

THE 'UNLIKELY FEMALE' CHARACTERS OF THE MABINOGI

Kathy E. Shimpock, 1302078

B.A., J.D., M.L.L., M.B.A

Submitted

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MA Celtic Studies

University of Wales, Trinity Saint David

2017

Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

Declaration Form.

1. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Name.....Kathy E. Shimpock.....

DateSeptember 25, 2017.....

2. This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree ofMaster of Arts in Celtic Studies.....

Name.....Kathy E. Shimpock.....

DateSeptember 25, 2017.....

3. This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references.

A bibliography is appended.

Name.....Kathy E. Shimpock.....

Date:September 25, 2017.....

4. I hereby give consent for my dissertation, if accepted, to be available for photocopying, inter- library loan, and for deposit in the University's digital repository

Name...Kathy E. Shimpock.....

Date... September 25, 2017.....

Supervisor's Declaration.

I am satisfied that this work is the result of the student's own efforts.

Signed:

Date:

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abstract	v
Introduction.....	1
1 Defining the 'Unlikely Female' Character	7
Church Doctrine.....	7
Courtesy Literature	13
Grammars	15
2 The 'Unlikely Female' Characters of the Mabinogi.....	21
Independent	24
Forthright.....	46
3 The Creation of the 'Unlikely Female' Character	54
Mythology, Motifs and International Tales	57
Authorship and Medieval Scribes.....	61
The 'Unlikely Female' in History	65
Conclusion	71
Bibliography.....	75

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Rhiannon Ifans, who brought clarity and structure to my thinking, and hope when I felt overwhelmed. This work would not have been possible without her guidance. I would like to thank Professor Jane Cartwright, who tutored me through the Mabinogion and the study of Welsh medieval women. She opened for me the questions found within this dissertation. I am also indebted to Professor Ann Parry Owen, at the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh & Celtic Studies, for her suggestions on the use of Welsh poetry. In addition, special thanks are owed to all the library staff; but especially to Mark Watkins and Anna Fonge, who provided invaluable assistance to a distance study student. Finally, I would like to thank my father, Charles Shimpock, who at 101 years old, continues to love and wait patiently for me.

Abstract

The female characters of the Mabinogi represent divergent views on medieval gender roles. Some characters are depicted in stereotypical ways – defined in dichotomy, as either Mary or Eve. Other female characters are different, for they portray women who act outside of social norms. These are the ‘unlikely female’ characters. The aim of this dissertation is to define, identify, and analyse the ‘unlikely female’ characters of the Mabinogi. The first chapter provides a literature review (of church doctrines, courtesy books and bardic grammar) to identify medieval gender assumptions. The ‘unlikely female’ characters do not meet any established gender norms. They are defined as either independent or forthright. Chapter two identifies the ‘unlikely female’ characters as Rhiannon, Branwen, Aranrhod and Gwein. Their actions and behaviours set them apart from societal expectations. The ‘unlikely female’ characters are then analysed within a background of law, history and medieval Welsh culture. The third chapter describes their creation and derivation. The continuing role of the author and scribal author is essential to understanding texts which were transcribed for over a hundred years. Scribal authors had agency and often modified or expanded texts. They were also influenced by the Church and their culture. References to mythology, folktales, hagiography and historical biography are discussed. Biographical depictions of medieval Welsh noblewomen indicate their similarity to these ‘unlikely female’ characters. In conclusion, the Mabinogi contains many references to medieval society and culture depicting gender norms. Yet as these characters developed, their mythic past may have been replaced by historic Welsh noblewomen; whose biographies show them to be both independent and forthright. By placing the ‘unlikely female’ characters of the Mabinogi in the context of medieval Welsh society, any perceived gender variations become less ‘unlikely’ and more expected.

Introduction

The medieval woman was portrayed as beautiful; with black brows, skin fair as the froth on the sea, and golden locks. In romantic literature,¹ she was the virginal maiden, dressed in perfect finery, bedecked in jewels, and waiting for a knight to win her favour. She was prized, fought after, and sometimes rescued – the stereotypical ‘damsel in distress’. She rarely took independent action.² Bornstein writes, ‘In the typical romance, little attention is given to the characterization of the lady, who exists mainly as a motivating force or source of inspiration for the knight’.³ In medieval Welsh poetry, she was the kind and gentle noblewoman whose nature was highlighted in elegy. Such is the standard motif found in both medieval and modern Welsh literature.⁴ Here was a woman seen through the eyes of man.⁵

¹ For example, ‘How Culhwch Won Olwen’, ‘Peredur son of Efrog’, ‘The Lady of the Well’, and ‘Geraint son of Erbin’.

² D. Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1983), p. 10.

³ *ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

⁴ Olwen is the perfect example of this motif, as described poetically in ‘How Culhwch Won Olwen’, see *The Mabinogion*, trans. S. Davies (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2007), p. 192.

⁵ Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower*, pp. 9–10.

Clearly the prized virtues of beauty,⁶ patience,⁷ modesty,⁸ wisdom,⁹ chastity,¹⁰ and loyalty¹¹ are exemplified in medieval literature.¹² Yet sprinkled throughout are complex¹³ and unexpected female characters, whose emotions run deep¹⁴ and actions are often surprising.¹⁵ These women are portrayed as being verbally skilled (when they wish to be), political and highly intelligent.¹⁶ They seek control over their own destinies and desire independence from established roles.¹⁷ They initiate action and attempt to manipulate events in their favour by working (for the most part) within their social system rather than

⁶ In the Mabinogi, Arawn's wife, Rhiannon, and Branwen, see Davies, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 5, 11, 23. In poetry, 'Denying that He's a Monk', Dafydd ap Gwilym writes of his beautiful married lover, Morfudd, see *Medieval Welsh Poems: An Anthology*, trans. Richard Loomis and Dafydd Johnston (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), pp. 27–28.

⁷ Rhiannon is often seen as patient: she waits to meet Pwyll, waits to marry him, and waits to complete her punishment for a crime she did not commit.

⁸ In the Third Branch, Cigfa expresses her desire for an honourable relationship with Manawydan.

⁹ Rhiannon, Branwen and the wife of Teyrnon advise their husbands.

¹⁰ The wife of Arawn waits to have relations with her husband for a year. Contrast this behaviour to Aranrhod, who falsely claimed to be a virgin.

¹¹ Pwyll remains loyal to Arawn by not having sexual relations with his wife.

¹² Davies contends that these characterizations display the author's views on proper social conduct and virtue, see Sioned Davies, *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi – Pedair Keinc Y Mabinogi* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1993), p. 80.

¹³ This is true even for minor women characters in the Mabinogi, such as Goewin, and the wives of Teyrnon and Arawn. Each shows humanity and great depth of emotion.

¹⁴ For example, Branwen, who fails at her attempt to keep the peace between the two countries, dies of a broken heart. Teyrnon's wife shows love and affection for the boy. Only after they discovered his actual parentage (and Rhiannon's punishment) was it agreed that he be returned.

¹⁵ For example, Rhiannon's planned meeting and selection of Pwyll as her spouse, and Aranrhod's refusal to acknowledge her son. Both actions are outside the norm for women of the day.

¹⁶ Often the women characters are more intelligent than their male counterparts. In each Branch of the Mabinogi, women characters offer counsel and advice (e.g., Cigfa, and the wife of Teyrnon). In addition, Rhiannon offers a plan to thwart Gwawl after Pwyll's thoughtlessly grants him a request of marriage; and Branwen is seen writing a letter when literacy was rare.

¹⁷ For example, Rhiannon seeks to select her own marriage partner; Aranrhod, to maintain a life without the control of any man; Branwen, relinquishment from her marriage vows; and Blodeuedd, control over her life.

outside it. These ‘unlikely female’ characters are outspoken, independent and assertive. Sometimes they are even otherworldly: portrayed with the strength of the strongest men.¹⁸ These women do not fit easily into any established medieval role or category. They also stand outside of established societal norms.

Scholars have long studied the female characters of the Mabinogi. They have been the focus of many books and articles, each bringing greater clarity to their speech and actions.¹⁹ While study has focused on their uniqueness, little research exists on how these characters fit within established gender norms. Further, there has been no exploration on how *likely* these female characters were within medieval Welsh literature. Lloyd-Morgan in her study of gender and violence, describes the need for this approach.

[O]ne immediately has to confront the question of the relationship between the society depicted in these texts and the society within which and for which such tales were preserved.²⁰

Medieval women were commonly depicted in extremes — as either Mary or Eve from the Bible.²¹ The Mabinogion does include such characters — women who match these stereotypes.²² Yet the most prominent female characters differ. They are both independent and forthright. Their deviation from social norms has been

¹⁸ The women claimed they could not restrain Rhiannon at the birth of her son.

¹⁹ Fiona Winward, ‘Some Aspects of the Women in the Four Branches’, *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 34 (1997); R.L. Valente, “‘Merched Y Mabinogi:’ and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches’, (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 1986); W.J. Gruffydd, *Rhiannon: An Inquiry into the Origins of the First and Third Branches of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1953); Proinsias Mac Cana, *Branwen Daughter of Llŷr: A Study of the Irish Affinities and of the Composition of the 2nd Branch of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1958).

²⁰ Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, ‘Gender and Violence in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi’, in Bernhard Maier, Stefan Zimmer & Christiane Batke, eds., *150 Jahre “Mabinogion” – Deutsch-Walisische Kulturbeziehungen* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2001), 67–77, p. 66.

²¹ Williams, Marty Newman and Anne Echols, *Between Pit and Pedestal: Women in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Pub., 1994), p. 3.

²² Olwen, in ‘How Culhwch Won Olwen’, representing Mary; and Blodeudd as Eve.

explained as evidence of mythology, or folktale motifs.²³ Comparing and contrasting these characters to medieval female stereotypes has been non-existent.

Distinguishing the 'unlikely female' character from the norm, however, requires an analysis of how women were perceived within medieval Welsh society. In this dissertation, the conventionalized woman is established by reviewing Welsh church doctrines, courtesy books and bardic grammar.²⁴ Although fictional female characters are often seen in relationship to men,²⁵ it is only by comparing these common qualities and behaviours to actual women, that the 'unlikely female' character can be defined.²⁶

The qualities of the 'unlikely female' character (i.e., independence and forthrightness) have also been examined.²⁷ This study has predominantly taken a 'lifecycle' approach, looking at female characters as they move from maiden to wife, mother, and widow. Women who are maidens or widows have the most

²³ Their independence and forthrightness are the remnants of a goddess past or simply derived from the international folktales. C.W. Sullivan, III., 'Inheritance and Lordship in Math', in C.W. Sullivan, III., ed., *The Mabinogion, A Book of Essays* (New York, Garland Pub., 1996, 2015), p 352.

²⁴ Naomi Hoogesteger in *Deviant Women in Courtly and Popular Medieval Castilian Poetry* described the ideal comportment of women as what was decreed by the church and as established by the aristocracy. Naomi May Jensen, Hoogesteger, 'Deviant Women in Courtly and Popular Medieval Castilian Poetry', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Durham University, 2012), p. 267.

²⁵ Angela M. Robinson, 'Unnamed Women in Medieval Welsh Literature', (unpublished MA thesis, Aberystwyth University, 2014), p. 20.

²⁶ Other scholars have examined 'unlikely female' characters in the medieval literature, see Naomi May Jensen, 'Anomalous Women in Fifteenth-Century Castilian Ballads', (unpublished MA thesis, Durham University, 2006); Naomi May Jensen, 'Deviant Women in Courtly and Popular Medieval Castilian Poetry', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Durham University, 2012); Vera Casto Lingl, 'Assertive Women in Medieval Spanish Literature', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1995); Marcia Lynn Neudigate, 'Unique Perspectives of Celtic Women in Early Medieval Irish and Welsh Literature', (unpublished MA thesis, Northern Kentucky University, 1994).

²⁷ Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in the Four Branches', pp. 81, 83.

independence, while wives and mothers have less.²⁸ Unfortunately, such an analysis restricts these characters to narrow gender roles, describing Branwen as 'passive' and 'colourless'²⁹ and Rhiannon as 'subjugated'.³⁰ Their actions are now confined to the patriarchal system — a system that equally controls the actions of men.³¹ However, when comparing these characters to the culture, laws and history of medieval Wales; a different interpretation of their actions and behaviour can be identified, showing them as more savvy and politically astute than has previously been explored. Comparing these fictional women to the norm (i.e., what is known of the lives and the status of women in medieval Wales), highlights any anomalies.³²

Scholars have also speculated on the identity of the Mabinogi author.³³ The author's skill in composition and structure has been fully explored.³⁴ Yet the author or 'scribal author's'³⁵ role in the creation of these characters has been ignored. The writing has been described as a 'cutting and pasting' from diverse sources including mythology or folktale motifs.³⁶ But these characters were not

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 98.

²⁹ Andrew Welsh, 'Branwen, Beowulf, and the Tragic Peaceweaver Tale', *Viator*, 22 (1991), 1–14, p. 13.

³⁰ Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in the Four Branches', p. 97.

³¹ Valente examines the language of women regarding their deference to men. Valente, "'Merched Y Mabinogi": Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches', p. 141.

³² Ascertaining which of their behaviours are 'unlikely' also requires some understanding of the status of medieval women. This will be determined by reviewing the *Welsh Law of Women (Cyfraith y Gwraedd)*. *The Welsh Law of Women*, eds. Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980).

³³ Glanmor Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1962), p. 85.

³⁴ Juliette Wood, 'The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature', in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp. 61-78, 62.

³⁵ Matthew Fisher, *Scribal Authorship and the Writing of History in Medieval England* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2012), pp. 14–58.

³⁶ Elisabeth Hanson-Smith, 'Pwyll Prince of Dyfed: The Narrative Structure', in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp.153–164, 153.

created once and then ignored. Instead they were derived over time: modified, reduced or expanded in later redactions.³⁷ Therefore, character variations may come from sources familiar to the scribe, including hagiography and the lives of actual medieval women. A comparison of the 'unlikely female' character to historic figures, brings further clarity to the narrative. The work of Richards³⁸ and Messer³⁹ is essential to this exploration. In addition, there has been little examination of the Church's influence on the text's creation.⁴⁰

The aim of this dissertation is to define, identify, and analyse the 'unlikely female' characters of the Mabinogi. These are the characters that fall outside of medieval, female stereotypes. This work seeks to answer the following questions: First, what are the social and gender norms for medieval Welsh women? How are the 'unlikely female' characters defined, in contrast to these stereotypes? Second, who are the 'unlikely female' characters of the Mabinogi? Why do their actions place them outside gender expectations? And third, what influenced the development of these characters? How 'unlikely' are these characters based on what is known about medieval culture and society? Were these characters reflective of reality or were they truly 'unlikely females'?

³⁷ *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain*, ed. Rachel Bromwich (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1961, 2014), pp. lxxi–lxxv.

³⁸ Gwennyth Richards, *Welsh Nobelwomen in the Thirteenth Century* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009); Gwennyth Richards 'Medieval Welsh Noblewomen: The Case of Margaret of Bromfield', *Eras Journal*, 3 (2002) [online]. Available at: <http://arts.monash.edu.au/publications/eras/edition-3/richards.php> <accessed 15 January 2017>.

³⁹ Danna R. Messer, 'The Uxorial Lifecycle and Female Agency in Wales in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Bangor University, 2014).

⁴⁰ The texts were influenced by the Church, and share the biases of the scribes that wrote them. Glanmor Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1962), p. 107.

1 Defining the 'Unlikely Female' Character

This investigation begins with defining the 'unlikely female' character. When crafting a definition, it is not sufficient to merely look for differences between literary characters. An examination of the social and cultural norms is required instead. The 'unlikely female' character becomes known only in contrast to the stereotypical medieval woman.

A variety of medieval writings highlights the character of women. This includes church doctrines, courtesy literature and bardic grammars. A further indication, however, of the *status* of women (i.e., their position in life, behaviours and duties), is indicated in the *Welsh Law of Women* and exemplified in praise poetry.⁴¹ Identifying medieval gender perceptions based on extant medieval writings has significant limitations, but provides some understanding of the qualities and behaviours desired and prized in women.⁴²

Church Doctrine

Early Church texts discussed the nature of women, beginning with the fall from the Garden of Eden. As a temptress, Eve was held responsible for this 'original sin'.

While Adam is assigned equal blame with Eve in the Genesis text of the Fall, biblical exegesis in the hands of the celibate Fathers of the Church tended to excuse Adam and to make Eve the sole source and symbol of original Sin.⁴³

⁴¹ This will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

⁴² As written by male authors and transcribed by male scribes.

⁴³ Maureen Fries, "'Feminae Populi': Popular Images of Women in Medieval Literature", *Journal of Popular Culture*, 14:1 (Summer 1980), 79–85, p. 79.

To persuade men not to marry, the Church focused on female sexuality,⁴⁴ for all Church Fathers accepted that marriage was inferior to virginity.⁴⁵ Women, therefore, as the daughters of Eve were perceived as lascivious, seductive, wicked and deceitful.⁴⁶ St Ambrose held that woman ‘stands for our senses’, and man ‘for our mind’.⁴⁷

Other early Christian theologians wrote of the subordination and inadequacy of women.⁴⁸ For example, St Augustine writes, ‘that women should serve men, and children their parents, because it is just that the weaker mind should serve the stronger’.⁴⁹ St Thomas Aquinas discussed the creation of woman as a ‘misbegotten male’ in which ‘nothing misbegotten or defective should have been in the first production of things’.⁵⁰ Further in 1191, Gerald of Wales⁵¹ travelled throughout Wales as a missionary. His text *Itinerarium Kambriae* (*The Journey through Wales*) surveyed the country and recorded its customs. Gerald shared the beliefs prevalent with medieval clerics,⁵² describing ‘women as a source of constant anxiety, social disorder and dissatisfaction’.⁵³

Medieval ideas about femininity were complex and at times ambiguous. These negative attitudes were only part of the mix. Yet such concepts ‘denoted

⁴⁴ Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (New Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 103.

⁴⁵ Katharine M. Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1966), p. 17.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 72–73.

⁴⁷ *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, 2002), p.3.

⁴⁸ Blamires provides an anthology of texts from early Church Fathers.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 77–82.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵¹ Gerald of Wales (Giraldus Cambrensis) (1146–1223). Giraldus Cambrensis, *The Itinerary through Wales and the Description of Wales* (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1908).

⁵² Danna A. Messer, ‘The Uxorial Lifecycle and Female Agency in Wales in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries’, (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Bangor University, 2014), p. 54.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 53.

gender expectations, that is, the social and cultural behavioural norms' which varied somewhat with age, and social status.⁵⁴ Cullum and Goldberg write:

[T]here is no single hegemonic ideology of gender applicable to the whole of the Middle Ages. Rather we find a multiplicity of overlapping ideologies, some of which are more visible than others. Clerical perceptions are particularly well documented because the clergy tended to monopolize literary production for much of the period.⁵⁵

In 1284, the Archbishop Peckham expressed a need for Welsh poets to have access to vernacular texts to spread Christian doctrines.⁵⁶ The contents of these popular instructional texts indicated that the Welsh church was not 'deeply involved in the avant-garde theological disputes of the Middle Ages'.⁵⁷ No complete Welsh translation of the scriptures exists from this period. There are only key texts and individual verses.⁵⁸ The writing of the Church fathers was not widely disseminated.

While literacy was the domain of the clerics, the laity received spiritual instruction from the pulpit. Williams writes that the fourteenth century Church had a 'gloomy pessimism of much of their official teaching concerning the weaker sex',⁵⁹ indicating an acquiescence to traditional ideas. Clerics shared with

⁵⁴ Jacqueline Murray, 'Femininity and Masculinity', in Margaret C. Schaus, ed., *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 284–287, 284.

⁵⁵ R. Howard Bloch, 'Medieval Misogyny', *Representations*, 20 (Autumn, 1987), 1–24, pp.10–11; P.H. Cullum and P.J.P. Goldberg, 'Gender Ideologies', in Margaret C. Schaus, ed., *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 308–311, 308.

⁵⁶ These writings were intended for lay readers and ordinary clergy. Morfydd E. Owen 'Functional Prose: Religion, Science, Grammar, Law', in A.O.H. Jarman and Gwilym Rees Hughes, eds., *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, Vol. 1 (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1976), p. 251.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 252.

⁵⁸ Welsh religious prose was limited to selected biblical translations, manuals of instructions, prayers and hymns, works of piety and devotion, apocryphal literature, visions of Heaven and Hell, and the lives of the saints. Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation*, pp. 87–88, 90.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 194.

laity 'threats of the dooms to come, by moralizing anecdote and by holding up as an example the pattern of the Holy Lives of the Saints who went before them'.⁶⁰

The medieval lives of the saints were especially popular in the Middle Ages. Of the small subset of saints who were women,⁶¹ many were martyred virgins. Hagiography presented female saints as exemplary role models for others to follow.⁶² Accordingly, the audience for these devotional texts may have been laywomen.⁶³ While saints' lives cannot be used to discern the actual lives of medieval women, they can be used to highlight the role of women in the church and the values and attitudes of the day.⁶⁴

Hagiography depicts female saints as disavowing marriage for a life of purity.⁶⁵ Clerics, who were also vowed celibates, agreed that virginity was preferable to marriage. This was supported by scripture and early Christian teachings.⁶⁶ The ideal medieval woman, therefore, was held to be virginal or

⁶⁰ Owen, 'Functional Prose: Religion, Science, Grammar, Law', p. 256

⁶¹ Willis Bund claimed women rarely became saints for they were unable to hold a position of authority that entitled them to be a saint, see J.W. Willis Bund, 'Some Characteristics of Welsh and Irish Saints', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 11, Series 5 (1894), 270–80. G.H. Doble also argued that women were unable to travel to different locations to establish religious communities, see G.H. Doble, *S. Keyne and the Children of Brychan in Cornwall*, Cornish Saints Series 25 (Exeter: Sidney Lee, 1930), p. 47. Today these views are largely discounted, as the spread of saints, is not believed to be due to the actual physical presence of the saint but to the growth of her cult, see S. Victory, *The Celtic Church in Wales*, p. 34.

⁶² Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation*, pp. 486; 'Middle English Legends of Women Saints: Introduction', ed. Sherry L. Reams, Medieval English Text Series [online]. Available: <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/reams-middle-english-legends-of-women-saints> <accessed 25 September 2016>.

⁶³ Jane Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008) p. 124.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 103.

⁶⁵ Much of these lives are a variation of the following story. A young and beautiful maiden dedicates her life to God. Her choice is in defiance to a suitor or authority figure. Ultimately, her decision to remain a virgin leads to her demise. She is either raped, tortured, maimed or killed. Yet in dying she becomes a saint, for her triumph over death makes her the ultimate victor.

⁶⁶ Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature*, p. 17.

chaste, silent and obedient.⁶⁷ The Virgin Mary was the perfect embodiment of this absolute in scripture.⁶⁸ Yet the paradox of Mary, when contrasted to Eve, resulted in some ambiguity as to the actual nature of women.⁶⁹

In philosophy and literature, womankind occupied either the pit of hell with Eve or the pedestal of heaven with Mary. Woman's literary presence in between those two extremes was rare, but neither stereotype was especially helpful to the majority of real women — those between *pit and pedestal*.⁷⁰

This dichotomy is also found within medieval Welsh literature.⁷¹

However, the Church's preference for celibacy did not have the same status in Wales as it did throughout Europe.⁷² Welsh women were encouraged to be chaste in marriage, rather than embracing lives of religious vocation.⁷³ Virginity was essential to the status of a maiden, for it impacted her ability to marry, who she would marry, and whether she would stay married.⁷⁴ Her virginity was essential to the very formalization of marriage as set forth in the

⁶⁷ Murray, 'Femininity and Masculinity', p. 285.

⁶⁸ Cartwright, *Female Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*, pp. 35–36. A cult to the Virgin Mary was active in medieval Wales. *ibid.*, pp. 8–94.

⁶⁹ Colton, Lisa, 'The Articulation of Virginity in the Medieval "Chanson de Nonne"', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 133:2 (2008), 159–188, p. 159.

⁷⁰ Williams, Marty Newman and Anne Echols, *Between Pit and Pedestal: Women in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Pub., 1994), p. 3.

⁷¹ See Welsh triads 'Three Chaste (Wives) of the Island of Britain' and 'Three Faithless (Unchaste) Wives of the Island of Britain'. Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, pp. 183, 210; Jane Cartwright, 'Virginity and Chastity Tests in Medieval Welsh Prose', in Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salih, eds., *Medieval Virginites* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 67–68.

⁷² St Non was an exception, for she was raped and yet still sanctified. Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*, p.121.

⁷³ There were only three nunneries and perhaps only thirty-five nuns in existence in Wales before the Dissolution. Robin Chapman Stacey, 'Wales', in Margaret C. Schaus, ed., *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 826–827, 827; Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*, p. 202.

⁷⁴ Cartwright, 'Virginity and Chastity Tests in Medieval Welsh Prose', p. 56.

Welsh Law of Women.⁷⁵ Therefore, young women dealt with the value of their virginity, while married women remained concerned with issues of chastity.⁷⁶

The female saints of the Middle Ages were exceptional characters, transgressing against cultural norms to defy the social and religious mores of the times.⁷⁷ Although there were few written texts until the fifteenth century,⁷⁸ the stories⁷⁹ of both local⁸⁰ and universal⁸¹ female saints were widely known. The interpretation of these lives varies, for scholars have conflicting views as to their importance. Some critics have argued that these stories are misogynist and even pornographic in the way they objectify women; making them subject to violence as a punishment for resisting carnal desires.⁸² Others see these texts as victories of very strong women whose purity is undaunted by any threat. Still other scholars point out that the virgins' adversaries tended to be authority figures. The saints' disobedience may be a rebellion against tyranny generally.⁸³ How medieval women viewed these stories is uncertain. Yet it should be remembered

⁷⁵ If claimed to be a 'false virgin', the bride did not automatically receive *agweddi* but was subjected to a humiliating test. Christopher McAll, 'Normal Paradigms of a Woman's Life in the Irish and Welsh Law Texts', in Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen eds., *The Welsh Law of Women* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1980), pp. 7–22, 9.

⁷⁶ Jane Cartwright, 'Virginity and Chastity Tests in Medieval Welsh Prose', p. 73.

⁷⁷ Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society ca. 500–1100*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), pp. 1–9.

⁷⁸ Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation*, p. 103.

⁷⁹ K.A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 12.

⁸⁰ Popular Welsh female saints included the many daughters of Brychan Brycheiniog, St Eluned, St Gwenfrewy, St Ffraid, St Dwywnwen, St Tegfedd, St Melangell, and St Non.

⁸¹ These include St Katherine, St Margaret, St Mary Magdalen, St Martha, St Ursula, and St Mary of Egypt.

⁸² 'Middle English Legends of Women Saints: Introduction', ed. Sherry L. Reams, Medieval English Text Series [online]. Available: <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/reames-middle-english-legends-of-women-saints> <accessed 25 September 2016>.

⁸³ 'Middle English Legends of Women Saints: Introduction', ed. Sherry L. Reams, Medieval English Text Series [online]. Available: <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/reames-middle-english-legends-of-women-saints> <accessed 25 September 2016>.

that the purpose of hagiography was to be devotional, instructional and entertaining.⁸⁴

The saints' lives portrayed the Christian virtues of humility, obedience,⁸⁵ purity, forbearance, and charity.⁸⁶ Clearly female saints served as an inspiration to live a faith-filled life. Beyond that, their influence is questionable. In Wales, saints were to be admired, but perhaps not imitated. Their behaviour was considered problematic, for a woman's primary role was that of mother, and not a monastic. These saints acted in a manner which was 'forgetful of their sex'.⁸⁷ They were the rebels who transgressed against their nature and culture.⁸⁸ Female saints were perceived as a serious threat to patriarchal order and authority. The female saints may even have inspired the 'unlikely female' characters in medieval Welsh literature.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the church texts set the tone for what was to come.

Courtesy Literature

⁸⁴ Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*, p. 124.

⁸⁵ Murray, 'Femininity and Masculinity', p. 285.

⁸⁶ Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation*, p. 486; 'Middle English Legends of Women Saints: Introduction', ed. Sherry L. Reams, *Medieval English Text Series* [online]. Available: <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/reames-middle-english-legends-of-women-saints> <accessed 25 September 2016>.

⁸⁷ There was only a fine line that separated sanctity from deviant modes of behaviour. Patrick Thomas, *A Candle in the Darkness: Celtic Spirituality from Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1993), p. 1.

⁸⁸ Leslie A. Donovan, *Women Saints' Lives in Old English Prose* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), p. 15.

⁸⁹ Saint lives follow folktale motifs, see Elissa R. Henken, 'The Saint as Folk Hero: Biographical Patterning in Welsh Hagiography', in Patrick K. Ford, ed., *Celtic Folklore and Christianity* (Santa Barbara, CA: McNally and Loftin, 1983), p. 58–74, 74; Elissa R. Henken, *The Welsh Saints: A Study in Patterned Lives* (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1991).

Appearing in the twelfth century,⁹⁰ courtesy books instructed women and children on proper conduct. Like etiquette books, these texts guided real world behaviour. Popular throughout the Middle Ages, many texts survived throughout Britain and Europe.⁹¹ It is unknown how many of these books were available in Wales.⁹² Over time, the knowledge contained within them was taught throughout medieval society.⁹³ Some scholars believe these books provided education to a merchant class seeking upward mobility. Others have pondered whether they met a more general need to teach the public manners.⁹⁴

Courtesy books detail the social subordination of women and the ideal behaviour for all social classes. The qualities of humility, modesty (in both speech and attire), chastity, loyalty and obedience (to husband or parent) were universally valued. Through these texts, the duties and responsibilities of aristocratic and merchant women can be determined, as well as the values and ideals of the time. The texts give frequent warnings as to which behaviours were

⁹⁰ Most were written from the 12th through the 15th centuries. Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower*, p. 13.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁹² Only later redactions are extant in Wales: *The Good Wife Would a Pilgrimage*, see Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Brogyntyn MS ii.1 (formerly known as *Porkington 10*). National Library of Wales, 'A Middle English Miscellany. Reference: Brogyntyn MS ii.1', Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru-The National Library of Wales [online]. Available: <https://www.llgc.org.uk/en/discover/digital-gallery/manuscripts/the-middle-ages/a-middle-english-miscellany/> <accessed 3 June 2017>; and the 'Stans Puer ad Mensam' (The Child at the Table). Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth 356B f.143r.

⁹³ Found in books, schools and trade guilds. These books were available to people from all classes and perhaps shared orally. Jonathan Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy: Medieval Courtesy Books and the Gawain-Poet* (Dover, NH: D.S. Brewer, 1985), p. 73.

⁹⁴ Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower*, p. 73; Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy: Medieval Courtesy Books and the Gawain-Poet*, p. 73.

considered inappropriate and which were desired. Simply stated, the 'good' woman was submissive and the 'bad' woman disobedient.⁹⁵

In contrast to church writings, courtesy books do not display misogyny so much as representing the patriarchal social order. The ideals set forth in courtesy books reflect the subordination that existed in medieval life. The subservience of women was believed to be part of the natural order, rather than simply a social construct.⁹⁶ Therefore, regardless of her rank, every woman should be humble, modest and most certainly, obedient.⁹⁷

Grammars

Christianity influenced both literature and poetry throughout the Middle Ages. Scribes served as authors and copyist for vernacular literature and sought to exemplify Christian values.⁹⁸ The Welsh grammars were Latin texts providing poets with instructions on grammatical principles. However, since most poets could not read Latin, the Church provided guidance and training in both the form and the content of their work.⁹⁹

The most significant bardic grammar, *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid*,¹⁰⁰ was attributed to Einion Offeiriad, a Welsh priest. Einion set forth two subjects as appropriate for poetry: praise (spiritual and temporal) and human beings (clerics

⁹⁵ Courtesy books were written in England, France, Germany, Italy and Spain with universal themes and minimal differences in content. Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower*, pp. 118–119.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 118.

⁹⁷ Ultimately the goal of the courtesy books was to create a docile wife. *ibid.*, p. 119.

⁹⁸ Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation*, p. 106.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁰⁰ Translated as *The Grammars of the Chief Bards*. Michela Jacques, 'Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid/Bardic Grammars', in Siân Echard and Robert Rouse, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2017), pp. 911–912, 911.

and lay).¹⁰¹ The praise of women was included in the duties of the household poet. Grammars indicated which character traits were appropriate for praise. The qualities listed were gender specific, and provided an idealized and conceptualized view of women.¹⁰²

The grammars remained influential throughout the sixteenth century. A Welsh manuscript¹⁰³ from this period provides instruction on the appropriate way to praise women.

Three kinds of women are praised, a noblewoman, a maiden, and a woman of religion. A noblewoman is praised for wisdom, and propriety, and chastity, and generosity, and beauty of countenance, complexion and form, and guilelessness of speech and actions. And it is not fitting to praise a noblewoman for prowess in love-making or dalliance, for amatory verse is not seemly to her.¹⁰⁴

As time went on, poets were less influenced by the grammars.¹⁰⁵ The thirteenth to the sixteenth century was the time of the 'Poets of the Nobility' (*Beirdd yr Uchelwyr*).¹⁰⁶ Poets, no longer supported by the court, were dependent on the patronage of nobility. Poets wrote both praise poetry and elegies for the wives and daughters of nobility who sponsored their work. Subjects were idealized in stereotypical ways.¹⁰⁷ They exemplified Christian virtues, comparing

¹⁰¹ Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation*, p. 107.

¹⁰² Messer, 'The Uxorial Lifecycle and Female Agency in Wales in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', pp. 41–42.

¹⁰³ The *Graduelys*, a 16th century treatise, was a redaction of earlier instructions. Ceri W. Lewis, 'The Content of Poetry and the Crisis in the Bardic Tradition', in A.O.H. Jarman and Gwilym Rees Hughes, *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, Vol. 2 (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1979), p. 90.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁵ Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation*, p. 200.

¹⁰⁶ Messer, 'The Uxorial Lifecycle and Female Agency in Wales in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', p. 36.

¹⁰⁷ Barry J. Lewis, 'Opening up the Archives of Welsh Poetry: Welshness and Englishness during the Hundred Years' War', University of Wales [online]. Available: <http://www.wales.ac.uk/Resources/Documents/Research/OpeningArchivesWelshPoetry.pdf> <accessed 15 January 2017>.

women to the Virgin Mary or female saints.¹⁰⁸ Ultimately the goal of poetry was to entertain and glorify the ideals of the court.¹⁰⁹

Medieval poetry most commonly portrayed women in a formulistic manner. Physically they were described as beautiful¹¹⁰ with fair skin,¹¹¹ golden hair,¹¹² rosy cheeks,¹¹³ and black brows.¹¹⁴ Their bodies were thin¹¹⁵ with a shapely figure.¹¹⁶ Noblewomen were praised for their gentleness,¹¹⁷ nobility,¹¹⁸ chastity or modesty¹¹⁹, generosity¹²⁰ and for being soft-spoken.¹²¹ As poetry began to express more romantic themes, the dichotomy of women's character continued to be expressed in traditional ways. Poets placed noble women on a pedestal of

¹⁰⁸ Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation*, p. 197.

¹⁰⁹ Messer, 'The Uxorial Lifecycle and Female Agency in Wales in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', pp. 46–47.

¹¹⁰ Dafydd ap Gwilym (1340–70) describes the subject of his poem as 'the lovely beauty which God of Heaven gave to Eve at the time of the fortunate event'. Dafydd ap Gwilym, 'A Pre-Eminent Girl', Dafydd ap Gwilym.net [online]. Available: <http://www.dafyddapgwilym.net/> <accessed 10 May 2017>.

¹¹¹ Dafydd ap Gwilym, 'Waiting in Vain', Dafydd ap Gwilym.net [online]. Available: <http://www.dafyddapgwilym.net/> <accessed 10 May 2017>.

¹¹² Dafydd ab Edmwnd, 'A Girl's Hair', in Clancy, ed., *Medieval Welsh Poems*, pp. 329–330.

¹¹³ Tudur Aled, 'Love's Frustration', in Joseph P. Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 349–351.

¹¹⁴ Dafydd ap Gwilym, 'Denying that He's a Monk', in Richard Loomis and Dafydd Johnston, trans., *Medieval Welsh Poems* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), pp. 27–28.

¹¹⁵ Dafydd ap Gwilym, 'The Heart', Dafydd ap Gwilym.net [online]. Available: <http://www.dafyddapgwilym.net/> <accessed 10 May 2017>.

¹¹⁶ Hywel Dafi of Gwent, 'Fantasy', in Dafydd Johnston, *Canu Maswedd yr Oesoedd Canol: Medieval Welsh Erotic Poetry* (Bridgend, Poetry Wales, Ltd., 1991. 1998), p. 5.

¹¹⁷ Dafydd ap Gwilym, 'The Cuckoo', Dafydd ap Gwilym.net [online]. Available: <http://www.dafyddapgwilym.net/> <accessed 10 May 2017>.

¹¹⁸ Gruffudd Gryg, 'The Fickle Girl', in Clancy, ed., *Medieval Welsh Poems*, pp. 215–217.

¹¹⁹ Iorwerth ab Y Cyriog, 'The Brooch', in Clancy ed., *Medieval Welsh Poems*, pp. 222–113.

¹²⁰ Guto'r Glyn, 'To Thank Joan Burgh Daughter of William Clopton of Wattlesborough for Her Care', Guto'r Glyn.net [online]. Available: <http://www.gutorglyn.net/gutorglyn/index/> <accessed 12 May 2017>.

¹²¹ Dafydd ap Gwilym, 'Yesterday', Dafydd ap Gwilym.net [online]. Available: <http://www.dafyddapgwilym.net/> <accessed 10 May 2017>.

virtue;¹²² while disparaging and chastising those who rebuffed their sexual advances.¹²³

Throughout the Middle Ages, women are portrayed either as Mary or as Eve. Blamires writes, 'The polarized nature of medieval attitudes to women is notorious. Eve is set against Mary, the sensual deceiver against maternal purity, rebelliousness against meekness'.¹²⁴ Birkan identifies the idealized woman of romantic medieval literature as Mary.¹²⁵ Her characterization occurs within the *Mabinogi* as the wife of Arawn. The queen is described as the 'most beautiful woman that anyone had seen, wearing a golden garment of shining brocaded silk'. As Pwyll talks with her he finds 'the most noble woman and the most gracious of disposition and discourse he had ever seen'.¹²⁶

Blodeuedd,¹²⁷ however, fails to meet this ideal. Magically created from the imagination¹²⁸ of men, Blodeuedd is clearly an Eve figure. As expected, she is beautiful, seductive and lascivious. But once 'birthed', Blodeuedd no longer meets the romantic fantasies of her male creators.¹²⁹ She is not an obedient and

¹²² Iolo Goch, 'The Court of Owain Glydwr', in Tony Conran, ed., *Welsh Verse* (Mid Glamorgan: Poetry Wales Press, 1986), pp. 183–186.

¹²³ These women were depicted as either lovers (or potential lovers) or as 'teases'. Dafydd ap Gwilym, 'A Girl's Feast', Dafydd ap Gwilym.net [online]. Available: <http://www.dafyddapgwilym.net/> <accessed 10 May 2017>).

¹²⁴ Alcuin Blamires, 'Chaucer's Revaluation of Chivalric Honor', *Mediaevalia*, 5 (1979), 245–269.

¹²⁵ Evren Birkan, 'Women & Love in Medieval Courtly Literature: The Real and the Fictional', (unpublished M.A. thesis, Doğus University, 2011), p. 39.

¹²⁶ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 5.

¹²⁷ *ibid*, pp. 58–63.

¹²⁸ Medieval wives were to be meek and obedient. Included within the marriage vow was the promise to be 'bonoure and buxum'. Sue Niebrzydowski, *Bonoure and Buxum: A Study of Wives in Late Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006), p. 91; *Woman is a Worthy Wight: Women in English Society c. 1200–1500*, ed. P.J.P. Goldberg (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton, 1992), p. 83.

¹²⁹ Joan, Ferrante, 'Male Fantasy and Female Reality in Courtly Literature', *Women's Studies*, 11:1 (1984), 67–97, p. 70.

submissive handmaiden. She commits adultery and along with her lover, attempts to murder her husband.

Accordingly, there is no simple way to define the character of medieval women, for both shadow and light are prevalent in the culture. She is seen in writing more in the extremity than in the reality. Highlighting her positive qualities, a medieval woman becomes Mary – Christian, beautiful, submissive, chaste or virginal, modest, physically weak and humble. Focusing only on the shadow side, she becomes Eve – a beautiful, but lascivious woman; who is seductive, wicked, deceitful, and dominant. Both characterizations are found in medieval, Welsh literature.¹³⁰

Therefore, the ‘unlikely female’ character is the one who does not meet the stereotypical representation of women, as indicated in Church doctrines, courtesy books or bardic grammar. Although she may embody some of the qualities of Eve or Mary; she is unique, neither solely one nor the other. Her speech and behaviour is unexpected. Her ability to change the course of her life is legendary. Scholars have studied extensively these female characters tracing them through theme and motif, narrative, dialogue, mythology and within the social and gender issues of the time. There seems to be little dispute that these are unique and unlikely characters; differentiated by the power of their speech,¹³¹ and their independent actions.¹³² Hence, the ‘unlikely female’ character (for this

¹³⁰ Mary can clearly be seen in the characterization of ‘The Lady of the Well’ in the Mabinogion. Blodeuedd in the Third Branch embodies many of the negative qualities of Eve.

¹³¹ Roberta Louise Valente, “‘Merched Y Mabinogi’: Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches’, (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 1986), p. 42.

¹³² Fiona Winward, ‘The Women in the Four Branches’, *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 34 (1997), 77–106.

dissertation) will be defined as one who is either forthright, or independent.
Perhaps she is the only one who can truly bridge the gap between Mary and Eve.

2 The 'Unlikely Female' Characters of the Mabinogi

The Mabinogi is filled with clearly delineated female characters. These women portray a wide variety of traits and qualities representing gender stereotypes. While the wife of Arawn is the bardic ideal, depicted with beauty, chastity, patience and loyalty; Blodeuedd fulfils all the negative female stereotypes of Eve. Cigfa and the wife of Teyrnon, however, depict the qualities of medieval wives found within courtesy literature. They clearly understand their position within medieval society. Only the 'unlikely female' characters of the Mabinogi act outside of established gender roles, demonstrating their independence and forthrightness. This includes Rhiannon, Branwen, Aranrhod and Goewin who each expand the boundaries of social norms.

Although defining the 'unlikely female' character aids in her identification, the qualities (of being independent and forthright) must be examined within a medieval context. For what might be considered 'forthright' behaviour in the Middle Ages would appear quite different today. It is only within medieval culture that these characters exist. Yet they inhabit a hybrid-world too: one with both fantasy and the reality of medieval Welsh life. The Mabinogi portrays such a dichotomy. Although the characters are often otherworldly, they exist within an environment that is familiar to the Welsh audience. Jaworska-Biskup describes the text as equally reflecting the legal customs found within the *Cyfraith Hywel*.¹³³ For example, Math son of

¹³³Katarzyna Jaworska-Biskup, 'The Legal Landscape of Medieval Wales Based on *Cyfraith Hywel*', *Prace Komisji Nauk Filologicznych Oddziału Polskiej Akademii Nauk we Wrocławiu*, 7 (2015), 9–19, p. 9.

Mathonwy, in the Fourth Branch, is a shape-turning sorcerer who gives recompense to Goewin after her rape.¹³⁴ Bollard writes:

The literary function of this kind of 'world', which is subject to laws other than the natural ones we experience, is to provide a setting in which the characters of a tale may be seen in situations where their actions may be judged by the reader according to idealized concepts of Good and Evil for though it is a world of enchantment, the principal characters are only required to act according to very human rules.¹³⁵

While there is no way to prove conclusively which system of social conduct governs in literature, it is possible to look at Welsh laws and other extant documents as a comparison.¹³⁶ Further as Ford argues, these narratives include more than codes of behaviour for 'they carry codes that relate to purely cultural (non-social) concerns and values'.¹³⁷

Cyfraith Hywel, the Laws of Wales (Laws of Hywel Dda)¹³⁸ provided a written codification of the legal customs and traditions that had developed in Wales over the centuries. The law categorizes people according to status focusing on 'property, insults, and dishonour'.¹³⁹ It is a legal system that is based

¹³⁴ Under the *Welsh Law of Women*, the virginial Goewin was entitled to both *cowyill* and to the maximum *agweddi*. Math turns his nephews into animals as punishment for Goewin's rape. He offers to marry her and give her authority over his kingdom. D. Jenkins, 'Property Interests in the Classical Welsh Interests of Women', in D. Jenkins and M.E. Owen, eds., *The Welsh Law of Women* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980), pp. 69–92, 87.

¹³⁵ J.K. Bollard, 'The Structure of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp. 165–196, 175.

¹³⁶ Roberta Louise Valente, "'Merched Y Mabinogi': Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches", (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 1986), p.120.

¹³⁷ Patrick K. Ford, 'Branwen: A Study of the Celtic Affinities', in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp. 99–120, 100.

¹³⁸ The laws begin with a prologue attributing the collection and redaction to the 10th century ruler Hywel Dda, although this attribution was believed to have been made to give the law more authority in the 12th century. David E. Thornton, 'Localities', in Pauline Safford, ed., *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland, c. 500–1100* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). Available at www.amazon.com <accessed: 3rd January 2017>.

¹³⁹ Thomas Peter Ellis, 'Legal References, Terms and Conceptions in the "Mabinogion"', *Y Cymmrodor*, 39 (1928), 86–148, p. 115.

more on compensation, through equitable restitution, than on imprisonment or death.¹⁴⁰ Part of its goal was to prevent blood feuds and to facilitate reconciliation between kinship groups.¹⁴¹ These laws provide an examination of the social and cultural order¹⁴² as seen within the Mabinogi.¹⁴³

Medieval Welsh literature can provide additional clarity and understanding of this law.¹⁴⁴ Stacey states literature is an example of “‘custom in action” – a way in which to contextualize and enlarge upon the schematic rigidity of the principles articulated in the lawbooks of the period’.¹⁴⁵ In this way, the Mabinogi is also a legal guide,¹⁴⁶ providing general instructions on right behaviour as understood and followed in medieval society. Without an examination of these laws, the Mabinogi and its characters cannot be comprehended; and are viewed with a contemporary understanding, rather than as seen by a medieval audience.¹⁴⁷ The world of social responsibilities is ultimately defined within these laws. Yet Welsh law must be used with caution, for it is uncertain to what extent these laws reflect actual practice.

The qualities and behaviours of the ‘unlikely female’ characters are not clearly cast as good or evil – purely as Mary or Eve. Some of these fictional

¹⁴⁰ Valente, “‘Merched Y Mabinogi’: Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches’, p. 120.

¹⁴¹ John Davies, *History of Wales* (London: Allen Lane, 1993), p. 88.

¹⁴² Valente, “‘Merched Y Mabinogi’: Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches’, p. 222.

¹⁴³ Jaworska-Biskup, ‘The Legal Landscape of Medieval Wales Based on *Cyfraith Hywel*’, p. 9.

¹⁴⁴ Schulenburg describes this as ‘unconscious or unintentional evidence’. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, “‘Saints’ Lives as a Source for the History of Women, 500–1100’, in Joel T. Rosenthal, ed., *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990), pp. 285–320.

¹⁴⁵ Robin Chapman Stacey, ‘Divorce, Medieval Welsh Style’, *Speculum*, 77:4 (October 2001), 1107–1127, p. 1107.

¹⁴⁶ Ellis, “Legal References, Terms and Conceptions in the *Mabinogion*’, p. 86.

¹⁴⁷ The word ‘audience’ will be used throughout, for in an illiterate medieval society these works were primarily shared orally.

women meet the cultural stereotype, while also acting in surprising and highly unlikely ways. For example, Branwen, who is portrayed as a generous noblewoman, takes independent action after being dishonoured and shamed. Instead of the flat depictions found within many folktales, the Mabinogi contains more fully developed personalities: characters with identifiable aims and motives. Such characters are embodied with a fusion of traits and behaviours.

Independent

The status of Welsh medieval women determines the nature of their independence in society. A woman's status in medieval society was changeable. Based primarily on the rank of prominent males in her life (whether father, brother, or husband), it shifted with her life circumstance.¹⁴⁸ Status as a social structure was both hierarchical and patrilineal. One's social order was viewed in relationship to others: some who were superior and others inferior.¹⁴⁹ A woman's status accordingly would follow that of her father and later her husband, rising and falling with their fortunes.¹⁵⁰ Further, while a woman's

¹⁴⁸ A young woman, 'protected' by her father, is given in marriage. The protection now shifts to her husband. She most commonly becomes a mother. She may stay married or be estranged from her husband. She may experience widowhood. If she remarries, her 'protection' shifts to her new husband. Otherwise, she may come under the 'protection' of her son, father or another male kinsman.

¹⁴⁹ James A. Brundage, 'Sexual Equality in Medieval Canon Law', in Joel T. Rosenthal, ed., *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990), pp. 66–76, 66.

¹⁵⁰ For example, if a *bonheddig* attained the status of a *breyr*, the status of his wife would also rise. Morfydd E. Owen, 'Shame and Reparation: Women's Place in the Kin', in Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen, eds., *The Welsh Law of Women* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980), pp. 40–68, 43; Joel R. Rosenthal, 'Anglo-Saxon Attitudes: Men's Sources, Women's History', in Joel T. Rosenthal, ed., *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990), pp. 259–284, 262.

worth was only a fraction of that of a man's,¹⁵¹ her role,¹⁵² age, and life circumstance¹⁵³ also impacted her status.

In the Mabinogi, the 'unlikely female' characters portray their independence within domestic life. These characters take solitary action – for personal choice, to broker the peace, to protect kin, and to seek justice. They act without consultation and do not automatically defer to others. Winward marks their memorability as due to 'their independence, their ability to instigate events and sometimes control their own fates'.¹⁵⁴ Valente identifies these characters as 'the imitators of action or the pivots upon which the story turns'.¹⁵⁵

Rhiannon's narrative is contained within the First and Third Branches.¹⁵⁶ As a maiden, Rhiannon makes her own decisions and directs events.¹⁵⁷ She independently seeks out Pwyll and sets the stage for their meeting.¹⁵⁸ She appears on a magical white horse and begins the courtship by giving him chase. It is only after he cries out that she allows her horse to slow. By this time, she has captured his interest. Medieval women were expected to be passive,

¹⁵¹ A woman's *galanas* was half of her brother's and a wife's one third of her husband's, see Ior §46. *The Welsh Law of Women*, eds. Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1980), pp. 165–166.

¹⁵² Whether a daughter, sister or wife.

¹⁵³ Messer discusses how this cycle impacted married women. Danna R. Messer, 'The Uxorial Lifecycle and Female Agency in Wales in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Bangor University, 2014).

¹⁵⁴ Fiona Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in the Four Branches', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 34 (1997), 77–106, pp. 79–80.

¹⁵⁵ Roberta Louise Valente, "'Merched Y Mabinogi': Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches", (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 1986), p. 9.

¹⁵⁶ *The Mabinogion*, trans. S. Davies (Oxford: Oxford's World Classics, 2007), pp. 8–21, 36–46.

¹⁵⁷ Valente, "'Merched Y Mabinogi': Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches", p. 77.

¹⁵⁸ Diane Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1983), p. 116.

while men were to initiate relationships.¹⁵⁹ However, it is Rhiannon, not Pwyll, who is taking the lead in this courtship. She flirtatiously shows Pwyll her beautiful face, and charms him with conversation.¹⁶⁰ Rhiannon describes the plight of being forced to marry against her will.¹⁶¹ Although her father, Hyfaidd Hen, selected her marriage partner;¹⁶² Rhiannon does not willingly accept his decision.¹⁶³ She declares her mission to find Pwyll, profess her love, and to ask him to marry her. Borstein reports that occasionally medieval girls were bold enough to select their own husbands. But in doing so, they faced ostracism and a great deal of criticism, particularly if they chose a man below their rank.¹⁶⁴ Rhiannon is independent in taking on the role of the pursuer.¹⁶⁵ She acts against the social norms,¹⁶⁶ at a time when marriage was most often arranged.¹⁶⁷ She chooses instead to craft her own destiny.

The narrative continues a year later, when a grand feast is held honouring Rhiannon and Pwyll's upcoming nuptials. The author does not share how Rhiannon won her father's favour, but he appears to now acquiesce in her choice

¹⁵⁹ Jacqueline Murray, 'Femininity and Masculinity', in Margaret C. Schaus, ed., *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 284–287, 284.

¹⁶⁰ Rhiannon understands relationship dynamics and medieval etiquette and can exploit them in her favour. Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in the Four Branches', p. 102.

¹⁶¹ Welsh laws differentiated between consensual marriage and marriage 'by gift of kin'. The decisive opinion, however, belonged to the male representative. Jaworska-Biskup, *The Legal Status of a Woman as Reflected in Medieval Welsh Law*, p. 24; Ellis, 'Legal References, Terms and Conceptions in the Mabinogion', pp. 124–125.

¹⁶² Perhaps to broker the peace between Gwawl's family and Rhiannon's. The botched marriage became a feud that continued throughout the narrative. Gwawl was identified as 'a powerful man with many followers', see Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p.12.

¹⁶³ Welsh law was clearly incompatible with 12th and 13th century canon law; under which consent, rather than consummation, was the requirement of lawful matrimony. Huw Pryce, *Native Law and the Church in Medieval Wales*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 10.

¹⁶⁴ Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women*, p. 116.

¹⁶⁵ Davies, 'The Four Branches of the Mabinogi', p. 67.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 76.

¹⁶⁷ See from the *Welsh Triads* (Q118) Rhiannon's dilemma. 'There are three shames of a maiden: one when her father tells her "I have given you to a man"'. Sara Elin Roberts, *The Legal Triads of Medieval Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 153.

of marriage partner. Gwawl arrives at the festivities expecting to marry Rhiannon. When Pwyll misspeaks, promising Gwawl that he can marry, she acts. Rhiannon does not consult with her father or Pwyll, she connives a solution to this dilemma herself.¹⁶⁸ A year later, her plan unfolds and Gwawl is caught in a magic¹⁶⁹ sack by Pwyll. When Pwyll seeks Hyfaidd's advice regarding his punishment, Rhiannon replies instead. She is used to making decisions, for her father remains silent.

Medieval women were defined by their relationships with men and their roles established within the social order.¹⁷⁰ Rhiannon's mother is not mentioned in the story. Perhaps she has taken on her mother's domestic duties. Noblewomen were deft managers with significant responsibilities, able to exercise authority when the lord was absent.¹⁷¹ Valente argues that Pwyll agrees to share this responsibility, for he understands the role Rhiannon will play as his wife.¹⁷² Hence, Rhiannon acts and speaks clearly without undue deference.¹⁷³ Both her father and Pwyll agree to the peace terms she sets for Gwawl.¹⁷⁴ Pwyll, however, as the highest ranking noble, speaks the words that finalize the deal saying, 'I am satisfied with what Rhiannon has drawn up'.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁸ Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in the Four Branches', p. 86.

¹⁶⁹ A bag that can never be filled.

¹⁷⁰ Rhiannon first identifies herself as the 'daughter of Hyfaidd Hen'. Robert L. Valente, 'Gwydion and Aranrhod: Crossing the Borders of Gender in Math', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 35 (1988), 1-9, pp. 2-3.

¹⁷¹ Murray, 'Femininity and Masculinity', p. 285.

¹⁷² Valente, "'Merched Y Mabinogi": Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches', p. 162.

¹⁷³ Contrast her words to those of Teyrnnon's wife in the First Branch. "'Lord," she said, 'it would be a pleasure and delight to me — should you agree'. Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 18.

¹⁷⁴ Davies, 'The Four Branches of the Mabinogi', p. 76.

¹⁷⁵ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 15.

Three years later, Pwyll still has no heir. His advisors tell him to divorce Rhiannon. Stephenson identifies Pwyll's need to continuously negotiate with his advisors:

Perhaps the main political task facing a prince was that of securing the loyalty of his leading subjects, a task in which depended on the personalities of the parties involved.¹⁷⁶

Legally, the advisors had no right to interfere, for this was an issue between husband and wife.¹⁷⁷ Yet the birth of an heir was of great importance for the kingdom. Nevertheless, Pwyll defers, and soon thereafter, Rhiannon conceives.

In the Mabinogi, the audience watches the status and power of women change; as they transition from single, to married, to mother, and back again to single (or married without children).¹⁷⁸ Single women and those estranged¹⁷⁹ have the most power, married women have less.¹⁸⁰ But the most significant denigration, appears in the role of mother.¹⁸¹ Women lose their independence when they become mothers. Their children are referred to as belonging to the father only and all attention falls to the male heir. Winward states that motherhood 'adversely affects standing and influence, since the independence of

¹⁷⁶ David Stephenson, *Political Power in Medieval Gwynedd: Governance and the Welsh Princes* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1984, 2014), p. 1.

¹⁷⁷ R.R. Davies, 'The Status of Women and the Practice of Marriage in Late-Medieval Wales', in Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen, eds., *The Welsh Law of Women* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1980), pp. 93–114, 95–96.

¹⁷⁸ Women under medieval Welsh laws are generally treated as inferior to men. Christopher McAll, 'The Normal Paradigms of a Woman's Life in the Irish and Welsh Texts', in Dafydd Jenkins, and Morfydd E. Owen, eds., *The Welsh Law of Women* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980), 7–22, p. 7.

¹⁷⁹ Fiona Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', pp. 77–106; Valente, "'Merched Y Mabinogi': Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches', p. 118.

¹⁸⁰ Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', pp. 77–106.

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*, pp. 82, 98.

the mother is directly threatened by the child'.¹⁸² Rhiannon's transition from wife to mother follows this pattern.

On the night of Pwyll's son's birth, mother and child are surrounded by watching women.¹⁸³ One by one, the women all fall asleep, negligent in their duty to protect the pair. During the night, the baby disappears.¹⁸⁴ When the women awake, no one knows what happened, so they plot to save themselves. They stage a heinous crime scene with references to witchcraft.¹⁸⁵ Women are the ones to bear witness and testify regarding the birth of a child. Hence, the words of these women carry great weight.¹⁸⁶ Rather than speaking truthfully, they unjustly blame Rhiannon for her son's death stating that even six women could not restrain her. In a patriarchal society, female strength was considered a negative trait for it threatened 'gender definitions'.¹⁸⁷

Rhiannon awakes, knowing she is blameless. She says she will protect the women, but only if they will speak the truth. Her speech is reasoned, kind and compassionate.¹⁸⁸ Yet punishment would await these women for murdering or abducting the child. Under Welsh law, death was punishable by compensation

¹⁸² *ibid.*, p. 97.

¹⁸³ Women of all social levels attended births. This included their knowledgeable servants. Most of the women in attendance would not have been considered midwives. By the 13th and 14th centuries, however, midwives were becoming more prevalent. Fiona Harris-Stoertz, 'Remembering Birth in Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century England', in Elizabeth Cox, Liz Herbert McAvoy and Roberta Magnani, eds., *Reconsidering Gender, Time and Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 45–60, 53.

¹⁸⁴ In folklore, midwives were believed to have precognitive abilities, allowing them to know when fairies planned to steal children. *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore*, ed. Patricia Monaghan (New York: Facts on File, 2004), p. 231.

¹⁸⁵ Witchcraft was rarely punished in Wales. Sally Parkin, 'Witchcraft, Women's Honour and Customary law in Early Modern Wales', *Social History*, 31:3 (Aug. 2006), 295–318, p. 295.

¹⁸⁶ Women served as witnesses and gave testimony to a birth. Harris-Stoertz, 'Remembering Birth', pp. 52–53.

¹⁸⁷ Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', p. 84.

¹⁸⁸ 'Out of fairness or pity'. Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 17.

requiring a payment of *sarhaed* and *galanas* to Pwyll.¹⁸⁹ Theft, however, was another matter. It was considered a more serious crime, especially if it was a stealth action. In some instances, the penalty for such crime was death.¹⁹⁰ The women certainly feared this is to be true, stating that ‘burning us alive or putting us to death would be too small a punishment for this’.¹⁹¹

Winward writes that Rhiannon can no longer protect these women, which is why her pleas go unheeded.¹⁹² But is this true? Perhaps Rhiannon’s fate was always in her own hands. Rhiannon acts independently. She does not communicate with Pwyll or ask for his support.¹⁹³ By contrast, she calls in the ‘wise and learned men’.¹⁹⁴ These advisors¹⁹⁵ may have been Pwyll’s councillors, who Stephenson identifies as barons and bishops.¹⁹⁶ Rhiannon sets out to solve the problem, just as she did in determining Gwawl’s punishment. She uses her vast political skills to determine the best option for all involved. As Pwyll’s wife, Rhiannon can advise and influence events as did the wives of Welsh kings.¹⁹⁷ The men within these stories do not appear to be threatened by the higher intelligence of the women characters, for they commonly seek and take their advice on

¹⁸⁹ Owen, ‘Shame and Reparation: Women’s Place in the Kin’, p. 41.

¹⁹⁰ Sara Elin Roberts, ‘“By the Authority of the Devil”: The Operation of Welsh and English Law in Medieval Wales’, in Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones, eds., *Authority and Subjugation in Writing of Medieval Wales* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 85–97, 87.

¹⁹¹ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 16.

¹⁹² Winward, ‘Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*’, p. 98.

¹⁹³ Valente, ‘“Merched Y Mabinogi”: Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches’, p. 167.

¹⁹⁴ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 17.

¹⁹⁵ In the *Mabinogi*, Bendigeidfran confers with advisors when the ships first arrive from Ireland.

¹⁹⁶ Stephenson, *Political Power in Medieval Gwynedd*, p. 9.

¹⁹⁷ Messer, ‘The Uxorial Lifecycle and Female Agency in Wales in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries’, p. 132.

significant issues.¹⁹⁸ Rhiannon does not show her emotions – the loss of her son and the betrayal of others.¹⁹⁹ She acts instead in a very unlikely manner, showing her ability to problem solve in a time of crisis.

Further, Pwyll does not appear to be convinced of her guilt. The noblemen request that he divorce Rhiannon; but again, he refuses, for she has born him a child.²⁰⁰ Their relationship remains strong. Rhiannon could choose to speak out and argue against these women, proclaiming her innocence. Scholars describe her behaviour as helpless²⁰¹ or defeatist – very much at odds with her actions as a single woman.²⁰² Kapphahn argues more sympathetically that:

Rhiannon is a new mother, and one who had waited a long time for a child, the despair she no doubt feels at that child's being torn away from her may temper her normal characteristics.²⁰³

Yet there may be a more political explanation. If Pwyll takes her side, the consequences may be serious. In doing so, the resulting controversy could put the very kingdom at risk.²⁰⁴ Rhiannon is not displaying her powerlessness as a new mother, so much as reflecting her true nobility. Because she seeks to broker

¹⁹⁸ Both Pwyll and Matholwch accepts advice from their wives, see Davies, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 14, 29.

¹⁹⁹ Contrast to the 'Lady of the Well'.

²⁰⁰ Pwyll responds to the advice of his counsellors with utmost care. This provides a minimum of personal and social upset until the truth is revealed. J.K. Bollard, 'The Role of Myth and Tradition in *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp. 277–302, 292.

²⁰¹ Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'Gender and Violence in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', in Bernhard Maier, Stefan Zimmer & Christiane Batke, eds., *150 Jahre "Mabinogion" – Deutsch-Walisische Kulturbeziehungen* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2001), pp. 67–77, 69.

²⁰² Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', p. 98

²⁰³ K.R.L. Kapphahn, 'Constructions of Gender in Medieval Welsh Literature', (unpublished MA thesis, Aberystwyth University, 2009), p. 36.

²⁰⁴ It is the same dilemma that Matholwch struggles unsuccessfully with in the Second Branch. How can he best keep the land at peace when people are troubled by an unresolved insult?

the peace, Rhiannon agrees to accept punishment²⁰⁵ for a crime she did not commit. It is the most politically astute action to take. In doing so, she is showing *haelioni*²⁰⁶ a generosity of spirit highly prized in noblewomen.

Pwyll, while reluctant to punish Rhiannon, must maintain order. His response to the nobles is terse and legal, 'If she has done wrong, let her be punished for it'.²⁰⁷ Hanson-Smith explains that 'the claims on him as a private person must bow to the claims of public law'.²⁰⁸ Rhiannon's punishment was to spend seven years, by the gate at the horse block, telling strangers the whole story,²⁰⁹ and offering to carry them to the castle on her back.²¹⁰ This is a punishment she has agreed to and perhaps helped negotiate.

Pwyll, however, does not treat her any differently. She stays at his table and maintains her status as his wife. She is not removed from his bed.²¹¹ He treats her as innocent. Fortunately, her son, Pryderi, is returned and the mystery of the child's disappearance is solved. However, even in Rhiannon's public acquittal, there is no apology and no recompense for the shame she

²⁰⁵ Lloyd-Morgan argues that female characters are punished for their independence in the Mabinogi, but this fails to acknowledge that the violent acts also perpetrated against the men. Lloyd-Morgan, 'Gender and Violence in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', pp. 67–77.

²⁰⁶ The Bardic Grammars recommend that poets praise noblewomen for their *haelioni* (generosity). Jane Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), p.196.

²⁰⁷ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 17.

²⁰⁸ Elisabeth Hanson-Smith, 'Pwyll Prince of Dyfed: The Narrative Structure', in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp.153–164, 160.

²⁰⁹ The 'whole' story may include Rhiannon's version of being betrayed. After hearing the story, people rarely asked for her to carry them, see Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 17.

²¹⁰ Considered to be a common motif and a familiar punishment in medieval literature. Juliette Wood, 'The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature', in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp. 25–38, 34–35. This punishment is similar to the humiliation awaiting false virgins. McAll, 'The Normal Paradigms of a Woman's Life in the Irish and Welsh Texts', p. 9.

²¹¹ Bollard, 'The Role of Myth and Tradition in *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', p. 290.

experienced.²¹² Perhaps *sarhaed* is not sought because her punishment was of her own devise.

In the Third Branch, Rhiannon's earlier actions are referenced. Pryderi offers land to Manawydan son of Llŷr, and his mother in marriage. He sought to prevent conflict between Manawydan and his cousin Caswallon.²¹³ Although Rhiannon is not consulted on the marriage, she readily agrees. The audience is left to wonder what action she might have taken otherwise. Yet Rhiannon knows the marriage will strengthen the friendship between Manawydan and her son, and in doing so bring peace.²¹⁴ This may be motivation enough.

Later in the narrative, Pryderi gets trapped in an otherworldly fort. When Manawydan returns without her son, Rhiannon chastises him. 'God knows', she said, 'you have been a poor companion and you have lost a good friend'.²¹⁵ This is strong criticism, which leads the audience to wonder whether Manawydan's actions were wise or cowardly.²¹⁶ Then without further discussion, she goes off alone to find Pryderi. Rhiannon is not obedient or subservient to Manawydan. She acts independently, without asking his permission, without seeking his protection. Although independence is an unlikely characteristic for female characters, in this context, it is expected. Rhiannon acts instinctively to rescue her son and, becomes lost in the same magical world.²¹⁷

²¹² Rhiannon was shamed by these women's false accusations. Under the *Welsh Laws of Women*, *sarhaed* would be owed to Pwyll. Owen, 'Shame and Reparation: Women's Place in the Kin', p. 47.

²¹³ Bollard, 'Structure of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', p. 166

²¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 179

²¹⁵ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 40.

²¹⁶ Bollard, 'The Structure of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', p. 176.

²¹⁷ Scholars have viewed this impulsive behavior as being a character flaw. Valente, "'Merched Y Mabinogi': Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches", pp. 5-6.

Scholars have contrasted her impulsive behaviour to the measured actions of Manawydan. To those scholars who see her only as a goddess, her actions seem vulnerable.²¹⁸ Valente writes, '[b]y trying to explain her role by analysing *only* the remnants of her former divinity, we overlook the human drama with which even modern readers can identify'. Therefore, when seen as a woman, Rhiannon's actions are quite normal and expected. She seeks to rescue Pryderi since she was unable to protect him at birth.²¹⁹

Scholars following the life stage theory see Rhiannon as a strongly independent maiden, who loses her independence at motherhood and then regains it during her second marriage. However, Winward states that even though Rhiannon has become Manawydan's wife, she is still a 'shadow of her single self'.²²⁰ These are harsh words, for Rhiannon is a highly intelligent woman with a keen understanding of women's role in society. As the wife of the ruler she uses all her power and influence to advise and guide the outcome of events. She matches the actions of historic Welsh noblewomen²²¹ and in this way, is independent throughout the tale.

Branwen's narrative is contained within the Second Branch ²²². In comparison to Rhiannon, scholars identify her character as flat, colourless and passive.²²³ Yet Branwen has many of those qualities prized in a noblewoman – beauty, obedience, submission and virginity. She is given in marriage by her

²¹⁸ Proinsias Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), pp. 55–56.

²¹⁹ Valente, "'Merched Y Mabinogi': Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches', p. 7.

²²⁰ Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', p. 99.

²²¹ This includes Joan (Siwan) and Eleanor De Montfort.

²²² Davies, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 22–34.

²²³ Wood, 'The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature', p. 73; Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, p. 53.

brother who sought 'to unite the Isle of the Mighty with Ireland so they might be stronger'.²²⁴ Parkin describes the goal thus:

In terms of lineage and inheritance, and without individual judicial power, the Welsh woman was no more than a procreatrix, but the place and status she had within Welsh society was extremely important. Socially, the Welsh woman was valued very highly as the genetrix, the unifying force between her natal kin and the kin into which she married.²²⁵

This was a common arrangement of the times,²²⁶ and Branwen was to serve as the peaceweaver²²⁷ between the two lands. The narrative does not disclose Branwen's opinion on the upcoming marriage, but as a noblewoman her agreement or acquiescence was expected.

Once married, Branwen moved to Ireland and gave birth to a son. She fulfils her obligations as 'genetrix and generous queen' with an 'unblemished reputation and unimpeachable actions'.²²⁸ Afterwards, the court is in turmoil over the insult Matholwch received while in Wales – a shame for which he received insufficient compensation. Rather than returning to Wales seeking further restitution, Matholwch allows his court to punish²²⁹ Branwen for Efnysien's insult. Messer finds criticism against medieval queens to be common:

The medieval royal consort had access to and was expected to operate within the magisterial authority, which increased her power and status.

²²⁴ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 23.

²²⁵ Parkin, 'Witchcraft, Women's Honour and Customary law in Early Modern Wales', p. 302

²²⁶ Neudigate finds this is an unusual arrangement. She believes Branwen would more likely have been bartered to another Welsh king or given into a relationship as compensation for a death or some insult her kindred committed. Marcia Lynn Neudigate, 'Unique Perspectives of Celtic Women in Early Medieval Irish and Welsh Literature', (unpublished MA thesis, Northern Kentucky University, 1994), p. 38.

²²⁷ The role of the wife as a link between lands. Andrew Welsh, 'Branwen, Beowulf, and the Tragic Peaceweaver Tale', *Viator*, 22 (1991), 1–14, p. 6.

²²⁸ Valente, "'Merched Y Mabinogi": Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches', p. 205.

²²⁹ The words used seem to indicate that the action was meant as humiliation rather than a formal act of revenge. Bollard, 'The Structure of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', p. 182.

Such a position, however, was challenging as it exposed the queen to ridicule and public circumspection largely associated with the inconsistencies between theory and reality as concerned the 'women's place' and the queen's standing as a model for all women.²³⁰

Unlike Pwyll, Matholwch does not stand up against the noblemen. He does not treat his wife as innocent of her step-brother's crime. He follows his advisors' guidance to keep the peace.

Although the calumniated wife motif is a common one, the accusation of the wife by her husband's kin is unique to Welsh tales.²³¹ Branwen loses her status as Matholwch's wife, is removed from the marriage bed, and begins working in the kitchen, where she is struck daily by the butcher.²³² This assault is a shameful blow against both Branwen and Bendigeidfran's honour. Lloyd-Morgan argues that Branwen has been subjected to the absolute power of her male relatives.²³³ Matholwch who anticipates a battle, has embargoed all ships from coming in and out of Wales, so there will be no news of Branwen's dishonour.

Of all the female characters in the Mabinogi, Branwen seems the most unjustly victimized. She is a foreigner,²³⁴ isolated and far away from her male protectors. She first appears to have no way to defend herself. Most women

²³⁰ Messer, 'The Uxorial Lifecycle and Female Agency in Wales in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', pp. 182–183.

²³¹ Wood, 'The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature', p. 65.

²³² The medieval butcher is a slaughter man with significant strength. *Breaking and Shaping Beastly Bodies: Animals as Material Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Aleksander Pluskowski (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007), p. 23. Compare this to 'clout to the ear' given to Enid in 'Geraint son of Erbin', see Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 174.

²³³ Lloyd-Morgan, 'Gender and Violence in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', p. 71.

²³⁴ Some scholars have explained the treatment of Rhiannon and Branwen as resulting from being foreigners within a land that has little tolerance for differences. Valente, "'Merched Y Mabinogi'": Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches', p. 222; Wood, 'The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature', p. 63.

characters speak out against their mistreatment,²³⁵ but Branwen is silent. She accepts her punishment, not out of weakness, but from necessity. Speaking out would only result in further or more extreme reprisals. There seems to be no means of escape and no one to aid or give assistance. Branwen finds herself, the designated peaceweaver, in a very difficult situation.²³⁶

Under Welsh law, an insult may cause shame that infringes on a woman's honour.²³⁷ These laws provide injured women with *sarhaed* (compensation for shame and dishonour)²³⁸ *Sarhaed* is payable by the husband when he unjustifiably²³⁹ beats his wife.²⁴⁰ The third such offence entitles the wife to leave her husband, else she be branded a wife without shame.²⁴¹ A woman could receive *agweddi* (marriage property), if abandoned or separated from her husband. When a husband was unfaithful or banished his wife from the marriage bed, the compensation was called *gowyn*.²⁴² Such actions also impacted the male kin of the victim and a feud could result, if reparations were not given.²⁴³

While Branwen appears to accept to her punishment, her behaviour proved otherwise. Rather than vocalizing her concern, she takes independent

²³⁵ For example, Goewin in the Fourth Branch.

²³⁶ This does not reflect on her own ingenuity or capability, but rather on her circumstances. Valente, "'Merched Y Mabinogi:' Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches', p. 191.

²³⁷ Ellis, 'Legal References, Terms and Conceptions in the "Mabinogion"', p. 113.

²³⁸ *Agweddi* (the wealth of the marriage) and various compensation (to the lord and to the woman) for her virginity. Owen, 'Shame and Reparation: Women's Place in the Kin', p. 41.

²³⁹ See from the *Welsh Triads* (Q180), three offenses for which a man is entitled to beat his wife: cursing his virility, taking an offense against him, and for taking another man. Branwen, however, is being punished for an insult for which Matholwch already received compensation. Roberts, *The Legal Triads of Medieval Wales*, p. 181.

²⁴⁰ *Sarhaed* is payable by the husband when he unjustifiably beats his wife. McAll, 'The Normal Paradigms of a Woman's Life in the Irish and Welsh Texts', p. 16.

²⁴¹ Owen, 'Shame and Reparation: Women's Place in the Kin', p. 51.

²⁴² Triad states the expulsion from marriage bed is regarded as one of the three shames of a wife and her kin. Owen, 'Shame and Reparation: Women's Place in the Kin', pp. 51, 59.

²⁴³ *ibid.*, pp. 59, 62.

action seeking reparation.²⁴⁴ Because Branwen is intelligent, patient and resourceful, she discovers an ingenious way to contact her brother. For three years, she trains a starling to speak,²⁴⁵ then ties a letter to its wing and sends it off to her brother. Branwen's literacy is rare even among medieval noblewomen.²⁴⁶ Lloyd-Morgan contends there is little evidence to determine if medieval Welsh women owned books, or could read or write.

Bendigeidfran has been without word from Ireland for three years. Curiously, he remains unconcerned. It takes a bird to inform him of Branwen's punishment and dishonour. He sets out for Ireland, army at his side, to right this injustice. Rather than fight, Matholwch gives his kingdom to his son as recompense for Branwen's shame.²⁴⁷ Ever the peacemaker,²⁴⁸ Branwen advises her brother to accept Matholwch's offer for 'she feared that the country would be laid to waste'.²⁴⁹

Alas, Branwen's step-brother, Efnysien, throws her son into the fire. Branwen tries to rescue him, but is restrained by Bendigeidfran. The boy's death ends any chance for peace. Branwen watches sadly as the two sides slaughter each other in battle. Although Efnysien is responsible for the ensuing

²⁴⁴ Neudigate, 'Unique Perspectives of Celtic Women in Early Medieval Irish and Welsh Literature', p. 39.

²⁴⁵ This might perhaps be a magical reference, for starlings are not known for being able to speak in the normal world.

²⁴⁶ Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'More Written About than Writing? Welsh Women and the Written Word', in H. Pryce, ed., *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 149–165, 160.

²⁴⁷ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 30.

²⁴⁸ A role which is a familiar one for the heroines of Germanic and Anglo-Saxon saga, see Owen, 'Shame and Reparation: Women's Place in the Kin', p. 58.

²⁴⁹ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 30.

destruction, Branwen takes the full blame.²⁵⁰ Poirier holds that women commonly bear a fault-bearing role in archaic societies for they may never fully integrate into the husband's family.²⁵¹ Branwen's marriage set forth a chain of events that ultimately resulted in war. Many people died and Branwen lost her son, husband and brother. On the Anglesey mainland, she laments in a manner reminiscent of Heledd in 'Canu Heledd'. She speaks out in elegy: 'Woe that I was ever born', she says. 'Two good islands have been laid waste because of me'.

Although Branwen appears silent throughout much of the story, she is a peaceweaver. It is only when she is injured and mistreated that she seeks the protection of her brother. She takes solitary, independent action to contact him. She impulsively seeks to rescue her son from the fire. Yet it is her failure as peacekeeper, that make her an 'unlikely female' character. For although she has been described as passive, that is not her true nature.

[For] 'passivity' cannot be the role of a peaceweaver (or of any weaver). True, she is not a heroic warrior. But the strenuous and delicate balance of behaviour which she must daily execute seems to be more difficult to achieve than the warrior's bold plunge into destruction. And when others finally make that plunge, even then the peaceweaver cannot relax into passivity – unless grieving is thought to be a merely passive experience.²⁵²

Branwen failed in this honourable goal and died of a broken heart.²⁵³ Her intentions and her good will could never guarantee the peace.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ Sioned Davies, *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi: Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1993), p. 79.

²⁵¹ Owen, 'Shame and Reparation: Women's Place in the Kin', p. 60.

²⁵² Andrew Welsh, 'Branwen, Beowulf, and the Tragic Peaceweaver Tale', p. 13.

²⁵³ 'Canu Heledd', poetry attributed to Heledd, who also blamed herself for starting a war.

²⁵⁴ Valente, "'Merched Y Mabinogi": Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches', pp. 218–219.

A woman's status relates to the value of her virginity and perhaps later issues of chastity.²⁵⁵ Unmarried women who were not virgins, were often marginalized in society. As for those women who sought to live outside the family structure, these too were marginalized. Marriage was considered an essential state for both medieval women and men.²⁵⁶ Aranrhod, however, may be the exception. Her narrative is contained within the Fourth Branch.²⁵⁷ She is a very 'unlikely female' character, who overtly rejects social constructs to live outside the norms of marriage, motherhood and dependence on men.²⁵⁸

Much of her life appears confusing from a medieval Welsh context. Her cantref, Caer Aranrhod, is isolated and far from Math's court. During the eleventh century,²⁵⁹ medieval Welsh women could not inherit land, except by special circumstance.²⁶⁰ Perhaps she was considered or treated as a foreigner.²⁶¹ Perhaps the land was provided for her by Math.²⁶² Although she is clearly under

²⁵⁵ Jane Cartwright, 'Virginity and Chastity Tests in Medieval Welsh Prose', in Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salih, eds., *Medieval Virginites* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 56–79, 73.

²⁵⁶ C.W. Sullivan, 'Inheritance and Lordship in Math', in C.W. Sullivan, III., ed., *The Mabinogion, A Book of Essays* (New York, Garland Pub., 1996, 2015), pp. 347–366, 349.

²⁵⁷ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 54–58.

²⁵⁸ Peredur's mother in 'Peredur Son of Efrog', likewise moves into the wilderness to safeguard her son and to protect him from the world of war.

²⁵⁹ Charles-Edward postulates that the earliest date of the *Mabinogion* would be the 11th century. T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Date of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi' in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp. 19–58, 44.

²⁶⁰ Jenkins, 'Property Interests in the Classical Welsh Interests of Women', p. 75. By the late 14th and 15th centuries, Welsh women's property rights were regulated by canon law, English common law, native Welsh law, local custom and even courts of equity. The right of women to both inherit and be endowed with land was established. Beverly Llinos Smith, 'Towards a History of Women in Late Medieval Wales', in Michael Roberts and Simone Clarke, eds., *Women and Gender in Early Modern Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 15, 21.

²⁶¹ Contrast Welsh law with English customary law in the 13th century, in which women could receive a dower in land. Davies, 'The Status of Women and the Practice of Marriage in Late-Medieval Wales', p. 101.

²⁶² He later gives land to her son, Llew. Davies, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 58–59. The arrangement may be similar to Pryderi's transfer of land to Manawydan. 'And although the realm will be mine in name, let the benefits be yours and Rhiannon's'. Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 35.

his protection,²⁶³ Aranrhod is not identified as any man's daughter, sister, wife or niece.

Aranrhod chooses to live a very independent, secluded life. In contrast to Rhiannon and Branwen, no one is planning her marriage. Welsh Tribal Law held that an unmarried woman:

[B]ecame her own mistress and could elect to remain at her father's platter or not, just as she wished, she became entitled at puberty to *hold property* of her own as an unmarried woman, and had full power to go wherever she willed.²⁶⁴

This text is ambiguous for medieval Welsh women whether single or married had little property rights. Further the law states that a woman need not stay by her father's side, although it seems unlikely that she would leave. Roberts explains that 'a woman who is not married had very few rights in medieval Welsh law and it would actually be of no advantage to her to have this independence'.²⁶⁵ Although this clearly conflicts with the *Welsh Law of Women*,²⁶⁶ it is uncertain how property was held in this context. Nevertheless, since marriage was the desired state in medieval Welsh culture, a single, unmarried woman living alone would be highly unlikely.²⁶⁷

When Math required a virgin foot-holder, Gwydion recommended Aranrhod. Gwydion should have known whether his sister was a virgin. The

²⁶³ This can be inferred, for Aranrhod comes to Math when called. Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 54.

²⁶⁴ Thomas Peter Ellis, *Welsh Tribal Law and Custom in the Middle Ages*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 386.

²⁶⁵ Sara Elin Roberts, 'Seeking the Middle-Aged Woman in Medieval Wales', in Sue Niebrzydowski, ed., *Middle-Aged Women in the Middle Ages*, (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 25–36, 30.

²⁶⁶ Jenkins, 'Property Interests in the Classical Welsh Interests of Women', p. 75.

²⁶⁷ See previous discussion in Chapter One.

narrative indicates that he may have molested his sister.²⁶⁸ Does Gwydion seek vengeance for being punished by Math? Aranrhod's position as foot-holder could place Math's life at risk. Although Gwydion vouches²⁶⁹ for Aranrhod, Math wisely requires a virginity test. As Aranrhod steps over his magic wand, she drops two items: one, 'a large, sturdy, yellow-haired boy' and the other, 'a small something'.²⁷⁰ Before anyone can make an identification, Gwydion picks the object up and hides it in a small chest. Aranrhod seems to be rushing away from the embarrassment and shame of the discovery. But she is not punished for this deception even though it risk Math's life. Her children are born magically.²⁷¹ They are not 'normal' children any more than the offspring of Gwydion and Gilfaethwy. A very unlikely mother, Aranrhod has no interest in either child.

Gwydion later 'births'²⁷² Lleu by removing the child from the box that served as its womb. He 'fosters' the child for four years.²⁷³ Finally, he brings the boy to Caer Aranrhod to visit his mother. '[W]hat has come over you, putting me to shame, and pursuing my shame by keeping him as long as this'? she asks. They each identify the child as the other's, which appears to indicate incest.²⁷⁴ Yet Aranrhod does not speak openly of the rape and Gwydion does not offer to

²⁶⁸ Kapphahn, 'Construction of Gender in Medieval Welsh Literature', pp. 44, 58; C.E. Byfield, 'Character and Conflict in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 40 (1993), 51–72, 58.

²⁶⁹ Owen, 'Shame and Reparation: Women's Place in the Kin', p. 48.

²⁷⁰ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 54.

²⁷¹ Citing Gruffydd who claimed that first birth was Gwydion's child and the second a magic birth, the result of stepping over the wand. R.M. Jones, 'Narrative Structure in Medieval Wales Prose Tales', in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996. 2015), pp. 217–262, 230.

²⁷² Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 55.

²⁷³ Under Welsh law, if a woman accuses a man of fathering a child and the man does not deny it for a year and a day, paternity is established. Andrew Welsh, 'Doubling and Incest in the Mabinogi', *Speculum*, 65:2 (April 1990), 344–362, 356.

²⁷⁴ A full discussion can be found in Welsh, 'Doubling and Incest in the Mabinogion', pp. 356–359.

compensate her. The boy still has no name and no reference of kinship. Gwydion needs Aranrhod to name the boy. The reason is uncertain, for Math named her first born.²⁷⁵ In addition, Gwydion could have given the child a name since he is now acting as his father.²⁷⁶

Aranrhod wants nothing to do with the child, for under Welsh law a woman loses her independence and power once she becomes a mother.²⁷⁷ If she names the boy,²⁷⁸ she acknowledges him as her heir. Under Welsh law, Aranrhod herself would have no land for an inheritance. However, if she is a foreigner, her male children would inherit through the matrilineal line.²⁷⁹ Bromwich argues that the inheritance in question is the lordship of Gwynedd.

Thus, Math may have been supposed to have inherited the rule of Gwynedd through his mother, as he in turn is succeeded by the sister's son (Lleu) of his sister's son (Gwydion).²⁸⁰

The fact that Lleu is illegitimate was not an issue in Wales. All that was required for a male child to inherit, was for the father to acknowledge his paternity.²⁸¹ The

²⁷⁵ Naming gives public recognition of the sex of the child and its kinship. T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 177.

²⁷⁶ Fathers had personal connections with the women who nursed the heirs., Harris-Stoertz, 'Remembering Birth', p. 54.

²⁷⁷ Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', p. 100.

²⁷⁸ Neudigate states that naming is the providence of women, but this is not born out in the Mabinogi. For although Rhiannon unknowingly names Pryderi, Math names both Dylan and Blodeuedd. Neudigate, 'Unique Perspectives of Celtic Women in Early Medieval Irish and Welsh Literature', p.51.

²⁷⁹ See from the Welsh Legal Triads (Q71), three women whose sons are entitled to the inheritance of their mother (Aranrhod is not included). Roberts, *The Legal Triads of Medieval Wales*, p. 129. However, if Aranrhod's son was considered a foreigner, her male children would inherit only through her line. Ior §53.

²⁸⁰ *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain*, ed. Rachel Bromwich (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1961, 2014), pp. 438–459.

²⁸¹ Contrary to Canon law, the Church was opposed to inheritance by illegitimate children. Even when acknowledged by the father, it was held to be immoral. Sara Elin Roberts, "'By the Authority of the Devil': The Operation of Welsh and English Law in Medieval Wales", p. 92.

mother would then make a formal declaration.²⁸² This Aranrhod will not do, for in the acknowledgment, her shame is revealed.²⁸³ It is unlikely that Gwydion, an amoral character, suddenly becomes a kind and caring father, unless he can benefit from the relationship.²⁸⁴ Math's inheritance is sufficient reward to interest Gwydion. Perhaps his desire for the estate, is further reason for Aranrhod to refuse his requests.

The shame Aranrhod experiences, results in her disavowing her son. Socially, the only way for her to remain free of the trappings and lost status of motherhood, is to deny the existence of the child.²⁸⁵ However, in disavowing the boy, she is threatening his ability to function as a man; leaving him without a name, weapon or wife.²⁸⁶ Gwydion continues to badger her. In anger, Aranrhod places three curses ('destinies') on her son.²⁸⁷ The plot follows along as her brother, attempts to thwart each curse by using magic.²⁸⁸ Lleu is a 'tangible

²⁸² Trefor M. Owen, *Welsh Folk Customs* (Cardiff: Museum of Welsh Life, 1974), p. 197.

²⁸³ Sullivan, 'Inheritance and Lordship in Math', p. 358.

²⁸⁴ Does Gwydion act as a father or an uncle? Lloyd-Morgan speaks of the close and special relationship between nephew and uncle 'as significant as father and son'. C. Lloyd-Morgan, 'Triadic Structures in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *The Journal of the Traditional Cosmology Society*, 5:1 (1988), 3–11, p. 7.

²⁸⁵ Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', p. 88.

²⁸⁶ Valente, 'Gwydion and Aranrhod: Crossing the Borders of Gender in Math', p. 9.

²⁸⁷ In medieval Wales, there was a strong tradition of religious cursing by clerics and others. The importance of spoken curses continued into the 16th century. Richard Suggett, 'Witchcraft Dynamics in Early Modern Wales', in M. Roberts and S. Clark, eds., *Women and Gender in Early Modern Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press), p. 89, 93. See also Culhwch's stepmother who destined him to having no woman unless he married the giant's daughter, Olwen, see Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 180.

²⁸⁸ Sullivan argues that after Gwydion tricks her, he takes all her social power and status. However, the narrative itself is silent on this point. Sullivan, 'Inheritance and Lordship in Math', p 359.

symbol of *their* battle'.²⁸⁹ Gwydion ultimately wins. Valente states that Aranrhod must forever live with the shame and failure of Lleu's acknowledged kinship.²⁹⁰

In the end, Math does not punish Aranrhod for being a false virgin, nor does he pressure her to acknowledge her son. This is strange since Math had punished his nephews for the rape of Goewin. Their punishment may hold a clue. The two brothers are turned into animals and forced to procreate with each other. It is perhaps the ultimate insult, for both the rape and Gwydion's molestation of Aranrhod. If Math had unconfirmed knowledge of these acts, many of the gaps in the narrative become clear. The audience now understands how and why Aranrhod lives far away, unmarried and unpunished. Math simply solves Lleu's need for a wife by creating one. He gives him land so there is no need for Aranrhod to make a public declaration. Aranrhod appears to remain independent and free: a highly 'unlikely female' character.

What was the practical impact of status in medieval Wales? With higher status came independence, freedom and the ability to choose to act and take part in society. The lower the status the more likely life was to be structured and controlled by another. This concept most certainly was not about equality: an idea that was then unknown (with the possibility existing only within a particular class).²⁹¹ It was also not about power, for some medieval women were skilled and cunning in their ways of influencing events. For example, women in the Mabinogi often defy social convention by working within the system,²⁹²

²⁸⁹ Valente, 'Gwydion and Aranrhod: Crossing the Borders of Gender in Math', p. 340.

²⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁹¹ Williams, Marty Newman and Anne Echols, *Between Pit and Pedestal: Women in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Pub., 1994), p. 66.

²⁹² While Rhiannon is evidently aware of the inequalities of contemporary society, she has not embarked on a struggle against it so much as within it. Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', p. 84.

thereby discounting the independence shown. Medieval Welsh society was a hierarchical and patriarchal system: one that was constructed more by rank rather than by gender.²⁹³

Forthright

In the Mabinogi, the 'unlikely female' characters are often forthright. Some women are assertive and outspoken, while some speak against injustice. Valente claims that the 'chief power' of these female characters comes through their words.²⁹⁴ Winward identifies these characters as maidens.²⁹⁵

Goewin, Aranrhod and Rhiannon are the only single women in The Four Branches, and all three display a striking forthrightness that is not perceptible in the women in other prose tales.²⁹⁶

These characters are women who are forthright in very unlikely ways. Dialogue infuses the 'unlikely female' characters with personal confidence and independence.²⁹⁷ Their ability to 'translate speech into verbal power [...] rivals the ability of men to act.'²⁹⁸ More importantly, their speeches have a direct impact on the events surrounding them.²⁹⁹

Valente studied the speech patterns of the Mabinogi characters. Her theory is that women speak less formally, showing more character, while male

²⁹³ Jaworska-Biskup, 'The Legal Status of a Woman as Reflected in Medieval Welsh Law', p. 22.

²⁹⁴ Valente, "'Merched Y Mabinogi': Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches', p. 67.

²⁹⁵ Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', p. 83.

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 83.

²⁹⁷ Valente, "'Merched Y Mabinogi': Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches', p. 98.

²⁹⁸ Kirstie Chandler, 'Patriarchy and Power in Medieval Welsh Literature', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 22 (2002), 80–95, 85.

²⁹⁹ Valente, "'Merched Y Mabinogi': Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches', p. 42.

speech is filled with standard greetings and responses.³⁰⁰ Although women may have less actual dialogue than men, they are not as confined to formulaic speech.³⁰¹ Strict social rules of the day dictated the use of titles and whom should speak first.³⁰² Women had a keen understanding of the nature of social etiquette between the sexes.³⁰³ Some female characters meet these expectations.³⁰⁴ They speak in more stereotypical ways. They use their speech to manipulate³⁰⁵ men. They present their ideas deferentially, making it easier for men to agree. These women, in contrast to the 'unlikely female' characters, speak as expected.³⁰⁶

Rhiannon, however, is portrayed as outspoken and somewhat sarcastic.³⁰⁷ Her manner of speech is forward and direct. This bluntness shows a confidence that contrasts with her legal status.³⁰⁸ Mac Cana attributes this to her mythic past.³⁰⁹ When Pwyll catches up to Rhiannon, in the First Branch, she removes the headpiece that covers her face. She makes direct eye contact³¹⁰ with him before speaking. Her actions are not those of a coy,³¹¹ medieval damsel, for Rhiannon is

³⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 107.

³⁰¹ Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', p. 79.

³⁰² Rhiannon in the first meeting with Pwyll addresses him as *arglwydd* (lord) three times. The use of this term may be part of her manipulation, rather than an acknowledgment of his status. Jones, 'Narrative Structure in Medieval Wales Prose Tales', p. 188.

³⁰³ Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', p. 102.

³⁰⁴ For example, the wife of Teyrnnon and Cigfa.

³⁰⁵ Winward identifies these characters as Rhiannon, Gowein, Cigfa, and Blodeuedd. Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', p. 102.

³⁰⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 84, 86, 87.

³⁰⁷ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 10.

³⁰⁸ Valente, 'Gwydion and Aranrhod: Crossing the Borders of Gender in Math', pp. 2–3.

³⁰⁹ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, p. 55; Valente, "'Merched Y Mabinogi': Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches", p. 68

³¹⁰ People in love often communicate by glance or gaze. J.A. Burrow, *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 92.

³¹¹ Courtesy literature instructs young women on their behaviour stating they should not speak to strange men on the street. Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower*, pp. 64–65.

obviously pursuing Pwyll.³¹² Although she calls him 'Lord', her actions show him that she is his equal.³¹³ Yet Rhiannon provides enough deference to Pwyll to maintain her subordinate position. She stretches the bounds of social convention, but does so in a manner that Pwyll finds flattering and intriguing, rather than offensive.³¹⁴ Winward states:

[W]omen are frequently seen getting their own way by *using* social etiquette, exploiting the pattern of formalities that exists between man and woman as well as between leader and leader.³¹⁵

Conversation as a form of entertainment was prized in the Middle Ages³¹⁶ and Rhiannon excels with it.³¹⁷ Her speech becomes biting, however, when foolish men are around her. After waiting three days for Pwyll to catch up with her horse, she grows impatient. 'I will wait gladly', she said, 'and it would have been better for the horse if you had asked that a while ago'!³¹⁸ Later when Pwyll's impetuous behaviour risks his marriage to her, she exclaims, 'Be silent for as long as you like [...] Never has a man been more stupid than you have been'.³¹⁹ Mac Cana claims that Rhiannon 'oversways her lord and her suitor and imprints her conscious dominance on all her converse with them'.³²⁰

³¹² Rhiannon controls the encounter. She knows just how to get Pwyll's attention so he will give chase to her. R.L. Valente, 'Gwydion and Aranrhod: Crossing the Borders of Gender in Math', pp. 2–3.

³¹³ She is not acting in a submissive way, or in a way that shows that she has a lesser status. She is showing him as her equal. Neudigate, 'Unique Perspectives of Celtic Women in Early Medieval Irish and Welsh Literature', pp. 36–37.

³¹⁴ Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', p. 102.

³¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 79.

³¹⁶ Sioned Davies, 'Storytelling in Medieval Wales', *Oral Tradition*, 7:2 (1992), 231–257, p. 238.

³¹⁷ Pryderi describes his mother, Rhiannon, to Manawydan in this manner, 'I am sure that you have never heard a woman converse better than Rhiannon'. Davies, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 35–36.

³¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 10.

³¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 12.

³²⁰ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, p. 56.

During her time of punishment, Rhiannon stayed by the gate to tell the whole story and carry people on her back to the court. It is unknown what she said, but the reference to the *whole* story infers that she also discussed the wrongful nature of her punishment. Her words were so convincing that 'rarely would anyone allow themselves to be carried.'³²¹

In the Third Branch, it was Rhiannon's conversational skills that first attracted Manawydan to her.

[A]s a result of that conversation his head and heart grew tender towards her, and he was delighted that he had never seen a woman who was fairer or more beautiful than her.³²²

Rhiannon, however, after marrying Manawydan, remains sharp-tongued. When Pryderi becomes lost, she speaks out with a mother's exasperation. 'God knows, [...] you have been a poor companion and you have lost a good friend'.

Married noblewomen might be expected to speak with greater deference. Courtesy literature states the ideal. A woman should always speak gently to her husband and not show anger, even if he is angry himself.³²³ In addition, a wife can be punished for insulting her husband. The husband can either strike his wife³²⁴ or accept payment of a small fine.³²⁵ The shameful words that a wife cannot utter are specified in a legal triad. A woman was not allowed to 'wish a

³²¹ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 17.

³²² *ibid.*, p. 36.

³²³ From the 1350 poem, 'The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter'. Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower*, pp. 64–65.

³²⁴ By striking her three times with a rod, long as a man's forearm, and thick as his middle finger, on any part of the body except the head. Owen, 'Shame and Reparation: Women's Place in the Kin', p. 52.

³²⁵ The uttering of shameful words makes a wife liable to *camlwrw*, a minor fine. Owen, 'Shame and Reparation: Women's Place in the Kin', p. 52.

blemish on [the husband's] beard (casting aspersions on virility), wish dirt on his teeth, or call him a cur'.³²⁶

Branwen speaks in a sarcastic manner when she is called out from the kitchen and asked for her advice. 'Though I am no "lady"', she said, 'I know what it is.' Branwen's statement references the mistreatment she has received by the court. She knows that they call her 'lady' only because they need her assistance for 'no one remembered that she was a princess of Wales and the wife of a king when the butcher came to beat her everyday'.³²⁷

The 'unlikely female' characters speak out forthrightly against injustice. Aranrhod's tale begins when Math asks for advice on finding another virgin, foot-holder. Gwydion offers his sister. When Math asks Aranrhod if she is a virgin, she replies, 'That is my belief'. But she fails Math's virginity test,³²⁸ giving 'birth' to two children. Her ambiguous reply to Math's question may be due to her shame. A single woman is dishonoured when her virginity is called into question, for her very status is tied to this state.³²⁹

Although now branded a 'false virgin',³³⁰ perhaps Aranrhod was being forthright. Her reply hinges on an understanding of what it means to be a virgin, or rather her perception of the term.³³¹ In the Middle Ages, it was possible to

³²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 52.

³²⁷ Valente, "'Merched Y Mabinogi": Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches', p. 211.

³²⁸ 'If a virgin should say that a man has raped her, and the man deny it, and the virgin say that if he has not raped her she is still a virgin, the law says that it is right to test whether she be a virgin or not a virgin, for it is her plea that she is a virgin', see Ior § 54. *Welsh Law of Women*, p. 177.

³²⁹ Owen, 'Shame and Reparation: Women's Place in the Kin', p. 45.

³³⁰ This would also affect any male on whom she is dependent. *ibid.*, p. 47.

³³¹ Sarah Salih, 'Virginity', in Margaret C. Schaus, ed., *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 817; Maha Sara Abdulelah Lloyd Salih, 'Versions of Virginity in Medieval Texts and Practices', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of East Anglia, 1999), pp. 37, 48.

argue, that a woman could retain her virginity, if she had been had been raped. This was true if she had never faltered in her intention to remain a virgin. St Augustine held that virginity was more about the 'will' of the woman than the state of the body. It is with this logic that Aranrhod could claim her virginity without technically being one.³³²

Under the law, a false virgin's punishment was humiliating.³³³ Math, however, does not sanction Aranrhod, nor does he request the *amobr* due him for a child born of rape.³³⁴ Kapphahn writes that her 'shame' is really a justification for the rejection of a maternal role she never wanted in the first place.³³⁵ Ultimately, the Aranrhod character is one outside of law and social convention, perhaps due to her fierce independence, the possibility of incest, or her magical abilities.³³⁶

Aranrhod puts three curses on her son. The first two are under her control ('he will not get a name until he gets one from me', and 'he shall never get weapons until I arm him myself').³³⁷ Gwydion overcomes these destinies with magic. The final one is different. Aranrhod phrases the curse in a way that prevents Gwydion's trickery. She simply says, Llew will never have a wife 'from the race that is here on this earth at present'.³³⁸ She no longer has a role in fulling

³³² This argument may have been known by the scribe authoring or transcribing this work.

³³³ 'The third thrust is when a virgin is given to a man with a surety on her virginity, and the man makes a thrust into her and finds her a woman; he is entitled to call his wedding guest and light candles, and cut her shift behind her as high as the top of her buttocks, and in front of her as high as the top of her cunt – that is the law of a false virgin – and he releases her with that thrust in her without any compensation for her'. S. Roberts, *The Legal Triads of Medieval Wales*, p. 71.

³³⁴ Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', p. 88.

³³⁵ Kapphahn, 'Constructions of Gender in Medieval Welsh Literature', p. 40.

³³⁶ She is not punished for her behaviour perhaps due to the magical nature of Math's family which dispatches justice in its own unique way.

³³⁷ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 55–56.

³³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 58.

his destiny. Gwydion and Math must now create Llew's bride magically from flowers.³³⁹

As Goewin's tale begins, she is Math's virginal foot-holder. His nephew Gilfaethwy lusts after her. Conspiring with his brother Gwydion, they plan a war so that Math will need to leave the castle. Once Goewin is alone, they both rape her in Math's bed. When Math returns, Goewin tells him that he must find another foot-holder for she is no longer a virgin. Goewin is forthright. She speaks honestly and without shame about the rape.³⁴⁰

I was assaulted, lord, quite openly, nor did I keep quiet – everyone in the court knew about it. It was your nephews who came, lord, your sister's sons, Gwydion son of Dôn and Gilfaethwy son of Dôn. And they forced me, and shamed you, and I was taken in your chamber and in your very bed.

There is no question that Goewin will be believed: she uses the words needed for Math to act. She identifies the rapists by name and references the kinship bonds they have with Math. She reminds him of their shame and insult. Such an act requires punishment but kinship complicates the matter. The rapists are Math's own nephews, so, he is forbidden to take revenge within his own family.³⁴¹ But as Goewin's lord and protector, Math must demand recompense on her behalf. Goewin seeks justice and she is given it by Math who takes her as his wife and gives her authority over his kingdom.³⁴² The fact that the punishment for his nephews is magical, may overcome any legal restraint on kinship revenge.

³³⁹ Valente, 'Gwydion and Aranrhod: Crossing the Borders of Gender in Math', p. 342.

³⁴⁰ Rape was a breach of honour for both the Math and Goewin. Owen, 'Shame and Reparation: Women's Place in the Kin', p. 49.

³⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁴² Katarzyna Jaworska-Biskup, 'Representation of Punishment in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', in E.M. Selina and Laura Bottell, eds., *Reframing Punishment: Silencing Dehumanisation and the Way Forward* (Witney: Interdisciplinary Press, 2014), p. 3.

Only the 'unlikely female' characters of the Mabinogi act outside of established gender roles, demonstrating their independence and forthrightness. This includes Rhiannon, Branwen, Aranrhod and Goewin. Each female character stretches the bounds of expectations: to protect kin, speak out for justice, and create their own destinies. If, as Harper writes, literature is 'a medium through which a society articulates its values, and individual authors voice their ambition, fears and criticism',³⁴³ then the 'unlikely female' characters may reflect actual social norms. Comparing their narratives to Welsh law, culture and history brings greater clarity of their speech and actions. Characters once seen as passive or subjugated now retain their autonomy no matter where they are in the lifecycle.

³⁴³ April Harper, 'The Image of the Female Healer in Western Vernacular Literature of the Middle Ages', *Social History of Medicine*, 24:1 (2011), 108–124, p. 108.

3 The Creation of the 'Unlikely Female' Character

The 'unlikely female' characters are the ones who do not meet medieval social expectations or stereotypes. How did these characters come into existence? Were they birthed from the imagination of a single author or pieced together from remnants of early mythology or popular folktales? How did the literature change as it was copied by later scribes? Were these characters inspired by actual women? While many scholars have speculated on these issues, no definitive answers have emerged. Yet the discussion is essential to the derivation of the 'unlikely female' characters.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the work of 'author' and scribe (or 'scribal author') will be examined separately.³⁴⁴ The 'author' is defined as the one (or ones) who first put medieval prose into written form. Although the scribe's role is commonly thought to be transcription, he was responsible for far more than copying. His work included revising, editing, rewriting and supplementing earlier texts. Fisher argues that while most medieval authors were scribes, not all scribes were authors. However, the actual line between these two roles remains unclear.³⁴⁵

Little is known about the original author or authors of the Mabinogi. Lloyd-Morgan finds the term 'author' itself to be inappropriate. The texts did not have a set form and 'may well have undergone change at each narration as it

³⁴⁴Using the work of Fisher in *Scribal Authorship* as a guide. Matthew Fisher, *Scribal Authorship and the Writing of History in Medieval England* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2012), 14–58.

³⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 6.

did at each copying'.³⁴⁶ Jackson claims there were multiple 'architects' who brought forth the final version. While this may be true, most scholars agree that the extant text had only one writer.³⁴⁷ The author is usually identified as a male scribe from a monastery,³⁴⁸ but some have argued instead that he was a lawyer.³⁴⁹ Breeze wrote that the Mabinogi was authored by a woman, because the text focused on motherhood.³⁵⁰ Winward and others disagreed, holding that the issues presented were from a male perspective.³⁵¹

The exact date of the Mabinogi is unknown. Estimates put its creation no sooner than the eleventh century.³⁵² The tales are contained in two manuscripts: the White Book of Rhydderch (1350) and the Red Book of Hergest (1410). In addition, fragments of texts exist from one hundred years earlier.³⁵³ Determining the original text is problematic. For example, although references to eleventh century spellings are found within the later manuscripts,³⁵⁴ little else remains from that earlier time. Did the 'unlikely female' characters exist within the original text or did that distinction only arise in later redactions?

³⁴⁶ Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan 'Gender and Violence in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', in Bernhard Maier, Stefan Zimmer & Christiane Batke, eds., *150 Jahre "Mabinogion" – Deutsch-Walisische Kulturbeziehungen* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2001), pp. 67–77, 75.

³⁴⁷ Proinsias Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, p. 43; *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales*, trans. and ed. P. Ford (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), p. 19.

³⁴⁸ Glanmor Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1962), p. 85.

³⁴⁹ Brynley F. Roberts, *Studies on Middle Welsh Literature*, Vol. 5 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), p. 17.

³⁵⁰ Andrew Breeze, *Medieval Welsh Literature* (Dublin: Four Court Press, 1997), p. 74.

³⁵¹ Fiona Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 34:7 (1997), 77–106, p. 105.

³⁵² T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Date of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi' in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp. 19–58, 44.

³⁵³ *The Mabinogion*, trans. S. Davies (Oxford: Oxford's World Classics, 2007), p. xvii.

³⁵⁴ Charles-Edwards, 'The Date of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', p. 20; Danna R. Messer, 'The Uxorial Lifecycle and Female Agency in Wales in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Bangor University, 2014), p. 26.

Although there is no way to distinguish the author's work from that of later scribes, the narrative of this literature can reasonably be attributed to its origination. The embellishments of the text, may be more suspect. This might include dialogue, cultural references and moral tone. Welsh describes the process of text variations as follows:

Folktale scholars have described those principles of structure and variation in the traditional tale: how tales change in the process of transmission by substituting alternative motifs, switching characters' roles, adding an introduction or a sequel to the basic tale, introducing into the tale local customs, characters, or details or geography, and so on.³⁵⁵

Davies questions whether authors who rely on traditional material are equally bound to defined stylistic elements.³⁵⁶ What freedom did a medieval author have in creating a narrative? Roberts explains:

[T]he 'author' is not as bound to his tradition as the *cyfarwydd*. He is free to derive his inspiration from a broader spectrum of influences, and his material ceases to be that of his community to be transmitted but his own to be interpreted or utilized.³⁵⁷

With that freedom, the author could draw upon a wide variety of sources including mythology, law, genealogy, the triads, proverbs, and folktales.³⁵⁸ Yet the style of these works was most influenced by the oral tradition.³⁵⁹ Some scholars have argued that the written texts simply record a prior oral version,

³⁵⁵ Andrew Welsh, 'Branwen, Beowulf, and the Tragic Peacemaker Tale', *Viator*, 22 (1991), 1–14, p. 4.

³⁵⁶ Sioned Davies, 'Written Text as Performance: The Implications for Middle Welsh Prose Narratives', in H. Pryce, ed., *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 133–148, 135.

³⁵⁷ Andrew Welsh, 'Manawydan fab Llŷr: Wales, England and the "New Man"', in C.W. Sullivan, III., ed., *The Mabinogi, A Books of Essays*, (New York: Garland Pub., 1996, 2015), pp. 121–144, 129.

³⁵⁸ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, p. 50.

³⁵⁹ Sioned Davies, 'Storytelling in Medieval Wales', *Oral Tradition*, 7:2 (1992), 231–257, pp. 234–235.

while others claim the texts are purely written compositions.³⁶⁰ Davies used the term ‘oral-derived texts’ to describe the Mabinogion, which was inspired by both oral and written sources.³⁶¹ Either way, these authors drew heavily on storytelling utilizing various stylistic elements including dialogue, formulaic phrases, meter, verbal repetitions, and the use of standard openings and closings.³⁶² Further if the author had a role in a text’s compilation, he may also have responsibility for its structure and style.³⁶³ Although the stories appear to have loose-ends,³⁶⁴ the author was skilled at weaving together disparate elements into a cohesive narrative.³⁶⁵

Mythology, Motifs and International Tales

Did the unlikely female characters exist in Celtic mythology? Certainly, references to mythological themes, pagan gods and motifs abound within these texts.³⁶⁶ Yet as Bollard writes, ‘mythology is shadowy at best, discernible primarily through the lens of comparative analysis and the work of scholars’.³⁶⁷ Nevertheless, Mac Cana contends that the Mabinogion is one of the most important sources for British mythology.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁰ Davies, ‘Storytelling in Medieval Wales’, p. 235.

³⁶¹ Davies, ‘Written Text as Performance: The Implications for Middle Welsh Prose Narratives’, p. 135.

³⁶² Sioned Davies, ‘Storytelling in Medieval Wales’, pp. 237–247.

³⁶³ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, p. 41.

³⁶⁴ Ford, *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales*, pp.101–102.

³⁶⁵ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, p. 32.

³⁶⁶ R.M. Jones, ‘Narrative Structure in Medieval Welsh Prose Tales’, in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp. 217–262, 239.

³⁶⁷ *Legend and Landscape of Wales: The Mabinogi*, John K. Bollard, trans. (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 2006), p. 118.

³⁶⁸ Proinsias Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology* (Rushden: Newnes Books, 1968), p. 16.

Rhiannon is often identified with the horse goddess Rigantona³⁶⁹ or Epona.³⁷⁰ Bromwich holds that the Mabinogion contains stories of Brittonic gods and goddesses with a connection to Welsh dynasties.³⁷¹ However, the references are now slight and symbolic at best.³⁷² There is no pantheon of goddesses such as is found in the Greek and Roman tradition. All that is known of Rhiannon's character is from the Mabinogi. She arrives on a magical white horse; births her son and perhaps a foal; and is punished by carrying people on her back. Instead of finding a goddess within these tales, the audience discovers a medieval noblewoman living in the Otherworld with a symbolic connection to horses. Winward writes,

[W]hile at the very most the vestiges of myths may place women in certain situations and empower them to a certain extent, it is surely dangerous to imply that their *characterization* was also inherited, particularly when all three of these women [Rhiannon, Aranrhod and Blodeuwedd] are given very different traits and have very different ways of upholding their independence.³⁷³

The author may also have drawn on universal tale types and motifs³⁷⁴ found within international popular tales. These encompass the basic story elements of plot, events and characterizations that appear in folktales throughout

³⁶⁹ The name means 'Great queen'.

³⁷⁰ John Waddell, *Archaeology and Celtic Myth: An Exploration* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014), p. 89.

³⁷¹ *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain*, ed. Rachel Bromwich (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1961, 2014), p. lxxxvii.

³⁷² Jessica Hemming, 'Reflections on Rhiannon and the Horse Episodes in "Pwyll"', *Western Folklore*, 57:1 (Winter, 1998), 19–40, p. 21.

³⁷³ Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', p. 80.

³⁷⁴ Stith Thompson defines types as being a traditional tale that has an independent existence, while a motif is the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition. Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (Berkeley, CA: University of California press, 1977), p. 415.

the world.³⁷⁵ In fact, within the Mabinogi, the author references storytelling three times, implying that the work is a compilation of existing tales.³⁷⁶ Motifs have been heavily researched in the Mabinogion³⁷⁷ and the Four Branches contain many motifs found in common folktales.³⁷⁸ An examination of these include elements of plot (e.g., ‘Disposal of cast-off wife’, (S430) or ‘Bird as messenger’ (B291.1)), and of character (e.g., ‘Persecuted wife’ (S410) or ‘Cruel uncle’ (S71)).

In the Mabinogi, many ‘unlikely female’ characters are mothers. Marriage and motherhood is the ideal state for medieval women, so it is not surprising that birthing³⁷⁹ is a significant theme. Motifs on this topic can be found throughout the Branches. For example, Aranrhod magically births³⁸⁰ two sons (‘Passing over magic rod’, (H412)). One was a large, yellow-haired boy and the other described as a ‘small something’. The night Rhiannon gave birth, Pryderi disappeared (‘Fairy steals child from cradle’, (F321)). An enormous claw abducted Teyrnnon’s foals and appears to have captured Pryderi too (‘Ogre with long arm thrust down chimney’, (G369.5)). Wood states that Rhiannon may also have had two births: one was Pryderi, and the other a foal³⁸¹ (‘Simultaneous birth of domestic animal and child’, (T589.7.1)).

³⁷⁵ *A World of Stories: Traditional Tales for Children*, eds. Raymond E. Jones and Jon C. Stott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. x–xi; Roberts, *Studies on Middle Welsh Literature*, p. 10.

³⁷⁶ Davies, ‘Written Text as Performance: The Implications for Middle Welsh Prose Narratives’, p. 135.

³⁷⁷ Juliette Wood, ‘The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature’, in C.W. Sullivan, III., ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp. 61–78. Andrew Welsh, ‘The Traditional Narrative Motifs of *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*’, *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 15 (1988), 51–62; Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961).

³⁷⁸ Welsh, ‘Manawydan fab Llŷr: Wales, England and the “New Man”’, p. 125.

³⁷⁹ Birthing was not only female purview in the Otherworld, for Math and Gwydion created Blodeuedd.

³⁸⁰ The children were ‘born’ when she steps over a magic wand.

³⁸¹ Wood, ‘The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature’, p. 65.

The 'otherworldly' characteristics of the 'unlikely female' are also common motifs. In the Mabinogi, Rhiannon meets the criteria for 'Strength of witches' (G221), for her birth attendants claimed she could not be restrained. And although Branwen had no magical abilities, Gruffydd postulates that she may have been a fairy bride.³⁸² When her son was pushed into the fire, it referenced the changeling motif. For placing a fairy child in a fire, would cause it to betray its true nature (F321.1.1.6).

While motifs classify the plot elements found in narratives, they focus less on the specific personality traits of characters. This may be because folktale characterizations tend to be either flat and poorly developed or exaggerated. There are no motifs that either categorize or classify women characters as either independent or forthright. Hence, this is not a useful tool for identifying the 'unlikely female' characters within international popular tales.

Perhaps these characters were borrowed from the tales of neighbouring lands, for Wales was not isolated from European texts. Medieval manuscripts were translated from Latin and French into Welsh.³⁸³ In addition, there were many opportunities for Irish narratives to enter Wales, although this cannot be proven. Sims-Williams discounts the Irish influence on Welsh vernacular literature stating that any similarities in narratives derive from a common origin.³⁸⁴ Although scholars have discovered medieval literary characters who

³⁸² W.J. Gruffydd, *Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion: A Lecture Delivered at the National Museum of Wales on 27 October 1950* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1964).

³⁸³ Helen Fulton, 'The Mabinogi and the Education of Princes in Medieval Wales', in Helen Fulton, ed., *Medieval Celtic Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), pp. 230–47, 232; Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'Triadic Structures in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *The Journal of the Traditional Cosmology Society*, 5:1 (1988), 3–11.

³⁸⁴ Patrick Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 2-4.

meet the profile of the 'unlikely female',³⁸⁵ no one has yet identified any tale or tales that would serve as the basis for these Welsh characters. Further research, therefore, is required to determine their derivation. It appears perhaps that neither mythology nor folktales can fully explain the 'unlikely female' characters, although a possible connection cannot be discounted.

Authorship and Medieval Scribes

The author, however, was not alone in the creation of these characters. Scribes and scribal authors also had an important part to play. Scribal authors were not 'simply scribal automations'.³⁸⁶ They did more than copy texts: they had agency.³⁸⁷ For copying was an intentional act, which created a new manuscript from an existing one. Medieval scribes were literate. They read the books before transcribing them. They had opinions about which texts to copy and how they would be transcribed. Fisher explains that 'medieval scribes did many things beyond reproducing the texts of their exemplars, and the conceptual certainty we have established by describing medieval texts as "copies" is often unwarranted'.³⁸⁸

The extant text of the *Mabinogi* is the work of a scribal author. Early texts are limited, leaving scholars unable to fully compare versions or track changes in the development of the female characters. However, Bromwich has concluded

³⁸⁵ Naomi May Jensen Hoogesteger, 'Deviant Women in Courtly and Popular Medieval Castilian Poetry', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Durham University, 2012); Naomi May Jensen Hoogesteger, 'Anomalous Women in Fifteenth-Century Castilian Ballads', (unpublished M.A. thesis, Durham University, 2006); Marcia Lynn Neudigate, 'Unique Perspectives of Celtic Women in Early Medieval Irish and Welsh Literature', (unpublished MA thesis, Northern Kentucky University, 1994).

³⁸⁶ Messer, 'The Uxorial Lifecycle and Female Agency in Wales in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', p. 46.

³⁸⁷ Fisher, *Scribal Authorship*, p. 15.

³⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p.189.

that some triads were based on early oral versions of the tales.³⁸⁹ For example, a Fourth Branch variant has Pryderi receiving swine from *Annwfn* rather than Pwyll. Another, has Matholwch casting a single blow on Branwen rather than his cook.³⁹⁰ Similarly, pre-existing triads seem to have shaped two episodes of the *Mabinogi*.³⁹¹

Manuscripts are a product of their times, and scribes were influenced both by the Church and by culture. The Church was essential to the proliferation of written texts. For secular texts, the Church favoured history or didactic exempla. Shepherd writes that many of the old stories were not written down for they were determined to be 'unfit for transcription'.³⁹² Scribes shared this disdain for early materials. In the twelfth century, an Irish scribe wrote within the Book of Leinster his disfavour of pagan elements within the work³⁹³ he was transcribing:

But I who have written this story, or rather this fable, give no credence to the various incidents related in it. For some things in it are the deceptions of demons, other poetic figments; some are probable, others improbable; while still others are intended for the delectation of foolish men.³⁹⁴

Welsh scribes, however, issued no such disclaimer, although the Church also encouraged them to reduce or eliminate pagan elements. Mac Cana believes this was unnecessary for the author of the *Mabinogi* was 'more the detached observer and manipulator of vernacular tradition than were his monastic contemporaries in Ireland'.³⁹⁵

³⁸⁹ Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, p. lxxiii.

³⁹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 54, lxxii.

³⁹¹ For example, two references to Manawydan and two to Branwen. *ibid.*, pp. lxxiii–lxxiv.

³⁹² G.T. Shepherd, 'The Emancipation of Story in the Twelfth Century', in *Medieval Narrative: A Symposium* (Odense: Odense University, 1979), pp. 44–57, 45.

³⁹³ 'Tain bó Cuailnge'.

³⁹⁴ David N. Dumville, 'Frivolity and Reform in the Church: The Irish Experience, 1066–1166', in *Studies in Church History*, 48 (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), pp. 47–64, 59.

³⁹⁵ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, p. 49.

As moral tales, the Mabinogi met the Church's standard for transcription. These cautionary tales were both entertaining and instructive, providing behavioural guidance to the aristocracy.³⁹⁶ Bollard observed that the scribe reduced pagan elements while also displaying an 'ethos [...] which is not inconsistent with the Judeo-Christian ethical system within which the audience lives'.³⁹⁷ Yet this scribe does not take a clear moral stance. Instead, he simply tells the story and leaves the audience to discern its meaning.³⁹⁸ Even so, the author treats the women characters sympathetically. Aranrhod is not punished for being a false virgin. Winward argues that the author's depiction of Aranrhod was intentional.

The author's ambiguous portrayal of Aranrhod, neither condemning nor lauding her behaviour outright, would again seem to demonstrate an understanding of the fate of a mother [...] it seems unlikely that the author would have allowed Aranrhod to be ultimately successful in her vengeance – or to evade a grizzly end – were this ambiguity not intentional.³⁹⁹

Further, Rhiannon's wrongful punishment is seldom employed. Even Blodeuedd's murderous intentions seem somewhat understandable. Over time, the Church's failure to modify these early pagan tales, led to the creation of new stories with a more Christian theme.⁴⁰⁰

The Church's influence is demonstrated by the addition of Christian elements to the text. For example, in the Third Branch, three men (a cleric, priest

³⁹⁶ Messer, 'The Uxorial Lifecycle and Female Agency in Wales in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', pp. 60, 62.

³⁹⁷ J.K. Bollard, 'The Role of Myth and Tradition in *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', in C.W. Sullivan, III., ed., *The Mabinogi, A Books of Essays* (New York: Garland Pub., 1996, 2015), pp. 277–302, 278.

³⁹⁸ Bollard, *Legend and Landscape of Wales: The Mabinogi*, p. 113.

³⁹⁹ Winward, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', p. 103.

⁴⁰⁰ This led to the development of the Charlemagne saga and the cycle of the Grail, see Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation*, p. 105.

and a bishop), sought to release the rat that Manawydan held captive. In the Fourth Branch, Lieu disclosed that he could only be killed with a special spear, made when people were at Sunday Mass. The Mabinogi also references the baptism of Pryderi as being performed 'in the way it was done at that time'.⁴⁰¹ Further, Math states he will have Hyddwn,⁴⁰² and Dylan baptized.⁴⁰³ Such statements seem out of place for a story set in an earlier time. At best, these Christian references appear to be later perfunctory modifications.

Scribes were fully aware of the Church's position regarding women and of the cultural ideals. Not surprisingly, stereotypical depictions of women are found in the Mabinogi. For example, Branwen is described as 'one of the Three Chief Maidens of this Island: she was the most beautiful girl in the world [...] she gained renown that year, and flourished with honour and companions'.⁴⁰⁴ The perception of women changed as the power of the Church grew throughout the Middle Ages. As women's power decreased, this was reflected in the literature.⁴⁰⁵

Doan argues that even though scribes could copy a pre-existing script verbatim, in practice they seldom did so, choosing to vary the text instead. It was 'as if the mere copying of a text was bad form or empty form'.⁴⁰⁶ If the Mabinogi followed a similar course, its scribe may have helped develop the 'unlikely female' characters. These characters do not appear diminished by either editing or rewriting. However, the scribe could easily have created more idealized

⁴⁰¹ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 18.

⁴⁰² The offspring of Gwydion and Gilfaethy.

⁴⁰³ Aranrhod's yellow-haired boy.

⁴⁰⁴ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 27.

⁴⁰⁵ Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi*, p. 1.

⁴⁰⁶ A. N. Doane, 'The Ethnography of Scribal Writing and Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Scribe as Performer', *Oral Tradition*, 9 (1994), pp. 420–39, 423.

female characters if desired. Even removing a small bit of dialogue would have changed the Mabinogi significantly. For example, without Rhiannon's piqued retorts, she would appear more demure. If Aranrhod's declaration of virginity was less equivocal, she might have been less sympathetic and seen more like Eve.

Yet it remains uncertain when the distinguishing qualities of these characters appeared in the narrative. This depiction could have been part of the original text or added in the redaction. Since these characters do not meet the social norm, what might have inspired their creation? Perhaps the scribe was guided by the lives of the female saints. While the lives were patterned and filled with folktale motifs,⁴⁰⁷ the saints were often independent and forthright.⁴⁰⁸ In addition, some of the plot elements are similar to the Mabinogi. In the First Branch, Rhiannon is seeking to avoid an arranged marriage. This theme is also found in the legends of St Melangell who fled Ireland to avoid an arranged marriage,⁴⁰⁹ and of San Ffraid who prayed for a reprieve, after which her eye popped out.⁴¹⁰ In the Fourth Branch, Aranrhod fails a virginity test. Although believing herself to be a virgin, she was most likely the victim of incest. Similarly, St Non was raped but still considered sanctified. For following the teachings of St Augustine, her 'will' maintained her chastity. The scribe may have also intended the same for Aranrhod since she was never punished for this falsehood.

The 'Unlikely Female' in History

⁴⁰⁷ Elissa R. Henken, 'The Saint as Folk Hero: Biographical Patterning in Welsh Hagiography' in Patrick K. Ford, ed., *Celtic Folklore and Christianity* (Santa Barbara, CA: McNally and Loftin 1983), pp. 58–74.

⁴⁰⁸ In the lives of St Barbara, St Agatha and St Katherine, each refused to sacrifice to pagan gods and marry their tormentors. St Ursula also refused marriage and was murdered. Jane Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), pp. 83–84.

⁴⁰⁹ Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*, p. 77.

⁴¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 87.

Although scribes were celibate, they had close relationships with the women in their families. These relationships may have influenced their perception of women, even more than the writings of the Church fathers. Perhaps the 'unlikely female' characters were retained because they represent actual medieval women – those who also did not meet lofty social ideals. Because little is known about medieval women outside the aristocracy, the lives of select Welsh noblewomen will be compared to these literary characters. Richards studied Welsh women from the thirteenth century, finding them to be more active than passive regarding their families. She holds that these 'women were not invisible, and in notable cases, neither were they marginal'.⁴¹¹

Welsh women may have had more independence and freedom than indicated under the Law of Women. Women were willing to enter advantageous marriages even if arranged. In the thirteenth century, Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, the king of Wales, married King John's daughter, Joan,⁴¹² as part of a suzerain settlement. He continued this tradition by marrying his daughters to major families, thereby building a stronger political alliance.⁴¹³ This included Elen ferch Llywelyn,⁴¹⁴ Gwenllian de Lacy,⁴¹⁵ Gwladus Ddu,⁴¹⁶ and Margaret Clifford.⁴¹⁷ Contrary to Welsh law, canon law required consent to marry.⁴¹⁸ Whether these

⁴¹¹ Gwenyth Richards, 'From Footnotes to Narrative: Welsh Noble Women in the Thirteenth Century', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Sydney, 2005), p. 7.

⁴¹² Messer, 'The Uxorial Lifecycle and Female Agency in Wales in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', pp. 197–218.

⁴¹³ Peter Berresford Ellis, *Celtic Women: Women in Celtic Society and Literature* (London: Constable, 1995), pp. 205–206.

⁴¹⁴ Richards, 'From Footnotes to Narrative: Welsh Noble Women in the Thirteenth Century', p. 64.

⁴¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 38.

⁴¹⁷ Gwenyth Richards, *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), pp. 43–70.

⁴¹⁸ Huw Pryce, *Native Law and the Church in Medieval Wales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 10.

women agreed to marry as did Branwen; or fought against it, as did Rhiannon, is unknown. Elen ferch Llywelyn married her second husband over her father's protests.⁴¹⁹ Further, these marriages did broker the peace. Branwen's fate as the failed peaceweaver was not part of their history.

In medieval Wales, many noblewomen, held land.⁴²⁰ This was true, even though the *Welsh Law of Women* limited land ownership⁴²¹ to exceptional circumstances.⁴²² In the thirteenth century, Angharad held land through either a marriage contract or dower deed. It was to be retained unless she remarried, took religious vows, or died without giving her husband an heir.⁴²³ Gwenllian de Lacy received lands as a marriage gift from her father.⁴²⁴ Elen ferch Llywelyn and Gwladus Ddu also received dower lands after their husbands' death.⁴²⁵ Over time, however, English laws became more prominent. By the late Middle Ages, the right of women to both inherit and be endowed with land was established

⁴¹⁹ Richards, 'From Footnotes to Narrative: Welsh Noble Women in the Thirteenth Century', p. 66.

⁴²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 265.

⁴²¹ In 1325–1326 the Anglesey county court contained thirty-seven records showing women to be landowners. A.D. Carr, *Medieval Anglesey: Studies in Anglesey History*, second edn (Llangefni: Anglesey Antiquarian Society, 2011), pp. 111–112.

⁴²² Jenkins, D., 'Property Interests in the Classical Welsh Interests of Women', in D. Jenkins and M.E. Owen, eds., *The Welsh Law of Women*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980), pp. 69–92, 75.

⁴²³ Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'More Written About than Writing? Welsh Women and the Written Word,' in H. Pryce, ed., *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 149–165; Richards, 'From Footnotes to Narrative: Welsh Noble Women in the Thirteenth Century', p. 74; Jane Cartwright, 'The Desire to Corrupt: Convent and Community in Medieval Wales', in Diane Watt, ed., *Medieval Women in their Communities* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 20–48, 34.

⁴²⁴ Richards, 'From Footnotes to Narrative: Welsh Noble Women in the Thirteenth Century', p. 30.

⁴²⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 66, 142.

and became more common.⁴²⁶ Therefore, Aranrhod's ownership of Caer Aranrhod may not have been exceptional after all.

Welsh medieval noblewomen were both independent and forthright. These women pushed the boundaries of the patriarchal system. They were known to be strong, brave, and politically astute. For example, Joan (Siwan), as the queen of Wales, was the chief counsellor to her husband King Llywelyn. She negotiated affairs of state on his behalf. Eleanor De Montfort⁴²⁷ was captured by her cousin, King Edward, to stop her marriage to Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. Edward feared the power she might wield as the Princess of Wales. Eleanor served as a diplomat and emissary during times of conflict. She even confronted King Edward regarding his unjust actions.⁴²⁸

In addition, women were known to litigate their disputes in court.⁴²⁹ Nest, daughter of Rhys ap Tewdwr, brought a claim for land against her brother and brother-in-law. King John intervened in her favour.⁴³⁰ Margaret of Bromfield, daughter of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, sought twenty-three entitlements for her children and a dowry for herself after her husband's death. On at least one occasion, she argued her case in person.⁴³¹ Senana ferch

⁴²⁶ Llinos Beverley Smith, 'Towards a History of Women in Late Medieval Wales', in Michael Roberts and Simone Clarke, eds., *Women and Gender in Early Modern Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 15, 21.

⁴²⁷ Messer, 'The Uxorial Lifecycle and Female Agency in Wales in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', pp. 227–237.

⁴²⁸ Richards, 'From Footnotes to Narrative: Welsh Noble Women in the Thirteenth Century', pp. 140–53.

⁴²⁹ Gwladus Ddu was involved in litigation regarding the administration of her estates. Richards, 'From Footnotes to Narrative: Welsh Noble Women in the Thirteenth Century', p. 59.

⁴³⁰ 'Oxford Dictionary of National Biography' [online]. Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com> <accessed 5 January 2017>.

⁴³¹ Gwenyth Richards 'Medieval Welsh Noblewomen: The Case of Margaret of Bromfield', *Eras, Journal*, 3 (2002) [online]. Available at: <http://arts.monash.edu.au/publications/eras/edition-3/richards.php> <accessed 15 January 2017>.

Caradog's⁴³² independence placed her outside the bounds of patriarchy. To seek her husband's release from prison, she gathered support from powerful noblewomen, before contacted the English king. Senana negotiated for the release or transfer of her imprisoned husband and son. The document for this agreement was unique in the thirteenth century.⁴³³ When compared to the Mabinogi, Rhiannon's efforts to negotiate with the wise men of Dyfed seems less unusual.

Further, Welsh women also fought and led battles when their husbands were away. Gwenllian, daughter of Gruffudd ap Cynan, king of Gwynedd, led a counter attack against a Norman uprising. Although she died in battle, she gave her husband time to gather more forces.⁴³⁴ Her name became a Welsh battle cry. Therefore, the lives and qualities of Welsh noblewomen may have provided inspiration for these fictional characters. The actions and behaviours of the 'unlikely female' characters cannot solely be relegated to a mythic past.

The Mabinogi often confounds contemporary scholars.⁴³⁵ Much of this narrative appears disjointed with plots marred by inconsistencies and oversights.⁴³⁶ Are these actual errors of authorship⁴³⁷ or poor transcriptions?

⁴³² Messer, 'The Uxorial Lifecycle and Female Agency in Wales in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', pp. 219–226.

⁴³³ Richards, 'From Footnotes to Narrative: Welsh Noble Women in the Thirteenth Century', pp. 37–42.

⁴³⁴ Her name became a rally call for the Welsh. Peter Berresford Ellis, *Celtic Women: Women in Celtic Society and Literature*, p. 204; National Library of Wales, 'Dictionary of Welsh Biography' [online]. Available at <http://yba.llgc.org.uk/en/index.html> <accessed 10 May 2017>.

⁴³⁵ Hanson-Smith, 'Pwyll Prince of Dyfed: The Narrative Structure', p. 153; Patrick K., Ford, 'Prolegomena to a Reading of the Mabinogi: "Pwyll" and "Manawydan"', in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp. 197–216, 200.

⁴³⁶ Jeffrey Gantz, 'Thematic Structure in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp. 265–275, 265.

⁴³⁷ This may include a 'series of storytellers, revisers, and scribes' who brought these works together as they are now known. J.K. Bollard, 'The Role of Myth and Tradition in *The Four*

Perhaps what seems a glaring omission to contemporary scholars was more fully and completely understood at the time.

The basic assumption about the tales must be, it seems to me, *a fortiori*, that they did have a meaning for the scribe as well as for his audience, whoever and whatever that was.⁴³⁸

Determining what the medieval Welsh audience knew and understood about these narratives, however, is an open question. Later Christian elements, social constructs and contemporary settings were added in the writing. Perhaps this also included defining traits for the 'unlikely female' characters.

The written text, therefore, may only summarize the actual story as it was then known. 'Lludd and Llefelys', for example, has been described as an extended triad.⁴³⁹ What seems surprising and highly unlikely about these female characters may not have appeared that way to an audience who understood more of the 'back story' including mythological and folktale references.⁴⁴⁰ In addition, what the audience expected regarding the actions and behaviours of these female characters is unknown. While the ideal woman was defined clearly by the Church and society, the reality for medieval noblewomen may have been very different. Their lives stretched the bounds of law and patriarchy, allowing them to be both independent and forthright. These women are neither Mary nor Eve. They too are 'unlikely females'.

Branches of the Mabinogi, in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp. 277–302, 280.

⁴³⁸ Ford, 'Prolegomena to a Reading of the *Mabinogi*: "Pwyll" and "Manawydan"', p. 200.

⁴³⁹ Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, p. lxxvii.

⁴⁴⁰ R.M. Jones, 'Narrative Structure in Medieval Wales Prose Tales', p. 239.

Conclusion

The female characters of the Mabinogi represent divergent views on medieval gender roles. Their world reflects medieval norms that mandate the types of behaviours considered acceptable, appropriate or desirable for women. Yet medieval gender ideologies were complex, with views and ideas overlapping. To distinguish among these ideologies requires an analysis of how women were perceived within medieval society, using Church doctrine, courtesy literature and bardic grammar. The Church described women in terms of Mary and Eve, courtesy literature focused on chastity and obedience, and bardic grammar praised noblewomen for their virtues.

The multiplicity of these gender expectations can also be found in the Mabinogi. Some female characters meet the social norm (e.g., the wives of Arawn and Teyrnnon). Their depiction within the Mabinogi is expected. Other female characters are different. These are the 'unlikely female' characters of the Mabinogi – women who are complex, verbally skilled, and political. The 'unlikely female' characters, identified as Rhiannon, Branwen, Aranrhod and Gowein, are set apart by their qualities of forthrightness and independence. They do not meet the stereotypical expectations of women and stretch the bounds of social limitations.

Understanding their place in literature, requires exploration beyond the study of gender ideologies. Welsh society and culture must also be examined, for it is only within a medieval context that these characters can be identified. Scholars have long studied the female characters of the Mabinogi. Some have identified the 'unlikely female' characters as having a mythic past. Other

scholars have argued their behaviours are befitting their lifecycle. Neither approach fully explains the development of these characters. For when the focus is on the goddess alone, the woman is ignored. When the focus is solely on a character's stage of life, other explanations become impossible.

The derivation of the 'unlikely female' characters is unclear. The Mabinogi was first written by a scribe in 1100 but only fragments of early texts have survived. The story is an oral-derived composite of mythology, folktales and other materials. Extant texts were issued hundreds of years later and redacted by a scribe or scribal author. Although the exact contribution of the scribal author is debatable, it is certain that the texts were modified over time. When the distinguishing qualities of these characters first appeared, may never be determined. However, additional research in extant texts and triads may prove helpful.

The 'unlikely female' characters are analysed within a background of law, history and medieval Welsh culture. Placed within a medieval context, their narratives are now open to different interpretations. For example, when Rhiannon, as a new mother, seeks the advice of 'wise men'; she has not lost her independence. Instead, she may use her role as Pwyll's wife to negotiate a punishment that maintains peace in Dryfed. Branwen is not passive, if she chooses the role of peaceweaver. Her commitment gives her the strength to face both shame and dishonour before acting. Further, Aranrhod may still be perceived as a virgin, if her 'will' to remain one stayed constant. Perhaps these characters are more independent and politically astute than believed.

Scribes drew upon a wide variety of sources including mythology, law, history and folktales. Scribal authors were more than mere transcribers, they had agency and often modified or expanded texts. They were also influenced by the

Church and their culture. Therefore, sources known to the scribal author may have further expanded the development of these characters. This includes references to hagiography and historical biography. Although the Mabinogi contains evidence of medieval Welsh life, referencing law and church doctrine, the female characters have not been adequately compared to the lives of medieval women. An examination of prominent Welsh noblewomen shows them to be both independent and forthright. Contrary to Welsh law, some owned property, managed kingdoms and served as political advisors and negotiators throughout their lives. These women also failed to meet the established gender norms and are 'unlikely female' characters. Therefore, medieval noblewomen may have influenced the development of the 'unlikely female' characters. The similarity between these characters and Welsh noblewomen require further exploration. As Johnson writes:

The question that needs to be asked here is whether [...] real women in Welsh communities were accustomed to more independence and thus the literary characters were portrayed as such. Or were these independent fairy brides and confident female characters of the Mabinogion simply caricatures of real women?⁴⁴¹

The aim of this dissertation was to define, identify, and analyse the 'unlikely female' characters of the Mabinogi. These women act outside of established gender norms. Their qualities of independence and forthrightness make them unique. Yet their derivation is uncertain and cannot be explained solely by mythic references or life stage. They are the 'unlikely female' characters.

⁴⁴¹ Johnson, Lizabeth, 'Attitudes Toward Spousal Violence in Medieval Wales', in Aled Jones and Huw Pryce, eds., *Welsh History Review/Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymru*, 24:4 (Dec. 2009), 87–115, p. 97.

However, when placed within the context of medieval society, any perceived gender variations become less 'unlikely' and more expected.

Bibliography

Manuscript Sources

Brogyntyn MS ii.1 (formerly known as *Porkington 10*). National Library of Wales, 'A Middle English Miscellany. Reference: Brogyntyn MS ii.1', LLyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru-The National Library of Wales [online]. Available: <https://www.llgc.org.uk/en/discover/digital-gallery/manuscripts/the-middle-ages/a-middle-english-miscellany/> <accessed 3 June 2017>.

How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter' (University of Rochester,' Item 4, How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter: Introduction', TEAMS Middle English Texts Series [online]. Available: <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/shuffelton-codex-ashmole-61-how-the-good-wife-taught-her-daughter-introduction> <accessed 3 June 2017>.

Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 356B f.143r.

Unpublished Sources

Beattie, Cordelia, 'Meanings of Singleness: The Single Woman in Late Medieval England', (unpublished D. Phil. thesis, University of York, 2001).

Birkan, Ervin, 'Women & Love in Medieval Courtly Literature: The Real and the Fictional', (unpublished M.A. thesis, Debus University, 2011).

Hoogesteger, Naomi May Jensen, 'Anomalous Women in Fifteenth-Century Castilian Ballads', (unpublished M.A. thesis, Durham University, 2006).

-----, 'Deviant Women in Courtly and Popular Medieval Castilian Poetry', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Durham University, 2012).

Kapphahn, K.R.L., 'Constructions of Gender in Medieval Welsh Literature', (unpublished MA thesis, Aberystwyth University, 2009).

Lingl, Vera Casto, 'Assertive Women in Medieval Spanish Literature', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1995).

Messer, Danna R., 'The Uxorial Lifecycle and Female Agency in Wales in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Bangor University, 2014).

Neudigate, Marcia Lynn, 'Unique Perspectives of Celtic Women in Early Medieval Irish and Welsh Literature', (unpublished MA thesis, Northern Kentucky University, 1994).

Richards, Gwenyth, 'From Footnotes to Narrative: Welsh Noble Women in the Thirteenth Century', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Sydney, 2005).

Robinson, Angela M., 'Unnamed Women in Medieval Welsh Literature', (unpublished MA thesis, Aberystwyth University, 2014).

Salih, Maha Sara Abdulelah Lloyd, 'Versions of Virginity in Medieval Texts and Practices', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of East Anglia, 1999).

Valente, Roberta Louise, "'Merched Y Mabinogi": Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 1986).

Secondary Works

Ancient Laws and Institutes of Wales, ed. Aneurin Owen (London: G.E. Eyre and A. Spottiswoode, 1841).

Ashton, Gail, *The Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography: Speaking the Saint* (London: Routledge, 2000).

Askwith, Teele, 'Aelfric's Female Saints and the Borderlines of Sanctity', *Proceedings of Borderlines Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Conference* (2003).

Author, Reader, Book: Medieval Authorship in Theory and Practice, eds. Erik Wakeel and Stephan Bradford Partridge (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

Authority and Subjugation in Writing of Medieval Wales, eds. Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

Barnsley, Sandy, 'Women's Work Reconsidered: Gender and Wage Differentiation in Late Medieval England: Reply', *Past & Present*, 173 (Nov. 2001), 199–202.

Beattie, Cordelia, "'Living as a Single Person": Marital Status, Performance and the Law in Late Medieval England', *Women's History Review*, 17:3 (July 2008), 327–340.

-----, *Medieval Single Women: The Politics of Social Classification in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Bennett, Judith M., *Medieval Women in Modern Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 2000).

Bennett, Judith and Ruth Karros, 'Women, Gender, and Medieval Historians', in Judith Bennett and Ruth Kara's, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval, Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Blamires, Alcuin, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

-----, 'Chaucer's Revaluation of Chivalric Honor', *Mediaevalia*, 5 (1979), 245–269.

Bloch, R. Howard, 'Medieval Misogyny', *Representations*, 20 (Autumn, 1987), 1–24.

-----, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Bollard, J.K., 'The Role of Myth and Tradition in *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', in C.W. Sullivan, III., ed., *The Mabinogi, A Books of Essays* (New York: Garland Pub., 1996, 2015), pp. 277–302.

-----, 'The Structure of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Commotion*, (1974–1975), 250–276.

Bornstein, Diane, *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1983).

Breaking and Shaping Beastly Bodies: Animals as Material Culture in the Middle Ages, ed. Aleksander Pluskowski (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007).

Breeze, Andrew, *Medieval Welsh Literature* (Dublin: Four Court Press, 1997).

British Museum, *List of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museums in the Years 1836–1840* (London: Order of the Trustees, 1843).

Bromwich, Rachel, *Medieval Welsh Literature to c. 1400, including Arthurian Studies* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996).

Brundage, James A., 'Sexual Equality in Medieval Canon Law', in Joel T. Rosenthal, ed., *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990), pp. 66–79.

- Bund, J.W. Willis, 'Some Characteristics of Welsh and Irish Saints', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 11:5 (1894), 270–280.
- Burrow, J.A., *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- Byfield, C.E., 'Character and Conflict in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 40 (1993), 51–72.
- Cambrensis, Giraldus, *The Itinerary through Wales and the Description of Wales* (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1908).
- Carri, A.D., *Medieval Anglesey: Studies in Anglesey History*, second edh (Llangefni: Anglesey Antiquarian Society, 2011).
- , "'This My Act and Deed": the Writing of Private Deeds in Late Medieval North Wales', in Huw Pryce, ed., *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 223–237.
- Cartwright, Jane, 'The Desire to Corrupt: Convent and Community in Medieval Wales', in Diane Watt, ed., *Medieval Women in their Communities* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 20–48.
- , *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008).
- , 'Virginity and Chastity Tests in Medieval Welsh Prose', in Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salih, eds., *Medieval Virginites* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 56–79.
- Cavell, Emma, 'Aristocratic Widows and the Medieval Welsh Frontier: The Shropshire Evidence', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 17 (2007), 57–82.
- Celtic Folklore and Christianity*, ed. Patrick K. Ford (Santa Barbara: McNally and Loftin, 1983).
- Celtic Hagiography and Saints' Cults*, ed. Jane Cartwright (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2003).
- Chandler, Kirstie, 'Patriarchy and Power in Medieval Welsh Literature', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 22 (2002), 80–95.
- Charles-Edwards, Gifford, 'The Scribes of the Red Book of Hergest', *National Library of Wales Journal*, 21:3 (1979–80), 246–56.

Charles-Edwards, T.M., 'The Date of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi' in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp. 19–58.

-----, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

-----, 'The Textual Tradition of Medieval Welsh Prose Tales and the Problem of Dating', in B. Maier, S. Zimmer & C. Batke, eds., *150 Jahre "Mabinogion" – Deutsch-Walisische Kulturbeziehungen* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2001), pp. 23–39.

Clancy, Joseph P., *Medieval Welsh Poems* (London, Macmillan, 1970).

Clover, Carol J., 'Maiden Warriors and Other Sons', in Robert R. Edwards and Vickie Ziegler eds., *Matrons and Marginal Women in Medieval Society* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), pp. 75–88.

Colton, Lisa, 'The Articulation of Virginity in the Medieval 'Chanson de Nonne'', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 133:2 (2008), 159–188.

Dafydd ap Gwilym.net [online]. Available at:

http://www.dafyddapgwilym.net/index_eng.php <accessed on 11 June 2017>.

Davies, John, *History of Wales* (London: Allen Lane, 1990, 1993).

Davies, Oliver, *Celtic Christianity in Early Medieval Wales: The Origins of the Welsh Spiritual Tradition* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1996).

Davies, R.R., 'The Status of Women and the Practice of Marriage in Late-Medieval Wales', in Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen, eds., *The Welsh Law of Women* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1980), pp. 93–114.

Davies, Sioned, *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi – Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1993).

-----, 'Storytelling in Medieval Wales', *Oral Tradition*, 7:2 (1992), 231–57.

-----, 'Written Text as Performance: The Implications for Middle Welsh Prose Narratives', in H. Pryce, ed., *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 133–148.

Davies, Wendy, 'Land and Power in Early Medieval Wales: O'Donnell Lectures, Delivered in the University of Oxford, 1983,' *Past & Present*, 81 (November 1978), 2–23.

-----, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990).

-----, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* ([Leicester]: Leicester University Press, 1982).

'The DIMEV: An Open-Access, Digital Edition of the *Index of Middle English Verse*: No. 5304', DIMEV.net [online]. Available: <http://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=5304> <accessed 3 June 2017>.

Doane, A.N., 'The Ethnography of Scribal Writing and Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Scribe as Performer', *Oral Tradition*, 9 (1994), 420–439.

Doble, G.H. *S. Keyne and the Children of Brychan in Cornwall*, Cornish Saints Series 25 (Exeter: Sydney Lee, 1930).

Donovan, Leslie A., *Women Saints' Lives in Old English Prose* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999).

Dumville, David N., 'Frivolity and Reform in the Church: The Irish Experience, 1066–1166', *Studies in Church History*, 48 (2012), 47–64.

Dunn, Caroline, *Stolen Women in Medieval England: Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Dyer, Christopher, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The People of Britain 850–1520* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

Ellis, Peter Berresford, *Celtic Women: Women in Celtic Society and Literature* (London: Constable, 1995).

Ellis, Thomas Peter, 'Legal References, Terms and Conceptions in the "Mabinogion"', *Y Cymmrodor*, 39 (1928), 86–148.

-----, *Welsh Tribal Law and Custom in the Middle Ages*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926).

The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore, ed. Patricia Monaghan (New York: Facts on File, 2004).

Ennen, Edith, *The Medieval Woman*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

Ferrante, Joan M., 'Male Fantasy and Female Reality in Courtly Literature', *Women's Studies* 11:1 (1984), 67–97.

-----, 'Public Postures and Private Maneuvers: Roles Medieval Women Play', in Mary Carpenter and Maryanne Kowalesk, eds., *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1988), 213–229.

-----, *To the Glory of her Sex Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

-----, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature: From the Twelfth Century to Dante* (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1985).

Fisher, Matthew *Scribal Authorship and the Writing of History in Medieval England* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2012), pp. 14–58.

Ford, Patrick K., 'Branwen: A Study of the Celtic Affinities', in C.W. Sullivan III., ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp. 99–120.

-----, 'Prolegomena to a Reading of the *Mabinogi*: "Pwyll" and "Manawydan"', in C.W. Sullivan III., ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp. 197–216.

Foster, Michael, 'From Courtesy to Urbanity in Late Medieval England,' *Parergon*, 29, no.1 (2012), 27–46.

Fries, Maureen, 'Feminae Populi: Popular Images of Women in Medieval Literature', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 14:1 (1980), 79–86.

Fulton, Helen, 'The Mabinogi and the Education of Princes in Medieval Wales', in Helen Fulton, ed., *Medieval Celtic Literature* (Dublin, Ireland: Four Courts Press, 2005), pp. 230–247.

Gantz, Jeffrey, 'Thematic Structure in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp. 265–275.

Goldberg, P.J.P., 'Gender Ideologies', in Margaret Schaus, ed., *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 308–311.

Gross, Charles, 'The Medieval Law of Intestacy', *Harvard Law Review*, 18:2 (December 1904), 120–131.

Gruffydd, W.J., *Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion: A Lecture Delivered at the National Museum of Wales on 27 October 1950* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1964).

-----, *Rhiannon: An Inquiry into the Origins of the First and Third Branches of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1953).

A Guide to Welsh Literature, Vol 1, eds. A.O.H. Jarman & Gwilym Rees Hughes (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1992).

Gwyndaf, Robin, *Welsh Folk Tales* (Cardiff: National Museums & Galleries of Wales, 1995).

Guto'r Glyn.net [online]. Available at: <http://www.gutorglyn.net/gutorglyn/index/> <accessed on 11 June 2017>.

Hanawalt, Barbara A., 'Remarriage as an Option for Urban and Rural Widows in Late Medieval England', in Sue Sheridan Walker, ed., *Wife and Widow in Medieval England*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 109–140.

Hanson-Smith, Elisabeth, 'Pwyll Prince of Dyfed: The Narrative Structure', in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp.153–164.

Harper, April, 'The Image of the Female Healer in Western Vernacular Literature of the Middle Ages', *Social History of Medicine*, 24:1 (2011), 108–124, p. 108.

Harris-Stoertz, Fiona, 'Remembering Birth in Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century England', in Elizabeth Cox, Liz Herbert McAvoy and Roberta Magnani, eds., *Reconsidering Gender, Time and Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 45–60.

Harvey, David C. and Rhys Jones, 'Custom and Habit(us): The Meaning of Traditions and Legends in Early Medieval Western Britain', *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, 81:4 (1999), 223–233.

Hatcher, John, 'Women's Work Reconsidered: Gender and Wage Differentiation in Late Medieval England', *Past & Present*, 173 (November 2001), 191–198.

Helmholz, Richard H., 'Canonical Remedies in Medieval Marriage Law: The Contributions of Legal Practice Founding', *University of St. Thomas Law Journal*, 1:1 (2003–2004), 647–655.

-----, 'Married Women's Wills in Later Medieval England', in Sue Sheridan Walker, ed., *Wife and Widow in Medieval England* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 165–182.

Hemming, Jessica, 'Reflections on Rhiannon and the Horse Episodes in "Pwyll"', *Western Folklore*, 57:1 (Winter, 1998), 19–40.

Hennequin, M. Wendy, 'Managing Medieval Misogyny', *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality*, 36:1 (2003), 49–51 [online]. Available at <http://ir.uiowa.edu/mff/vol36/iss1/15/> <accessed on 15 January 2017>.

Henken, Elissa R., 'The Saint as Folk Hero: Biographical Patterning in Welsh Hagiography' in Patrick K. Ford, ed., *Celtic Folklore and Christianity* (Santa Barbara, CA: McNally and Loftin 1983), pp. 58–74.

-----, *The Welsh Saints: A Study in Patterned Lives*, (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1991).

Howell, Martha, 'Marriage in Medieval Latin Christendom', in Carol Lansing and D. Edwards, eds., *A Companion to the Medieval World* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

Huws, Daniel, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000).

Ireland and Wales in the Middle Ages, eds. Karen Jankulak and Jonathan M. Wooding (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007).

Jackson, Kenneth Hurlstone, *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961).

Jacques, Michela, 'Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid/Bardic Grammars', in Siân Echard and Robert Rouse, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2017), pp. 911–912.

Jaworska-Biskup, Katarzyna, 'The Legal Landscape of Medieval Wales Based on *Cyfraith Hywel*', *Prace Komisji Nauk Filologicznych Oddziału Polskiej Akademii Nauk we Wrocławiu*, 7 (2015), 9–19.

-----, 'The Legal Status of a Woman as Reflected in Medieval Welsh Law', *Acta alters Philological*, 43 (2013), 21–28.

-----'Representation of Punishment in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', in E.M. Selina and Laura Bouttell eds., *Reframing Punishment: Silencing Dehumanization and the Way Forward* (Witney, UK: Interdisciplinary Press, 2013).

Jenkins, D., 'Property Interests in the Classical Welsh Interests of Women', in D. Jenkins and M.E. Owen, eds., *The Welsh Law of Women*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980), pp. 69–92.

Johns, Susan M., *Gender, Nation and Conquest in the High Middle Ages: Nest of Deheubarth* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

Johnson, Lizabeth, 'Attitudes Toward Spousal Violence in Medieval Wales', in Aled Jones and Huw Pryce, eds., *Welsh History Review/Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymru*, 24:4 (Dec. 2009), 87–115.

-----, 'Sex and the Single Welshwoman: Prostitution and Concubinage in Late Medieval Wales', *Welsh History Review/Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymru*, 27: 2 (2014), 253–269.

Johnston, Dafydd, *Canu Maswedd yr Oesoedd Canol: Medieval Welsh Erotic Poetry* (Bridgend, Poetry Wales, Ltd., 1991, 1998).

-----, 'The Manuscript Tradition', Dafydd ap Gwilym.net [online]. Available: <http://www.dafyddapgwilym.net/> <accessed 10 May 2017>

Jones, Gwyn, 'Early Prose: The Mabinogi', in A.O.H. Jarman and Gwilym Rees Hughes, eds., *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, Vol. 1 (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1976), pp. 189–202.

-----*Stories from Wales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955).

Jones, T. Gwynn, *Welsh Folklore and Folk-Custom* (Totowa, New Jersey: D.S. Brewer, 1930, 1979).

Jones, R.M., 'Narrative Structure in Medieval Wales Prose Tales', in D. Ellis Evans, John G. Griffith, and E.M. Jope, *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Celtic Studies Oxford 1983* (Oxford: D.E. Evans, 1986), 171–98.

Karras, Ruth Mazo, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (New Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Kelly, Joan, 'Early Feminist Theory and the "Querelle Des Femmes", 1400–1789', *Signs*, 8:1 (Autumn 1982), 4–28.

Lawne, Penny, *Joan of Kent: The First Princess of Wales* (Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2015).

Legend and Landscape of Wales: The Mabinogi, trans. John K. Bollard (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 2006).

Lewis, Barry J., 'Opening up the Archives of Welsh Poetry: Welshness and Englishness during the Hundred Years War' [online]. Available at: <http://www.wales.ac.uk/Resources/Documents/Research/OpeningArchivesWelshPoetry.pdf> <accessed 15 January 2017>.

Lewis, Ceri W., 'The Content of Poetry and the Crisis in the Bardic Tradition', in A.O.H. Jarman and Gwilym Rees Hughes, *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, Vol. 2 (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1979), pp. 88–111.

-----, 'The Court Poets: Their Function, Status and Craft', in A.O.H. Jarman and Gwilym Rees Hughes, eds., *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, Vol. 1 (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1976), pp. 118–156.

Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies, ed. Huw Pryce (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Lloyd, D. Myrddin, 'The Poets of the Princes', in A.O.H. Jarman and Gwilym Rees Hughes, eds., *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, Vol. 1, (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1976), pp. 189–202.

Lloyd-Morgan, Ceridwen, 'Crossing the Borders: Literary Borrowing in Medieval Wales and England', in Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones, eds., *Authority and Subjugation in Writing of Medieval Wales* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), pp. 159–173.

-----, 'Gender and Violence in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', in Bernhard Maier, Stefan Zimmer & Christiane Batke, eds., *150 Jahre "Mabinogion" – Deutsch-Walisische Kulturbeziehungen* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2001), pp. 67–77.

-----, 'More Written About than Writing? Welsh Women and the Written Word,' in H. Pryce, ed., *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 149–165.

-----, 'Narrative Structure in Peredur', *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 38 (1981), 187–231.

-----, 'The "Querelle des Femmes": A Continuing Tradition in Welsh Women's Literature', in J. Wogan-Browne, R. Voaden, A. Diamond, A. Hutchison, C. Meale, L. Johnson, eds., *Medieval Women – Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain* (Turnhout: Brepols Pub., 2000), pp. 101–114.

-----, 'Triadic Structures in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *The Journal of the Traditional Cosmology Society*, 5:1 (1988), 3–11.

-----, 'Women and Their Poetry in Medieval Wales', in Carol M. Meale, ed., *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 183 – 201.

Lucas, Angela M., *Women in the Middle Ages: Religion, Marriage and Letters* (Sussex: Harvester Press, Ltd., 1983).

The Mabinogion, trans. S. Davies (Oxford: Oxford's World Classics, 2007).

The Mabinogi, A Books of Essays, ed., C.W. Sullivan, III. (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015).

The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales, trans. and ed. P. Ford (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977).

Mac Cana, Proinsias, *Branwen Daughter of Llŷr: A Study of the Irish Affinities and of the Composition of the 2nd Branch of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1958).

-----, *Celtic Mythology* (Rushden: Newnes Books, 1968, 1983).

-----, *The Mabinogi* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992).

Matonis, A.T.E., 'The Welsh Bardic Grammars and the Western Grammatical Tradition', *Modern Philology*, 79:2 (Nov. 1981), 121-145.

Matrons and Marginal Women in Medieval Society, eds., Robert R. Edwards and Vickie Ziegler (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995).

Matter, E. Ann, 'Women and the Study of Medieval Christianity', *Medieval Feminist Newsletter*, 19:1 (1995), 16-17.

McAll, Christopher, 'The Normal Paradigms of a Woman's Life in the Irish and Welsh Texts', in Dafydd Jenkins, and Owen E. Morfydd, eds., *The Welsh Law of Women* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980), pp. 7-22.

McCash, June Hall, 'The Role of Women in the Rise of the Vernacular', *Comparative Literature*, 60:1 (Winter 2008), 45-57.

McKenna, Catherine A., 'The Theme of Sovereignty in Pwyll', in C.W. Sullivan, III., ed., *The Mabinogi, A Books of Essays* (New York: Garland Pub., 1996, 2015), pp. 277-302.

Medieval Domesticity Home, Housing and Household in Medieval England, eds. Maryanne Kowaleski and P.J.P. Goldberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Medieval Virginites, eds., Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salin (Toronto: Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 56–79.

Medieval Welsh Poems: An Anthology, trans. Richard Loomis and Dafydd Johnston (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992).

Medieval Women in Their Communities, ed. Diane Watt (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1997).

Middle English Legends of Women Saints, ed. Sherry L. Reames (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Pubs., 2003) [online]. Available at <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/reames-middle-english-legends-of-women-saints> <accessed 25 September 2016>.

Murray, Jacqueline, 'Femininity and Masculinity', in Margaret Schaus, ed., *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 284–287.

National Library of Wales, 'A Middle English Miscellany. Reference: Brogyntyn MS ii.1', Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru-The National Library of Wales [online]. Available: <https://www.llgc.org.uk/en/discover/digital-gallery/manuscripts/the-middle-ages/a-middle-english-miscellany/> <accessed 3 June 2017>.

-----, 'Dictionary of Welsh Biography [online]. Available at <http://yba.llgc.org.uk/en/index.html> <accessed 10 May 2017>.

New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: The Holy Women of Liège and their Impact, eds. J. Dor, L. Johnson, and J. Wogan-Browne, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts*, 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999).

Nicholls, Jonathan, *The Matter of Courtesy: Medieval Courtesy Books and the Gawain-Poet* (Dover, New Hampshire, D.S. Brewer, 1985).

Niebrzydowski, Sue, *Bonoure and Buxum: A Study of Wives in Late Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006).

Nolan, Barbara 'Reviewed Work(s): Clean Maids, True Wives, Steadfast Widows: Chaucer's Women and Medieval Codes of Conduct by Margaret Hallissy', *Speculum*, 70: 3 (July 1995), 627–629.

O'Pry-Reynolds, Anita Kay, 'Men and Women as Represented in Medieval Literature and Society', *Saber and Scroll*, 2:2 (2013), 37–45.

Owen, Morfydd E., 'Functional Prose: Religion, Science, Grammar, Law', in A.O.H. Jarman and Gwilym Rees Hughes, eds., *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, Vol. 1 (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1976), pp. 248–275.

-----, 'Shame and Reparation: Women's Place in the Kin', in Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen, eds., *The Welsh Law of Women* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980), pp. 40–68.

Owen, Trefor M., *Welsh Folk Customs* (Cardiff: Museum of Welsh Life, 1974).

The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse in English, ed. Gwyn Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

'Oxford Dictionary of English', Oxford Reference [online]. Available: <http://www.oxfordreference.com> <accessed 3 July 2017>.

'Oxford Dictionary of National Biography' [online]. Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com> <accessed 5 January 2017>.

Parkin, Sally, 'Witchcraft, Women's Honour and Customary Law in Early Modern Wales', *Social History*, 31:3 (August 2006), 295–318.

Parry-Jones, D., *Welsh Legends and Fairy Lore* (London: Barnes & Noble, 1997).

Patterson, Nerys W., 'Honour and Shame in Medieval Welsh Society: A Study of the Role of Burlesque in the Welsh Laws', *Studia Celtica*, 16 (1 Jan. 1981), 73–103.

-----, 'Woman as Vassal: Gender Symmetry in Medieval Wales', in *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 8 (1988), 31–45.

Power, Eileen and M.M. Postan, *Medieval Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

Pryce, Huw, 'Early Irish Canons and Medieval Welsh Law', *Peritia*, 5 (1986), 107–127.

-----, 'Lawbooks and Literacy in Medieval Wales', *Speculum*, 75:1 (Jan. 2000), 29–67.

-----, *Native Law and the Church in Medieval Wales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

The Representation of Women's Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Culture, ed. Lisa Perfetti (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).

Reynolds, S. Rhian, *A Bibliography of Welsh Literature in English Translation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004).

Richards, Gwennyth, 'Medieval Welsh Noblewomen: The Case of Margaret of Bromfield', *Eras Journal*, 3 (2002) [online]. Available at: <http://arts.monash.edu.au/publications/eras/edition-3/richards.php> <accessed 15 January 2017>.

-----, *Welsh Nobelwomen in the Thirteenth Century* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009).

Roberts, Brynley F., *Studies on Middle Welsh Literature*, Vol. 5 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992).

Roberts, Sara Elin, "'By the Authority of the Devil": The Operation of Welsh and English Law in Medieval Wales', in Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones, eds., *Authority and Subjugation in Writing of Medieval Wales* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 85–97.

-----, 'Emerging from the Bushes: The Welsh Law of Women in the Legal Triad', in Joseph F. Eska ed., *Law, Literature and Society, CSANA Yearbook*, 7 (2008), pp. 58–76.

-----, *The Legal Triads of Medieval Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011).

-----, 'More Plaints in Medieval Welsh Law', *Studia Celtica*, XLVIII (2014), 171–199.

-----, 'Plaints in Mediaeval Welsh Law', *The Journal of Celtic Studies*, 4 (2004), 219–261,

-----, 'Seeking the Middle-Aged Woman in Medieval Wales', in Sue Niebrzydowski, ed., *Middle-Aged Women in the Middle Ages*, (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 25–36.

Roderick, A.J., 'Marriage and Politics in Wales, 1066–1282', *Welsh History Review Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymru*, 4:1 (June 1968), 3–20.

Rogers, Katharine M., *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966).

The Role of Women in Middle Ages, Papers of the Sixth Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, State University of New York, Binghamton, 6–7 May 1972, in Rosmarie Thee Morewedge, ed., (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975).

Rosenthal, Joel T., 'Anglo-Saxon Attitudes: Men's Sources, Women's History', in Joel T. Rosenthal, ed., *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990), pp. 259–284.

Ross, Anne, *Folklore of Wales* (Charleston, SC: Tempus Publishing, 2001).

Salih, Sarah, 'Virginity', in Margaret C. Schaus, ed., *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Schulenburg, Jane Tibbetts, *Forgetful of their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society ca. 500–1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998).

-----, 'Saints' Lives as a Source for the History of Women, 500–1100', in Joel T. Rosenthal, ed., *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990), pp. 285–320.

Seeing and Knowing: Women and Learning in Medieval Europe 1200–1550, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004).

Segol, Marla and Llan Mitchell-Smith, 'Gendered Action in Medieval Narrative, History, and Art', *MFF*, 45:2 (2009), 7–11. Available at: <http://ir.uiowa.edu/mff/vol45/iss2/> <accessed 27 September 2016 >.

Shahar, Shulamith, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1983).

Shepherd, G.T., 'The Emancipation of Story in the Twelfth Century', in *Medieval Narrative: A Symposium* (Odense: Odense University, 1979), pp. 44–57.

Sikes, Wart, *British Goblins, Welsh Folk-Lore, Fairy Mythology, Legends and Traditions* (London: E. P. Publishing, 1880, 1973).

----- 'The Evidence for Vernacular Irish Literary Influence on Early Medieval Welsh Literature', in Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamond McKitterick and David Dumville, eds., *Ireland in Medieval Europe*, (Cambridge, University of Cambridge, 1982), pp. 248–55.

Sims-Williams, Patrick, *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Smith, J.B., 'Dower in Thirteenth-Century Wales: A Grant of the Commote on Anhuniog, 1273', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 30 (1983), 348–355.

Smith, Llinos Beverley, 'Towards a History of Women in Late Medieval Wales', in Michael Roberts and Simone Clarke, eds., *Women and Gender in Early Modern Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000).

Stacey, Robin Chapman, 'Divorce, Medieval Welsh Style', *Speculum* 77: 4 (October 2002), 1107–1127.

-----, 'Wales', in Margaret Schaus ed., *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 826–827.

Stephenson, David, *Political Power in Medieval Gwynedd: Governance and the Welsh Princes* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1984, 2014).

Stuard, Susan Mosher, 'A Swift Coming of Age: History of Medieval Women', *Journal of Women's History*, 8:3 (Fall 1996), 228–241.

Stuber, Leann, 'The Contradiction of Masculinity in the Middle Ages', *The Delta*, 3:1 (2008), 5–23.

Suggett, Richard, 'Witchcraft Dynamics in Early Modern Wales', in M. Roberts and S. Clark, eds., *Women and Gender in Early Modern Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press).

Sullivan, C.W., 'Inheritance and Lordship in Math', in C.W. Sullivan, III., ed., *The Mabinogion, A Book of Essays* (New York, Garland Pub., 1996, 2015), pp. 347–366.

Thomas, Patrick, *A Candle in the Darkness: Celtic Spirituality from Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1993).

Thompson, Stith, *The Folktale* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946, 1977).

Thornton, David E., 'Communities and Kinship', in Pauline Safford, ed., *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland c. 500–1100* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), available at www.amazon.com <Accessed: 23 August 2017>.

-----, 'Localities', in Pauline Safford, ed., *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland, c. 500–1100* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) available at www.amazon.com <Accessed: 3rd January 2017>.

- Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain*, ed. Rachel Bromwich (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1961, 2014).
- Valente, Roberta L., 'Gwydion and Aranrhod: Crossing the Borders of Gender in Math', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 35 (1988), 1–9.
- Van der Lugt, Maaïke, 'Sex Difference in Medieval Theology and Canon Law: A Tribute to Joan Cadden', *MFF*, 46:1 (2010), 101–121. Available at: <http://ir.uiowa.edu/mff/vol46/iss1/> <accessed 27 September 2016>.
- Van Houts, Elisabeth Marie, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe, 900–1200* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).
- Victory, Siân, *The Celtic Church in Wales* (London: SPCK, 1977).
- Virgin Lives and Holy Deaths: Two Exemplary Biographies for Anglo-Norman Women: The Life of St. Catherine: The Life of St. Lawrence*, trans. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Glyn S. Burgess (London: Charles Tuttle, 1996).
- Waddell, John, *Archaeology and Celtic Myth: An Exploration* (Dublin, Ireland: Four Courts Press, 2014).
- Wade-Evans, A.W., *Welsh Medieval Law* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1909).
- Ward, Jennifer C., *English Nobelwomen in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Longman, 1992).
- , *Women in Medieval Europe, 1200–1500* (London: Routledge, 2002, 2014).
- Welsh, Andrew, 'Branwen, Beowulf, and the Tragic Peaceweaver Tale', *Viator*, 22 (1991), 1–14,
- , 'Doubling and Incest in the Mabinogi', *Speculum*, 65: 2 (1990), 344–362.
- , 'Manawydan fab Llŷr: Wales, England and the "New Man"', in C.W. Sullivan, III., ed., *The Mabinogi, A Books of Essays*, (New York: Garland Pub., 1996, 2015), pp. 121–144.
- , 'The Traditional Narrative Motifs of *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 15 (1988), 51–62.
- The Welsh Law of Women*, eds. Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980).
- Welsh Verse*, trans. Tony Conran (Mid Glamorgan: Poetry Wales Press, 1986).
- Welsh Women's Poetry 1460–2001: An Anthology*, eds. Katie Gramich and Catherine Brennan (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2003).

- The White Book of Rhydderch* [online]. Available at: <http://www.llgc.org.uk> <accessed 27 September 2016>.
- Wife and Widow in Medieval England*, ed. Sue Sheridan Walker (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993).
- Williams, G. J. and Evan John Jones, *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid. Casglwd a Golygwyd Gan* (Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru: Caerdydd, 1934).
- Williams, Glanmor, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1962).
- Williams, J.E. Caerwyn, *The Poets of the Welsh Princes* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994).
- Williams, Marty Newman and Anne Echols, *Between Pit and Pedestal: Women in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Pub., 1994).
- Winstead, Karen A., *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).
- Winward, Fiona, 'Some Aspects of the Women in *The Four Branches*', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 34 (1997), 77–106.
- Wogan-Browne, Jocelyn, 'Saints' Lives and the Female Reader', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 27:4 (1991), 314–332.
- , *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture, 1150–1300: Virginity and its Authorizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- Women, Agency and the Law, 1300–1700*, eds. Bronach Kane and Fiona Williamson (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013).
- Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Margaret Schaus (New York: Routledge, 2006).
- Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, 2002).
- Women in England, c. 1275–1525: Documentary Sources*, trans. & ed. P.J.P. Goldberg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).
- Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987).
- Woman is a Worthy Wight: Women in English Society c. 1200–1500*, ed. P.J.P. Goldberg (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton, 1992).

Wood, Juliette, 'The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature', in C.W. Sullivan III, ed., *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2015), pp. 61–78.

A World of Stories: Traditional Tales for Children, eds. Raymond E. Jones and Jon C. Stott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Young Medieval Women, eds. Katherine J. Lewis, Noel James Menuge and Kim M. Phillips (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

Youngs, Deborah, 'For the Preferment of Their Marriage and Bringing Upp in Their Youth': The Education and Training of Young Welshwomen, c. 1450–c. 1550', in *The Welsh History Review: Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymru*, 25:4 (2011), 463–485.

-----, 'She Hym Fresshely Followed and Pursued' Women and Star Chamber in Early Tutor Wales', in Kane, Bronach and Fiona Williamson, eds., *Women, Agency and the Law, 1300–1700* (London: Routledge, 2013, 2016), pp. 73–85.

-----, 'The Townswomen of Wales: Singlewomen, Work and Service, c. 1300–c.1550', in Helen Fulton, ed., *Urban Culture in Medieval Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), pp.163–182,