁵ McKenna, pp. 45-8.

¹⁶ On *The Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), Everyman's Library No. 458 (London: J. M. Dent and New York: E. P. Dutton, 1910), p. 54.

¹⁷ On the development of allegorical interpretations of Vergil, see Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory, 350-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), pp. 118-61.

¹⁸ Roberts 1988, p. 11.

However, if it can be admitted that the author may have understood his story to embody a particular meaning, then it is possible as well that he believed that meaning to be encoded in part in the story of Rhiannon as told in the First and Third Branches.

A number of scholars share a sense that the traditional substratum of the Four Branches asserts itself undeniably and irresistibly in the text that we have. Brynley Roberts comments that '[t]hese stories continue to have a peculiar mythic resonance, of which the author is aware and which he uses in his composition, but this is not to say that he is mainly concerned to reproduce traditional narratives'.¹⁹ And Proinsias Mac Cana has written more recently that 'the mythological element pervades all four tales and . . . one cannot properly evaluate them without giving it its due weight'.²⁰

The pervasiveness of a paradigmatic Celtic myth in which a goddess chooses for a spouse the rightful king of a territory, thereby validating his claim to the kingship and ensuring the fertility and prosperity of the land, has long since been definitively established by Proinsias Mac Cana and other scholars.²¹ The influence of the old myth on the Welsh romances, *Iarlles y Fynnawn* (*Owein*), *Peredur vab Evrwac*, and *Gereint vab Erbin* has been noted in particular.²² Mac Cana has written

That the sovereignty myth underlies the three romances is beyond question, but it may be asked whether those who composed the extant texts were fully aware of its deeper significance. In general, the indications are that by the eleventh or twelfth century in Wales the knowledge and understanding of native mythology, even among the learned poets, was patchy and unsystematic, but nevertheless, as in a much later period in Ireland, certain basic concepts seem to have survived the social system which had generated them, and of these the myth of the goddess of sovereignty and of the sacred marriage, the *bieros gamos*, was one of the most permanent and productive. . . . When about 1170 Eleanor of Aquitaine had her son Richard installed as Duke of Aquitaine, she arranged that this should take the form of a symbolic marriage between him and St. Valéry, the legendary martyr and patroness of the region. The saint's ring was placed on his finger in

¹⁹ Roberts 1984, p. 96.

²⁰ Mac Cana 1992, p. 52.

²¹ Mac Cana 1955-8; Rachel Bromwich, 'Celtic Dynastic Themes and the Bretons Lays', *Études Celtiques* 9 (1960-1), pp. 439-74, and 'The Celtic Inheritance of Medieval Literature', *Modern Language Quarterly* 26 (1965), pp. 203-27; Rhian Andrews, 'Rhai Agweddu ar Sofraniaeth yng Ngherddi'r Gogynfeirdd', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 27 (1976), pp. 23-30.

²² See, for example, Glenys Goetinck, 'Sofraniaeth yn y Tair Rhamant', *Llên Cymru* 6 (1960-1), pp. 138-53; I. C. Lovecy, 'The Celtic Sovereignty Theme and the Structure of *Peredur*', *Studia Celtica* 12-13 (1977-78), pp. 133-46;

solemn token of his indissoluble union with the provinces and vassals of Aquitaine. One does not need to be a Celticist to appreciate the implications of this ritual.²³

Mac Cana also writes of the strong women in the Four Branches that

. . . it is more simple to take them for what they are: literary reflexes of the Celtic goddess in some of her many aspects. When Rhiannon comes from the Otherworld and chooses Pwyll for her husband, she reincarnates the goddess of sovereignty who, in taking to her a spouse, thereby ordained him legitimate king of the territory which she personified. Not only does she take the initiative in forming a marriage alliance, but she overpowers her lord and her suitor. . . . Her masterful behaviour carries over into her dealings with Manawydan in the third branch, though here the shrewd old protagonist is more her match than the conventional heroic prince.²⁴

In the context of such a still potent, even if imperfectly remembered, mythology of sovereignty, the figure of Rhiannon might well have stimulated certain sensibilities in an audience familiar with Welsh tradition, particularly in an audience familiar with her role in the First Branch of the *Mabinogi* as well. Even for a reader, or listener, who was not equipped to recognise in Rhiannon an avatar of the sovereignty goddess with equine affinities, the interplay of the character as she appears in the Third Branch with the Rhiannon of the First Branch would have been evocative of a certain sense of her significance and of the significance of her marriage to Manawydan, of her disappearance, and of her restoration.

In the Third Branch, for example, Rhiannon is given in marriage to Manawydan by her adult son, Pryderi. This accords, of course, with medieval Welsh practice.²⁵ In addition, however, it reminds us that the goddess cannot be courted and won; she must choose her mate. That is certainly what happens in the First Branch, where Rhiannon informs Pwyll that

*Riannon, uerch Heueyd Hen, wyf i, a'm rodi y wr o'm hanwod yd ydys. Ac ny mynneis innheu un gwr, a hynny o'th garyat ti. Ac nys mynnaf etwa, onyt ti a'm gwrthyt. Ac e wybot dy atep di am hynny e deuthum i.*²⁶

Rhiannon, daughter of Hefeydd the Old am I, and I am being given to a husband against my will. And I have never desired a husband, and that for love of you.

²³ Mac Cana 1992, pp. 111-12.

²⁴ Mac Cana 1992, pp. 55-6.

²⁵ See *The Welsh Law of Women*, ed. Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen (Cardiff: U WalesP, 1980), p. 19 *et passim*.

²⁶ PKM, p. 12.

And I still don't want one, unless you refuse me. And to know your answer to that have I come.

The Rhiannon of the Third Branch strikes us as very different in some respects, but it remains the case that she is not to be won, like a prize, but must be received as a gift.

It is not Rhiannon herself who chooses Manawydan as her husband, but her son Pryderi:

*Seith cantref Dyuet yr edewit y mi, heb y Pryderi, a Riannon wy mam yssyd yno. Mi a rodaf it bonno, a medyant y seith cantref genthi. . . . A chyn bo enwedigaeth y kyuoeth y mi, bit y mwynant y ti a Riannon. . . . Er amser y bu biheu yn y dewred, ny bu wreic delediwach no hi, ac etwa ny bydy anuodlawn y phryt.*²⁷

The seven cantrefs of Dyfed were left to me, said Pryderi, and Rhiannon, my mother, is there. I'll give her to you, and possession of the seven cantrefs with her And though the land is mine in name, you and Rhiannon shall have the enjoyment of it When she was in her prime, there was no woman more lovely than she, and still you will not be displeased by her form.

Rhiannon is never, apparently, consulted in the matter; she nevertheless retains some of her old spark when Manawydan speaks in her hearing as if she were merely an object in his dealings with Pryderi.²⁸ John Koch emphasises the differences between the First and Third Branches here: 'Riannon chooses Pwyll for her mate after he proves his valour in Annwryn, but she is bestowed on Manawydan (after he displays *lleddfdra*) by a powerful man'.²⁹ It is possible, though, to regard the two episodes as more similar than different, in that each involves the bestowal of Rhiannon upon a husband both surprised and delighted to be so favoured. If the *panache* with which Rhiannon elected Pwyll to be her mate in the First Branch was the ineluctable clue to the presence of a sovereignty goddess, the echo of that episode in the Third Branch brings the goddess back onto the stage.

And yet it is true that the memory of Rhiannon's regal and self-sufficient demeanour in the First Branch evokes at the same time a certain unease with her

²⁷ PKM, pp. 49–50.

²⁸ PKM, p. 50.

²⁹ Koch, pp. 37–8. Charles W. Sullivan III implies that the difference may be one of the elements in the Four Branches that encodes a shift from matriliney to patriliney among the Celts. See 'Inheritance and Lordship in *Math*', in *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York and London: Garland, 1996), pp. 347–66, at pp. 361–2; rpt. from *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1990), pp. 45–63.

position in the Third. The echo signals something gone wrong. She is older, for one thing; Pryderi's words draw attention to this fact. While this makes sense in light of her having become, since the reader first met her, the widowed mother of a son who is now grown and married, her age may also be read as an instance of the theme in which the goddess suffers in her form or condition when without her proper spouse, of the aged hag who is transformed into a beautiful young woman upon sexual acceptance by the rightful king.³⁰

What is certain is that Manawydan's marriage to Rhiannon appears initially to be associated with precisely the kind of fertility and abundance that would be expected of the union of the rightful lord with the territorial goddess, but that soon enough he finds himself at the centre of a kind of desert, as might be expected of a failed or bad king. After the wedding feast of Pwyll and Rhiannon, the couple join Pryderi and his wife in a circuit of Dyfed:

*Ac wrth rudyaw y wlat ny welsynt eiryoet wlat gyuanhedach no hi, na heldir well, nac amlach y mel na'y physcawt no hi.*³¹

And as they wandered the country, they had never seen a more accommodating land than that, nor better hunting grounds, nor a land more ample in its honey or its fish.

But during a second feast, celebrating the return of Pryderi from Oxford, where he has gone to pay homage to Caswallawn, the self-proclaimed king of Britain, all of this changes suddenly and dramatically. The four visit the Gorsedd Arberth, the very spot from which Pwyll first spotted the horsewoman Rhiannon in the First Branch,

Ac ual y bydant yn eisted yuelly, llyma dwrwf, a chan ueint y twrwf, llyma gawat o nywl yn dyuot hyt na chanhoed yr un obonunt wy y giliid. Ac yn ol y nywl llyma yn goleubau pob lle. A phan edrychyssant y ford y guelynn y preideu, a'r anreitheu, a'r kyuanhed kyn no hynny, ny welynt neb ryw dim, na thy, nac aniueil, na mwc, na than, na dyn, na chyuanhed, eithyr tei y llys yn wac,

³⁰ For further discussion of this theme, see Mac Cana 1955–8, at 7, 84–5; 8, 63–4, and *passim*. For its reflex in the First Branch, see McKenna, 47–8. Since Manawydan already finds that *na welsei eiryoed wreic digonach y thecket a'y thelediwet no hi* ('he had never seen a woman more satisfactory than she in loveliness and charm') before he announces to Pryderi his willingness to accept the match, however, it may be going too far to read her age as an aspect of her privation, at the mythic level.

³¹ PKM, p. 51

*diffeith, anghyuanhed, heb dyn, heb uil yndunt; eu kedymdeithon e hun wedy eu colli, heb wybot dim y wrthunt, onyt wyll pedwar.*³²

And as they were sitting thus, there was a thunderclap, and with the immensity of the thunderclap, there came a cloud of mist so that none of them could see the other. And after the mist, there was a brightening everywhere. And when they looked the way that they would see the flocks and the herds and the dwellings before that, they saw nothing, neither house, nor animal, nor smoke, nor fire, nor person, nor dwelling, except the court buildings — empty, deserted, uninhabited, without person or beast in them; their own companions lost, without their knowing anything about them, except the four of them.

Proinsias Mac Cana has noted the parallel between the First and Third Branches in the way that wonders are precipitated by a visit to the Gorsedd Arberth during a feast.³³ But the descent of the devastating mist stands in stark contrast to the appearance of Rhiannon: whereas that mystery leads to the designation of Pwyll as the spouse of the goddess and his validation as lord, the desolation that follows the mist appears to reproach Manawydan and Pryderi — their lordship has led to this. There is more than one echo of the First Branch in this scene, though. The reader is reminded as well, by the emphasis on the isolation of the four companions, of Pwyll, hunting from Arberth in Glyn Cuch, and losing his companions. It is the episode in which Pwyll, having discourteously attempted to seize the quarry of another hunter, has his first encounter with the Otherworld, in the form of Arawn king of Annwn.³⁴ Both the reiteration of the excursion to Gorsedd Arberth where wonders are experienced, and the replication of the isolation that accompanies the encounter of Pwyll with Arawn, link this scene of the Third Branch with the First.

As Andrew Welsh has pointed out, Dyfed is not reduced to a wasteland by this first enchantment:

it is deserted but not infertile. Even under the enchantment it abounds in game, fish and wild honey. Only the refinements of civilised life are gone: domestic

³² PKM, pp. 51–2.

³³ Mac Cana 1992, p. 33.

³⁴ Brynley Roberts (1984) sees *cydymdeithas* 'friendship' as the keyword in Manawydan (p. 99 of rpt.). But the Arawn episode of Pwyll places a similar emphasis on *cydymdeithas*. When Arawn returns home to discover that Pwyll has not only subdued his old enemy Hafgan, but has remained chaste with respect to Arawn's wife, he exclaims that Pwyll is *cadarn a ungwr y gydymdeithas* 'strong and peerless in friendship', for example (PKM, p. 7). For a discussion of the role of the Arawn episode in the First Branch, see McKenna, pp. 48–51.

herds, dwellings with their hearth fires, the society of people. It is not nature but culture that has failed.³⁵

Nevertheless, the change is drastic and dispiriting for Manawydan and his companions. It is ultimately discovered to be part of the vengeance taken by Llwyd son of Cil Coed upon Pryderi and upon Dyfed for the insult inflicted upon Gwawl son of Clud by Pwyll (and Rhiannon) in the First Branch. However, even as the temporary loss of Pryderi in *Pwyll* can be understood as part of an ongoing test of Pwyll's lordship,³⁶ so too can the enchantment of Dyfed in the Third Branch be read in terms of theme as well as of plot.

In the First Branch, though, there are some fairly clear indications of the ways in which Pwyll is deficient. In his attempted appropriation of Arawn's quarry, he demonstrates *anwybot* and *ansyberwyt* ('ignorance' and 'discourtesy')³⁷ in the same thoughtless arrogance that will later impel him to send riders in pursuit of the mysterious horsewoman even after it becomes obvious that she is not to be overtaken. *Arhoaf yn llawen. . . ac oed llesach y'r march pei ass archut yr meityn*, she replies when he at last requests her to stop: 'I'll stop gladly, and it would have been better for the horse if you had asked sooner'.³⁸ An impulsive, rash munificence allows him to be tricked into giving Rhiannon to Gwawl: *ny bu uuscrellach gwr ar y ssynnwyr e hun nog ry uuost ti*, she tells him, 'there was never a man feebler of wit than you have been'.³⁹

If the desolation of Dyfed, on the other hand, betokens some failure on Manawydan's part, there is no Arawn to announce what it is, and Rhiannon remains silent. It occurs soon after the return of Pryderi from Oxford, where he has gone to offer homage (*gwrogaeth*) to Caswallawn. John Koch sees one aspect of Manawydan's 'unrightfulness' in his failure to resist the usurpation of the crown of Bendigeidfran by his cousin Caswallawn,⁴⁰ although it is of course Pryderi, the ruler in name of Dyfed who submits to Caswallawn, and not Manawydan, to whom he has given the exercise of power (*medyant*) and its enjoyment (*mwynant*)⁴¹. One way of interpreting Manawydan's position at the moment of the enchantment of Dyfed is to see him as a lord who is enjoying his sovereignty — hunting, fishing, feasting, and marriage to Rhiannon but shirking its responsibilities. He complains about Caswallawn at the beginning of the tale,

³⁵ Welsh, pp. 134–5.

³⁶ For a discussion of this issue, see McKenna, pp. 47–52.

³⁷ PKM, p. 2.

³⁸ PKM, p. 12.

³⁹ PKM, p. 14.

⁴⁰ Koch, p. 37.

⁴¹ PKM, p. 49.

*Kyt boet keuwynderw y mi y gwr bwnnw, goathrist yw genhyf i guelet neb yn lle Bendigeiduran uy mrawt, ac ny allaf uot yn llawen yn un ty ac ef.*⁴²

Although he is my cousin, it is distressing to me to see anyone in the place of my brother Bendigeidfran, and I cannot be happy in the same house as he.

Yet he undertakes neither to depose the usurper, nor to acknowledge him formally. It is Pryderi, not Manawydan, who transcends the old heroic ethos with a self-effacing gesture of accommodation of both Caswallawn and Manawydan.

The question of Dyfed's relationship to Caswallawn's kingship does not arise again. However, in the dénouement of the tale, when Manawydan negotiates with Llwyd son of Cil Coed for the liberation of his land, wife, and son-in-law, he demonstrates his ability to engage a powerful opponent successfully but without violence. The courage and cunning with which he does so, however, are not so much qualities that have been operating throughout, invisible to the reader, as they are qualities that have developed in the course of the narrative, qualities that stand in marked contrast to the snivelling about Caswallawn with which the tale opens.

In the immediate aftermath of the enchantment, Manawydan is as helpless to deal with the predicament as are his three companions. No one can think of anything better to do for two years than to continue feasting and hunting as they did before. Although these are regal pastimes, they can be construed, under the circumstances, as irresponsible. They represent the enjoyment of sovereignty (*mwynant y kyuoeth*) that Pryderi offered to Manawydan, without its obligations. In fact, they involve the ongoing depletion of the resources of the land — precisely the sort of behaviour that is associated in many literary and political traditions with bad kingship. In an Irish text generally acknowledged to have its roots in Celtic mythological tradition, *Cath Maige Tuired*, the Fomorian king Bres, who exacts excessive tribute and labour from the Tuatha Dé Danann, is the paradigm of *gáu flathemon*, or what John Koch has called 'Unrightful Kingship'. In another, *Aislinge Meic Conglinne*, like the *Mabinogi* generally dated to the late eleventh or twelfth century,⁴³ the demon of gluttony that possesses king Cathal mac Finguine threatens to devastate all of Munster, such are Cathal's demands for food.

Ultimately, it is Manawydan who proposes a different response to their situation: *ny bydwn ual hynn. Kyrchwn Loygyr, a cheisswn greft y caffom yn ymborth*,⁴⁴ he says to his companions, 'we shall not live like this. Let us go to England, and let us find a craft by which we may support ourselves'. The suggestion is surprising. Manawydan proposes not only that the foursome leave the desolate land,

⁴² PKM, p. 49.

⁴³ Ed. Kenneth H. Jackson (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1990).

⁴⁴ PKM, p. 52.

rather than trying to do anything about matters there, but also that they abandon the way of life associated with their noble rank and take on the guise of artisans. At the same time, there is an echo of the First Branch to be heard here: even as Pwyll, in order to redress the ignoble discourtesy that he had shown to Arawn, needed to relinquish his kingdom and travel to Annwfn, so also does Manawydan, confronted with the evidence of his and Pryderi's inadequate lordship, travel out of Dyfed into England.

Arawn explains to Pwyll in great detail what he is to do in Annwfn, and Pwyll redeems himself by following those instructions to the letter. Manawydan, on the other hand, must devise his own agenda. Pwyll returns to Dyfed with the lifelong friendship of Arawn and the title *Pen Annwfn*, and is soon thereafter chosen by Rhiannon as her mate. Manawydan's ventures on the first visit to England, on the other hand, effect no change in his own status or the condition of Dyfed; if anything, the events that take place upon his return suggest that he is still being punished. On the level of plot, of course, his failure to lift the enchantment is the result of his simple failure to discover its source. On a deeper level, however, on which the tale is concerned both thematically and mythically with sovereignty, the failure of the first expedition to England is a failure to develop lordly virtues.

The foursome undertake a series of occupations that seem, on the face of it, to be inappropriate for persons of their rank. While J. K. Bollard wrote accurately that Manawydan 'supplies the knowledge, counsel, and craftsmanship by which they are able to survive',⁴⁵ during the desolation of Dyfed, the point of John Koch is equally well taken: that Manawydan supports himself and his companions by sinking 'to the status of . . . a peripatetic craftsman'.⁴⁶ Manawydan proposes in turn that the group take to saddlery, shield making, and shoemaking; in each case, it is Manawydan who develops the techniques that allow them to prosper in their craft, effectively driving local artisans out of business. His aptitude for such peaceable and productive work is impressive. In a more broadly Celtic framework, the reader is reminded of the Irish mythological figure of Lug Samildánach, the 'all-arts-together-one', as he appears at the gate of Nuadu's court in *Cath Maige Tuired*,⁴⁷ and of his Welsh cognate, Lleu, a central figure in the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogi*, who also engages in the craft of shoemaking.⁴⁸ Yet, as the murderous rage of the local artisans suggests, Manawydan's strategy is an

⁴⁵ Bollard, p. 175.

⁴⁶ Koch, p. 37.

⁴⁷ *Cath Maige Tuired*, pp. 38–43.

⁴⁸ PKM, pp. 80–1. John Koch observes that 'Manawydan and Lleu are both sovereigns who have been denied their birthright. The craft they practise while thus dispossessed serves as a badge of their thwarted kingly natures: they make the sort of shoes proper to kings'. (p. 33)

inappropriate one for an aristocrat. Rather than fostering prosperity, he causes an economic crisis, albeit not in the kingdom for which he is responsible. As sovereign, he ought, perhaps, ideally to encompass the capacity for all the crafts that his realm needs in order to thrive. His own proper work, however, is to provide his people with protection, wise governance, and the sacral presence that insures fertility — not to make shoes. When he resumes that occupation on the second sojourn in England, Cigfa makes this plain to him: *Arghwyd . . . nyt hoff bonno y glanet y wr kyngbilet, kyuurd a thydi*, she says, 'Lord . . . I don't think much of the cleanliness of that for a man as able and as noble as you are'.⁴⁹ I would disagree with Proinsias Mac Cana's assessment of Cigfa's remark as arising from 'a kind of prim suburban snobbery'⁵⁰. Bourgeois pretension is not an issue for these characters, who are not of the bourgeoisie. They are aristocrats in a hierarchical society, in which there is behaviour that is appropriate and inappropriate to each class. Manawydan himself seems implicitly to recognise this when he insists against Pryderi's counsel that they must not give battle to the angry saddlers of Hereford. *Bei ymladem ni ac wyntwy, clot drwc uydei arnam, ac yn carcharu a wneit*, he warns, 'if we fought with them, we would be of ill repute, and would be imprisoned'.⁵¹ His *clod* — a concept embracing reputation, honour, and fame — was of paramount importance to a nobleman, and Manawydan knew that attacking *taeogan* 'churls' was no way to enhance it.

Later, however, while Manawydan does resist the 'heroic' impulse of Pryderi to kill the unhappy local shield makers, his rationale seems less than kingly. *Caswallawn a glywei bynny, a'e wyr, a rewin uydem* he argues, 'Caswallawn and his men would hear of it, and we would be ruined'.⁵² He still lacks the ability to deal with Caswallawn, and in this regard stands in stark contrast to Pwyll, who early in the First Branch establishes a strong and useful fellowship with Arawn. And when he decides upon shoemaking as a third trade, he reasons that *ni byd o galhon gan grydyon nac ymlad a ni nac ymwaraun* 'shoemakers won't have the heart to fight with us or hinder us'.⁵³ This is hardly the attitude of a man who is rising above the martial ethos of a warrior aristocracy, but rather that of a coward who

49 PKM, p. 58. John Koch argues that

'Clean' is neither strong enough nor sufficiently wide in its range of meaning to convey the culturally charged force of *glân*. . . . It hardly needs saying that work that was not *glân* was not appropriate to a king. If we think in terms of the sacral kingship of the ancient Celts, we come near to its exact antithesis. (p. 33)

50 Mac Cana, p. 47.

51 PKM, p. 53.

52 PKM, p. 54.

53 PKM, p. 54.

shirks it by pitting himself against an opponent of lowly status within the context of a society that regards valour as an aristocratic virtue.

As I see it, Manawydan returns to Dyfed stymied. He has not learned to behave in a manner appropriate to his status, and only half knows this. It is the consequence of his failure that not only does Dyfed remain deserted, but that he also loses Rhiannon, the sign and source of his sovereignty, along with Pryderi, the emblem of her fertility. During the course of a hunt, Manawydan and Pryderi come upon a mysterious *caer*, into which their dogs, Pryderi, and finally Rhiannon vanish, after which the entire edifice disappears.⁵⁴

This episode echoes the First Branch again, and in more than one way. Pwyll, too, is given Rhiannon, loses her, and must win her back by outwitting Gwawl at his wedding feast. Pwyll, too, loses Pryderi, his infant son, and with him, in a sense, loses Rhiannon once more, for she cannot reign at his side until the child is recovered and she is exonerated of blame for his death and disappearance. From another perspective, we are reminded, by the hunt that leads Manawydan and Pryderi to the enchanted *caer*, of the hunt that led Pwyll to his encounter with Arawn. The parallelism is underscored by Manawydan's pledge to Cigfa just after the others disappear that he will respect her chastity for the sake of [*c*]ywirdeb wrth Pryderi, 'faith with Pryderi',⁵⁵ just as Pwyll remained chaste with respect to Arawn's wife in the First Branch, thus demonstrating his capacity for [*c*]adw kywirdeb, 'keeping faith'.⁵⁶ Manawydan, however, remains without the explicit instruction that Pwyll received in how to restore the goodwill of Arawn and to win Rhiannon back from Gwawl.

The second journey to England reiterates, in abbreviated form, the first: Manawydan takes up shoemaking once again, ignoring the censure of Cigfa. The repetition helps to point up the difference, however: on this occasion, when he gives up in the face of hostility from other shoemakers and turns homeward, Manawydan carries with him some wheat, and upon his return to Dyfed he begins to cultivate the soil. Perhaps farming is no more an appropriate occupation for a

54 John Koch offers a detailed reading of the disappearance of Pryderi and Rhiannon in terms of the sovereignty myth:

[T]he hero destined to be king often proves his valour in the chase for a magical white animal in the wilderness Manawydan holds back . . . as a prelude to losing the personified sovereignty. The paralysing golden bowl, by which Pryderi and Rhiannon are spirited off from Manawydan, can be seen as a reversal of the golden cup with which the personified Sovereignty of Ireland offers liquor to the successive kings of *Baile in Scáil*. (p. 35)

55 PKM, p. 57.

56 PKM, p. 8.

ruler than is shoemaking, but at least he is now devoting himself not only to his own well being, but also to that of the land whose sovereignty he enjoys. The second return, just a bit more than halfway through the text, marks the first real change in Manawydan. He sows, rather than merely garnering the fruits of the land; he engages in essential work, rather than superfluous rivalry with other craftsmen; he concerns himself with the welfare of his realm rather than living from hand to mouth as a vagabond.

Nevertheless, Manawydan's enterprises continue, apparently, to fail. Even as the threat of violence disrupted initial success every time that Manawydan and his companions undertook a craft, so too violence carries off the fruit of his agricultural work. It is at this moment that Manawydan has his first useful insight into his distress and that of Dyfed. *A mi a'e gwnn; y neb a dechreuis uyn diua, yssyd yn y orffen, ac a diuawys y wlad gyt a mi*, he muses, 'I know that it is the one who began my ruin who is completing it, and who has ruined the land along with me'.⁵⁷ He has already recognised the malevolent nature of the enchantment. He counsels Pryderi not to venture into the mysterious *caer*. *Ac o gwney uygkyngbor i nyt ey idi. A'r neb a dodes hut ar y wlat, a beris bot y gaer yma*, he tells him, 'if you follow my advice, you won't go in. The one who cast the spell on the country caused the *caer* to be here'.⁵⁸ Only once up to this point, however, has he employed the verb *gwybod*, 'know'. *Mi a'y gwn*, he says to Pryderi, 'I know it', speaking of the craft of shoemaking.⁵⁹ The contrast between the two forms of knowledge accentuates the importance of Manawydan's growing understanding of the enchantment. In place of, or in addition to, the applied knowledge of the craftsman, he is developing the wisdom, the discernment, the *pwyll* that is appropriate to a ruler.

In the First Branch, too, Pwyll ultimately learns to exercise the good judgement that is the hallmark of a rightful sovereign.⁶⁰ And he too does so in relation to a threat to the fertility that attends the reign of a true ruler. As I have argued,

For Pwyll, [the] final achievement of full sovereignty is impeded first by Rhiannon's failure to give birth to a son until nearly three years have passed and then by the mysterious abduction of the boy and the accusation of murder against Rhiannon. Throughout, Pwyll acts in accordance with the wisdom he has

⁵⁷ PKM, p. 59.

⁵⁸ PKM, p. 56.

⁵⁹ PKM, p. 54.

⁶⁰ In Irish tradition, the importance of good judgement to rightful sovereignty is explicit in *Cath Maige Tuired*, where Bres is lured by the Mac Óc into making a false judgement. He tells the Dagda, *Ispéarae iarum an rí de marbad. Isbéarae-sa fris, Ní fíor flatbu deit, a rí óc Fénei, a n-udbere*. 'Then the king will order you to be killed, and you will say to him, "What you say, king of the warriors of the Féni, is not a prince's truth"'. Pp. 30-1.

acquired. He refuses at first to divorce his wife for barrenness because they have been married so short a time, but he promises to submit to the counsel of his men after an allotted period passes. When the child disappears, he refuses again to divorce Rhiannon, but agrees because of the evidence against her that she should be punished.⁶¹

Fundamental to his defence of Rhiannon is his *gwybod*, knowledge. *Plant a wnn i y uot idi hi. Ac nyt yscaraf a hi*, he insists, 'I know her to have children, and I will not divorce her'.⁶²

By the time that he catches one of the mice that prove to be the ravagers of his crop, Manawydan has developed similar wisdom and discernment. He exhibits considerable cunning in his negotiations with the clerk, the priest, and the bishop who approach him as he prepares to hang the mouse. On the level of the plot, he must bargain for the future of Dyfed, seeking not only to undo the enchantment, but to secure a peaceful and prosperous future as well. Forbearance and acumen are the qualities with which he wins restoration of Rhiannon, Pryderi, and the land. On the level of myth, it is those qualities — political, rather than heroic virtues — that achieve his reunion with the goddess of sovereignty. In the world in which the *Mabinogi* was composed, in other words, the sacral king in immobile possession of the *fir flathemon* is a thing of the past. The heir to that mythic position must bear himself in accordance with his status, but also be a wily negotiator.

On four occasions, as he makes elaborate preparations to hang the captured mouse, Manawydan is advised that it is unseemly for a person of his status to have anything to do with such vermin. The first reproach comes from Cigfa, and reminds the reader of her insistence earlier that shoemaking was unclean work for a man of his rank. One effect of the repetition is to underscore the fact that whereas Manawydan had proceeded with his shoemaking despite Cigfa's objection, he does not, in fact, hang the mouse. Cigfa's protest calls attention to what happens next. When the clerk reproaches him for the second time, Manawydan is suspicious, because *neut oed seith mlyned kyn no hynny, yr pan welsei ef na dyn, na mil, eithyr y pedwardyn y buassynt y gyt* 'it had been seven years since he had seen either man or beast except the four who had been together'.⁶³ From the moment when the clerk first attempts to negotiate the mouse's freedom, Manawydan seems alert to the possibility of a chance to recover Rhiannon, Pryderi, and Dyfed. He not only refrains from hanging the mouse, but bears himself so nobly that he refuses to negotiate with Llwyd ap Cil Coed until he appears in the form of a bishop.

⁶¹ McKenna, p. 52.

⁶² PKM, p. 21.

⁶³ PKM, p. 61.

When that bishop asks Manawydan to 'name his price' (*gwna y guerth*),⁶⁴ he must be sure not only to remember every evil that the enchantment has visited upon Dyfed, but also to anticipate future dangers and ward them off. Llwyd underscores the difficulty and importance of Manawydan's task when he says *A dioer, da y medreist . . . bei na metrut hynny . . . ef a doy am dy benn cwbyl o'r gouut* 'By heaven, you've done well. . . if you hadn't done that .. all the harm would have been on your head'.⁶⁵ Various features of this episode — the setting on the Gorsedd Arberth and the explicit references to the Gwawl and to Pwyll — recall the First Branch once more. These intertextual connections accentuate Manawydan's achievement: whereas Pwyll tricked Gwawl into relinquishing Rhiannon by following her instructions exactly, Manawydan faces Llwyd on the Gorsedd Arberth with only his own wits to guide him in the exchange that will determine the future of Dyfed.

That he succeeds completely is attested by Llwyd's congratulatory comment and by the release of Rhiannon and Pryderi from an imprisonment that recalls once more both their mythic import and their roles in the First Branch. Llwyd tells Manawydan that *Pryderi a uydei ac yrd porth uy llys i am y uynwgyl, a Riannon a uydei a mynweireu yr essynn, wedy bydyn yn kywein gueir, am y mynwgyl bithen* 'Pryderi had the gate hammers of my court around his neck, and Rhiannon had the collars of the asses, after they had been carrying hay, around her neck'.⁶⁶ They have been treated like horses, as was Rhiannon during her penance in the First Branch. Pryderi, too, delivered to Teyrnon's door at the same time that a foal disappears, is associated with horses in the First Branch. The equine affinities of the goddess and her offspring appear to belong to a very early stratum of the sovereignty myth.⁶⁷ If the account of Rhiannon's and Pryderi's bizarre suffering in the Otherworld has any rhetorical purpose other than the preservation of tradition, it is surely to remind the reader that they are more than they seem, and that recovering them is an achievement charged with mythic significance.

Manawydan is, after all, the man who achieves for Dyfed 'peace and prosperity, which can only be purchased through the practice of the unheroic and somewhat prosaic virtues of prudence and tolerance'.⁶⁸ But he is all the more to be admired

64 PKM, p. 63.

65 PKM, pp. 64–5.

66 PKM, p. 75.

67 See Patrick K. Ford, trans., *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U California P, 1977), pp. 5–12, for a full discussion of the equine aspect of the sovereignty goddess and her son.

68 Mac Cana 1992, p. 48.

because he attains to those virtues from ignoble beginnings in passivity, evasiveness, and cowardice. Like Pwyll, he offers the Welsh princes who heard his story a model of effective sovereignty for an age in which shrewdness, circumspection, and accommodation were essential instruments of good governance. He is more sympathetic than Pwyll, however, because he must find his own way to true nobility in a baffling world where the elusive sovereignty goddess gives no instructions.

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