Exploding the myth of the Celtic myth: a new appraisal of the Celtic background of Arthurian Romance

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When in the eighteenth century Lewis Morris and his circle emphasised the antiquity of Welsh literary tradition to justify writing within that tradition rather than the Classical, they can have had no idea of the critical confusion to which this would lead some two hundred years later. The revival of Celtic studies last century under the influence of such scholars as the religious philosopher Renan, coming as it did at a time when the opening of Africa was leading to a more scientific approach to anthropology, and in the wake of a 'Gothic revival' which had looked back romantically to a highly improbable vision of druidism, led almost inevitably to an emphasis on the mythological background to the surviving early Celtic literature, an emphasis which if anything increased in the first half of this century. Professor W.J. Gruffydd, who could at times be a sober and rational judge of literature, waxes lyrical over Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi in this context:

> Here we have the Welshman's primitive gods, fallen upon evil and forgetful days, but still preserving somewhat of their pristine fire, of their divine vigour, and what is more important for us, 'trailing clouds of glory' from the larger air of a former world. [1]

Professor Gruffydd might excuse himself as suffering merely from a temporary excess of hwyl, but no such excuse can be adduced for those literary critics who have devoted their time to the search for myths both in Celtic works and, even less excusably, in works in other languages which show signs of Celtic derivation. A.C.L. Brown's interesting study, Iwain [2], cites numerous parallels from Irish literature to characters or events in Chrêtien's Le Chevalier au Lion, parallels which demonstrate the wealth of imagery which was available to a twelfth-century writer. He has, however, a clear idea in his mind of how the tale should develop in order to be logical mythologically, and can state categorically of the Irish tale In Gilla Decair 'Finn ought not, however, to win the hand of the fée' (p.111). Professor R.S. Loomis, whose work was for many years very influential in this field, finds a different way of grappling with the fact that clearly no consistent Celtic myth underlies Le Chevalier au Lion: after relating the Hospitable Host, the monstrous herdsman and Esclados le Ros to various forms of Curoí mac Dáire in the Irish Fled Bricrenn he continues, 'with the entrance of Lunete into the gateway where Yvain was trapped an entirely new and elaborate story-pattern is introduced. We have finished with the web of traditions associated with Curoí's testing of the rival heroes of Ulster ...'. [3] There is in all Professor Loomis's criticism an underlying implication that

Chrétien de Troyes got it wrong; that he was trying to write the original Celtic myth, but alas lacked the knowledge of mythology, which might have allowed him to disinter it from the 'web of traditions'.

That this attitude still exists today can be seen in such writings as Dr Glenys Goetinck's on Peredur[4], in which she has attempted to relate the tale to the Celtic sovereignty myth. In this particular case the common practice is reversed: rather than asserting that the tale has misrepresented the myth, Dr Goetinck modifies the myth to fit the tale, as I have argued elsewhere.[5] Whichever way the approach is made, it is indicative of a belief that only the discovery of a mythological foundation will validate a work of, or derived from, Celtic tradition. Thus the most difficult and unlikely explanation, if mythological, is to be preferred to the simple. In the Welsh tale Breudwyt Ronabwy, Professor Loomis sees Owain's ravens as 'the bird-forms of Owain's goddess-mother Modron and her companions, eerie survivors from British heathendom'.[6] Anne Ross, with the objectivity of an archaeologist, suggests they might be warriors capable of assuming bird form, a motif attested in Irish literature, while R.S. Bromwich and G. Peredur Jones argue prosaically, but very convincingly, for bran ('raven') as a kenning for 'warrior'.[7] Neither of these explanations rests on the ill-attested tradition of 'Owain's goddess-mother'.

Not surprisingly, this mythological approach to medieval literature has provoked a reaction. Professor Eugène Vinaver warned of the dangers facing critics in this tradition:

> He seems to take it for granted that anything that survives must be corrupt, and conversely, that whatever is structurally valid in the surviving texts must belong to the distant past. Behind these assumptions there is the fundamental belief, strangely akin to the romantic theory of Naturdichtung, that as literature develops, so its themes deteriorate. Literary creation is conceived as an essentially destructive process.[8]

C.S. Lewis pointed to the inherent vanity (in the Biblical sense) of this constant search for mythological origins:

> Gawain's property of growing stronger as the sun ascends can be explained as the last vestige of a myth about the sun-god. But let us be clear in what sense we are using the word 'explain'. The word has a different meaning when we say that someone first 'explained' to us the Deduction of the Categories or the beauties of the Virgillian hexameter. To explain in this second sense is to open our eyes; to give us the power of receiving, or receiving more fully, what

> Kant or Virgil intended to give us. The causal explanation of Gawain's peculiarity 'explains', in this other sense, nothing whatever.[9]

Others have reacted by seeking to exclude not only mythology but also Celtic tradition altogether from their discussion of the Continental Arthurian literature of the twelfth century. Dr Claude Luttrell, in an important article on Le Chevalier au Lion[10] in which he demonstrates that many elements in the romance derive ultimately from international popular tales, seems almost to deny the Celts a place in the traditions behind Chrêtien:

> That scholars have failed to probe sufficiently into the relationship of Chrêtien's romance with The Man on a Quest for his Lost Wife must be due to the distraction of the Owein included in the Mabinogion, which - on dubious grounds - has been treated as descended not from Le Chevalier au Lion but from a common source. ... Deriving the Welsh tale from Le Chevalier au Lion, thus dispensing with the myth of a French common source, brings an end to the possible attribution to this of any features in Owein which distinguish it from Chrêtien's romance - they belong to the history of Welsh literature. (p.55)

To regard the history of Welsh literature as something with which Chrêtien has no connection is as rash, though not critically as unilluminating, as to see him as an unsuccessful apologist for a pagan mythology.

Both viewpoints assume, by implication at least, the mythological nature of Celtic material. It is an assumption which deserves to be questioned. A well-known passage from Matthew Arnold's 'The study of Celtic Literature' points us in the right direction:

> The very first thing that strikes one, in reading the Mabinogion, is how evidently the mediaeval story-teller is pillaging an antiquity of which he does not fully possess the secret; he is like a peasant building his hut on the site of Halicarnassus or Ephesus; he builds, but what he builds is full of materials of which he knows not the history, or knows by a glimmering tradition merely.[11]

In other words, by the time we come to the sources available to a twelfth-century writer such as Chrêtien de Troyes, the Celtic works themselves have long ceased to be in any real sense mythology - a point which explains the difficulty that Professor Brown and others have found in fitting Celtic tales into their ideas of Celtic myth. The Celtic parts of the British

Isles had, after all, been Christian by that time for about seven hundred years, probably without interruption, and the Christian faith had been brought to many Frankish and Germanic areas by people from the very monasteries where the Irish tales were being carefully preserved in manuscript. These tales were to them and their Welsh counterparts by no means myths; they varied between traditional history and science fiction, as an examination of their use of supernatural elements shows. Because it was often these supernatural elements which provided their attraction for continental writers, it is worth considering this point in a little greater detail.

Although most of my examples will be drawn from Welsh literature as being the most accessible Celtic literature to modern critics as well as having been one possibly available to the French writers of the twelfth century, it is as well to start with the nearest work we have to a genuine myth, the Irish tale Cath Maige Tured (The [Second] Battle of Moytura).[12] The text probably dates back to the ninth or tenth century although some revision has taken place since;[13] it tells of a battle between two sets of supernatural beings, the Tuatha Dé Danann (their name means 'Peoples of the Goddess Danu') and the Fomorians. These latter appear elsewhere in Irish tales as troublemakers, and their name appears to mean 'under-demons' (mor being akin to mare in 'nightmare');[14] Cath Maige Tured has consequently often been taken as an example of the battle of two opposing groups of deities, good and evil, light and dark, which seems to be common to many Indo-European cultures.[15] Despite this, and despite the original divinity of many of the characters attested by the existence of their names in altar inscriptions, it is clear that the redactor could not rely upon his audience's understanding who they were from the 'mythological' clues present. Thus the description of the woman with whom the Dagda mates before the battle contains the phrase, 'nine loosened tresses were on her head' ('Noi trillsi taitbechtai fora ciond'), a statement with little point unless it was intended to identify her. Yet three sentences further on we find 'Is hi an Morrigan an uhen sin isberur sunn' (The woman that is here mentioned is the Mórrígan), which reads like a marginal gloss which has been incorporated into the text, a gloss felt necessary because the description no longer sufficiently identified the woman.

In this tale the attitude to the supernatural seems in general to be one of passive acceptance; the supernatural is taken as an objective fact, part of a story which is regarded as history, rather than as something which might hide a deeper significance. Where it impinges directly upon the action of the story it is dealt with in a severely practical manner, as it is, for example, in the case of Balor's evil eye, or the effects on the battle of a magic well in which the dead can be brought back to life. The supernatural inspires neither amazement nor awe, but is treated as a fact which has to be taken into account.

This attitude is echoed in all those Celtic works, Irish or Welsh, which treat of matters which may be regarded as the legendary history of the country. Sometimes the bald statement may strike us today as intentionally underplayed, as when in Immram Brâin mac Febail, we are told 'O roboí dá lá ocus dí aidchi forsin muir, conacci a dochum in fer isin charput íarsin muir' [16] (when he had been on the sea two days and two nights he saw a man with a chariot coming towards him over the sea). There is, however, no supporting evidence to suggest that it was so regarded at the time; on the contrary, the style of such statements is echoed in those writings specifically termed chronicles:

> Ac yna y dyfygyawd bwyt yn Iwerdon, kanys pryfet o neff a dygywydawd ar weith gwad a deudant y pop vn; a rei hyny a vytaad yr holl ymborth, a thrwy vnpryt a gwedi y gwrthladwyt. [17]
>
> (And then food failed in Ireland, for mole-shaped vermin, each having a pair of teeth, fell from heaven; and these devoured all the food, and through fasting and prayer they were driven away.)

Nor generally do the characters in such stories appear in the least surprised by supernatural occurrences. In the first branch of the Mabinogi, Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet, [18] Pwyll shows none of the surprise or concern we might expect at the intrusion of the supernatural realm of Annwfn into his hunting and his life. His immediate reaction on seeing dogs other than his own destroying a deer is to assert his rights as ruler, drive them off, and set his own pack on the animal. Although he is (as becomes a model prince) polite to Arawn, he addresses him slightly haughtily as 'unben', 'chieftain'; it is not Arawn's supernatural nature which causes him to alter his mode of address but his statement of rank, 'Brenhin corunawc wyf i yn y wlat yd hannwyf oheni' (p.2 - a crowned king am I in the land I come from) which is answered by Pwyll 'Arglwydd', 'Lord'. When Arawn suggests that he and Pwyll change appearances, the latter's immediate reaction is not surprise, horror, interest in the mechanics of the change or awe at Arawn's powers but the practical concerns of how he is to find Hafgan and what is to happen to his own kingdom in the meantime (ll. 59-66).

Later in the same branch the supernatural is used directly for a narrative purpose. Pwyll (who like Arthur after him dislikes completing his meal at major feasts unless he has seen a wonder) goes with his court to Gorsedd Arberth, whence they observe a maiden on a horse who, despite her apparent slow pace, cannot be caught by the servant who is sent after her. The court returns to dine. The following day the lad stands ready beside

the best horse of the court, but despite being prepared is still unable to catch the lady; again this appears to cast no blight over the evening's festivities. On the third day, Pwyll himself gives chase to the maiden, whom he likewise cannot catch, despite the apparent slowness with which she passes. In desperation, as his horse (presumably) was foundering, he calls to her to stop 'in the name of him you love best'. 'Arhoaf yn llawen', heb hi, 'ac oed llessach y'r march pei ass archut yr meityn' (ll.272-3): 'I will stop gladly,' she said, 'and it were better for the horse had you asked this a while ago'). Undoubtedly we, like the court, are expected to find the incident surprising, and to be amused by the matter-of-fact way in which Rhianon, the lady, treats it - as we are not supposed to be amused at Pwyll's own acceptance in the Arawn episode.

This points to a second use of supernatural in Celtic tales, one which I have termed somewhat anachronistically 'science fiction'. The term has, I feel, a value, since the supernatural in many stories performs the same function that bug-eyed monsters, Daleks, warp motion and curiously-inhabited planets perform in the fantasies of the modern age. It differs from the supernatural discussed above by being more obtrusive, by being an element in the appeal of the story. The difference may perhaps best be seen in the Irish tale, Serglige Con Culaind [19] ('The wasting-sickness of CúChulainn'), where the tale as we have it seems to be an amalgamation of two earlier recensions; it falls into two parts, the second of which was clearly modified later than the first (as an analysis of the language shows) whatever the actual original dates of composition. [20] The first part, up to the interpolation concerning the election of Lugaid Red-Stripes to the kingship of Ulster, accepts the supernatural as a part of the world that has to be acknowledged, but without making too much of it. Naturally the supernatural whipping of Cú Chulainn stands out, but the event is sufficiently acceptable to the hero's contemporaries for Fergus's statement, 'res atchi' (he is having a vision) to pass without further comment.

In this part, CúChulainn's charioteer, Laeg, is sent ahead of the hero to see what the otherworld is like, and he returns with an attractive but brief description:

> Tic Láeg ass íarom co Emain adfét a scéla do Choin Chulaind do chách olchena.
>
> (Then Laeg returned to Emain, and he gave news to CúChulainn and to everyone else.)

In the second part, which begins with an overlap of the first, Laeg is again sent, but the seventy-one lines of his description on his return show that in this case the whole purpose of his journey is to provide an excuse for this description of marvels:

Atát arin dorus tíar,
insinn áit hi funend grían,
graig ngabor nglas, brec a mong,
is araile corcordond.

Atát arin dorus sair
tri bile do chorcor-glain,
dia ngair in énlaith búan bláith
don macraid assin rígráith.

(At the door towards the west
on the side towards the setting sun,
There is a troop of grey horses with dappled manes,
and another troop of horses, purple-brown.

At the door towards the east
Are three trees of purple glass.
From their tops a flock of birds sing a sweetly drawn-out song
For the children who live in the royal stronghold.)

It is interesting that unlike the equivalent passage in the first part of the tale this section is in verse, making it almost an artistic work in its own right.

At the end of Serglige Con Culaind the supernatural plays an important mechanistic part in the plot. This of course it did in Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet, which could never have worked without Pwyll's and Arawn's ability to change shapes. But whereas that episode is passed rapidly over, the appearance of Manannán as a deus ex machina at the end of the Irish tale, coupled with the drink of forgetfulness which enables the reconciliation of CúChulainn and Emer, provides an unexpectedly happy ending which, in the context of the story as a whole, cannot seem other than contrived. It draws attention to the supernatural as something which behaves in a way no-one in the story expects; when the actors themselves find events strange and marvellous we, the audience, must be expected to do likewise.

The most prolific examples of this sort of use of the supernatural are of course the Immrama, the voyages (with the exception to some extent of the very early Immram Brain). The most famous perhaps is Immram Curaig Maile Duin, [21] and here the comparison with 'Star Trek' is very obvious: Mael Duin's boat boldly goes where no man has gone before, and on each of the many islands they find, inhabited or uninhabited, there is some marvellous occurrence. Some of their adventures have a moral purpose, such as the cat who passes through a thief like a blazing arrow (p.35); other immrama are explicitly Christian, such as Immram Curaig Ui Corra [22] and Immram Snedgusa ocus Meic Riagla [23] in which the heroes are clerics. The genre continues

into Continental tradition with the various versions of the voyage of St Brendan. But if the immrama represent the most truly 'science-fiction' elements in the use of the supernatural, the complete detachment of this sort of material from mythology is illustrated best in those tales where the Otherworld as such does not exist. In the Welsh story Breudwyt Macsen Wledic [24] (The dream of Maxen Wledig), Maxen, Emperor of Rome, has a dream in which he sees a fair country and an even fairer maiden, with whom he falls in love. Because of this love he falls sick; at the suggestion of his courtiers he sends men to look for the lady, and finally they are united. In such stories it is usual for the man to be a mortal, the lady to be of the Otherworld; here Elen's castle in Arfon, for all its splendour, can have seemed no more Otherworldly to the Welsh audience than Maxen's far-off glittering Rome, where he has thirty-two crowned kings as vassals. Both are, in the context of the story, mortal; Maxen is in fact the historical figure Maximus Magnus Clemens whose name appears at the head of many Welsh genealogies, which may account for his association with Elen Luydawc ('Helen of the Hosts') who was probably in origin an ancestral goddess. [25] No trace of mythology remains, however, and the trappings of the supernatural - the splendour of the castle of the lady - have been introduced for their entertainment value only. This is clear in the description of the ship Maxen sees in his dream, where its richness and excellence are the whole point:

> A llog a welei ym plith y llyghes; a mwy lawer a thegach oed honno no'r rei eraill oll. A welei ef uch y mor o'r llog; y neill ystyllen a welei ef yn eureit, a'r llall yn aryaneit. Pont a welei o ascwrn moruil o'r llog hyt y tir. (col. 180)
>
> (And he saw a ship in the middle of the fleet; and far bigger and fairer was that ship than all the others. And he looked at the ship above the water-line; he saw one plank of gold and the next of silver. He saw a bridge of walrus ivory from the ship to the land.)

Having shown that the supernatural in Celtic tales is not used for mythological reasons, and that indeed elements of it can be used where the Otherworld as such does not really exist, it should be pointed out that many of the plots of Celtic tales are not in origin mythological at all. A number of such tales are descended from, or use, International Popular Tales, sometimes in conjunction with elements more clearly of mythological origin. The Welsh story Kulhwch ac Olwen [26] provides an excellent example of just such a combination. The framework tale - Culhwch's love for Olwen (whom he has never seen), his quest for her, the tasks set by her father and their completion with the aid of helpers from Arthur's court - seems to be some sort of conflation of 'The Man on a Quest for his Lost Wife' (Aarne-Thompson 400) and 'The Helpers' (Aarne-Thompson 513), although primarily

the latter. (The possibilities of conflation centre on the use of helpers in both tales - motif B563, helping animals, given by Aarne as part of 400, certainly appears in Kulhwch - and the finding of the lady only temporarily in the first place, with a need to complete certain tasks before achieving permanent union.) Within that framework is set accomplishment of various tasks, and some of these sub-tales do indeed have echoes of mythology. Twrch Trwyth, described by Arthur as 'a king, and for his wickedness God transformed him into a swine' may well be a mythological figure - boars are found fairly extensively in pagan Celtic epigraphy[27] - although the concentration on the death of his children, together with the type of havoc he wreaks suggests also a dim recollection of a dynastic conflict. The search for Mabon ap Modron, undoubtedly the Maponus of altar inscriptions, must surely have mythological origins; yet it contains a variation of the Oldest Animal tale (Aarne-Thompson 80*) and the motif of animal helpers (Motif B563), both of which are well known in popular tales. Conversely, in the framework story the hero is helped by six companions who perform his tasks for him (Motif F601.1), but while Gwalchmei, 'best of walkers and best of riders' or Cynddylig, 'He was no worse a guide in the land he had not seen than in his own land', have an authentic popular note about them, Cei has too many cynneddfau (peculiarities or special attributes) for a popular tale helper:

> Angerd oed ar gei, naw nos a naw diwarnaw hyt y anadyl y dan dwuyr, naw nos a naw dieu hyd uydei hep gyscu. Cleuydawd kei ny allei uedyc y waret. Budugal oed kei: Kyhyt ar prenn uchaf yn y coet uydei pan uei da'n ganthaw. Kynnedyf arall oed arnaw: pan uei uwyaf y glaw dyrnued uch y law ac arall is y law yt uyd yn sych yr hynn a uei yn y law rac meint y angerd. A ffan uei uwyaf y anwyd ar y gydymdeithon dyskymon vydei hynny utunt y gynneu tan. (col. 470, 471)
>
> (Cei had this peculiarity, nine nights and nine days his breath would last under water, nine nights and nine days would he be without sleep. A wound from Cei's sword no physician might heal. A wondrous gift had Cei: when it pleased him he would be as tall as the tallest tree in the forest. Another peculiarity had he: when the rain was heaviest, a handbreadth before his hand and another behind his hand what was in his hand would be dry, by reason of the greatness of his heat; and when the cold was hardest on his comrades, that would be to them kindling to light a fire.)

It is hard not to believe that some attributes of a Celtic divinity have here become intertwined with those of a popular tale figure.

Even within that peasant's hut built upon the site of Halicarnassus,

the Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi, popular tales lurk in corners or under the eaves. In Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet the arrangement between Arawn and Pwyll suggests the tale the Two Brothers (Aarne-Thompson 303), specifically section IV, the Chaste Brother. Later in this branch, Rhiannon suffers as the Calumniated wife (Aarne-Thompson 707 II), while the foal which is closely associated with Pryderi would seem to be potentially a congenitally helpful animal (Motif-Index B311), which is often found in the first section of tale 303. Math uab Mathonwy contains, among other elements, a version of the three-fold Death (Aarne-Thompson 934A). The popular tale elements in the Pedeir Keinc have been studied in some detail by Professor K.H. Jackson;[28] interestingly he suggests a correlation between the amount of international material in the stories and their success and interest (Manawydan uab Llyr is the least interesting and has least of this material). While I would not go so far as does Professor Jackson in dismissing a mythological element in these tales, his warning is valid:

> By and large, however, I think it is wise to regard mythological explanations of even the non-international episodes in the Mabinogion with cautious scepticism. Such interpretations can be tailored to fit anything, and hence they are a favourite device in the hands of the unscholarly. This is not to say that they cannot be handled in a scholarly manner, but as a common rule when a mythological explanation is foreshadowed one suspects that a speculation is likely to be on its way, and probably a series of others erected upon that one. (p.129)

Certainly in pointing to the 'extraordinarily confused and incoherent' nature of the plots Professor Jackson is pointing again to the lack of any sort of comprehended myth behind them, while his demonstration of the existence of the international element is a useful antidote to the wilder fantasies of the 'mythologisers'.

There is thus no reason for an exploration of possible Celtic sources for Medieval Continental or English writings to be the sort of myth-hunt which they have often become; conversely there is no reason to exclude from discussion of popular tale sources of such work all mention of Celtic material. To take as an example, Chrêtien's poem Le Chevalier au Lion[29], it is clear that no discussion of gods of storms or goddesses of fountains or Sovereignty is going greatly to further our understanding of the French work. Yet its Celtic frame of reference cannot be denied either, and to oppose tale-type 400, The Man on a Quest for his Lost Wife, to Iarlles y Ffynnawn[30] (the Welsh version of the story, often known as Owein), as Dr Luttrell does in his article, is to deny much that is in both Le Chevalier au Lion and the Welsh tale. The latter is, as a chwedl (tale) rather than a romance, in the tradition of European Volksmärchen, as Tony Hunt has demonstrated[31]; it is

thus in parallel with, rather than in contrast to, the other sources and analogues mentioned by Dr Luttrell. It should be noted that among his references, and showing something of the story-pattern of the whole of Chrêtien's work, are three Breton Lais - Lanvel, Graelent and Desiré - which can surely be presumed (from the Breton connection which is always insisted upon) to have Celtic backgrounds.

More important is the fact that a discussion of Chrêtien's poem which concentrates on the international aspects and plays down the Celtic side does no justice to what Chrêtien wrote. Chrêtien, after all, specifically chose the Arthurian setting, the matière de Bretagne; moreover he makes the various settings clear: the court was at 'Carduel an Gales', Calogrenant's adventure was in Broceliande (in Brittany), Yvain's denunciation takes place at Chester. If Chrêtien were using an international tale-type from a Continental source, he has taken great pains to make it seem Celtic, and to choose those images - the fountain, the rings, the monstrous herdsman - which can most easily be paralleled in other Celtic tales. His lady, Laudine, is imperious not in the manner of the courtly dame who dictates terms to her lover who is bound by his courtliness to obey; she dictates them more in the manner of a ruler in her own right:

> Et ele dit: 'Je vos creant
> Le congie jusqu'a un termine;
> Mes l'amors devandra haine,
> Que j'ai a vos, seurs souez,
> Certes, se vos trespassiiez
> Le terme, que je vos dirai' (ll.2562-2567)

She also displays something of the gift of prophecy:

> 'neporquant bien vos promet,
> Que, se Des de mort vos deffant,
> Nus essoines ne vos atant
> Tant con vos sovandra de moi' (ll.2596-2599)

In both these respects, however much she may be the courtly lady in other parts of the romance, she has a great deal in common with the Otherworldly ladies who often direct the action in Celtic tales - the lady in Immram Brain, for example, or Rhiannon in Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet.

All this may not alter the fact that the poem's origins lie very largely in the popular tales of Europe, but it does suggest a familiarity on Chrêtien's part with the stories and ideas of the Celtic countries. In the traditions of those countries I believe he found certain elements which he needed for the sort of works he wished to write; elements like the figure of

the imperious lady dominating all around her. One thing above all I believe he found and it is in a way connected with the possible remote mythological connections of Celtic tales: he found a supernatural which was not morally polarised. In the strict Continental tradition events were the work either of God or of the Devil, and there is thus a right and a wrong way to respond to them. Something of this appears in Le Chevalier au Lion where Yvain's adversaries at the Chastel de Pesme Avanture are said to be 'sons of the devil' ('deus fiz de Deable' - L. 5271) and can therefore be safely opposed by a good knight. But for much of the time the audience is as ignorant as the hero of whether what he meets is good or bad: would anyone care to comment on the moral status of the Monstrous Herdsman, or of the fountain and its storm? In such a world the knight is tested not against an absolute standard (or not only against this) but against his ability to carry out in practice the theories of behaviour he professes. This theme, as it relates to purely physical courage, is introduced by the avid-tongued Kay:

'Bien pert qu'il est aprés mangier,'
Fet Kes, qui taire ne so pot.
'Plus a paroles au plain pot
De vin, qu'an un mui de cervoise.
L'an dit que chez saous s'anvoise.
Aprés mangier sanz remuër
Va chascuns Naradin tuër,
Et vos iroiz vangier Forré!'

.....

je vos pri, comant qu'il soit,
N'an alez pas sanz nos congiez:
Et se vos anquenuit songiez
Mauvés songe, si remanez!' (ll.590-611)

In that particular respect Yvain has no trouble in measuring up to his standards; on the level of personal responsibility, however, he has much to learn, and the second part of the tale concerns his learning of such lessons, and the public demonstration of it. It is essential for this aspect of the tale that the world in which it takes place must be no more familiar to the audience than to the hero.

Attempts to relate such stories to the remaining vestiges of Celtic myth have both obscured the real attraction of the Celtic world to the medieval French or English writer and denied or diminished his creativity. The reaction against the mythologising in the form of pointing the analogies in European Volksmärchen has equally tended to deny the creativity of the writers. For the important feature of Le Chevalier au Lion and a number of other romances

is the way whatever sources are used are altered (Dr Luttrell's article points to a considerable number of alterations) to be part of a unified whole which is held together by a sen which is the creation of the writer, not a reworking of a primeval myth. To the conveyance of that sen certain elements from Celtic traditions are necessary; it is to be hoped that by demonstrating the fallacy of the argument that a writer using Celtic traditions is valiantly but vainly trying to reproduce a supposed original myth a clearer understanding of the nature and aims of medieval romance will be possible.

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NOTES

1. W.J. Gruffydd, Math uab Mathonwy, Cardiff 1928, p.41.

2. A.C.L. Brown, 'Iwain', Studies and Notes in Philology VIII (Boston, Mass. 1903), 1-149.

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