

Assignment 2

Write an essay of 4,000 words on :

What do we know of the daughters of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth

The aim of this essay will be to consider the daughters of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth and to establish what, if anything, we know of them – either as individuals, or as a collective. The title and subject matter of this essay potentially underestimates the enormity of who this group of women were, and their contribution to the history of Wales, and therefore by looking at primary sources as well as academic and other secondary sources, the aim is to provide a broader understanding of who this group of women were, their position within Medieval society, their ability (or not) to influence their surroundings, and their legacy. The timeframe that these women were part of – the thirteenth century – is one where Smith suggests that the ‘social, legal and marital status exercised profound influences on the public role which a woman might hope to enjoy’.¹ As Smith continues, a ‘woman’s racial and legal status depended on those of her father and husband, although her own lineage and pedigree were clearly important matters of pride, and even of practical consequence to her own issue’.² This is echoed by Richards who says that Welsh women were “used” to ensure the legitimisation of integration through marriage and noted that ‘noblewomen in Wales in the thirteenth century were not mere ciphers who were manipulated by male family members and other

¹ Smith, Llinos Beverley Smith, 'Towards a History of Women in Late Medieval Wales', in *Women and Gender in Early Modern Wales*, ed. by Michael Roberts and Simone Clarke (Cardiff, CF10 3NS: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 14-49. (p. 15)

² Smith, *Towards a History of Women in Late Medieval Wales*, p. 16

Assignment 2

noblemen for political gain in order to advance family holdings and prestige'.³ This might suggest that these women (and others from a similar background) had some agency about who they were and what pressure or support they might be able to offer for the good not only for themselves, but also their offspring and definitely for the family.

By considering evidence that 'may be found in Welsh genealogical charts, printed legal records and chronicles of the period, plus the footnotes of narratives of the medieval history of Wales written by modern historians'⁴ as well as 'Court Rolls, genealogies, medieval letters, law texts [and] poetry'⁵ we will consider the daughters of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth – both legitimate and illegitimate – during this period which has been described by Richards as 'dramatic [and] comprised as it is of wars, of heroic deeds, of conquests, bravery and betrayal'.⁶ It is interesting to note that Richards originally conceived her PhD thesis (and subsequent book) on Welsh noblewomen by looking at the footnotes in published texts and recognised that whilst some authors had consigned these women to mere footnotes, they were, in fact, key "players" in the developing landscape of Welsh history. On that note, Richards commented that 'with one or two rare exceptions, women seem to be totally absent from the scene ... [and these] women were largely ignored, [and] when they did appear, they have usually been relegated to the footnotes to the text in modern historical accounts of the

³ Richards, Gwennyth, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century* (Lampeter, Ceredigion, Wales SA48 8LT: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009). (p. 6)

⁴ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 13

⁵ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, III

⁶ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 2

Assignment 2

period'.⁷ Why is that? These women 'played an active rather than a passive role in determining outcomes for their families'⁸ and as noted by Jenkins, 'at critical moments, women played an important role in the careers of influential Welsh princes'.⁹

The thirteenth century has been called 'the age of the Welsh Prince',¹⁰ and it is against this backdrop that we will briefly consider Llywelyn ab Iorwerth in his own right, alongside his wife Joan, before turning to the more substantive part of this essay, which is his issue. Llywelyn was the only son of Owain and, given the political situation in Wales, he was 'removed from Gwynedd – and from mortal danger – by his mother Maredudd, daughter of Madog ap Maredudd of Powys [and] bought up in the north Powysian March'.¹¹ As noted by Stephenson, by 1202 'he had established control over most of Gwynedd, and by 1204 had negotiated a hugely prestigious marriage to Joan (Joanna), natural daughter (and subsequently legitimised daughter) of King John'.¹² The extent of his control saw Llewelyn ab Iorwerth as 'the direct lord of all of Gwynedd and of southern Powys, as well as being the overlord of northern Powys and of Deheubarth ... and his power extended into the Middle March'.¹³ Stephenson remarks that 'the period from the mid-eleventh century until 1282 is usually discussed in terms of the growth of the power of native rulers',¹⁴ and it is in this period that Llywelyn titled himself as

⁷ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 2

⁸ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 6

⁹ Jenkins, Geraint H., *A Concise History of Wales*, (The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU: Cambridge University Press, 2007) (p. 76)

¹⁰ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 1

¹¹ Stephenson, David, *Medieval Wales c.1050 - 1332* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019) (p. 17)

¹² Stephenson, *Medieval Wales*, p. 17

¹³ Stephenson, *Medieval Wales*, pp. 17-18

¹⁴ Stephenson, *Medieval Wales*, p.1

Assignment 2

'Princeps Norwallie (prince of Gwynedd/north Wales which from 1230 became *Dominus Snowdoniae et Princeps de Aberffraw* (lord of Snowdon and prince of Abberffraw) [and] Joan entitled herself *domina Wallie* (lady of Wales).¹⁵ Llywelyn ab Iorwerth was at 'considerable pains to ensure that nearly all his children married into prominent aristocratic marcher families'¹⁶ to ensure that his dynasty would survive, and it is considered that it was Llywelyn ab Iorwerth who 'brought marriage into the ranks of the marcher lords [as] he knew well the advantages that a cross-border marriage might bring'¹⁷ and he aimed to form astute political alliances of the day via carefully chosen marriages for his children – regardless of whether those children with legitimate or illegitimate. Cartwright comments that 'there were no superfluous or unwanted daughters who could be assigned to the nunneries'¹⁸ and this is an interesting observation given that women were predominately regarded as "second rate" compared to males, but Llywelyn was clever enough to recognise the opportunity to expand and consolidate his empire, and he took it. Richards comments that 'Welsh noblewomen ... were crucial to the conquerors' aims of turning power into authority'¹⁹ Llywelyn was 'an adroit negotiator [and] his reputation for wisdom and [his] avuncular style masked a ruthless streak'.²⁰

¹⁵ Stephenson, *Medieval Wales*, p. 18

¹⁶ Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales*, p. 76

¹⁷ Stephenson, *Medieval Wales*, p. 72

¹⁸ Jane Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*, (Cardiff, CF10 3NS, University of Wales Press, 2008), p. 204

¹⁹ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 9

²⁰ Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales*, p. 89

Assignment 2

It is noted that Llywelyn ab Iorwerth had one son and at least one daughter Gwenllïan from his relationship with Tangwystl ferch Llywarch Goch ('a Welsh woman of distinguished ancestry')²¹ whom he did not marry – and his marriage with Joan, daughter of king John produced one legitimate son and three legitimate daughters – Gwladus Ddu, Elen (or Helen) and Margaret; so a total of two sons and four daughters. There is also a possibility that he had another two daughters, namely Angharad and Susanna, and Cartwright notes that the first four daughters married Anglo-Norman barons, and 'Angharad appears to have married a Welshman'.²² His relationship with Tangwystl was not legally recognised but his marriage to Joan 'was a dynastic opportunity not to be missed [as] their children would be part of the European royal and aristocratic network which would in turn elevate the Gwynedd dynasty to a higher status than the other Welsh ruling houses'.²³

The first daughter to consider is the illegitimate daughter of Llywelyn and Tangwystl, namely Gwenllïan, usually known as Gwenllïan de Lacy, after her marriage in around 1222 to William de Lacy, and the marriage is said to have been had 'political advantage for Llywelyn [as] it suited his own position against the crown to have an ally in Ireland'.²⁴ Richards advises that Gwenllïan was born before Llywelyn's marriage to Joan – so before 1205 – and died somewhere between 1280 and 1282 which would make Gwenllïan around eighty years of

²¹ Stephenson, *Medieval Wales*, p. 19

²² Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*, p. 204

²³ A. Carr, *Llywelyn ab Iorwerth [called Llywelyn Fawr] (c. 1173-1240, Prince of Gwynedd)*, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-16874?rskey=vBGGpA&result=2> [accessed April 2022]

²⁴ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 48

Assignment 2

age.²⁵ This advantageous marriage was used to 'seal alliances with [a] major baronial family',²⁶ and on her marriage, Gwenllïan received 'Welsh lands ... which she still held at her death'.²⁷ Richards notes that Gwenllïan is visible in legal records dated August 1280 and also was in a letter sent after her death to the Bishop of Bath and Wells in which a dispute over her estate in Ireland was discussed, as well as being an entry into the *Calendar of Patent Rolls of Edward I, 1272-1281*.²⁸ Richards also notes that Gwenllïan is included in the *Roll of the House of Lacy*, and Gwenllïan is 'mentioned many times in various legal rolls and documents for Britain in the thirteenth century'²⁹ including in a letter from William Marshal to king Henry III in which he states that he has taken Gwenllïan 'prisoner'.³⁰ The *Curia Regis Rolls of the Regis of Henry III* also demonstrates a 'visible legal record asserting her rights with regard to her property in Wales and her other business affairs ... for the return of her four villis [that] had been given to her by her father'³¹ which were 'likely lands granted in free marriage'³² and Richards also comments that it is possible that Gwenllïan 'appeared in person at her appeal as no attorneys are present'³³ which would suggest that Gwenllïan was articulate and comfortable to appear in a public place concerning matters of her own legacy, and to have travelled from Ireland to London for the court appearance. Richards also notes that there is

²⁵ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 45

²⁶ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 46

²⁷ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 46

²⁸ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 45

²⁹ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 45

³⁰ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 48

³¹ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 50

³² Susan M Johns, 'Charters and Contexts: Gender, Women and Power', in *Gender, Nation and Conquest in the High Middle Ages* (Manchester University Press, 2013), (pp. 83-114)

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv6wgnb9.8> (p. 93) [accessed April 2022]

³³ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 51

Assignment 2

the suggestion that there are places named after Gwenllïan such as *Llys Gwenllïan* as well as other places such as Maesmynan and Blorant.³⁴

Richards concludes that for Gwenllïan to have 'retained custody of and maintained both the property which had been bestowed upon her at her marriage and her dower property in Ireland ... was an outstanding achievement for a medieval noblewoman'³⁵, and it is interesting to note that Gwenllïan did not remarry after the death of her husband which may have been because she did not want to, but possibly because it 'suited those in power for her to remain [a widow]'.³⁶

The second daughter to consider is Gwladus Ddu although there are differences in scholastic opinion as to whether she was the illegitimate daughter from Tangwystl as suggested in the genealogical chart prepared by Peter Bartrum, or if she was the legitimate daughter of Joan. Richards comments that much is made by various genealogists and poets regarding the descent from Joan, including referencing Gwladus Ddu in the *Chronicle of Adam Usk 1377-1421* in which the 'emphasis [is] on Gwladus's glorious descent [which] further strengthens the argument that she was indeed the daughter of Joan'.³⁷ Gwladus Ddu had an arranged marriage in 1215 with Reginald de Braose who was a Norman baron, or as Pritchard commented, Gwladus became a 'political victim for what was considered the good of her

³⁴ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 51

³⁵ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 51

³⁶ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 52

³⁷ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 57

Assignment 2

country',³⁸ and this marriage lasted for around thirteen years until Reginald de Braose died in 1228, Gwladus Ddu was around twenty when she became a widow.³⁹ It is interesting to note that Gwladus Ddu, according to Richards, accompanied her brother Dafydd to London and Richards postulates as to why she may have undertaken that journey, one of those thoughts being that she was seen as a 'marriageable widow ... [and/or] perhaps the reason for the visit was social or political or both'.⁴⁰ Another strand that Richards highlights is that Gwladus Ddu could have gone to London as she had 'personal close links with the English court'⁴¹ through her mother Joan, and her now deceased husband, the Anglo-Norman baron.

Again, it is noted that Gwladus Ddu, like her half-sister Gwenllïan, is 'visible in legal historical records as being actively involved in litigation and with the administration of her estates'⁴² and again Gwladus Ddu, like Gwenllïan, appointed lawyers regarding the preservation of her estates including her dower lands which would suggest that Llywelyn ab Iorwerth had bestowed lands to Gwladus Ddu.

After an appropriate period of mourning, Gwladus Ddu remarried another marcher baron, Ralph Mortimer, in 1230, and Richards notes that 'this marriage lasted for sixteen years and

³⁸ Thomas J.L. Pritchard, *The Heroines of Welsh History* (London: W & F.G. Cash, 1854) <https://archive.org/details/heroinesofwelshh00pric/page/n9/mode/2up?q=Heroines+of+Welsh+history> [accessed April 2022] (p. 406)

³⁹ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 54

⁴⁰ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 54

⁴¹ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 54

⁴² Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 54

Assignment 2

produced at least three children [or possibly four]⁴³ and her lineage is mentioned in *Fundationis et Fundatorum Historia* of Wigmore Abbey in *Monasticon Agnlicanum*. Gwladus Ddu is also mentioned in two undated deeds notes Richards,⁴⁴ as well as being mentioned in various court documents surrounding the assignment of lands by Henry III to Gwladus Ddu. When Gwladus Ddu died in 1251, her death was noted by the Welsh chroniclers in *Brut y Tywysogion* and Richards comments that it is the 'exception for a Welsh noblewoman [to have so many] references ... in genealogies, chronicles and poetry'⁴⁵ and it is noted that Gwladus Ddu appears in at least two poems by the Welsh Bard Guto'r Glyn.⁴⁶

Another legitimate daughter to consider is Elen (or Helen) who married to John le Scot who was the Earl of Huntingdon and Cambridge. Richards comments that Llywelyn's motivation for this marriage was that 'John le Scot was the nephew and heir of Rannulf (the earl of Chester) [and] was heir-presumptive to King Alexander II of Scotland'.⁴⁷ The marriage of Elen to John le Scot was witnessed by 'highly placed individuals in [both] households ... and the high level of political elite at the ceremony ... suggests the political resonance and importance of the event'.⁴⁸ 'Elen was provided with a settlement in the form of landed endowment as well as moveable wealth at the time of her marriage'⁴⁹ and Johns comments that those lands

⁴³ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 55

⁴⁴ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 55

⁴⁵ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 56

⁴⁶ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 57

⁴⁷ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 60

⁴⁸ Susan M Johns, 'Charters and Contexts: Gender, Women and Power', in *Gender, Nation and Conquest in the High Middle Ages* (Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 83-114 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv6wgnb9.8> [accessed April 2022] (p. 92)

⁴⁹ Johns, *Charter and Contexts*, p. 93

Assignment 2

that were given to Elen were the lands that 'Llywelyn had acquired through [his] marriage to Joan and were transmitted through marriage to the daughter'.⁵⁰

After the death of John le Scot, Elen remarried Robert de Quiney although it is said that this marriage was not something that Llywelyn had arranged and that it did not accord him with any political gain. Richards notes that perhaps this marriage was done for love, or at least some sort of emotional attachment, or perhaps as noted by A J Roderick, this might have been 'a rebellion against being used as a political pawn'.⁵¹

As with her siblings, evidence of Elen appears in various printed legal records and in particular she is mentioned in 'connection with litigation concerning ... the manor of Wellington'.⁵² Elen also appears in the *Curia Regis Rolls* of 1243 as well as the *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem* for 1253 in which the later 'refers to the portioning of [her] dower lands'⁵³ after her death in 1253.

Margaret is Llywelyn ab Iorwerth's fourth daughter and Margaret was married to John de Braose who was 'the nephew of Reginald de Braose, Gwladus's first husband'.⁵⁴ After the death of John de Braose, Margaret married Walter Clifford of Llandovery and this marriage

⁵⁰ Johns, *Charters and Contexts*, p. 94

⁵¹ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 61

⁵² Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 61

⁵³ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 62

⁵⁴ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 63

Assignment 2

(to Walter Clifford) 'represented [to Llywelyn] an important alliance with a marcher baron at a time when Llywelyn was consolidating his influence in the south-eastern march'.⁵⁵

As we have seen with her siblings, Margaret too was included in historical records such as a 'charter made by Margaret ... concerning the bequest of property ... and is an example of an irrevocable bequest'.⁵⁶ This charter showed some interesting observations about Margaret, namely that she stated that her heart should be buried in Aconbury Priory, and it is evident that when discussing her funeral arrangements, Margaret had made a will as she refers to it. As Richards notes, this is an important, historic and personal document, written by a Welsh noblewoman⁵⁷ and the fact that she wrote a will gives an insight perhaps into the type of person that Margaret may have been.

Angharad was the illegitimate daughter of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth who married a Welshman – Maelgwyn Ieuane or Fychan of Deheubarth and was a 'direct descendant of a Welsh ruling house [and] would have been seen as entirely suitable as a husband for Angharad'.⁵⁸ There is scant information available on Angharad although she is mentioned as having villas/property that belonged to her in an letter from 1259 mentioned in *Littere Wallie*.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 64

⁵⁶ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 64

⁵⁷ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 65

⁵⁸ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 67

⁵⁹ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 67

Assignment 2

There is potentially one further daughter which is Susanna, as noted by Norgate and Carr⁶⁰, and also by Hurlock who comments that Susanna has been 'largely forgotten about in the genealogies ... although the Patent Rolls in November 1228 record that Henry III arranged for "Susanna our niece, the daughter of Llywelyn prince of North Wales and Joanna his wife, our sister" to live with Nicholas de Verdun and his wife Clementia'.⁶¹ Hurlock suggests that Susanna had been sent to England as 'a hostage for her father's good behaviour'⁶² and when Nicholas de Verdun dies in 1231, Susanna is not mentioned as having been returned to Wales, nor is she mentioned anywhere as having been married. There is a suggestion says Hurlock that in fact Susanna did marry, and that marriage was to Malcom II, earl of Fife, and that 'this marriage would have been agreeable to Llywelyn as it provided a link with Scotland'⁶³ and consolidated his position by enhancing the political relationships that he already had with the nobility of England, Ireland and Wales.⁶⁴

It is interesting to consider who these women were, and what their lives were like. Richards comments that they would have been 'brought up in an environment ... conducive to some education and culture ... and [they would] have been well educated for a woman of this

⁶⁰ Kate Norgate and A. D. Carr, *Joan [Siwan] (D. 1237), Princess of Gwynedd, Wife of Llewelyn Ab Iorwerth*, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-14819?rskey=vBGGpA&result=1> [accessed April 2022]

⁶¹ Kathryn Hurlock, 'The Welsh Wife of Malcolm, Earl of Fife (D. 1266): An Alternative Suggestion', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 88 (2009), pp. 352-355, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27867580> (p. 354) [accessed April 2022]

⁶² Hurlock, 'The Welsh Wife of Malcolm, Earl of Fife (D. 1266): An Alternative Suggestion', p. 354

⁶³ Hurlock, 'The Welsh Wife of Malcolm, Earl of Fife (D. 1266): An Alternative Suggestion' p. 355

⁶⁴ Hurlock. 'The Welsh Wife of Malcolm, Earl of Fife (D. 1266): An Alternative Suggestion' p. 355

Assignment 2

time'.⁶⁵ Richards suggests that they could have been fluent in French as 'this was the language of the court',⁶⁶ as well as Welsh and perhaps some English. These women were most certainly used as political pawns, but 'once established in these marriages [the women] showed themselves to be successful negotiators'.⁶⁷ When considering the different daughters, a common theme amongst them is property and land, and these daughters are 'examples of Welsh women ... who married Welsh nobility [and] managed to procure land'.⁶⁸ Through advantageous marriages, they not only provided heirs but also bought with them landed wealth as well as livestock, and as Richards comments, 'cattle was an important and viable commodity and a moveable stock'.⁶⁹

So what do we know about the daughters of Llywelyn? As noted by Stephenson, the 'growth of power of most prominent Welsh rulers ... left traces in the surviving sources',⁷⁰ and Richards comments that 'if an historian approaches the printed record without gender blindness, many Welsh noblewomen of the thirteenth century are found there'⁷¹, and this has been evidenced (in part) by the collection of genealogies that survive from this period which include details of not only the daughters of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth but other contemporary women of the time. The perceived dearth of material pertaining to women of this period has been shown to be incorrect and it is interesting to note that the unpublished

⁶⁵ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 58

⁶⁶ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 59

⁶⁷ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 238

⁶⁸ Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*, p. 204

⁶⁹ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 18

⁷⁰ Stephenson, *Medieval Wales*, p. 1

⁷¹ Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 6

Assignment 2

PhD thesis of Richards was entitled “From footnotes to narrative” (before becoming “Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century”) and this sums up the perception and treatment of women from this time period, ie, relegated to the footnotes when it is clear that they are a huge part of the story. Richards and others have taken the time to investigate further these “footnotes” and from them emerge strong and confident women, women who know that they are being used as political pawns but almost seem to embrace it and use it to their advantage as seen with Joan acting as a mediator between her husband and her father.

These confident women were not only taking control of their own lands, but they were also fighting to keep their property, were attending court and were travelling across the country (from Wales to London). They used their positions within society to advance their lineage and these astute women were more than mere notes in a margin - they deserve thorough and in-depth investigation, and whilst Richards talks about “gender blindness” which could explain the lack of examination of the history, hopefully that imbalance is starting to be addressed.

Word count : 3958 words

Assignment 2

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Assignment 2

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Assignment 2

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