

One of the biggest challenges medieval literary scholars face in modern times is the question of interpretation: how to correctly interpret a medieval text with limited amount of or total lack of contextual knowledge. In search of an answer, many scholars have engaged themselves in painstaking detective work to find the author, and the ever-increasing number of monographs and articles on this topic show the breadth and depth of the scholarship involved in the pursuit. In the realm of *Mabinogi* scholarship, likewise, there have been multiple theories on the authorship of the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* since Sir Ifor Williams first postulated in the introduction to his edition that an old man from Dyfed united the ancient legends of Gwent, Dyfed and Gwynedd around 1060.¹ Perhaps the pursuit of ‘capturing’ the author becomes a more important task in a critical approach urged by Andrew Welsh:

A fundamentally different critical approach to *The Four Branches* is to see what happens if one assumes that its elements form a coherent work, the product of an author in control of his craft, who used that craft to explore and develop various major themes which were important to him and to his society.²

The purpose of this paper is to consider and assess major theories that have been put forward in regard to the authorship of the *Four Branches* and to offer a conclusion that will hopefully make a meaningful contribution to the discussion.

¹ Sir Ifor Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, 1st edn. (Cardiff: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1930), p. xli.

² Andrew Welsh, ‘Doubling And Incest In The Mabinogi’, *Speculum*, 65.2 (1990), 344-362 (p. 346) <DOI: 10.2307/2864296>.

Essay Plan

1. Introduction

2. Evaluation of Sir Ifor Williams' theory

- Overview of William's orthographic and phonological argument
- Tolstoy's recent work also points to Dyfed for an exact site of writing.
- "Since the history of MW. orthography has not yet been properly worked out, this is not enough by itself to prove that the Four Branches had been written down by 1100." - Charles-Edwards
- The possibility of French cultural influence still remains.

3. Evaluation of Iestyn Daniel's theory

- Similarities of writing style and philosophical background among most of the medieval Welsh tales?
- Thirteenth-century poet and grammarian Cnepyn Gwerthrynion, who is also Llywelyn Offeiriad at Bangor, Gwynedd → Both location and time period are very different from Williams' theory.
- Inconsistent methodology: Daniel's selectiveness in choosing evidences for inter-textual similarities

4. Evaluation of Andrew Breeze's theory

- The Four Branches is the work of a female author?
- Oversimplification of the subject matter
- Unsound logic: The fact that there is no clear evidence against Gwenllïan's authorship does not suffice to prove that she was the author.

5. Conclusion

- It is not possible to determine the author of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi.
- Furthermore, the question of authorship is not the most important element in interpreting not only the Four Branches but also most of the medieval texts.
- Dissecting a flower and knowing more about its parts does not lead to deeper appreciation and understanding of the beauty and essence of the flower.

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1. UCD Digital Library: <https://www.ucd.ie/irishfolklore/en/digitallibrary/>

This digital library run by University College Dublin holds a myriad of interesting and unique resources relevant to the history and culture of Ireland. There are several different kinds of resources available on this website, including texts, still images, maps, sound recordings, etc. Each entry is well-catalogued with detailed descriptions of the origin and current location of the entry and other useful, relevant information, which makes it very easy for a researcher to cite the source. I found the image sources to be the most impressive part of the website; they are in high resolution, which allows one to zoom in and see the details of the image. While there are some older sources, such as pictures of Roman coins, the majority of the sources on the website are from the 19th and 20th century. This means the website would be mainly useful for those who study topics from those time periods. In terms of the presentation of the website I would suggest a different color for the links; it is hard to read words in light blue against a white background.

2. Dictionary of Welsh Biography: <https://biography.wales>

This is a very informative website that contains thousands of biographies of Welsh individuals. Each entry is written in a concise manner, which allows the reader to get a thorough introductory idea about the individual. The authorship of each entry is clearly stated in the beginning and at the end of the article. The sources and further reading sections arranged at the end of each entry not only adds credibility to the information presented on the website but also gives a direction for those who want to study more in-depth about the individual.

Aside from the content, the website itself is neatly built with an eye-catching crimson color as accent. I think the banner on the homepage is very well-designed; it represents the website in a precise and artistic way, showing portraits and profile pictures of individuals from the entire scope of Welsh history. The website has excellent browsing functions with which one can scan through the massive amount of

information by the name of the entry or the author. The conveniently located search bars help users find the information that they are looking for more quickly by allowing them to type in any keyword. This function is especially useful if the user does not have a clear idea of whom to search for.

One criticism I have is for the Featured Article section on the homepage. This section certainly enhances the dynamic look of the page and also gives a visitor an opportunity to learn about a historical figure of whom they did not know or knew very little. In order to maximize its functionality, I would suggest making the picture and the name of the individual presented in the section clickable as an encouraging and welcoming gesture. All in all, this website is an appropriate research source for both academic and leisure purposes.

3. The Four Branches of the Mabinogi: <http://www.mabinogi.net/index.html>

This simply-built HTML website features a full translation of the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* with detailed notes. It also holds a bibliography that chronologically lists selective published works on the *Mabinogi* from 1795 until 2003, along with a bibliographic essay on *Mabinogi* scholarship between 1795 and 1997. While the bibliography is incomplete and out-dated, it could serve as a starting point in collecting reading materials relevant to the study of the *Mabinogi*.

Unlike the two websites reviewed above, all of the information on the website seems to be written by a single individual. I can only say 'seems' because the authorship of the website is not clearly stated. One can assume who the author is by a few clues scattered throughout the website, but a firm conclusion is difficult to reach. The website also provides links to a selection of web pages that contain relevant information, but many of them are broken. This, coupled with the fact that the bibliography page is updated only up until 2003, tells me that the website is not currently up to date, and for this reason alone it would be difficult for me to recommend this website for scholarly research.

4. Celtic Studies Resources: <https://www.digitalmedievalist.com>

The most perplexing element of this website is the title. While the web address says *Digital Medievalist*, the title on the website reads *Celtic Studies Resources*. By reading the about page, a visitor can learn that *Digital Medievalist* is a nickname that the author goes by, and the name of the website is *Celtic Studies Resources*. This inconsistency in titles gives an impression that the website was put together sloppily or on a whim. There are a few other aspects that support that very impression; the sluggishly-moving animated banner on the homepage, broken links and undeleted spam comments.

There is some good information and book recommendations for Celtic studies enthusiasts, but because of some navigation issues it is not easy to get to the informative parts. One of the navigation problems that stands out is the unclear marking of the home button. Normally if there is a logo of a website displayed at the top of a webpage, the logo works as a home button and one can go to the home page from anywhere on the website by simply clicking it. On this particular website, however, the logo on the upper-left corner does not function as a home button; it took me a while before discovering a link to the home page, written in a very tiny font.

This website seems to be a mixture of useful information and personal musings, both relevant to Celtic studies. While the author has a respectable academic background (which is clearly stated on the about page) which gives some weight to the trustworthiness of the materials presented on the website, the poor navigation functions and too many advertisements displayed all around (even in the middle of blog posts) hinders and distracts visitors from not only mining information but also enjoying the website. I would not recommend this website for either academic studies or leisurely reading.

5. Transceltic: <https://www.transceltic.com>

This is an informative and entertaining website that contains a lot of interesting information regarding Celtic history, culture and heritage. The logo of the website, a

single flag combining the six flags of the Celtic nations, clearly represents its mission as a platform to bring the Celtic nations closer together and raise awareness of the shared heritage among the Celtic nations. The website is very easy to navigate; well-organized tabs and eye-catching graphics help visitors to land on the page they desire. All of the content—even travel information and cooking recipes—are categorized by nation, which makes it extremely easy to find information about a particular Celtic nation. The authorship of the website is plainly presented with short bios of the contributors and their profile photos.

It is definitely not a website built for scholarly purposes. The historical information about each Celtic nation is written in a very brief manner, and the majority of the subject matter lies in the realm of popular culture. However, it is apparent that the website is very well-managed and run by people who are passionate about the Celtic nations and their individual and communal heritage. I would definitely recommend this website for people who are beginning to acquire their interest in the Celtic nations and hobbyists in general.