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The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature

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THE influence of folklore on medieval Welsh literature has long been a topic for study and speculation. A work which has attracted particular attention is *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi* which, with its rich and controlled use of language and its wealth of intricate, and often frustratingly complex, narrative detail, has caused numerous scholars to speculate on what lies behind the texts as they exist in their present form. In his recent essay, *The Mabinogi*, Proinsias Mac Cana has described and evaluated both the older historical approach to this text and the increasing emphasis on its unity and aesthetic quality which characterizes several more recent studies. Although modern scholarship has tended to move away from the exclusively historical approach with its often highly speculative search for origins, Mac Cana warns, quite rightly, that in dealing with pre-modern traditional literature such factors as 'social milieu, artistic convention and the extent to which the author retains or discards the matter and form of traditional oral literature' must be taken into account.¹ This is particularly true of *The Four Branches*, where so much of the material is rooted in Celtic myths, in which themes concerning the birth and adventures of a semi-divine hero and sovereignty in both human and divine realms abound, and in international folktale motifs dealing with magic and the Otherworld and its inhabitants. In handling material such as this, a medieval writer's 'creativity' lies less in creating novelty than in his ability to incorporate the disparate elements into a smoothly flowing work. However, the author's skill may be hampered by the state of the narrative as he inherits it, and this is certainly one of the imponderables in any historical consideration of *The Four Branches*.

¹Proinsias Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, Writers of Wales Series (Cardiff, 1977), p. 4. References to tales and motifs in this article are followed by letters and numbers which refer to the appropriate tale-type or motif as laid out respectively in Antti Aarne, *The Types of the Folktale*, translated and enlarged by Stith Thompson, Folklore Fellows Communications, 184 (Helsinki, 1964), and in Stith Thompson, *Motif Index of Folk Literature*, revised and enlarged edition, 6 vols (Copenhagen, 1955-58). The abbreviation AT refers to tale-types in the Aarne-Thompson Type Index, while motifs are preceded by the relevant classifying letter in the *Motif Index*.

Although there are a few references in Welsh poetry, the *Triads*, and other prose tales which hint at versions of events different from those described in *The Four Branches*, little is actually known about the development of the text, and the modern reader must turn to analogous material from other cultures, material whose history and development is itself often obscure. In dealing with the international motifs, however, one is at least dealing with a structure which remains remarkably constant and recognizable, and where these occur it is often easier to establish how precisely a motif has been integrated into the text.

The scope of this article is to consider the relationship between the international folktale motifs and their literary context—specifically the material which clusters around the Calumniated Wife motif (K 2110.1) in the first two Branches, *Pwyll* and *Branwen*—and to examine the relationship of this material to its cultural environment. This approach is particularly suited to the Calumniated Wife motif and to the *Mabinogi* tales because the Calumniated Wife story forms an important part of both tales and because variants of the Calumniated Wife are sufficiently numerous for cultural comparisons to be made.

The Welsh heroines in the First and Second Branches of *The Four Branches*, Rhiannon and Branwen, are very different in character, but they both share the experience of persecution after marriage. The link between the two is further strengthened by the fact that the stories share a number of folktale motifs. Branwen is a Welsh woman who marries an Irish king; Rhiannon, an inhabitant of the Otherworld who marries a mortal. Both are rejected after marriage like the women in other Calumniated Wife tales, and ultimately their persecution stems from the fact that these women are foreigners, intruders, as it were, into a world which will not readily accept them. On a literary level, the Calumniated Wife motif contributes to the complex characterization of two very different heroines; but it also reflects cultural factors which created a situation in which foreign wives would be open to persecution.

A prominent aspect of attitudes to foreigners is the tendency to identify what is rejected in the foreign with what is culturally outcast. Those individuals who cannot be clearly classified in a culture, for example aliens, are relegated to a special class which is 'unclassifiable' in terms of all the usual social categories.² A characteristic often attributed to foreigners (and social pariahs) is the use of supernatural power.³ William of Auvergne attempted to give a rational justification for this link between magic and foreignness. Magic, he says,

²Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 1970), pp. 53–57. ³Venetia Newell, 'The Jew as Witch', in *The Witch Figure: Essays presented to Katherine N. Briggs*, edited by Venetia Newell (London, 1968), pp. 100–102 and 104.

is seldom practised in Europe because the demons have been stopped by Christianity and because gems and other occult materials are not plentiful, while in the East, magic is common because the people are not Christian and bizarre plants and animals abound.⁴ The reasoning may seem a little circular for modern tastes, but William was expressing a common feeling about the nature of magic and the character of the foreign. Giraldus Cambrensis says much the same thing in his comparison of West and East in which he calls the East a 'fountain of poison' where men have more subtle minds.⁵

Interplay between the real world of cultural experience and the imaginative world of literature occurs on all levels, and it is not surprising to find cultural concerns and preoccupations reflected in literary works. The treatment of Medea in Euripides' play is a literary view of the foreigner as possessor of diabolic power, which has some bearing on the Calumniated Wife theme as it is found in Welsh tradition. The theme of Medea as a homeless foreigner pervades the play, and she is conscious that this puts her at a disadvantage in Greek society,⁶ and describes herself to Jason as 'your barbarian bride'.⁷ In *Medea*, the witch and foreigner concepts have merged completely. She is a witch, and she does murder her children, whereas the Calumniated Wife figure is an innocent victim of these accusations. Yet their situations have much in common. As a foreigner, Medea is not well integrated into the structure of Greek society, and is thus a natural focus for hostility. The Calumniated Wife is also a foreigner and often accused of witchcraft, and here too her relatively unstable position in society makes her vulnerable.

The Calumniated Wife has been part of European folk tradition since at least the twelfth century and forms an important episode in several folktales. The motif The Woman Charged with Eating her Children (K 2116.1.1) concerns a king who marries a mysterious girl. The king's mother hates the young queen, and when children are born, the mother-in-law steals them, often smears the queen's mouth with blood, and tells the king his wife has eaten the children. Eventually the mother-in-law is punished and the wife exonerated.

The Maiden Without Hands story (AT 706) is frequently introduced by the motif The King who Wants to Marry his Daughter (S 322.1.2). The girl cuts off her hands and sends them to her father. She is found wandering in a forest by a king who marries her despite her mutilation, but she incurs the enmity of someone at court (usually his mother). This jealous person substitutes letters saying she has given birth to a monster and another saying she should be banished.

⁴William of Auvergne, *De Universo*, II.iii.23, quoted by Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 10 vols (New York, 1923), II, 236. ⁵Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topographia Hibernica*, in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, V, edited by J. F. Dimock, Rolls Series (London, 1867), Book I, Chapters xxxiv–xl. ⁶Euripides, *Medea*, lines 222–23. ⁷*Ibid.*, line 591.

The wife wanders again, during which time her hands are restored, and is finally reunited with her husband. The motif also occurs in the Crescentia tale (AT 712), in which the banished wife becomes renowned for her saintliness and is eventually reunited with her husband and children.

A third tale in which the Calumniated Wife motif plays an important part is *The Maiden who Seeks her Brothers* (AT 451). The girl is attempting to free her brothers from a spell when a king finds and marries her. After their child is born, the mother-in-law steals the baby and accuses the queen, who cannot defend herself because of her vow of silence. The motif appears as an important sub-plot in three other tales: *The Three Golden Sons* (AT 707), *Our Lady's Child* (AT 710), and *The Prince whose Wishes Always Came True* (AT 6532). In the first tale, the queen is imprisoned and it is her children who eventually rescue her. In *Our Lady's Child*, a supernatural being steals the baby because the mother, who was the fosterling of this being, had been disobedient. In *The Prince*, a supernatural child is born to the queen, someone steals it and accuses the mother, who is eventually rescued by her own child. In these last three tales, the Calumniated Wife is a subsidiary theme since they focus on the adventures of the children rather than the mother.

The Calumniated Wife motif in the Welsh tales has already been the subject of a great deal of comment.⁸ W. J. Gruffydd deals with it extensively in his study, *Rhiannon*.⁹ He feels that the influence of the Calumniated Wife *märchen* in medieval times 'overshadowed all others', but gives no evidence for this opinion. According to Gruffydd, *Rhiannon* was accused of giving birth to a foal and her punishment was to act as a mare.¹⁰ Similarly *Branwen* was accused of being a fairy and of giving birth to a supernatural child, and Efnisien's subsequent burning of the child is seen by Gruffydd as an attempt to refute this charge. As the accusation of infanticide does not occur in *Branwen* and is very unclear in *Pwyll*, although both women are punished, Gruffydd has to rely on very speculative reconstructions to support his thesis. Gruffydd's instincts are more correct than his arguments, however, when he points out that the motivation for the wife's persecution is the hostility she engenders because she is a foreigner or a supernatural being.¹¹

⁸Kenneth Jackson, *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff, 1961); W. J. Gruffydd, *Math vab Mathonwy* (Cardiff, 1928) and *Rhiannon: An Inquiry into the Origins of the First and Third Branches of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff, 1953); Seán Ó Coileáin, 'A Thematic Study of the Tale of Pwyll Pendueic Dyuet', *Studia Celtica*, 12/13 (1977-78), 78-83; J. K. Bollard, 'The Structure of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1975, pp. 150-76, and 'The Role of Myth and Tradition in *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 6 (Winter 1983), 67-87. ⁹Gruffydd, *Rhiannon*, pp. 60-67. ¹⁰*ibid.*, pp. 110-11. ¹¹*ibid.*, p. 65; W. J. Gruffydd, *Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion* (Cardiff, 1958), p. 17.

Recently Proinsias Mac Cana has re-evaluated Gruffydd's reconstruction of *Branwen*.¹² Mac Cana accepts Gruffydd's suggestion that hatred of foreigners and the accusation of the wife by the people are regular features of the Calumniated Wife motif.¹³ However, specific mention that the wife is a foreigner, together with the name of her native country, is more characteristic of the literary variants; in oral tales, the wife is found living in exile, thereby a foreigner by implication, but details about her background are seldom given. The accusation of the wife by her husband's people is unique to the Welsh tales. Even here the motivations are complex. *Rhiannon* is merely accused of barrenness, whereas *Branwen* is clearly the victim of a wider xenophobia:

... llyma ymodwrd yn Iwerdon am y guaradwyd a gawssei Matholwch yg Kymry, a'r somm a wnathoedit idaw am y ueirch. A hynny y urodyr maeth, a'r gwyr nessaf gantaw, yn lliwaw idaw hynny, a heb y gelu. A nachaf y dygyuor yn Iwerdon hyt nat oed lonyd idaw ony chaei dial y sarahet. Sef dial a wnaethant, gyrru Branwen o un ystauell ac ef . . .

... lo, a murmuring in Ireland, on account of the insult which Matholwch had suffered in Wales, and the shameful trick played on him over his horses. Moreover, his foster-brothers and the men close to him taunted him therewith, and did not conceal it. And lo, an uprising in Ireland till there was no peace for him unless he avenge the disgrace. The vengeance they took was to drive away Branwen from the same chamber with him . . .¹⁴

Professor Jackson does not mention the appearance of the Calumniated Wife motif in *Branwen*, although he recognizes its importance in *Pwyll*. He considers that the Calumniated Wife motif in its form K 2116.1.1.1 (The Woman Charged with Eating her Children) was the last element to enter the story in an attempt to provide motivation and characterization in the original version,¹⁵ but it is difficult to establish a temporal sequence for tale elements such as these. Jackson's analysis, while it classifies a number of motifs in *The Four Branches*, leaves the texts in a rather dissected state. This is perhaps an inevitable result of this type of historical-analytical approach; however, it is at variance with the impressions one gets in reading *The Four Branches*, and recent work on the prose and the internal structure of the tales would tend to support the thesis that the author

¹²Mac Cana, *Branwen*, pp. 154 and 162, and *The Mabinogi*, pp. 28-30. ¹³Mac Cana, *Branwen*, pp. 49 and 161. ¹⁴*Branwen Uerch Lyr*, edited by Derick S. Thomson (Dublin, 1961), lines 213-18; *The Mabinogion*, translated by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (London and New York, 1949; reprinted 1966), p. 32. ¹⁵Jackson, *International Popular Tale*, pp. 92-95.

has succeeded in imposing a degree of order on his material.¹⁶ In addition, an analysis of other Calumniated Wife stories does not suggest that *The Four Branches* present a particularly fragmented version. The motif occurs in some half-dozen tale types and within these one finds variants which echo features in *The Four Branches*.¹⁷ These similarities are purely coincidental, but they do illustrate the degree of fluidity that can exist without the tale losing the essential structure that allows us to classify it as a particular type.

A Florentine version of the Calumniated Wife tells how a king out hunting frees a lady from an enchanted castle.¹⁸ The initial situation resembles that in *Pwyll*, in which the hero rescues his bride from danger in the Otherworld. There are also a number of tales in which the character of the heroine is elaborately drawn and she is depicted as taking an active part in her fate.¹⁹ In one of the *Arabian Nights* tales, a girl marries a sultan and her sisters substitute a puppy for the child. The mother is confined at the door of a mosque and everyone who passes is compelled to spit at her. Her son refuses to do so and frees her.²⁰ The situation is not unlike that in *Pwyll* where Rhiannon is forced to sit by the horseblock and carry guests to the court. Pryderi refuses to allow this and soon frees his mother.

Italian tradition contains a number of Calumniated Wife tales. The two motifs prominent in nearly all Italian variants are mutilation and the exchange of letters. The best known example is probably the one included in Basile's collection *Il Pentamerone* (1634),²¹ although the story appears much earlier. The sixteenth-century *Pecarone* contains a version in which the king of England marries the disguised sister of the king of France.²² The king's mother objects that she is

¹⁶Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, pp. 44–61; J. K. Bollard, 'A Literary Assessment of the Four Branches of the Mabinogion' (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1970); Sioned Davies, 'A Study of Narrative Methods in the Mabinogion' (unpublished D.Phil. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1982); and Catherine A. McKenna, 'The Theme of Sovereignty in *Pwyll*', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 29 (1980–82), 35–52. ¹⁷Cornelius Barbulescu, 'The Maiden Without Hands: AT 706 in Romania', in Linda Dégh, *Studies in East European Folk Narrative* (Indiana, 1978), pp. 319–67. This study examines twenty-one examples of AT 706 collected from Romanian folk tradition. All can be classified as The Maiden Without Hands on the basis of the mutilation and exile motifs, but within even this rather restricted group of variants, the author identifies three sub-types. Furthermore, examination of the tale summaries reveals that very few of the variants do not differ in some way from the type-plot given in the Aarne–Thompson Index. ¹⁸*La Novellaja Fiorentina, Fiabe e Novelline*, collected and edited by Vittorio Imbriani (Livorno, 1877), p. 232. ¹⁹Margaret Schlauch, *Chaucer's Constance and Accused Queens* (New York, 1929), pp. 102–103. ²⁰'Two Sisters who Envied their Cadette', in R. F. Burton, *Supplemental Nights to the Book of One Thousand Nights and A Night*, 6 vols (London, 1886–88), iii, 491–510; analogues, pp. 647–48. ²¹Day 3, Tale ii, 'La Bella dalle Mani Mozzate', in Giambattista Basile, *Il Pentamerone, La Fiaba delle Fiabe*, translated by Benedetto Croce (Bari, 1925). ²²Tale iv, in *Il Pecarone di Ser Giovanni Fiorentino e Due Racconti Anonimi del Trecento*, edited by Salvatore Battaglia (Milan, 1944), pp. 36–42.

a low-born foreigner and here we have some indication of a motivation for the persecution. The version in the fifteenth-century *I Reali di Francia* also says that the mother objects on the grounds that the girl is a foreigner and she plots with two other women to discredit her.²³ Multiple persecutors are rare, but the motif occurs in both *Branwen* and *Pwyll*.

Italian tradition contains a whole cycle of stories about St Uliva (the Crescentia tale), many of them in the form of popular drama and chapbooks.²⁴ In most of these the mother-in-law objects to the marriage, claiming that the girl is a foreigner, but a more striking feature is the piety and patience of the heroine, which are reminiscent of *Branwen's* character.

The English variants, almost without exception, include an exchanged letter motif. They are also very specific about the motivation for the persecution. Gower's Constance is accused of being a fairy, and the king is advised to kill the 'devill'.²⁵ In *Emaré*, the heroine says vaguely that she comes from a 'ferre lande' and the king's mother calls her a 'fende'.²⁶ Chaucer's Constance is called an 'elf' who works 'by charms or by sorcerie'.²⁷ In Matthew Paris's *Vitae Duorum Offarum*, one of the earliest variants, the girl is accused of witchcraft.²⁸

In a fifteenth-century Catalan version, the heroine takes shelter with a couple who pity the beautiful girl 'from a foreign land', while the accusation brought against her clearly reflects the prevailing xenophobia, since she is accused of giving birth to a child 'black and having the shape of a Saracen'.²⁹ Examples such as this could be multiplied indefinitely, but it is clear that one factor underlying all the tales is a polarity between that which is within the boundaries of society and that which is foreign or intrusive.

Welsh and Irish laws dealing with foreigners, with kinship, and with marriage reflect the tension between an integrated social unit and external, but tangential, elements. In Ireland laws applied only between members of a *túath*, the basic jurisdictional unit, and a man lost his legal and political status once he crossed the boundary in

²³*I Reali di Francia di Andrea da Barberino*, edited by Giuseppe Vandelli, 2 vols (Bologna, 1900), ii, Book 2, Chapters 42, 49, and 52–53. ²⁴'Rappresentazione di Santa Uliva', in *Sacre rappresentazioni dei secoli xiv, xv e xvi*, collected and edited by A. d'Ancona, 3 vols (Florence, 1872), iii, 235–316; 'Historia de La Regina Oliva', by Joannus Florentinus (sixteenth century), in *Novella della Figlia del Re di Dacia*, edited by Alessandro Wesselofski (Pisa, 1806), p. 19. ²⁵'The Tale of Constance', in John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, edited by R. A. Peck (New York, 1968), lines 1919–29. ²⁶*The Romance of Emaré*, edited by Edith Rickert, Early English Text Society, extra series, 99 (London, 1906), lines 442 and 446. ²⁷'The Man of Law's Tale', in *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, edited by F. N. Robinson, second edition (London, 1970), lines 754–55. ²⁸*Vitae Duorum Offarum*, edited by William Wats (London, 1775), pp. 6–7. ²⁹Hermann Suchier, 'La Fille Sans Mains', *Romania*, 20 (1901), 525–26 and 531.

which his kin resided.³⁰ This kind of social ordering created problems when marriage occurred outside the *túath*, since it failed to achieve one of the expected benefits of such an alliance, that is, the strengthening of kin groups. One of Matholwch's reasons for marrying Branwen is that the alliance will benefit both islands.³¹ Since this is a marriage outside the *túath*, conflict results. Branwen is removed from the protection of her kin and becomes a resented foreign element among her husband's people. Eventually the Welsh try to avenge their kinswoman. Much of the tale's irony lies in the fact that the two islands are destroyed, not strengthened, by the alliance. Branwen's comment about the war and her part in the destruction of Wales and Ireland emphasizes her pivotal role in the relationship between the two countries, as well as her personal tragedy as a rejected wife:

'Oy a uab Duw,' heb hi, 'guae ui o'm ganedigaeath. Da a dwy ynys a diffeithwyd o'm achaws i'.

'Alas, Son of God,' she said, 'woe is me that ever I was born: two good islands have been laid waste because of me!'³²

The Laws refer contemptuously to men and women who marry foreigners.³³ A wife who moved to her husband's *túath* might naturally be brought into conflict with her husband's kin and in most of the Calumniated Wife tales the accusers are members of the husband's family.³⁴ In the stories of Branwen and Rhiannon, the accusers emphasize that they are foster-brothers (*brodyr maeth*) of the husband and in this role of kin-substitute would naturally resent a foreign wife in the group.

However, no direct prohibition existed against the marriage of a Welshman and a foreign woman,³⁵ and no doubt such marriages did occur. Foreigners, whatever the feelings towards them, had definite duties and rights under law. The Latin texts of the Welsh laws refer to men 'De aliena patria . . . de uno pago . . . de uno commoto'³⁶ as having different degrees of responsibility under law. This classification is similar to that reflected in the Irish laws between an *ambue*, an exile from another *túath* in Ireland, and a *cú glas*, an exile from outside Ireland.³⁷ *Cú glas* means 'grey dog' or 'wolf', and this may

³⁰T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Some Celtic Kinship Terms', *BBCS*, 24 (1970-72), 115; and D. A. Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship* (Oxford, 1970), p. 5. ³¹*Branwen Uerch Lyr*, lines 35-39. ³²*ibid.*, lines 406-7; *The Mabinogion*, translated by Jones and Jones, p. 38. ³³Charles-Edwards, 'Celtic Kinship Terms', pp. 116 and 119. ³⁴Schlauch, *Chaucer's Constance*, p. 32. ³⁵T. P. Ellis, *Welsh Tribal Law and Custom in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1926), I, 425. The author cites several examples of royal marriages between Welsh princes and foreign women. ³⁶*The Latin Texts of the Welsh Laws*, edited by H. D. Emanuel (Cardiff, 1967), p. 211. ³⁷Charles-Edwards, 'Celtic Kinship Terms', p. 116; Kenneth Jackson, 'Varia II: Gildas and the Names of the British Princes', *CMCS*, 3 (Summer 1982), 33.

reflect a certain contempt for this type of foreigner. There are several references to children of marriages between foreigners and Irish women. In one law tract the offspring of such unions are called *glasfine*, the grey kin.³⁸ Here too the term may contain a slighting reference to children possessing alien blood, and therefore not fully members of the social group. This attitude both to the alien spouse and to the half-alien offspring of these unions helps to clarify why such tension surrounds the birth of the Calumniated Wife's children. In many tales, a member or members of the husband's family are openly resentful of the marriage. The mothers-in-law in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* and in Giovanni Fiorentino's tale of *Dionigia in Il Pecarone* retire from the court after their sons' unwanted marriages, but when grandchildren are born, they take a more active role (falsifying letters) in bringing about the expulsion of their daughters-in-law. *Branwen* may reflect this negative attitude to alien offspring, since it is not until after the birth of her son that the Irish cause her humiliation.

The Welsh versions of the Calumniated Wife as they appear in the first two Branches of *The Mabinogi* differ from other variants on a number of points, but the Welsh stories preserve both the structure and the cultural tensions of the Calumniated Wife motif. Rhiannon claims that she is being forced into an unwelcome marriage, an assertion which can be compared to the other Calumniated Wife stories where the girl is escaping an unwelcome, usually incestuous, alliance. Furthermore, the proposed marriage of Rhiannon to Gwawl is a logical substitute for the unwanted incestuous alliance. The wedding generally occurs without comment in the *märchen*, but in *Pwyll* it is the setting for the Badger in the Bag episode and in *Branwen* for the mutilation of the horses, both of them incidents which influence the subsequent persecution of the women.

Another distinctive feature is Rhiannon's initiative in seeking out Pwyll once he has placed himself on Gorsedd Arberth. The Calumniated Wife is usually a passive figure, while it is the opposite quality in Rhiannon that gives the Welsh version much of its artistry. The Badger in the Bag episode is not part of the Calumniated Wife tradition, but it develops the dramatic possibilities inherent in Rhiannon's preference for Pwyll and helps to link the First and Third Branches through the vengeance motif which motivates Llwyd Cil Coed's activities in Dyfed.

The men of Dyfed bring the charge of barrenness against Rhiannon and this precipitates the major conflict of the Calumniated Wife section. They regard Pwyll as a foster-brother and in the context of this assumed kinship relationship their concern over the queen's

³⁸Charles-Edwards, 'Celtic Kinship Terms', p. 119.

barrenness is understandable. They advise Pwyll to take another wife, but he delays them for a year. This action is paralleled in some folktales³⁹ in which the wife is often reprieved twice through her husband's intercession before being condemned.

Rhiannon's child disappears despite the guardian nurses, who later implicate the queen. In most versions of the Calumniated Wife, the same person accuses the queen, steals the child, and implicates the mother. In the Welsh tale, the men of Dyfed accuse the queen of barrenness, not infanticide, while the nurses' actions stem from fear of reprisal, not hatred.⁴⁰ It is not stated who steals the child, but later the culprit seems to be a mysterious supernatural claw. The *Pwyll* version is clearly more complicated than the ordinary folktale, and it is likely that elements of another tale, *The Hand and the Child*, have entered the story.⁴¹ Jackson assumes that the theft of Teyrnon's colt occurs some time after the theft of Pryderi, but it is just as likely that both actions occurred on the same night with the author bringing the Rhiannon situation to its logical conclusion then backtracking; the technique of narrating simultaneous action is always difficult, and this would be a natural, and not uncommon, way of solving the problem. One can see why Jackson should raise so many questions about action and motivation at this point. If, however, a variant of *Our Lady's Child* formed part of the background for the First Branch, then the motif of supernatural persecution would already be part of the tale and some at least of the seeming confusion in this episode would be dispelled.

Rhiannon refuses to defend herself against the women. Dramatically this helps to elucidate her character. In *The Maiden who Seeks her Brothers*, the heroine is often silent in the face of accusation in order to release her enchanted brothers. Although Rhiannon is punished, she retains her position at court. Interestingly, the language used to describe her, and particularly that used in direct address, is respectful. The correct terms for a woman of her status are used and this further underlines the impression that the relationship between the husband and wife remains intact.⁴²

Rhiannon's penance is an interesting feature of the story. Although this is the only instance in which it is associated with the Calumniated Wife, it occurs as a motif elsewhere (Q 493: Punishment of being

³⁹Schlauch, *Chaucer's Constance*, pp. 28–30; Wats, *Vitae Duorum Offarum*, pp. 6–7; and J. F. Campbell, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, 4 vols (Edinburgh, 1860–62; reprinted London, 1983), 1, 226. ⁴⁰*Pwyll Pendueic Dyuet*, edited by R. L. Thomson (Dublin, 1957), lines 449–508. ⁴¹Jackson, *International Popular Tale*, pp. 90–95; Patrick K. Ford, *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Tales* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1977), pp. 4–5; and Bollard, 'Role of Myth and Tradition', p. 78. ⁴²T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Honour and Status in Some Irish and Welsh Prose Tales', *Ériu*, 29 (1978), 127–29. Charles-Edwards points out, however, that one incident differs from this apparent consistency in the use of honour titles. When Teyrnon brings Pryderi to court he initially addresses Rhiannon as *gwreicda* and *eneit*, and only after her innocence is proved does he use *arglwydes*.

Saddled and Ridden as a Horse), and frequently appears in medieval literature, sometimes in fabliaux.⁴³ The character of Rhiannon is strong and memorable and much of its quality is due to the fusion of traditional and literary elements. Rhiannon is an Otherworld being who takes the initiative in seeking out her lover. This puts her within the tradition of the fairy mistress, which is a strong one in Celtic tradition. Rhiannon appears riding a white horse which cannot be overtaken, and only stops when Pwyll himself addresses her. It is nowhere stated that Rhiannon is an Otherworld being, but from the manner of her appearance, she clearly comes from Annwn. The impossibility of anyone overtaking her, the fact that her father's court lies outside the bounds of Pwyll's kingdom, and her appearance after Pwyll places himself on a mound, Gorsedd Arberth, provide clear indications of her supernatural nature. At the wedding, Gwawl almost tricks Pwyll out of his bride, and it is Rhiannon who comes to the rescue. Yet once she and Pwyll return to his world, Rhiannon seems to become more vulnerable. She becomes a foreigner, in effect, and the initial roles are reversed, with Pwyll and later Pryderi having to protect her.

Rhiannon is first accused of barrenness, an accusation which fits in with the legal and social consequences of marriage in Welsh society. It is not, however, an accusation that figures much in the Calumniated Wife *märchen*. The second accusation, brought by the nurses, is more usual. They are multiple accusers, an uncommon but not unknown motif. The fact that the women persist despite Rhiannon's reassurance gives the author an opportunity to portray her as a dignified and noble woman. The text says that she prefers penance to wrangling with the women.⁴⁴ Both Pwyll and the kings in other fairy tales are reluctant to punish their wives, despite the seeming evidence against them. In *The Four Branches*, this aspect of the tale is developed into a convincingly real and sustained husband-wife relationship.

Gwawl's character also reveals much about the use of folklore in the work. Gwawl is a rejected suitor who shares some of the qualities of the incestuous father and the supernatural being in *Our Lady's Child*. He does not accuse the wife, but, by implication, is the reason for the vengeance taken against her and, later, her son. It is not clear in the First Branch to whom the mysterious claw belongs, but in the Third Branch it seems, in retrospect, to be part of a plot against Rhiannon and her family.⁴⁵ Motivation in folktales is usually very clear, whereas here a motif initiated in the Calumniated Wife section of the First Branch forms a link with material in the Third. Motivation in *The Four Branches* is more complicated than in

⁴³Brynley F. Roberts, 'Penyd Rhiannon', *BBCS*, 23 (1968–70), 325–37. ⁴⁴*Pwyll*, lines 449–501. ⁴⁵*Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, edited by Ifor Williams, second edition (Cardiff, 1951), pp. 64–65.

märchen, but the structure underlying the story, the persecution of a queen who is an outsider in her husband's kingdom, is a constant feature no matter how complicated or how literary the tale.

The return of Pryderi follows the pattern in tales such as *The Prince whose Wishes Always Came True* and *Our Lady's Child*, in which the son returns to vindicate the mother. The court recognizes that Pryderi is Pwyll's son, and Rhiannon's penance is at an end. There is, however, no punishment of the accuser as is customary in the märchen since, as yet, he has not been identified.

The Calumniated Wife episode in *Branwen* contains no attempted incest, but there is mutilation, of the horses rather than of the heroine. Branwen marries Matholwch with the consent of her family, except Efnisien who is a perennial trouble-maker. Efnisien is angry because he has not been consulted about Branwen's marriage and he mutilates the horses in revenge.⁴⁶ In Ireland all goes well for a while and when her son is born, he is put out to fosterage according to custom. Once again, it is the king's 'foster-brothers' who cause trouble. They do not accuse Branwen directly, but they remind Matholwch of the insult of the mutilated horses. Since Bendigeidfran made restitution for the horses and since the Irish king accepted the restitution, it is clear that this is not the real point. Rather, the insult committed against the Irish during their stay in Wales is being transferred to Branwen, the alien Welshwoman in Ireland.

The men of Ireland are more successful in turning Matholwch against his wife, and Branwen is driven from the court and made to work in the kitchen. Again the language reflects the change in circumstances.⁴⁷ She is a much more passive figure than Rhiannon, and in this her character is closer to that of the folktale queen, even though her story diverges more from the structure of other Calumniated Wife folktales than does Rhiannon's. The description of how she raises a starling in her kneading trough to inform her brother of her plight gives her both individuality and a tragic dimension. The relation of *Branwen* to the Calumniated Wife folktales is complex. There is no flight motif, no incest, and no mutilation. Branwen's child is born before she is persecuted. He is not stolen, nor she accused of murdering him. She is exonerated and reunited with her child and her family, but not with Matholwch, who shows none of the belief in his wife's innocence characteristic of the märchen husband. Whatever the author's intention, the section presents an interesting contrast to the treatment of Rhiannon. Both women are punished as the outcome of popular unrest, but the

⁴⁶Pwyll, lines 58–77. ⁴⁷Morfydd E. Owen, 'Shame and Reparation: Woman's Place in the Kin', in *The Welsh Law of Women: Studies presented to Professor D. A. Binchy*, edited by Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen (Cardiff, 1980), pp. 58–59; and Charles-Edwards, 'Honour and Status', pp. 129–30.

personal relationship between Pwyll and Rhiannon survives, unlike that of Branwen and Matholwch.

The shadowy figure of Efnisien takes on some of the qualities of the persecutor in the Maiden Without Hands tale. He causes trouble before Branwen's marriage and later kills her son. This aspect of *Branwen* is not characteristic of the folktale, where conflicts are resolved happily, and the Calumniated Wife theme which appears in *Branwen* is clearly to be considered a literary adaptation of a folktale. In structure, the theme in *Branwen* is most like the Crescentia tale (AT 712) in the patient endurance shown by the heroine. In *Branwen*, the theme provides a poignant characterization of the heroine, although it appears to be slightly removed from the main narrative, while in *Pwyll*, with the exception of the Pwyll–Arawn material, the theme is a motivating factor throughout the story.

There is one other possible example of the Calumniated Wife in Welsh tradition. This occurs in an episode in *Culhwch and Olwen* in which Arthur and his men set out to rescue the prisoner Mabon, who was stolen from his mother when three nights old.⁴⁸ Jackson points out that the abduction of a child takes place in both myth and folktale.⁴⁹ Here Mabon, not his mother, is the prisoner and the tale is, in any case, too fragmentary for real analysis. However, if Celtic mythology contained a story about a stolen son of one of its goddesses, then this would have been a possible way in which the Calumniated Wife tale could have entered Welsh tradition.

Whatever the particular variations, the tale clearly reflects a number of attitudes towards that which is foreign and to the foreigner's role within the familiar bounds of society. The fact that there were laws referring to aliens and to the children of alien marriages indicates that society recognized their existence and needed to define their position within the social system.

The position of the *fiana* in Irish law and literature provides a model for the process by which aliens could be integrated into the dominant social structure. It also illustrates the similarities between attitudes to members of the social periphery and attitudes to foreigners, and in this sense is relevant to the foregoing discussion of the Calumniated Wife theme. The position of the Irish *fiana*, roving bands of independent fighting men, was similar to the legal status of the Welshman or Irishman who travelled outside his own country. A *féinnid* was *écland* (clanless), which meant that, like the Welsh *alltud*, he lost his legal status and the protection of his kin.⁵⁰ However, he was an outsider, not an outlaw, and his position

⁴⁸*The Mabinogion*, translated by Jones and Jones, pp. 118 and 126. ⁴⁹Jackson, *International Popular Tale*, pp. 128–29. ⁵⁰Marie-Louise Sjoestedt, *Gods and Heroes of the Celts*, translated by Myles Dillon (London, 1940; reprinted Berkeley, California, 1982), p. 102.

entailed certain duties and privileges.⁵¹ Much of what can be said of Celtic society's attitude to the *fiana* can be applied to its attitude to foreigners as well:

Every society and specially a closed society organized in rigid classes like that of the Celts includes certain abnormal elements . . . Celtic society provides its own antidote (the *fiana*) and copes with what is asocial by expelling it, while at the same time recognizing its right and assigning it a particular domain.⁵²

The foreigner does not need to be expelled, as he is already outside the social structure, but he does need to have his place in society defined and what Sjoestedt says in the above quotation can be applied to the position of the foreign wife in the Calumniated Wife tales; she is an acknowledged but unnatural element in the social system. Her position is a weak one, and she is subject to rejection in times of stress.

This examination of the parallels between *The Four Branches* and folktales that contain the Calumniated Wife episode does not imply that these tales were direct sources for the author of *The Four Branches*. Reconstruction of sources is always difficult, and the author may have known one or several versions of the tale. What seems unlikely is that he created a pastiche out of half-remembered folklore motifs, which is the impression that one gets from Jackson's book, or that he was trying to make sense out of a contaminated mythology, as Gruffydd implies. Rather, his use of folklore sources was a creative and very controlled activity. The many parallels between the events of the Welsh tales and folklore tradition indicate that the latter was a major source for these tales, but it is also evident from the text that the author reworked the stories, developing the dramatic possibilities and adding characterization. This is particularly clear in Rhiannon's story, where the Calumniated Wife motif is pivotal to much of the action in the First Branch and ultimately affects events in the Third Branch as well. The Calumniated Wife theme is much less pronounced in *Branwen*. Here the motif is closely tied to a feud and an eventual war between two national groups and this clearly demonstrates the way in which elements of the theme relate to negative attitudes to foreigners. The motif functions on at least two important levels in *The Four Branches*. As a dramatic theme forming part of an integrated work, it adds further motivation, and therefore further meaning, to the persecution of the two queens, and contributes substantially to the characterization of both figures. As a folktale motif incorporated into a literary work, it reveals something about the nature of the connection between these medieval Welsh stories and their cultural context which can help to clarify the meaning and significance of these works for the modern reader.

⁵¹*ibid.*, pp. 100, 103, and 108. ⁵²*ibid.*, p. 109.