The Medieval Mabinogion

The Mabinogion, in its most commonly accepted form, is a collection of eleven – sometimes twelve – Welsh prose tales, *chwedlau*, combining significant mythological and folkloric elements with the romance tradition of the High Middle Ages. The stories are collected together in complete form in two manuscripts of the fourteenth century, the *White Book of Rhydderch* of c.1350 and the *Red Book of Hergest*, tentatively dated between 1382 and 1410. The texts are the same except for minor orthographic and lexical differences, and for the omission, in the *White Book*, of *The Dream of Rhonabwy*. Fragments of certain stories from the *Mabinogion* exist in manuscripts dating as much as a hundred years earlier. The stories, in the order given in the *Red Book*, are: *The Dream of Rhonabwy; Owan, or The Lady of the Fountain; Peredur son of Efrawg; The Dream of Maxen Wledig; The Tale of Lludd and Llefelys; Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed; Branwen the Daughter of Lyt; Manawydan son of Lyt; Math son of Mathonwy; Gereint and Enid, and Culhwch and Olwen*. The order in the *White Book* is *Pwyll, Branwen, Manawydan, Math, Peredur, Maxen, Lludd and Llefelys, Owein, Gereint, and Culhwch*.

The stories of *Pwyll, Branwen, Manawydan, and Math* are known as the "Four Branches of the Mabinogion," based on a common convention by which each finishes with "Here ends the (first, etc.) branch of the Mabinogi." Each deals with the parts of the life and adventures of figures of Celtic myth often identified as euhemerized gods. The only common
thread among the four stories is the presence of the character Pryderi with varying levels of involvement. Peredur, Owain, and Gereint are referred to as the Tair Rhamant, or "Three Romances," based on their strong association with Continental romance, particularly their relationship with Chrétien de Troyes' Perceval, Yvain, and Erec et Enide respectively, corresponding closely in character and plot. All three stories feature King Arthur in a supporting role. King Arthur is similarly featured in Culhwch and Olwen, which, along with Lludd and Llefelys, is often described as a native romance uninfluenced by the Continental tradition. Whether that is true or not, the stories feature elements which seem purely Celtic: speaking animals, shapechanging, giants, and other supernatural components. The dream narratives, Maxen and Rhonabwy, are entirely unrelated to each other, aside from the plot device of a daydream. Maxen is the story of Magnus Maximus, a fourth-century usurper of the throne of the Western Roman Emperor; it mixes a historical event with a heavy dose of Celtic lore and features the Welsh as a powerful force within the Roman Empire. Rhonabwy is an account of Arthur's court through the perspective of a twelfth-century Welsh soldier; it juxtaposes a mythical Golden Age with a fractured and contentious Wales in the early Middle Ages. It is included in the Mabinogion based on its presence in the Red Book, but it does not occur next to the other chweddau in the manuscript, being separated from them by poetry, genealogies, devotional texts, and the entirety of Trioedd Ynys Prydein. Hanes Taiselis, the pseudo-historical account of the birth and youth of the sixth-century bard Taiselis, has been long associated with the Mabinogion but does not appear alongside the more conventionally accepted text in any manuscript. Thus it has recently been omitted or treated separately from the canon of the Mabinogion by modern scholars.

Yet there is no clear standard for qualifying or disqualifying a text from forming part of the Mabinogion corpus. It is clear that the twelve stories do not form any cohesive narrative or possess any theme, motif, character or even date in common. Yet their juxtaposition in multiple manuscripts of the Middle Ages suggests that there was an understood association for the scribe who recorded them. That these stories represent a record of an earlier and more extensive oral tradition has long been understood. Unfortunately, little survives of the tradition other than these few recorded examples. Brynley Roberts writes:

The living oral tradition of Welsh story-telling died before more than a few examples could be noted and it can never be re-created. What we have are versions of prose tales written in the medieval period by particular authors. These are in each case literary versions rather than verbatim copies of the oral tales on which they are based.

The process of redaction which has preserved them for us has, however, simultaneously rendered assigning any of them a definite date impossible. The oldest manuscript containing fragments of the Mabinogion is Peniarth MS. 6, which contains fragments of the Second and Third Branches and is dated to c. 1225; while the last texts to be recorded are the two halves of the Taiselis narrative, which are unknown in redaction before the sixteenth century. The Tair Rhamant (the Three Romances: Owain, Peredur, Gereint) are probably late twelfth-century. Dating these texts is usually further complicated by the break between the oral and folk origins of achwed and its redaction. For example, the most archaic in language and style is Culhwch ac Olwen. However, the elaborate composition of Culhwch hints at some attempt at formal written composition;

Brynley Roberts writes that Culhwch's attempt at a sophisticated structure neatly divided into self-contained elements, the well-classified list of tasks, the disproportionate number of helpers, and some borrowings from written sources, suggest that the author was a literary man, perhaps following a common medieval mode of composition as he used and adapted an existing framework to serve as a vehicle for some favorite folk-tales.

This inherent tension between the nature of the oral tale and the standards of medieval literary Welsh characterizes all of the tales in the Mabinogion. The texts range from the stylized but still clearly oral Four Branches to the pseudo-literary Culhwch to the Tair Rhamant to Breuddwyd Rhonabwy, which opens with the colophon that it cannot be learned "without a book," and reading its incredibly detailed panegyric and descriptive prose, it becomes evident that the text has literally been designed to be unrecitable. Yet despite the literary pretensions of the redactor(s), the text itself seems to have been little-known in the Middle Ages. That is not to say that the oral and poetic traditions upon which it was based were not known, rather that the text itself does not seem to have been widely read. "TheMabinogion tales appear to have been widely known in oral tradition," Bromwich writes, "yet for the poets who were the custodians of this tradition, they bore no comparison in esteem to those works which were regarded as the pillars of the historical record, such as texts like Nennius' Historia Brittonum or Trioedd Ynys Prydein. In fact, Bromwich says that "If we examine the allusions made by the [High and Late Medieval Welsh poets] to the traditional legendary characters it becomes very clear that the prime sources of their knowledge were the Triads and [the Historia], and the same is true, by and large, of the earlier [poets]. Of characters from our version of the Mabinogion, Bromwich has identified only four allusions that are likely or certain to have been made from the actual text. This speaks for the breadth and depth of the oral tradition in the period, and suggests that the unique versions of the stories preserved in the White Book and the Red Book are a particular interpretation of a number of ancient folk tales. Ford says that "It is certain that a single person was responsible for the final shape of the four branches of the Mabinogi," although not for the other stories in the collection. The medieval Mabinogion is an almost seamless blend of traditional lore and literary innovation. "The storyteller's art is everywhere in evidence," Ford writes, "though he could not alter his inherited materials at will, for that would have done violence to the myth." Given the particular nature of the text copied in the Red Book and White Book, in addition to its fractured origins, it not surprising that the existing folk traditions differ, even extensively, from the written form of the stories. Bromwich, has, however, suggested that the famous poet Dafydd ap Gwilym (c.1320 – c.1370) derived his knowledge of the Mabinogion either from the White Book itself or from its immediate source.

In fact, allusions to the traditional characters and stories are plentiful in the poetry of Dafydd and his contemporaries. A good example is the poetry of Iolo Goch (fl. c. 1350 – 1398), which is teeming with references. In his panegyric to Sir Hywel of the Axe, a noted veteran of the Hundred Years' war, he describes his brutality in battle: "He was a barber like Erbin's son ... with his hand and strength he did shave heads and beards and he let, without delay, blood over feet." The doer of the action has changed in this version of the myth, but there is no mistaking the violent climax of Culhwch and Olwen. If we had any doubt of the allusion, he later describes Hywel directly as the "Twrch Trywdd of battle." Similarly, the sons of Tudur Fychan are described as "four great Nudds" – a character who, in addition to being the father of a great deal of Arthur's host in Culhwch is also synonymous with Lludd and Llefelys. Owain Glyndwr, the great Welsh rebel prince, is described as having "Peredur's hand" and therefore his prowess. It is clear that the traditions from which these chweddau are drawn, if not the particular redactions that we possess today, were very much alive in the poetic consciousness of the fourteenth century. It is perhaps telling that it is this period in which the White Book and Red Book are written.
The disjointed nature of the Mabinogion as a text, in addition to the fantastic and ahistorical content of thechweddau, both contributed to its being relatively unknown to scholars before the late eighteenth century. Bromwich notes that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries everything was deprecated that was not believed to contribute in some way to the historical record. Thus the Trioddf Ynys Prydein were considered a most important historical resource—given their purported seventh-century provenance—but the Mabinogion was mainly ignored, glossed over in Lhuyd's catalog of the contents of the Red Book of Hergest as "certain fabulous tales."43 Texts of Lludd and Llefelys and Breudwyf Maxen were included in a large collection of triads compiled in 1711 by Moses Williams but they were never published.44 That the medieval Mabinogion ever came to light at all is thanks to two nineteenth-century amateur scholars, the lexicographer Dr. William Owen Pughe and Lady Charlotte Guest.

William Owen Pughe (1759 – 1835) was a Welsh law clerk living in London who took up Celtic scholarship as a way of feeling connected with his homeland. Although a late inheritor and an honorary doctorate allowed him to focus his entire energies later in life on Welsh, his scholarship remained almost entirely self-taught. His theories, while advanced for his time, are notorious for his extremely prescriptive and preconceived approach to the Welsh language and the factual inaccuracies and idiosyncrasies caused by his long association with the literary forger Edward Williams, more commonly known by his bardic name Iolo Morganwg. His long association with the literary forger Edward Williams, more commonly known by his bardic name Iolo Morganwg, uge's best-known work, the Geiriadur Cymraeg a Saesneg (Dictionary of Welsh and English), a Welsh-English dictionary including words both modern and archaic, was published in 1793. In this Dictionary the following entry is given for "mabinogion": "mabiniog, s. m. pl -ion (mabinawg): Juvenility; juvenile instruction; the amusement of youth, the title of some ancient tales." Pughe's dismissive attitude is consistent with both the scholarly consensus of the time and his other early writings, as Bromwich notes that in the Cambrian Biography he "contrasted the Mabinogion with the Triads which he described as 'documents of undoubted credit'—again demonstrating the supposedly great historical value of TYP [Trioedd Ynys Prydein] which had persisted down the ages."15 Yet Pughe was drawn to the Mabinogion by the fascinating beauty of its prose, writing in his introduction to his translation of Hanes Taliesin, late in his career: "Many of these poetical compositions have long been known and admired as most happy efforts in the Welsh language. These pieces, beautiful as they are, we must arrange in their proper rank, reject them as historical documents, and discard them as the genuine compositions of Taliesin, the bard of Urien Reged [sic] and Rhuin." Nevertheless, he increasingly turned to the study of the Mabinogion, and by the time of his death he had completed in manuscript and intended to print, The Mabinogion, or The Ancient Romances of Wales, in the original language, and a literal translation into English, for which the prospectus had been printed in John Murray's Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland.17 While this was never published in its entirety, bits of it (like the Hanes Taliesin mentioned above) were published individually. Bromwich emphasizes the strong influence that Pughe's work would have on Charlotte Guest.18

Lady Charlotte Elizabeth Bertie Guest Schreiber (1812 – 1895) was an English aristocrat, entrepreneur and polymath who in her colorful life, in addition to the translation of the best-known and longest-printed edition of the Mabinogion, ran and operated a steelworks at Dowlais, in Wales, and amassed the world's largest collection of playing cards. Married at twenty-one to Welsh ironmaster John Guest, she learned literary Welsh in an effort to better understand her adopted country.19 It is at this point that it seems most probable that she encountered Pughe's works, for she writes that she chose to translate the Mabinogion as amusements for her growing family, to the two eldest of whom, Ivor and Merthyr, she dedicated her translation.20 Yet she found that not all of the Mabinogion seemed appropriate for the children she believed it was intended for; her resulting censorship of the sexuality in the First Branch is famous.

This conception of the Mabinogion as a collection of stories intended for children is due to a mistranslation by Pughe, whose interpretation of the meaning of "mabinog" is highly influenced by his dubious linguistic theories. Robert John Pryse, editing the third edition of Pughe's Geiriadur, writes that Dr. Pughe believed that letters, or combinations of two or three letters, had a philosophical signification, although such were not significant or usual words in the language. ... He considered such letters or unauthorized syllables also as roots of Welsh words. For this reason, the first part of his explanations of numerous words is nothing more than an explanation of imaginary roots.21

Pughe deconstructed mabiniog by separating out the "philosophical signification"—a Pughism for "meaning"—of the element he recognized, "mab." In this case there was no need for him to supply an inventive meaning; mab was and is the Welsh word for a son or more importantly a candidate for inclusion, which explains his addition of "Rhun." But the title Mabinogion is actually grammatically incorrect. The form Mabiniog, which occurs at the end of the Second, Third and Fourth Branches, is already plural. The error made in pluralizing an already-plural form can be explained by a scribe's error, at the end of the First Branch in the Red Book of Hergest transposing the plural ending of a word directly above mabiniog, to inadvertently create the more famous title Mabinogion.22 Because of the widespread popularity and truly foundational importance of Guest's first complete translation of the Mabinogion into English, this error is assumed to be hers by Ford,23 Jones and Jones, and Davies,25 and others, but this is obviously incorrect as Pughe's Dictionary predates her birth by decades.

Pughe's errors aside, his discussion of the Mabinogion did contribute one important aspect of later scholarly debate. He writes in his introduction to his Grammar of the Welsh Language that the Mabinogion "are highly valuable, on account of the numerous traits of original nuances, and of ancient British mythology, which they display. These, as I am induced to suppose, for several reasons, were the origins of romance in Europe."26 This sentence, apart from being a clear (so to speak) example of the arcane and often incomprehensible style known as 'Pughism,' is clearly a grandiose pronouncement based more in nationalist sentiment than literary analysis. But Guest, an Englishwoman with little experience in Celtic philology, took it literally. She writes

Before commencing these labours, I was aware, generally, that there existed a connexion between the Welsh Mabinogion and the Romance of the Continent; but as I advanced, I became better acquainted with the closeness and extent of that connexion, its history, and the proofs by which it is supported. [...] Such being the case, it is
She took Pughe's rhetoric literally and meticulously researched it, demonstrating parallels not just in French but in German and Icelandic literature, which would be the foundation of a debate over the origins of the *Tair Rhymant* which continues to the present day under the name of the *Mabinogionfraga,* or the “Question of the Mabinogion,” which will be discussed in more detail later in this essay.

Of the publication of Guest's first translation, Bromwich writes that it was “an epoch-making event in Welsh studies.... Her translation had a penetrating influence both at home and abroad, as can seen from the manner in which allusions and themes from the Mabinogi gained increasing prominence in the work of Welsh poets.” In both the literary and scholarly world, which now, in the nineteenth century, could be considered to be formally separated, Guest sparked a new interest in stories that had been hitherto little-known even among the most ardent Welsh nationalists. Furthermore, her “easy, fluent, slightly archaic style,” as Bromwich puts it, ensured that her translation was considered not only a scholarly treatise but literature in its own right. Guest does seem to have regarded her work, initiated though it was for children, as a legitimate scholarly effort, with a long philological and literary introduction, copious scholarly notes and the edited text both of the *Mabinogion* itself (from the *Red Book*) and of many of the texts to which she compared it. Even though later scholars like John Rhys would allege that her work belonged to “a pre-scientific age,” her contributions both to scholarship and the literary ambit of nineteenth-century Europe were considerable.

### The Mabinogion in Nineteenth-Century Literature

On October 28, 1853, Charlotte Guest recorded in her diary that “The Tennysons came this week to stay at the Camerons. I went there one evening to meet them. We spent a very pleasant evening.” In fact, Tennyson and Charlotte Guest were long acquainted; he often stayed with the Camerons, a local family, and Charlotte Guest records repeated encounters in local society. Tennyson's debt to Guest in the composition of *Idylls of the King* particularly that of *Enid,* was acknowledged by the poet during his own life and is obvious even to the casual eye. David Staines, in his *Tennyson's Camelot: The Idyls of the King and Its Medieval Sources* demonstrates what he calls Tennyson's "likeness to the story in the *Mabinogion* [albeit with] additions and minor changes [that] serve to bring the story into a new light." Compare, for demonstration, the examples Staines gives of the close textual relationship: “And one of them went, and she found but two horses in the stable, and Gwenhwyvar and one of her maidens mounted them, and went through the Usk, and followed the track of the men and the horses. And as they rode thus, they heard a loud and rushing sound...” compared to Tennyson's “But rose at last, a single maiden with her / Took horse, and forded Usk, and gain’d the wood / There, on a little knoll beside it, stay’d / Waiting to hear the hounds; but heard instead / A sudden sound of hoofs...” Yet we should not assume that Tennyson's sole exposure to the material was through Guest's translation, however much he owed to it. In 1921, Tom Peete Cross demonstrated that Tennyson had almost certainly encountered the English-language works of William Owen Pughe, both the *Cambrian Biography* — which included substantial material drawn from the *Mabinogion* — and Pugh's contribution on the *Mabinogion* to T. C. Crosser's *Fairy Legends.* Furthermore, Staines demonstrates that the account of Geraint's death in *Enid* — “He crowned a happy life with a fair death, and fell / Against the heathen of the Northern Sea / In battle, fighting for the blameless King” — occurs nowhere in the corresponding *Mabinogion,* and must have been taken from the only known account of his death in the elegies of Llywarch Hen, which as Cross had pointed out, Tennyson recorded in his journals as being one of the texts he had read with his wife shortly after taking up Welsh. A literary passion for things Welsh was not by any means limited only to Tennyson. As Andrew Breeze has pointed out, Charlotte Guest quoted Sir Walter Scott in her introduction to the *Mabinogion,* and Bromwich records that Scott often had consulted with Pughe. Certainly Scott's interest in local folklore and in medieval traditions is so well-known and evident in his work — from the chivalrous *Ivanhoe* to *The Talisman's* story of Crusade to *The Bride of Lammermoor* and its extensive use of medieval and Scots folk traditions — that it hardly merits citation. There is no evidence of Scott's having used the Mabinogion directly in any of his work, but it is clear that he and other major figures of nineteenth-century British literature were aware of and intimately connected with the developments in Welsh literature as they began to blossom for the first time into what Sir John Rhys would have called "scientific" study.

Arguably, however, the greatest contribution the Mabinogion made to the nineteenth-century literary canon was the text itself. Unlike other medieval texts which had been published, translated, republished and distributed over the intervening centuries since their redaction, the Mabinogion, as we have previously discussed, more or less burst onto the English literary scene — particularly the London literary scene — all at once with the publication of the second edition in 1877. The first edition, while enjoying great popularity among scholars of Celtic studies and enthusiasts such as Tennyson, had several features which prevented its more general popularity: its relative difficulty to obtain, of which Sir John Rhys would complain, and the inclusion, along with the translation, of both the original Welsh text and texts which Guest considered relevant to the context or understanding of the Mabinogion; Lady Charlotte, it seems, eschewed citation in favor of inclusion. Friends supplied many of her examples, but several of the texts she acknowledged having copied herself from medieval manuscripts. This produced first a seven-part series of publications starting in 1838, which were published together in a three-volume edition by Longman, Orme, Brown, Green and Longman's of London: Volume One in 1838, Volume Two in 1840, and Volume Three in 1849. The size — and thus expense — of the set limited its availability. Yet with the completion of a second edition, published by Quaritch in 1877, many of these problems were resolved. The new, single-volume edition retained Guest's notes and comments on the text but omitted the considerable mass of source and related texts. It was a more compact version that would have had more appeal to a Romantic market eager for ancient tales but perhaps less keen on scholarly apparatus.

A further bowdlerized, simplified and edited version of Guest's text appeared in print in 1881 as *The Boy's Mabinogion,* notably with phonetic spelling and removal of confusing or risqué plot elements. It was published by Scribner and written by Sidney Lanier, a Confederate veteran, professional flautist and poet, who would similarly reduce Malory, Thomas Percy and, improbably, Jean Froissart. The willingness with which the public was ready to accept the Mabinogion as children's tales is a testament to the faith in and respect for the Guest translation.

### The Turn of the Twentieth Century

Despite the issues with the Guest translation, it nevertheless was to remain the standard text for decades after its author's death in 1895. In 1892, three years before Lady Guest passed away, Cassell began what would be a long run of a condensed version of the Guest Mabinogion in two volumes edited by Meta E. Williams and marketed as juvenile literature, under the title “Tales from the Mabinogion.” It featured a heavily-edited and simplified text, much in the style of Lanier's *Boy's Mabinogion,* and was published jointly by E.P. Dutton (now Dutton Penguin) of New York and J. M. Dent as part of the Temple Classics series, but by 1906 those two publishing houses had begun the Everyman's Library series and the Guest Mabinogion became one of its titles, re-set and featuring new scholarly notes by Robert Williams. In this form it would remain in print until 1949.

Yet the feeling on the part of Sir John Rhys that Guest's translation was "unscientific" seemed to have been shared by other notable members of the Celticist community, and the
time was ripe for a new translation along more scholarly lines. This was attempted in 1927 by Thomas Peter Ellis, a historian known primarily for his two-volume *Tribal Law and Custom in Medieval Wales* and John Lloyd, translating this time not just from the *Red Book of Hergest*, as had Guest, but also from the *White Book of Rhuddderch*, which Gwengovryn Evans had published in a diplomatic edition in 1907. The resulting translation was published in a two-volume set by Oxford University Press. The failure of this edition to replace the Guest text (as we shall see, editions of Guest in one form or another were published continuously until 1949) can be explained by two factors: the rather unqualified literary of the text and the violent negative reaction by W. J. Gruffydd and other reviewers. This and the Jones and Jones translation that was to follow it in 1949 were marked, as Jeffrey Gantz wrote of the latter, by "literalness" and "unidiomatic English."44 Thus, it was felt, it could not have the same popular success that the unreliable but "easy, fluent, slightly archaic"45 translation Guest had had. On top of that, it lacked the novelty that Guest's translation, as the first published, had had. If the Ellis and Lloyd text had been a critical or scholarly success, it might have found a niche in academic circles, but the text was likewise seriously flawed. John J. Parry, reviewing the new translation, notes particularly the inconsistency of the translation of the same words in different instances and the extremely awkward English.46 W. J. Gruffydd's review is even less kind. "It is impossible in the current space," he writes, "to mention any of the innumerable blemishes of this unfortunate work. … Neither of [the translators] had the knowledge necessary to their undertaking."47 He takes particular offense at attempts by the translators to discuss the origins of the text:

The difficulty arises when the scholar tries to discover what original legends underlie the present complex of tales contained in these texts, or when he wishes to correlate the *Mabinogion* with other forms of legend. In their present form, as far as it concerns the scholar, the *Mabinogion* are a crude material which must be carefully worked over and manipulated before it can be utilised for comparison with other material. It was the absence of this preliminary study that vitiated much of the work of that brilliant scholar the late Sir John Rhys, who, on other grounds, had all the necessary qualifications for such work, namely, a knowledge of Welsh and Irish, and of the mediaeval and later legends of Europe in general. It follows, then, that the translator, unless he has the necessary knowledge, should not attempt to add either an introduction or notes except on the formal details of the text.48

He simultaneously asserted the correctness of his own mentor (and thus his own work, as later exemplified in *Folklore and Myth*) and suggested the irrelevance of Ellis and Lloyd's work. While it is clear that Ellis and Lloyd's translation is imperfect, Gruffydd's review – delving as it does into personal attack – seems more motivated by a desire to discredit any other interpretation of the *Mabinogion*’s origins than it does to consider the book impartially as a translation.

The conception of the *Mabinogion* as "crude material to be worked upon" characterized most formal study of the period. Matthew Arnold in *On the Study of Celtic Literature* famously described Welsh literature as "pilaging… antiquity… a peasant building his hut on the site of Halicarnassus or Ephesus."49 Andrew Breeze, in his article "Some Critics of the Four Branches," has outlined how this conception of Welsh literature as a "remnant" of an older tradition evolved through successive generations of English and Welsh scholars. The first example of this was Sir John Rhys himself, who attempted to recreate a Celtic pantheon that he felt was reflected in the text of the Four Branches. Most particularly, his conception of a "culture hero, one who was originally a god or demigod,"50 was the first suggestion of a euhemerized pantheon of Welsh gods whose names can be found splashed across Neopagan and New Age websites today. Two of his students carried on his work. Sir Edward Arwyl the first tentative attempt at reconstructing a hypothetical "original narrative" behind the *Mabinogion* stories and was the first to suggest Pryderi as its theoretical hero. He stripped the tales of what he felt must be later additions of the stories of the sons of Don and the sons of Llyr (the majority of the second and third branches).51 The second student of Rhys' who developed this idea was W. J. (William John) Gruffydd (1851-1954), whom Breeze calls that "academic, poet, polemicist, and stormy Welsh nationalist, who ended his career somewhat improbably as MP for the University of Wales."52 This highly colorful figure was to shape the study of the *Mabinogion* even into the present day.

When Gruffydd published his first essays on *Brânwen* and gave the first of a series of lectures that were to become his *Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion*, he had access to two resources that Arnold had not had. The appearance for the first time of a diplomatic edition of the text of the *Red Book of Hergest* by John Rhys and J. Gwengovryn Evans in 188753 allowed scholars the close access to the original (without its being viewed through the lens of Guest's translation) that had been lacking. His work combined the "Grimmian" theories first promulgated by Arnold with Rhys and Arwyl's attempts to reconstruct aspects of an original Celtic culture from these "huts built on Ephesus." In a book that is more magisterial in nature than argumentative, Gruffydd puts forward the most elaborate reconstruction to date of a theoretical early Welsh "saga" around the figure of Cuchulinn—citing Gruffydd several times on his first page alone.

Gruffydd's work would come mostly on thematic and structural grounds, not on historical ones. This is based on two main connections: one, that Caswallon, like Henry II, gained his throne by force, and two, that he thus valued highly acts of homage by his vassals. T. M. Charles-Edwards has pointed out, however, that this picture "is just as true, or even more so, of every English king since 1066. William the Conqueror, William II, Henry I, Stephen, all seized the throne in spite of good or even superior rival claims.54 Other small inconsistencies, such as what exactly constitutes "homage" in the feudal sense of the word, make a direct historical correspondence unlikely. Future criticism of Gruffydd's work would come mostly on thematic and structural grounds, not on historical ones.

Gruffydd's work had one other important effect – it served to stimulate interest in the formal study of the *Mabinogion* in the United States, where the text had been hitherto known only through Guest and the interpretations of Sidney Lanier, both of whom considered the stories to be flights of fancy aimed at children. With the publication of *Folklore and Myth* and Gruffydd's other works the body of textual criticism became accessible and understandable to an American audience. Roger Sherman Loomis, the great American medievalist and early American Celticist at Columbia University, wrote in response to the publication of Gruffydd's essay, "*On the Study of Celtic Literature*, was unappreciated; and she translated for her children in the nursery…. The wonder is that she was able to translate at all.” Gwyn Jones later wrote:

The "Jones and Jones" text, drawn mostly from the *White Book*, is both more accurate than Guest's text and written in better English than Ellis and Lloyd's. This was made possible when Ifor Williams published a new, more correct edition of the *White Book* text in 1930.61 In their introduction, the authors credit Guest with a "charming and felicitous piece of English prose," noting that "It has been her just reward that almost every English reader, and many a foreign, has made acquaintance with *Pwyll* and *Branwen*." Yet they share some of Rhys' misgivings about her work: "She translated under difficulty, at a time when no satisfactory edition of her original was available, and when the value of the *White Book* was unappreciated; and she translated for her children in the nursery…. The wonder is that she was able to translate at all.” Gwyn Jones later wrote:
that is certainly what they delivered. Compare the following passages, from the opening of Culhwch and Olwen. Here is Guest’s:

The lady returned with joy, and she asked her consort, “Wherefore hast thou concealed thy children from me?” The king said, “I will do so no longer.” And he sent messengers for his son, and he was brought to the court. His stepmother said unto him, “It were well for thee to have a wife, and I have a daughter who is sought of every man of renown in the world.” “I am not yet of an age to wed,” answered the youth. Then said she unto him, “I declare to thee, that it is thy destiny not to be suited with a wife until thou obtain Olwen, the daughter of Yspaddaden [sic] Penkawr.”

Here is the Jones and Jones version:

The good lady returned home joyfully, and quoth she to her husband, “What reason hast thou to hide thy child from me?” Quoth the king, “I will hide him no longer.” Messengers were sent after the boy, and he came to the court. His stepmother said to him, “It were well for thee to take a wife, son, and I have a daughter meet for any nobleman in the world.” Quoth the boy, “I am not yet of an age to take a wife.” Said she in reply: “I will swear a destiny upon thee, that thy side shall never strike against woman till thou win Olwen daughter of Ysbaddaden Chief Giant.”

Not only is Jones and Jones’ translation more accurate (among other things, translating “penkawr” as “Chief Giant,” when Guest had left it untranslated) but it retains the characteristic Welsh word order and more technical details that would have been unimportant to Guest, such as the distinction between cousin and first cousin, which has a specific meaning in Welsh kinship obligations, without losing clarity. Furthermore, they fulfilled their intention of eliminating most of the Maloryesque prose, although Gantz’ later criticism of their unidiomatic English is in parts justified. Although their translation is considered more accurate, Jones and Jones do credit Ellis and Lloyd’s attempt in 1929 with “a far greater accuracy in detail... directed at ‘scholastic and scholarly circles.’” Their work, then, is to “convey literature in terms of literature, and yet endure the most rigorous scrutiny of contemporary scholarship.” It was no low standard to which they aspired.

It is a testament to the nearly universal positive contemporary acclaim for this translation that it quickly became the definitive edition of the text, even though its original release was quite limited. Jones and Jones undertook the translation at the request of the Golden Cockerel Press, who published a limited, illustrated edition of their Mabinogion in 1948, almost one hundred years after Guest had released her landmark translation. Admittedly, Gwyn Jones was not unknown in Welsh scholarly circles, as he founded The Welsh Review in 1939 and was still serving as editor at the time of his translation, nor was Thomas Jones, who served as professor of Celtic Studies at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, and is perhaps known to modern Celtic Studies for, among other things, his edition of both versions of the chronicle Brut y Tywysogion. But it is still impressive that in the same year that the new translation was published the Everyman’s Library edition of the Mabinogion that had used Guest’s text since the turn of the century replaced it with the Jones and Jones, which it still uses today.

Recent Scholarship

The Jones and Jones was just a part of a sudden increase of interest in the Mabinogion as a scholarly text. Starting in 1957 with Pwyll Penddeuc Dyfed, the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (DIAS) released editions of the text from the White Book manuscript (with additions and corrections from the Red Book), edited by R. L. Thompson. This edition, in contrast to that prepared by J. Gwenogvryn Evans, contained extensive annotations, grammatical notes and suggested readings, marking it as the first edition aimed primarily towards students of the language. These would be followed by Derick S. Thomson’s edition of Branwyn urch Lyr in 1961, then Owain, or Caradog Yr Yrwydd in 1966 and Lludd ac Lleiflys in 1975. Even more importantly, in 1964 D. Simon Evans had published through DIAS a student Grammar of Middle Welsh, which has remained the standard up to the present, and used with the other DIAS texts, remains a core part of the teaching of Middle Welsh. The new availability and approachability of these texts cannot help but have spurred interest in the Mabinogion and new critical approaches.

As previously discussed, much modern scholarship is in some way an answer to Gruffydd’s theories on the Mabinogion, which have their admirers and their detractors. Their disagreement is essentially structural. As Gantz wrote, “such myths as are preserved in these tales are so obscure and fragmentary that restoration is difficult if not impossible.” The tales seem unconnected, forced together by a misunderstanding scribe who, as Loomis unhappily suggested, must have been mad. Unlike Gruffydd, who attempted the reconstruction of an underlying body of material in the Mabinogion, his intellectual successors have concluded that aside from scattered gleanings, the texts themselves, their primary emphasis, and their social role are obscured by the mists of time and redaction. Kenneth Jackson contended himself with categorizing the many folk motifs present in the work, but did not attempt to use them to explain the tale. John K. Bollard objects specifically to this belief that the tales are essentially fractured, particularly to Gruffydd’s assertion that the First Branch consists of several different—and unrelated—episodes. Bollard’s arguments, as best expressed in “The Structure of the Four Branches of the Mabinogion,” and those of Patrick K. Ford, in “Prolegomena to a Reading of the Mabinogion,” are that the tales must be approached from a vertical, not horizontal, perspective. Instead of focusing on the abrupt disconnects—which, R. M. Jones argues, might not have seemed strange to a medieval listener—Bollard suggests the emphasis should be placed on the repetitive elements linking the stories together, such as the repeated banquets in the Third Branch, the repeated animal transformations in the Fourth, and so on. This is most clearly demonstrated in an article by Gantz, “Thematic Structure,” where he maps the progressions of plots through each of the episodes in each of the branches. He comes to the conclusion that “the structure [of the Mabinogion] is [its] theme; for, as alternating tales balance and sequences parallel each other, so the world of the Four Branches is an ideally just one in which good begets good, evil evil.” Thus selfish and unselfish actions are the duality on which the tension of the Branches is based, from which we can extrapolate ideas in the society which produced them. Bollard, borrowing from Professor Eugene Vinaver, calls this the “interface method,” whereby multiple episodes and themes are managed simultaneously. The interlocking structure of the Mabinogion, then, serves as a means of keeping the themes of the earlier Branches in the mind of the reader. Although the reminder at the end of the Third Branch of the injury done to Gwawl would have seemed sudden to a modern reader, if the parallels in plot and theme, character and situation, and even diction and idiom are more apparent to a medieval reader/listener, the effect is to constantly keep multiple plots present in one’s mind.
Although Gruffydd's structural analysis—or lack thereof—has been widely rejected, his mythological assertions—where it is possible to evaluate them—are still generally accepted as valid. Catherine McKenna calls this “the reconstructive approach,” and describes how Kenneth Jackson attempted to reconcile the arguments for literary status for the Mabinogion with Gruffydd's assertion that they were but fragmented pieces of a far older folklore. His work thus encouraged scholars to interpret the Branches as they were rather than simply looking for some other original. In fact, the idea that the Mabinogion can only be understood by “refining” it to some more Celtic ancestor becomes ridiculous when faced with studies such as Juliette Wood's "The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature" which, focusing mostly on Rhiannon, demonstrates a great deal of conformance on the part of these Welsh stories to their contemporaries elsewhere in Europe. It is difficult to argue that the Welsh themes and stories are somehow obscure versions of others from antiquity if there are good examples of the same themes—with no suggestion of their being corrupted from others—in diverse cultures of the Middle Ages. The only argument put forward that justifies a concern about the antiquity of these motifs is the idea that they may have been contaminated over the centuries by external themes and motifs present in other works of literature diffused in Wales. Sean O Coileain puts forward a thematic, not structural, argument for the unity of the First Branch by demonstrating thematic links, suggesting, for example, that it is the contamination of the Chaste Friend/Brother motif that causes Pwyll to fail in what was traditionally his purpose, to beget a child on a lady of the other world, and necessitates a "restart" so that Pwyll can father an otherworldly child properly, this time with Rhiannon, something with many parallels in other tales.

The modern continuance of Gruffydd's folkloristic approach to the Mabinogion has become more specialized in recent years with studies such as Sioned Davies' interpretation of horses in the Mabinogion and Rhiannon's role as a horse-goddess akin to Gaulish Epona, but it has also led to a great deal of "popular" scholarship aimed more at the neopagan community than at scholars or students, such as the book Mabon and the Mysteries of Britain: An Exploration of the Mabinogion which takes Gruffydd's work and extrapolates a "Welsh pantheon" of gods and goddesses.

Other recent work on the Mabinogion has focused on the relationship between the romances of Chrétien de Troyes and the Tair Rhamant. Ardent Welsh nationalist scholars have long argued either for the originality of the Welsh or for some common ancestor, preferring to believe that the Welsh must have been first. Although this can be dismissed as an attempt to claim for Wales some piece of France's heritage, recent work has suggested an intriguing possibility. Joseph J. Duggan admits that it is "likely that a reading of Chrétien's romance [Yvain] was heard by some Welsh storyteller who retold the tale using elements familiar to his audience and stripping it of most of the characteristics that make it instructive in the ways of courtliness."

Patrick K. Ford, on the other hand, published in 1975 a book entitled The Mabinogi and Other Welsh Tales. Simply from the title, it would be easy to surmise—correctly—that Ford is looking to change the general perception of the text. Instead of the Mabinogian stories as originally selected by Pughe, Ford rejects the Tair Rhamant as being French-influenced and translates the Four Branches, the stories of Breudwyd Maxen Wledig and Lludd and Llefelys. He omits Breudwyd Rhonabwy as being unrelated to the other texts, but includes the two linked stories of Gwion Bach/Taliesin and the archaic poem Cad Goddeu. Ford is following in Gruffydd's footsteps, in a way, consolidating the Mabinogion to include just those tales whose origins are demonstrably Celtic and which consist of "more or less related adventures, related sufficiently for them to be metaphorically conceived as branches, rather than as independent tales. ... Each branch represents a collection of more or less related lore." His extensive introduction provides a background to Gruffydd's theories and his own, making it quite useful to beginning Celticists.

The most recent translation of the Mabinogion is that published by Sioned Davies in 2007. Davies, like Ford before her, emphasizes the nature of the text as folktales, but unlike Ford, she believes these to have been performed texts, and her work is specifically translated to allow both ease of understanding and also ease of recitation, with some attempt being made to imitate the original in its speech-patterns. Although this is a significant aspect of Celtic literature and poetry as a whole and Middle Welsh in particular, it has never been attempted before with a prose text. Davies' translation accomplishes her goals admirably; is clear and readable—and, in some places, its vastly simplified language is a blessing—and it seems at least as accurate as Gantz or Jones. The language is vastly more contemporary without incorporating elements of modern slang or simplifying the vocabulary—the literal meaning of the line is the same but its clarity is much improved. This translation is the first to suggest that a Mabinogion translation can be both academically rigorous and popularly accessible.

**Some New Directions in Scholarship**

Structural and thematic analysis, although the primary medium of criticism of the Mabinogion for most of the twentieth century, seems to have been well explored. Perhaps the next steps to take in the analysis and understanding of the Mabinogion lie exactly in the direction in which Sioned Davies has taken it. Understanding the place of these tales in the society that produced them—their almost certain identity as tales to be performed aloud before a hall—give them an importance that an exotic collection of folk tales might not otherwise have. The reverse side of the coin, as it were, of these texts being oral accumulations of material—if, in fact, that is what they are—is that these texts are, in fact, oral. They were performed, they were understood and, presumably, enjoyed. What aspects of the stories, then, serve to fulfill a social need? Or is it the performance that serves the need? No text would be so important as to be preserved and enshrined in Welsh culture as has been the Mabinogion without satisfying some requirement, conscious or unconscious, of its audience.

Certainly several writers have outlined corrective themes in the Four Branches. Bollard, as previously mentioned, wishes to see this as a simple duality; that is, with sense on one hand and its opposite on the other. Bollard sees the tales as essentially highlighting a stark contrast between good and evil. A more subtle reading is that provided by Andrew Welsh, who writes that the story of Manawydan mab Llyr presents "a thoroughgoing criticism of the heroic ideal [in which] social and political values of the author's own time are reflected and also criticized."

He specifically discusses the patterns of vengeance and feud prevalent in medieval life. In a sense, though, I think this ties into a greater theme in all four Branches and to a certain extent in the Tair Rhamant and Culhwch and Olwen—the omnipresent tension between law and violence in a society ruled by a warrior class.

Culhwch we get a sense of the violence of the warrior unrestrained; Twrch Twrch, once an Irish prince but so horribly sinful that he has been transformed by God into a literal manifestation of his ugliness and brutality, must be conquered—i.e., subdued, controlled—by the soldiers of King Arthur, a clan warlord here (think of his obligation to Kilhew based on the fact that they are cousins). The first segment of Pwyll is all about properly used violence—Pwyll must strive Hwgan once and only once. This will kill him. Any indulgence in further violence—either out of a sense of obligation to the customs of the warrior class or for petty enjoyment—will result in a literalizing of the cycle of violence: Hwgan will simply be unhurt and continue to fight. Only through the proper regulation of his violence can Pwyll destroy him and end the civil war which divides Annwn in half. This is further reinforced by Pwyll's switch with Arawn. When Arawn takes his place, he rules correctly, justly, so well that Pwyll's men "have never been better ruled." So, it goes, in order for the exchange to be just, Pwyll must rule correctly in the other realm. We know that they are not being contrasted—after all, if Pwyll was meant as a model of incorrect kingship his chastity and withholding his sexuality from Arawn's wife would never be mentioned—but they are, somehow, being equated. If the gateway in the forest in Glyn Cuch...
This is carried on into *Manawydan*, where, as Andrew Welsh writes, “heroic battle appears … to be futile as a means for freeing the land from the spell.” When first Pryderi, and then Rhiannon, rush into the strange fortress, they simply disappear. There is no violent clash of arms, no opportunity for glory. In fact, it is through Manawydan's capture, trial, and formal execution (or threatened execution) of the culprit that “Rhiannon and Pryderi are freed, herds and houses and human society are restored to the land.”

There are other examples throughout the Branches—a desire for vengeance leads to the massacre of almost every living thing in Ireland in the Second Branch, for instance—but this is only the very tip of the iceberg. Given the layers upon layers of meanings and implications, it is possible that not only is there one set of corrective themes, but that there are multiple sets, some partial, intended for cultures and societies through which the text has passed in its oral descent to the present but which are no longer present. Certainly, the tenth, eleventh and twelfth-century tales of the glory of Welsh kings would have rung hollow by the end of the thirteenth. Or perhaps they would have held a particular value, praised as references in poetry to suggest a Golden Age. All this demonstrates is that now, having finally understood the structure of the *Mabinogion*, we are only barely beginning to be able to truly read it in the manner that its redactor clearly felt it needed to be read.

**Modern Retellings**

The inevitable consequence of so much interest in Welsh and in the *Mabinogion* as a whole is that the text’s entry to some degree into popular culture, as it had done in the nineteenth century with Tennyson’s *Idylls*. In the twentieth century, with books like "Mabon and the Mysteries of Britain," elements of the *Mabinogion* are becoming fused with popular understandings of “Celtic” culture. Yet there are particular works, mostly historical fiction or fantasy, that draw directly on the *Mabinogion* as retellings or elaborations and more that use characters, situations, or even motifs and themes. An example of this is Olwen Bowen’s 1969 romantic retellings in *Tales from the Mabinogion*, where she simplifies and “corrects” the plot to make it resemble Arthurian romance—or rather, to resemble nineteenth-century versions of Arthurian romance. She does not add new characters or elements to the story; but her descriptions are elaborate and detailed and the dialogue so much changed that this qualifies as a retelling, not a loose translation. A more elaborate retelling—but still recognizably the *Mabinogion*—is found in the novels of Evangeline Walton, starting with *The Virgin and the Swine* and ending with *Prince of Annwn*. As C. W. Sullivan has noted, she has “altered little, but added much.” For example, the lone monstrous arm that steals the cauld in the First Branch is here extended to an entire battle scene between Pwyll and a monster, which showcases some of Walton’s occasionally questionable prose—“he plunged his sword into the wriggling redness”—and “Pwyll saw her shinginess, that for a little while the bushes had hidden” come to mind—but also gives a fascinating account of a story where Pwyll is as completely lacking in agency as he is in the original *Mabinogion*. A slightly less recognizable retelling is *The Ninth Wave* by Russell Celyn Jones. Here Pwyll carries an AK-47 and rules an industrial wasteland. Rhiannon is punished not by being transformed into a horse but into a janitor. The dialogue is sparse but effective, and if one can relinquish one's preconceived notions of what to expect from the *Mabinogion*, the novel is enjoyable. A series of books which borrow liberally from the *Mabinogion* is Lloyd Alexander’s *Prydain* chronicles. The name Prydain itself, of course, is the Welsh word for Britain. The plot bears some similarities to the First Branch—Taran is born, comes of age, marries a princess (named Eilonwy here), journeys with bards, and defeats Arawn, here not a benevolent otherworld figure but an evil God of the Dead. The morally ambiguous Cauldron-Born of the Second Branch become for Alexander a mute, grey-skinned army of the dead, and a great deal of the series—specifically the book *The Black Cauldron*—concerns itself with a raid on the Otherworld to retrieve the cauldron, clearly an episode drawn from the Middle Welsh poem *Preiddeu Annwn*. Other names from the *Mabinogion* are here, corresponding more or less with their medieval namesake: Coll mab Colfrewy, who is mentioned briefly in the court list in Culhwch and Olwen as eternally chasing the magic pig, *preiddeu annwn*.

This is carried on into *Manawydan*, where, as Andrew Welsh writes, “heroic battle appears … to be futile as a means for freeing the land from the spell.” When first Pryderi, and then Rhiannon, rush into the strange fortress, they simply disappear. There is no violent clash of arms, no opportunity for glory. In fact, it is through Manawydan's capture, trial, and formal execution (or threatened execution) of the culprit that “Rhiannon and Pryderi are freed, herds and houses and human society are restored to the land.”

**Conclusion**

William Owen Pughe intended, with his translations and editions of the *Mabinogion*, to revive the academic study of Welsh literature and promote it in the world, to found a new generation of scholarship that would eventually exalt what he believed the oldest of languages to its deserved place in the forefront of the study of Celtic language and indigenous British culture. He succeeded, but not in the manner that he intended. When he died, with the manuscript of what would have become his *Mabinogion* and his magnum opus left unpublished, it might have seemed to him and to those close to him that he had failed in his purpose. Yet thanks to a young English aristocrat, translations from Pughe’s material might have held a particular value, praised as references in poetry to suggest a Golden Age. All this demonstrates is that now, having finally understood the structure of the *Mabinogion*, we are only barely beginning to be able to truly read it in the manner that its redactor clearly felt it needed to be read.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**Translations of the Entire Text**


With an emphasis on capturing the sound of the performed Welsh tales, Davies' translation leaves out any of the romantic embellishment which characterized Guest and to a certain extent Jones and Jones' translations. She leaves the repetitions, continuous sentences, and other distinctive features of the Middle Welsh language while intentionally choosing approachable vocabulary.


Based on John Gwenogvryn Evans’ two diplomatic texts of the White and Red Book *Mabinogions*. Received badly, although John Rhys noted the quality of T. P. Ellis’ footnotes concerning Welsh legal sources.


This is an early Modern Welsh translation of the Four Branches.


This is a beautifully illustrated and meticulously crafted collector's edition of the Jones and Jones text, featuring Dorothea Braby's wood engravings and Eric Gill's unique typeface. Golden Cockerel Press became famous for this kind of illustration and artisan work; their best-known product is probably their edition of *Sr Gwain and the Green Knight*.


*Simultaneously published in the U.S. with a new title page by Scribner's Sons of New York.*


This is a reissue of the Jones and Jones text in large size with illustrations added by Alan Lee, most famous for his work with Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.


Reissued in 1913 "entierement rev., cor., et augm."


Simultaneously published by Rees of Llandovery. This is the original seven-part version of the *Mabinogion* published in 1849 with source texts, some in full and some in summary or abridged.


Simultaneously published in the U.S. with a new title page by Scribner's Sons of New York.


This is the second version of Guest's *Mabinogion* printed jointly by Dent and Dutton. With the advent of the Everyman's Library series joint venture in 1906, the text seems to have been moved from its place in their earlier Temple Classics series.


Before Dent and Dutton produced the Everyman's Library series, they first presented Schreiber's *Mabinogion* text as part of their Temple Classics series. By 1906, the text was being published through their new series, Everyman's Library, where it remained until replaced in 1949 by the Jones and Jones text, the year after that text had been published by the Golden Cockerel Press for the first time.


This is an abridged version of the 1849 Longman's edition which omits the Welsh text and other sources, although her notes at the end of each part are left intact. Reduced because of this to one volume.


*Second edition revised and enlarged, published 1904.*


This is a "coffee table" edition of the Four Branches, with a simplified, easy-to-read text and notes of general interest, illustrated with photos of named or related places in modern Wales.


The second part of the Williams edition of the Guest *Mabinogion* reprinted by Llanerch.


This is a new edition of the edited Guest text from the 1901 *Mabinogion Tales*. Fisher Unwin edition, with illustrations added by Jo Conti. It forms part of a series with *Mabinogion Legends* and *Mabinogion: The Four Branches*.


**Editions of the Whole Text**


This is a German edition of the text with a Middle Welsh-German glossary.


**Editions of Part of the Text**


As with all of Williams’ editions of Welsh texts, this has for years been considered the definitive edition. Although parts of it have been replaced with the DIAS texts, the majority of it remains the standard for the translation of the Mabinogion.


The most commonly used student edition.


**Retellings and Adaptations**


Based in part on the *Mabinogion* and other Welsh sources.


Mostly "standard" chivalric fantasy, including the almost-mystical powers of Griffith the Bard in "Griffith and Bronwen," and the noble knight Tarianfrych in "The Quest of Tarianfrych," owing more, perhaps, to the Tair Rhamant than to the Four Branches or Kilhwch and Olwen. Replete with swooning maidens in distress, twilight and fog in the mountains, and a maiden who can win the heart of a knight through her "dumplings… and pasties beyond compare."


This is a feature-length animated adaptation of the Four Branches, professionally produced and with voice talent from well-known actors.


Williams, Meta E. *Tales from the Mabinogion*. New York: Cassell, 1892.

Scholarship


Ellis' two-volume set brings together all of the different Welsh law codes into one readable explication of the nature and practice of Welsh law, a subject caught up in the *Mabinogion* – the issue of social status and propriety is everywhere and the text makes frequent – if not always correct – use of legal terminology, betraying the centrality of the subject to the Welsh aristocratic mindset.


Pughe's volume contains information on many *Mabinogion* figures, often with information drawn from other sources. Although his interpretations are interesting (particularly given their originality), the lack of citation and Pughe's known faults as a scholar are problematic.

Note: The prevalence of Guest's text and its easy availability on Project Gutenberg has spawned dozens of mirror sites throughout the Web. For the sake of clarity and brevity I will include only a few exemplars and otherwise limit this section to sites with original content.


An online guide to the *Mabinogion* with texts included from Guest's original.


Massively multiplayer online roleplaying game (MMORPG). Very little actual content related to the Mabinogion, as it is actually mostly based on Shakespeare. A spirit-guide named Pryderi (female!) seems the only connection.


A quite accurate and well-put together reference guide to the Mabinogion.


Text of the Four Branches, from the 1930 Ifor Williams edition, indexed for searching and easy translation.

*Parker, Will, trans. "The Four Branches of the Mabinogion." Mabinogi.net. Available online: [http://www.mabinogi.net](http://www.mabinogi.net).* An independent translation and website compiled by Will Parker, who has also released his translation through an independent publisher, Bardic.
The Mabinogion is a collection of ancient Welsh mythological tales which spawned the fantasy genre as we know it and inspired countless works of fiction. Featuring quests, dragons, magic, giants and heroes long before the advent of Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings or Game of Thrones, the tales of The Mabinogion were also the first to chronicle Arthur, his famous sword and knights. The Elvish language spoken in Lord of the Rings is even based on Welsh and several parallels have been drawn between Game of Thrones and Welsh mythology tropes. Prince of Dyfed hunting with his hounds. The collection


This is the free Project Gutenberg edition, drawn from the original 1849 publication by Longman's.


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2 Jones, p. 190.