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### 3 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

The importance of the oral tradition in any discussion of *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* has already been noted, and when turning our attention to the stylistic features of the branches we see that this is an essential consideration. The tales belong in essence to the oral tradition, and the influences of that tradition are to be seen clearly on their style [Davies 1993]. We have no direct evidence regarding the techniques or style of the medieval Welsh storytellers when narrating their tales orally. But it is possible to come to some general conclusions regarding the narrative techniques and methods of oral storytellers by studying folk tales collected in Celtic and other countries. By examining such collections we can argue that the style of *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* in their written form owes much to the craft of the *cyfarwydd*. The expression was tempered when the tales were transmitted to a written form, but the implication is that the author recognised and respected the same conventions when narrating a tale, conventions that were originally part of the oral performance of the *cyfarwydd*.

#### Chronological order and additive style

The main purpose of the medieval storyteller was to entertain, as testified by Gwydion in the fourth branch:

A'r nos honno, didanu y llys a wnaeth ar ymdidaneu digrif a chyuarwydyt, yny oed hoff gan paub o'r llys, ac yn didan gan Pryderi ymdidan ac ef. [p.69]

(And that night he entertained the court with pleasant tales and storytelling till he was praised by everyone in the court, and it was a pleasure for Pryderi to converse with him.) [p.57]

A storyteller would entertain his audience by causing them to see a sequence of strange events. The medieval audience was on the whole illiterate—listeners would not expect a tale making great intellectual demands. Therefore we find the narrator moving suddenly from one event to the next without pausing for explanation. As W.L. Evans says when discussing some narrative techniques in medieval Welsh literature [1960:156]:

An audience of a spoken tale has a primitive feeling for an ordered narrative, and the unity of time is therefore seldom violated.

We have already seen that the tales have a clear chronological structure. All events belong to the past, and this leads us to an important feature in the craft of the storyteller. The narrator was expected to cover the transition from one period to the next—the interstices between the important and exciting occasions had to be filled. The art of linking major events was an important part of the narrator's craft and is seen in passages such as:

*Pwyll* Y'r llys y doethant, a threulaw y nos honno a orugant drwy gerdeu a chyuedach, ual y bu llonyd ganthunt. A thrannoeth diuyrru y dyd a wnaethant yny oed amser mynent y wwyta. [p. 11]  
(They came to the court, and they spent that night in song and carousal, so that they were well content. And on the morrow they spent the day until it was time to go to eat.) [p.11]

*Branwen* Dilit ymdidan a wnaethant y nos honno, tra uu da ganthunt, a cherd a chyuedach. A phan welsant uot yn llessach udunt uynet y gyscu noc eisted a wei hwy, y gyscu yd aethant. [p.37]  
(They continued to converse that night, while it pleased them, and to carouse. And when they realised that it was better for them to go to sleep than to sit any longer, they went to sleep.) [p.26]

The effect of this emphasis on progression is noticeable on *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*.

A great number of 'connectors' are seen throughout the tales, for example:

Ac yna; ac ar hynny; a gwedy; a thrannoeth; a'r dyd hwnnw.  
(And then; and upon that; and then; and the following day; and that day.)

Here we see the style of the elementary storyteller, a style that every school child today is taught to avoid when writing [Ong 1982:38; Tannen 1982]. The word *ac* (and) usually links the statements, and the text consists of sequences of simple sentences. Note the following passage from *Pwyll*:

Ac yna edrych ohonaw ef ar liw yr erchwys, heb hanbwylaw edrych ar y carw. Ac o'r a welsei ef o helgwn y byt, ny welsei cwn un lliw ac wynt. Sef lliw oed arnunt, clærwyn llathreit, ac eu clusteu yn gochyon. Ac ual y llathrei wynnet y cwn, y llathrei cochet y clusteu. Ac ar hynny at y cwn y doeth ef, a gyrru yr erchwys a ladyssei y carw e ymdeith, a llithyaw y erchwys e hunan ar y carw. Ac ual y byd yn llithiau y cwn, ef a welei uarchauc yn dyuot yn ol yr erchwys y ar uarch erchlas mawr;

a chorn canu am y uynwyl, a gwisc o urethyn llwyd tei amdanaw yn wisc hela. Ac ar hynny y marchawc a doeth attaw ef, a dywedut ual hynn wrthaw. . . [pp.1-2]

(And then he looked at the colour of the pack, without troubling to look at the stag. And of all the hounds he had seen in the world, he had seen no dogs the colour of these. The colour that was on them was a brilliant shining white, and their ears red. And as the whiteness of the dogs shone, so shone the redness of their ears. And with that he came to the dogs, and drove away the pack that had killed the stag, and baited his own pack upon the stag. And while he was baiting his dogs he could see a horseman coming after the pack on a big dapple-grey steed, and a hunting horn round his neck, and a garment of light grey cloth about him by way of hunting garb. And upon that the horseman drew near him, and spoke to him thus. . . ) [pp.3-4]

Such a style would hardly be approved in a literary work today. Yet, if the passage is read aloud, the *ac* (and) does not draw attention to itself at all—it is an integral part of the composition, leading the narrative on swiftly and reflecting the sudden movements that culminate in Pwyll's meeting with Arawn. The author cleverly avoids a surfeit of verbs in the third person preterite tense—as T.J. Morgan has shown in his seminal article on the style of medieval Welsh prose, the author succeeds in varying the sentence syntax [1951:161-175; Evans 1976]. Let us examine the above passage once again:

Ac yna edrych ohonaw ef —verb noun + preposition *o* + subject  
(And then he looked)

at y cwn y doeth ef —mixed sentence  
(to the dogs he came)

a gyrru yr erchwys —verb noun  
(and sent the pack)

a llithyaw —verb noun  
(and fed)

Ac ual y byd yn llithiau y cwn —historic present  
(And as he is feeding the dogs)

ef a welei —abnormal sentence  
(he saw)

y marchawc a doeth attaw ef —abnormal sentence  
(the rider came to him)

a dywedut —verb noun  
(and said)

Further examples of such variation in syntax can be found, for example:

Dyuot deu Wydel uonllwm idaw [p.44]  
—verb noun + subject  
(Two bare-breeched Irishmen came to him) [p.37]

Kyuodi a orugant pawb o niuer y llys [p.31]  
—verb noun + a + auxiliary verb  
(All the host of the court arose) [p.26]

Ac ar hynny, nachaf un o'r llongeu yn raculaenu rac y rei ereill [p.30]  
—exclamation + subject  
(And upon that, behold one of the ships proceeding before the others)  
[p.25]

This seems to have been a device that developed to avoid monotony in narrative prose, a device that originated in the function, craft and performance of the *cyfarwydd*.

### The Formula

Another obvious feature of *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* and the tales of the *Mabinogion* generally is the formula. It is certain that the formula in written literature does not have the same importance and function as in an oral performance of the same tale. Yet, the formulaic technique is an integral part of the composition of *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* and deserves close attention in any study of the style of the tales [Davies 1988b]. The meaning of formula in this context is a set of words employed to indicate or describe a certain idea. Much research has been done on the formula and formulaic composition in Homeric verse. One of the most important scholars in this field was Milman Parry—it was he, together with his student Albert Lord, who developed the theory that formulaic composition is synonymous with oral composition [Parry 1971; Lord 1960]. According to Parry, the formula developed as an element in oral composition: in the course of time the need for a particular phrase arises over and over again; the phrase therefore becomes fixed and the poet uses it regularly, under

the same metrical conditions, thus creating a formula. The unlettered singer, therefore, builds up a reserve of ready-made formulae which enables him to rise immediately to most needs that his subject forces on him. By comparing Homeric diction with that of the South Slavic heroic songs, Parry concludes that the heroic epics were the product of an oral poetic tradition—they had originally been composed orally. According to Parry's theory, therefore, the main feature of orally composed poetry is its formulaic character, and the recurrence of formulae brands a poem as oral. The use of Parry's methods has been accompanied by increasing questions about the validity of some of his most basic assumptions and definitions, including his definition of a formula [Finnegan 1990]. Also, there is little agreement on whether formulaic style implies oral composition, whether literacy and oral composition are always mutually exclusive. Many believe Parry's definition of the formula to be too narrow [Russo 1976], and that it should embrace more than the fixed noun-epithet combinations of Parry's first study. Indeed, Parry himself emphasises a 'formula-system', introducing the concept of the open variable combined with the fixed element to form a larger unit, and prepares the way for further broadening of the definition by saying that there were still 'more general types of formulas'; not only were there fixed or verbatim formulae, but also fluid formulae that resemble others 'in rhythm, in parts of speech, and in one important word' [Russo 1976:32; Parry 1971:313].

To what extent can these theories be applied to prose, and to medieval Welsh prose in this particular case? Metre is an essential ingredient in the Parry-Lord formula. Even so, there have been many attempts to adapt the theory to prose. İlhan Başgöz, for example, in his treatment of the *hikaye* of Azerbaijan, argues that verbal repetition is a distinct feature of orally transmitted literature, prose and verse alike [1978:1; Gray 1971]. He defines the prose formula as a traditional, literary unit of verbal repetition which expresses a given essential idea (formula-thought) in one or more phrases [1978:3]. Isidore Okpewho, too, comes to the conclusion that there is nothing particularly metrical about the formula [1977:190]:

... the formulary device is simply a case of memory pressed into a pattern of convenience, and is by no means peculiar to a prosodic context...

Kevin O'Nolan applied the formula concept to Irish medieval prose romances and he, too, concludes that metre has no essential connection with formulae [1975; 1978]. Edgar Slotkin, on the other hand, has argued that there is no such thing as an oral prose formula in the sense of formula defined by Parry and Lord—one must be able to show that there is a high density of formulae in a text and that they are necessary to the composition before one can argue for an oral provenance [1991]. Slotkin's paper raises very important issues. However, I would tend to agree with Rosenberg [1981:443], who argues that in almost all applications of the theory to national literatures the starting point has been a modification of the original conception, adjusted to suit the demands of the particular language being studied and the tradition in which it was being performed. There are difficulties in adapting the classical Parry-Lord analyses to prose narratives. Perhaps it would be safer to avoid the term 'formula' with all its connotations, and employ another term such as 'verbal repetition' or 'traditional pattern' when dealing with prose. However, in spite of the possible confusion, I have chosen to use the term 'formula' in my analysis of *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, although I wish to make it clear that I do not use it in the Parry-Lord sense. Neither do I equate the presence of formulae with oral composition. The four tales under discussion are not markedly formulaic [Roberts 1984: 216], yet I would argue that certain phrases and descriptions are used so frequently that they must be more than chance combinations: we can be fairly certain that we are dealing with an acquired technique. The suggestion is that the author (and the authors of the *Mabinogion* tales in general) was drawing on a stock of stereotyped forms of expression or formulae, and that he would build on these as the need arose. This is not to say that the tales were composed orally; yet the implication is that these formulae were part of the technique of the oral storyteller and that the oral style has left its mark on the written texts.

#### *Linguistic Formulae*

Let us first examine the linguistic formulae in the *Pedeir Keinc*, those formulae that are apparent in dialogue passages and were, it would seem, part of the every day language of the period. Although they do not further the development of the plot in any way, they are important as regards the presentation and maintaining of dialogue. Oaths and greetings belong to this category. In the *Pedeir Keinc* two formulae occur in conjunction with each other when greeting, that is one

character greets and the other replies at once. *Duw a rodo da yt* (a *chraessaw duw wrthyt*) (God be good to you (and God's welcome to you)) is the usual answer. The first greeting is *Dyd da itt* (Good day to you), *Henpych guell* (Greetings) or an indirect greeting, that is *cyfarch guell idaw* (greeted him). Here is an example from *Pwyll*:

a guedy y dyuot y gynted y neuad kyuarch guell a wnaeth y Wawl uab Clut a'y gedymdeithon o wyr a gwraged. 'Duw a ro da yt,' heb y Gwawl, 'a chraessaw Duw wrthyt.' [p.16]

(and when he came to the upper part of the hall he greeted Gwawl son of Clut and his company of men and women. 'God be good to you,' said Gwawl, 'and God's welcome to you.') [p.15]

Note how the author plays on this formula when describing Pwyll and Arawn's first encounter:

'A unben,' heb ef [Arawn], 'mi a wnn pwy wytti, ac ny chyuarchaf i well it.' [p.2]

('Ah lord,' he said [Arawn], 'I know who you are, and I will not greet you.') [p.4]

Usually it is the character of lower status who greets first, and the other responds by wishing him *graessaw Duw* (God's welcome) [T. Charles-Edwards 1978]. Pwyll believes Arawn is refusing to greet him because of his status. However, when Pwyll realises that Arawn is a king, and therefore of higher rank, he responds immediately:

'Arglwyd,' heb ynteu, 'dyd da itt...' [p.2]

('Lord,' he said, 'good day to you...') [p.4]

This is an interesting example, therefore, of using a formula for a specific purpose.

Many types of oaths are found in the text:

Y rof i a Duw (Between me and God)

Dioer (God knows)

Yr Duw (For God's sake)

Ym kyffes i Duw; I Duw y dygaf uyg kyffes; dygaf y duw uyg kyffes (By my confession to God; to God I bear my confession; I bear to God my confession)

Meuyl ar uy maryf; mefl (Shame on my beard; shame)

Oy a arglwyd Duw; Oy a uab Duw; Oy a Duw holl gyuoethawc; Oy a Duw

(Oh lord God; Oh son of God; Oh all powerful God; Oh God)

A detailed analysis of the oaths in the *Mabinogion* corpus points to the existence of some sort of system—they have a particular location within the speech, various oaths occur under the same grammatical conditions (e.g. after a negative), and most oaths are followed by a speech marker (e.g. he/she said).

#### *Variable Formulae*

The oaths are verbatim formulae; the greetings are combinations of verbatim units which unite to give a longer formula. Although the verbatim formulae were an aid to the oral narrator, perhaps the need for them was not so great when the tales were committed to manuscript. This is why we see more variable formulae, where identity is established by similar structural patterns and repetition of key words. Formulae of this type are much more common in the *Pedeir Keinc*, suggesting perhaps that the tales reflect a more developed and more sophisticated mode of expression than that of the oral storyteller.

Variable formulae are used in *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* to describe physical appearance [Davies 1988a]. There are very few long and detailed descriptions in the tales, and very few adjectives, for example:

*Pwyll* ... wynt a welynt yn dyuot y mywn, guas gwineu, mawr, teyrneid, a guisc o bali amdanaw. [p.13]  
(... they saw entering a large, princely, auburn-haired youth, and a dress of silk about him.) [p.13]

*Branwen* A mi a welwn gwr melyngoch mawr yn dyuot or llyn [p.35]  
(And I saw a large ginger-haired man coming from the lake) [p.30]

Most of the descriptions are introduced by the verb *gweld* (to see); the character's personal name is not mentioned; a brief description of the character's dress is sometimes given, following the same pattern in *Pwyll*:

gwisg o bali amdanaw (a dress of silk about him)  
gwisg o urethyn ... amdanaw (a dress of cloth ... about him)

and reference is made to hair colour without using the noun *gwallt* (hair) at all. Although there are only a few short descriptions in *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, yet the common elements suggest the existence of a particular convention when describing physical appearance. Indeed,

the same type of simple description can be seen throughout the tales of the *Mabinogion*. One feature that becomes apparent is that every description has been structured in a particular way—formulae, or rather short formulaic units, are combined, containing a noun + descriptive element (an adjective/adjectives or *o* [of] + material of dress). These formulaic descriptions found in *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* are therefore examples of a technique that was used extensively. However, the descriptions found in *Pwyll* are much more developed than those found in *Branwen* and *Math*, and not one description of this type is found in *Manawydan*.

*Pwyll* also stands apart since it is also the only branch to employ a combat formula, although one could argue that the opportunity does not arise to use such a formula in the other three tales. This formula is used extensively in the Three Romances, especially in *Gereint*. There are four combinations to this formula in *Pwyll*:

Ac ar hynny y deu urenhin a nessayssant y gyt am perued y ryt e ymgyuaruot. Ac ar y gossot kyntaf y gwr a oed yn lle Arawn, a ossodes ar Hafgan ym perued bogel y daryan yny hylt yn deu hanner, ac yny dyrr yr arueu oll, ac yny uyd Hafgan hyt y ureich a'e paladyr dros pedrein y uarch y'r llawr, ac angheuawl dynawt yndaw ynteu. [p.5]  
(And upon that the two kings approached each other towards the middle of the ford for the encounter. And at the first attack the man who was in Arawn's place struck Hafgan on the centre of his shield's boss, so that it was split in two and all his armour broken, and Hafgan was his arm and his spear's length over his horse's crupper to the ground, and a mortal wound upon him.) [p.6]

Here we see the *gossot* (attack), the place of attack, the result of the attack on the enemy's arms, and the result on the enemy himself.

It has already been observed that in oral narrative care is taken to cover the transition from one period to the next—the interstices between the important and exciting occasions are almost always filled. Naturally, formulae are employed for this purpose. When attempting to outline the action from one day to the next, formulaic units are combined in the *Pedeir Keinc*. There are three stages here: *treulaw/dilit* (spend/follow); *cysgu* (sleep); *trannoeth* (the following day). Note two examples:

*Pwyll* Bwyta a chyuedach a wnaethont, ac amser a doeth y uynet y gyscu. Ac y'r ystauell yd aeth Pwyll a Riannon, a threulaw y nos honno drwy digriuwch a llonydwch. A thrannoeth yn ieuengtit y dyd... [p.18]

(They ate and caroused, and time came to go to sleep. And Pwyll and Rhiannon went to the room, and spent that night in pleasure and satisfaction. And early the following day...) [p.16]

*Branwen* Dilit y gyuedach a wnaethant ac ymdidan. A phan welsant uot yn well udunt kymryt hun no dilyt kyuedach, y gyscu yd aethant. A'r nos honno y kyscwys Matholwch gan Uranwen. A thrannoeth, kyuodi a orugant pawb o niuer y llys... [p.31]  
(They followed the feasting and talked. And when they saw that it was better to sleep than to follow the carousal, they went to sleep. And that night Matholwch slept with Branwen. And the following day, everyone in the court arose...) [p.26]

Sometimes a description precedes the reference to the feast, that is a description of the welcome, the preparation, and the seating arrangements at table. In this context units are combined yet again to express (a) the welcome and preparation; (b) sitting at table; (c) the seating arrangement; (d) the beginning of the feasting. The same basic structure is found in each example, but the details are varied for each individual situation, for example:

*Branwen* Yn Aberfraw dechreu y wled, ac eisted. Sef ual yd eisteddyssant, brenhin Ynys y Kedeirn, a Manawydan uab Llyr o'r neill parth idaw, a Matholwch o'r parth arall, a Branwen uerch Lyr gyt ac ynteu... A'r gyuedach a dechreussant. [p.31]  
(In Aberfraw they began the feast, and sat down. This is how they sat, the king of the Island of the Mighty, and Manawydan son of Llyr on his one side, and Matholwch on his other, and Branwen daughter of Llyr with him... And they began the carousal.) [p.26]

Although the units in this formula are not verbatim, key words are employed during each stage of events, giving the impression of familiarity.

Lastly in this category, formulaic units are combined when describing an approach to a building. Each description is preceded by the verb *gweld* (to see), that is the listener sees everything through the eyes of the protagonist. It is interesting to note the use made of detailing or precise focusing, for example:

*Manawydan* A chan y geir hwnnw mynet allan, ac y traws y managassei ef uot y gwr a'r gaer, kyrchu a wnaeth hitheu. Porth y gaer a welas yn agoret; ny bu argel arnei. Ac y mywn y doeth, ac y gyt ac y doeth... [p.57]

(And with that word she went out, and in the direction he told her the man and the fort were, she proceeded. She saw the gate of the fort open; it was not concealed. And she came in, and as soon as she came...) [p.47]

This is a dramatic device where tension is maintained as the listener moves, one step at a time, with Rhiannon into the fort. Evans [1960:109, 143-147] refers to this as the observing eye technique, while Roberts [1984:218] compares it to a T.V. camera panning and finally centering on the significant object or person.

Another type of variable formula exists, where a number of formulaic units are not combined to build up the description. Instead there is only one verbal pattern, and a clear structure within that. These variable formulae are therefore much shorter than those already discussed. Three of the four branches begin in the same way, with the name of a lord, the name of his land, and the location of the lord at that particular time. Before the last element there is a 'time' phrase which focuses the attention on a particular event:

*Pwyll* Pwyll, Pendeuic Dyuet, a oed yn arglwyd ar seith cantref Dyuet. A threigylgweith yd oed yn Arberth, prif lys idaw... [p.1]  
(Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed, was lord over the seven commotes of Dyfed. And once upon a time he was in Arberth, a chief court of his...) [p.3]

*Branwen* Bendigeiduran uab Llyr, a oed urenhin coronawc ar yr ynys hon, ac ardyrchawc o goron Lundein. A frynhawngueith yd oed yn Harlech yn Ardudwy, yn llys idaw. [p.25]  
(Bendigeidfran son of Llyr was crowned king over this island, and exalted with the crown of London. And one afternoon he was in Harlech in Ardudwy, in a court of his.) [p.25]

*Math* Math uab Mathonwy oed arglwyd ar Wynedd, a Pryderi uab Pwyll oed arglwyd ar un cantref ar ugeint yn y Deheu... dydgweith... [p.67]  
(Math son of Mathonwy was lord over Gwynedd, and Pryderi son of Pwyll was lord over twenty one commotes in the South... one day.) [p.55]

There is no opening formula in the third branch which may imply that *Branwen* and *Manawydan* were one branch originally.

A variable formula is often used to open other tales of the *Mabinogion*. For example:

*Owein* Yr amherawdyr Arthur oed yg Kaer Llŷon ar Wysc. Sef yd oed yn eisted diwarnawt yn y ystauell. . . [Thomson 1968: 1]  
(The emperor Arthur was in Caer Llŷon on Usk. And he was sitting there one day in his room. . .) [p.155]

Each branch ends with the same formula:

*Pwyll* Ac yuelly y teruyna y geing hon yma o'r Mabyngogyon. [p.27]  
(And so ends this branch of the Mabinogion.) [24]

*Branwen* A llyna ual y teruyna y geing honn o'r Mabinyogi, o achaws. . . [p.48]  
(And so ends this branch of the Mabinogi, because of. . .) [p.40]

*Manawydan* Ac yuelly y teruyna y geing honn yma o'r Mabinogi. [p.65]  
(And so ends this branch of the Mabinogi.) [p.54]

*Math* Ac yuelly y teruyna y geing honn o'r Mabinogi. [p.92]  
(And so ends this branch of the Mabinogi.) [p.75]

Note that *llyna* occurs in *Branwen*, but *yuelly* in the other branches, which again may suggest that there was originally no division here and that the formula at the end of the second branch is a later addition. In *Manawydan* there is a specific phrase before the formula:

Ac o achaws y carchar hwnnw y gelwit y kyuarwydyt hwnnw Mabinogi Mynweir a Mynord. [p.65]

(And because of that imprisonment that *cyfarwyddyd* was called Mabinogi Mynweir and Mynord.) [p.54]

and this combination of *galw* (to call) + *cyfarwyddyd/chwedl* (tale) is employed at the end of some of the other tales of the *Mabinogion*, for example

*Owein* A'r chwedyl hwn a elwir Chwedyl Iarlles y Ffynnawn. [Thomson 1968: 30]  
(And this tale is called the Tale of the Lady of the Fountain.) [p.182]

When using degrees of the adjective to describe people and places, the narrator again relies on short formulae with a fixed pattern but with variety in the vocabulary. Two categories can be observed here—one uses the comparative degree of the adjective and the other the superlative degree, for example:

*Manawydan* Mi a debygaf na werendeweist eiryoet ar ymdidanwreic well no hi. [p.50]

(I am sure that you have never listened to a better conversationalist than she.) [p.41]

*Pwyll* Ac a rodaf y wreic deccaf a weleist eiroet y gyscu gyt a thi beunoeth. [p.3]  
(And I will give the most beautiful woman to sleep with you each night.) [p.4]

A variable formula is employed to describe the taking of counsel:

*Branwen* Yny lle trannoeth kymryt kynghor. Sef a gahat yny kynghor. . . [p.30]  
(In that place the following day counsel was taken. And he was advised to. . .) [p.26]

and also when the need arises to describe a journey. The latter is a very short formula and contains no details. Yet it emphasises the importance of accounting for every interstice:

*Manawydan* Byhyt bynnac y buant ar y fford, wynt a doethant y Dyuet. [p.55]  
(And however long they were on the road, they came to Dyfed.) [p.45]

By adhering to the same structure in his formulae the storyteller can maintain the pattern without repeating the same vocabulary. He can therefore have variation but at the same time he has a basic pattern which is a continuous help when composing his tale.

### *The Doublet*

The third type of formula seen in *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* and in the *Mabinogion* tales in general is the doublet, a combination of two words which are to all intents synonymous and very often bound together by alliteration. Some doublets in the *Pedeir Keinc* also occur in other tales of the *Mabinogion*, for example *y gyuoeth ac y wlat* (his land and country); *am dir a dayar* (for land and earth); *hud a lledrith* (magic and enchantment). Without recurrence there is no indication that a doublet is part of a system which the tradition has established as useful to itself. Yet one surely cannot ignore the numerous doublets that occur only once in the *Mabinogion*. Even if one cannot prove that they are part of the traditional 'system', in all probability they do reflect an attempt on the part of the narrators to adapt traditional techniques to suit their favoured mode of expression. Here are a few examples from the *Pedeir Keinc*:

|                             |                             |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| llys ar kyuaned [p.4]       | (court and dwelling) [p.5]  |
| digrifwch a didanwch [p.23] | (pleasure and mirth) [p.20] |

car a chedymeith [p.47] (friend and companion) [p.40]  
 dicter a llit [p.60] (anger and wrath) [p.50]

It has been observed that triplets and even foursomes occur in Homer and also in Irish tales, although not often [O'Nolan 1978]. This is found to be the case in Welsh too—a few cases of triplets are found in the *Pedeir Keinc*:

tir a dayar a chyuoeth [p.16]  
 (land and territory and dominions) [p.15]

o bryt a thwf a meint [p.81]  
 (in feature, growth and stature) [p.66]

y llongeu ar yscraffeu ar corygeu [p.38]  
 (the ships and ferry-boats and coracles) [p.32]

By examining the evidence in *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* it would seem that certain phrases and descriptions are used so frequently that they must be more than chance combinations. It is apparent that the author is drawing on a reserve of traditional patterns or formulae that were known to him, and that he built on them and varied them depending on the circumstance. We can be fairly certain therefore that we are dealing with an acquired technique, a technique that can be described as formulaic, and which can be seen to some extent throughout the tales of the *Mabinogion*. This is not to claim that the tales were composed orally and then transmitted to vellum, but rather that the conventions of the oral storytellers have greatly influenced the authors of the written tales, and that the craft of the oral performer has left its mark on their work.

## Dialogue

Another important feature when discussing the style of *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* is the use made of dialogue, a technique which again has its origins in the oral tradition [Delargy 1945:33; Bruford 1969]. In the Middle Ages oral entertainment was the prime means of entertainment, and conversation must therefore have been all-important. The ability to hold a conversation was a great virtue:

*Pwyll* Ac o'r a welsei eiryoet wrth ymdidan a hi, dissymlaf gwreic a bonedigeidaf i hannwyt a'y hymdidan oed. [p.4]  
 (And of all he had ever seen, conversing with her, she was the most unaffected woman, and the most gracious of disposition and discourse.) [pp.5-6]

*Manawydan* Mi a debygaf na werendeweist eiryoet ar ymdidanwreic well no hi. [p.50]  
 (I am sure that you have never heard a better conversationalist than she.) [p.41]

Conversation would therefore have been a perennial form of entertainment. It remains so today—the interesting conversationalist is a source of entertainment for all. And, indeed, this was the original meaning of the verb *ymddiddan* (to converse)—to entertain each other. What would have been the content of such conversations in the Middle Ages? There would no doubt be news and gossip. But also, surely, anecdotes and humorous occurrences would be related. Teyrnon's conversation is concerned with the *story* of Pryderi's youth:

Guedy daruot bwyta, ar dechreu kyuedach, ymdidan a wnaethon. Sef ymdidan a uu gan Teirnon, menegi y holl gyfranc am y gassec ac am y mab... [pp.25-26]  
 (Having finished eating, at the beginning of the carousal, they conversed. Teyrnon's conversation was to tell the whole story about the mare and about the boy... ) [p.22]

Matholwch relates a story as he is conversing:

A chymeint ac a wnn, mi a'e managaf y ti. Yn hela yd oedwn... [p.35]  
 (As much as I know, I will tell you. I was hunting...) [p.30]

and tells Brân the tale of the iron house. Indeed, so often did people relate anecdotes and tales to each other, that *ymddiddan* became a term for a tale, as the romance of *Iarlles y Ffynnaun* (The Lady of the Fountain) suggests:

'Weithon,' heb y Kei, 'chwithheu bieu talu y minneu uy ymdidan.'  
 'Kynon,' heb yr Owein, 'tal y ymdidan y Gei.' 'Dioer,' heb y Kynon, 'hyn gwr wyt a gwell ymdidanwr no mi, a mwy a weleist o betheu odidawc; tal di y ymdidan y Gei!' 'Dechreu di,' heb yr Owein, 'o'r hynn odidockaf a wpych.' [Thomson 1968:2]  
 ('Now', said Cei, 'it is for you to pay me my story (*ymddiddan*).'  
 'Cynon', said Owein, 'pay Cei his story (*ymddiddan*).' 'God knows,' said Cynon, 'an older man and a better teller of tales (*ymddiddanwr*) are you than I. More have you seen of wondrous things. You pay Cei his tale (*ymddiddan*).' 'You start,' said Owein, 'with the most wondrous thing you know.' ) [pp.155-156]

An *ymddiddan*, like a *cyfarwyddyd*, is to be full of *petheu odidawc* (wondrous things). There is one main difference, however, between

the two narrative forms. In his *ymddiddan*, Cynon talks in the first person; throughout he makes remarks to Cei, and although they elicit no response, Cei is still the chief auditor:

A hyn a dywedaf ytti, Gei, vot yn debic genhyf . . . [Thomson 1968:3]  
[And I tell you this, Cei, that I am sure . . .] [p.157]

Thus the tale is an *ymddiddan* (= conversation) in so far as Cynon addresses another character, and also speaks in the first person. In a *cyfarwyddyd*, however, the narrator is totally divorced from the tale—he himself took no part in the action of the story. A *cyfarwydd* (storyteller), of course, could also tell *ymddiddaneu*:

Ynteu Wydyon goreu kyuarwyd yn y byt oed. A'r nos honno, didanu y llys a wnaeth ar ymddidaneu digrif a chyuarwyd . . . [p.69]  
(He Gwydion was the best storyteller in the world. And that night he entertained the court with pleasant *ymddiddanion* (tales) and *cyfarwyddyd* (storytelling) . . .) [p.57]

It would seem that an *ymddiddan* was a short anecdote recited by a speaker, probably concerning his or her own experiences. But in his performance, a storyteller could also make use of *ymddiddan* in its original sense: he could re-create conversations and dialogue in order to vary his rendering and to create a dramatic atmosphere.

In written literature, the difference between dialogue and narrative can be conveyed by visual devices, but oral storytellers have to rely on the virtuosity of their oral performance, making use of voice, intonation and gesture. One characteristic of the *Four Branches* is the constant use of identification tags or speech markers in passages of dialogue—*heb ef/heb hi* (he said/she said) is the most common. Sometimes the narrator states who is going to speak and to whom; then the speech occurs within which another speech marker, usually involving a pronoun, is embedded:

Ac ar hynny y marchawc a doeth attaw ef, a dywedut ual hynn wrthaw, 'A unben,' heb ef, 'mi a wnn . . . ' [p.2]  
(The horseman drew near him, and spoke to him thus, 'Chieftain,' he said, 'I know . . . ' [p.4])

This technique is very common in contemporary oral storytelling [Slotkin 1991]—recordings from the Welsh Folk Museum archive prove this beyond any doubt. Alan Bruford [1969:34] attempts to explain the feature in his discussion of dialogue in Irish Romances:

It may seem unduly full of apostrophes to the hearer and assertions by the speaker's word, but this again is required by oral delivery. If the speaker begins '*A Chonail* . . . ' the audience realizes at once that he is speaking to Conall; they might have forgotten who was present at this stage.

Rarely is the embedded marker omitted, as reflected in the following passage:

'Pa achaws,' heb ynteu, 'na dywedy di wrthyf i?' 'Dywedaf wrthyf,' heb hi, 'na dywedeis ys blwydyn y gymmeint yn y kyfryw le a hwnn.' 'Paham?' heb ef. 'Ys glut a beth yd ymddidanyssam ni.' 'Meuyl im,' heb hi, 'yr blwydyn y neithwyr o'r pan elem yn nyblyc yn dillat guely, na digrifwch, nac ymddidan, nac ymchwelut ohonot dy wyneb attaf i, yn chwaethach a uei uwy no hynny o'r bu y rom ni.' Ac yna y medylwys ef. 'Oy a Arglwyd Duw,' heb ef, 'cadarn a ungwr y gydymdeithas, a diffleis, a geueis i yn gedymdeith.' Ac yna y dywot ef wrth y wreic, 'Arglwydes,' heb ef, 'na chapla di uiui. Y rofi a Duw,' heb ynteu, 'ni chyskeis inheu gyt a thi, yr blwydyn y neithwyr, ac ni orwedeis.' [p.7]

('Why,' he said, 'do you not speak to me?' 'I tell you,' she said, 'for a year I have not spoken so much in such a place as this.' 'Why?' he said. 'We have talked closely together.' 'Shame on me,' she said, 'if since a year from last night, from the time we were enfolded in the bedclothes, there has been neither pleasure nor conversation between us, nor have you turned you face towards me, let alone anything more than that.' And then he thought, 'Oh Lord God,' he said, 'a man steadfast and unswerving of his friendship did I find for a friend.' And then he said to his wife. 'Lady,' he said, 'do not blame me. Between me and God,' he said, 'I have neither slept nor lain down with you since a year from last night.') [p.8]

There are very few passages of dialogue without identification tags in the *Pedeir Keinc*. Here is one example:

Val y byd ynteu yn dod i y dulath yn y fyrrch, nachaf offeirat yn dyuot attaw, ar uarch yn gyweir. 'Arglwyd, dyd da it,' heb ef. 'Duw a ro da it,' heb y Manawydan, 'a'th uendith.' 'Bendith Duw it. A pha ryw weith, Arglwyd, yd wyd yn y wneuthur?' 'Crogi lleidyr a geueis yn lledratta arnaf,' heb ef. 'Pa ryw leidyr, Arglwyd?' heb ef. 'Pryf,' heb ynteu 'ar ansawd llygoden . . . ' 'Arglwyd, rac dy welet yn ymodi y pryf hwnnw, mi a'y prynaf. Ellwng ef.' 'Y Duw y dygaf uyghyffes, na'y werthu, na'y ollwng nas gwnaf i.' 'Gwir yw, Arglwyd, nyt guerth arnaf ef dim. Rac dy welet ti yn ymhalogi wrth y pryf hwnnw, mi a rodaf it deir punt, a gollwng ef e ymdeith.' 'Na uynhaf, y rofi a Duw,'

heb ynteu, 'un guerth, namyn yr hwnn a dyly, y grogi.' 'En llawen, Arglwyd, gwna dy uympty.' E ymdeith yd aeth yr offeirad. Sef a wnaeth ynteu, maglu y llinin am uynwyl y llygoden. [pp.62-63]

(As he was fixing the crossbeam upon the forks, lo, a priest coming towards him on a caparisoned horse. 'Lord, good day to you,' he said. 'God be good to you,' said Manawydan, 'and your blessing.' 'God's blessing on you. And what kind of work are you doing, lord?' 'Hanging a thief whom I caught stealing from me,' he said. 'What kind of a thief, lord?' he said. 'A creature,' he said, 'in the shape of a mouse. . . ' 'Lord, rather than see you handling that creature, I will buy it. Let it go.' 'By my confession to God, I will neither sell it or let it go.' 'The truth is, lord, it has no price set upon it. Rather than see you defiling yourself with that creature I will give you three pounds, and let it go.' 'Between me and God,' he said, 'I want no price for it, save what is its due: to hang it.' 'Gladly, lord, do as you wish.' The priest went away. This is what he did, he noosed the string about the neck of the mouse.) [pp.51-52]

Close analysis of the above passage reveals some very interesting points. Firstly, note how the whole scene is contained within a framework—the steps taken while attempting to hang the mouse. The passage opens in a dramatic manner with the use of the present tense and the exclamation *nachaf* (lo, behold). Then the normal greeting formula is used, and the author establishes immediately the identity of the two speakers. It is interesting to note that the *offeirad* (the priest) greets Manawydan as *arglwydd* (lord) from the very beginning, and the author makes use of this term each time in the ensuing dialogue. The dialogue opens, as one would expect, with the use of speech markers, but then they are omitted. Why should the author choose to deviate from the 'norm'? I would argue that he wishes to speed the rhythm of the dialogue and reflect the pace of the question and answer format between Manawydan and the priest, a feature again found in oral narrative. Both men utter short, simple sentences, and no ambiguity arises regarding the identity of the speaker. And here we realise the significance of the word *arglwydd* (lord). Firstly, the priest wishes to appeal consistently to Manawydan's noble status. But secondly, because of the absence of traditional identification tags, the author uses the word *arglwydd* (lord) to show that the priest is the speaker—after all, the pattern was established in the very first word uttered by him. So the author has ensured that there will be no ambiguity, and at the same time avoids slowing the tempo by means of tags. This serves as an excellent example of how important it is to

be conscious of the narrative techniques employed in *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*. By being aware of the 'norm', attention is drawn immediately to the abnormal, so enhancing our reading of the text.

Before proceeding with the general discussion, I should like to place the passage discussed in its context, in order to appreciate further the author's attention to detail when constructing dialogue. This section of *Manawydan* has a tripartite structure—three attempts by Manawydan to hang the mouse and three visitors attempting to foil him—the scholar, the priest and the bishop. Manawydan's first step is to plant 'two forks on the highest place of the mound' [p.50]. Then, use is made of the historic present and an interjection:

Ac ual y byd yuelly, llyma y guelei. . . [p.61]  
(And while he is doing this, lo he could see. . .) [p.50]

Manawydan is greeted in the traditional manner, and note that the term used to greet him is *arglwydd* (lord). The scholar uses this term each time when talking to Manawydan, but here identification tags appear throughout the dialogue, unlike the second passage discussed above. One could argue, therefore, that the only function of *arglwydd* (lord) in the first section is to appeal to Manawydan's status. The third section opens in a dramatic manner yet again. The historic present is not used, but an interjection appears:

Ac ual yd oed yn y dyrchauael, llyma rwttter escob. . . [p.63]  
(And as he was raising her, lo a bishop's retinue. . .) [p.52]

Since Manawydan is in the middle of raising the poor mouse, the dialogue cannot begin immediately as in the two previous cases, and we have a sentence full of tension:

Sef a wnaeth ynteu, gohir ar y weith. [p.63]  
(What he did was to delay the work.) [p.52]

This time Manawydan realises that it is he who is of lower rank, and must therefore be the first to offer his greeting:

'Arglwyd escop,' heb ef, 'dy uendith.' [p.63]  
( 'Lord bishop,' he said, 'your blessing.' ) [p.63]

It is he who greets the stranger as 'lord' on this occasion, suggesting, therefore, that events will be different this time. Upon examining the dialogue, we see that the author uses the traditional tags *heb ef/ynteu* (he said) at the beginning, and then omits them:

'Na uynhaf, y rof a Duw,' heb ynteu. 'Cany mynny hynny, gwna y guerth.' 'Gwnaf,' heb ynteu, 'rydhau Riannon a Phryderi.' 'Ti a gehy hynny.' 'Na uynhaf, y rof a Duw.' 'Beth a uynhy ditheu?' 'Guaret yr hut a'r lledrith y ar seith cantref Dyuet.' 'Ti a geffy hynny heuyt, a gellwng y llygoden.' 'Na ellyngaf, y rof a Duw,' heb ef. 'Gwybot a uynhaf pwy yw y llygoden.' 'Wy gwreic i yw hi, a phy ny bei hynny nys dillyngwn.' 'Pa gyffurf y doeth hi attaf i?' 'Y herwa,' heb ynteu. 'Miui yw Llwyd uab Kil Coet...' [pp.63-64]

('I will not, between me and God,' he said. 'Since you will not have that, name its price.' 'I will,' he said, 'that Rhiannon and Pryderi be set free.' 'You shall have that.' 'I will not, between me and God.' 'What do you want?' 'That the magic and enchantment be removed from the seven cantrefs of Dyfed.' 'You shall have that also, and let the mouse go.' 'I will not let it go, between me and God,' he said. 'I want to know who the mouse is.' 'She is my wife, and were that not so, I should not free her.' 'How did she come to me?' 'Stealing,' he said. 'I am Llwyd son of Cil Coed...') [pp.52-53]

As in the second section of the episode, the tempo moves faster, and because of the nature of the question and answer, no ambiguity arises regarding identity of speaker. A close examination of this episode, therefore, highlights the storyteller's art when composing dialogue. He succeeds in varying the pattern each time—both traditional tags and *arglwydd* in the first section; traditional tags or *arglwydd* in the second section; traditional tags and speech with no tags at all in the final section. This episode began with Cigfa's words:

'A gwna ditheu yn llawen,' heb hi. [p.61]  
(And do so gladly,' she said.) [p.50]

Later the priest says:

'En llawen, Arglwyd, gwna dy uympwy.' [p.63]  
(Gladly, Lord, do as you wish.) [p.52]

—the same message, but a different syntax. The true gladness is only revealed the third time, when Manawydan himself says:

'Ellynghaf yn llawen,' heb ef. [p.65]  
(I will free her gladly,' he said.) [p.54]

He would not have been happy hanging the mouse—it would have been a vindictive gesture. True happiness comes from knowing that the land is peacefully restored to its former glory.

It is clear that dialogue plays an essential part in *Pedeir Keinc y*

*Mabinogi*. This is reflected in the percentage of direct speech in the narrative:

|                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Pwyll</i>     | 42% direct speech |
| <i>Branwen</i>   | 39% direct speech |
| <i>Manawydan</i> | 43% direct speech |
| <i>Math</i>      | 37% direct speech |
| Overall          | 40% direct speech |

Dialogue is very prevalent in *Pwyll*. The tale progresses by means of dialogue; if the narrative were to be omitted, then there would remain a series of prose dialogues, not unlike the series of saga englynion known as *Canu Llywarch Hen*. The dialogue passages in *Pwyll* are also quite long, so that the author is able to develop the conversation and characters. Turning to *Branwen*, we find that the nature of dialogue is completely different. In this branch there are several long monologues, and the dialogues are generally quite short. The majority are conversations between one character and a group of people, the group speaking as one man, for example Matholwch and his men, Brân and Matholwch's messengers, Efnysien and Brân's men. It would seem that dialogue does not have the same function in *Branwen* as in *Pwyll*. It is more of an ornament in the second branch, and the liveliness and wit seen in *Pwyll* is absent. Turning to *Manawydan*, we see that dialogue is again important. The branch begins with a long conversation between Manawydan and Pryderi; there is a lively conversation between Manawydan and Cigfa, and the passages of conversation at the end of the branch have already been discussed. Here we are back in the realm of the first branch. In *Math* there are few extended passages of dialogue, yet it is an important technique here too. Each major episode contains passages of dialogue, which further the progress of the narrative.

## Conclusion

Having examined the evidence offered by the *Four Branches*, I should like to argue that the author has been greatly influenced by the oral storytelling techniques of the medieval *cyfarwydd*. A chronological order and an additive style is characteristic of oral storytellers. Dialogue, too, plays an important part in oral narrative, together with speech markers. I should also like to argue that the author was drawing on a stock of traditional verbal patterns or formulae that were familiar to him, and that these formulae also derive from an oral style.

This is not to say that the tales were composed orally, rather that they have been influenced by the stylistic methods of oral storytellers.

One problem remains, and a study of the style of the branches forces us to face that problem. Most scholars have accepted that the *Pedeir Keinc* are the work of *one* author. But do the stylistic features of the tales confirm this? Are there enough similarities between the formulae, for example, to warrant common authorship? The formula *kymryt kynghor* (to take counsel) is not found in *Pwyll*; the oath *y rof i a duw* (between me and God) does not appear in *Branwen*, although it is very apparent in *Pwyll* and *Manawydan*; the superlative degree of the adjective is used in each case except one in *Pwyll*, while the comparative degree is most obvious in *Manawydan*; only in *Pwyll* and *Branwen* do we have all combinations of the *eistedd wrth y bwrdd* (seating at table) formula; only in *Pwyll* do we find descriptions of dress and of combat; the 'spending time' formula does not occur in *Manawydan*. We have also seen that the function of dialogue varies from branch to branch—it is more prominent in *Pwyll* and *Manawydan* than in *Branwen* and *Math*.

It is clear that there is a relationship between the branches as regards content, and they are unified also by the colophon that occurs at the end of each one. But yet does this necessarily mean that we are dealing with the work of *one* author here? The stylistic features of the branches are similar on the surface, but a closer examination reveals variation in detail. And indeed many of the techniques employed to convey the narrative are common to all tales of the *Mabinogion*. Are the *Pedeir Keinc* therefore a collection of tales composed by men with a common background, respecting the same conventions when narrating a tale, but varying in their use of those conventions? This would be one explanation for the inconsistencies in the *Pedeir Keinc*. It is extremely difficult to answer this question with any certainty, but without doubt it is high time that these branches were looked at anew and the whole question of authorship reconsidered.