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OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

The Mabinogion

Translated with an Introduction and Notes by
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Rhonabwy's Dream



MADOG son of Maredudd ruled Powys from one end to the other, that is, from Porffordd to Gwafan in the uplands of Arwystli.* At that time he had a brother whose rank was not equal to his. His name was Iorwerth son of Maredudd.* And Iorwerth became greatly concerned and saddened to see the honour and power possessed by his brother, and he with nothing. So he sought out his companions and foster-brothers, and consulted with them as to what he should do about it. They decided that some of them should go and ask Madog for maintenance. Madog offered him the position of the head of the retinue,* and equal standing with himself, and horses and armour and honour. But Iorwerth refused that, and went raiding in England, and he committed murder, and burned houses and took prisoners. Madog took counsel, together with the men of Powys. They decided to place a hundred men in every three commots in Powys to look for Iorwerth. And they regarded Rhychdir Powys, from Aber Ceiriog in Halictwn as far as Rhyd Wilfre on Efyrynwy,* as equal to the three best commots in Powys. And anyone who did not succeed with a retinue in this arable land would not succeed anywhere in Powys. And those men split up as far as Didlystwn,* a small town in this arable land.

There was a man on that quest whose name was Rhonabwy. He and Cynwrig Frychgoch, a man from Mawddwy, and Cadwgan Fras, a man from Moelfre in Cynllaith, came to the house of Heilyn Goch son of Cadwgan son of Iddon* for lodging. And when they approached the house, they could see a very black old building with a straight gable end, and plenty of smoke coming from it. When they came inside they could see an uneven floor, full of holes; where there was a bump in the floor, scarcely could a man stand up, so slippery was the floor with the dung of cattle and their piss. Where there was a hole, a man would go over his ankle, what with the mixture of water and cattle-piss. And there were branches of holly in abundance on the floor, with their tips eaten by the cattle. When they came to the

upper end of the hall they could see bare, dusty, dais boards, and a hag feeding a fire on one dais.* And when she became cold, she would throw a lapful of chaff on the fire so that it was not easy for anyone in the world to put up with that smoke entering his nostrils. On the other dais they could see a yellow ox-skin;* good luck would befall whichever one of them got to lie on that skin.

When they had sat down they asked the hag where the people of the house were, but she would only speak gruffly to them. Suddenly the people arrive, a red-haired, balding, wizened man, with a bundle of sticks on his back, and a little skinny, grey-haired woman, with a bundle under her arm too. And they gave the men a cold welcome. The woman lit a fire for them with the sticks and went to cook, and brought them their food—barley bread and cheese, and watered-down milk. Suddenly there was a surge of wind and rain, so that it was not easy for anyone to go out and relieve himself. And because their journey had been so troublesome, they grew weary and went to sleep. When they examined their sleeping-place there was on it only dusty, flea-infested straw-ends, mixed with bits of twig, the cattle having devoured all the straw that was above their heads and below their feet. A greyish-red blanket, rough and threadbare and full of holes, was spread on it, and over the blanket a coarse, tattered sheet with big holes, and a half-empty pillow with a filthy cover on top of the sheet. And they went to sleep. Rhonabwy's two companions fell into a deep sleep, after the fleas and discomfort had tormented them. But Rhonabwy, since he could neither sleep nor rest, thought he would suffer less if he went to sleep on the yellow ox-skin on the dais. And there he slept.

As soon as sleep entered his eyes he was granted a vision, that he and his companions were travelling across Maes Argynroeg, and his inclination and intent, so he thought, was towards Rhyd-y-groes on the Hafren.* As he was travelling he heard a commotion, and he had never heard a commotion like it. He looked behind him, and saw a young man with curly yellow hair and his beard newly trimmed, on a yellow horse, and from the top of its forelegs and its kneecaps downwards green. And the rider was wearing a tunic of yellow brocaded silk, embroidered with green thread, a gold-hilted sword on his thigh, with a sheath of new Cordovan leather, and a thong of deerskin with a clasp of gold. And over that a mantle of yellow brocaded silk, embroidered with green silk, and the fringes of the

mantle were green. What was green of the garment of the rider and horse was as green as the leaves of the pine-trees, and what was yellow was as yellow as the flowers of the broom.* Because the rider looked so fierce, Rhonabwy and his companions became frightened and began to retreat. But he pursued them. As the horse breathed out, the men moved a distance away from him; but as he breathed in, they came closer to him, right to the horse's chest. When he caught up with them, they asked him for mercy.

'You shall have it, gladly, and don't be afraid.'

'Lord, since you have shown us mercy, will you tell us who you are?' said Rhonabwy.

'I will not conceal my identity from you: Iddog son of Mynio. But usually I am not known by my name, but by my nickname.'

'Will you tell us your nickname?'

'I will. I am called Iddog Cordd Prydain.*'

'Lord,' said Rhonabwy, 'why are you called that?'

'I will tell you why. I was one of the messengers between Arthur and his nephew Medrawd at the battle of Camlan. And at that time I was a high-spirited young man, and because I was so eager for battle, I stirred up trouble between them. This is what I did: whenever the emperor Arthur would send me to remind Medrawd that he was his foster-father and uncle, and to ask for peace lest the sons of the kings of the Island of Britain and their men be killed, and when Arthur would speak to me the fairest words that he could, I would repeat those words to Medrawd in the most offensive way possible. Because of that I was called Iddog Cordd Prydain. And that is how the battle of Camlan was contrived. But three nights before the end of the battle of Camlan I left them, and came to Y Llech Las in Prydain* to do penance. And I was there for seven years doing penance, and I was shown mercy.'

Then they heard a commotion that was louder by far than the first one. When they looked towards the commotion, behold, a young lad with yellowish-red hair, without a beard or a moustache, and the look of a nobleman about him, on a large horse. From the top of its shoulders and its kneecaps downwards, the horse was yellow. The man was wearing a garment of red brocaded silk, embroidered with yellow silk, and the fringes of the mantle were yellow. What was yellow of his and his horse's garment was as yellow as the flowers of the broom, and what was red was as red as the reddest blood in the

world. Then, behold, the rider catches up with them, and asks Iddog if he would give him a share of these little men.

'The share that is proper for me to give, I will do so: to be a friend to them as I have been.' The rider agreed to that and went off.

'Iddog,' said Rhonabwy, 'who was that man?'

'Rhuawn Bebyr son of Deorthach Wledig.*'

Then they travelled across the great plain of Argyngroeg to Rhyd-y-groes on the Hafren. And a mile from the ford, on each side of the road, they could see huts and tents and the mustering of a great host. They came to the edge of the ford, and saw Arthur sitting on a flat meadow below the ford, with Bedwin the Bishop on one side and Gwartheygydd son of Caw* on the other. A tall, auburn-haired young man was standing beside them, holding his sword in its sheath, and wearing a tunic and cape of pure black brocaded silk, his face as white as ivory, and his eyebrows as black as jet. What could be seen of his wrist between his gloves and sleeves was whiter than the lily, and thicker than the calf of a warrior's leg. Then Iddog, accompanied by the men, went up to Arthur, and greeted him.

'May God prosper you,' said Arthur. 'Iddog, where did you find these little men?'

'I found them, lord, up there on the road.' The emperor smiled disdainfully.

'Lord,' said Iddog, 'why are you laughing?'

'Iddog,' said Arthur, 'I am not laughing; but rather I feel so sad that scum such as these are protecting this Island after such fine men that protected it in the past.'

Then Iddog said, 'Rhonabwy, do you see the ring with the stone in it on the emperor's hand?'

'I do,' he said.

'One of the virtues of the stone is that you will remember what you have seen here tonight; and had you not seen the stone, you would remember nothing about this.'

After that Rhonabwy saw a troop coming towards the ford.

'Iddog,' said Rhonabwy, 'whose is that troop?'

'The companions of Rhuawn Bebyr son of Deorthach Wledig. And those men receive mead and bragget with honour, and get to make love to the daughters of the kings of the Island of Britain with no objection, and they have a right to that, for in each battle they lead and bring up the rear.'

Rhonabwy could see no other colour on a horse or a man in that troop that was not as red as blood. And if one of the riders broke away from that troop, he would be like a column of fire rising to the sky. And that troop encamped above the ford.

Then they saw another troop coming towards the ford. And from the horses' front pommels upwards they were as white as the lily, and from there downwards as black as jet. Behold, they saw a rider coming forward and spurring his horse in the ford so that the water splashed over Arthur and the bishop and all who were conferring with them, so that they were as wet as if they had been dragged out of the river. As the rider was turning his horse's head, the lad who was standing beside Arthur struck the horse on its nostrils with the sword in its sheath, so that it would have been a wonder had it not shattered steel, let alone flesh or bone. The rider drew his sword half out of his sheath, and asked him, 'Why did you strike my horse? Was it out of disrespect or by way of advice?'

'You needed advice. What madness made you ride so foolishly, causing the water to splash from the ford over Arthur and the consecrated bishop and their counsellors, so that they were as wet as if they had been dragged out of the river?'

'Then I shall take it as advice.' And he turned his horse's head back towards his troop.

'Iddog,' said Rhonabwy, 'who was the rider just now?'

'A young man considered to be the wisest and most accomplished in this kingdom, Addaon son of Taliesin.'

'Who was the man who struck his horse?'

'A stubborn and fierce lad, Elphin son of Gwyddno.*'

Then a proud, handsome man with eloquent, bold speech said that it was strange that a host as large as that could be accommodated in such a confined place, and that it was even stranger that those who had promised to be at the battle of Baddon by noon, to fight Osla Gyllellfawr,* should still be there: 'Decide whether you will go or not. I shall go.'

'You are right,' said Arthur. 'And let us go together.'

'Iddog,' said Rhonabwy, 'who is the man who spoke so boldly to Arthur as he who spoke just now?'

'A man who had the right to speak to him as plainly as he wished, Caradog Freichfras son of Llŷr Marini,* his chief adviser and nephew.'

Then Iddog took Rhonabwy behind him on the horse, and that large host set off towards Cefn Digoll,* each troop in its proper place. When they were halfway across the ford on the Hafren, Iddog turned his horse's head round, and Rhonabwy looked at the Hafren valley. He could see two most disciplined troops approaching the ford on the Hafren. A brilliant white troop was approaching, each man wearing a mantle of white brocaded silk with pure black fringes, and from the kneecaps and the tops of the horses' forelegs downwards they were pure black, but apart from that they were pale white all over. And their banners were pure white, and the tip of each one was pure black.

'Iddog,' said Rhonabwy, 'who is that pure white troop over there?'

'They are the men of Norway, led by March son of Meirchawn.* He is Arthur's cousin.'

Then Rhonabwy could see a troop, and each man wearing a pure black garment with pure white fringes, and from the tops of the horses' forelegs and their kneecaps downwards, they were pure white. And their banners were pure black and the tip of each one was pure white.

'Iddog,' said Rhonabwy, 'who is that pure black troop over there?'

'The men of Denmark, led by Edern son of Nudd.*'

By the time these had caught up with the host, Arthur and his host of warriors had dismounted below *Caer Faddon*. Rhonabwy could see that he and Iddog were going the same way as Arthur. When they had dismounted he heard a huge, dreadful commotion among the host. And the man who would be at the edge of the host one moment would be in their midst the next, and the one who would be in their midst would be at the edge. Suddenly he could see a rider approaching, both he and his horse dressed in chain-mail, its rings as white as the whitest lily, and its rivets as red as the reddest blood, and he was riding among the host.

'Iddog,' said Rhonabwy, 'is the host retreating from me?'

'The emperor Arthur has never retreated, and if you were heard uttering those words, you would be a dead man. But the rider you see over there, that's Cai,* he is the fairest man who rides in Arthur's court. And the man at the edge of the host is rushing back to see Cai ride, and the man in the middle is retreating to the edge for fear of being hurt by the horse. And that's the meaning of the commotion in the host.'

Then they heard Cadwr, earl of Cornwall,* being summoned. Behold, he got up with Arthur's sword in his hand and the image of two golden serpents on the sword. When the sword was drawn from the sheath, it was like seeing two flames of fire from the serpents' jaws. And it was not easy for anyone to look at that, because it was so terrifying. Then, behold, the host calmed down and the commotion ceased; and the earl returned to the tent.

'Iddog,' said Rhonabwy, 'who was the man who brought the sword to Arthur?'

'Cadwr, earl of Cornwall, the man whose duty it is to dress the king in his armour on the day of battle and combat.'

Then they heard Eiryng Wych Amheibyn,* Arthur's servant, being summoned, a rough, ugly, red-haired man, with a red moustache full of bristling hairs. Behold, he came on a big red horse with its mane parted on both sides of its neck, carrying a large, handsome load. The big red-haired servant dismounted in front of Arthur and pulled out a golden chair from the load, and a mantle of damasked, brocaded silk. He spread out the mantle in front of Arthur, with a reddish gold apple at each of its corners. He placed the chair on the mantle, and the chair was so large that three armed men could sit on it. Gwen was the name of the mantle.* One of the attributes of the mantle was that the person wrapped in it could see everyone yet no one could see him. And no colour would ever last on it except its own colour. Arthur sat down on the mantle; Owain son of Urien* was standing near him.

'Owain,' said Arthur, 'do you want to play *gwyddbwyll*?'

'I do, lord,' said Owain. And the red-haired servant brought the *gwyddbwyll* to Arthur and Owain—pieces of gold and a board of silver. And they began to play.

When their game of *gwyddbwyll* was at its most entertaining, behold, they see coming from a white, red-topped tent—with an image of a pure black serpent on top of the tent, and crimson-red, poisonous eyes in the serpent's head, and its tongue flame-red—a young squire with curly yellow hair and blue eyes, sprouting a beard, wearing a tunic and surcoat of yellow brocaded silk, and stockings of thin greenish-yellow cloth on his feet. And over the stockings two buskins of speckled Cordovan leather,* and clasps of gold around his ankles to fasten them, and a golden-hilted, heavy, triple-grooved sword, with a sheath of black Cordovan leather, and a tip of excellent

reddish gold at the end of the sheath. And he was coming to where the emperor and Owain were playing *gwyddbwyll*. The squire greeted Owain. And Owain was surprised that the squire greeted him but did not greet the emperor Arthur. And Arthur knew what Owain was thinking, and he said to Owain, 'Do not be surprised that the squire greeted you just now. He greeted me earlier. And his message is for you.'

Then the squire said to Owain,

'Lord, is it with your permission that the emperor's young lads and squires are molesting and harassing and brawling with your ravens?* If they don't have your permission, then ask the emperor to call them off.'

'Lord,' said Owain, 'you hear what the squire says. If you please, call them off my little ravens.'

'Your move,' he said. Then the squire returned to his tent.

They finished that game and began another. When they were halfway through the game, behold, a young ruddy-faced lad with very curly auburn hair, sharp-eyed, well-built, having trimmed his beard, coming from a bright yellow tent, with the image of a bright red lion on top of the tent. And he was wearing a tunic of yellow brocaded silk down to his calf, embroidered with thread of red silk, and two stockings on his feet of thin white linen, and over the stockings, two buskins of black Cordovan leather with golden clasps. And he had a large, heavy, triple-grooved sword in his hand, and a sheath of red deerskin for it, and a golden tip on the sheath, and he was coming to where Arthur and Owain were playing *gwyddbwyll*. The lad greeted him. And Owain was put out at being greeted, but Arthur was no more troubled than before. The squire said to Owain, 'Is it against your will that the emperor's squires are wounding your ravens, and killing some and bothering others? If it is against your will, beg him to call them off.'

'Lord,' said Owain, 'call your men off if you please.'

'Your move,' said the emperor. Then the squire returned to his tent.

They finished that game and began another. As they were beginning the first move in the game, they could see a short distance from them a mottled yellow tent, bigger than anyone had ever seen, with an image on it of an eagle made of gold, and precious stones in the eagle's head. Coming from the tent they could see a squire with

bright yellow hair on his head, fair and graceful, wearing a mantle of green brocaded silk, a golden pin in the mantle on his right shoulder, as thick as a warrior's middle finger, and two stockings on his feet of thin totnes cloth,* and two shoes of speckled Cordovan leather with golden clasps. The young lad was of noble appearance—he had a white, rosy-cheeked face, and large, hawk-like eyes. In the squire's hand was a thick, speckled yellow spear, with a newly sharpened head, and on the spear a conspicuous banner. The squire came angrily, passionately, and at a fast canter to where Arthur was playing *gwyddbwyll* with Owain. And they realized that he was angry. Yet he greeted Owain, and told him that the most notable ravens had been killed, 'and those who have not been killed have been wounded and injured so badly that not one of them can raise its wings six feet from the ground.'

'Lord,' said Owain, 'call off your men.'

'Play on,' he said, 'if you want to.'

Then Owain said to the squire, 'Go back, and raise the banner where you see the battle at its most intense. And let God's will be done.'

Then the squire rode to where the battle was at its most intense for the ravens, and raised the banner. As he raised it the ravens flew up into the sky angrily, passionately, and ecstatically, to let wind into their wings and to throw off their fatigue. When they had regained their strength and power, with anger and joy they swooped down together on the men who had previously caused them injury and pain and loss. They carried off the heads of some, the eyes of others, the ears of others, and the arms of others, and took them up into the air. There was a great commotion in the sky with the fluttering of the jubilant ravens and their croaking, and another great commotion with the screaming of the men being attacked and injured and others being killed. It was as terrifying for Arthur as it was for Owain to hear that commotion above the *gwyddbwyll*.

When they looked they could hear a rider on a dapple-grey horse coming towards them. His horse was of a very strange colour*—dapple-grey, and its right foreleg bright red, and from the top of its legs to the top of its hoof, bright yellow. The rider and his horse were dressed in strange, heavy armour. His horse's covering, from the front pommel of his saddle upwards, was of bright red sendal, and from the pommel downwards, of bright yellow sendal. There was a

large, golden-hilted, one-edged sword on the lad's thigh and a new bright-green sheath with its tip of Spanish latten.* The sword's belt was of rough, black, Cordovan leather with gilded cross-pieces, and a clasp of ivory with a pure black tongue. On the rider's head was a golden helmet with precious, valuable stones in it, on top of the helmet an image of a yellow-red leopard, with two crimson-red stones in its head, so that it was terrifying for a warrior, however strong-hearted he might be, to look in the face of the leopard, let alone in the face of the warrior. In his hand a spear with a long, heavy, green shaft, and from its hilt upwards it was crimson-red with the blood of the ravens and their feathers. The rider approached the place where Arthur and Owain were over the *gwyddbwyll*. They realized that he was weary, angry, and troubled as he came towards them. The squire greeted Arthur and said that Owain's ravens were killing his young lads and squires. Arthur looked at Owain and said, 'Call off your ravens.'

'Lord,' said Owain, 'your move.' They played. The rider turned back towards the battle, and the ravens were no more restrained than before.

When they had played a little they could hear a great commotion, and the screaming of men, and the croaking of ravens as they seized the men by brute force into the sky and tore them apart between each other, and let them fall in pieces to the ground. Out of the commotion they could see a rider approaching on a pale white horse, and the horse's left foreleg was pure black down to the top of the hoof. The rider and his horse were dressed in large, heavy, green armour. He wore a cloak of yellow, damasked, brocaded silk, and the fringes of the cloak were green. His horse's covering was pure black with its fringes bright yellow. On the squire's thigh was a long, heavy, triple-grooved sword, with a sheath of engraved, red leather, and the belt of new red deerskin, with many golden cross-pieces, and a clasp made of whalebone with a pure black tongue. On the rider's head a golden helmet with magic sapphires in it, and on top of the helmet an image of a yellow-red lion, its foot-long, flame-red tongue sticking out of its mouth, and crimson-red, poisonous eyes in its head. The rider carried a stout spear of ash in his hand, with a new, bloody head on it and silver rivets. And the squire greeted the emperor.

'Lord,' he said, 'your squires and young lads have been

killed, together with the sons of the noblemen of the Island of Britain, so that from now on it will never be easy to protect this Island.'

'Owain,' said Arthur, 'call off your ravens.'

'Lord,' said Owain, 'your move.'

That game ended and they began another. When they were at the end of that game, behold, they heard a great commotion, and the screaming of armed men, and the croaking of ravens and their fluttering in the sky as they let the weapons fall to the ground in one piece but the men and horses were in pieces. Then they could see a rider on a black-hoofed, high-headed horse, and the top of the horse's left leg was bright red, and its right foreleg was pure white to the top of the hoof. The rider and his horse were dressed in mottled yellow armour, speckled with Spanish latten. He and his horse wore a cloak, in two halves, white and pure black, and the fringes of his cloak were golden purple. On top of his cloak was a golden-hilted, shining, triple-grooved sword. The sword's belt was of yellow gold cloth, with a clasp made of the eyelid of a pure black whale and a tongue of yellow gold. On the rider's head was a shiny helmet of yellow latten with shining crystals in it, and on top of the helmet an image of a griffin with magic stones in its head. In his hand was a spear of ash with a rounded shaft, coloured with blue azure, with a new, bloody head on the spear, riveted with precious silver. The rider came angrily to where Arthur was, and said that the ravens had killed his retinue and the sons of the noblemen of this Island, and asked him to persuade Owain to call off his ravens. Then Arthur asked Owain to call off his ravens. Then Arthur crushed the golden pieces that were on the board until they were nothing but dust; and Owain asked Gwres son of Rheged to lower his banner. Then it was lowered and everything was peaceful.

Then Rhonabwy asked Iddog who were the first three men who had come to tell Owain that his ravens were being killed. Iddog said, 'Men who were unhappy at Owain's loss, fellow noblemen and companions, Selyf son of Cynan Garwyn from Powys, and Gwgawn Gledyfrudd,* and Gwres son of Rheged, the man who carries Owain's banner on the day of battle and combat.'

'Who were the last three men who came to tell Arthur that the ravens were killing his men?' said Rhonabwy.

'The best and bravest men,' said Iddog, 'and they hate to see

Arthur suffer any loss: Blathaon son of Mwrheth, and Rhuawn Bebyr son of Deorthach Wledig, and Hyfaidd Unllen.*'

Then twenty-four horsemen came from Osla Gyllellfawr to ask Arthur for a truce until the end of a fortnight and a month. Arthur got up and took counsel. He went up to a large man with curly auburn hair standing a short distance from him. And there his counsellors were brought to him: Bedwin the Bishop, and Gwartheygydd son of Caw, and March son of Meirchawn, and Caradog Freichfras, and Gwalchmai son of Gwyar, and Edern son of Nudd, and Rhuawn Bebyr son of Deorthach Wledig, and Rhiogan son of the king of Ireland, and Gwenwynwyn son of Naf, Hywel son of Emyr Llydaw, Gwilym son of the king of France, and Daned son of Oth, and Gorau son of Custennin, and Mabon son of Modron, and Peredur Paladr Hir, and Hyfaidd Unllen, and Twrch son of Perif, Nerth son of Cadarn, and Gobrw son of Echel Forddwyd Twll, Gwair son of Gwystyl, and Adwy son of Geraint, Dyrstan son of Tallwch, Morien Manog, Granwen son of Llŷr, and Llacheu son of Arthur, and Llawfrodedd Farfog, and Cadwr, earl of Cornwall, Morfran son of Tegid, and Rhyawdd son of Morgant, and Dyfyr son of Alun Dyfed, Gwrhwr Gwalstawd Ieithoedd, Addaon son of Taliesin, and Llara son of Casnar Wledig, and Ffleuddwr Fflam, and Greidol Gallddofydd, Gilbert son of Cadgyffro, Menw son of Teirgwaedd, Gyrrhmwl Wledig, Cawrdaf son of Caradog Freichfras, Gildas son of Caw, Cadyriaith son of Saidi, and many men from Norway and Denmark, together with many men from Greece.* And plenty of people came to that counsel.

'Iddog,' said Rhonabwy, 'who is the man with auburn hair they approached just now?'

'Rhun son of Maelgwn Gwynedd, a man who has such authority that everyone goes to him for advice.'

'Why was a lad as young as Cadyriaith son of Saidi* brought to a counsel of such high-ranking men as those over there?'

'Because no one in Prydain gives more solid advice than he.'

Then, behold, poets came to perform a poem for Arthur. And no one understood the poem, apart from Cadyriaith himself, except that it was in praise of Arthur.* Then, behold, twenty-four mules arrived with their loads of gold and silver, and a tired and weary man with each of them, bringing tribute to Arthur from the Islands of Greece. Then Cadyriaith son of Saidi asked that a truce be given to Osla

Gyllellfawr for a fortnight and a month; and that the mules which had brought the tribute be given to the poets, along with what was on them, as a reward for waiting; and that during the truce they should be given payment for their singing. And that was agreed.

'Rhonabwy,' said Iddog, 'would it not be wrong to stop a young man who can give such generous advice as that from attending his lord's council?'

Then Cai got up and said, 'Whoever wishes to follow Arthur, let him be with him tonight in Cornwall.* And he who does not, let him stand against Arthur until the end of the truce.'

So loud was that commotion, Rhonabwy awoke. And when he awoke he was on the yellow ox-skin, having slept for three nights and three days.

And this story is called the Dream of Rhonabwy. This is why no one knows the dream—neither poet nor storyteller—without a book,* because of the number of colours on the horses, and the many unusual colours both on the armour and their trappings, and on the precious mantles and the magic stones.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

ABBREVIATIONS

- TYP* *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain*, ed. and trans. Rachel Bromwich (3rd revised edn. Cardiff, 2006; 1st edn. 1961). References are to triad numbers or page numbers in the 3rd edition.
- AOW* *The Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. Rachel Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman, and Brynley F. Roberts (Cardiff, 1991).
- LHDd* *The Law of Hywel Dda*, ed. and trans. Dafydd Jenkins (Llandysul, 1986).

THE FIRST BRANCH OF THE MABINOGI

In the White and Red Book manuscripts there are no specific titles to the Four Branches: each tale ends with a variation on the colophon 'and so ends this branch of the Mabinogi', giving rise to the current title which was popularized by Ifor Williams in his classic edition *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* (Cardiff, 1930)—'The Four Branches of the Mabinogi'. However, it is not clear whether there were only four branches. In the Red Book of Hergest the words *llyma dechreu mabinogi* ('this is the beginning of a mabinogi') appear before the First Branch; similar introductions are given to the other three tales: 'this is the Second/Third/Fourth Branch of the mabinogi'. Yet, there is no closing formula informing us that the *mabinogi* has come to an end, again implying that there may well have been more than four branches originally (see also the note to p. 21 on *branch of the Mabinogion*).

Regarding the titles of the individual tales, the First and Fourth Branches are commonly referred to by their *incipits*—'Pwyll, prince of Dyfed' and 'Math son of Mathonwy'. The Third Branch is, in reality, a continuation of the Second, and no personal name appears in the opening lines (indeed, these may have been one branch originally); however, Manawydan is central to the plot, and it could thus be argued that 'Manawydan son of Llŷr' is a suitable title. The Second Branch begins with the words 'Bendigeidfran fab Llŷr'; until the middle of the nineteenth century this, too, was commonly known in scholarly publications as *Mabinogi Bendigeidfran* or *Brân* (another version of his name). However, the tale is commonly known today as 'Branwen daughter of Llŷr', a title bestowed on the branch by Lady Charlotte Guest. From her textual notes, it would seem that Branwen had captured Guest's imagination, and especially the 'discovery' of her grave in 1813. To the male scholars of her time it was the king who was central to the tale; to Guest, however, it was the 'unfortunate heroine', Branwen. One could surmise about whether Guest felt some empathy with Branwen who, like her, had left her homeland for foreign parts in order to get married (see Sioned Davies, 'A Charming Guest:

- Ysbaddaden's list. *Ledewig* ('Breton') suggests that Gilythfyr came from Brittany.
- 207 *Gwrgi Seferi*: the first and only time that he is mentioned in the tale. *Gwrgi* means 'Man Hound', while *Seferi* may derive from *Severus*, a third-century emperor.
- Arthur went to the North*: presumably the 'Old North', namely the old Brittonic kingdoms of Gododdin, Strathclyde, and Rheged located in the North of England and southern Scotland. This, ironically, is where some of the earliest surviving Welsh poetry originates, such as the *Gododdin*, and poems associated with Owain and his father Urien of Rheged.
- 208 *Llamrei, Arthur's mare*: 'Grey or Swift Leaper.' Note that Arthur's horse is a 'mare'—the medieval warhorse of the West was almost always a stallion.
- 209 *Porth Cerddin in Dyfed. And Mesur y Pair is there: cerddin* is a 'rowan tree'; however, the exact location of the *porth* ('port') is unknown, although Pwll Crochan ('Pool of the Cauldron'), west of Fishguard, is a possibility, especially in view of the onomastic explanation: 'The Measure of the Cauldron is there.'
- Gwlad yr Haf*: the 'Summer Country', originally the whole of the south-west peninsula rather than just Somerset.
- a tribute of food*: the laws describe in detail the food tributes to which the king was entitled twice a year from his subjects, including flour, mead, oats, pigs, butter, and beer (*LHDD* 128–9).
- seven little pigs*: six of these are named as the hunt progresses: Grugyn Gwrych Eraint, Llwydog Gofyniad, Twrch Llawin, Gwys, Banw, Benwig.
- a fifth of Ireland*: Ireland was traditionally divided into five provinces: Ulster, Munster, Leinster, Connacht, and Meath. The closing lines of the Second Branch tell how Ireland was repopulated after the great massacre between the Irish and the men of the Island of the Mighty (p. 34).
- Grugyn Gwrych Eraint*: 'Grugyn Silver-bristle'. He is also referred to in this tale as Grugyn Gwallt Eraint (Grugyn Silver Hair); see p. 211. For Irish parallels, see *CaO* 158.
- 210 *Porth Clais in Dyfed . . . Mynym that night: Mynym* or *Menevia* is the old name for St David's, while *Porth Clais* is a harbour 5 miles south-west of the city.
- Glyn Nyfer . . . Cwm Cerwyn*: the Nyfer ('Nevern') valley, north-east of St David's, not far from *Cwm Cerwyn* ('the Cerwyn valley') in the Preseli mountains. For detailed geographical references to Twrch's journey, together with onomastic associations and a map, see *CaO*. See William Rees, *An Historical Atlas of Wales*, for the administrative divisions of medieval Wales.
- Gwartheyydd son of Caw, and Tarog Allt Clwyd*: 'Cattle-raider son of Caw' and 'Tarog from the Rock of the Clyde'; neither was included in the Court List. Indeed, several of the characters mentioned here have not been introduced previously in the tale.

- Peuliniog*: the land between Narberth and Carmarthen in south-west Wales.
- Glyn Ystun*: a wooded area to the east of the Llychwr valley (*Dyffryn Lluchwr*).
- 211 *Mynydd Amanw . . . Dyffryn Amanw . . . Banw and Benwig were killed: Amanw Mountain* and 'Amanw Valley' can be linked with the name Aman, a stream which flows into the Lluchwr. There is clearly an onomastic association here, *Banw* meaning 'pigling', and *Benwig* being the diminutive form, 'young pigling'.
- Llwch Ewin . . . Lluch Tawy . . . Din Tymi . . . Garth Grugyn . . . Ystrad Yw*: many of these places are difficult to identify with any degree of certainty. *Llwch Tawy* is the old name for Llyn y Fan Fawr in the Brecon Beacons; *Garth Grugyn* Castle, built in 1242, stands in Llanilar; the commot of *Ystrad Yw* is in south-east Wales, in the cantref of Talgarth.
- Hir Peisog*: 'Long Tunic.'
- between Tawy and Ewias . . . Aber Hafren*: the river Tawe flows into the sea at Swansea (*Abertawe*); *Ewias* was a cantref in the south-east, located between Talgarth and Erging. *Aber Hafren* is the estuary of the river Severn.
- 212 *between Llyn Lliwan and Aber Gwy: Lliwan Lake* can be equated with *Llyn Lliw*, the home of the Salmon (p. 204); it was a tidal lake reached by the Severn 'bore', a fast-moving tidal wave caused by the meeting of the tidal estuary and the river. The reference to 'the estuary of the Wye' (*Aber Gwy*) implies that the lake, described in the *History of the Britons* as one of the Wonders of Britain, was situated on the Welsh side of the Severn estuary. The description below of the waters flooding over Twrch Trwyth may be a further reference to the Severn bore. Some sixty such features are found worldwide, the largest in the river Quaintang in China, personified as the Quaintang Dragon. Today, surfing the Severn bore is popular: the experience has been described, ironically, as 'Hunting Wild Bore'. See also the note to p. 17 on *Teyrnnon Twrf Liant*.

RHONABWY'S DREAM

- 214 *Madog son of Maredudd . . . uplands of Arwystli*: Madog ruled Powys from 1130 until his death in 1160. Throughout his reign he attempted to defend his lands against the power of Gwynedd, joining forces with Henry II against Owain Gwynedd in 1157. After his death Powys was shared between his heirs, namely three of his sons, his brother Iorwerth, and his nephew Owain Cyfeiliog, leading to internal strife. Powys in the twelfth century consisted of today's Montgomeryshire and parts of the counties of Merioneth, Denbigh, and Flint. Porffordd can be identified with Pulford in Flintshire, 5 miles south of Chester. The exact location of Gwafan is uncertain, except that it was somewhere in the cantref of Arwystli in south Montgomeryshire. The author emphasizes, therefore,

that *all* of Powys is under Madog's rule. For a detailed map of the places mentioned in the tale, see Melville Richards's Welsh-language edition of the tale, *Breudwyf Ronabwy* (Cardiff, 1948). See also William Rees, *An Historical Atlas of Wales*.

- 214 *Iorwerth son of Maredudd*: or *Iorwerth Goch* ('Iorwerth the Red'), according to historical sources. Iorwerth was a *latimari* ('translator') for the king, and was given the lordship of Chirk Castle for his services. He joined his brother in 1157 against Owain Gwynedd. But in 1165 he fought with Owain Gwynedd for a short period, against Henry II; but then restored his allegiance to the English Crown once more. The tension between Iorwerth and his brother is representative of the fragile situation in medieval Wales, where male relatives would fight for supremacy.

head of the retinue: the *teulu* ('retinue') was integral to the role of any ruler; it would not only defend him, but also promote his cause in the bloody political sphere. The *penteuulu* ('head') was usually a close relative, as attested by the Welsh laws (*LHDD* 8–11).

Rhychdir Powys . . . *Efyrynwy*: the *Rhychdir* (meaning 'arable land') is the area around Oswestry. The river Ceiriog flows into the Dee at Aber Ceiriog, not far from Chirk; nearby is Halton (*Halictwn*). *Rhyd Wilfre* refers to a ford (*rhyd*) on the river Efyrynwy (English: Vyrnwy), between Llanymynech and Melverley.

Didlystwn: Dudleston, to the south-east of Aber Ceiriog.

Rhonabwy . . . *Heilyn Goch son of Cadwgan son of Iddow*: Rhonabwy's two companions are from Powys: *Cynwrig Frychgoch* ('Freckled and Red') comes from Mawddwy, a commot in north-west Powys; *Cadwgan Fras* ('stout') comes from Moelfre in the commot of Cynllaith, 6 miles to the west of Oswestry. No details are given about Rhonabwy himself. Heilyn, like Cynwrig, is 'Red', presumably a reference to the colour of his hair.

- 215 *A very black old building* . . . *on one dais*: a vivid description of a medieval house, quite unlike the sumptuous halls of the 'romances'. The building is unlikely to be a hall-house (which might have a raised dais at one end of the hall for the main table), and probably represents a building lower down the social scale, such as a medieval long-house with combined cattle/living quarters, where the dais may refer to low built-in benching along the walls, either side of the central hearth, for sleeping and sitting on. My thanks to Mark Redknapp, Amgueddfa Cymru/National Museum Wales. See also John B. Hilling, *The Historic Architecture of Wales* (Cardiff, 1976), 90–104.

yellow ox-skin: in Irish sources sleeping on an ox-hide was a precursor to a dream, very often a prophetic vision.

Maes Argyngroeg . . . *Rhyd-y-groes on the Hafren*: *Maes Argyngroeg* is the level land near Welshpool, retained in the name Gungrog today. *Rhyd-y-groes* ('Ford of the Cross') is probably at Buttington near Welshpool.

- 216 *and saw a young man . . . as yellow as the flowers of the broom*: the first of many formulaic descriptions which, although highly elaborate, follow the traditional pattern found in most of the other tales. The horse is often an integral part of the description in 'Rhonabwy's Dream'. Powys was famous for its horses in the Middle Ages, as witnessed, for example, by Gerald of Wales, who emphasizes their 'majestic proportions' and 'incomparable speed': Lewis Thorpe (trans.), *The Journey Through Wales and The Description of Wales* (Harmondsworth, 1978) 201. See Sioned Davies, 'Horses in the *Mabinogion*', in Davies and Jones (eds.), *The Horse in Celtic Culture*.

Iddog Gordd Prydain: an onomastic tale, explaining how Iddog received his nickname 'Agitator of Britain'. He is almost unknown outside this tale, although he is included in a fifteenth-century version of the triad the Three Men of Shame (*TYP* 51) as one who caused strife between Arthur and Medrawd at the battle of Camlan. For further triads reflecting a strong Welsh tradition concerning Arthur's last battle, see *TYP*, pp. 167–70, as well as the many references in 'How Culhwch Won Olwen'. See note to p. 68 for further details of Medrawd. This reference to Iddog would suggest that the battle of Camlan has already taken place; however, Arthur is then introduced later in the story. Rather than read this reference to Iddog as an anachronism, it could be viewed as a deliberate attempt at parody on the part of the author, where the expected chronological sequence of events is reversed. On the notion of the story 'running backwards', see Edgar Slotkin, 'The Fabula, Story, and Text of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 18 (1989), 89–111.

Y Llech Las in Prydain: the Grey Rock in Pictland.

- 217 *Rhuawn Bebyr son of Deorthuch Wledig*: Rhuawn the Radiant, one of the Three Fortunate Princes of the Island of Britain (*TYP* 3), appears in Arthur's Court List as Rhuawn Bebyr son of Dorath (p. 184).

Bedwin the Bishop . . . *Gwartheygydd son of Caw*: Bishop Bedwin is mentioned in Arthur's Court List (p. 188), while Gwartheygydd ('Cattle-raider') is killed while hunting Twrch Trwyth (p. 210).

- 218 *Addaon son of Taliesin* . . . *Elphin son of Gwyddno*: Addaon (sometimes Afaon) appears in the triads as one of the Three Bull-Chieftains (*TYP* 7), and one of the Three Battle-Rulers (*TYP* 25); his death was one of the Three Unfortunate Slaughters of the Island of Britain (*TYP* 33). Elphin is associated with the saga of Taliesin; see note to *Morfran* (p. 264).

battle of Baddon . . . *Osla Cylllellfawr*: this was traditionally one of Arthur's famous battles (see *AOW* for references in Welsh sources). Osla 'Big Knife' plays a prominent role in the hunting of Twrch Trwyth, where he is portrayed as one of Arthur's own men rather than his enemy (p. 212).

Caradog Freichfras son of Llŷr Marini: Caradog Strong Arm appears in the triads, and also in 'Geraint son of Erbin' (see note to p. 152).

- 219 *Cefn Digoll*: Long Mountain, south of Welshpool.
March son of Meirchawn: the King Mark of the Tristan romances. Welsh sources suggest that there existed many traditions about him. In *TYP* 14, for example, he is one of the Three Seafarers/Fleet Owners, which perhaps explains his association with the men of Scandinavia in the dream—they were renowned for their seafaring exploits. He is also associated with the Three Powerful Swineherds of the Island of Britain (*TYP* 26) through his nephew Trystan. For a discussion of 'The *Tristan* of the Welsh', see Rachel Bromwich in *AOW* 209–28.
Edern son of Nudd: a character who appears in 'Geraint son of Erbin' (p. 148) and also 'How Culhwch Won Olwen' (p. 184).
Cai: one of Arthur's foremost warriors, who appears in five of the *Mabinogion* tales. See note to p. 68.
 220 *Cadwr, earl of Cornwall*: a borrowing from Geoffrey's *History of the Kings of Britain*.
Eiryn Wych Amheibyn: Eiryn the Splendid, son of Peibyn.
Gwen was the name of the mantle: a reference is made to Arthur's mantle in 'How Culhwch Won Olwen' (p. 183); it is also listed as one of the Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain—'whoever was under it could not be seen, and he could see everyone' (*TYP*, p. 240)—compare Caswallon's mantle in the Second Branch (p. 33).
Owain son of Urien: one of Arthur's men, and the hero of the tale 'The Lady of the Well'. See note to p. 66.
gwyddbwyll: a board game not unlike chess; see discussion in the note to p. 86. The chess motif is often used to parallel real battles; however, here Arthur and Owain are on the same side, although ironically, when they begin to play their men begin to fight.
Cordovan leather: see note to p. 38.
 221 *your ravens*: Owain is traditionally associated with ravens; compare the ending of 'The Lady of the Well', where reference is made to the 'Flight of Ravens' (see note to p. 138). 'Raven' is a common metaphor for warrior in Welsh poetry. Here, in the dream, Owain's troops behave literally like ravens who swoop down and attack Arthur's men. Owain's ravens are commemorated in the coat of arms of the family of Sir Rhys ap Thomas of Abermarlais, which claimed descent from Owain and his father Urien.
 222 *thin totnes cloth: twtnais*, from Middle English *totenais*, a type of cloth from the town of Totnes.
His horse was of a very strange colour: it is difficult to know whether the descriptions of this horse, and the two that follow, should be taken at face value. Ambiguity arises as to whether the colours, here and elsewhere in the tale, refer to the horses themselves or to their apparel. Some have attempted to link the colours with thirteenth-century heraldry, while others argue that the colours themselves are not important—this is all part of the author's attempt to parody the formulaic descriptions of

- medieval narrative. See Sioned Davies, 'Horses in the *Mabinogion*', in Davies and Jones (eds.), *The Horse in Celtic Culture*, 121–40.
 223 *Spanish latten*: a yellow metal, either identical with, or very like, brass.
 224 *Selyf son of Cynan Garwyn . . . Gwgawn Gleddyfrudd*: Selyf was king of Powys at the beginning of the seventh century; he lost his life fighting the Northumbrians at the battle of Chester (c.615). His reputation as a fierce warrior is reflected in the triads, where he is named as one of the Three Battle-Rulers of the Island of Britain (*TYP* 25). Gwgawn Red Sword, too, is commemorated as someone who holds his ground in battle (*TYP* 24). According to the genealogies, he was a local ruler in Ceredigion, in West Wales (see *TYP*, p. 384).
 225 *Blathaon son of Mwrheth . . . Hyfaidd Unllen*: for Blathaon, compare the place-name (see note to p. 182 on *Pen Pengwaedd*); Hyfaidd One-Mantle appears in Arthur's Court List (p. 185).
Bedwin the Bishop . . . many men from Greece: compare the lists in 'Geraint son of Erbin' (p. 155) and 'How Culhwch Won Olwen' (pp. 184–9). It would seem that the author has borrowed extensively from the latter, and also from the triads. The following names do not appear in the above lists, neither are they mentioned elsewhere in the dream: Gwynwyn son of Naf (one of the Three Fleet Owners, *TYP* 14); Daned son of Oth, Gwair son of Gwystyl (meaning 'hostage', one of the Three Diademed Battle-Leaders, *TYP* 21); Dyrstan son of Tallwch (for Trystan, see note to p. 219 on *March*); Granwen son of Llŷr; Llacheu son of Arthur (mentioned in the triads, see *TYP*, pp. 408–10); Rhyawdd son of Morgant (a 'frivolous/amateur bard', according to *TYP* 12); Gilbert son of Cadgyffro (son of Battle Tumult, see *TYP*, pp. 360–1); Gyrthmwl Wledig (see *TYP*, p. 383); Cawrdaf son of Caradog Strong Arm (see *TYP*, p. 308).
Rhun son of Maelgwn Gwynedd . . . Cadyriaith son of Saidi: Maelgwn, king of Gwynedd (d. 547), is one of the five rulers of sixth-century Britain condemned by Gildas for his crimes. His son Rhun is mentioned in more than one source regarding a dispute with Maelgwn's son-in-law Elidir Mwynfawr (see *TYP*, pp. 491–2). For Cadyriaith ('Fine Speech') see note to p. 141.
it was in praise of Arthur: the author is probably satirizing the court poets here—their poetry is so complex that no one understands! Madog himself was a renowned patron of poets: eulogies were composed to him by men such as Gwalchmai ap Meilyr and Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr.
 226 *in Cornwall*: a memory of the older, pre-Geoffrey of Monmouth tradition that associated Arthur with Celli Wig in Cornwall.
neither poet nor storyteller . . . without a book: a much-quoted phrase in any discussion regarding the relationship between the poet and the storyteller. This could well be a doublet, and does not necessarily prove that poets and storytellers were two autonomous groups. The reasons given for dependence on a book are hardly plausible, considering the mnemonic

feats of the medieval storytellers; moreover, the elaborate descriptions found in the dream, although detailed, all follow a similar pattern, so facilitating the task of committing them to memory. *Without a book* probably refers to the fact that this tale had always been a literary tale, and had no dynamic oral life prior to its being committed to manuscript, although the author certainly draws on traditional sources. It is perhaps appropriate that this is the last tale in our *Mabinogion* 'collection', for with it medieval Welsh narrative moves in a new direction.

INDEX OF PERSONAL NAMES

This list is not meant to be exhaustive. For the names included in the Court List and Ysbaddaden's list of tasks in 'How Culhwch Won Olwen', see pp. 184-9 and 195-200.

- Amhar son of Arthur** one of Arthur's chamberlains 141, 256 n.
Amhren son of Bedwyr one of Arthur's chamberlains 141, 186
Angharad Law Eurog Angharad Golden Hand, with whom Peredur falls in love 82, 86
Aranrhod daughter of Dôn mother of Lleu and Dylan, sister of Gwydion and Gilfaethwy, niece of Math son of Mathonwy, ruler of Gwynedd 54-8, 242 n.
Arawn king of Annwfn (the Otherworld) 3-8
Arthur 'chief of the kings of this island' in 'How Culhwch Won Olwen', but 'emperor' in the three 'romances' 66-71, 73-4, 79-82, 84-6, 94-6, 98, 102, 116-17, 121, 124, 127-31, 134, 137-8, 139-41, 145, 147-9, 150-7, 168-72, 179-91, 199-200, 202-13, 216-26, 245 n.
Bedwin the Bishop Arthur's bishop 188, 217, 225
Bedwyr son of Bedrawd one of Arthur's men, closest companion to Cai 141, 155, 184, 186, 189-90, 193, 202, 203-5, 206, 208, 210, 263 n.
Beli (the Great) son of Manogan/Mynogan ruler of the Island of Britain, father of Lludd, Caswallon, Nyniaw, and Llefelys 22, 33, 36, 107, 111, 112, 115, 233 n.
Bendigeidfran son of Llŷr crowned king of the Island of Britain, brother to Branwen and Manawydan, and half-brother to Efnysien; he is sometimes known as *Brân* (meaning 'raven' or 'crow') 22-34, 35, 232 n., 235 n.
Bleiddwn the son of the brothers Gwydion and Gilfaethwy, conceived and born while they were in the shape of a wolf and she-wolf; his name means 'Dark-red Wolf' 54
Blodeuedd meaning 'flowers'; she is created out of flowers by Math and Gwydion as a wife for Lleu, but is transformed into an owl for her infidelity with Gronw Pebr, and her name changes to *Blodeuwedd* ('Flower-face') 58-64
Branwen daughter of Llŷr; sister of Bendigeidfran and Manawydan, and half-sister to Efnysien; she is given in marriage to Matholwch, king of Ireland 23-4, 27-34, 233 n., 236 n.