

# The Mabinogi of Pwyll

Translated by Will Parker

Introductory notes for this branch can be found at [www.mabinogion.info/pwyll.htm](http://www.mabinogion.info/pwyll.htm).

## I

*Pwyll Pendeuic Dyfed* was lord of the seven cantref[s]<sup>[1]</sup> of Dyfed. Once upon a time he was at Arberth<sup>[2]</sup>, a chief court of his, and he was seized by the thought and the desire to go hunting. The part of his country in which he wished to hunt was Glyn Cuch<sup>[3]</sup>. He set out that evening from Arberth, coming as far Pen Llwyn Diarwya, and there he spent the night.

The next morning, in the young of the day, he arose and came to Glyn Cuch to let loose his dogs beneath the wood. He sounded his horn and he began to muster the hunt, chasing after the dogs and becoming separated from his companions<sup>[4]</sup>.

As he listened out for the cry of the pack he heard the cry of another pack, with a different bark, coming to meet his own. He could see a clearing in the wood, like a smooth field, and as his pack was reaching the edge of the clearing, he could see a stag at the head of the other pack. And in the middle of the clearing, there was the pack catching it up and bringing it to ground.

Then he caught sight of the colour of the pack, barely noticing the stag itself. Of all the hunting dogs he had seen in this world, he had never seen dogs the same colour as those. The colouring they had was a dazzling bright white and with red ears<sup>[5]</sup>. As bright was the dazzling whiteness as the brightness of the red.

At that he came up to the dogs and drove off the pack which had killed the stag, and [let] his own dogs feed on the stag instead.

While he was busy feeding his dogs like this, he could see a horseman coming after the pack on a huge, dapple-grey horse; with a hunting-horn around his neck and a garment of brownish grey material around him as a hunting smock. The horsemen approached him thereupon, speaking to him thus:

'Chieftain<sup>[6]</sup>,' he said 'I know who you are, but greet you I will not.'

'Aye,' said Pwyll 'perhaps you are so important you don't have to?'

'God knows' he replied 'its not the dignity of my rank that's restraining me'

'What is it then, Chieftain?'

'Between me and God, its your rudeness and discourtesy.'

'Chieftain, what discourtesies have I committed in your eyes?'

*'I've never seen a greater discourtesy by a man than driving off a pack which has killed a stag, and [then] feeding your own dogs on it. That' said he 'was the discourtesy, and though I won't be revenging myself on you, between me and God, I will be claiming dishonour from you to the value of a hundred stags. [7]*

*'Chieftain, if I've committed an offence, I will redeem your friendship.'*

*'In what form will you redeem it?'*

*'As appropriate to your rank - I don't know who you are...'*

*'A crowned king am I in the land I am from.'*

*'Lord,' said Pwyll 'good day to you. Which land is it that you are from?'*

*'From Annwyn. Arawn[8] king of Annwfn am I.'*

*'Lord, how might I obtain your friendship?'*

*'This is how you might obtain it: there is a man whose kingdom borders on my kingdom, who is constantly at war with me. He is Hafgan king of Annwfn. The removal of this oppression from me - which you can do easily - will win you my friendship.'*

*'For my part I would do that gladly. Tell me by what means I can do that.'*

*'I'll tell you. You can do it like this: I will make a strong bond of friendship with you. I'll do that by giving you my place in Annwfn, and I'll give you the most beautiful woman you have ever seen to sleep with every night, and my form and appearance will be upon you so that neither the chamber-boy nor the steward nor anybody else that has ever served me will know that you are not I. And,' he continued 'it will be that way until the end of a year from tomorrow, and we'll meet again at this very place. [9]*

*'Aye,' he responded 'although I'm going to be there until the end of the year, what advice do I have about finding this man that you speak of?'*

*'A year from tonight,' said [Arawn] 'there is a meeting between him and myself at the ford. You will be there in my guise, and a single blow you must give him: he will not survive it. And even if he asks you to give him another, you mustn't. For despite any more [blows] I [ever] gave him, he was always able to fight back just as well the next day. [10]*

*'Aye,' said Pwyll 'but what am I to do with my country?'*

*'I can bring it about that there will not be a man or a woman in your country who will not know that I am not you: I will go in your place. [11]*

*'Very well,' said Pwyll 'I will be on my way.'*

*'Unimpeded will be your path, and nothing will get in your way until you reach my country: I will guide you to it.'*

*He guided him on his way until he could see the court and the out-houses. 'There' he said 'the court and the country under your rule. Go to the court: there won't be anyone there who doesn't recognise you; and as you watch the service therein, you will learn the manners of the court.'*

*He approached the court, and in the court he could see sleeping quarters, halls, chambers with the most beautiful decoration on the buildings anyone had ever seen[12]. He went into the hall to pull off his boots. Retainers and servant-boys came up to pull off his boots, and everyone greeted him as they approached. Two knights removed his hunting-garb from around him, and clothed him in a garment of gold brocaded silk[13]. The hall was prepared. [Then] lo and behold - he saw the household and hostings coming inside - the most exalted and refined host anyone had ever seen. And behind them the queen - the most beautiful woman anyone had ever seen - a garment of shining gold brocaded silk was around her. At that they went to wash, and made for the tables and sat down in the following way: the queen on one side of him and the earl (as he supposed) on the other. And he began a conversation with the queen. From talking to her he could see that she was the most unassuming woman her had ever [met], and the most genteel in her manner and conversation. They passed the time with food and drink, singing and carousing. Of all the courts he had ever seen on this earth, here was the best with food and drink and gold vessels and royal jewels.*

*Time came for them to go to bed - and to bed they went, himself and the queen. The moment they got into to the bed, he turned his face to the side, with his back towards her. From then until the next day, he didn't say a single word to her. The next day there was tenderness and affectionate conversation between them. [But] whatever fondness there might have been between them during the day, there was not a single night that wasn't like the first[14].*

*He passed the year in hunting, singing, dancing, friendship and conversation with his companions until the night that the engagement was [to be]. The date of that night came as clearly to the memory of the farthest man in the land as it did to he himself. He went to the appointment, along with the nobles of the country. As soon as he came to the ford, a horseman rode up and spoke thus:*

*'Good men,' said he 'listen well. Between [these] two kings is this appointment, and that between their two persons [only]. Each one is a claimant against the other, over issues of land and territory. May all [the rest] of you stand back, and let [the fight] be between them [alone].'*

*At that the two kings closed in on one another to the middle of the ford for their encounter. At the first onslaught the king who was in the place of Arawn[15] struck Hafgan in the middle of the boss of his shield, so it split in two halves and all his armour was broken and Hafgan was a spear-and-arms length over the back of his horse and onto the ground, with a mortal wound upon him.*

*'Chieftain,' said Hafgan 'what right have you to my death?[16] I was not bringing any claim against you, I do not know why you are killing me either; but by God', he said 'since you have begun my death, finish it [now]!'*

*'Chieftain,' he replied 'it may be that I would regret doing what I did to you[17]. Find someone [else] to kill you; [but] I will not kill you.'[18]*

*'My faithful peers,' said Hafgan 'carry me away from here. The conclusion of my death is truly upon me. I am in no condition to uphold you any more.'*

*'Peers of mine' said the man who was in the place of Arawn 'take a reckoning<sup>[19]</sup>, and find out those [out there] who owe me allegiance.'*

*'Lord, everybody owes you [allegiance], as there is [now] no other king in the whole of Annwfn but yourself.'*

*'Aye' said he '[for those] who come in peace, the reception will be just. Whoever does not come compliantly, let them be impelled by force of arms.' Then he took homage from the men, and began to take possession of the land, and by noon the next day both the two kingdoms were in his power. At that he made for his meeting place and came to Glyn Cuch. When he got there Arawn was awaiting him. Each greeted the other.*

*'Well,' said Arawn 'God repay you for your friendship. I have heard all about it.'*

*'Aye' he replied 'when you come yourself to your country you will see what I have done for you.'*

*'Whatever you have done for me, may God repay you.'*

*Arawn then gave Pwyll Penduic Dyuet [back] his own form and his appearance, while he for his part took back his own form and appearance. Arawn went towards his court in Annwfn and rejoiced on seeing his host and his household, having not seen them for [such] a long time. They, however, knew nothing of his absence and were no more surprised at his arrival than before. He passed that day with cheerfulness and merriment, sitting talking to his wife and his noblemen. When it became more timely to sleep than to carouse, [off] they went to bed.*

*He made for the bed, and his wife came with him. The first thing he did was talk with his wife and join in sensual pleasure and love-making with her. She had not been used to that for a year, and that is what she thought. 'O God,' she wondered 'what is the different mind that is in him tonight, [so different] from that which has been in him for the last year?' She lay in thought for a long time. After that, he woke up and tried speaking to her once, twice, and a third time. No answer could he get from her.*

*'Why won't you speak to me?'*

*'I tell you,' she replied 'for a year I have not spoken even so much anywhere like this.'*

*'Why,' said he 'we've been talking all the time.'*

*'Shame on me,' she replied '[but] for the last year, from whenever we were enfolded in bed clothes there has been no affection, no conversation, nor you even turning your face towards me: let alone anything other than which might have happened between us.'*

*Then he began thinking. 'Lord God,' he said to himself 'a uniquely strong and unwavering friend is the one with whom I have made [this] friendship.'*

*He then spoke to his wife: 'Lady,' he said 'You mustn't blame me. Between me and God, I haven't slept with you for a year since last night, nor have I laid down [here].' And he told her the whole story.*

*'By my confession to God,' said she 'a strong hold you have on your friend, for warding off bodily temptation, and keeping faith with you.'*

*'That was what I was thinking while I was silent with you.'*

*'No wonder,' she replied. [\[20\]](#)*

*As for Pwyll Pendevic, he came to his country and his lands and began asking the noblemen of his realm how his lordship had been for the last year, compared to what it had been before.*

*'Lord,' said they 'never was your knowledge so good, never was there a more likable fellow than yourself, never were you so free in spending your goods and never was your ruling better than during this year.'*

*'Between myself and God,' he replied 'it would be better for you to thank the man who [really] was with you [last year]. Here is the story, even as it was.' And Pwyll told it all to them.*

*'Aye, Lord,' said they 'thank God for giving you that friendship. And the lordship we had that year, I'm sure you won't take that away from us.'*

*'I will not take it away, between me and God'*

*And thenceforth a strong friendship began between them, each giving the other horses, greyhounds, hawks and any other kind of treasure he thought might be pleasing to the mind of his fellow [\[21\]](#). And because of his sojourn that year in Annwfn, and his kingship [which had been] so prosperous there, and the forging of two kingdoms into one through his resilience and his fighting-power: the name 'Pwyll Pendevic Dyfed' fell out of use and he became known as 'Pwyll Pen Annwfn' from then on.*

## II

*Once upon a time*<sup>[22]</sup> he [i.e. Pwyll] was in Arbeth, a chief court of his, with a feast laid out and great hosts of men all around him. After the first course, Pwyll got up to go for a walk and made for the top of a mound which was above the court and was called Gorsedd Arbeth.

'Lord', said one of the court 'it is a peculiarity of the mound that whatever high-born man might sit upon it, he will not go away without one of two things: either wounds or blows, or his witnessing a marvel.'<sup>[23]</sup>

'I have no fear of wounds or blows in the midst of this host. A marvel, however, I would be glad to see. I will go,' he continued 'and sit on this mound'. And he went to sit on the mound<sup>[24]</sup>.

As they were seated, they could see a woman on a large stately pale-white horse, a garment of shining gold brocaded silk about her, making her way along the track which went past the mound. The horse had an even, leisurely pace<sup>[25]</sup>; and she was drawing level with the mound it seemed to all those who were watching her<sup>[26]</sup>.

'Men' said Pwyll 'is there any of you who recognizes that lady on horseback<sup>[27]</sup> over there?'

'There is not, my Lord,' they replied.

'One [of you] go up to her to find out who she is' he said.

One [man] got up, but when he came onto the road to meet her, she had [already] gone past. He went after her as fast as he was able to on foot, but the greater was his speed, the further away from him she became<sup>[28]</sup>. When he could see that following her was to no avail, he returned to Pwyll and said to him [the following words]:

'Lord, it is no use anyone in the world [trying] to follow her on foot.'

'Aye,' said Pwyll 'go back to the court, and take the fastest horse that you know, and go after her.'

He took the horse and off he went. He got to smooth open country, and he began to set his spurs to the horse; but the more he struck the horse, the further away she became. Yet she still had the same pace with which she had begun. His horse flagged, and when he noticed his horse's slackening pace, he returned to Pwyll.

'Lord,' said he 'it is no use following that Lady over there. I haven't known any horse in the land faster than this one, but [even on this] following her was to no avail.'

'Aye' said Pwyll 'there is some kind of a magical meaning<sup>[29]</sup> to this. Let us go [back] to the court.'

[So] they went [back] to the court, and passed the rest of that day. The next day they arose and that [too] passed until it was the hour to eat. After the first meal [Pwyll spoke thus]:

*'We will go - the company that we were yesterday - to the top of the mound. And you,' he said to one his retainers 'take with you the fastest horse you know in the field.' And that the retainer did. They [then] made for the mound with the horse.*

*And, as they were sitting, they could see the woman on the same horse, with the same apparel about her, coming up the same road.*

*'Look!' said Pwyll 'here comes the lady on horseback[30]. Be ready, boy, to find out who she is.'*

*'Lord, that I'll do gladly.'*

*Thereupon, the lady on horseback drew level. The boy then mounted his horse, but before he had [even] settled in the saddle, she had already gone past, and there was a distance between them. Her pace was no different from the day before. He [too] put his pace at an amble, supposing as he did that however slowly his horse went, he might be able to overtake her. But it was no use. He loosed his at the reins, but got no nearer than if he had been on foot; and the more he beat his horse, the further away she became. [Yet] her pace was no greater than before. Since he saw it was useless [trying] to follow her, he returned, coming back to Pwyll.*

*'Lord,' said he 'there is no more this horse can do than what you have seen.'*

*'[So] I saw' replied [Pwyll] 'its pointless anyone pursuing her. But between me and God,' he continued 'she has a message for someone on this plain, if obstinacy would [only] allow her to say it. Let us go back to the court.' [31]*

*They came [back] to the court and spent the evening in song and carousel as they pleased.*

*The next morning, they passed the day until it was the hour to eat. When they had finished the meal Pwyll announced 'Where is that group of us that went up on the mound yesterday and the day before?' [32]*

*'Here [we are], my Lord' said they.*

*'Let us go [then],' said he 'to sit upon the mound. And you' he said to his stable-boy 'saddle my horse well and bring him to the path, and bring my spurs with you.' And that the boy did.*

*They came to sit on the mound. They had hardly been there any time before they caught sight of the lady on horseback, coming along the same path, with the same apparel, at the same pace.*

*'Ah, boy, I can see the lady on horseback coming!' said Pwyll 'Bring me my horse.'*

*Pwyll mounted his horse, and no sooner than he had done so, she had passed him by. He turned after her, and let his lively horse prance at its own pace. He guessed that he would catch her up on the second or third bound. [But] no nearer did he get to her than [any of the times] before. He spurred on the horse as fast as it could go. But he saw it was useless following her [in this way].*

*Then Pwyll spoke: 'Maiden,' he said 'for the sake of the man you love the best, wait for me!'*

*'Gladly I'll wait' said she 'but it might have been better for the horse if you had asked me a good while before.'* [33]

*The maiden stopped and waited and drew aside the part of her headdress that was there to cover her face. She looked him in the eye, initiating conversation with him.*

*'Lady,' he asked 'where are you from? And where are you going?'*

*'Going about my business' said she 'and glad I am to see you.'*

*'And you are also welcome to me,' said he.*

*And he realized at that moment the faces of every woman and girl he had ever seen were dull in comparison to her face.*

*'Lady,' he asked 'can you tell me something of your business?'*

*'Between myself and God I'll tell you,' said she 'my chief business was to try and see you.'*

*'Well,' said Pwyll 'this is the best business you could have come on as far as I'm concerned. And will you tell me who you are?'*

*'I will tell you, my Lord,' she replied 'I am Rhiannon, daughter of Hyfaidd the Old, and I am being given to a man against my will. For my part, I do not wish for the love of any man, because of the love I have for you. I still do not want this [other] man, unless you refuse me. And it is to find out your answer to this that I have come.'* [34]

*'Between myself and God, this is my answer to you' he replied 'If I was given the choice out of all of the women and girls of this world, it is you that I would choose.'*

*'Aye' said she 'if that is your wish, before I am given to another man, make an appointment with me.'*

*'The sooner the better, as far as I'm concerned'* [35], *'said Pwyll 'in whatever place you wish; make the appointment.'*

*'I will make it, Lord, one year from now, at the court of Hyfaidd the Old'* [36] *she replied 'I will order the preparation of a feast ready for your arrival*

*'Gladly' said he 'I will be at that appointment.'*

*'Lord,' she said 'farewell, and remember to keep your promise. I will be on my way.'*

*They parted and he went back to his household and his host. Whatever questions they might have had about the maiden, he would change the subject'* [37].

*After that they passed the year until the [appointed] time, and [then] Pwyll equipped himself as one of a hundred riders. He went over to the court of Hyfaidd Hen. He came to the court and there was joy at his arrival [38]. He was met by a throng and a jubilation, and great preparations were made for his arrival: all the resources of the court were expended*



according to his direction. The hall was prepared, and they went to the tables. This is how they sat: Hyfaidd Hen on one side of Pwyll with Rhiannon on the other, and then everyone according to his rank. And they began to eat, drink and converse.[\[39\]](#)

As they started [their] after-dinner drinking[\[40\]](#), they saw coming inside an auburn-haired youth: tall and of princely demeanour, with a garment of brocaded silk about his person. And when he came to the upper part of the hall he greeted Pwyll and his companions.

'God's welcome to you, my friend' said Pwyll 'come and sit down.'

'I will not [sit down],' said the youth 'I am a petitioner, and I will deliver my request[\[41\]](#).'

'Please do so,' said Pwyll.

'Lord, it is for you I have a request, and to ask you for it I have come.'

'Whatever boon you put to me, as far as I am able to get it, it will be yours.'

'Och!' said Rhiannon 'why do you give such an answer?'

'That is how he has given it, Lady, in the presence of nobles,' said the other[\[42\]](#).

'Friend,' said Pwyll 'what is your boon?'

'You are [about] to sleep with the woman whom I love the most tonight. And it is to ask for her, [along] with the provisions and victuals which are here that I have come.'

Pwyll fell silent, for there was not an answer he could give.

'Be dumb as long as you like,' said Rhiannon 'there was never a man so slow with his wits as you were [just] then.'

'Lady,' he said 'I didn't know who he was.'

'This is the man to whom they wanted to give me against my will,' said she 'Gwawl son of Clud[\[43\]](#), a man rich in hosts and lands. And since you have said the words that you said, you have to give me to him to prevent dishonour.'

'Lady,' said he 'I don't know what kind of answer that is. I could never on my life [do] what you say.'

'Give me to him,' said Rhiannon 'and I will make it so that he can never have me.'

'How will that be?' asked Pwyll.

'I will put a small bag in your hand: keep that with you safely. He is asking for the feast and the provisions and the victuals. But those are not under your sovereignty. I myself gave the feast to the household and the hosts, and that will be your answer regarding that.'[\[44\]](#)

*'As for myself,' she continued 'I will arrange a tryst with him, one year from tonight, to sleep with me [then]. At the end of the year you will be in the orchard up there, with this bag and a hundred horsemen. When he is in the midst of his merriment and carousal, you come inside wearing shabby clothes and with the bag in your hand.'*

*'I will bring it about' said she 'that whatever food and drink from these seven cantrefs[45] is put inside it, it will be no more full than before. [46] And after so much has been thrown in, he will ask if your bag will ever be full. You will say it will not unless a noble lord over many lands should arise and press his feet down on the food in the bag and say "Enough has been placed herein." And I will make him go and step on the food in the bag. And when he goes in, turn the bag over until he goes head over [heels] into the bag. Then tie a knot on the strings of the bag. And let there be a good hunting-horn about your neck. When he is tied up in the bag, give a blast on the horn - it can be a signal from you to your men - when they hear the sound of the horn, they can descend on the court.'*

*'Lord,' said Gwawl 'It is high time I got an answer to my request.'*

*'Whatever you requested,' said Pwyll 'that is under my sovereignty, you can take.'*

*'Friend,' said Rhiannon 'about the food and the provisions here; these I have given to the men of Dyfed and the household and hosts that are here. I cannot all them to be give away to anyone [else]. One year from now, however, a feast will be provided in this court for you, my friend, to [celebrate] sleeping with me.'*

*Gwawl went [back] over to his land. Pwyll, for his part, came [back] to Dyfed. Each passed the rest of the year until it was time for the feast at the Court of Hyfaidd Hen. Gwawl son of Clud came along to the feast had been prepared for him, and made for the court, and there was joy at his arrival. As for Pwyll, the Head of Annwfn, he came to the orchard in a group of a hundred horsemen, just as Rhiannon had commanded him to do, the bag with him. Pwyll had clothed himself in dull rags and put big rag-boots on his feet. [47] When he became aware that the after-dinner drinking had begun he proceeded into the hall, and after he had crossed to the upper part of the hall [48], greeted Gwawl and his company of men and women.*

*'God give well to you!' said Gwawl 'and may the welcome of God be upon you.'*

*'Lord,' he replied 'may God repay you. I am before you with a request [49].'*

*'Your request is welcome,' said he 'and if it is a modest boon which you have to ask of me, then I will gladly grant it.'*

*'[It is] modest, my lord,' he replied 'I ask nothing but relief from starvation. This is the boon I ask: the filling of the little bag you can see with food.'*

*'That is a humble boon,' said the other 'and one which you will get, gladly. Bring him food!' he commanded.*

*A large number of courtiers got up and began to fill the bag. Yet however much they threw in, it was no more full than before.*

*'Friend,' said Gwawl 'will your bag ever be full?'*

*'Between me and God, it will not,' he replied 'however much is put therein - unless a man noble with land, territory and domains gets up and treads with both feet and says "enough has been placed herein". [50]*

*'O hero,' said Rhiannon 'get up right away!'*

*'I'll get up gladly,' he replied.*

*He got up and put his two feet into the bag. Pwyll turned the bag so that Gwawl was head [over heels] in the bag and quickly closing the bag he tied up the strings in a knot and gave a blast on his horn. At that, his household fell on the court and seized everyone from the host that had come with Gwawl, and took each one prisoner. [51] Pwyll threw off his rags, his old boots and the shabby garment in which he had been clad.*

*As each one of his host came inside, each one of them would strike a blow to the bag, and ask: 'What is in the bag?', 'A badger,' the others would reply. [52]*

*They played a game like this: each one striking a blow with his foot and his staff. In such a way they made sport of the bag.*

*As each one came, he would ask 'What game are you playing there?'*

*'Badger-in-the-Bag.' would be the reply.*

*And that was the first time Badger in the Bag was ever played.*

*'Lord,' said the man from the bag 'if you would hear me - this is not a fitting death for me - to be slaughtered in a bag.'*

*'Lord,' said Hyfaidd [to Pwyll] 'He speaks the truth. It is legitimate that you should hear him - that is not a fitting way for [this man] to die. [53]*

*'Aye,' said Pwyll 'I will follow your council about this.'*

*'Here is your counsel:' suggested Rhiannon 'You are now in at a juncture where it is proper to give satisfaction to both petitioners and minstrels. Leave him there to give to all on your behalf,' she continued 'and take guarantees against his making a claim or pursuing revenge. That will be punishment enough for him.'*

*'He will take that gladly,' said the man in the bag.*

*'And gladly I will accept it as well,' replied Pwyll 'by the counsel of Hyfaidd and Rhiannon.'*

*'That is our counsel' they replied.*

*'[In that case] I will accept it,' said Pwyll 'Take [some] guarantors for yourself.'*

*'We will stand on his behalf,' said Hyfaidd 'until his men are free to represent him.'*

*Thereupon he was released from the bag and his top men set free.*

*'Now[you must] take guarantors from Gwawl' said Hyfaidd 'we acknowledge those who should be taken from him.' Hyfaidd then enumerated the [name and rank] of the guarantors.*

*'Formulate the conditions yourself,' said Gwawl 'on your own terms.'* [54]

*'The way Rhiannon formulated [the conditions]' said Pwyll 'is good enough for me.'*

*The guarantors went on those terms.*

*'Aye, Lord,' said Gwawl 'I am injured and have received great wounds, and I need a bath. With your leave, I will be on my way. I will leave some noblemen in my stead who will answer to all who petition you.'* [55]

*'Gladly,' replied Pwyll 'you do that.'*

*And Gwawl went back to his country.*

The hall was then set out for Pwyll, his host, and the host of the court. They came to sit at the tables: and as they had been seated the previous year, so they sat down that evening. They ate and drank, and when the time was right they went off to sleep. Pwyll and Rhiannon went to the chamber, and passed the night in pleasure and satisfaction.

*The following morning, in the young of the day, Rhiannon said to Pwyll:*

*'Lord, get up and begin the indulgence of the minstrels, and don't refuse anyone today what they might desire [of you].'*

*'I'll do that gladly' said Pwyll, 'both today and every other day while this feast still lasts.'*

*Then Pwyll got up and ordered silence for the asking of any petitions the minstrels might have, and granted the satisfaction of each according of them to his will and his fancy* [56]. *And that was done. The feast was consumed and nothing denied while it endured.*

*When the feast was drawing to a close, Pwyll said to Hyfaidd 'Lord, with your blessing, I will be setting off back to Dyfed tomorrow.'*

*'Aye' said Hyfaidd, 'may God smooth your way. Arrange a time after which Rhiannon might follow.'*

*'Between God and myself,' said Pwyll 'it is together that we will travel from here.'*

*'And it is your wish, Lord, [to do it] this way?'*

*'In [just] this way, between God and myself.'* replied Pwyll. [57]

*So they set off for Dyfed, and made for the court of Arbeth, and a feast was laid out for them there. A throng of noblemen and noble women from [throughout] the land and the nation came to them. Neither man nor woman of them left Rhiannon without bestowing upon them [some kind of] special gift: either a broach, a ring, or a stone of great value.* [58]

*They ruled the country prosperously for [the rest of] that year and the next.*

### III

*In the third year the men of the land began to feel a heaviness of spirit, seeing a man [i.e. Pwyll] whom they loved so much as their lord and foster-brother[59] being without an heir. [So] they summoned him to them. The place where they convened was the Precelli [mountains][60] in Dyfed.*

*'Lord,' said they 'we know that you may not be of an age of some men in this land[61], and it is our fear that there may never be an heir [born] to you from that woman who you are with. Take another wife instead, from whom an heir might be born. You will not last for ever,' they continued 'and wish as you may to remain being like this, we will not allow you.'*[62]

*'Aye,' said Pwyll 'it is not long since we have been together, and there are still many chances which may yet befall. Give me respite until the end of the year. We will arrange an appointment to come re-convene a year from this time, and I will place myself before your judgement.' [So] they made the appointment.*

*Before the end of that time arrived, a boy was born to him - and it was in Arbeth that he was born. On the night of his birth, [some] women were brought in to keep watch over the boy and his mother. Now the women dropped off to sleep, along with the mother, and the son of Rhiannon. Six was the number of the women who had been brought to that chamber. They kept watch for part of the night but before the midnight hour every one of them had fallen asleep - only to wake up again towards the cock-crow. As soon as they awoke, they started searching the place where they had left the boy: but nothing was to be found there.*[63]

*'Och,' said one of the women 'the boy is lost for sure.'*

*'Aye,' said another 'we would be lucky to get away with merely being burned or put to death over that boy'*[64].'

*'Is there any way in the world out of this'*[65]?' asked another of the women.

*'There is' said the next 'I can think of a good way out.'*

*'What is that?' asked the others.*

*'There is a female stag-hound [around] here,' she explained 'with puppies. Let's kill one of the puppies, and smear some of its blood on the face of Rhiannon, and each of her hands and leave its bones in front of her, and accuse her of killing the baby herself'*[66]. *Against the word of the six of us, her word alone will not stand'*[67]."

*And that was the plan that was agreed.*

*Towards day, Rhiannon awoke.*

*'Women,' she asked 'where is the boy?'*

*'O Lady,' they replied 'Don't you ask us about the boy. We're nothing but bruises and wounds from struggling with you: it is certain to us that we have never seen such violence in a woman as there was in you (last night), and struggling with you was no use. It was you that destroyed the baby yourself! Don't ask for him from us.'*

*'Oh wretched creatures,' exclaimed Rhiannon 'for the sake of Lord God who knows all things, don't put this falsehood onto me. God who knows all things knows that this is accusation of me is not true. And if you are afraid, by my confession to God, I will protect you.'*

*'God knows,' they replied 'we won't take harm on ourselves for anyone in the world.'*

*'Oh wretched creatures,' said Rhiannon 'you'll come to no harm if you [just] tell the truth.' But despite all she said - fair or wretched - there was but one answer she would get from the women.*

*At that Pwyll Pen Annwfn woke up, with the household and the hostings: and it was not possible to conceal that event. The news spread out round the country, and every one of the noblemen of the land heard [all about] it. The noblemen of the land then converged - petitioning him to cast aside his wife for such a terrible atrocity as the one which she had committed.*

*Pwyll gave the following reply:*

*'There was never any justification for those who asked me to put aside my wife - other than the fact that she was without a child. I know her to have been with child, and I will not cast her aside[68]. If she has committed a crime, let her take penance in return.'*

*For her part, Rhiannon summoned her sages and wise men[69] and, once she had decided that it was fairer to take penance than embroil herself in a quarrel with the women[70], she [went about] taking her penance.*

*The penance that was put on her was as follows: she was to stay at the court of Arbeth for the duration of seven years. There was a mounting-block by the gate. She had to sit beside it every day telling anyone coming by the whole story (of those she supposed did not know it) and offering whichever guest and stranger would allow themselves to be carried, to be carried on her back to the court. But only rarely did anyone allow the carrying. In this way she passed the next part of the year.[71]*

*At that time there was a lord, Teyrnon Twryf Liant, ruling over Gwent-Ys-Coed[72], and the best man in the world was he[73]. At his house [he had] a mare: and throughout his realm there was neither horse nor mare in his realm as beautiful as she. And she would give birth every night at the Calends of May[74] - yet no-one ever knew what became of her foals[75].*

*One night Teyrnon was talking with his wife:*

*'Wife,' he said 'it is careless of us, letting our mare foal every year without our [ever] getting a single one of them.'*

*'What can we do about that?' she asked.*

*'Tonight is the Calends of May,' said he 'The vengeance of God be upon me if I do not find out what misfortune is taking these colts!'*

*He had the mare brought into the house, and he equipped himself with weapons and began his watch for the night.*

*As night was falling, the mare gave birth to a large, perfectly-formed foal: standing up on the spot. Teyrnon got up to admire the sturdiness of the foal. As he was doing this, he could hear a mighty commotion - and, following this commotion there was an enormous claw [reaching] through the window, seizing the colt by its mane. Teyrnon drew a sword and severed the arm from the elbow down - so that the bulk of the arm, together with the colt, [fell off] inside next to him.*

*At that he heard a commotion and a scream (at the same time). He went out of the door in the direction of the commotion. He could not identify [the source of] the commotion as the night was so dark. But he kept up its trail and its pursuit.*

*He remembered that he had left the door open, [so] he returned. And by the door - lo and behold! - a small child in swaddling clothes, wrapped in a sheet of brocaded silk. He picked up the boy, and [noticed] he was strong for his age.*

*He fastened the door, and made for the chamber where his wife was [sleeping].*

*'Lady,' he said 'are you asleep?'*

*'No I'm not, my Lord,' she said 'I was sleeping, and when you came in I woke up.'*

*'Here is a child for you,' he said 'if you want him. That which you have never had.'*

*'Lord,' she exclaimed 'what is the story behind this? [76]'*

*'Well,' said Teyrnon 'it was like this.. [77]'* And he related the entire account.

*'Aye,' said she 'what kind of clothing is the child wearing?'*

*'Brocaded silk,' he replied.*

*'He is the son of gentle-folk...' said she.*

*'Lord,' she continued 'it would be a pleasure and a comfort to me: if it is what you want. I could get the other women on my side, and say that I had been pregnant.'*

*'I'll go along with you on that [78], gladly' he replied.*

*And so it was done. They had the boy baptized, with the baptism that they used to practice in those days [79]. The name he was given was Gwri Golden-Hair [80] - for the hair that was on his head was as yellow as gold.*

*The child was brought up in the court until he was one year old. And before [the end of] his [first] year he was walking steadily, and was stronger than a three-year old boy of the*

*greatest growth and size. And [after] he had been raised for another year, he was as sturdy as a six-year old boy. Before the end of the fourth year, he was striking deals with the stable lads to be allowed to lead [the horses] down to water.*

*'Lord,' said Teyrnon's wife to him [one day] 'where is that foal which you saved on the night we got the boy?'*

*'I put it in the care of the stable boys,' he replied 'and asked them to look after it.'*

*'Would it not be good, my Lord,' said she 'for you to have it broken in, and given to the boy? For the night we got the boy, the foal was born and saved.'* [\[81\]](#)

*'I will not go against that,' replied Teyrnon 'and I will let you do the giving of it to him.'*

*'Lord,' said she 'God re-pay you. I will give it to him.'*

*The horse was given to the boy, and she came to the grooms and the stable boys and commanded them to be careful of the horse, and [to be kept informed of] the news about it*[\[82\]](#)*: for it was to be broken in preparation for the time when the boy would go out on horseback.*

Meanwhile, they heard stories about Rhiannon and her penance. Now Teyrnon Twryf Lliant, because of what he had found out, [began] to listen out for news and continually make inquiries about it - so that he heard more and more complaints from the numerous multitude who had been to the court about how wretched was the fate of Rhiannon and her penance.

This made Teyrnon think and he looked closely at the boy, realising that he had never seen a father and son who had looked more similar in appearance as the boy did to Pwyll Penn Annwfn. He was familiar with Pwyll's appearance as he had been a vassal of his before[\[83\]](#). After that, anxieties entered into [his mind]: [because] of how wrong it was for him to keep the boy when he knew him to be another man's son. When he got the first chance to talk privately with his wife he asked her if it was right that they should keep the boy - that being the cause of such punishment on a noble woman as fine as Rhiannon, as well as the boy being the son of Pwyll Penn Annwfn.

For her part, Teyrnon's wife agreed about sending the boy [back] to Pwyll:

*'And three things, lord,' she said 'we will get in return for doing that: thanks and gratitude for freeing Rhiannon from the penance which she endures, thanks from Pwyll for raising the boy, and the third thing is that if the boy becomes a noble man, he will be our foster-son, and will always do the best he can for us.'*

And that was the course of action they followed.

They left it no later than the following day [before] Teyrnon equipped himself as one of three riders - and the boy as the fourth on the horse Teyrnon had given him. And they set out to Arbeth, and it wasn't long until they had arrived there (they came to Arbeth).

As they came towards the court, they could see Rhiannon sitting beside the mounting block. When they came up to her she said:



'O Chieftain, go no further than that! I will carry every one of you to the court. And that is my penance for killing him who was my own son, and for his destruction.'

'Good woman,' replied Teyrnon 'I don't believe a single one of these will be going on your back.'

'Let him go who wants to,' said the boy 'but I myself will not go'.

'God knows, friend,' said Teyrnon 'we will not go either.'

They made for the court, and there was very great joy at their arrival. [Then] they started on the feast that was in the court. Pwyll himself came [back] from his circuit of Dyfed. They went into the hall and washed. Pwyll welcomed Teyrnon and they went to sit down. This is how they sat: Teyrnon between Pwyll and Rhiannon; the boy between the two companions of Teyrnon above Pwyll.

After the end of the meal, as the drinking began they made conversation. In his conversation, Teyrnon related the whole story about the mare and the boy, and how the boy had been in the charge of himself and his wife, and how they had raised him.

'Behold your son there, lady!' exclaimed Teyrnon 'whoever put [this] falsehood upon you has done you wrong. When I heard of the misery you were in, I thought it wretched and it saddened me. But I believe,' continued Teyrnon 'that there is no-one in the whole of this hosting that would not believe that the boy is [indeed] the son of Pwyll.'

'There is no-one,' said everyone 'who is not sure of that fact.'

'Between myself and God,' said Rhiannon 'if that were true I would be delivered of my care.'

'Lady,' said Pendaran Dyfed 'well did you name that boy "Pryderi" - it suits him best: Pryderi son of Pwyll Pen Annwfyn[84]."

'Let us check,' said Rhiannon 'that his own name doesn't best become him.'

'What is his name?' asked Pendaran Dyfed.

""Gwri Golden Hair" was what we called him.'

""Pryderi" will be his name' said Pendaran Dyfed.[85]

'That is most fitting' said Pwyll 'the boy taking his name from the first word uttered by his mother on hearing the good news about him.'

And so it was decided.

'Teyrnon, God repay you for raising the boy up until this time. It would be right for him, if he grows up a noble man, that he should repay you.'

'Lord,' Teyrnon replied '[don't forget] the woman who reared him: there is no one in the world that will miss him more than she[86]. It would be right for him to remember me and that woman for what we did for him.'

'Between myself and God,' said Pwyll 'as long as I am alive I will maintain you and your people as well as I would my own. If he lives [to adulthood], it is even more appropriate that he should continue maintaining you than I. And if it is your counsel, and that of these nobles, seeing as you have raised him up until now, we will give the boy to Pendaran Dyfed to foster from now on. And [both of] you be as friends and foster-fathers to him.' [87]

'That is good counsel,' all agreed.

[So] the boy was then given to Pendaran Dyfed, and the noblemen of the country allied themselves with him. Teyrnon Twryf Lliant and his companions set off back to his country with friendship and contentment. [Moreover] he did not leave without being offered the most beautiful treasures, the best horses and the most highly-prized dogs. But he did not want anything.

After that they remained in their own lands, and Pryderi son of Pwyll Pen Annwfn was brought up with care, in the right way: so that he became the most faultless, the most handsome and the most accomplished in all noble sports of any in the realm.

In that way, they passed one year after the next[88] until the life of Pwyll Penn Annwfn came to an end and he was dead. And Pryderi ruled the seven cantrefs of Dyfed with prosperity, and in friendship with his countrymen and those around him.

After that, he conquered the three cantrefs of Ystrad Twyi and the four cantrefs of Ceredigion and those seven cantrefs are called Seisyllwch[89]. Pryderi son of Pwyll Penn Annwfn was on that conquest, it came into his mind to take himself a wife. The woman he desired was Cigfa, daughter of Gwynn Gohoyw, son of Gloyw Wallt, son of Casnar Wledic: of the noble ones of this Island[90].

And thus ends here this Branch of the Mabinogion.

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[1] See p. ## n. ##

[2] This significant location has often been identified with *Narbeth* in Southern Pembrokeshire (the site of a thirteenth century fortification), though a more plausible case can perhaps be made for the *Nant Arberth* area (Breeze, p. ###), a few miles east of the modern town of Cardigan. Subsequent episodes confirm Arbeth, whatever its precise location, was the focus for a number of folk-beliefs of magical origin.

[3] The area, a few miles up the Teifi valley from Nant Arbeth is associated (in an earlier tradition) with the pig-herding exploits of Pryderi vab Pwyll: see p##### above

[4] The hero's impulsiveness is emphasised: he sets off as soon as it occurs to him to do so, although it is after nightfall and therefore impractical to begin a journey. Such instinctiveness is important, suggesting as it does that he may be under the control of a subconscious (i.e. Otherworldly) force (see also p.## above).

This opening section conforms to a narrative pattern which was almost certainly already familiar to its contemporary audience. The story-type involved, of which this was the classic *entrée*, is commonly found in the Irish, Welsh and Breton traditions, and was undoubtedly rooted in the pan-Celtic past. Bromwich (1960) described this scenario as *The Chase of the White Stag*. Typically this begins, as above, with an *impulsive desire to hunt* on the part of a young king or hero. In such a way the protagonist is drawn into a wilderness setting: where he becomes separated from his companions; often in pursuit of a strange, magical animal (often an Otherworld being in disguise). Such situations typically preceded a shift of reality into an Otherworld state, or herald a momentous encounter with magical figures involved.

The Chase of the White Stag, as Bromwich points out, was frequently connected to the theme of *sovereignty* as an animistic force underlying the natural world - which, as we will discuss below (p.###-###) - was often personified by shape-shifting female: young and beautiful when the ruling king was at the height of his powers, withered and threadbare when the male consort was either absent or in some way impaired. The tale of *Lugaid Laigde*, ancestor of the ancient Érainn dynasty, rulers of *Mumu* (Munster) recalls the Chase of the White Stag in a form which preserves much of this original pagan signification:

*"It was prophesied that a son of King Dáire Sirchrechtach would gain the kingship of the whole of Ireland. Dáire consults a druid to find out which of his five sons it will be, and the druid replies that a fawn with a golden lustre upon it will come into the assembly and the son who shall capture the fawn shall win the kingship..."*

There and then the golden fawn appears before the company. As they go off in pursuit, a magical mist descends and the sons of Daire become separated from the rest. Each of the brothers in turn encounter a mysterious, hulking old woman. Lugaid Laigde alone accepts the hag's embrace - and thereafter catches the golden fawn and goes on to win the sovereignty of the land. This might be compared with the sovereignty myth of the Ulaid described on p. ### below.

[5] These were the hallmarks of the Otherworldly origins, according to a deeply rooted tradition found throughout the British Isles. The Wild Hunt of Gwyn ap Nudd (p. ### above) included dogs of this kind. The Wild Hunt motif, an expression of the turbulent aspect of the animistic faery world, was itself a deeply rooted and perennial feature of North European folklore. An apprehension of this archetype was clearly being evoked at this juncture.

[6] Following Jones and Jones, P.K Ford, D. S. Thomson et al., I have translated this Welsh proto-feudal title *unben* (GM = 1. dictator, despot ; 2. lord, noblemen, monarch, prince) as 'chieftain'. We might assume this was the default mode of address between unacquainted noblemen in Medieval Wales. Pwyll also addresses Arawn in this way (albeit somewhat sarcastically) until he realises that Arawn is of equal if not greater social rank than himself, after which time he switches to the rather more elevated *arglwydd* ('lord').

[7] The language here is legalistic: *mi a wnafo anglott itt guerth can carw* lit. 'I will be making of dishonour to you the value of a hundred stags'. Pwyll's initial offence was the driving off of another man's pack: a pack which, as we have seen, was clearly 'not of this world'. This error was compounded by his failure to recognise a fellow king and show appropriate respect. Mistakes such as these could be highly dangerous. According to the traditional Celtic socio-legal code, Pwyll was in a compromised position: he had offended a powerful being on the border between their respective domains and was now obliged to recompense the other or risk a destructive enmity between themselves and their regions. The 'hundred stags', the value of which is calculated by the *wynebwerth* 'honour price' of the injured party, see. ###

[8] The name of Arawn may conceivably relate to the River *Aeron* - which rises in uplands of Ceredigion. We might in turn relate this to the River *Arun* in Southern England. Likewise, there are various *Eirean- Aran-* place names throughout the Gaelic world, where an indigenous tribal grouping, the *Erainn* are identified. Lugaid son of Daire, in the Irish variant of the Chase of the White Stag mytheme quoted above, is associated with this people. Arawn might have originally been an eponymous ancestor of this people, whose legend entered the Demetian tradition by the same route as the exile myth of the Deísi discussed in Chapter 4 below (pp. ###-###).

[9] As this point the plot begins to take the form of another stereotyped narrative mytheme, equally familiar throughout the Celtic world. The *Otherworld Sojourn*, as we might call this scenario, could take a number of forms: but always followed the same basic gist: the mortal protagonist is lured to an Otherworldly domain, where they subsequently abide for a period of time. This occurs at the instigation of one or more of the Otherworld beings, and often follows a Chase of the White Stag introduction, or some variant thereof.

The purpose of Pwyll's sojourn in the Indigenous Underworld is to rid Arawn of his 'oppression': the rival king *Hafgan* ('Summer-Bright') with whom he is locked in an ongoing and irreconcilable conflict. A further example of mortal interventions in Otherworldly conflicts of this kind in the Celtic world include Arthur's adjudication of the seasonal dual between Gwynn ap Nudd and Gwerthfyr ap Greidawl for the hand of Creiilydyd, on the Calends of May. In this and other respects, the plot of *The Sickness of CuChulain* and *The Only Jealousy of Emer* follows this First Branch episode even closer: complete with the 'Chase of the White Stag' entrée. This narrative can be summarised thus:

The clan of Ulaid were on the plain of Muirthemne at the feast of Samain. A flock of beautiful birds alight on a nearby lake. CúChulainn is persuaded by the ladies of the court to capture some of these and bring them back as ornamental pets. He rounds them up, two by two, until just a single pair remain, linked by a silver chain. It is this pair he has promised his wife. He attempts to trap these birds but they allude him for a prolonged period of time, until he collapses exhausted by a certain standing stone. Here he is visited by two women of the Sídh, one in red, the other in green. They beat him with horsewhips to the very threshold of his life. He is found by some friends in a comatose state in which he remains for the duration of a year. After this time, he is visited by a stranger who reveals himself as Oengus son of Aed Abrat, [for more about this powerful Otherworld figure see p##, ##]. Oengus recites verses over CúChulainn's unconscious body, promising him a return to health and much more besides if he visits his Otherworld kingdom.

With his companions, CúChulainn returns to the stone at which he suffered his first inauspicious encounter with the Otherworld denizens. The lady in the green cloak returns to meet him. He is assured that they have never sought his harm, but rather his friendship. A certain lady of the Sídh, Fand daughter of Aed Abrat, has been abandoned by her lover, Mannanan mac Lir, and now was desirous of CúChulainn's affection. In return for 'one day's fighting' against certain Otherworld rivals, he would be allowed (and expected) to fulfill a tryst with this lady.

Like Pwyll, CúChulainn finds himself indebted to Otherworld powers as a result of abusing magical animals on a hunting expedition. Like Pwyll also, this encounter carries the appearance of having been contrived and instigated by the Otherworld agency. The measured responses of Arawn (*'I know who you are...'*), the location and timing of their encounter, and its favourable outcome for the Annuvian king suggest that the event was no coincidence. Like CúChulainn, Pwyll was in effect drawn and entrapped by the otherworld powers involved. And both were required to visit Underworld regions where they were obliged to lend their assistance as mortal warriors in the magical protagonists' struggles for power. Interestingly as well, the Irish Manawydan - Manannan mac Lir - features in this same story as the one time spouse of the heroine involved. (As we shall see in subsequent chapters, Pwyll and Manawydan become linked in a similar way).

[10] That the denizens of the Indigenous Underworld should be so in need of the military prowess of mortal warriors is another motif not unfamiliar within the Celtic world and beyond. The well known myth of the aversion of faery-folk to iron is an example of the ambiguous power-relationship between themselves and the mortal world. The Indigenous Underworld, however, while being mysteriously vulnerable in certain respects, was clearly a source of danger when it came to magical initiatives. The trade-off of these respective strengths and weaknesses is a frequent theme in fairy tales and popular magical tales from around the world. It was within this tradition that the narrative of much of the Mabinogi would have been understood.

The narratives produced by animistic belief systems often focus on the acquisition of *power*, in its elemental-magical form. The struggle for possession of this substance of power is typically waged by any variety of means: *trickery* and cunning prevailing as frequently as any other stratagem. In this episode Pwyll is consummately manipulated by the Underworld agent who thereby obtains *his* power, which becomes harnessed to the latter's own agenda in the arena of Annuvian politics. Through an act of impulsive foolishness (significantly, as we shall see, involving the *dog* and the *stag*), the ironically-named Pwyll (see p ##-##) had inadvertently placed himself in a chain of events, which would ultimately result in a mysterious fusion between Dyfed and Annwn.

[11] Again, a motif not unfamiliar within the Celtic world. Perhaps the best known example of shape-shifting of this kind (i.e. the assumption of another's identity) occurs in Geoffrey of Monmouth's account of the covert adultery of Uther Pendragon and Igrn: wherein the father of Arthur, Uther Pendragon, becomes transfixed with lust for Igrn, wife of the Duke of Cornwall (HRB, Bk viii Ch. 20). While laying siege to the latter's castle, he persuaded the magician Merlin to transform his appearance into that of the Cornish lord to enable him to gain entry to the castle and sleep with Igrn. Out of this illicit union the child Arthur is conceived.

[12] *A'r ardu m teccaf a welsei neb o adeiladeu* 'and the most beautiful ornamentation anyone had ever seen of buildings'

[13] Frequently a signifier of Otherworldly and/or aristocratic origins throughout the Medieval Welsh literary tradition. See also p. ###

[14] Although it may have ultimately contributed to the chivalric complex of chastity and feudal honour, the sexual restraint displayed by the mortal protagonist of the Otherworld Sorjourn scenario (in this case Pwyll) should be seen in terms of magical strategy rather than Christian morality or *Amor Courtois* (see pp. ###-### for the full description of this episode in terms of the 'magical narrative'). More sense can be made of this episode by comparing it to a close analogue to be found in the story of *Gawain and the Green Knight*. In the Middle English text in which we have the fullest treatment of this legend, the theme of seduction by an Otherworldly hostess plays an integral role in a mysterious power game between Gawain, a young knight of Arthur's court, and an ambivalent magical figure known as the Green Knight.

The action of this tale begins in Arthur's court at the feast of New Year's eve. A tall, green-skinned knight of impressive girth and bearing enters bearing an enormous axe while they are seated at board. He offers the mysterious challenge: that he would offer one with a 'mettlesome mind' his axe, and a free blow on his person; in return that the other might offer himself in a similar way one year on from then. Gawain, Arthur's nephew, takes up this challenge to the bravery of the court and strikes the stranger with his own axe, severing his head clean from his shoulders. But then, to the horror of all, the Green Knight rises to his feet, picks up his head and with an entreaty that Gawain must fulfill that he promised at the 'Green Chapel' one year hence, the stranger disappeared into the night.

The rest of the story involves a prolonged stay endured by Gawain at the court of the Green Knight in the weeks building up to their ordained encounter. During this time, his host goes hunting on three separate occasions, during which time his wife visits the bed-chamber of the young knight, and attempts to seduce him sexually. At the end of each day, the Green Knight offers Gawain the trophies of his day's hunting, while Gawain in return must provide his host with the fruits of his own exploits. These were restricted to a platonic kiss on the cheek on each occasion. At appointed time, Gawain meets the Green Knight in the Green Chapel, and through his integrity is protected from the full force of the magical warrior's blow.

The so-called 'Temptation Game' was to become a popular scenario in the Medieval Western narrative tradition. The basic scenario involved the hero being tempted by the hostess of a mysterious household in order that her own husband might somehow gain power over him. I have argued below (see p.###) that the origin of this narrative complex was Pwyll I itself, or a closely related British tradition, which was popularised through its inclusion in the Arthurian corpus. What started out as Medieval Welsh tradition relating to the delicate balance of power between Dyfed and the Indigenous Underworld, was transformed, in Gawain and subsequent versions, into a fully blown psychodrama involving an Oedipal conflict between guilt and desire. Many of these later Romances retain certain features (the Chase of the White Stag entrée, the proximity of hunting and sexual metaphors) which would appear to have been inherited from this episode in the First Branch.

[15] Pwyll is referred to consistently in this way throughout this episode: implying perhaps a more profound distortion of personal identity than a shift in physical appearance alone. Further examples of this magical idiom occur throughout the Four Branches.

[16] Interestingly, it would appear that Hafgan realises that Pwyll is not Arawn after this attack. The reason for this is not unclear. The implication would seem to be that by engaging in physical combat, Pwyll's true identity is revealed to his enemy. In the same way, Pwyll's identity is revealed to Arawn's wife by his sexual restraint (see pp. ### below).

[17] *Ef a eill uot yn ediuar gennyf gwneuthur a wneuthum itt* 'It is possible the being regret to me doing what I have done to you'. The exact force of this rather clumsy periphrastic construction is unclear. It would appear Pwyll is referring to the possibility of rather unspecified more long-term consequences to his interventions in Annwfn, rather than explaining why he is unwilling to 'complete' Hafgan's death.

[18] We see here that, rather like the Gawain, Pwyll is able to defeat the Annuvian king by following a prescribed form of behaviour, one that in many ways might seem somewhat counter-intuitive. The *denouement* of this act, as it were, is Pwyll's refusal to finish what he started and give Hafgan the mortal blow. The underlying implication of this act is that had Pwyll given in to his enemy's entreaty, he would have somehow failed to defeat him. Here, the natural laws of the Otherworld seem *diametrically opposed* to those of the mortal world, where destroying an enemy in this way would have been simple common sense. It seems likely that for this kind of Otherworldly warrior such a move might have even resulted in a healing of the latter, or even a comprehensive reversal of their respective positions. So, by following Arawn's magical (i.e. irrational) advice, Pwyll is able to avoid falling foul of this Otherworldly ruse, and assure that the defeat of Hafgan is comprehensive.

[19] *Kymerwch ych kyuarwyd*: *kyfarwydd* is the general term for 'lore' or 'expertise', and is being used here in a legalistic sense

[20] As P.K. Ford points out "it is not the matter of the chastity that interests the author, but the ironic consequences of it. Arawn imagined he [Pwyll] would act out his role fully [which included sleeping with his wife]. When Pwyll abstained from part of the routine, Arawn had some explaining to do."

This would seem the most likely 'magical' explanation for how Pwyll gained the esoteric power which presumably accompanied the title 'Pen Annwfn' (see pp. ###-### for a full discussion of this curious development).

[21] This might be compared with William of Malmesbury's description of the tribute paid by Hywel Dda to Athelstan in ###.

[22] A significant detail, which should be noted at this stage, is the similarity to the opening of the first episode of the First Branch. Both sections begin with the opening formula *a threigylgweith yd oed yn Arbeth. Treigylgwaith*, which I have translated as 'Once upon a time', is a particularly interesting word. Like the English idiom, it is exclusive to a specific form of narrative communication, and contains within it an evocative etymology: compounding to the verbal element *treigliaw*, meaning 'to turn', 'to develop' or 'mutate' with the archaic word *gweith* - usually translated as 'action', 'exertion', or 'time'. As such, *Treigylgweith* is highly suggestive of the *turning point* of a *cycle* of time - a moment of cosmic flux and transformation.

[23] The magical nature of this mound is reinforced by the somewhat double-edged comment from one of his courtiers - explaining that no king can sit on that tumulus without 'one of two things: either his receiving blows or witnessing a marvel (*ryvedawt*)'. There is more to this remark from the sidelines than the relaying of ancient topographical lore. As the medieval Celtic audience would have understood it, this was an implicit challenge to the sacral authority of the kingship of Pwyll. As in parts of the tropical world where the 'Rain Maker' was instated as king and treated as such until the rain ceased to fall when desired (Frazer p.62, 265 etc.), Pwyll is being invited to test the responsiveness of the cosmos to his status as king. The failure to demonstrate his miraculous credentials, as for the primitive Rain-Kings, is a sacrificial death at the hands of his own people. Throughout the First Branch, an implicit suggestion of this regicidal hostility latent within the Demetian court is developed, incrementally. It will be discussed in greater detail below (pp. ## and ##-##).

[24] *Eisted a wnaeth ar yr orssed* lit. 'He did the sitting on the mound'.

[25] This 'even, leisurely pace' is possibly significant: the horse-goddess Epona (see p.# above) is conventionally depicted riding side-saddle on a horse in the *passant* poise: with the single raised hoof of a walking rather than galloping motion. Also of possible interest is the fact that throughout the following section, the significant moment arrives with when the gold-clad, horse-riding lady draws *level* with where they are sitting on the mound (*y uarchoges a doeth gywerbyn ac wynt*). The horse, as seen in Bronze Age iconography and certain Indo-European mythological traditions carried a number of solar associations. The megalithic provenance of a monument such as Gorsedd Arberth can hardly be disputed, and the significance of celestial alignments (both

solar and lunar) within this sacred culture is also incontestable. Putting these considerations together, one cannot help wondering whether the nature of Epona's appearance at the mound of Arberth reflect some memory of megalithic calendrical ritual woven into this medieval myth?

[26] *Ar uryt y neb a'y guelei* lit. 'on the mind of anyone that would see her'

[27] *marchoges* the feminine form of *marchog* 'rider' 'horseman' 'knight'. Jones and Jones simply use 'rider', while P.K. Ford translates it as 'horsewoman'. Ford's rendering is perfectly accurate, and by no means inappropriate considering the atavistic equine affiliations of this figure (see p.###-###). However, to modern English ears 'horsewoman' tends to evoke a rather robust, mannish upper-class female (a 'horsy woman'), so I have used a rather more periphrastic equivalent.

[28] *A fei uwyaf uei y urys ef pellaf uydei hitheu e wrthaw ef* lit. 'should his speed be at its greatest, the farthest might she be from him.'

W. J. Gruffydd points out that this is a well-known motif in the Welsh faery tradition (*Rhiannon* p.50 and notes the story of a Llangatog man who met a fairy on the Black Mountain: '*he hastened his steps thinking he could overtake her, but the faster he ran, the further he found himself behind her.*'

[29] *hud ystyr* 'magical meaning'. For discussion of the word *ystyr* see p. ##

[30] see n. ### above

[31] The structure of this episode appears at first to follow a fairly conventional narrative formula, known by folklorists as the 'Law of Threes'. This dictates that a particular action is carried out three times in succession, with success only being achieved on the last attempt. So familiar is this device that it is used almost universally - in jokes, stories, rhetorical sequences etc., with the effect of priming the audiences' expectations.

In this episode, however, the fact that the situation remained unresolved - even after the third attempt in a series of this kind - is an unusual departure in this kind of narrative format. It is almost something of a 'shaggy dog story' - where the audiences' expectations are primed by the development of a traditional narrative structure which, at the last minute, is deflated and subverted for humorous or ironical purposes.

The author's method at this stage in the narrative is not at all dissimilar to this, although his intentions are altogether different. The purpose of this section is to emphasize the exceptional elusiveness of the objective involved - the identification of and conversation with the mysterious lady on horseback - whose persistent if paradoxical manifestations cry out for explanation. By having our expectations stretched out by this episode out beyond their conventional confines we are intended to share in the sense of frustration expressed by Pwyll in his concluding speech: 'she has a message for somebody on this plain - if her obstinacy would only allow her to say who it is!'

[32] *Mae yr yniuer y buom ni doe ac echtoe ym penn yr orsedd* lit. 'where is the retinue we were yesterday and the day before at the top of the mound?'

[33] This unexpected response emphasises Rhiannon's compassion, as well as her totemistic affiliations

[34] Rhiannon's predicament, and her petitioning of Pwyll to provide its resolution, is again a fairly traditional theme within the Celtic world. As has been already suggested, this Faerie Mistress theme is not dissimilar to the Otherworld conflict scenario endured by Pwyll in the first section of the First Branch. In both cases, the hero typically sojourns in a mysterious land, comes into conflict with Otherworldly enemies - and does so at the instigation of an Otherworld agent. The love-triangle element - clearly present in this case - is also a not unfamiliar ingredient of this variant of the 'Otherworld Sojourn' narrative formula (discussed above on p ##). Nor is the fact that the female protagonist is being delivered into a marriage against her will especially unusual within this literary context. Finally, the existing knowledge exhibited by Rhiannon of her mortal paramour (who, in contrast shows nothing but ignorance of his new acquaintance) is a further feature of a tradition where the Otherworldly lover typically shows signs of having crossed over into the mortal world with the specific aim of meeting the mortal object of her love - about whom the faerie protagonist seems to be mysteriously well-informed.

[35] *Goreu yw gennyf i bo kyntaf* lit. 'It is best with me if it is soonest'

[36] The name *Hyfaidd Hen* ('Hyfaidd the Elder') may be expected to have evoked the Hyfaidd ap Tancoyslt, of the old House of Dyfed (grandfather of Elen). Hyfaidd represented significant link to the independent Demetian dynasty of *Vortiporix*, and through that to Dyfed's indigenous past.

[37] *Y chwedleu ereill y trossei ynteu* lit. 'he would turn to other news'

[38] *llawen uuwyf wrthaw* lit. 'there was joy towards him'

[39] This section has strong echoes of Pwyll's reception at the court of Arawn, in the first part of the First Branch. This is no doubt intentional, like the other structural and lexical similarities which suggest that conscious parallels between the two episodes are in the making. The audience is being invited to compare and contrast the developments and outcomes involved.

In both cases, Pwyll has come at the behest of an Otherworldly agent, on whose behalf he is expected to resolve some kind of tension or duality. Each episode is a variant of that basic Celtic myth, The Otherworld Sojourn: the first being the Otherworld Combat scenario, the second involving the development of a love-triangle situation between a mortal and an Otherworld agent: the classic Otherworld Lover or Faerie Mistress scenario. While in both cases Pwyll temporarily assumes kingship over the Otherworldly courts, there are also significant differences in the attendant circumstances. In the first episode, Pwyll is brought to the court of Arawn in order to compensate for an earlier act of disrespect. He comes alone, in the guise of his host, and executes his obligations wisely and effectively. In the second episode, however, he arrives openly with his own retinue at the court of Hyfaidd Hen, invited thence by the daughter of the house. He assumes a kingly role on the strength of this association (once again, suggesting the status of a sovereignty-bestowing, tutelary role for the numinous Rhiannon). Unlike in the first episode, where his error occurs at the very outset, it is when he is in this elevated role: paradoxically at his most exalted and his most vulnerable, that Pwyll makes his crucial mistake.

[40] This was doubtless the stage of the evening when conversation became expansive, gestures were generous, and the mood of the company was sanguine and benevolent.

[41] *a'm neges a wnafl* lit. 'I will do my errand'

[42] Like all Celtic kings, Pwyll is responsible in some measure to the collective will of the men of the tribe, represented by the warrior nobility. The convention of the men of the tribe has a sacral, ritual associations - and what is spoken by the king at such times is binding by the tutelary powers.

Pwyll's open-handedness at this point is as symptomatic of the naïve and trusting aspects of his character, as much as his innate generosity.

[43] *Gwawl* or *Guaul* as it is sometimes spelt is an archaic Welsh word cognate with the English word 'Wall'. It means a wall or a hedge - but it has specific associations with Hadrien's Wall - the enormous Roman construction on the borders of Scotland, built in the second century AD with the specific intention of protecting the province of *Britannia* from the unconquered Picts north of the border.

Gwawl's northern affiliations are further reinforced by his patronymic (or, more probably, *matronymic*) 'uab Clud'. This is an ambiguous affiliation which relates on one hand to the archaic word *clud* meaning 'goods' or 'possessions'. 'Son of Wealth' would not have been an inappropriate epithet for the mercenary Men of the North, but the element *clud* had further signification - being identical as it was to the Old Welsh name for the River Clyde. Clud/Clyde is also cognate with the Irish *cléodna* meaning 'wave'. This, interestingly enough, relates to the name of the Irish goddess *Clidna* who appears in the mysterious story of the Voyage of Tadhg mac Céin. Clidna presides over an Otherworldly island paradise wherein feasting, horse-racing and other peaceful pursuits are the order of the day. She is accompanied at all times by her host of magical, brightly coloured birds whose singing is music unsurpassed. On other similar island paradises in the Celtic tradition we hear of birds which sing the 'hours of the day'. It is from such an island, significantly known as *Emain Aballac* - 'Emain of the Apple Trees' - that the Irish hero Bran mac Febail receives the blossoming branch which inspired his Otherworld adventure (see pp. ####-#### below). Rhiannon of course shares some of these avian/island otherworld affiliations, as we shall see in Chapter Three, and we might even assume the possibility of some kind of generic relationship



(possibly even a kin relationship) between Clud (= Clídna) and Rhiannon. On this basis it is possible to discern in the Pwyll vs. Gwawl conflict an opposition between the principles of exogamy vs. endogamy: a pertinent theme elsewhere in the Mabinogi and in twelfth-century Wales in general

[44] A special significance too seems to be attached to the feast itself, which seems to be almost as much of an issue of contention as the hand of Rhiannon herself. Again, this is quite traditional. The 'heroes portion' (see p#) above was a deeply symbolic tribal bounty over which it was not unknown for blood to be spilt in the Iron Age Celtic world. There are also strong links between the gift of food and the love of the goddess. In the Gaelic world the word *feis* means both a tribal feast and a sexual act. It was used specifically in the context of the festive inauguration at the culmination of which the new king would sleep with the queen, herself the embodiment of the sovereignty principle. As we have seen, this complex has traditional associations with the horse goddess (p. ## above). The words of Rhiannon in this section underline this ritual understanding. She promises Gwawl that in a year's time a feast will be held 'to celebrate their sleeping together'. Before this she had to explain that the present year's feast had already been dedicated to the hosts and retinues of Pwyll, and this gift could not be reneged.

[45] The 'Seven Cantrefs' echos the composition of Dyfed, although the court of Hyfaidd Hen is generally conceived of as somehow apart or distinct from Pwyll's kingdom. Given the broad hints elsewhere in the Mabinogi pertaining to Rhiannon's tutelary status, the territory she represents is probably best considered a kind of 'Inner Dyfed', i.e. the Indigenous Underworld of Dyfed, the seat of its mystical sovereignty, source of its fertility etc.

[46] In psychoanalytical terms, all objects which *enclose* or *contain* are associated with the female (e.g. Freud p. ###). This womb-like bag exemplifies the analogy. As such, we should not be surprised that, in the context of Celtic goddess mythology, the bag of Rhiannon is capable of holding (and therefore bearing forth) the 'food and drink of the seven cantrefs'. Seven, as we will remember, was the number of districts or cantrefs which made up the kingdom of Dyfed. This is further confirmation that this goddess is linked with, or even the personification of, the bountiful powers of fertility latent within the lands of Dyfed.

Metaphors of containment/envelopment are repeatedly developed throughout the Four Branches: almost to the point of obsession. The significance of this is dicussed on pp ##, ###-### and ###.

It might also be noted that the figure of Epona was traditionally represented as carrying sheaves of corn and a bowl or *cornucopia* (Ross p.269, 287) which (like the magical bag of Rhiannon) might be presumed to represent the bounty of the land.

[47] It is significant that on his covert arrival at the hall, the magical Bag of Rhiannon in his hand, the author draws attention to the status of Pwyll as the *Penn Annwfn* (see pp. ##-## above). We have seen how Penn Annwfn, or the Head of Annfwn, seems to have exerted proprietary rights over a mysterious cauldron which 'would not boil the food of a coward'. In this capacity, Pen Annwfn appears to relate to a certain aspect of the masculine principle in Celtic mythology - the Cauldron God - which was often portrayed as a crude, phallic archetype: semi-naked, wild of hair and beard, wielding a hammer or oaken cudgel in one hand and the cauldron or bowl of the goddess in the other. He was consort of the sovereignty goddess and guardian of the bounties of nature.

In the British tradition, a number of figures besides the Pen Annwfn relate to this figure: including the Grail King of the Arthurian cycle and the malformed *Llaser Laes Gyfnewid*, who makes an appearance in the Second Branch. However, particularly interesting in the present context is the figure of the *Green Knight*, from the Arthurian tale of that name. We have already seen (n.###) how elements of this story relate to events and esoteric significations earlier on the First Branch: notably the 'Temptation Game' ordeal experienced by Pwyll in his initiation into the role of Penn Annfwn. There are further signs of common ground between the traditions at this stage as well: both Pwyll Penn Annfwn and the Green Knight emerging out of the night, interrupting the carefree *bonhomie* of the regal feast with mysterious, esoteric demands; and gaining an advantage over their hosts through a revelation of their magical, Otherworldly powers. There is at least the hint of a suggestion that both of these scenarios share some common origins in the ritual and myth of the British Celtic pagan religion.

I would go as far as to venture the possibility of a *ritual drama*, practiced in prehistoric Celtic Britain, involving the ceremonial entrance, at the climax of seasonal festivities, of a hideous, costumed figure representing the voracious/fecund powers of Earth. These traditions were preserved in the rustic pageants such as those of the

Obby Oss and the Mari Llwyd (see p###-## above), whilst a the body of folklore surrounding this awe-inspiring personification of this chthonic spirit was preserved in a variety of local mythologies and eventually reworked (via the bardic schools) into dramatic stories such as those found in this section of the First Branch, and Arthurian material such as Gawain and the Green Knight.

[48] *Gwedy y dyuot y gynted y neuad* lit. 'after his coming to the upper part of the floor'

[49] *Negasasawl wyf wrthyt* lit. '[as] a requester I am before you'

[50] Gwawl would have recognised a challenge to his kingship. The Celtic tradition is full of such animistic signifiers of these hotly-contested virtues of potency. We have already seen how the sacred mound of Arbeth would throw up miracles and wonders for or 'wounds and blows' for an imposter who dared stand upon it. Likewise, the 'Brutus Stone' in the West Country of town of Totnes, the Scottish 'Stone of Scone' or the mythical Irish *Lia Fáil* were all reputed to let out a cry or a scream beneath the feet of a true king. The Cauldron of the Head of Annwfn, we may remember, 'will not boil the food of a coward - it has not been destined so' (p####) - more evidence of a particular form of magical responsiveness of a goddess-associated vessel in the hands of the chosen consort.

[51] There are similarities between this sequence of events, and the assault of castle of Gerald de Barri by Owain ap Cadwgan, allegedly with the cooperation of Nest daughter of Rhys ap Tewdwr, Gerald's wife and mistress of Owain (see p##### above). It is described in the following terms in the medieval chronical, *Brut Y Twysogion*:

He came at night to the castle and but a few men with him, about fourteen, after having secretly made a hole under the threshold, unknown to the keepers of the castle. And then he came to the chamber in which Gerald and Nest, his wife, were sleeping. And they raised a shout around and about the chamber in which Gerald was, and kindled tapers and set fire to the buildings to burn them. And when he heard the shout, Gerald awoke, not knowing what to do. And Nest said to him 'Go not out to the door, for there thine enemies lay in wait for thee, but follow me. And that he did. And she led him to the privy which ajoined the chamber. And there, as is said, he escaped by way of the privy hole

If indeed this was a partial inspiration of the First Branch scenario, it is a further reminder of the stimulus of the Norman presence on the narrative culture of Wales: and how readily this presence must have assimilated itself to existing traditions of The Other.

[52] See pp. #### for further discussion of this incident, and its esoteric significance

[53] It is highly characteristic of the hierarchical nature of Celtic society that Gwawl should demand a 'fitting death' (*dihenyd*) in keeping with the dignity of his caste. However, these concerns may extend to the esoteric, as is suggested by a rather sinister practice belonging to the world of Druidic justice - as witnessed by classical observers in the Iron Age Celtic world of Ancient Gaul:

The Druids...are also believed to be the most just of men, and are therefore entrusted with the decision of cases affecting either individuals or the public...murder cases have been mainly entrusted to their descision. When their are many such cases they believe that there will be a fruitful yield from their fields. These men...have pronounced that men's souls and the universe are indestructible (*Tierney p.269*)

Although this is usually taken (e.g. McCone p##) to refer to a classical description of the whole concept of *fír flathemon* (see p## above). However, it is equally possible to interpret this as a description of a process by which those accused of murder are ritually sacrificed, and their souls reincarnate in the form of a bountiful harvest. Perhaps Gwawl, being beaten to a pulp inside the bag of Rhiannon, alongside the other fruits of the earth felt he was approaching this ultimate degradation in the transmigratory cycle of life, hence the fervent nature of his plea.

Hyfaidd, in his capacity as the elder of the house, undertakes the role of the druid-judge, pronouncing that indeed, this was not the 'fitting death' for a man like Gwawl and the beating must stop and negotiations begin..

[54] Pwyll wisely defers to the intellectual and judicial authority of Rhiannon and her father Hyfaidd, despite Gwawl's (possibly calculated) attempt to have the notoriously gullible Pwyll set the conditions 'on his own terms'. The freedom of Gwawl to return to his homeland and treat his wounds is thus paid by the latter in terms of hostages left in his stead 'to answer all who petition'.

Law was enforced in the Medieval Celtic world as much through taboo and superstitious sanction as by the force of a centralised civil authority. One of the most feared individuals in Medieval Scotland, for instance, was a man known as *toschederach* or 'pilgrim chief'. It is thought that this figure derived his authority from possession of, or a special relation with, certain relics or objects of sacred power. The wording of law, and its enforcement, was therefore seen as an essentially *magical* act - which effected a substantial *change* in the cosmic balance, having the power to endure and withstand beyond the exoteric means of control.

[55] The taking of hostages from Gwawl might have had further significance for the medieval Welsh audience. There was a substantial Anglo-Norman community living in Dyfed or the South at that time, whose presence in the area was explained in this way might be felt to be typologically related to this enforced settlement of Gwawl's men under compromising magico-legal circumstances.

[56] *a menegi udunt y llonydit pawb ohonunt wrth y uod a'y uymppy* lit. 'and the telling to them the satisfaction of each of them according to his will and his fancy'

[57] Pwyll's brief conversation with his father-in-law suggests that this was somehow quite an unusual arrangement. Hyfaidd had asked the Demetian king when his daughter should follow in his wake, suggesting that it was customary for the newly-wedded man to spend a period on his own in his court, before the arrival of his wife. The origin, purpose or even existence of this custom is unclear, but one might assume that Pwyll would have been expected to prepare his court for the coming of the queen: perhaps paying off former mistresses or resolving other such potentially problematic issues from his bachelor days. Pwyll, then, by declining such measures, demonstrates a particularly intense and unsullied devotion towards the heroine of the tale. Also implicit in Pwyll's rejection of this customary 'ground-clearing' period (if this interpretation is correct) is the comparative sexual and social innocence of Pwyll, before his meeting Rhiannon. This would cohere with the general outline of the character of Pwyll as developed in the preceding episodes.

[58] The traditional values of Celtic society held that the greatness of a king is measured not only in his military power or political wit, but perhaps most of all in his ability to acquire, generate and *circulate* wealth. Generosity was the greatest virtue of a king: as the bardic opinion-formers never ceased to remind their patrons.

Here, it is Rhiannon's generosity which is emphasised - possibly reflecting (as did the largesse of Branwen on her arrival in Ireland in the Second Branch), a sociologically indispensable ritual, promoting the integration of the foreign princess into her host community. On a deeper level, the Sovereign Queen, as the embodiment of the Earth and its riches, enacts this archetypal role with her dispensation of mineral wealth (jewels, broaches and precious stones) amongst the peers of 'the kin and the countryside'.

[59] The relationship between Pwyll and his clients from among the Demetian nobility have shown signs of strain earlier in the First Branch. The fact he is also a *foster-brother* to some of this contingent is also possibly significant. The very mention of this evokes a complex socio-political relationship found throughout the Celtic world (see p## above) wherein a child from one kingdom was sent to grow up in the court of another. Situations of this kind, involving dual ties of marriage or fosterage and a blood relationship to the dominant regional kindred throughout the region were often the cause of serious problems in Celtic society (as suggested by Giraldus Cambrensis, see p. ## above): with the interests of the fostered youth being split between his adoptive kindred and that of his natural family. Such a position clearly required considerable reserves of intelligence, leadership, diplomacy and worldly wisdom: qualities which, it is implied throughout most of the First Branch, the ironically named Pwyll (lit. 'wisdom) was yet to master.

[60] This area of North-West Dyfed had strong links with the Gaelic world (Davies p.47), and also was also home the highest concentration of bilingual inscribed stones in Early Christian Wales. It is tempting to see in this distinctive local culture some continuity with the pre-Christian, indigenous past: the same area also housed the largest concentration of *cromlech* or megalithic chambered tombs in Wales. (Davies p.8). The famous 'bluestones' of Stonehenge were also excavated from the Precelli Mountains were also excavated from this area, providing the tantalising hint that Dyfed's traditional had associations with the Indigenous Underworld may have

a basis in prehistoric fact: going back to magico-religious and/or commercial ties with Stonehenge in Wessex, the cultural centre of the Late Megalithic world (see pp. ##-##).

[61] *Ni a wdom na bydy gyvoet ti a rei o wyr y wlat hynn* The verbal form *bydy* expresses futurity as well as the habitual present. This sentence therefore has a menacing ambiguity, and could equally be read as an implicit threat: 'we know you will not live as long as some men in this land'

[62] The resentment of the Demetian *uchelwyr* appears to be focussed on Pwyll's foreign bride, Rhiannon, although there is at least a suggestion that the king's own virility is being called into question (Ford #####)

[63] The mysterious disappearance of Rhiannon's child on the night of his birth is unexplained at this juncture of the narrative - and to some extent remains so throughout the rest of the Branch. The dark hint that magic is involved is implied by the fact that all six women put to watch over the child are overcome by irresistible sleepiness - a common feature of enchantment in medieval narrative. However, the circumstances of this 'infant disappearance' remain intentionally obscure - and of greater importance at this stage is the reaction of the six chamber-maids to the horror of the situation.

[64] *Bychan a dial oed yn llosgi ni, neu yn dienydaw* lit. 'Small of punishment would be burning us or putting us to death about the boy'

[65] *kynghor o'r byt am hynn?* lit. 'is there any counsel from the world concerning this'. *Cynghor*, a word which occurs frequently in the Mabinogi, can also be translated as 'plan' or 'course of action'.

[66] In seeking to explain this episode of the First Branch W. J. Gruffydd, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century pioneer of modern studies of the Mabinogi made the startling assertion that the implicit theme underlying the framing of Rhiannon was the *cannibalistic* tendencies exhibited by an Otherworldly being towards her own, half-human offspring. The accusation was that Rhiannon, already under suspicion because of her exotic, Otherworld origins, had in the night heard 'the call of the wild', and shed her superficial humanity: tearing her new-born child limb from limb in a fit of savage blood-lust.

Unspeakable as such an idea may seem, it belongs to a universal seam of thinking which is by no means confined to the Medieval Celtic world. By smearing the blood of a freshly slaughtered puppy around the lips and hands of the sleeping Rhiannon - the Demetian chamber-girls were playing on a powerful, atavistic complex of superstition which lies at the heart of human fears associated with that which is 'outlandish', foreign and unknown. To understand how these prejudices were to stick to Rhiannon with such ease, we must understand her position in the court as the archetypal foreign princess.

As the Mabinogi scholar Juliette Wood points out in relation to the medieval European mind: "a prominent aspect of attitudes to foreigners is the tendency to identify what is foreign with what is culturally outcast". She goes on to pin-point witchcraft and the deployment of magical powers as an archetypal example of what the parochial medieval mind might have identified with this demonised 'Other'. As Wood points out, the sinister figure of the witch-like, foreign princess, working illicit magic in the bosom of her host court has extremely ancient roots - at least as old as the tragic yet irredemable figure of Medea the 'barbarian bride' of the Jason the Argonaut who, just like Rhiannon, was accused of killing her own offspring.

[67] *ni byd yn taered ni an chwech wrth hi* lit. 'the insistence of us six won't be put before [that of] her alone'

[68] *Plant a wnn i y uot idi hi* lit. 'children I know that were to her'. The force of this phrase is unclear. P. K. Ford suggests it meant that Rhiannon had other children from previous liaisons, and by extension that the fertility problem of the previous years was Pwyll's rather than Rhiannon's - opening up a number of questions about the paternity of Pryderi (Ford #####).

A rather less problematic interpretation is that Pwyll was simply telling his noblemen that Rhiannon's fertility was no longer under question - and as that had been the stipulated grounds for their separation - they would continue to stay together.

[69] Rhiannon, in the absence of effective support from her husband, seeks the advice of her 'seers and wisemen'. These 'wise-men and seers' - as well as the nature of the atonement they impose on Rhiannon - recall (like the

semi-ritualised interventions of Hyfaidd Hen during the 'badger in the bag' incident in Pwyll II) the archaic ritual-judicial world of Native Wales - which arguably had more in common with the world the Old Testament judges or pagan Druidic priesthood than the bureaucratic courts of the Anglo-Norman administration.

[70] *Nog ymdaeru a'r gwared*. Rhiannon's decision was no doubt influenced by her awareness of the harsh treatment awaiting the servant girls if the accusation went against them (Medieval Celtic society was far from egalitarian in this respect), but no doubt also the diplomatic realities of being a foreign queen in an alien household (see n ### above).

[71] Here, as is often the case at the more esoteric junctures of the Mabinogi, animal symbolism rises to the fore. The nature of Rhiannon's punishment was to *take on the role of the horse* - affirming her kinship with the beast in the same way that the pagan Irish kings were described as doing by Giraldus Cambrensis (see p ## above). We have already delineated the extensive equine associations of Rhiannon (=Epona) whilst introducing the previous section (pp. ##-##). In the light of these observations, it can be seen that in following the seemingly outlandish advice of her druidic advisors Rhiannon is in fact performing the supreme gesture of mystic identification with the Great Goddess of the Horse - for whom, it would seem, she was both the *avatar* and leading devotee.

The very nature of Rhiannon's ritual penance: 'offering whichever guest or stranger would permit it . to be carried on her back' is suggestive of degradation of a sexual nature, and reminiscent of the kind of sacred promiscuity practiced by the temple prostitutes of Ancient Greece.

[72] The Early Medieval kingdom of Gwent, where this episode takes place is located in the South Eastern corner of Wales, and takes its name from the Romano-British Venta Silurum - 'Fields of the Silures'. As we have seen (p.### above) the Silures were an Iron Age tribe who formed the basis of a civitas in the area during the Roman Age, which later became the kingdom of Gwent. In common with many parishes or tribal homelands in Medieval Wales: Gwent seems to have been split between upper and lower zones: Gwent Ywch Coed 'G. above the wood' and Gwent Ys Coed 'G. below the wood' respectively. As we have already discussed (pp.##-##) - such divisions were not only social and economic, but seems to have also attracted similar geo-cosmological associations to the North-South division in the British Celtic mind. More so even than Dyfed, I would argue, the kingdom of Gwent and the South East in general represented to the psycho-geography of Medieval Wales the most quintessentially 'Southern' tribal kingdom: the most remote from the power-bases of the Northern Royal Tribe, the most obdurately independent - with its own enduring sub-Roman legacy; as well more fanciful (yet no less affective) proximity to the Indigenous Otherworld dreamscapes of 'The Land of Summer' (Somerset) where the faery-king Gwyn ap Nudd abided in his 'Castle of Glass' (Glastonbury). The medieval Welsh tradition quoted on p.### legend reinforces the view of the South as an unusually fertile, arable paradise benefiting perhaps from its proximity to the Indigenous Underworld of Dummonia/Andumnonia.

Combining these Southern associations with that of the *ys coed* 'below the wood' geographical zones: it would not be unreasonable to identify Gwent Ys Coed as almost the 'deepest' point in the land as a whole: and therefore the closest to the borders of the Indigenous Underworld. It is in this capacity that the events of this episode begin to make sense.

[73] Teyrnion's name derives from the Celtic \*Tigernos 'Great Lord', is clearly related to that of Rhiannon (< \*Rigantona 'Great Queen'). This has led some commentators to suggest that he the original 'consort' of Rhiannon - an Otherworld king and queen corresponding to the Old European cult of the 'Lord' and 'Lady' (cf. the Nordic Freyr and Freya). Did Pwyll replace Teyrnion at some stage in the evolution of the Mabinogi in its existing form - to be relegated to this sideline role?

There is no doubt that the evolution of this Branch of the Mabinogi exhibits signs of a complex and somewhat convoluted history; and the theories of W J Gruffydd (Gruffydd, 1926, pp ##-##) offer some interesting suggestions as to the coalescing of the First Branch myth out of a number of (previously unrelated) mythical prototypes.

Whether or not Gruffydd's ambitious analysis can be accepted in its every detail, it is beyond doubt that the Mabinogi had been composed partly in relation to a number of variant traditions dealing with temporary loss and disappearance of child: with the crossing and re-crossing of Otherworldly boundaries being an important element in all of the traditions involved. I believe that the bardic author of the Four Branches had correctly identified a

connection between Rhiannon and Teyrnnon: but chose to reconcile this relationship in qualitative, esoteric terms - rather than in terms of a conjugal relationship.

Teyrnnon and his wife represent the southeastern corner of Wales - just as Pwyll and Rhiannon represent the Southwest. These Southern tribal regions have various connections with the Indigenous Underworld.

[74] Probably equivalent to *Beltane* - the Celtic May-Day: a seasonal festival rich in both agricultural and mythological significance.

[75] *Ac ny wybydei neb un geir e wrth y hebawl* lit. 'but nobody ever knew a single word concerning the foals'

[76] *pa gyfranc uu hynny?* lit. 'what story was that?'

[77] *Llyma oll* lit. 'here is it all.'

[78] *miui a duunaf a thi* lit. 'For my part, I [will] agree with you'

[79] *o'r bedyd a wneit yna* lit. 'of the baptism that used to be done'. As is usually the case in medieval art and literature, the characters in the Four Branches tend to look, behave and talk much like the members of their twelfth-century audience. This mention of a superseded baptismal rite would appear to a rare inclusion of a conscious archaism, which once again raises the interesting and elusive question of the supposed religious affiliations of these mythological protagonists (cf. p. ##, ###-###)

[80] *Gwri Gwallt Euryn* 'Gwri Golden Hair'. The similarity between the name of this character and the 'exalted prisoner' *Gweir map Geiroedd* was first suggested by Gruffydd (*Rhiannon*, p.13 etc), who also appears in *Preiddeu Annwfn* (see p. ### above). The suspicion is that, like Pryderi, these figures represent localised variants of the Magical Prisoner archetype (see pp. ###-###), all of which perhaps stem back to Mabon ap Modron (pp. ##-## above)

[81] The boy is, of course, none other than the missing child of Rhiannon and Pwyll. His reappearance in South East Wales at this juncture: and the connection between this and the ritualistic penance of Rhiannon is never fully explained, though there is little doubt that they would have been understood (by the medieval audience) as being mysteriously associated. This is considered more fully, along with the magical logic of the First Branch as a whole, at the end of this chapter.

[82] *A chwedyl y wrthaw* This clause comes at the end of the sentence and it's not entirely clear whether the news is about the refers to the horse or the boy. Another possible translation for this sentence would be: 'Then the horse was given to the boy, and she came to the grooms and stable lads and commanded them to be careful of the horse, and have it broken in for when the boy would go forth on horseback, and [there would be] stories about him.

[83] *Gwr uuassei idaw knn no hynny* lit. 'he had previously been a man to him'. *Gwr* 'vassal' should not be understood here in a strictly feudal sense (where vassalage was a life-long, legally binding arrangement); but rather understood in the looser, early-medieval sense of that relationship, as Thomas Charles-Edwards suggests (pp. 32-33) 'it would mean that he had been Pwyll's servant, *minister*, and had spent a period at the court of Dyfed. He had been a *makwyf* or perhaps a *gwas ieuanc*'.

This proto-feudal subordination of Teyrnnon to Pwyll is mentioned parenthetically, but its significance would not have been lost on medieval audiences. The implication is that had Gwent been in a client relationship with Dyfed: implying that the notion of an overkingdom of Deheubarth, extending as far as the South Eastern border had a precedent in this mythological foretime

[84] Pryderi = 'care' 'anxiety' Pwyll = 'sence' 'thought' 'wisdom'. Pendaran is punning on Rhiannon's exclamation: *oed escor uym pryder im pei gwir hynny* 'I would be delivered of my care if that were true', *escor* being the same verb used to describe the act of giving birth. He rounds off this pun with a witty dovetailing of this name with that of his father, i.e. Care [the son] of Wisdom.

[85] Pendaran Dyfed, whom we have already discussed, appears to have belonged with the mythology Pwyll and Pryderi from a relatively early stage: in which his role seems to have been similar to that of Pwyll Pendevic in the extant version of the Mabinogi (i.e. the mortal Demetian ally of Underworld king).

What is noticeable in this episode is this character's assertiveness - which borders on the aggressively discourteous. He emerges from nowhere - barging in on the conversation between Teyrnon, Rhiannon and Pwyll: before virtually dictating what the boy should be called. When he suggests this name - based on a pun derived from the words of Rhiannon. When Rhiannon gently suggests that the boy may already have an adequately suitable name, Pendaran bluntly rejects the name given by Teyrnon and his wife.

Strangely enough, Pwyll - who then goes on to offer the remainder of the fostership of his son to this very same man, concurs with Pendaran's rather forceful recommendation. When it is announced that Pendaran is to foster the boy for the remainder of his youth, the assembled company seem to unanimously agree that such is 'good counsel': suggesting that the judgment of Pwyll has resolved some underlying hostilities in the Demetian court.

If we are to extend the Pwyll Pen Annwfn : Hywel Dda analogy any further, Pendaran Dyfed (and the hostile foster brothers discussed in n.###) might have been comparable to native elements at the tenth century Demetian court who remained loyal to the old Demetian line, who might therefore have been ambivalent towards Hywel Dda with his Northern connections.

[86] *Nyt oes yn y byt dyn uwy y galar no hi yn y ol* lit. 'there is not to any person in the world great grief than [to] her after him'

[87] This concluding section of the First Branch is intended to underline the essential unity of the kingdoms of the South: based on the ancient bonds created by the fostering and naming of Pryderi. As such, these myths can be related to the tribal-political aims of the patrons: who were keen to assert political control over a fractious and fragmented Deheubarth, centring on Dyfed, but also including the kingdoms of the South East. The only Welsh king to have realised this aim was Gruffydd ap Llewelyn, in 1057.

[88] *Uelly y treulyssant blwydeyn a blwydyned* lit. 'thus they passed a year and years'

[89] The tribal-political subtext of the Four Branches obtrudes once again at this point. As with Pryderi's fosterage (see n# above), the detail about Pryderi's conquest of the Seissylwch was intended to furnish contemporary political arrangements with a precedent in the mythical past. We have already seen (p.##) how, in the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century, Ceredigion became once more affiliated with the Southern hegemony on *Deheubarth* - having previously been occupied the Marcher Lords, then the men of Powys, then (for a while) the sons of Gruffydd ap Cynan (of the Gwynedd-based House of Aberfraw). *Seissylwch* - the old name of the combined kingdoms of Ceredigion and Ystrad Twyi - had fallen out of general usage in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, and is most strongly associated with the time and provenance of Hywel Dda (p.##).

[90] This was a dynasty not unknown elsewhere within the British tradition. Gloyw Wallt, Cigfa's grandfather, was the mythical founder of great city of Gloucester, Caer Gloiu in the synthetic chronicle known as *Historia Brittonem*. Cigfa's affiliation to the Gloucester region follow on neatly from Pryderi's expansion into south-eastern Wales. The logical conclusion would be conquest or intermarriage with the dynasty immediately beyond these areas: penetrating into an area which, as we have seen, retained almost mythic, Otherworldly quality in the mind of Medieval Wales (p. ##-##, ## etc.).

It is a curious process of backward-projection, or 'telescoping' of the past which has led to this particular demographic element, which is more readily associated with the Romano-British/Sub-Roman era, being placed in the pre-Roman context of Caswallon and the Sons of Beli Mawr, or married to a figure whose associations hark back to the Neolithic world (p. ## etc). I would suggest that this would not have worried most medieval readers unduly: whose conception of the distant past was prone to many such anachronisms. The setting of the Mabinogi was, as has already been suggested, not so much at any definite point in time, so much as at the mythic and flexible horizon of historical memory - a gathering point tribal-origin figures from a range of different sources.