

Hysbysiad Hawlfraint

Dyma atgoffa staff a myfyrwyr y Brifysgol hwn fod hawlfraint yn gymwys ar y darn hwn ac ar y gwaith y mae'n dod ohono. Gwnaed y Copi Digidol hwn yn unol â thelerau Trwydded yr Asiantaeth Trwyddedu Hawlfraint, sy'n golygu eich bod yn cael:

- Gweld a lawr lwytho copi
- Argraffu copi

Mae'r Copi Digidol hwn ac unrhyw gopi digidol neu argraffedig a roddir ichi neu a wnaed gennych yn ôl telerau'r Drwydded hon i'w ddefnyddio yng nghyd-destun y modiwl hwn neu'r cwrs astudio hwn. Cewch gadw'r copïau hyn ar ddiwedd y cwrs, ond dim ond at eich defnydd eich hun.

Rhaid i bob copi (gan gynnwys copïau electronig) gynnwys yr Hysbysiad Hawlfraint hwn a rhaid iddynt gael eu dinistrio neu eu dileu os bydd y Brifysgol yn gofyn ichi wneud hynny.

Ac eithrio'r hyn sy'n dderbyniol yn ôl darpariaethau cyfraith hawlfraint, ni cheir copïo, cadw na dosbarthu (gan gynnwys dosbarthu drwy e-bost) heb ganiatâd y sawl sy'n dal yr hawlfraint.

Mae gan yr awdur (ymadrodd sy'n cynnwys arlunydd a'r sawl sy'n creu gweithiau gweledol eraill) hawliau moesol ar y gwaith ac ni chaiff staff na myfyrwyr achosi na chaniatáu i'r gwaith gael ei anffurfio, ei lurgunio na'i addasu fel arall, na'i drin mewn unrhyw fodd difriol arall, a fyddai'n gwneud cam ag anrhydedd neu enw da'r awdur.

Teitl y darn: **Character and Conflict in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi**

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Character and Conflict in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi**

INTRODUCTION

"THE Four Branches of the Mabinogi" have exercised the minds of scholars from many disciplines for many decades. Attention has been focused on virtually all aspects of the Four Branches, from the linguistic to the aetiological, from the literary to the historical. In the main, the verdicts on the tales have been characterized by an apparent dichotomy, arising from the approach adopted towards their study. The tales have been described either as comprising, for example, 'a broken design and mutilated fragments, great confusions and unanswerable problems';¹ or have been judged to be 'masterpieces of swift and graceful style, enchanting... in their vivid detail and succinct understatement'.² Both conclusions carry weight; but the apparent contradiction arises from an emphasis on, respectively, a diachronic or a synchronic approach to the study of the tales. However, the widespread agreement on the *literary* merits of the Four Branches warrants an exploration of those merits. To accomplish this I intend, for the sake of convenience, to employ a synchronic approach, and will assume a single authorship for the tales.³

Many aspects of the literary style of the Four Branches have been praised, from the unadorned, yet dramatically effective, narrative passages to the subtlety and economy of the characterization. It is this latter feature which deserves closer scrutiny, for it is from the delineation of characters, and in their interactions and motivations, that the Four Branches derive much of their value as literature.⁴

In this paper I will first discuss the different devices which the author has used to outline his characters and form conclusions about how effective that characterization may be. Second, I hope to demonstrate how one of the central themes of the tales—the conflict

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* All quotations from the Four Branches are taken from Ifor Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, 2nd edn (Cardiff, 1951); page references are provided in parentheses after the extracts. All English translations of Welsh passages are my own. Welsh names are given in modern orthography.

¹ Gwyn Jones, "The Prose Romances of Medieval Wales" in A. J. Roderick (ed.), *Wales through the Ages I* (Llandybie, 1959), p. 143.

² E. Hanson-Smith, "Pwyll Prince of Dyfed: the narrative structure", *Studia Celtica* 16/17 (1981-2), p. 126.

³ Cf. S. Davies, "Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi—a case

for multiple authorship" in Gordon W. MacLennan (ed.), *Proceedings of the First North American Congress of Celtic Studies* (Ottawa, 1988), 443-59, who postulates a multiple authorship for the Four Branches. Although Davies makes some telling points concerning oral formulae within the Four Branches, I am not entirely convinced that the presence or absence of certain types of formulae (or formulaic units) is a reliable criterion on which to base part of her argument. Moreover, I must agree with Brynley Roberts, "From Traditional Tale to Literary Story: Middle Welsh Prose Narratives" in Leigh A. Arrathoon (ed.), *The Craft of Fiction: Essays in Medieval Poetics* (Solaris Press, 1984), p. 216 that such formulae play only 'a narrow functional role in composition'; too narrow to serve as a significant indicator of stylistic differences. See also Glenys Goetinck, "Pedeir Cainc y Mabinogi: Yr Awdur a'i Bwrpas", *Llên Cymru* 15 (1987-88), 249-69.

⁴ See also Brynley F. Roberts, *Studies on Middle Welsh Literature* (1992), chs 5 and 6 for a succinct and perceptive discussion of theme and characterization in the four tales.

arising from the roles which the characters assume¹—affects the presentation of the characters.

Techniques of characterization

Within the Four Branches one can detect, broadly speaking, four techniques of characterization. The first is what Wayne Booth refers to as 'authorial presence' or 'authorial voice', whereby the 'author tells us what no one in so-called real life could possibly know.'² The second is the actions performed by the characters themselves, through which we may infer their motivations and the extent to which their roles determine their behaviour. The third is interplay between the characters: the degree to which one character may serve as foil or complement to another, and how the character's choice or assumption of role affects such interplay. Finally, perhaps the most significant of these techniques is dialogue: here we learn, first, how the characters perceive themselves and others; and second, how they perceive, and respond to, the responsibilities and duties inherent in the roles they represent.

Interlaced with these four techniques is the viewpoint from which the individual characters are presented; our judgement of a character's actions or speech is necessarily influenced by the vantage point from which we view that character. As the tales progress, however, it becomes apparent that none of these techniques operates in isolation: it is essential, for example, to compare what we learn from the narrative with what the characters' dialogue or actions tell us.

THE FIRST BRANCH: *Pwyll Pendueic Dyuet*

The first character introduced in this tale is Pwyll, 'arglwyd ar seith cantref Dyuet' (lord over the seven cantrefs of Dyfed; PKM, p.1); the tale opens with a description of his encounter with Arawn, king of Annwfn. The author swiftly establishes the impetuosity and rashness of Pwyll's temperament. His eagerness to follow his hounds, his driving off of Arawn's pack, and particularly his first speech—in which he rashly promises to recompense his insult to Arawn in a manner appropriate to the stranger's rank—all betray these traits.

'A unbenn,' hep ef, 'o gwneuthum gam, mi a brynaf dy gerennyd... Vrrth ual y bo dy anryded, ac ny wnn i pwy wytti.' 'Brenhin corunawc wyf i yn y wlat yd hanwyf oheni... Arawn urenhin Annwbyn wyf i.' 'Arglwyd,' heb ynteu, 'pa furyf y caf i dy gerennyd di?' (p. 2)

'Chieftain,' he said, 'if I have done you an injury, I will redeem your good will... According to your rank; but I do not know who you are.'... 'I am a crowned king in the land from which I come... I am Arawn, king of Annwfn.' 'Lord,' said he, 'how shall I obtain your good will?'

When Arawn does reveal the means by which Pwyll may win his friendship, Pwyll replies, characteristically, 'Minnheu awnaf hynny, ... yn llawen. A manac ditheu y mi pa furyf y gallwyf hynny.' (I will do that... gladly. And tell me how I may do that; PKM, p. 3). Throughout the interchange, Pwyll's own words and actions demonstrate his propensity for *doing* first and thinking later. It is clear that Pwyll has no notion of what Arawn will demand of him, or how he may accomplish it: only after Arawn reveals the task does Pwyll question the consequences of his promise.

¹ See Andrew Welsh, "Doubling and Incest in the *Mabinogi*," *Speculum* 65(2) (1990), 344-62 for an enlightening discussion of a similar theme.

² Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 3.

Throughout the scene, too, we realize that Pwyll is manipulated step by step to conform to Arawn's will. The dialogue between the two, and the readiness with which Arawn presents a plan for redeeming Pwyll's insult, reveal that Arawn is quick to recognize and manipulate Pwyll's impetuosity and sense of honour. As a consequence, both men will adopt an additional role in the tale: Arawn, the otherworld king, will become a 'mortal' king for one year. Pwyll, in fulfilling Arawn's demand for recompense, will assume Arawn's kingship for that same year.

In Pwyll's exchanges with Arawn, and during his sojourn in Annwfn, Pwyll's code of honour is as crucial to the development of his character as is his rashness. From Arawn's speech we learn that Pwyll is not only to assume Arawn's form and place as crowned king of Annwfn, but is also given Arawn's queen to sleep with each night. However, Pwyll's refusal to take advantage of the queen's ignorance of his identity apparently both surprises and pleases Arawn:

Ac yna y medylwys ef, 'Oy a Arglwyd Duw,' heb ef, 'cadarn a ungwr y gydymdeithas, a diffleis, a geueis i yn gedymdeith.' (p. 7)

And then he thought, 'Oh lord God,' said he, 'I have found one man firm in his friendship, and constant as a companion.'

It seems likely, then, that the strength of the subsequent friendship between Arawn and Pwyll was due as much to Pwyll's honourable conduct as it was to his successful fulfilment of Arawn's task. Pwyll clearly recognizes the boundaries between the two roles he now occupies: that of 'y gwr a oed yn lle Arawn' (the man who was in Arawn's place; PKM, p. 6) and that of Arawn's friend and ally.

In the next portion of the tale, dealing with the encounter between Pwyll and Rhiannon, the author again brings these two traits—honour and impetuosity—to our attention. Clearly Rhiannon has engineered her meeting with Pwyll, and the pattern of their relationship is fixed from the outset, as she entices Pwyll into pursuing her. The pace of their steeds mirrors the pace of their interaction: Pwyll is never able to keep up with her.

The author carefully orchestrates the action between the two in order that each may serve as foil to the other: Pwyll's heedless actions are contrasted with Rhiannon's mental acuity, strengthening our perceptions of her incisiveness and wit, while Rhiannon's sharp tongue and 'no-nonsense' attitude throw Pwyll's impulsive generosity and recklessness into relief. This is seen most clearly in the first feast at Hefeydd's court, when Gwawl requests a boon from Pwyll. Pwyll grants it 'hyt y gallwyf y gaffael' (as far as I am able to get it; PKM, p. 14), whereupon Gwawl asks for Rhiannon herself. When Pwyll, shamed at having been outwitted so easily, falls silent, Rhiannon rounds on him:

'Taw, hyt y mynnych,' heb y Riannon, 'ny bu uuscrellach gwr ar y ssynnwyr e hun nog ry uuost ti.' (p. 14)

'Be silent as long as you please,' said Rhiannon. 'There was never a man weaker in his wits than you have been.'

We learn from Gwawl's speech that Pwyll was to have slept with—in effect, married—Rhiannon that night. By presenting his request before the union is consummated, however, Gwawl has prevented Pwyll from becoming Rhiannon's husband: a role which would have allowed him to deny Gwawl's boon with impunity. Interestingly, therefore, it is Rhiannon who outlines a ruse which will thwart Gwawl, and permit her union with Pwyll.

However, as soon as Pwyll and Rhiannon have consummated their union, he adopts an authority and initiative previously lacking in his interaction with her:

'Arglwyd,' heb y Pwyll wrth Heueyd, 'mi a gychwynnaf, gan dy gannyat, parth a Dyuet auore.' 'Ie,' heb Heueyd, 'Duw a rwydhaio ragot; a gwna oet a chyfnot y del Riannon i'th ol.' 'Y rof i a Duw,' heb ynteu Pwyll, 'y gyt y kerdwn odymma.' (p. 19)¹

'Lord,' said Pwyll to Hefeydd, 'with your permission I will set out for Dyfed tomorrow.' 'Well,' said Hefeydd, 'May God speed you. And appoint a season and time when Rhiannon may follow you.' 'Between me and God,' Pwyll replied, 'we will journey from here together.'

Rhiannon, too, demonstrates a recognition of her new responsibilities as wife: both through addressing Pwyll as *arglwyd* (lord) immediately after their wedding-night, and by giving largesse to the 'gwyr goreu a'r gwraged goreu' (the foremost men and the foremost women; PKM, p. 19) of the realm—a custom which Branwen follows after her marriage to Matholwch, in the Second Branch.

The author's use of address in dialogue is intended not only to indicate the relative status of the characters, but also to reveal how one character may perceive another. In Pwyll's interaction with Arawn, for example, we find that Pwyll is *arglwyd* over the seven cantrefs of Dyfed, but Arawn is *brenhin corunawc* (crowned king) of his own land. Only once does Arawn give Pwyll a title, that of *unben* (chieftain), an honorific which is 'polite but noncommittal'.² Pwyll uses the same form of address to Arawn, until Arawn reveals that he is a king. Thenceforth Pwyll addresses Arawn as *arglwyd*. Although Arawn does not explicitly use any other title to address Pwyll, we are told that

o achaws i drigiant ef y ulwydyn honno yn Annwbyn, a gwledychu o honaw yno mor lwydannus, a dwyn y dwy dyrnas yn un drwy y dewred ef a'y uilwraeth, y diffygywys y enw ef ar Pwyll, Pendeuc Dyuet, ac a gelwit Pwyll Penn Annwbyn o hynny allan. (p. 8)

by reason of his stay that year in Annwfn, and his governing there so successfully and bringing the two kingdoms into alliance through his valour and his strength, the name of Prince of Dyfed ceased to be used of Pwyll, and he was named Pwyll Head of Annwfn from that time forth.

From this we may infer that Pwyll has not only united two kingdoms in one, but has also successfully resolved the conflict between his two roles: that of Arawn's friend, and that of 'the man in Arawn's place'.

The use of forms of address is also an important device in the scenes involving Pwyll and Rhiannon. I have shown above that Rhiannon demonstrates her recognition of Pwyll's new role and her own by addressing him, immediately after their marriage, as *arglwyd*. In their first encounter, Rhiannon addresses Pwyll as *arglwyd* three times, but thereafter uses no title in her speech to him until after he becomes her husband. Her use of *arglwyd* in that first encounter can be seen as part of her manipulation of Pwyll, rather than an acknowledgement of his superior status.

After Pwyll's marriage to Rhiannon, however, he is confronted with a new dilemma which occurs not as a result of his actions (as in the earlier portions of the tale), but as

¹ Hefeydd's statement here may indicate that the marriage of Pwyll and Rhiannon was regarded as "*caradas*"; i.e. that, although 'it is a public and regular union', Rhiannon is expected to remain, at least for a time, in her father's home (T. M. Charles-Edwards,

"Nau Kynywedi Teithiauc", in D. Jenkins and M. E. Owen, *The Welsh Law of Women*, p. 30; hereafter *WLW*).

² T. M. Charles-Edwards, "Honour and status in some Irish and Welsh prose tales", *Eriu* 29 (1978), p. 125.

a result of Rhiannon's apparent barrenness. Pwyll, balancing his dual responsibilities as *arglwyd* over his nobles and as husband to Rhiannon, clearly recognizes the merit in his nobles' demand that he take '[g]lwreic arall y bo ettiued yt ohonei' (another woman from whom there may be children; PKM, p. 19). However, his refusal to act against Rhiannon without sufficient proof of her barrenness demonstrates a patience and wisdom which we are evidently meant to note and approve; a patience vindicated when Rhiannon gives birth to a son within the period Pwyll has specified.

The disappearance of their son provides further insight into the characters of Pwyll and Rhiannon. In the scene between Rhiannon and her chamberwomen, Rhiannon knows that their accusation is false, and is quick to realize that the women have lied out of fear. The repetition of *truein* (wretches) in Rhiannon's replies to the frightened women, and her reassurances to them, indicate a measure of compassion in her nature previously unexplored. The later statement that 'Riannon a dyuynnwys attei athrawon a doethon' (Rhiannon summoned to her scholars and wise men; PKM, p. 21) demonstrates both her willingness to seek impartial legal counsel concerning the implications of the accusations, and her perception of the precariousness of her situation. She recognizes almost immediately the futility of protesting innocence which she cannot prove.¹

However, the author seems most concerned to explore Pwyll's reaction to this dilemma. As in the episode of Rhiannon's apparent barrenness, Pwyll's nobles urge him to put aside his wife; and again, their counsel is based on a premise which cannot be proved conclusively. Pwyll's response to their counsel acknowledges Rhiannon's possible innocence:

'Nyt oed achaws ganthunt wy y erchi y mi yscar a'm gwreic namyn na bydei plant idi. Plant a wnn i y uot idi hi. Ac nyt yscaraf a hi. O gwnaeth hitheu gam, kymeret y phenyt amdanaw.' (p. 21)

'There was no reason for them to ask me to divorce my wife, except that there were no offspring to her. I know that there are offspring to her, and I will not divorce her. If she has done wrong, let her accept the penalty for it.'

Once again Pwyll is faced with the conflicting demands of his two roles as husband and lord, and once again he balances them skillfully. He acknowledges the real grievance his nobles feel, yet he demonstrates his faith in Rhiannon by refusing to pronounce her guilty without sufficient proof of her wrongdoing. Furthermore, these two scenes may be contrasted with the episode in which Pwyll encounters Gwawl: Pwyll has gained both a measure of circumspection and a recognition of the consequences of his words and actions.

The scene in which Teirnon and his wife restore Pwyll's lost son confirms Pwyll's newfound wisdom. Although Rhiannon has undergone her punishment for four years, Pwyll still accords her the protection and honour of her position as his wife, and she retains her place of honour at his table. Moreover, as Teirnon's wife predicted, Pwyll rewards Teirnon suitably for the care which he and his wife have given the boy.

It is apparent, then, that one of the author's chief aims is to explore what Bollard has called 'Issues of human choice':² the recognition of the need to resolve conflicting demands and roles. Pwyll especially has learned his lessons, and the 'happy' conclusion vindicates his choices.

¹ See Glenys Goetinck (p. 262 and notes) for a brief reference to legal and moral aspects of the accusation against Rhiannon, and the penance assigned to her.

² J. K. Bollard, "The Role of Myth and Tradition in *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*", *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 6 (1983), p. 70.

THE SECOND BRANCH: *Branwen uerch Lyr*

In the Second Branch, the author provides a different view of the conflict between the duties attached to various roles. Throughout this tale, he directs our sympathy first to one viewpoint, then to another, as if we are meant to experience the same division of loyalties which the characters themselves suffer.

The central figure of the Second Branch, Bendigeidfran—*brenhin coronawc* (crowned king) of the island of Britain—is a giant, both in character and physique: so large that 'Ny angassei Uendigeituran eiryoet ymywn ty' (Bendigeidfran could never be contained inside a house; PKM, p. 31). Through descriptions in narrative and dialogue, the author indicates from the outset that Bendigeidfran will tower over the action of the tale literally and figuratively.

The opening scene introduces the significant characters, and the stage for the catalytic event of the tale: Efnisien's mutilation of Matholwch's horses. Thereafter, the characters must resolve the conflicts arising from the demands of their complex and overlapping roles. Bendigeidfran faces the dilemma of having to balance his kinship loyalty to his half-brother Efnisien against his obligation to redeem the insult to his guest Matholwch; this dilemma is further complicated by Branwen's marriage to Matholwch. The marriage, intended to cement an alliance between the two kingdoms, results in the three major figures assuming double roles which require them to choose between conflicting loyalties. Bendigeidfran and Efnisien retain their roles as Branwen's brothers, and become Matholwch's kinsmen by marriage; Branwen adopts the role of Matholwch's queen, while retaining her role as sister to Bendigeidfran and Efnisien. The attempt to reconcile the divided loyalties which emerge lies at the core of the ensuing tragedy.

The author handles the initial 'insult and compensation' scene skilfully, allowing us to view the action first through Bendigeidfran's eyes, then through Matholwch's, then back again. Initially, we are led—by the immediacy of Efnisien's reaction, and by the graphic description of the mutilation he performs—to sympathize with Matholwch. However, Matholwch's response to Efnisien's action plunges us into the tension caused by his sense of injury and Bendigeidfran's desire to recompense him.

The fact that Matholwch and Bendigeidfran conduct their exchanges through their messengers increases the scope for misunderstanding between the two men,¹ and Matholwch's men take full advantage of the breach. After the maiming of the horses, two sets of messengers approach Matholwch; and his responses to them betray his susceptibility to influence. In the first exchange, Matholwch's own men attempt to convince him that

'...dy waradwydaw yr a wnaethpwyd, a hynny a uynhir y wneuthur a thi' (p. 32)

'...you have been insulted, and the doing of that to you was intended'

Matholwch's immediate response reveals his reluctance to accept this provocative statement:

'eres genhyf, os uy gwaradwydaw a uynhynt, rodi morwyn gystal, kyuurd, gyn anwylet gan y chenedyl, ac a rodyssant ym.' (p. 32) (italics my own)

¹ See Roberta L. Valente, *Merched y Mabinogi: Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches* (unpublished PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1986), ch. 5, esp.

pp. 186-7. During the marriage feast, however, when Matholwch and Bendigeidfran do converse directly, the two are in harmony.

'it is strange to me, if they wished to shame me, to give me as good a maiden, of such rank, so beloved of her kin, as they have given to me.'

However, the messengers' rejoinder that 'ti a wely dangos ef' (you see the demonstration of it; PKM, p. 32) not only overwhelms Matholwch's objections, but also sabotages the possibility of direct communication between the two kings. Learning of Matholwch's intention to depart, Bendigeidfran sends an embassy to him. Matholwch's first words to these messengers demonstrate how easily his own men have manipulated him:

'Dioer,' heb ynteu, 'pei ys gwypwn, ny down yma. Cwbyl waradwyd a geueis... A reuedawt rygyueryw a mi... Rodi Bronwen uerch Lyr ym... a chyscu genthi, a gwedy hynny uy gwaradwydaw.' (p. 32-3) (italics my own)

'God knows,' he [Matholwch] said, 'if I had known it, I would not have come here. I have received full insult... And a marvel has befallen me... To give Bronwen daughter of Lyr to me... and to sleep with her, and after that, my insulting.'

In the first speech, Matholwch expresses doubt as to whether he *has* been insulted. In the latter speech, no doubt remains. However, Matholwch will capitulate again, this time to the persuasion of Bendigeidfran's messengers, and allow himself to be convinced of Bendigeidfran's peaceful intentions. But the damage has been done: his willingness to perceive the insult as intentional, and his vacillation, place our sympathies finally with Bendigeidfran.

Throughout the tale Matholwch is contrasted strongly with Bendigeidfran: both are kings, but the fact that Matholwch comes to the Island of the Mighty as a suppliant establishes his subordination to Bendigeidfran in status. Later in the tale, Matholwch's compliance with his nobles' rejection of Bendigeidfran's compensation, his consent to Branwen's punishment, and his resort to treachery against Bendigeidfran, carry the contrast further.

The use of indirect or second-hand speech is employed to great effect in the characterization of Branwen. Our knowledge of her is restricted primarily to hearsay: first, through Efnisien's description of her as '[m]orwyn kystal a honno, ac yn chwaer y minheu' (a maiden as good as that, and a sister to me; PKM, p. 31); and later, Matholwch's reference to her virtually the same words (cited above, PKM, p. 32). By presenting Branwen in this way, the author has distanced her from the forefront of the action; she is not yet a 'character', but an object of negotiation and exchange between Bendigeidfran and Matholwch, and the impetus for Efnisien's actions. Such speeches reinforce the sense of Branwen's isolation, prefiguring her predicament in the "calumniated wife" episode.

There are clear parallels between Branwen's predicament and Rhiannon's: both are powerless against their persecutors, and both suffer harsh and wholly undeserved punishment. Our sympathy towards Branwen, however, is strengthened by two considerations. First, her position as Matholwch's wife entitles her to his protection, which he singularly fails to provide.¹ Second, Matholwch and his nobles are well aware of her

¹ There were three means by which *sarhaed* (injury) could be done to a queen: 'pan torher ynowd. neu pan trawher trwy lit. neu pan tynher peth oe llaw gan treis' (when her protection shall be violated, or when she shall be struck in anger, or when a thing shall be taken out of her hand with violence: A. W. Wade-Evans, *Welsh Medieval Law* [Oxford, 1909], pp. 3 and 148 [henceforth

WML]). Matholwch, by dismissing Branwen from his bed and from the court, has deprived her of his protection; and he has further insulted her by having her struck daily by the butcher. Moreover, any insult done to her constitutes an insult to Matholwch as her legal protector. Matholwch has thus shamed himself as well as Branwen.

blamelessness: their mistreatment of her arises from Matholwch's dishonourable rejection of the *sarhaed* Bendigeidfran paid to him.¹ Thus Matholwch's rejection of the compensation and his mistreatment of Branwen are doubly reprehensible.

Both Branwen and Rhiannon accept their punishments without complaint; but here the resemblance between them ends. Rhiannon's silence in the face of accusation arises first from her realization that she has no way of proving her innocence and therefore accepts the justice of the penalty for her alleged crime; and, second, because she realizes, with an admirable pragmatism, that it would be 'yn degach genthi kymryt y phenyt nog ymdaeru a'r gwaged' (fairer to her to take her punishment, than to dispute with the women; PKM, p. 21). Branwen, on the other hand, suffers not punishment but *vengeance*.²

Sef *dial* a wnaethant, gyrru Branwen o un ystauell ac ef, a'y chymell y bobi yn y llys, a pheri y'r kygyd, gwedy bei yn dryllaw kic, dyuot idi a tharaw bonclust arnei beunynd. (pp. 37-8; italics my own)

The *vengeance* they took was to drive Branwen away from the same chamber with him, and compel her to cook in the court, and to cause the butcher, after he had been cutting the meat, to come to her and stike her a blow on the ear each day.

The proposed ban on 'y llongeu, a'r yscraffeu, a'r corygeu' (the ships, and the skiffs, and the coracles; PKM, p. 38) indicates how deeply the Irish fear that Branwen will inform Bendigeidfran of her mistreatment.³ This speech is our first indication that Branwen is not to be dismissed entirely as a passive victim: the following passage, in which she spends three years teaching a starling to speak and to carry a letter, reveals her to have a measure of resourcefulness and cunning patience hitherto undisclosed.⁴

Branwen's first speech confirms the spark of spirit intimated by her training of the starling. In replying to Matholwch's messengers that 'Kyn ny bwyf Arglwydes... mi a wnn beth yw hynny' (Though I am not a Lady, I know what that is; PKM, p. 40), Branwen explicitly rejects her role as Matholwch's queen. There is an unmistakable note of pride in her revelation of Bendigeidfran's coming:

¹ The *sarhaed*—which may also signify the price payable for injury committed—for a king is clearly set out in the laws; see Wade-Evans, *WML*, pp. 2 and 147. Bendigeidfran meets two of the three requirements listed. Instead of paying Matholwch the third item required—one hundred horses per cantref—he gives one healthy horse for each injured one, and adds the cauldron of rebirth as additional compensation. Whether or not one agrees, as Brynley Roberts has stated, that "Brân's apology to Matholwch... is accompanied by full and complete legal compensation" (*Studies on Middle Welsh Literature* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), p. 99), it is clear that Matholwch accepts the restitution as fair.

² M. E. Owen, in "Shame and Reparation: Woman's Place in the Kin", *WLW*, p. 47, states that "Insult (*sarhaed*) implies blemish (*meftl*) and *sarhaed* to kin as well as individual, such blemish (*meftl*) can only be removed by *sarhaed* (reparation) or otherwise vengeance (*dial*) will arise". In the extract above, *dial* is thus used in its legal sense: Matholwch's noblemen have convinced him that the reparation received from Bendigeidfran has not been sufficient to compensate for the *sarhaed* (insult).

³ After Matholwch fails so signally to protect her, Branwen's only recourse would be to seek redress from her former protector Bendigeidfran, thus, in a sense, rejecting her position as Matholwch's wife.

⁴ Wade-Evans, *WML* (pp. 130 and 274) tells us that there are 'Tri dyn a dyly tauodyawc yn llys drostunt. gwreic. achryc anyanawl. ac alltut aghyfieithus. (Three persons who are entitled to an advocate for them in court: a woman; and one with natural impediment in speech; and an alltud of foreign speech.). Branwen is thus ensuring that she will have a legal advocate, and the author of the Four Branches may be driving this point home when he tells us that the starling 'y causas Uendigeiduran, ... in dadleu' (found Bendigeidfran, ... in council; PKM, p. 38). The word *dadleu*, as well as meaning "council" or "assembly", can also mean "dispute", "lawsuit" or "court of law". Since Matholwch has not allowed Branwen to voice any complaint about her mistreatment, she has dispatched an advocate, a "tongue", to Bendigeidfran's own court of law.

'Gwyr Ynys y Kedyrn yn dyuot drwod o glybot uym poen a'm amharch... Bendigeiduran uym brawt', heb hi, 'oed hwnnw, yn dyuot y ueis. Nyt oed long y kynghanei ef yndi... Ef,' heb hi, 'yn edrych ar yr ynys honn, llidyawc yw.' (p. 40)

'The men of the Island of the Mighty coming across, having heard of my punishment and my shame... That was Bendigeidfran, my brother,' she said, 'coming by wading. There was never a ship in which he might be contained... He,' said she, 'looking towards this island; he is angry.'

By presenting the description of Bendigeidfran crossing the sea first from the viewpoint of the Irish, and, then from that of Branwen, the author emphasizes Matholwch's fear of retribution, and reinforces our perception of Matholwch's weakness in contrast to Bendigeidfran's strength. From this point, Matholwch's actions and speech are characterized by fear and treachery. After learning that Bendigeidfran has crossed the Llinon river, he hastily dispatches a conciliatory embassy, to present spurious peace terms. There is more than a hint of irony and deception in the embassy's declaration that they come 'yn kyuarch guell idaw, ac yn y annerch y gan Uatholwch y *gyuathrachur*' (greeting him, and saluting him from Matholwch *his kinsman by marriage*; PKM, p. 41, italics my own). Bendigeidfran's reply indicates clearly that he knows just how little to trust Matholwch's avowal of kinship and loyalty.

That Matholwch's proposed feast is the occasion for his intended treachery indicates the extent of his dishonour. The focal point of this scene, however, is the behaviour of Efnisien. The author's treatment of Efnisien's character is unusual in the Four Branches: he is perhaps the only character whose motivations are stated overtly, through his speech and thoughts. Indeed, in the opening paragraphs of the tale, the author makes virtually his only explicit 'moral' statement when he compares Efnisien to his brother Nisien: 'Y llall [Efnisien] a barei ymlad y rwng y deu uroder, ban uei uwyaf yd ymgerynt' (the other [Efnisien] used to foment discord between the two brothers, when they would be loving each other most; PKM, p. 29).

Efnisien himself revealed his motivation for mutilating Matholwch's horses:

'Ay yuelly y gwnaethant wy am uorwyn kystal a honno, ac yn chwaer y minheu, y rodi heb uyghanyat i? Ny ellynt wy tremic uwy arnaf i' (p. 31-2).

'And have they done thus with a maiden as excellent as she, and my own sister also, to give her without my consent? They could not have contrived a greater insult to me'

His anger appears to be justified;¹ nowhere do we find mention that Efnisien was present at the council which agreed to the marriage. His reaction to this insult, however, constitutes the core of Bendigeidfran's dilemma: how to make adequate recompense to Matholwch for the mutilation of his horses, without violating the bonds of kinship by taking vengeance on Efnisien.

The next mention of Efnisien occurs when he discovers and kills the two hundred Irish warriors hidden in Matholwch's feasting-hall. As a result of Efnisien's action, Matholwch

¹ See T. P. Ellis, "Legal References, Terms and Conceptions in the 'Mabinogion'", *Y Cymmrodor* 39 (1928), p. 129. In his analysis of legal references within the *Mabinogion*, Ellis deduces three stages in the right to bestow a kinswoman in marriage: first by all her relatives within four degrees; second, by the nearest male relations only; and last, by the feudal overlord. Ellis adds that only

the second right is 'recognised by the Welsh Codes', and it is logical to assume that Efnisien, Branwen's half-brother, would hold this right. While it is apparent from the narrative that Efnisien knew of Matholwch's suit, it is not made clear whether he was part of the council which granted Matholwch's request.

is forced to sue for peace and 'guedy daruot y tangneued, galw o Uendigeiduran y mab attaw' (after concluding the peace, Bendigeidfran called the boy [Branwen's son Gwern] to him; PKM, p. 43). Efnisien, apparently angered at Gwern's failure to greet him, decides abruptly to commit 'anhebic a gyflauan' (an unthinkable outrage; PKM, p. 43), and throws Gwern into the fire. Efnisien seems determined to destroy the newly-established peace: the only rational explanation for his action appears to be either that he sees war between the two factions as the sole means by which to avenge Branwen's shame, or that he is the inveterate sower of dissent that he has hitherto been labelled.

The dramatic importance of this scene, however, may lie partly in the sequence of events, presented as follows:

- 1) Efnisien enters the feasting-hall ahead of the British host
- 2) He kills the hidden Irish warriors
- 3) He sings an englyn which scorns the bravery of the dead Irish warriors
- 4) The British and Irish hosts enter
- 5) The two factions sit on opposite sides of the hall
- 6) Peace is made between the two hosts
- 7) The kingship of Ireland is invested in Matholwch's son Gwern.

Bendigeidfran has apparently had no opportunity to learn of the Irish plot to ambush his retinue. Before Efnisien can inform Bendigeidfran of Matholwch's treachery, however, peace is declared and the Irish kingship is bestowed on Gwern. It seems reasonable to assume that Efnisien, angered at the perfidy of the Irish, would wish to avenge the treachery upon its perpetrator, Matholwch. However, Matholwch then surrenders his kingship to Gwern. A few lines later, Efnisien delivers the following speech:

'Paham... na daw uy nei uab uy chwaer attaf i? Kyn ny bei urenhin ar Iwerdon, da oed genhyf i ymtiryoni a'r mab.' (p. 43)

'Why does my nephew, son of my sister, not come to me? Though he were not king of Ireland, it would be good with me to show friendship to the boy.'¹

The interaction between Efnisien and Gwern is, to a certain extent, constrained by the double roles the characters now assume. The emphasis on Gwern's newly-bestowed title signals that he embodies two roles: Efnisien's nephew, and the king of Ireland. It was Matholwch as *king of Ireland* who plotted the treachery. Whether one interprets Efnisien's 'incomprehensible outrage' as a compulsion to foment discord, or a result of having transferred his anger at the treachery from Matholwch as king of Ireland to Gwern as king of Ireland, the author intends for us to note the conflict between the two roles.

Efnisien's own words reveal the motivation for his final act: his shame at 'uy mot yn achaws y'r wydwi honn o wyr Ynys y Kedyrn' (my being the cause of this funeral pile of men of the Island of the Mighty; PKM, p. 44). His self-sacrifice in throwing himself into the cauldron of rebirth at once both gratifies and confuses the reader. His death in the cauldron gratifies by providing 'a timely and glorious demise for the fractious

¹ Efnisien's speech here is somewhat enigmatic: I would prefer to take 'kyn ny' as meaning 'if not', giving a translation which reads 'If he were not king of Ireland, it would be good with me to show friendship...'

(see *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, "cyd" (b), p. 658). In any case, Efnisien's speech clearly demonstrates his difficulty in reconciling Gwern's two roles.

Efnisien';¹ and the confusion stems from the inconsistency of this selflessness compared with his previous behaviour.

Branwen figures directly only twice in these later scenes: in her attempt to pull Gwern from the fire, and when she delivers her second and final speech upon returning to the Island of the Mighty. Her lament that 'Da a dwy ynys a diffeithwyt o'm achaws i' (Two good islands have been laid waste on my account; PKM, p. 45) not only recalls her three years of suffering but also echoes Efnisien's final lament. The irony—and tragedy—of their deaths, and Bendigeidfran's, lie ultimately in their failure to recognize the extent of Matholwch's own culpability.

The final portion of the tale, the episode of the 'Assembly of the Wondrous Head', is a poignant reminder of the unshakable loyalty of Bendigeidfran to his kinsmen and his kingdom. Even after Bendigeidfran's head is buried in London by the seven survivors, he continues to guard the island:

A hwnnw trydyd matcud ban gudywyt, ... cany doey ormes byth drwy uor y'r ynys honn, tra uei y penn yn y cud hwnnw. (p. 47)

And when it [Bendigeidfran's head] was buried, that was one of the three happy concealments, since no oppression would ever come across the sea to this island, while the head would be in that concealment.

THE THIRD BRANCH: *Manawydan uab Lyr*

Guedy daruot y'r seithwyr a dywedysam ni uchot, cladu penn Bendigeiduran yn y Gwynyr yn Llundain, a'y wyneb ar Freinc, edrych a wnaeth Manawydan ar y dref yn Llundain, ac ar y gedymdeithon, a dodi uchenait uawr, a chymryt diruawr alar a hiraeth yndaw. (p. 49)

After the seven men whom we mentioned above had buried the head of Bendigeidfran in the White Mount in London, with its face towards France, Manawydan looked upon the town in London, and upon his companions, and gave a great sigh, and felt enormous grief and longing within him.

With these lines, the author links the action of the Third Branch explicitly to that of the previous tale. In addition, by setting the action of this tale in Dyfed, and by introducing Pryderi—Pwyll's son—in the succeeding passage, he establishes a connection with the First Branch. In the following discussion I hope to demonstrate Manawydan's centrality to the plot of this Branch: his character appears to have been constructed consciously in order to deliver Pryderi's kingdom from the wasteland spell. The other major characters—Pryderi, Rhiannon and Cigfa—are first the media through which the various aspects of Manawydan's character are presented; and second, the foils for his unfailingly honourable conduct. The resolution of the wasteland crisis is possible only through Manawydan's faithfulness to his role as kinsman and sworn companion to Pryderi.

The author's presentation of Manawydan differs somewhat from that of other characters in the Four Branches: the dilemma in which he is embroiled arises not from his own actions or speeches, or indeed the roles he adopts within the tale, but from circumstances over which he has no control. Manawydan acts only when the necessity for action is *imposed* on him—in direct contrast to Pwyll and Pryderi, whose actions are often *unnecessary* and *ill-conceived*.

¹ P. Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi* (University of Wales second edition, with revised annotation (University of Press, 1977), p. 40. This work is now available in a Wales Press, 1992).

In the opening passage we learn that Manawydan's cousin is king over the Island of the Mighty and, 'kyn gwnel gameu it, . . . ny buost hawlwr tir a dayar eiryoet' (though he [Caswallawn] may do injury to you, . . . you have never been a claimant of land and earth; PKM, p. 49). The implication is that Manawydan is entitled by law to claim at least a portion of Bendigeidfran's lands.¹ Instead of pursuing his claim, however, he chooses to accept Pryderi's offer of lands and a wife—Pryderi's mother Rhiannon. By renouncing his role as Bendigeidfran's brother and thus his kinship with his cousin Caswallawn, and accepting Pryderi's offer, Manawydan chooses the role of kinsman (by marriage) and vassal to Pryderi. His loyalty to these new roles determines his pattern of behaviour in subsequent events. Moreover, by informing us that Manawydan is 'Trydyd lledyf unben' (one of the three prostrate chieftains; PKM, p. 49)² and by reminding us of Manawydan's sorrow at Bendigeidfran's death, the author solicits our sympathy for the grief and misfortunes he has suffered.

This sympathetic presentation of Manawydan contrasts with the character of Pryderi. His impetuous generosity in bestowing Rhiannon and the seven cantrefs upon Manawydan echoes the impulsiveness and generosity which characterized Pryderi's father Pwyll. In addition, the scene on Gorsedd Arberth, in which the kingdom becomes a wasteland, echoes Pwyll's experience on Gorsedd Arberth in the First Branch. In both tales the characters on the mound experience a wonder, signalling a crisis which they must resolve. The crisis confronting Manawydan and his companions springs directly from that faced by Pwyll and Rhiannon in the First Branch: the rejection of Gwawl as a suitor, and his humiliation in the 'badger in the bag' episode.

Manawydan's initial response to the desolation of Dyfed determines the development of his character. After leading his companions in a search of Dyfed to find their lost retinue and comrades, he suggests setting out for England, '[a] cheisswn greft y caffom yn ymborth' (that we may seek a craft by which we may be able to support ourselves; PKM, p. 52). He therefore becomes a guide to his three companions, both in this scene and during their sojourn in England.

The sojourn in England is intended not to further the plot of the tale, but to provide an arena in which Manawydan is established as 'director', and his companions as followers. The understated narrative style of this section, with its repetitive phrasing and sequence of events, reflects the subtlety and deceptive mildness of Manawydan's temperament; and these traits are contrasted skilfully with Pryderi's own rash impulse to 'do first and think later'. It is noteworthy that, despite Pryderi's forceful urgings to action, Manawydan's counsel always prevails. By repeating this sequence of events with only slight variation, the author reinforces the patterns of behaviour of both men. Pryderi, on the other hand, seems trapped in the immediate moment. In his inability to maintain a clear view of his primary dilemma—the devastation of Dyfed, of which this sojourn is merely a symptom—he is unable to perceive the futility and inappropriateness of his

¹ See Wade-Evans, *WML*, pp. 53 (V fol 25 a, lines 16-17) and 203; and R. L. Thomson, *Pwyll Pendewic Dyuet* (The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1957), p. 28, n. 108.

² The most appropriate translation of 'lledyf' in this context would perhaps be 'laid low by misfortune'; see R. Bromwich, *Triedd Ynys Prydein* (Cardiff, 1978) (henceforth *TYP*), pp. lxxxviii-lxxxix and Triad 8, pp. 14-15 and notes.

reactions. Manawydan, on the other hand, clearly recognizes the relative insignificance of their activities in England, and he is quick to perceive the consequences of yielding to Pryderi's angry impulses—consequences which may prevent the restoration of Pryderi's kingdom.

Throughout the remainder of the tale, we see Manawydan's judgement vindicated time and again: his counsel to Pryderi to avoid the *caer*; his awareness that the *caer* is a trap designed by the same agency responsible for the devastation of Dyfed; and his realization, later in the tale, that the destruction of his wheat crofts derives from the same source.

Pryderi's disappearance in the *caer* recalls his disappearance as a child in the First Branch. The fact that both Manawydan and Pryderi 'ryuedu a wnaethant welet y gaer yn y lle ny welsynt eiryoet weith kyn no hynny' ([they] marvelled to see a fortress where they had never seen a building before; PKM, p. 55) indicates that Pryderi does acknowledge the strangeness of the sight before him. However, his persistent refusal to abandon his hounds, coupled with his rejection of Manawydan's advice, betrays his fundamental weakness: a neglect of the duties inherent in his role as lord of Dyfed. Pryderi's seizing of the golden bowl also hints at his greed, a trait which will be revealed again in the Fourth Branch. Rhiannon, in this scene, embodies Pryderi's counterpart; presented with a choice of conflicting roles, she chooses her role as mother over that as Manawydan's wife, and follows Pryderi into the enhanced *caer*.

The interaction between Cigfa and Manawydan reinforces our perceptions of Manawydan's loyalty and prudence. At first, it seems curious that Rhiannon (Manawydan's wife) and not Cigfa (Pryderi's wife) chides Manawydan for being a bad companion to Pryderi; and it is Rhiannon, not Cigfa, who follows Pryderi into the *caer*. By casting Cigfa as Manawydan's companion in misfortune, the author drives home the full extent of Manawydan's loyalty to Pryderi: he adopts the role, left vacant by Pryderi, as Cigfa's protector:

'Dioer,' heb ef, 'cam yd wyt arnaw, os rac uy ouyn i y drygyruerthy di. Mi a rodaf Duw y uach it, na weleisti gedymdeith gywirach noc y keffy di ui, tra uynho Duw it uot uelly. Y rof a Duw, bei et uwni yn dechreu uy ieuengtut, mi a gadwn gywirdeb wrth Pryderi, ac yrot titheu mi a'y cadwn; ac na uit un ouyn arnat' (p. 57)

'God knows', he said, 'you are wrong if you grieve through fear of me. I will give God as surety to you, that you have not seen a companion more true than you will find me, while it please God for you to be thus. Between me and God, even if I were just beginning my youth, I would keep faith with Pryderi, and for your sake also I would keep it; and let there not be a single fear in you' . . .

Cigfa has clearly assumed that Manawydan has no obligation to protect her; her 'kymryt llywenyd ac ehoundra' (taking joy and courage; PKM, p. 57) from Manawydan's declaration therefore demonstrates the depth of Manawydan's trustworthiness.

The following scene, in which Manawydan suggests returning to England to find employment, serves much the same purpose as did the first journey from Dyfed: Manawydan's faithfulness to his promises: here, to protect and support Cigfa. Cigfa's concern that Manawydan should choose a craft appropriate 'y wr kygynhilet, kyuurd a thydi' (for a man of such worthiness, of such rank, as you'; PKM, p. 58) emphasizes her new perception of his honour and worth.

The author's use of forms of address among the four companions reinforces this portrayal of the characters. In the opening scene, in which Pryderi addresses Manawydan as *arglwyd* and Manawydan—although apparently occupying a subordinate role—answers him with the title of *unben*, the author establishes Manawydan's pre-eminence over Pryderi. In the interaction between Rhiannon and Manawydan, she never bestows a title on him at all, although she addresses her son Pryderi as *arglwyd* twice: once, interestingly, just after she and Manawydan have celebrated their wedding feast. Rhiannon's use of this title at such a critical moment confirms her choice of 'mother' role over that of wife.

In the dialogue between Cigfa and Manawydan, Manawydan addresses Cigfa once as *eneit* (friend), immediately after reassuring her of his loyalty and friendship. A little later, after seeking her counsel about hanging the 'thief', he calls her *arglwydes* (lady), signalling his respect for her advice and his assumption of the role of protector properly belonging to her husband. On the other hand, Cigfa addresses Manawydan as *arglwyd* no less than seven times: she first uses this title after Manawydan has promised her his friendship 'tra welho Duw yn bot yn y dihirwch hwnn a'r goul' (while God may see us being in this misery and woe; PKM, p. 57).

The narrative of the tale overall is a deliberately constructed crescendo culminating in the 'mouse in the wheat' scene. The description of the crop's growth and devastation mirrors the earlier description of Dyfed's fertility and of the wasteland it has now become. When Manawydan realizes that the devastations of land and croft derive from the same source, he identifies fully with the sense of injury which Pryderi as lord of Dyfed should have felt:

'Oy a Arglwyd Duw,' heb ef, 'pw yssyd yn gorfen uyn diua i? A mi a'e gwnn: y neb a dechreu i uyn diua, yssyd yn y orffen, ac a diuawys y wlad gyt a mi.' (p. 59, italics my own)

'Alas, oh Lord God,' said he, 'who is completing my ruin? And I know it: the one who began my ruin, is finishing it, and has ruined the land with me.'

The ruin of the land is an act of vengeance for an insult of which Manawydan is entirely innocent. Manawydan has assumed, in Pryderi's absence, responsibility for his friend's misfortunes—his disappearance in the *caer* and the devastated realm. Pryderi's absence is more than a physical one: it symbolizes his absence from, or failure to fulfil, his responsibilities.

However, there is no trace in Manawydan of the failure which characterizes Pryderi: Manawydan immediately resolves to discover the source of the croft's destruction. In this, as in everything Manawydan does, he is justified: despite seeing a host of mice so great that 'ny chytremei ef ar yr un ohonunt wy' (he could not keep his eye on a single one among them; PKM, p. 60), he captures the one mouse which will enable him to redeem the land.

Manawydan's determination 'Crogi lleidyr a geueis yn lledratta arnaf' (To hang the thief which I caught thieving from me; PKM, p. 62) marks the climax of the tale's dramatic tension. The scene in which Manawydan constructs a tiny gallows is full of humorous irony: each stage of the construction is interrupted by a passerby, who queries Manawydan about the curious activity in which he is engaged. Each vignette prolongs the drama and highlights the ludicrousness of Manawydan's intention; despite his repeated insistence on hanging the mouse, Manawydan is in no hurry to accomplish the execution.

The structure of each scene—in which the status of each passerby is higher than that of his predecessors,¹ and the redemption price offered by each increases—contributes to the tension.

The third passerby, a bishop, is forced to bargain with Manawydan for the release of the mouse. In their dialogue, the author builds the tension to a higher pitch: Manawydan compels Llwyd fab Cil Coed to offer increasingly greater concessions, until the latter pleads that 'Cany mynny hynny, gwna y guerth' (Since you do not wish that, set its price; PKM, p. 63). The sequence of cumulative conditions which Manawydan imposes on Llwyd for the release of the mouse demonstrates forcefully Manawydan's wisdom and caution: after Manawydan cleverly blocks all avenues of retribution, Llwyd concedes that 'A dioer, da y medreist... Bei na metrut hynny... ef a doy am dy benn cwbyl o'r gouut' (God knows, you have considered well... If you had not hit upon that... the whole of the harm would have come upon your head; PKM, pp. 64-5).

In his confrontation with Manawydan, Llwyd himself faces a conflict of loyalties, between that which he owes to 'Guawl uab Clut, o gedymdeithas ac ef' (Gwawl fab Clud, because of friendship with him; PKM, p. 64), and that due to his wife. In the end he places the duty of protecting his wife before other claims on his loyalty. However, Llwyd's predicament springs from his violation of the sureties Gwawl gave to Pwyll in the First Branch, that no vengeance would be taken for the insult Gwawl suffered. Llwyd's conduct thus is contrasted sharply with Manawydan's: the former, because he has dishonoured Gwawl's vow, fails in his attempt to devastate Pryderi's kingdom; and Manawydan outwits Llwyd, and triumphs over his misfortunes, because his loyalties remain intact and unsullied.

The forms of address in the three 'hanging' episodes contribute to the rising tension. In the first two, both the clerk and the priest address Manawydan as *arglwyd* several times during their respective speeches; and they initiate the conversation. In the third encounter, Manawydan opens the dialogue, addressing Llwyd as *Arglwyd escop* (Lord bishop), indicating the significance of this confrontation. Llwyd at first bestows no title on Manawydan: only after Manawydan has compelled him to lift the enchantment from Dyfed and release Pryderi and Rhiannon does Llwyd then address Manawydan as *gwrda* (nobleman), in recognition of having been thwarted in his vengeance.

The author clearly intends our sympathies to lie with Manawydan. What seems central to these object lessons, however, is that Manawydan triumphs over misfortune through his unwavering dedication to the responsibilities of his chosen role. Pryderi, on the other hand, fails to adopt the long-term view of his duties as lord of Dyfed, and is easily diverted—by his anger against the English craftsmen, and his fear of losing his hounds—from his first loyalty to his realm and his wife.

Cigfa alone provides a complement to Manawydan's character: she is first presented as Pryderi's wife, and then as Manawydan's kinswoman by marriage and companion in

¹ Hanson-Smith (p. 127) remarks that each passerby is actually Llwyd fab Cil Coed 'in the disguises of clerk, priest, and bishop'. Her statement is supported by Manawydan's remark to the clerk that 'Na weleis... neut seith mlyned, un dyn yma, onyt pedwar dyn diholedic, a thitheu yr awr honn' (I have not seen... for

seven years, a single man here, except four homeless people and now yourself; PKM, p. 61). Clearly, the only other person Manawydan could possibly encounter is the agent who caused the devastation of Dyfed. The following exchanges imply strongly that Manawydan is aware of the stranger's identity.

misfortune. But the roles are discrete, and Cigfa has no need to choose between them. Moreover, she is the only character who unfailingly bows to Manawydan's superior judgement and thereby reinforces impressions of both her own prudence, and Manawydan's.

Manawydan's judgement and perspicacity are vindicated only through hindsight. His actions—during the sojourns in England, after Pryderi and Rhiannon's disappearance, and atop Gorsedd Arberth—cannot properly be understood until Manawydan has played out the last scene with Llwyd. The author seems to have endowed Manawydan with an omniscience which we—like Pryderi, Cigfa and Rhiannon—do not possess. I stated at the beginning of this discussion that the author appears to have constructed Manawydan's character solely in order to resolve the wasteland crisis. His portrayal as flawless hero is therefore an embodiment of the author's over-riding concern 'with the maintenance of peace and order'.¹ Manawydan is an authorial ideal, perfectly equipped to encounter and resolve the dilemmas with which he is presented.

THE FOURTH BRANCH: *Math uab Mathonwy*

The opening passage of the Fourth Branch sets Math ('arglwyd ar Wyned' [lord over Gwynedd]; PKM, p. 67) in opposition to Pryderi ('arglwyd ar un cantref ar ugeint yn y Deheu' [lord over the twenty-one cantrefs in the South]; PKM, p. 67); and the revelation that 'Math... ny bydei uyw, namyn tra uei y deudroet ymlyc croth morwyn, onyt kynwryf ryuel a'y llesteirei' (Math... could not live except while his feet were in the lap of a maiden, unless the tumult of war hindered him; PKM, p. 67) introduces the possibility of conflict between the two. A few lines later the author constructs a parallel to this possible discord in the plight of Gilfaethwy, whose love for Math's footholder, Goewin, sets him at odds with Math. At the outset, therefore, the author identifies two potential arenas of conflict; and in both, Gwydion—Math's nephew and Gilfaethwy's brother—is the catalyst.

In the earlier portion of the tale Gwydion is motivated by love for his brother; he is quick to perceive Gilfaethwy's '[l]liw a'y wed a'y ansawd yn atueilaw o'y charyat' (colour and appearance and form fading on account of loving her [Goewin]; PKM, p. 67); and Gwydion's proposal for winning Goewin reveals the extent of his devotion:

'Minheu a baraf,' heb ef, 'cany ellir heb hynny, dygyuori Gwyned a Phowys a Deheubarth y geissaw y uorwyn; a byd lawen di, a mi a'y paraf yt.' (p. 68).

'I will cause,' he said, 'since it cannot be accomplished without that, a mustering of Gwynedd and Powys and the South, to seek the maiden; and be glad, and I will bring it about for you.'

Gwydion is thus prepared to set the kingdoms of Gwynedd and the South at war in order to secure Goewin—who otherwise 'oed gyt a Math yn wastat' (was with Math constantly; PKM, p. 67)—for his brother. In pursuing this course of action, however, Gwydion has chosen between the demands of his two roles as brother and nephew.

Gwydion's cunning and subtlety are perhaps his most notable traits. Twice in the Branch we are told that Gwydion was skilled at story-telling;² and he employs his skill

¹ J. K. Bollard, "The Structure of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi", *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1974-5), p. 262.

² PKM, p. 69: Gwydion 'goreu kyfarwyd yn y byd oed' (was the best story-teller in the world), and p. 82: 'Ynteu Wydyon kyuarwyd da oed' (Gwydion was a good story-teller).

primarily to deceive. His description to Math of the 'Aniueileit bychein, guell eu kic no chic eidon' (small animals, the flesh of which is better than that of oxen; PKM, p. 68) and his promise that 'Nit drwc uyn trawscwyd i... Ny doaf i heb y moch' (My scheme is not a bad one... I will not come without the pigs'; PKM, p. 69) reveal his penchant for manipulation: Math patently suspects nothing of Gwydion's intention to foment war. Gwydion's boast that 'his scheme is not a bad one' is doubly ironic; he will succeed in his aim of obtaining Goewin, but the scheme will prove disastrous in its ultimate consequences.

Gwydion demonstrates the same traits—and the same *modus operandi*—in his interaction with Pryderi. When Pryderi claims that he cannot give the swine away 'yny hilyont eu deu kymeint yn y wlat' (until they have bred twice their number in the land; PKM, p. 69), Gwydion twists Pryderi's words:

'Arglwyd,' heb ef, 'llyma rydit yti am y geir a dywedeist neithwyr am y moch, nas rodot ac nas guerthut. Titheu a elly gyfnewit yr a uo guell.' (p. 70)

'Lord,' he said, 'there is a release for you concerning the word which you spoke last night about the swine, that you would not give nor would you sell. You can exchange for that which may be better.'

Gwydion plays on Pryderi's greed by offering magic animals and trappings in exchange for the swine; and Pryderi, like Math, succumbs to Gwydion's persuasion and manipulation. Gwydion is not offering a fair exchange for the swine: Pryderi's discovery that the animals and trappings will last only 'o'r pryt pwy gilyd' (from one day to the next; PKM, p. 71) is essential in order to incite him to war.

Curiously, Gwydion is not called to task by Math for his warmongering: he and Gilfaethwy are punished for the rape of Goewin. The sexual nature of their punishment—that they should have 'plant o bob un o honawch o'y gilyd' (offspring from each one of you by his fellow; PKM, pp. 76-7)—clearly indicates that Math perceives the dishonour to Goewin—and, by extension, to Math himself—as the greater crime.¹

The completion of Gwydion's punishment appears to signal a marked change in his character: his denunciation of Aranhod for her rejection of her son Llew contrasts sharply with his previous disregard for the loyalty he owed to Math. However, his behaviour throughout the tale is rooted in an obsessive determination to arrange the events and people around him to his own liking; the single-mindedness with which he pursues his aims, and his disregard for social or familial obligations, demonstrates his amoral nature. He acts under the guise of devotion, directed first toward Gilfaethwy and then transferred to Llew; and the consequences are tragic in both cases. In the first, Math is endangered, Goewin raped and Pryderi slain in battle. In the second, Gwydion's anger at Aranhod's rejection of Llew goads him into creating Blodeuwedd—an act which culminates in Blodeuwedd's deception and betrayal of Llew.

Gwydion thus seems to ignore the necessity of balancing the obligations of his various roles; instead his actions are motivated by an egocentricity frightening in its disregard for

¹ M. E. Owen, *WLW*, p. 49-50: 'The most extreme violation a girl might suffer was the forcible termination of her virginity by rape'. Owen goes on to state that the payment of *dirwy* by the rapist to the king as

compensation for the rape of a virgin implies 'that the safe keeping of virgins lay within the king's *nawdd* or protection... [And] Infringement of the king's *nawdd* constituted a *sarhaed* to him.'

other loyalties and duties. Perhaps Gwydion's tragedy is that neither his determination, his genius for intrigue, nor his magic are sufficient to redress the ill consequences of his actions. Math informs him that 'Vyg kywilyd ny ellwch chwi y dalu y mi, heb angheu Pryderi' (My shame is that you are not able to accomplish its payment [i.e. of compensation] to me, without the death of Pryderi; PKM, p. 74); and later, though Gwydion restores Lleu to human form, his magic is inadequate to return Lleu to full health,¹ to circumvent Aranrhod's third curse on Lleu, or to compensate for Blodeuwedd's treachery.

Math, on the other hand, is clearly a more powerful magician than Gwydion. Gilfaethwy reveals his fear of the 'kynedyf Math' (the peculiar ability of Math; PKM, p. 68): that he can hear 'every word spoken in the open air'.² Later, when Math is about to punish Gwydion and Gilfaethwy, we find that Gwydion, 'kyt mynhei dianc nys gallei' (though he wished to escape, could not do it; PKM, p. 75), presumably because Math's power was greater.

Math's primary role is that of *arglwyd*. The author provides only brief glimpses of his motivations, chiefly in his anger over the rape of Goewin: he is above all the upholder of social order. Only in his collaboration with Gwydion to create Blodeuwedd does he bridge the distance between himself and the characters around him; otherwise—in his testing of Aranrhod and in his assumption of responsibility for the offspring of Gwydion and Gilfaethwy—his authority and power are pre-eminent.

The author's treatment of Aranrhod is perhaps the most significant feature of the tale. She is presented almost entirely as Gwydion's antagonist; his denunciation of her, and his assumption of her role as Lleu's parent, divorce her from her roles as sister and mother. Valente has stated that Aranrhod is 'The only woman in the *Mabinogi* having no defined obligatory bonds to any man';³ she recognizes no social or kinship obligations.

The references to Aranrhod's 'shame' in her dialogue with Gwydion reflect the source of the contention between them:

'Y mab hwnn, mab y ti yw,' heb ef. 'Oy a wr, ba doi arnat ti, uyg kywilydaw i, a dylt kywilyd, a'y gadw yn gyhyt a hynn?' 'Ony byd arnat ti gywilyd uwy no meithryn o honaf i uab kystal a hwnn, ys bychan a beth uyd dy gywilyd di.' (pp. 78-9)

'This boy is your son,' he said. 'Alas, man, what was coming over you, to shame me and to pursue my shame, and keep him as long as this?' 'Unless there is a greater shame on you than my rearing of a boy as fine as this, your shame will be a small thing.'

For Aranrhod the shame lies in having given birth to Lleu, first after claiming to be a maiden and second, in the implication (in the following passage) that Lleu is also Gwydion's son and therefore a product of incest.⁴ To Gwydion, however, her shame lies

¹ The author's statement that 'yno y ducpwynt a gahat o uedic da yg Gwyned wrthaw' (There were brought to him what could be had of good doctors in Gwynedd; PKM, p. 90) indicates strongly that Gwydion was unable to restore Lleu's health.

² Bromwich, *TYP*, p. 449. For further discussion of Math as a magician, see, e.g., *TYP*, p. 56 (Triad 28 and note), and pp. 448-9.

³ Roberta L. Valente, "Gwydion and Aranrhod—

crossing the borders of gender in *Math*", *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 35 (1988), p. 7.

⁴ See PKM, p. 79, lines 10-11: 'A thrannoeth kyuoedi a oruc, a chymryt y uab gyt ac ef' (And the next morning he rose, and took his son with him). The lenition of *mab* indicates that it is preceded by a prefixed masculine possessive pronoun, i.e. *his* [Gwydion's] son. See also PKM, p. 273 n. 79 line 1, and Bromwich, *TYP*, p. 450 n. 1.

in her refusal to rear Lleu as her son, and to provide him with a name, arms, and a wife; and he usurps those roles in her stead.

After her appearance in Math's court, Aranrhod retires to Caer Aranrhod, in effect dwelling apart from either a societal or familial milieu. Only Gwydion (with Lleu) trespasses upon this isolation; and in all three instances he tries to circumvent Aranrhod's denial of her maternal responsibilities: twice by tricking her into performing those duties unwittingly, and once by creating a woman through magic to be Lleu's wife. However, his championship of Lleu is possible only through his rejection of the loyalty he owes his sister Aranrhod.

As I said earlier, both Gwydion's skill at intrigue and his magic ultimately prove inadequate for his purposes. He is unable to prevent the fulfilment of the final destiny Aranrhod swears upon Lleu, that 'na chaffo wreic uyth, o'r genedyl yssyd ar y dayar honn yr awr honn' (he may never obtain a wife, of the race which is now on this earth; PKM, p. 83): Blodeuwedd is neither 'of the race which is now on this earth', nor does she remain Lleu's wife.

Blodeuwedd, like Aranrhod, stands outside any social or familial context. Because she is not 'o'r genedyl yssyd ar y dayar honn', she has no kinship ties; she rejects her role as Lleu's wife. But I would liken her more to Gwydion than to Aranrhod. Like Gwydion, she is amoral: by the very fact of her creation she constitutes a disruption of the natural order. She also shares with him a genius for deception, vividly apparent in her dialogue with Lleu.

Gronw is the catalyst for Blodeuwedd's transformation from passive creation to independent, and uncontrolled, will. Immediately after her creation, she submits to marriage with Lleu, but her first conscious act is adultery with Gronw; thenceforth, she and Gronw are equally active in plotting Lleu's betrayal. The black irony of her statement to Lleu that 'Medylyaw yd wyf, . . . yr hynn ny medylyut ti amdanaf i . . . gualu am dy angheu di' (I am thinking . . . that which you would not think concerning me . . . being anxious concerning your death; PKM, p. 86), and the double entendres lacing her subsequent exchange with him, underline this transformation dramatically.

Lleu himself is curiously passive: during his youth he follows Gwydion, literally and figuratively; and he symbolizes the shame with which Gwydion constantly taunts Aranrhod. Lleu's only positive act throughout the tale appears to be the vengeance he takes on Gronw. Interestingly, it is Gwydion, not Lleu, who punishes Blodeuwedd for her treachery.

The author's use of address reinforces these perceptions of the relationships among the characters. In the interaction between Gwydion and Gilfaethwy, and Gwydion and Lleu, Gwydion addresses them both as *gwas* (lad), presumably a term of affection. Much later, Gwydion, in a speech to Math, refers to Lleu as *nei* (nephew; PKM, p. 88), an attempt perhaps to conceal the truth of Lleu's parentage. Gilfaethwy calls Gwydion *arglwyd urawt* (lord brother), which might indicate either that Gwydion is the older, or that Gilfaethwy considers himself to be under Gwydion's guidance, or both. Gwydion and Gilfaethwy address Math as *arglwyd*; while Math in turn addresses them, only once, as *gwyr* (men). This, and the lack of reference to the uncle-nephew relationship, in the speeches of the latter three, serve to distance Math from the other characters.

In the dialogue between Gwydion and Aranrhod, she gives him a title—*gwr* (man)—only once, when he is in his own form. He, on the other hand, addresses her as *arglwydes* (lady) when he is in disguise, and otherwise calls her *gwreic* (woman), a term of reproach in light of her claim, at Math's court, to be a maiden.

In the final portion of the tale, Blodeuwedd gives Llew no title at all until she coaxes him to demonstrate how his death may be accomplished; during that relatively short scene, she addresses him as *arglwyd* four times, reinforcing perceptions of her cunning and deceit. Moreover, as Gruffydd has pointed out, 'In every case where Blodeuwedd... mentions her husband to Gronwy Pevr, she carefully avoids his name'.¹

The Fourth Branch, in its considerations of kinship obligations and transgressions, abounds in complications. There are two uncle-nephew relationships: Math and his nephews Gwydion and Gilfaethwy; and Gwydion and Llew, where the latter is Gwydion's sister's son. There are at least three instances of illicit sexual relations: Gilfaethwy and Goewin, Gwydion and Gilfaethwy, and Blodeuwedd and Gronw—and a fourth, if one acknowledges that Gwydion fathered Llew on Aranrhod. Moreover, the tale is littered with the offspring of unnatural unions: the three offspring of Gwydion and Gilfaethwy, for whom Math assumes responsibility; and the two children—Dylan Eil Ton and Llew—produced by Aranrhod. Blodeuwedd too is an 'unnatural offspring', the creation by magic of Math and Gwydion.

The conflicts within the branch arise as much from a *usurpation* of roles and responsibilities, as from the acceptance or rejection of those duties. Gwydion and Gilfaethwy trespass on Math's relationship to Goewin; Gwydion assumes Aranrhod's responsibilities towards Llew. Math assumes responsibility for Gwydion and Gilfaethwy's offspring. Gronw usurps Llew's place in Blodeuwedd's affections; and Gwydion also usurps Llew's prerogative in punishing Blodeuwedd for treachery.

Gwydion himself is the pivot around which the various elements of the tale revolve: Math, for all his power and authority, merely responds to events which Gwydion has set in motion. Aranrhod is driven by Gwydion's vituperation to lay the three destinies on her son; and Llew's misfortunes stem from Gwydion's determination to thwart Aranrhod and twist the natural course of events to his own will. Gwydion, like Efnisien in the Second Branch, is a catalyst whose actions trigger the conflicts within the tale. Both, too, are anarchic elements in their obsession with a particular role to the exclusion of all others.

Conclusion

In the foregoing discussion of the Four Branches, I have attempted to demonstrate first how the characterization of the various actors was achieved; and second, the importance of the conflict theme to the characterization.

Although the author uses the various techniques of characterization skilfully in the four tales, the emphases he places on various aspects of the conflict theme—the origin of the conflict, its resolution and its consequences—differ in each tale. Interestingly, the divide among the Four Branches in characterization and tone coincides neatly with the

¹ W. J. Gruffydd (*Math vab Mathonwy* [Cardiff, 1928], p. 259) points out that Blodeuwedd describes Llew only as

'yr unben bieu y llys' (the lord who owns the court; PKM, p. 85).

geographical divide.¹ The First and Third Branches (set in Dyfed, in the south) are altogether lighter in mood than the Second and Fourth Branches (set in Gwynedd, in the north); and the element of tragedy so prevalent in the latter two is absent in the former. The most important distinction between the two pairs of tales, however, is the extent to which the characters perceive the implications of, and fulfil the responsibilities inherent in, their various roles.

Manawydan is perhaps the primary example of such success: his refusal to be diverted from the responsibilities he has assumed allows him to resolve the crisis with which he is faced. As stated earlier, however, we understand Manawydan's character only through hindsight: we share the frustration felt by Pryderi, Rhiannon and Cigfa in being unable to comprehend Manawydan's actions and motives. This feature contributes to the dramatic tension of the tale, and renders Manawydan's success all the more effective.

The misfortunes in the Second and Fourth Branches derive from the characters' inability to define the roles they assume, or to reconcile the conflicting demands of those roles. Matholwch is perhaps the most obvious example of this failure: both his mistreatment of Branwen and his rejection of Bendigeidfran's compensation demonstrate his refusal to fulfil his obligations as husband and kinsman. Further, by allowing his nobles to infringe upon his authority, he demonstrates clearly his weakness as *arglwyd*. The tragedy of this tale is that the characters who do attempt to fulfil their obligations—Branwen, Bendigeidfran and (arguably) Efnisien—become victims of Matholwch's dishonour and treachery.

In the Fourth Branch, Gwydion's single-minded devotion first to Gilfaethwy and then to Llew blinds him to all other loyalties and obligations. Likewise, Aranrhod's rejection of her relationship to Llew leads eventually to the creation of Blodeuwedd by Gwydion and Math. Blodeuwedd in turn betrays Llew; and even Gwydion cannot redress the consequences of her betrayal. The tale ends abruptly, almost brutally, with Llew's revenge on Blodeuwedd and Gronw Pebyr, and his reclamation of the kingship.

Points of view

The points of view from which the author presents each character contribute to our understanding and evaluation of that character's motivations and actions. In each tale, the same broad technique appears to have been employed: 'that of the TV camera panning and finally centering on the significant... person'.² The purpose of this technique is to focus our sympathy in one direction or another. In some instances our sympathy is divided equally between the characters so presented; as in the initial scenes between Rhiannon and Pwyll, or the interplay between Matholwch and Bendigeidfran when the former expresses his amazement at being insulted (see pp. 56-7 above). By thus dividing the audience's

¹ For more detailed discussions of the thematic and structural differences among the Four Branches, see, e.g., S. Davies, *Pedeir Kainc y Mabinogi* (Caernarfon, 1989), esp. chs 2 and 4; J. Gantz, "Thematic structure in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi", *Medium Aevum* 47 (1978), 247-54; Bollard, "The Structure of the Four Branches", 25-76; S. Ó Coileáin, "A Thematic Study of the Tale *Pwyll Pendic Dyuet*", *Studia Celtica* 12/13

(1977-8) 78-82; and Hanson-Smith, 126-34. Although the action in the Second Branch extends to Ireland, and that of the Fourth Branch ranges from Gwynedd to Dyfed and back again, the thematic centres of these tales remain in Gwynedd.

² Brynley Roberts, "From Traditional Tale to Literary Story", p. 218.

attention and sympathy, the author is able to present both sides of the conflict simultaneously; and we perceive more clearly the dilemmas which the characters themselves must resolve, and the moral and social issues underlying the dilemmas.

In other instances, however, the author establishes a bias for or against a particular character, as with Efnisien or Manawydan. In attempting to analyse Efnisien's character, we must rely on the two explicit authorial statements,¹ and the hints which Efnisien himself provides. In both instances he is, in a sense, set outside the context of the tale: the first mention of him places him in opposition to his brother Nisien, but thereafter Nisien disappears (apart from a brief mention near the end of the tale) and our point of comparison vanishes with him. This unique treatment of his character is perhaps intended to reflect Efnisien's wild-card nature: he is the unpredictable—and therefore uncontrollable—element which brings chaos to a well-ordered world. The presentation of Manawydan is in sharp contrast to that of Efnisien: almost everything we learn of Manawydan we learn from *within* the context of the tale, from the viewpoints and limited perceptions of the other characters.

The author's treatment of his characters reveals his sensitivity to personal interaction, with both men and women. Perhaps the most delicately and masterfully drawn of his actors is Rhiannon: as can be seen from the discussion above, the author has achieved—with restraint and economy—a complex yet highly credible portrait. If at times his skill appears to flag (and Branwen springs almost immediately to mind), it is perhaps a result of the almost inevitable conflation of character with function. Branwen, for example, serves primarily as the focus of contention between Bendigeidfran and Matholwch, and as the impetus for Efnisien's struggle to perceive and discharge his loyalties.

Gwydion and Efnisien are the most elaborately drawn male characters; but even here the author seems more concerned with the anarchic elements of their characters, and with their failure to define the demands of their various roles.

Ultimately, however, the exploration of the conflicts arising from those roles shapes the presentation of the characters which fill them. It is clear that the author has combined an insight into social relationships (and the moral issues which inform them) with a profound knowledge of the human capacities which must resolve those issues.

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¹ These are: 'Y llall a barei ymlad y rwng y deu uroder, ban uei uwyaf yd ymgerynt' (The other was fomenting discord between the two brothers when they were most loving each other: PKM, p. 29); and

'Efnysen [y] gwr anagneuedus a dywedassam uchot' (Efnisien, the contentious man of whom we spoke above: PKM, p. 31).