

## CONCLUSION – THE POETICS OF EXILE

The Mabinogi of Manawydan, like the other three Branches, drew on existing narrative traditions. We can see connections with what was apparently a Southern Irish exile narrative – brought to West Wales by the Gaelic migrations of the third- to sixth-centuries, and perhaps coloured by the ‘Empty Land’ experiences of the refugee British populations from the East (p. 390-394). The basic structure of the Un-King myth is also apparent, as is the ‘magical prisoner’ theme: a device that was probably original to the pagan *\*maponakiji* (see p. 213-219), but which may have been coloured by esoteric associations developed by the medieval bardic schools (p. 383 ff.). Finally, well-known tales of misfortune, such as those of Eustace or Apollonius of Tyre, also seem to have left their imprint on the original Déisi exile myth, lending it a quasi-hagiographical atmosphere that was altogether more intimate and pregnant with personal significance. It is out of this fusion of traditions and associations that the final version of the Third Branch has evolved.

The tale itself might be described as an account of the salvation of Dyfed though the exogamous intervention of Manawydan fab Llŷr, who himself was a medieval memory of the tutelary spirit of the Irish Sea. As a scion of the House of Llŷr, Manawydan represented a link with the peregrinatory wanderings of the Belgic hero Brennus/Brân (pp. 280-282) and to the mysteries of the Island Otherworld. As the consort of the Rhiannon his role is that of an initiate into the matrilineal mysteries of the Ancient South, and the inheritor of its Otherworld legacies. Once again we see how the author or redactor of the Mabinogi thus forms an ingenious thematic connection between previously unrelated bodies of mythological and tribal-historic lore: the druidic cosmology of the Irish Sea area, the foundation legend of the Belgic tribes and the folk-memory of Britain’s megalithic background. The common thread linking these disparate traditions is the general experience of exile, dispossession and the Otherworld experience. Although Manawydan succeeds in consolidating his possession of the outlying kingdom of Dyfed, the dynasty he represents (the Sons of Llŷr) was never to regain its position at the temporal centres of political power. The contemporary significance of this is evident from the typological connections between Manawydan and Cadwgan ap Bleddyn – and through him to the twelfth century House of Mathrafal.

Thus it could be argued that there was a specific purpose to these tribal-historic and mythological associations, reflecting the agenda of Lywelyn ap Iorwerth and his political need to cast certain regions of Wales (and their associated dynasties) into a marginal role as defeated, liminal outcasts. But what is interesting is the degree to which these rather transient (perhaps even unedifying) motivations are transcended by the narrative artistry of the end result. The truth is that the story of the dispossessed exile has a dramatic power of its own. It is significant, perhaps, that the sagas of founding figures like Rhodri Mawr, Beli Mawr or Cunedda did not survive into the medieval manuscript record – while those of dispossessed wanderers such as Manawydan fab Llŷr, Brân/Brennus and Llywarch Hen are extensively attested. If there was a contemporary political agenda in the anti-heroic presentation of this itinerant Demetian figure, this was long outlived by his literary appeal.

But the Third Branch reveals rather more than the enduring appeal of the protagonists of heroic misfortune. It also brings into focus the narrative mechanism at the very heart of the Mabinogi as a whole, a process which is, paradoxically, more apparent in the symbolic associations between the various Branches than in the unitary plot-structures evident within them.

The Third Branch sees the closure of a complex narrative loop that began with the Badger-in-the-Bag sequence in the second section of the First Branch. The imagery of this initiatory event was echoed significantly (and gruesomely) throughout the action of Second: by the Men-In-Bags incident, by the Iron House as an instrument of murder, and even by the womb-like properties of pair *dedani* (c.f. pp. 348 etc.). In the Third Branch, the relationship to this event is more causal and direct. It might therefore be said that the success of Manawydan's magical bargaining on the Mound of Arberth brings to a close two quite distinct categories of disruption: the causal (represented on the social plane by the feud with Gwawl and his patron Llwyd Cil Coed) and the secondly the associative (represented by the wider-ranging symbolic echoes in the Second Branch).

This two-fold connection exemplifies the complex and multifarious structure of the narrative format of the Mabinogi. The author is representing a universe in which actions in one geographical sphere (e.g. Dyfed) can be mysteriously echoed by events in another (e.g. Gwent or Aberffraw). That the action should suddenly jump from North to South Wales should no longer surprise us. But what should by now be clear is that apparent discontinuity of person and place often conceals deeper continuity of archetypal purpose. We must be continuously attentive – as the original audiences would undoubtedly have been – as to where, how and with what significance the next connection would eventually emerge. We may remember what the medievalist Eugene Vinaver said of the interlace style of the cyclic romance, that 'there is no limit to what a cycle might include in its orbit ... everything we see or read about is part of a wider canvas, of a work still unwritten, of a design still unfulfilled'.

So despite the apparent finality of Manawydan's deliverance of Dyfed, there is no reason to believe that further thematic development may not yet occur. Although the action of the next Branch transfers itself to Gwynedd, it is not long before a number of the old strands re-emerge. As we will see, a final echo of the 'Badger in the Bag' series of containment symbols appearing at a critical juncture in the Fourth Branch, when Gwydion's coffer is used as a surrogate womb for the pethan 'the little something' that is destined to become the hero, Llew Llaw Gyfess (p. 509, n. 910 etc). That two chains of events – one causal, one associative – finally converge in the mouse-in-the-glove bargain on the mound of Arberth, carries with it a suggestion of a closure or completion. But that such a narrative loop might be mirrored significantly in subsequent events is perfectly in keeping with this particular narrative idiom. Although the place and the personnel of the following Branch seem barely connected to the Branches that precede it, the great harmony of structure, theme and symbol continues to unfold.