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Title of extract: **What Dreams May Come Must Give Us Pause:**

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Name of Author: **McKenna, C.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable): **Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies Vol 58 Winter 2009**

Publisher: **CMCS Publications**

Pages scanned: **69 - 99**

Course of Study (Module name and number): **The Celtic Arthur and the Matter of Britain CYCS7021**

Name of Designated Person

authorising scanning:

E. L. Harris

Date authorised: 13.12.17.

Moodle/Powerpoint

‘What Dreams May Come Must Give Us Pause’: *Breudwyt Ronabwy* and the Red Book of Hergest

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At some point in the last two decades of the fourteenth century, the professional scribe Hywel Fychan copied the Welsh prose tale ‘Rhonabwy’s Dream’ (*Breudwyt Ronabwy*) into the imposing anthology of poetry and literary prose that he was preparing for his patron, Hopcyn ap Tomas of Glamorgan. Hopcyn was exemplary of the cultured Welsh gentlemen who served as patrons of the bards and conservators of Welsh literature after the eradication of Welsh royalty at the end of the thirteenth century. The poems recorded in the anthology that Hywel Fychan compiled for his patron include five addressed to Hopcyn himself, celebrating his importance in that role.

Hopcyn was also known as a ‘master of Brut’, or at least he was so described in a letter summoning him to the presence of Owain Glyndŵr at Carmarthen in July 1403.¹ The Welsh term *brut* derives via French from the name of Brutus, the eponymous founder of the kingdom of Britain, according to Geoffrey of Monmouth’s twelfth-century bestseller, *Historia Regum Britanniae*. The Welsh came to refer to their translations of Geoffrey’s book as *Brut y Brenhinedd*, and eventually used the term for other narratives of British history as well, most notably the chronicle of the Welsh princes that we know as *Brut y Tywysogion*. By the fourteenth century, though, *brut*, or *brud*, had come to refer not only to narrative accounts of the past but to prognostication of future events as well. It was the prophetic dimension of *brut* with which Owain Glyndŵr was concerned when he sent for Hopcyn; he wanted to know ‘how and of what manner it should befall of him’.²

¹Quoted in Daniel Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Aberystwyth, 2000), p. 80, citing Henry Ellis, *Original Letters*, second series, 1 (London, 1827), p. 23. ²For Hopcyn ap Thomas, see Brynley F. Roberts, ‘Hopcyn ap Tomas ab Einion (fl. 1337–1408)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), and Christine James, ‘“Llwyr wybodau, llên a llyfrau”: Hopcyn ap Tomas a’r Traddodiad Llenyddol Cymraeg’, in *Cwm Tawe*, edited by Hywel Teifi Edwards (Llandysul, 1993), pp. 4–44.

Hopcyn was familiar with *brut* in both senses, if we may judge by the evidence of the manuscripts made for him. In the anthology that includes *Breudwyt Ronabwy* — which is, of course, the Red Book of Hergest — he had both *Brut y Brenhinedd* and *Brut y Tjwysogion*, the latter in a version that extended right down to 1382. There was, as well, *Ystoria Dared*, the narrative of the Trojan War attributed in the Middle Ages to Dares Phrygius, in Welsh translation; this provided the back story for *Brut y Brenhinedd* and *Brut y Tjwysogion*. The *Ystoria de Carolo Magno*, a collection of Charlemagne narratives based on a variety of sources, supplied additional historical perspective, this with a European compass. Hopcyn's interest in vaticination, on the other hand, is reflected in the Red Book in prose texts that describe acts of prognostication in the past, such as *Proffwydolyaeth Sibli Doeth* and *Proffwydolyaeth yr Eryr yn Nghaer Septon*, and early poems of a prophetic nature from the Myrddin and Taliesin traditions of *canu brud* as well. The Red Book also preserves a substantial collection of Triads, those compact and sometimes cryptic nuggets of legendary history or *cyfarwyddyd* that served as resources for bards and storytellers.

For Hopcyn ap Tomas, it would appear, knowledge of what happened in the past would seem to have provided a standpoint from which he might construe both the cryptic prophetic poetry of the past and the new *canu brud* that was being produced in substantial quantity in Wales during his lifetime. Rees Davies observed that 'History, prophecy and poetry were close bedfellows in medieval Wales, never more so than in the post-Conquest generations'.³ Hopcyn's library, in combination with the evidence of his reputation for an ability to interpret prophecy, testifies to the truth of this remark.

I begin by reflecting on Hopcyn's interest in the past and the future, and the ways in which those paired preoccupations are represented in the Red Book of Hergest, because I want to suggest in this essay that *Breudwyt Ronabwy* is a tale that reflects both of them, and that in Hopcyn ap Tomas's mastery of *brut* lies a key to a better understanding of this riveting but enigmatic tale.

Literary taxonomy has long situated *Breudwyt Ronabwy* among the eleven tales of *The Mabinogion* as that artificial entity was constructed in the nineteenth century by Lady Charlotte Guest.⁴ Melville Richards's edition of *Breudwyt Ronabwy* — at this writing still the only one available — citing J. Gwenogvryn Evans and Ifor Williams, perpetuates the view that it might at

³R. R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence and Change: Wales 1063–1415* (Oxford, 1987), repr. as *The Age of Conquest: Wales 1063–1415* (Oxford, 1991), p. 436. ⁴*The Mabinogion from the Llyfr Coch o Hergest, and Other Ancient Welsh Manuscripts* (London, 1836–49).

one time have been among the texts in Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch, the White Book.⁵ Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, in their Everyman translation of *The Mabinogion*, first published in 1949 and reprinted many times since, included *The Dream of Rhonabwy* without comment, except to note that 'Lady Guest's title was really a misnomer ... but it has proved to be so convenient ... and is now so well-established in use, that it would be the sheerest pedantry to replace it with a clumsier if more correct alternative'.⁶ Sioned Davies, too, in her recent translation, emphasizes the fact that

the term Mabinogion is no more than a label, and a modern-day one at that: the stories vary as regards date, authorship, sources, content, structure and style. Having said that, ever since Lady Guest's achievement the *Mabinogion* have taken on a life of their own.⁷

And so she too includes *Rhonabwy's Dream* in her collection. Thus, it has become common to think of *Breudwyt Ronabwy* as part and parcel of a medieval tradition of Welsh narrative prose that includes the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* and other 'native' tales. Fictional prose, we might call it, hesitatingly, to distinguish it from the *Bruts* and other texts with greater pretence to historicity. Native prose, we sometimes have called it, to distinguish it from texts like *Ystoria de Carolo Magno* or *Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein*, which have often been regarded as mere translations of imported texts, despite the fact that they represent significant intervention on the part of the writers who adapted them to Welsh literary values, conventions, and interpretive practices.⁸

In some respects, it makes good sense to bundle *Breudwyt Ronabwy* with the other ten tales of *The Mabinogion* as the prose fiction of medieval Wales; it is, after all, as many a critic has observed of it, the most literary of the narrative texts that we have.⁹ We must not ignore the fact, however, that there is no evidence for its having been associated with any of the other ten tales of *The Mabinogion* in the Middle Ages. It has been some time since Daniel Huws demonstrated that the writing space in the folios missing from the White Book of Rhydderch, our earliest manuscript source for the complete texts of the other ten tales of the *Mabinogion*, would have been inadequate

⁵*Breudwyt Ronabwy*, edited by Melville Richards (Cardiff, 1948), pp. ix–xi. ⁶*The Mabinogion*, translated by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, revised edition (London and Rutland, VT, 1989), p. x. ⁷*The Mabinogion*, translated by Sioned Davies (Oxford, 2007), p. x. ⁸On the nature of medieval Welsh 'translation', see Diana M. Luft, 'Medieval Welsh Translation: The Case of Ymddiddan Selyf a Marcwlff', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Harvard University, 2004), and Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'Rhai Agwedddau ar Gyfieithu yng Nghymru yn yr Oesoedd Canol', *Ysgrifau Beirniadol*, 13 (1985), 134–45. ⁹See, for example, Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. xii; Proinsias Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, Writers of Wales (Cardiff, 1992), p. 83.

to contain *Breudwyt Ronabwy* as we know it.¹⁰ The Red Book of Hergest, Hopcyn ap Tomas's imposing anthology of Welsh literature, is our single medieval manuscript source for this particular tale.

And the text of *Breudwyt Ronabwy* does not occur in the Red Book among the other ten tales. It appears, rather, in a miscellany that follows the opening set of texts, *Ystorya Dared*, *Brut y Brenhined*, *Brut y Tywysogion*, the Charlemagne material, and a Welsh version of the *Imago Mundi* of Honorius Augustodunensis. These texts occupy folios 1^r–125^v of the Red Book, filling its first eleven quires plus a single leaf. They may all be said to belong to the tradition of world and British history as it was known in fourteenth-century Wales. The 'miscellany' to which I have referred begins with the twelfth quire. The first of the texts in the twelfth quire is a Welsh translation of Walter of Henley's thirteenth-century agricultural treatise, *Le Dite de Hosbondrie*,¹¹ and it is followed in turn by *Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein* and *Breudwyt Ronabwy*.

Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein is a version of the Latin collection of tales of the Seven Sages, which itself goes back to eastern sources. Seven masters of the liberal arts battle a wicked stepmother who seeks revenge for her stepson's rejection of her sexual advances by accusing him falsely and demanding that her husband put him to death. Seven of the stories are parables that she tells her husband, illustrating the dangers of naively harbouring the villain who seeks one's destruction. Seven are counter-parables told by the seven sages illustrating the irrevocability of rash acts of punishment and destruction, especially as these are provoked by women. The final story is told by the king's son himself. This work strikes the modern reader primarily as a frame tale that employs the device, familiar from *The Thousand and One Nights*, of stories deployed in the service of sustaining — or in this case sustaining or dooming — a life. Its position in the Red Book seems random. And yet it interconnects with some of the texts among which it is placed in telling ways. In relation to the 'historical' texts of the first eleven quires, *Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein* could be described as sharing its interest in the activities of kings and emperors, since it centres upon a Roman emperor identified as Diocletian. More intriguing, though, and, I would argue, more significant, is the fact that *Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein* is very much about interpretation and control of interpretation. The frame tale hangs upon the wicked empress's advancing her explanation of the rift between her and her stepson, to which the boy himself will eventually

respond with his own very different account. In the interim, the empress, the sages, and eventually the boy regale the emperor with parables. The stories are individually engaging, but the narrative trajectory of the text as a whole depends entirely upon the effectiveness with which each tale-teller interprets his or her parable in relation to the guilt and punishment of the emperor's son. *Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein* explores a question that preoccupied many medieval theologians with respect to interpretation of Scripture, and that is central to literary criticism: how can the validity of interpretation be warranted? In *Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein* it is, finally, the character and the wisdom of the sages, and the honesty of the boy, that convince audience and emperor alike that their readings of their stories are sounder than those offered by the lustful, irate, and deceitful empress in connection with the tales that she tells. The pleasure of the text lies to a considerable degree in the audience's certainty that one of the sages will trump each manipulative allegory presented by the empress with a better parable, and save the young prince's life for another day. Yet despite the narrative inevitability of the boy's vindication, *Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein* raises the question of interpretation and control of interpretation. It is a question, I will argue, that is central to *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, the text that follows it in the Red Book.

Breudwyt Ronabwy continues into the thirteenth quire of the manuscript, where it is followed by *Proffwydoliaeth Sibli Ddoeth*,¹² a prophetic text, as are those that immediately follow it. Like *Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein* and *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, *Proffwydoliaeth Sibli Ddoeth*, based on a late-

¹⁰See Gifford Charles-Edwards, 'The Scribes of the Red Book of Hergest', *National Library of Wales Journal*, 21 (1980), 246–56 (p. 255); see also Peter Wynn Thomas, D. Mark Smith, and Diana Luft, *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg 1350–1425* (2007), <http://www.rhyddiaithganoloesol.caerdydd.ac.uk>, at <http://www.rhyddiaithganoloesol.caerdydd.ac.uk/en/tei-header.php?ms=Jesus111>. This electronic resource is hereinafter referred to as *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg 1350–1425*. Marged Haycock discusses the cultural and textual traditions of *Breudwyt Sibli* or *Proffwydoliaeth Sibli Ddoeth* in 'Sy abl fodd, Sibli fain: Sibyl in Medieval Wales', in *Heroic Poets and Poetic Heroes in Celtic Tradition: A Festschrift for Patrick K. Ford*, edited by Joseph F. Nagy and Leslie Ellen Jones, *CSANA Yearbook*, 3–4 (Dublin, 2003), pp. 115–30 (pp. 115–25). Haycock makes the point that *Proffwydoliaeth Sibli Ddoeth* is situated in the Red Book among 'different kinds of prophetic and dream texts', which represents a different classification than is suggested by its context in the White Book of Rhydderch or in Peniarth 14 (p. 119). Further on *Proffwydoliaeth Sibli Ddoeth*, see R. Wallis Evans, 'Proffwydoliaeth Sibli Ddoeth,' *Llên Cymru*, 14 (1983–84), 216–23, and idem, 'Ystorya Addaf a Proffwydoliaeth Sibli Ddoeth,' *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 35 (1988), 29–32. For the background of this text in the oracles of the Tiburtine Sibyl, see J. L. Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles: With Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on the First and Second Books* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 117–19.

¹¹Daniel Huws, 'Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch,' *CMCS*, 21 (Summer 1991), 1–37 (p. 16, n. 25), repr. in Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, pp. 227–68. ¹²*Welsh Walter of Henley*, edited by Alexander Falileyev, *Medieval and Modern Welsh Series*, 12 (Dublin, 2006).

fourth-century Latin text, concerns itself with emperors in that it 'foretells' the coming of a great Roman emperor who will oversee the triumph of Christianity. More significantly, though, it introduces a series of texts that are concerned with *brut* or *brud* in its late medieval sense of prophecy, including two vaticinatory poems from the Myrddin tradition¹³ and *Proffwydolyaeth Eryr yg Kaer Septon*. The four prophetic texts are followed, beginning still within the confines of the thirteenth quire and extending into the fourteenth, with Triads and related *cyfarwyddyd*. The remaining ten narrative texts of *The Mabinogion* appear in the fifteenth to twentieth quires.

Thus, the codicological context of *Breudwyt Ronabwy* associates it with history, with native and international learned traditions, and most particularly and closely with arcane modes of knowledge such as vision and prophecy. Vision and prophecy are of course intimately connected in Western tradition (and by no means in Western tradition exclusively) with dreaming, going back to the Book of Revelation and beyond. From Antiquity to the present, philosophers, theologians, and scientists have been fascinated by dreams and visions — their origins, their meaning, their relationship to truth. The Middle Ages were a period of intense interest in these matters, an interest that not only produced a substantial body of theory and many practical guides to dream interpretation, but also engendered an international literary genre, the poetic dream vision. The manuscript context of *Breudwyt Ronabwy* urges us to read it as a contribution to that medieval dream science and the literature that it produced. That context insists upon attention to the ways in which the tale speaks to Hopcyn ap Tomas's interest in *brut*, as well as to its very skilful literariness.

There was no question for medieval thinkers that dreams — some dreams, at any rate — were to be taken seriously. The Bible itself authorized this stance. In the Mosaic period, God had announced that 'Should there be a prophet among you, in visions I will reveal myself to him, in dreams I will speak to him' (Numbers 12, 6). Eliu told Job that God speaks 'By a dream in a vision by night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, and they are sleeping in their beds: Then [God] openeth the ears of men, and teaching instructeth them in what they are to learn' (Job 33, 15–16). In the New Testament, angels with messages from God had appeared in dreams and spoken directly to Joseph (Matthew 1, 20–24; 2, 13 and 19–22) and to the Magi (Matthew 2, 12). But the Old Testament in particular also sanctioned a respectful attitude toward even the most enigmatic of dreams in its accounts of Joseph's allegorically prophetic dreams and his ability to construe the dreams of

Pharaoh and his servants (Genesis 37, 40, and 41), and of Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams (Daniel 2, 4).

And yet, it was understood as well that dreams could be dangerous, instruments wielded by demonic forces to the injury of the dreamer, or spiritually meaningless, symptoms merely of bodily disturbances. Thus it was of the utmost importance to heed God's charge to Israel, delivered through Moses, that 'When thou art come into the land that the Lord thy God shall give thee, beware lest thou have a mind to imitate the abominations of those nations. Neither let there be found among you any one ... that consulteth soothsayers, or observeth dreams and omens, neither let there be any wizard, nor charmer, nor anyone that consulteth pythonic spirits, or fortune tellers, or that seeketh the truth from the dead, for the Lord abhorreth all these things' (Deuteronomy 18, 9–12).

So medieval thinkers were both fascinated by dreams and wary of them, and quite a few philosophers and theologians attempted to distinguish the revelatory from the deceptive, the momentous from the dyspeptic, even as ancient thinkers had done. Indeed, their principal authority was the late Roman grammarian and philosopher Macrobius, whose early-fifth-century *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (that is, on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*) provided a taxonomy of dream types that served throughout the Middle Ages as a useful framework for reflection on dreaming.¹⁴ Drawing on earlier classical writers, most notably the *Oneirocritica* of a second-century Greek writer, Artemidorus,¹⁵ Macrobius became the conduit to the Latin Middle Ages of ancient thought about dreaming. Macrobius proposed that there are five kinds of dream, two of them insignificant and three of them reliable. His system accommodated both extremes of biblical attitude toward dreams: that they are a medium through which God speaks, on the one hand, and that they are delusory on the other, occasions of both revelation and sacrilege. Moreover, and most important, the Macrobian scheme could be interpreted as a kind of sliding scale, a continuum on which any dream might be situated and in terms of which it might be described.

The first kind of false dream in the Macrobian scheme is the *insomnium*, rendered as 'nightmare' by the translator of the *Commentary*, William Stahl. Such a dream, according to Macrobius 'may be caused by mental or physical distress, or anxiety about the future ... the patient experiences in dreams vexations similar to those that disturb him during the day.' (i.iii.5, p. 88) He calls such dreams *insomnia*, Macrobius informs us, following Artemidorus,

¹⁴Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, edited and translated by William H. Stahl (New York, 1952). Subsequent quotations from Macrobius in English translation reference this edition. ¹⁵*The Interpretation of Dreams: The Oneirocritica of Artemidorus*, translated by Robert White (Park Ridge, NJ, 1975).

¹³*Cyfoesi Myrddin a Gwenddydd and Gwasgargerdd Fyrddin*, in *The Poetry from the Red Book of Hergest*, edited by J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Llanbedrog, 1911), pp. 1–5, cols 577–84.

'not because such dreams occur "in sleep" — in this respect nightmares are like other types — but because they are noteworthy only during their course and afterwards have no importance or meaning' (i.iii.5, p. 89). The second kind of unreliable dream is the *visum* or *phantasma*, which according to Macrobius 'comes upon one in the moment between wakefulness and slumber, in the so-called "first cloud of sleep"'. In this drowsy condition 'a person thinks he is still awake, and imagines he sees specters rushing at him or wandering vaguely about, differing from natural creatures in size and shape, and a host of divers things, either delightful or disturbing' (i.iii.7, p. 89).

According to Macrobius, the true dreams, the dreams with prophetic value, are the *somnium*, the *visio*, and the *oraculum*. The *somnium* is the dream type with which we in the post-Freudian age are most familiar; it is an enigmatic dream, which 'conceals with strange shapes and veils with ambiguity the meaning of the information being offered, and requires an interpretation for its understanding' (i.iii.10, p. 89). What Macrobius calls *somnium* is not only the kind of dream that most of us recognize — full of a sense of import, but baffling, even absurd. It is as well the kind of dream that Joseph and Daniel interpret, a dream that offers to the dreamer able to read its figures the possibility of personal communication with God. For the medieval reader of the *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* there was biblical authority for taking the *somnium* seriously. And such a dream, according to Macrobius, could not only tell the dreamer something important about himself, as Freud would have it, but might convey something of consequence about another person, about the body politic, or about the world at large. In Macrobius' words, the *somnium* might be 'personal, alien, social, public or universal' (i.iii.10, p. 90), or any combination of these. It had the potential to bring divine omniscience to bear on a range of human affairs, allowing for behaviour modifications that could avert impending disaster — this is how the prophetic dream interpretations of Joseph and Daniel had functioned. Yet outside of Scripture, the possibility of misinterpretation threatened to obstruct communication between God and dreamer. A misread dream might lead to inappropriate action or to none at all. The *somnium* was potentially consequential, potentially ineffectual, potentially dangerous. In many respects, the *somnium* as conceived by Macrobius was like the parables of *Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein*: it is not so much the content that matters, in either case, as it is the interpretation.

The *visio* was less complicated, as was the *oraculum*. The *visio*, in Macrobian terms, is simply a prophetic vision of something that then actually happens, often something very ordinary. For example, 'a man dreams of the return of a friend who has been staying in a foreign land,

thoughts of whom never enter his mind. He goes out and presently meets his friend and embraces him.' (i.iii.9, p. 90) The *oraculum* is more portentous. In it, 'a parent, or a pious or revered man, or a priest, or even a god, clearly reveals what will or will not transpire, and what action to take or avoid' (i.iii.8, p. 90). The biblical reference-points for such dreams included those of Joseph and of the Magi in the Gospel of Matthew; in the Christian context, angels were irrefutably reliable heralds of the truth.

Along one axis, the distinction in Macrobius' taxonomy of dreams is between the revelatory and the meaningless. From another perspective the division he makes is between the spiritual dream and the physical. *Insomnia*, for example, come in both flavours:

The physical variety might be illustrated by one who has overindulged in eating or drinking and dreams that he is either choking with food or unburdening himself, or by one who has been suffering from hunger or thirst and dreams that he is craving and searching for food or drink and has found it. (i.iii.4, p. 88)

But nightmares may be caused by 'mental distress, or anxiety about the future' as well as by digestive disturbances:

As examples of the mental variety, we might mention the dream of the lover who dreams of possessing his sweetheart or losing her, or the man who fears the plots or might of an enemy and is confronted with him in his dream or seems to be fleeing him ... Anxiety about the future would cause a man to dream that he is gaining a prominent position or that he is being deprived of it as he feared. (i.iii.iv, p. 88)

While preoccupation and anxiety lack the unequivocal materiality of food and drink, the dreams that they engender are just as meaningless for Macrobius as are drunken and dyspeptic dreams. All of them come from within the dreamer, all are contingent. To be significant of truth, in the Macrobian scheme inherited by the Latin Middle Ages, a dream must bear a message warranted by authority external to the dreamer. This is most clearly the case in the oracular dream, setting aside the question that must arise of how a dreamer is to know that the 'revered man ... or even a god' who speaks in a dream is in fact that authoritative figure and not a demonic delusion.

Macrobius was the best known and most influential of the dream theorists during the Middle Ages, but not the only well-known writer to address the subject. Calcidius, Augustine, and Gregory the Great were among the other authors, both non-Christian and Christian, whose writings about dreams were well known in the West during the Middle Ages.¹⁶ Without going into

¹⁶Representative works include Calcidius, *Timaean a Calcidio Translatius Commentarioque Instructus*, edited by J. H. Waszink, Plato Latinus, 4, second edition

the details of their theories,¹⁷ it can be said that all of them propose sets of contraries: dreams of external origin/dreams of internal origin; dreams of spiritual (including psychological) origin/dreams of physical origin; dreams of divine derivation/dreams of demonic derivation. These pairs align neither neatly nor fully. For example, dreams that come from God or his angels are clearly both external and spiritual. As are dreams that are visited upon the dreamer by demons. But a dream that is provoked by anxiety or some other emotional condition is internal, and yet in medieval terms 'spiritual' rather than physical. And such a dream does not participate at all in the divine/demonic dichotomy. One system of terminology employed by some of the medical writers of the Middle Ages classified dreams as *naturale* (those that arose from a physical condition), *animale* (those that arose from mental perturbation), and *coeleste* (those that are visited upon the dreamer by an external agent).¹⁸ This taxonomy concerns itself exclusively with the sources of dreams, while Macrobius approaches that question through analysis of their typology. It needs to be employed in conjunction with Macrobius' fivefold scheme in order to appreciate fully the subtlety of the medieval understanding of dreams. Indeed, Gregory's scheme recognized the intersection of the categories set out by other authors when he proposed that some dreams arose from a combination of revelation and our own minds, or a combination of demonic delusion and our own thoughts.¹⁹ In the rest of this essay, I will discuss *Breudwyt Ronabwy* primarily in Macrobian terms, but it is important always to bear in mind the complexity of medieval dream theory, and the fact that every available scheme concerned itself with the question of a dream's authority, its validity as a source of information about the future.

Macrobius' *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis* was enormously popular in the Middle Ages, as its survival in hundreds of manuscript copies demonstrates.²⁰ Calcidius, too, was much read in the Middle Ages, as of course were Augustine and Gregory. All four major dream authors were probably known in Wales; in the case of Macrobius, Alison Peden has argued

(London, 1975), especially §§ 249–55; Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, translated by John H. Taylor, Ancient Christian Writers, 41–42 (New York, 1982), Book xii; Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, translated by Odo John Zimmerman, Fathers of the Church, 39 (Washington, 1959), Book iv. ¹⁷There are a number of studies that offer more detailed surveys of medieval dream theory and provide extensive bibliographical guidance. The one that I have found most useful is Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1991). ¹⁸This system is described by A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 55–56. ¹⁹*Dialogues*, iv.50.2 ²⁰See Kruger, *Dreaming*, pp. 58–60, for a discussion with further references to the medieval manuscript tradition of Macrobius and the other major Late Antique dream theorists.

persuasively that his *Commentary* was known in Wales, at Llanbadarn, no later than the eleventh century.²¹

All of this theorizing of dreams, of course, took place on the intellectual high ground, among philosophers, theologians, and physicians. It had little impact on the kind of dream interpretation that assigns a specific value to every imaginable dream image and circumstance, seeking to resolve the enigma of the Macrobian *somnium*, which 'conceals with strange shapes and veils with ambiguity the meaning of the information being offered, and requires an interpretation for its understanding' (i.iii.10, p. 89). This kind of dream interpretation is an ancient, universal, and ongoing practice. It found its way into the Latin West no later than the ninth century, in a manual that in most surviving texts bears the title *Somniale Danielis*. Unsurprisingly, different texts of the *Somniale Danielis* vary. It is the kind of compendium that invites the addition of items gleaned from accepted authors, while making scribal eyeskip all too easy. Despite the variations among individual texts, however, there are, according to the editor of one of them, two main versions of the *Somniale Danielis*, one of which indexes 275 dream motifs, the other some 162.²² The *Somniale Danielis* was widely disseminated in both Latin and in various other European languages — including Welsh.²³ Although the vernacular translations suggest that the 'dream book' attracted a wider readership than did the dream theories of Macrobius and the others, nonetheless they too were, of course, only available to a literate elite. In its own way, the *Somniale Danielis* was as much a learned text as was Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*.²⁴

Its status in Wales is suggested by the fact that the oldest of the Welsh texts of the dream book is to be found in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Llanstephan 27, the Red Book of Talgarth, a manuscript roughly contemporary with the Red Book of Hergest and written in large part by the same scribe, Hywel Fychan. This manuscript is essentially an anthology of religious prose — hagiography, apocrypha, doctrinal and devotional texts. It also contains, though, various texts dealing with prognostication on the basis of weather, the phases of the moon, and the like. First among these vaticinatory texts in Llanstephan 27²⁵ is the dream book, with the incipit *deall y*

²¹Alison Peden, 'Science and Philosophy in Wales at the Time of the Norman Conquest: A Macrobius Manuscript from Llanbadarn', *CMCS*, 2 (Winter 1981), 21–46 (pp. 22–27). ²²Lawrence T. Martin, *Somniale Danielis: An Edition of a Medieval Latin Dream Interpretation Handbook* (Frankfurt, Bern, and Cirencester, 1981), pp. 2–10. ²³See *ibid.*, pp. 13–62; Kruger, *Dreaming*, pp. 10–11; Max Förster, 'Das älteste kymrische Traumbuch', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 13 (1921), 55–92. ²⁴For a more extensive discussion of the relationship of dream theories to dream books, see Kruger, *Dreaming*, pp. 14–16. ²⁵At fols 153^v–156^v.

breudwydon herwyd danyel broffŷyt ('The Interpretation of Dreams according to the Prophet Daniel').²⁶ The version of the dream book in Llanstephan 27 catalogues 186 dream motifs; it is near the short end of the spectrum of dream-book texts.

We know, then, that the codicological context of *Breudwyt Ronabwy* in the Red Book of Hergest encourages us to think about it as part of the tradition of *brut* in both senses — history and prophecy. We know that dreaming was understood throughout Western Europe in the Middle Ages as a vaticinatory medium, a channel through which knowledge of the future might be attained, but that dreams were also known often to be deceptive, the product of demons or dyspepsia. And we know that both the best known dream theorist of the Middle Ages, Macrobius, and the manual of dream interpretation — the *Somniale Danielis* — were known in Wales when *Breudwyt Ronabwy* was written into the Red Book of Hergest. Consequently, it seems appropriate to take a closer look at *Breudwyt Ronabwy* from an oneirocritical standpoint, focusing on the fact that it not only frames its central narrative as a dream, as did many European fictions of the Middle Ages, but also vigorously calls attention to the circumstances in which that dream is dreamt and to the remarkably surreal and dreamlike quality of the dream itself.

The story of Rhonabwy and his dream is remarkably disjunctive with the opening of the tale. As Dafydd Glyn Jones observed, the opening leads us to expect a story about Madog ap Maredudd, the prince of Powys who died in 1160, and his rogue brother Iorwerth Goch, but this narrative is interrupted and derailed by the intrusive account of Rhonabwy's dream.²⁷ That is true, perplexing, and fascinating. Nevertheless, only twenty-eight lines into a text that runs to just under six hundred lines in Richards's edition, the narrator's attention turns from Madog and Iorwerth to Rhonabwy, and it never returns to its initial concerns. It is Rhonabwy's adventures that command the reader's attention through ninety-five percent of the tale.

These adventures begin with the arrival of Rhonabwy and his two companions, all of them part of a posse dispatched by Madog to find his brother, at the home of a certain Heilyn Goch, in search of hospitality for the night. The narrator attends lovingly to the appointments of Heilyn's household, and these speak volubly of poverty and slovenliness. The floor is

²⁶Förster identifies several additional manuscripts, of the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, that contain versions of the *Somniale Danielis* in Welsh. These are Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MSS Peniarth 26 (a collection of vaticinatory material), Llanstephan 117, Peniarth 172, and Cardiff, Central Library, MS 6.

²⁷Dafydd Glyn Jones, 'Breuddwyd Rhonabwy', in *Y Traddodiad Rhyddiaith yn yr Oesau Canol*, edited by Geraint Bowen (Llandysul, 1974), pp. 176–95 (p. 178).

slippery with dung and pitted with holes in which bovine urine has pooled; the fire is fueled by chaff and thus terribly smoky.²⁸ The visitors are offered only bread, cheese, and 'watered-down milk' for supper.²⁹ It is not explicit that the rations are inadequate, but the reader has the impression that the visitors are left rather hungry. And then the narrator comments on the sudden downpour outside; we might expect this to be the prelude to a description of the leaky roof in this sorry household, but instead the point is, oddly enough, that because of the storm 'it was not easy for anyone to go where they needed to go' (that is, to the privy).³⁰ The travellers are weary, and settle down to try to sleep, despite the fact that their beds are made of twigs and bits of verminous straw, covered with a tattered blanket and sheet, and their pillow is thin and filthy.³¹

This is the prelude to Rhonabwy's dream. The circumstances in which he sleeps would seem extremely inconducive to revelatory dreaming. Macrobius and the other dream theorists of Late Antiquity had all made the point, as we have seen, that dreams could be induced by the dreamer's physical condition, as well as by the perturbation of his mind, and that such dreams were inconsequential. Macrobius treated the topic in general terms, explaining, as we have seen, that either an excess or an insufficiency of food or drink might cause a nightmare.

Gregory, too, cites the too full and the too empty stomach as two possible causes of insignificant dreams.³² But in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as Alison Peden, Steven Kruger, and other scholars have demonstrated, the development of a new medical learning in the West, some of it deriving from Aristotle and some from the Galenic tradition mediated through the Arabic

²⁸'A phan doethant y mywn y gwelynt lawr pyllawc anwastat; yn y lle y bei vrynn arnaw a breid y glynei dyn arnaw rac llyfnet y llawr gan vissweil gwarthec a'e trwnc. Yn y lle y bei bwill, dros vynwgyl y troet yd aei y dyn gan gymysc dwfyr a thrwnc y gwarthec ... A phan deuthant y kynted y ty y gwelynt partheu llychlyt goletlwm, a gwrach yn ryuelu ar y neillparth. A phan delei annwyt arnei y byryei arffedeit o'r us am penn y tan hyt nat oed hawd y dyn o'r byt diodef y mwc hwnnw yn mynet y mywn y dwy firoen' (edited by Richards, p. 2, lines 11–22). ²⁹'... a dwyn y bwyt udunt, bara heid a chaws a glastwfyr llefrith', *ibid.*, p. 3, lines 5–6. ³⁰'Ac ar hynny nachaf dygyuor o wynt a glaw hyt nad oed hawd y neb vynet y'r aghenedyl', *ibid.*, p. 3, lines 7–9. *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, s.v. *angenedyl* (p. 30, col. 1), derives the word from *angen* + *eddyl* and defines it as 'necessity (of evacuating body); privy' and this has been accepted by translators, although Richards goes no further than quoting Timothy Lewis's *Glossary of Medieval Welsh Law* (1913), which renders the term more generally (or obliquely) as 'a necessary or imperative journey' (Richards, p. 34). ³¹'... nyt oed arnei namyn byrwellt dysdlyt chweinllyt, a boneu gwrysc yn amyl trwydaw ... Breckan lwytkoch galetlom toll a dannwyt arnei, a llenlliecin vrastoll trychwanawc ar uchaf y vreckan, a gobennyd lletwac a thudet govudyr idaw ar warthaf y llenlliecin', *ibid.*, p. 3, lines 11–18. ³²*Dialogues*, iv.50.2

scholarship of such authors as Avicenna, gave rise to what Kruger has called the 'somatizing' of later medieval dream theory.³³ The new medical theory placed considerable emphasis on the ways in which imbalance of the bodily humours could give rise to ill health, and on the visible and measurable indicators of such imbalance. Among those indicators were the patient's dreams: dreams about fire or the sun's heat, for example, or dreams in which the colour yellow predominated, might be a sign of cholera.³⁴ This kind of thinking led to reflection on the role of all sorts of bodily experiences and processes in the generation of dreams, including even revelatory dreams that originated outside the dreamer. If the dream could be a diagnostic tool, providing information about the body's condition to a medical practitioner, it followed that management of the body's condition could affect the nature of the dream. As Kruger has explained, twelfth-century writers on dreams were inclined to maintain that an unperturbed spirit, a well-ordered physiological condition, and cleanliness and peace in a bedchamber unpolluted by insalubrious vapors were all desirable prerequisites for illuminating dreams.³⁵

The medical learning of the later Middle Ages found its way into Wales not only in Latin but in the vernacular texts associated with the Meddygon Myddfai, a family of physicians from Carmarthenshire supposedly attached to the court of Rhys Gryg; a Deheubarth prince who died in 1233. The earliest versions that we have of these medical writings in Welsh are to be found in British Library, Additional MS 14912, a compendium of medical prose written in the late fourteenth century, and in the roughly contemporary Red Book of Hergest, where the medical material was written by Hywel Fychan.³⁶ Thus, the medical lore that was circulating in medieval Europe from the twelfth century on constituted an additional dimension of learned tradition in medieval Wales, along with — among other things — history, prophecy, methods of prognostication, and the interpretation of dreams. And

³³Steven F. Kruger, 'Medical and Moral Authority in the Late Medieval Dream,' in *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare*, edited by Peter Brown (Oxford, 1999), pp. 51–83 (pp. 51–63); Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, pp. 69–89; Alison M. Peden, 'Macrobius and Medieval Dream Literature', *Medium Aevum*, 54 (1985), 59–73. ³⁴See Kruger, *Dreaming*, pp. 56–57, for a list of twelfth-century Latin authors in whom this kind of diagnostic material is to be found, with further references. ³⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 76–78. ³⁶Oxford, Jesus College, 111, 231^v–238^r, cols 928–59. See J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language*, II, Part 1 (London, 1902), p. 7; Gifford Charles-Edwards, 'The Scribes of the Red Book of Hergest', p. 255; Morfydd E. Owen, 'Meddygon Myddfai: A Preliminary Survey of Some Medieval Medical Writing in Welsh', *Studia Celtica*, 10/11 (1975–76), 210–33. For the text, see *Rhyddiaith Cymraeg 1350–1425*; Pol Diverres, *Le plus ancien texte des Meddygon Myddveu* (Paris, 1913).

at various times and in various books, Hywel Fychan copied texts in all of these fields of study into manuscript anthologies. The Red Book, as we have now seen, contained texts dealing with each of these subjects, with the sole exception of dream interpretation, which is included in the Red Book of Talgarth.

The interest in physiology and dream science manifest in Welsh manuscripts of the late fourteenth century, and especially in the manuscripts from the Tawe valley in whose production Hywel Fychan was involved, is likely to have influenced contemporary readings of *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, a text that participated in the same literary culture. The fumes of the animal waste, the smoke, the flea-bites, the chilly and uncomfortable beds all predispose Rhonabwy to an insignificant dream, to an *insomnium* or *visum*, in Macrobian terms. The details of Heilyn Goch's hospitality shape an alert reader's expectations of the dream.

Most particularly, the reference to the storm that makes it difficult 'for anyone to go out and relieve himself'³⁷ affects the way that we read the dream that ensues. There are two possible consequences of the circumstance: the inhabitants of the house must either see to their needs inside the house, or control themselves until the storm abates. Neither is likely to enhance the conditions for sleeping and dreaming. The first solution makes worse the already unwholesome air of the house; the second threatens the physiological equilibrium of dreamers more directly.³⁸

Medieval medicine recognized the importance of urine in the balance of the humours in the body. Indeed, a patient's urine was the principal tool in the diagnosis of humoral imbalance and related disease. Medical treatises devote a good deal of space to uroscopy, the study of urine for diagnostic purposes. The Welsh medical treatises in the Red Book include, immediately following an extensive description of the elements and the qualities associated with each of the humours, a tractate with the incipit *Kanys trôy ansodeu y trônc y gellir adnabot beieu dyn. ae berigleu. ae heineu. ae gleiyyt o bell ac o agos* ('From the characteristics of a person's urine his weaknesses, dangers, diseases, and illnesses can be identified from afar and from near'):

Or byd dyfyrlyt trwnc neu debic y win coch, neu y win du, neu y win gôyrd, neu y olew, neu y waet, neu y drônc anieileit, ac os kywreint a edrych yr achôysson aghennreidafl hynn, ac ae deall ar neilltu, ef a wybyd pa un vôyhaf or gôlybreu hynn a ragorho, ae y ffeuma, ae y colera, ae y sanguis, ae y melancoli

³⁷In the translation of Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 215. ³⁸It is possible that the intention of *nad oed hawd y neb vynet y'r aghenedyl* is to indicate that the storm was sufficiently severe to prevent even an urgent journey, let alone a directionless quest for better accommodation. However, it has been the consensus of editors that the clause has to do more specifically with the impossibility of visiting the privy.

If urine is watery, or like red wine, or black wine, or green wine, or oil, or blood, or animal urine, and if an expert examines these symptoms, and interprets them individually, he will know which of these humours chiefly predominates, whether the phlegm, the choler, the blood, or the melancholy.³⁹

Urination served the purpose of helping to purge excessive humours from the body, and that was one of the reasons why urinary retention was a dangerous medical condition, one for which medieval medical treatises prescribed remedies:

Rac llesteir pissaw, kymer emhennyd ysgyuarna6c a thara6 h6nn6 ar win arogleua6r, ac yf ef.

For obstruction of urination, take the brain of a hare and put it in fragrant wine, and drink it.⁴⁰

To my mind, the preoccupation of medieval medical writing with imbalance of humours as the underlying cause of most disease, and with the role of urine in the diagnosis and elimination of these imbalances, suggests a reading of the detail in *Breudwyt Ronabwy* about the difficulty of going 'where they needed to go' during the storm. Taken with the other details about the night in Heilyn Goch's house, it points to the advent of a meaningless dream. And yet, such expectations are immediately destabilized by another detail:

Ac ar y parth arall y gwelynt croen dinawet melyn ar y parth. A blaenbren oed gan vn onadunt a gaffei vynet ar y croen hwnnw ... A Ronabwy, hyt na allei na chyscu na gorffowys, medyl yaw a oruc bot yn llei boen idaw mynet ar groen y dinawet melyn y'r parth y gysgu. Ac yno y kysgwys.

On the other dais, they could see a yellow oxhide on the dais. And it would be a privilege for anyone of them who got to go on that hide ... And Rhonabwy, since he could neither sleep nor rest, thought that there would be less discomfort for him on the yellow oxhide on the dais to sleep. And then he slept.⁴¹

³⁹Oxford, Jesus College, 111, 235^v, col. 947, line 38-236^r, col. 948, line 3; *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg 1350-1425*; Diverres, §140, p. 106; my translation. The full Red Book text of *Meddygon Myddfai* is translated in *Meddygon Myddvai: The Physicians of Myddvai*, edited by John Williams ab Ithel and translated by John Pughe (Llandoverly and London, 1861; repr. Felinfach, 1993). ⁴⁰Oxford, Jesus College, 111, 235^r, col. 944, lines 9-11; *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg 1350-1425*; Diverres, §119, p. 88; my translation. ⁴¹Richards, p. 2, lines 24-26, and p. 3, lines 21-24. Sioned Davies (*The Mabinogion*, p. 276, note to p. 215) explains that the *parth*, which both she and the Joneses (*The Mabinogion*, p. 138) render as 'dais', 'may refer to low built-in benching along the walls, either side of the central hearth, for sleeping and eating on'. *Parth* seems sometimes to refer to a dais or bench, sometimes to the floor of a room, sometimes to the hearth; literally, it simply denotes a region or area - a part. Thus, it is difficult to determine exactly on what sort of surface the oxhide lies. Davies renders *blaenbren oed gan vn onadunt a gaffei vynet ar y croen hwnnw* as 'good luck would

Some critics have understood the hide to portend a revelation for Rhonabwy. Sioned Davies writes that 'Rhonabwy falls asleep on a yellow ox-skin and is granted a vision, reflecting the ritual of the Irish poet-seers who were said to lie on the hides of bulls to acquire hidden knowledge',⁴² and Angela Carson that 'his sleeping on an ox-skin opened to Rhonabwy the possibility of receiving wisdom from the otherworld'.⁴³ Dafydd Glyn Jones argues that by evoking Irish rites of divination, the narrator creates for Rhonabwy circumstances favourable to a vision of the future, and then parodies such rites by describing instead a vision of the past; this point is reiterated by Proinsias Mac Cana in his guide to the *Mabinogion* in the *Writers of Wales* series.⁴⁴ The scholarship on *Breudwyt Ronabwy* has tended to read the significance of the hide in purely Celtic terms, invoking Irish analogues, but in fact the author could as readily have based the suggestion of an incubatory dream - a dream induced by sleeping in a sacred place having observed defined rituals - on Latin sources. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, a text well received in twelfth-century Wales and one known, it has been suggested, to the author of *Breudwyt Ronabwy*,⁴⁵ bases the colonization of Britain by Brutus and the Trojan survivors on an incubatory dream:

They came to a deserted city and there they found a temple of Diana. In the city there was a statue of the goddess which gave answers if by chance it was questioned by anyone ... They suggested to their leader that he should go to the temple and that, when he had offered sacrifices, he should inquire of the deity of the place what land she would grant them as a safe and permanent dwelling place ... When they reached the place, they wrapped fillets round their brows and, according to the age-old rite, they set up three sacrificial hearths to the three gods: to Jupiter, that is, to Mercury and to Diana. To each in turn they poured a libation. Brutus stood before the altar of the goddess, holding in his right hand a vessel full

befall whichever one of them got to lie on that skin' (p. 215), and the Joneses' translation is similar: 'And good luck it would be for the one of them whose lot it would be to go on that skin' (p. 138). Literally, according to *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, *blaenbren* in this context refers to a staff (from *pren*, a tree, timber, staff, or stick), that would fall toward the winner in a kind of lot drawing. See further Richards, p. 31, note to 2.25. The meaning of the sentence, thus, is that it would be fortunate, a piece of good luck, to have the chance to sleep on the hide on the bench, given the nastiness of the appointed *tyl*, or sleeping place, not that to sleep on the oxhide would induce good fortune. ⁴²*The Mabinogion*, p. xxi. ⁴³Angela Carson, 'The Structure and Meaning of *The Dream of Rhonabwy*', *Philological Quarterly*, 53 (1974), 289-303 (p. 294). ⁴⁴Dafydd Glyn Jones, 'Breuddwyd Rhonabwy', p. 179. He cites the account by Geoffrey Keating (*Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, 1, edited and translated by David Comyn, Irish Texts Society, 4 (London, 1902), pp. 348-49, §xlvi) of druids lying on the flesh side of the hides of sacrificed bulls, spread on wattles, for the purpose of conjuring. See also Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, pp. 89-90. ⁴⁵See, e.g., Richards, pp. xv-xvi.

of sacrificial wine mixed with the blood of a white hind, and with his face upturned toward the statue of the godhead he broke the silence with these words: 'O powerful goddess, terror of the forest glades, yet hope of the wild woodlands, you who have the power to go in orbit through the airy heavens and the halls of hell, pronounce a judgment which concerns the earth. Tell me which land you want us to inhabit. Tell me of a safe dwelling-place where I am to worship you down the ages and where, to the chanting of maidens, I shall dedicate temples to you'. This he said nine times; four times he proceeded round the altar, pouring the wine which he held upon the sacrificial hearth; then he lay down upon the skin of a hind which he had stretched before the altar. Having sought for slumber, he at length fell asleep. It was then about the third hour of the night, when mortal beings succumb to the sweetest rest. It seemed to him that the goddess stood before him and spoke these words to him ...⁴⁶

Virgil, too, describes incubation on animal skins in the *Aeneid*, as Latinus seeks to discover the import of several alarming omens at the oracle of Faunus:

huc dona sacerdos
cum tulit et caesarum ovium sub nocte silenti
pellibus incubuit stratis somnosque petivit,
multa modis simulacra videt volitantia miris
et varias audit voces fruiturque deorum

⁴⁶Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, translated by Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 65; my emphasis. The text of the Welsh translation of Geoffrey's *Historia* in the Red Book is as follows: 'ac yna y doethant y hen dinas diffeith oed yn yr ynys. yno yd oed demyl y Diana dŷyges yr hely. ac yno yd oed delŷ y diana yn rodi gŷrtheb y baŷp or a ovynnit idi ... a chyghori aŷnaethant y eu tyŷysaŷc mynet yr demyl ac aberthu yr dŷyges. a gofyn pa wlat y pressŷylei oe chyuan hedu yn dragŷydaŷl idaŷ ac oe etiued. a gŷedy eu dyuot yr demyl gŷisgaŷ aŷnaethpŷyt coron o ŷinŷyd am benn brutus. ac ynherŷyd hen gynefaŷt kynneu aŷnaethpŷyt teir kynneu yr tri duŷ. Nyt amgen Jubiter. a Mercurius. a diana. ac aberthu y bop vn onadunt ar neilltu. ac odynd yd aeth brutus chun rac bron allaŷr diana. a llestyr yn y law yn llawn o win. a gŷaet ewic wenn adrychael y ŷyneb aŷnaet gyuarŷyneb ar dŷywes. a dyŷedut ŷrthi yr ymadraŷd hŷn. Ae tydy dŷyges gyuoethaŷc ti yssyd aruthur yr beid koet. yt y mae kenat ŷrthi treiglaŷ aŷyrolon lŷybreu a gellŷg eu dylyet y daearolyn ac vŷfernolyn dei. dyŷet ti ymi pa dayar y pressŷylaf i. yndiheu yndi. a pha eistedua ydanrydedŷyf i. dydy trŷy yr oessoed o demleu a gŷerinaŷl goreu gŷerydon. A gŷedy dyŷedut hynny ohonaŷ hyt ympenn naŷeith treiglaŷ ygkylch yr allaŷr aŷnaeth pedeir gweith. a dineu y gŷin oed yny laŷ ymyŷn geneu y dŷyges. a thannu croen yr ewic wen rac bron yr allaŷr. Ac ar hŷnnŷ gorŷed. ac am y dryded aŷr or nos Pan oed esmŷythaf gantaŷ y hun y gŷelei y dŷyges yn seuyll rac y vron ac yn dyŷedut ŷrthaŷ val hynn.' Oxford, Jesus College, 111, 10^v, col. 40, lines 20–44; *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg, 1350–1425*. See also *The Text of the Bruts from the Red Book of Hergest*, edited by John Rhys and J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Oxford, 1890), pp. 51–52, cols 40–41. Dafydd Glyn Jones notices this parallel in his essay as well: 'Breuddwyd Rhonabwy', p. 179.

conloquio atque imis Acheronta adfatur Avernis.
Hic et tum pater ipse petens response Latinus
centum lanigeras mactabat rite bidentis
atque harum effultus tergo stratisque iacebat
velleribus: subita ex alto vox reddita luco est.

Here the priest, when he brings the sacred gifts and looks for sleep beneath the silent night— stretched out on the hides of slaughtered sheep— will see whole hosts of phantoms, miracles on the wing, hear the voices swarm, engage with the gods in words and speak with Acheron in Avernus' deepest pools. Here too, Latinus himself, seeking out responses, slaughtered a hundred yearling sheep in the old way and there he lay ensconced, at rest on fleecy hides when a sudden voice broke from the grove's depth.⁴⁷

Thus, the author of *Breudwyt Ronabwy* could have drawn his inspiration as readily from the Latin literary tradition as from a common Celtic inheritance if indeed he sought to evoke thoughts of divination when he spread the yellow oxhide on the *parth* in Heilyn's house, and gave an exhausted but sleepless Rhonabwy the idea of exchanging his flea ridden pile of scratchy straw for its more welcoming surface. The Welsh translation of *Historia Regum Britanniae*, after all, was available along with *Breudwyt Ronabwy* in the Red Book of Hergest, and it may have been assumed that the audience for the tale was familiar with *Brut y Brenhinedd* and other learned literature of the period.

Is it indeed the purpose of the *croen dinawet melyn*, otherwise a seemingly incongruous feature of Heilyn's house, to awaken in the reader an expectation of a revelatory dream? I believe that it is; I believe too that the disjunction between our expectation as readers, and Rhonabwy's modest hope that he will simply be able to get some sleep, is one of the many and various jokes in the tale. Rituals of incubation, after all, are traditionally complex and formal, not to mention deliberate: witness the libations, prayers, and circumambulations that accompany Brutus' incubation in the temple of Diana. It is not really to be expected that Rhonabwy will induce revelation merely by sleeping on the hide of an animal which he has not sacrificed, and yet the juxtaposition of the oxhide and the sleeper puts a bookish reader — though not Rhonabwy himself — in mind of such things.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Virgil, *Aeneid*, vii.86–95, translated by Robert Fagles (New York, 2006).

⁴⁸Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan has made this point about Rhonabwy's expectations of the oxhide versus the reader's in 'Breuddwyd Rhonabwy and Later Arthurian Tales', in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, edited by Rachel Bromwich and others (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 183–208 (p. 189).

As our hero falls asleep, such a reader simultaneously knows that every circumstance of this sleep militates against any but the most meaningless dreams, and yet at some level expects revelation.

Ac yn gytneit ac yd aeth hun yn y lygeit y rodet drych idaw y vot ef a'e gedymdeithon yn kerdet ar traws Maes Argyngroec.

And as soon as sleep came into his eyes, a *drych* was given to him that he and his companions were journeying across Maes Argyngroec.⁴⁹

The *drych* in this passage is translated as 'vision' both by the Joneses and by Sioned Davies. In the context of medieval dream theory, however, it makes sense to inquire more closely what kind of sleep experience it is.

The most common meaning of *drych* is mirror, but it is also used in the sense of 'image' or 'form'. The database of late medieval Welsh prose identifies twenty-four instances of the word in the Red Book of Hergest, and in only nine of those does it refer to a 'mirror'. Significantly, *drych* occurs on several occasions in *Brut y Brenhinedd*, the Welsh version of Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, to denote various preternatural and illusory bodies. When Merlin's mother responds to Vortigern's question as to the identity of the boy's father, she answers that she was raped by a creature having the *drych* of a young man.⁵⁰ Vortigern's court scholars tell him about the incubus — the demonic being believed to descend upon persons in their sleep — and tell him that it is a spirit that takes on a human *drych*.⁵¹ Elsewhere in the Red Book version of *Brut y Brenhinedd*, *drych* is used of the forms that Merlin gives magically to Uther and himself, allowing Uther to appear to Ygern as her husband, Gorlois, and so find his way into her bed.⁵² The word is used in the same way in the First Branch of the Mabinogi in recounting Arawn's magical exchange of shapes and appearances with

⁴⁹Richards, p. 3, lines 25–27. ⁵⁰Nachaf y g6el6n yn dyuot attaf yn drych g6r Jeueinc or byt. ac yndodi y d6yla6 ymkylch ac yn ymgaru ami. ac or di6ed yn kyda6 a mi dr6y vy hun am hada6 yn veicha6c a g6ybydet dy brudder di athoethineb argl6yd vrenhinn na bu imi eiryet acha6s a g6r namyn hynny', Oxford, Jesus College, 111, 29^c, col. 113; *Rhyddiaith Gynraeg, 1350–1425*.

⁵¹apulenus heb ef ady6eit pan draetho o du6 ar seint. bot ry6 genedyl o yspryt yn press6yla6 r6g y lleuat ar dayar. ar rei hynny a al6n ni diefyl gog6ydedic. a ran yndunt or dayar ac o dyna6l anyan. a ran arall o anyan egylyon ynpress6yla6 yno. a phan y mynont y gallant kymryt furyf dyna6l ac drych arnadunt. a chyda6 arg6raged vely. ac atfyd vn or reihynny adoeth at y wreic da hon. ac ae beichoges pan gahat y g6as Jeuanc h6nn', *ibid.*, 29^c, col. 114. ⁵²Kanys mi a 6n o medeginyaetheu .i. rodi ytti drych ac ansa6d g6rlois. hyt na bo neb a 6ypo na vo ti vo g6rlois. ac 6rth hynny o mynny dithu v6udhau y hynny. Minheu ath wna6 di yn y drych ar wed y mae g6rlois. ac 6lphin oryt garada6c yn rith J6rdan o dindagol', *ibid.*, 38^c, col. 150, lines 27–34; 'a g6edy b6r6 drych a ffuryf g6rlois y ana6. ef a ymchoeles yn uthur penn dragon', 38^c, col. 152, lines 12–17.

Pwyll.⁵³ The remaining instances of *drych* in the Red Book refer to forms or shapes of a more ordinary sort. Rhun ab Owain is praised in *Brut y Tywysogion*, for example, as having been fair *o ffuruf a drych*, 'of form and appearance'.⁵⁴

In relation to the terms for dream experiences used by Macrobius, *drych*, essentially 'that which is seen', is semantically closer to *visio* and *visum* than to *somnium*. Rhonabwy's dream is no *visio* in Macrobian terms, for 'we call a dream a *visio*', according to Macrobius, 'if it actually comes true' (1.iii.9, p. 90).⁵⁵ As more than one critic has observed, Rhonabwy's dream takes him into the past, not the future; it can be construed as a *visio* only in a parodic sense. The *drych* might well qualify, however, as a *visum*, the dream known in Greek as a phantasma. Indeed, Macrobius asserts that the ἐπιάλτης or incubus — described in *Brut y Brenhinedd*, as we have seen, as a creature with the *drych* of a young man — is a subset of the *visum*.⁵⁶ Of course, there is no oppressive weight like the incubus in Rhonabwy's dream. However, it is also characteristic of the *visum*, according to Macrobius, that it 'comes upon one in the moment between wakefulness and slumber, in the so-called "first cloud of sleep"', and indeed the *drych* comes to Rhonabwy as soon as sleep comes to his eyes.⁵⁷ 'In this drowsy condition', Macrobius continues (as quoted above), 'a person thinks he is still awake, and imagines he sees specters rushing at him or wandering vaguely about, differing from natural creatures in size and shape, and a host of divers things, either delightful or disturbing' (1.iii.7, p. 89). As Rhonabwy's dream begins, Rhonabwy and his companions are being pursued by a terrifying rider, and all is characterized by motion and *twryf*, 'tumult'. And the inhabitants of the dream world are much larger than Rhonabwy and his companions.

⁵³'Yna y rodes ara6n y ffuryf ac drych e hun y p6yll pendeuic dyuet. ac y kymherth ynteu y ffuryf ehun ac drych', *ibid.*, 176^c, col. 714, lines 1–3. Cf. *Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet*, edited by R. L. Thomson (Dublin, 1957), lines 138–39, p. 6. It is interesting in this connection that Triad 27 names *Drych eil Kibdar* (Drych the son of Cibddar) as one of *tri lledrithog Ynys Prydain*, 'the three enchanter of the Island of Britain': *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain*, edited and translated by Rachel Bromwich, third edition (Cardiff, 2006), p. 59. ⁵⁴*Brut y Tywysogion, or, The Chronicle of the Princes: Red Book of Hergest Version*, edited and translated by Thomas Jones (Cardiff, 1955), pp. 122–23. ⁵⁵Visio est autem cum id quis videt quod eodem modo quo apparuerat eveniet', *Ambrosii Theodosii Macrobiani Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, edited by James Willis (Leipzig, 1963), p. 10. ⁵⁶1.iii.7: 'in hoc genere est et ἐπιάλτης, quem publica persuasio quiescentes opinatur invadere, et pondere suo pressos ac sentientes gravare', *Commentarii*, p. 10. ⁵⁷With this detail we might contrast the detail in Geoffrey and in *Brut y Brenhinedd*, that Brutus' dream in which Diana appears to him occurs 'in the third hour of the night when it was most restful for him', *Red Book Bruts*, edited by Rhys and Evans, p. 52.

There are a number of signs at the start of the dream, despite the hints of ritual incubation that precede it, that it is nothing more than a meaningless *visum* brought on by Rhonabwy's anxieties and discomforts. However, the ground shifts under the reader's feet again as Iddawg introduces himself to Rhonabwy. Iddawg, the first figure to appear in the dream, will serve as Rhonabwy's guide on the journey to Rhyd-y-groes and to the assembly there and its bizarre events. He fills the role of the Cumaean Sibyl in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, and more to the point, of the great general Scipio Africanus in the *Somnium Scipionis* of Cicero, the object of Macrobius' *Commentary*. The reader is invited to perceive Iddawg as an oracle, but virtually in the same moment that reading of the dream is snatched away. An oracle, according to Macrobius, is 'a parent, or a pious or revered man, or a priest, or even a god [who] clearly reveals what will or will not transpire, and what action to take or avoid' (1.iii.8, p. 90).⁵⁸ Iddawg, although he identifies the dramatic personae and explains some of the enigmatic events of the dream for Rhonabwy, all but announces that he is an unreliable narrator, or false oracle:

'Ny chelaf ragot vyg kystlwn, Idawc uab Mynyo. Ac nyt o'm henw y'm clywir yn vwyaf, namyn o'm llysenw ... Idawc Cord Prydein y'm gelwir ... Vn oedwn o'r kenadeu yg Katgamlan y rwng Arthur a Medrawt y nei. A gwr ieuanc drythyll oedwn i yna, ac rac vy chwannoctet y vrwydyr y tervysgeis y rygtunt. Sef y ryw teruysc a orugum, pan ym gyrrai i yr amherawdyr Arthur y venegi y Vedrawt y uot yn datmaeth ac yn ewythyr idaw, ac rac llad meibon teymed Ynys Prydein a'e gwyrda, y erchi tagnefed. A pan dywettei Arthur yr ymadrawd teckaf wrthf o'r a llei y dywedwn ynneu yr ymadrawd hwnnw yn hacraf a allwn wrth Vedrawt. Ac o hynny y gyrrwyrt amaf ynneu Idawc Cord Brydein.'

'I won't conceal my lineage from you — Iddawg ap Mynio. But I'm mostly not known by my name but by my nickname ... I'm called Iddawg the Agitator of Britain ... I was one of the messengers at Camlan between Arthur and Medrawd his nephew, and I was a spirited young man then, and because of my lust for battle I stirred things up between them. This is the kind of trouble I made: when the emperor Arthur sent me to remind Medrawd that was his foster father and uncle, and to ask for peace to prevent the slaughter of the kings' sons of the Island of Britain, and when Arthur would speak to me the fairest speech he could, I would speak that speech as offensively as I could to Medrawd. And that is why I came to be called Iddawg the Agitator of Britain.'⁵⁹

Not only is Iddawg someone who has been a deliberate misinterpreter, he is as well one of only three figures in *Breudwyt Ronabwy* who are otherwise unknown to Welsh tradition. He appears only once in *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, and that is in a late manuscript that clearly derives its account of Iddawg

⁵⁸ 'et est oraculum quidem cum in somnis parens vel alia sancta gravisve persona seu sacerdos vel etiam dues aperte eventurum, faciendum vitandumve denuntiat', *Commentarii*, p. 10. ⁵⁹ Richards, p. 4, line 23-p. 5, line 11. My translation.

from the tale.⁶⁰ It is among the many ironies of *Breudwyt Ronabwy* that in a tale full of characters drawn from history and known narrative tradition, the role of oracular guide is assigned to one who is, as far as we can tell, the author's own invention. For a reader versed in Welsh tradition — and we do well here to remember that there is a text of *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* in the Red Book of Hergest⁶¹ — the question might well arise at this point in the story, 'Who on earth is this fellow?'

Within the first fifth of the tale, the audience has been teased into anticipating the account of a revelatory dream despite circumstances hospitable only to a meaningless *insomnium* or *visum*, and into recognizing Iddawg as an oracular guide only to discover that he is — or to make it still more bewildering, has been — a calculating misconstruer. Despite narrative detail that grounds the dream decisively in the material, the text invites us to expect a dream from the spiritual realm. For a reader familiar with the learned literature of medieval Wales, *Breudwyt Ronabwy*'s play with dream theory and medical lore accentuates and enhances its wit, while at the same time raising real questions about the interpretation of signs.

Notwithstanding the various options for classifying Rhonabwy's dream laid out in the first 125 lines (of the edited text), the tale settles down from that point on to describe what would appear to be unmistakably an enigmatic dream, a *somnium*. It devotes itself enthusiastically to description in excruciating detail of regiments and individuals whose armour, trappings, and insignia are wildly and very specifically colourful. The action in the narrative, on the other hand, for the most part concerns the inscrutable game of *gwyddbwyll* played by Arthur and Owain, and the mayhem perpetrated by Owain's ravens. Very little happens. The reader casts about as though veritably in a dream, asking what is going on and what it all means.

Rhonabwy's dream calls for interpretation, and for many a medieval reader the interpretation of such a dream would have called for the *Somniale*

⁶⁰ See Richards, p. xvi, and Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 277. According to Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, p. 141, 'R and Pen. 51 are the only manuscripts to give complete texts of this triad [51, Trywyr Gwarth a uu yn Ynys Prydein], and Pen. 51 [c. 1450–1500; see Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, p. 61] is interesting as including under c [Medrawd] a name known elsewhere only in the tale of Breudwyt Ronabwy: Idawc ap Nynian ... idawc korn prydyn'. The passage in Peniarth 51 reads as follows: 'Ac yna doeth idawc ap nyniaw yr hwnn a elwir idawc korn prydyn yr hwnn a wnaeth y gynnen rrwng Arthur a medrod', *ibid.*, p. 140. Iddawg also appears in *Bonedd y Saint*, a genealogical tract, but only in two late-fifteenth- or sixteenth-century copies of a text well attested from the thirteenth century on. Here too, in other words, the reference seems likely to depend on *Breudwyt Ronabwy*. See *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts*, edited by P. C. Bartrum (Cardiff, 1966), p. 66, §88. ⁶¹ Oxford, Jesus College, 111, 144^v–147^r, cols 588–600.

Danielis, with its lists of dream motifs unequivocally construed. A Welsh reader of the kinds of text to be had in the Red Book might also have been a reader of the Welsh dream book that Hywel Fychan copied into the Red Book of Talgarth.

Like the Latin texts of the *Somniale*, this dream book offered plenty of guidance on the significance of colours. The colours mentioned in the Welsh dream books are black, white, red, and yellow; as it happens, these are also the colours most frequently mentioned in *Breudwyt Ronabwy*: *du*, *coch*, *gwyn*, and *melyn*.⁶² The descriptions of individuals, of hosts and of horses alike ring changes on these four, with the occasional addition of *glas*, translated both by the Joneses and by Sioned Davies as 'green'.⁶³ There is as well a single instance of *porffor*, 'purple'.⁶⁴ Black, white, red, and yellow predominate, however. And these are as well the colours associated with the humours (of which more below).

A reader turning to the dream book in an effort to make sense of Rhonabwy's dream would find the following tantalizing passages:

Gwelet peis goch, uffern a arwydockaa ...
 Gwelet yn marchogaeth march gwelw, kennat da a digrifwch ...
 Gwelet yn marchogaeth march du, kyfyngwyd a arwydockaa.
 Gwelet yn marchogaeth march coch, kennat da a arwydockaa

To see a red tunic signifies hell ...
 To see [someone] riding a white (or pale) horse [means] good news and delight ...
 To see [someone] riding a black horse signifies distress.
 To see [someone] riding a red horse signifies good news.⁶⁵

The dream book offers guidance, but provides no hope of definitive interpretation when a dream features horses of each of these colours, and people wearing garments not only of red, but of white, black, yellow, and green as well — many of them parti-colored.⁶⁶ The surfeit of signifiers defeats the

⁶²This review of colour terms in *Breudwyt Ronabwy* excludes hair colours. Compounds of the four basic colour words are common — *purdu*, *eglwrem*, *fflamgoch*, *gwyrhvelyn*, etc. There are also occasional instances of some other terms for the same colours, such as *canwelw*, 'pale white', p. 16, line 23 and elsewhere.

⁶³Richards p. 14, line 1; *burlas*, p. 15, line 20; *paladyrlas*, p. 16, line 4; *trymleision*, p. 16, line 25; also *erchlas*, p. 15, lines 11–12, 'dapple grey', and *asur glas*, 'blue azure', p. 18, line 7. ⁶⁴*ibid.*, p. 17, line 30. ⁶⁵Förster, 'Das älteste kymrische Traumbuch', pp. 75–79; also *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg*, 1350–1425. ⁶⁶I cite here only entries in the text of *Deall Breuddwyddion* in NLW MS Llanstephan 27. Elsewhere in the European dream-book tradition, in Latin, French, English, and later Welsh texts, there are entries concerning yellow horses as well, and white, black, and green clothing, as well as red. In the Welsh text preserved in MS Peniarth 26 (c. 1456), pp.

objectives of the *Somniale Danielis*: clarity, certainty, and univocality. In much the same way that the circumstances of the dream raise contradictory expectations, so do its many colours suggest interpretability only to confound the attempt to construe it by the book.

It is not only the colours in *Breudwyt Ronabwy* that might send a medieval reader to the dream book. One might hope to shed light on other images of the dream as well. For example, the inscrutable battle of Arthur's men with Owain's ravens:

Gwelet adar drwy dy hun, ennill a arwydockaa ...
 Gwelet yn ymlad a llawer o adar, gwythloned a arwydockaa⁶⁷

To see birds in your sleep signifies profit ...
 To see [someone] fighting with a lot of birds signifies strife.

It is the colours in their abundance, though, that most attract and resist reference to manuals of dream interpretation.

Indeed, I would propose a reading of the concluding passage of *Breudwyt Ronabwy* that addresses the implicitly inevitable association of the tale with the dream science of the Middle Ages. *Breudwyt Ronabwy* concludes thus:

And here is the reason that no one, neither poet nor *cyfarwydd*, knows the dream without a book: because of the great number of colours there were on the horses, and the great number of various unusual colours on both the weapons and their harness, and on the precious garments and the magical stones.⁶⁸

It was at one time common for this final sentence to be taken to mean that *Breudwyt Ronabwy* is not a tale that can be recounted orally, even by a

73–81, and several later manuscripts, white garments signify honour, black garments signify sorrow, green betoken joy, and red, suffering. See J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language*, 1, Part 2 (London, 1899), p. 351. In Llanstephan 117, a manuscript of the mid-sixteenth century, a yellow horse is a sign of illness or exhaustion (p. 91b, 34). It is quite possible that some of these traditions were known in mid-fourteenth century Wales, despite their absence from the Llanstephan 27 text, but I do not want to claim that this was the case. For a comprehensive inventory of medieval dream-book entries, see Steven R. Fischer, *The Complete Medieval Dreambook: A Multilingual, Alphabetical Somnia Danielis Collection* (Bern, 1982), esp. pp. 46–47. This volume collates twenty-three manuscripts of the tenth to sixteenth centuries, with texts in Latin, Old English, Middle English, French, and German, although not in Welsh. Martin, *Somniale Danielis*, pp. 122–23. ⁶⁷Förster, 'Das älteste kymrische Traumbuch', pp. 64 and 69; *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg*, 1350–1425. At least one version of the dream book, a late-fifteenth-century Latin text published in Rome, included entries explicitly involving ravens: 'to see ravens signifies strife, and to see them overhead signifies danger'. See Fischer, p. 120. ⁶⁸Richards, p. 21, lines 10–14: 'A llyma yr achaws na wyr neb y breidwyt, na bard na chyfarwydd, heb lyuyr, o achaws y geniuier lliw a oed ar y me[i]rch, a hynny o amruael liw odidawc ac ar y aruev ac eu kyweirdebeu, ac ar y llenneu gwerthuawr a'r mein rinwedawl'.

professional like the *cyfarwydd* who was both tradition bearer and storyteller,⁶⁹ but one that must be read out of a book.⁷⁰ A number of scholars, however, have pointed out that *Breudwyt Ronabwy* might actually be easier than some tales to remember without written aids, precisely because the descriptions, the dialogues identifying the cast of characters, and the exchanges that accompany the game of *gwyddbwyll* in which Arthur and Owain engage are in so many ways formulaic. These scholars have looked for ways to reinterpret the epilogue.⁷¹ Proinsias Mac Cana, for example, believed that the passage addresses itself to the literary textuality of *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, writing that 'while the text contains much colourful description, neither its language nor its diction is particularly abstruse, and I suspect that the author is simply poking some good-humoured fun at the pretensions of traditional storytellers while indirectly acknowledging the fact that the Dream was a written text intended to be read'.⁷² It would be no rejection of that view to read the epilogue as simultaneously a teasing invitation to resort to a dream book, as well as a sign of the text's awareness of itself as more deeply embedded in the book learning of the age than in the traditional *cyfarwyddyd* or lore upon which it draws. It is a tale to be understood properly only by those who are thoroughly immersed in the kinds of text known only in books: history, medicine, and dream science.

For indeed, the *cynifer lliw*, the 'great number of colours', in *Breudwyt Ronabwy* are suggestive not only of the definitions that might be found in the *Somniale Danielis* or its Welsh version, *Deall y Breudwydon*. The sense that there are too many signs and very little signified is further compounded by the fact that the overwhelmingly dominant colours of Rhonabwy's dream — black, white, red, and yellow — are, as mentioned earlier, the colours associated with the humours: black with melancholy or black bile, white with phlegm, red with blood, and yellow with yellow bile or choler. The medical approach to dreaming, as this was developing in the West from the twelfth century on,⁷³ read dream colours as indicators of an excess of the humour associated with the dominant colour. An erudite and sophisticated reader of *Breudwyt Ronabwy* might think rather of a treatise on diagnosis than of the *Somniale Danielis*.⁷⁴ However, with such a riot of humoral colors

pervading the dream, the dream data would be of limited use to a physician. From the medical perspective as well as from the vaticinatory, there are too many signs for them to be of any use in sorting out the muddle of the dreaming body.

Readings of *Breudwyt Ronabwy* have for some time focused attention on its highly self-conscious, highly literary, playful, and parodic character and tone. It may well comment on matters external to itself — on the political circumstances of Wales in whatever historical moment it is deemed to have been written, for instance, or the reception of Arthurian romance; several critics have approached it from these perspectives.⁷⁵ Overwhelmingly, however, *Breudwyt Ronabwy* is a narrative about narration. Its principal referents are other texts. As Dafydd Glyn Jones succinctly put it, 'Stori lenyddol yw hi, yn patrymu defnyddiau chwedlonol mewn modd cywrain a gogleisiol, ac yn dychanu chwedloniaeth ar yr un pryd' ('It is a literary story, modeling narrative usages in a clever and amusing fashion, and satirizing storytelling at the same time').⁷⁶

In his superb discussion of the ways in which *Breudwyt Ronabwy* 'continually direct[s] our attention to the narrative act itself', Edgar Slotkin has shown how the author manipulates the chronology of his narrative materials (the fabula) so that the story in the dream runs backward.⁷⁷ Opening in the frame story with the deterioration of Powys during and after the reign of Madog ap Maredudd (d. 1160), it moves in Iddawg's account of himself back to the calamitous end of the reign of Arthur at Camlan, and then in the dream vision proper to the emblem of Arthurian triumph, the Battle of Badon.

Slotkin further demonstrates how effectively the author of *Breudwyt Ronabwy* elaborates description of the troops and individuals who wander into the tale to the point where that description threatens to overwhelm the narrative:

The descriptive elements in the dream become so thick, finally collapsing into a bare list or catalogue at the end of the tale — just names as descriptive elements, so to speak, prosopography without qualifiers — and the narrative becomes so submerged by the descriptive that the dream misleadingly appears at the level of the text as a series of static tableaux.⁷⁸

imbalance from dreams in Welsh. Thus, I am suggesting only that such material may have been known in the circles in which learned literature was cultivated, whether in Latin or in Welsh. ⁷⁵See especially Helen Fulton, 'Cydestun Gwleidyddol Breudwyt Ronabwy', *LIC*, 22 (1999), 42–56; Carson, 'The Structure and Meaning of The Dream of Rhonabwy'; Richards, pp. xxxviii–xxxix; Dafydd Glyn Jones, 'Breuddwyd Rhonabwy', pp. 177–78. ⁷⁶*ibid.*, p. 194. ⁷⁷Edgar M. Slotkin, 'The Fabula, Story, and Text of Breuddwyd Rhonabwy', *CMCS*, 18 (Winter 1989), 89–113 (p. 108). ⁷⁸*ibid.*, p. 103. See the discussion of this matter at pp. 100–103.

⁶⁹See Sioned Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd: Astudiaeth o Dechnegau Naratif yn Y Mabinogion* (Cardiff, 1995), especially pp. 1–4. ⁷⁰See for example Jones and Jones, *The Mabinogion*, p. xxvi. ⁷¹Oliver Padel, *Arthur in Middle Welsh Literature* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 95; John K. Bollard, 'Traddodiad a Dychan yn Breuddwyd Rhonabwy', *LIC*, 13 (1985), 155–63 (pp. 156–58). ⁷²*The Mabinogi*, pp. 88–89; see also Davies, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 279–80, where she proposes that the epilogue indicates only the fundamentally literary nature of *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, the absence of an oral past. ⁷³See above, pp. 81–83. ⁷⁴Though I need to make it clear that, to the best of my knowledge, there is no treatise concerning diagnosis of humoral

Brynley Roberts, for his part, directs our attention to *Breudwyt Ronabwy* as a satire on 'contemporary literary standards', especially those of the romance, with its tendency toward *entrelacement* and digression, mentioning specifically 'the irrelevant use of a multitude of personal names devoid of their traditional connotation and the inconsequentiality of the events in the dream'.⁷⁹

Dafydd Glyn Jones's insightful and nuanced essay on *Breudwyt Ronabwy* adds to the list of literary fashions upon which the tale casts a satiric eye the use of dreams in literature. 'Above all', he writes, 'there is, I believe, satire on the use of dreams in stories, on the importance and the significance that were customarily attributed to dreaming and the theory of learned men of the age about what a dream was — or what it should be'.⁸⁰

All of these observations contribute to our appreciation of the erudite complexity and sheer wit of *Breudwyt Ronabwy*. I suggest that our reading of the text is still further enriched by attending to the implications of its place in the Red Book of Hergest, where it is associated with *brut*, with arcane modes of knowledge, and with the international learned traditions that provide access to such wisdom. For at least some readers — Hywel Fychan and, presumably, for his patron Hopcyn apTomas — *Breudwyt Ronabwy* belonged with that sort of literature, whether because it was of its kind or because it resonated with it. If we accept that its position in the Red Book matters to the reading of *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, we can deepen our reading further by looking at the range of international learned texts, both Latin and vernacular adaptations thereof, known in Wales, and attested in manuscripts contemporary with the Red Book — or, in the case of Macrobius' *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, much earlier.

I do not propose here to reopen the question of the date of composition of *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, for which dates ranging from 1160 to 1400 have been proposed.⁸¹ We have no evidence of the existence of the text before the

⁷⁹Brynley F. Roberts, 'Tales and Romances', in *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, 1, edited by A. O. H. Jarman and Gwilym Rees Hughes (Swansea, 1976), pp. 203–43 (pp. 231–34); quotation from p. 234. ⁸⁰'Ar ben hyn oll, mae yma, mi gredaf i, ddychan ar y defnydd o freuddwydion mewn chwedlau, ar y pwysigrwydd a'r ystyr yr arferid eu tadogi ar freuddwyd, ar theori gwyr dysgedig yr oes ynghylch beth oedd breuddwyd — neu beth ddylai fod', Jones, 'Breuddwyd Rhonabwy', p. 177. ⁸¹On the dating of *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, see Richards, pp. xxxvii–xli; Mary E. Giffin, 'The Date of the Dream of Rhonabwy', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1958, pp. 33–40; T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Date of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *ibid.*, 1970–71, pp. 263–98 (repr. in *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays*, edited by C. W. Sullivan (New York and London, 1996), pp. 19–58 (p. 22)); Carson, 'The Structure and Meaning of The Dream of Rhonabwy', p. 290 et passim.

making of the Red Book in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, but it is of course the case with most texts in the medieval Celtic languages — and not only in Celtic languages — that the earliest manuscript witness is considerably later than the date that can be assigned a work on linguistic or other grounds. The question of the date of *Breudwyt Ronabwy* remains an open one, and one to which this discussion may or may not have something to contribute in the long run.

My argument here is rather that regardless of the date of composition, the fourteenth-century reception of *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, as indicated by the codicology of the Red Book of Hergest, has something to tell us about ways of reading it. What it suggests is that, within the context of learned literature in which it is physically and culturally embedded, one of the ways in which *Breudwyt Ronabwy* responds to literary texts is by reflection on interpretation as one of the practices inevitably associated with reading, whether of stories or of dreams.

Medical symptoms, the phases of the moon, the characteristic weather of each month, and dreams — all of them called for interpretation. Texts, at least some of them, resembled these natural phenomena in requiring construal. A 'master of Brut' like Hopcyn ap Tomas must certainly have well understood that prophecy required elucidation, to cite the most obvious example of texts that could fulfill their purpose only when their meaning was mediated by an interpreter. Indeed, *Breudwyt Ronabwy* itself contains the sign of its own preoccupation with issues of interpretation when it reports that poets arrived to recite Arthur's praises, but 'nyt oed dyn a adnapei y gerd honno, namyn Kadyrieith ehun, eithyr y uot yn uolyant y Arthur' ('there was no one who could understand that poetry other than Cadyriaith himself, except that it was in praise of Arthur').⁸² Fourteenth-century readers realised that narrative texts, too, could be differently read and that the stakes could be high: in *Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein*, as we have seen, the life of the emperor's son depends upon the effectiveness with which the tellers of tales — the empress, the wise men, and ultimately the emperor's son himself — extract meaning from their own parables. *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, which follows *Seith Doethon Rufein* in the Red Book, engages the problem of interpretation differently. It employs the dream device to suggest an analogy between dream narratives and textual narratives, and then offers a dream that wittily but absolutely resists interpretation. Indeed, the dream narrative in which individual mental experience and communally shared text coalesce seems to revel in its own opacity.

Macrobius himself had drawn the analogy between dreams and fictions.

⁸²Richards, p. 20, lines 14–16.

In the opening chapters of his *Commentary*, he responds to those who might regard the analysis of a fictional dream, that of Scipio as recounted by Cicero, as inappropriate to philosophy. In the process, he constructs a system of fictions, among which are three sorts of *narrationes fabulosae* that stand in varying relation to truth and decorum. Entirely fictitious fables had no place in philosophical discourse. Those, on the other hand, that 'rest on a solid foundation of truth ... treated in fictitious style' (i.ii.9, p. 85) might be acceptable to the philosopher, but only if they offer 'a dignified and decent conception of holy truths, with respectable events and characters ... presented beneath a modest veil of allegory' (i.ii.11, p. 85). He rejects stories in which

the presentation of the plot involves matters that are base and unworthy of divinities and are monstrosities of some sort (as for example gods caught in adultery, Saturn cutting off the privy parts of his father Caelus and himself thrown into chains by his son and successor), a type which philosophers prefer to disregard altogether. (i.ii.11, p. 85)

The link between the reading of dreams and the reading of stories, and between both and the discernment of truth, was an easy one to make, and had a well-established history before *Breudwyt Ronabwy* was inscribed into the Red Book after *Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein* and before *Proffwydolyaeth Sibli Doeth*. In the concerns that Macrobius raises about the representation of figures solidly rooted in history, or *brut*, we confront another way in which *Breudwyt Ronabwy* confounds interpretation. This issue is in a sense at the heart of the question so many critics of the tale have asked: are we to take the Emperor Arthur of *Breudwyt Ronabwy* at his own word, that he perceives Rhonabwy and his companions, visitors from the twelfth century, as *truan* 'vile' by comparison with the fine fellows who protected Britain in his own day? He who allows the men of his household retinue to harass Owain's ravens? He who seems unable to get himself organized to go to Badon? Is this story of one of the great figures of *Brut y Brenhinedd* even worthy of our attention?

For one writer very much in the Macrobian tradition of dream theory, the twelfth-century English author John of Salisbury, the difficulty of interpretation arises from the polysemy of signs, with dream events posing even greater challenges than language. 'The significance of events', he writes in Book II of the *Policraticus*,

which is much more intricate than meaning conveyed by words, requires much shrewdness for the interpretation of dreams and the elucidation of riddles and signs ... Surely if ambiguous language is used which lends itself to many interpretations would not one be justly regarded as quite ignorant who, as a result of it, stubbornly makes some particular decision without taking into consideration

these meanings? All things involve varied and manifold meanings, as has been stated above. Careful discrimination is to be made amid this multiplicity of meanings, lest by following one line too enthusiastically there be a tendency to fall into error. Hence the dream interpreter which is inscribed with the name of Daniel is apparently lacking in the weight which truth carries, when it allows but one meaning to one thing. This matter really needs no further consideration since the whole tradition of this activity is foolish and the circulating manual of dream interpretation passes brazenly from hand to hand of the curious.⁸³

This is the attitude that *Breudwyt Ronabwy* evokes through the abundance of dream imagery that overwhelms any system wheeled into place to make efforts at interpretation.

Dafydd Glyn Jones sees in the tale's failure to pursue its own apparent narrative impulses, its failure to answer the questions it raises, a fundamental authorial distrust in the story and the purpose of telling it. He describes it as '[g]waith awdur sy'n gwybod ei chwedloniaeth, sy'n gwybod beth yw nerth chwedl, a'i hapêl, a'i dylanwad, ar feddyliau ei gyd-ddynion; ond nad yw, o'i ran ei hun, yn credu un dim ynddi' ('the work of an author who knows his narrative tradition, who knows what the power of story is, and its appeal, and its influence on the minds of his fellow men, but who does not, for his part, believe anything in it').⁸⁴ Edgar Slotkin, too, is struck by the scepticism of the author, whom he describes as 'a genuine humanist, a literary man who, like most satirists, cared deeply about human values, and a subtle literary craftsman who distrusted his craft'.⁸⁵ It seems to me that the evocation of dream science in the tale, too, in a manner which yields both too much information and too little, so that it makes no sense of the dream and by extension the dream fails to make sense of the waking world, is another and potent denial of the value of the very fiction in which this subversion takes place. My primary interest in this effort to understand how dream science informs *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, however, has been in the fourteenth-century readers of the text as emblemized by Hopcyn ap Tomas, 'master of brut' and patron of the Red Book of Hergest. For the learned reader of that period, *Breudwyt Ronabwy* was surely a reminder that while we must try to read the signs offered to us by prophecy, the stars, the weather, our dreams, and our bodies, and to find the meaning in both story and history, interpretation is at every level a process as perilous as it is vital.

⁸³*Policraticus*, II.16–17; *Frivolities of Courtiers and Footprints of Philosophers: Being a Translation of the First, Second and Third Books and Selections from the Seventh and Eighth Books of the Policraticus of John of Salisbury*, translated by Joseph B. Pike (Minneapolis, 1938), pp. 81 and 84. ⁸⁴Jones, 'Breuddwyd Rhonabwy', pp. 194–95. ⁸⁵Slotkin, 'The Fabula, Story, and Text of Breuddwyd Rhonabwy', p. 111.