Cyfarwydd as Poet in the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi

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In 'The poet as *cyfarwydd* in early Welsh tradition', Patrick Ford discusses the semantic range of the term *cyfarwydd* and the vexed question of whether it denoted, in medieval Welsh, a storyteller. Ford contests translations of the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi that render the term *cyfarwydd*, as applied to the character Gwydion, as 'storyteller' or 'teller of tales'. He objects as well to the translation of *cyfarwyddyd* as 'story' or 'tale' (Ford 1975: 152—7). As he has described that article,

> I claimed that the older meaning of *cyfarwyddyd* in *Math* was 'lore; stuff of stories' and not the stories themselves.' The corollary is that the poet in early Wales was not a *cyfarwydd* (storyteller) but someone whose performances were informed and amplified by his acquired knowledge of such matters. (Ford 2013: 238)

For Ford, the figure of Gwydion as he appears in the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi is *cyfarwydd*, not because he tells stories, but because as a poet he is necessarily in possession of *cyfarwyddyd*, the kind of lore that was an essential component of the 'stuff' of poetry, as well as of stories. The present essay seeks to build on Ford's work by exploring further Gwydion's role in the Fourth Branch as a poet and the cultural notions of poetic function and power that his activities imply.

Whatever the noun *cyfarwydd* means in the Fourth Branch, the text certainly claims that Gwydion is one. *Ynteu Wydyon kyuarwyd da oed* 'Gwydion was a good *cyfarwydd*'(MUM: line 344), we are told, and *goreu kyuarwyd yn y byt oed* 'he was the best *cyfarwydd* in the world' (MUM: line 53). Gwydion is also a poet, however, and not merely a poet, but *pencerdd* 'a chief poet', if we accept his own assessment of himself when he tells Pryderi that *Moes yw genhym ni, Arglwyd . . .y nos gyntaf y delher*

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at wr mawr, dywedut o'r penkerd 'Our custom, lord, is that on the first night that we come to a great man, the chief poet performs.' (MUM: lines 50—2; M:48)

Ford reads Gwydion as primarily a poet, while acknowledging that he does not until near the conclusion of the Fourth Branch perform in verse, as far as we can tell— neither at the court of Pryderi, where what he produces are *cyfarwyddyd* and *ymddiddaneu*, nor later, when he and Lleu enter Caer Aranrhod as poets, and the evening's entertainment consists of *chwedlau a chyfarwyddyd*. (Ford 1975: 155—6; MUM: lines 53—5, 342—4)1 He argues that Gwydion's request for the Otherworld pigs that Pryderi possesses, a request made after he has entertained Pryderi's court with his *cyfarwyddyd* and *ymddiddaneu*, is effectively a *canu gofyn* 'asking poem', even though he doesn't produce any verse at that point, either; his *cyfarwyddyd* and *ymddiddaneu* serve the same purpose in the culturally endorsed economy of the gift exchange (Ford 2013: 249—52). There is also further evidence in the text that Gwydion is a poet, in addition to his roles as king's nephew and *penteulu*, magician, and *cyfarwydd*.

When Gwydion goes to Pryderi's court, he goes with nine companions, *yn rith beird* (MUM: lines 41, 47). GPC glosses the phrase *yn rhith* as *(i) in the form or guise of, like, as*; *(ii) under the pretext or pretence of, pretending (that)*. If we read *yn rith beird* as 'pretending that they were poets', the emphasis is on Gwydion's deployment of his deceptive magic. But if we understand it as simply 'as poets', then

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1 Davies 2007:48 translates *ymdidaneu digrif a chyuarwydyt* as 'amusing anecdotes and stories', and p. 57, *ymdidan a wnaeth hi a Guydyon am chwedleu a chyuarwydyt. Ynteu Wydyon kyuarwyd da oed* as 'she and Gwydion talked of tales and storytelling. And Gwydion was a good storyteller.' Patrick Ford discusses the terms *cyfarwyddyd* and *ymddiddan* in Ford 1975: 156—62. *Chwedlau* 'stories' is a relatively straightforward term.

it is possible to imagine that Gwydion actually *is* a poet, and that it is this aspect of

his multi-faceted and multi-talented nature that he chooses to highlight when he

visits Pryderi. He doesn't wear a magician's pointy hat with stars on it, or brandish

his magic wand; he doesn't arrive in the full armor of Math's *penteulu*. He presents

himself and his companions *yn rhith beirdd*, the guise in which they will be most

readily welcomed in the court of Dyfed, although he seems to know from the outset

that he will need to deploy his magic in order to succeed in getting the pigs.

When Math doubts that Pryderi will yield his Otherworld animals in

exchange for the wares of poets, Gwydion assures him that *nit drwc uyn trawscwyd i,*

Arglwyd, ny doaf i heb y moch 'My plan is not a bad one, lord,' he said, 'I will not

return without the swine' (MUM: lines 42—4;M:48). Indeed, since the ultimate

objective is to rouse the armies of Dyfed to attack Gwynedd, in order to take Math

out of the court where he sits with his feet in the lap of his footholder *onyt kynwryf*

ryuel a'y llesterei 'except when the turmoil of war prevented him' (MUM:line 6;

M:47), so that Gilfaethwy can have access to Goewin—since the objective is not the

pigs, qua pigs, at all, but the warfare that stealing them will precipitate—Gwydion

must be planning all along to conjure up those mushroom-based horses and hounds,

tack and shields. But he presents himself as a poet, and to some extent behaves as

one.

Similarly, later in the tale, when Gwydion brings Lleu to Caer Aranrhod for

the second time, in order to trick Aranrhod into arming her son, he asks the porter

to announce the two of them as *beird o Uorgannwc* 'bards from Morgannwg' (MUM:

lines 339—40; M: 57). Shortly before that, the two have 'altered their appearance'

so that they arrive *yn rith deu was ieueinc*, 'disguised as two young men' (MUM:lines 336—7; M: 57). But they are in fact two young men (or young-ish, at least, in Gwydion's case), so the change (*amgenu)* in their appearance is something short of the kind of transformation that Math inflicts upon Gwydion and Gilfaethwy when he turns them into deer, or boars, or wolves. 2

There is no reason, then, to dismiss the possibility that Gwydion is, among other things, a poet; we know that he is *goreu kyuarwyd yn y byt* 'the best cyfarwydd in the world' (MUM: line 53) and he may be a fine poet as well. The three *englynion* that he sings to Lleu as the tale draws to its conclusion show that this is indeed the case. These *englynion* are noteworthy, if for no other reason, because they are three of only five *englynion* in the Four Branches. In the story of Gwydion's role in the rearing to manhood of his nephew Lleu, the *englynion* play a critical part in the process. I argue that with the *englynion*, Gwydion demonstrates that he is indeed a poet, and that through his decisive poetic performance the author of the Fourth Branch speaks to the importance of poetry to the political culture of contemporary Wales, and of a bard's service to any prince.

In 'Boys in Boxes: The Recipe for a Welsh Hero', Leslie Ellen Jones writes that 'although Lleu is not very much of a character, more acted upon than acting, the one talent he appears to have is an ability to change shape whether he wants to or not, a talent for continual rebirth'. (Jones 2005: 216—7) It can be argued that all of the changes Lleu undergoes are the result of Gwydion's interventions. First, Gwydion seems to save

2 It is possible that by describing them as *yn rith deu was ieueinc*, the author is suggesting that Gwydion and Lleu present themselves as young men of lower social standing than their own, since *gwas* 'lad' is a term often applied to a servant. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who made this suggestion.

Lleu's life when he takes the *ryw bethan* 'small something' that Aranrhod dropped, 'and wrapped a sheet of brocaded silk around it and hid it. He hid it in a small chest at the foot of his bed.' (M:54)[3] After his incubation in the chest, Lleu emerges as a fully formed and bonny baby, and Gwydion arranges for him to be nursed for two years. During that period, Lleu grows at twice the pace of a normal child, in the way that heroes do. The same rate of growth continues during his next two years at court, where Gwydion *a synnywys arnaw* 'took notice of him' (MUM: line 264; M:55).

The verb *synied*, used here to describe Gwydion's response to Lleu's arrival at court as a four-year-old sized two-year-old, implies more than the phrase *take notice* as it is used in American English, so it might be worth pausing to look at it.[4] GPC glosses it with *to suppose, think, fancy, imagine, believe; be conscious of, be aware of, know; consider, contemplate, study, attend to; examine, look at (intently or in astonishment), notice*. The notice taken, in other words, is more than passing, and the fact that *Ynteu e hun Wydyon, wedy y dyuot y'r llys, a synnywys arnaw* 'Gwydion himself took notice of him after he came to court '(MUM: lines 263—4) suggests that Gwydion was both astonished by Lleu and took him under his wing. Up to this point, then, Lleu's development, his 'changing shape whether he wants to or not', is a function of Gwydion's care but not of Gwydion's magic.

The next set of episodes recounts the successful efforts of Gwydion to circumvent Aranrhod's sworn *tynged* 'destiny' that the boy shall have neither name, nor

[3] . . kyrchu y drws a oruc hi, ac ar hynny adaw y ryw bethan ohonei. A chyn cael o neb guelet yr eil olwc arnaw, Gwydyon a'e kymerth, ac a droes llen o bali yn y gylch, ac a'e cudyawd. Sef y cudyawd, y mywn llaw gist is traed y wely. (MUM: lines 242—5)

[4] The verb appears in the 3rd person singular preterite indicative *synnywys* in MUM line 264.

arms, nor a bride—three attributes essential to the adult hero—without her. In two of these episodes, Gwydion *does* use his powers of enchantment, not only casually conjuring everything he needs out of various varieties of seaweed, but also when necessary changing his and Lleu's appearance (their *eilyw*, *pryd*, or *rhith*) and restoring their *pryd* (shape) and *ffurf* (form) when the task as hand has been accomplished. It is worth recalling here that in the second episode, the quest for arms, discussed above, it is as poets from Morganwg, *beirdd o Uorgannwc*, that Gwydion presents himself and Lleu at the gate of Caer Aranrhod.

Lleu's most dramatic transformation, however, is not brought about by Gwydion, but seems to be one of those things that happens 'whether he wants to or not'. Having been pierced by the poisoned spear of Gronw Pebr while improbably demonstrating the single and equally improbable position in which his death can be accomplished, *yn bwrw ehetuan ohonaw ynteu yn rith eryr, a dodi garymleis anhygar. Ac ny chahat y welet ef odyna y maes* 'Lleu flew up in the form of an eagle and gave a horrible scream, and he was not seen again'. (MUM:lines 483—5; M: 61)

Now it is not necessarily a bad thing for Lleu to be an eagle. The term *eryr* is one of the most common epithets for an heroic prince in the praise poetry of the *beirdd y tywysogion* 'the poets of the princes'. It occurs more than 100 times in the 12,600 lines of verse in *Cyfres Beirdd y Tywysogion*. It is such a common epithet for a patron in that poetry that its editors routinely paraphrase *eryr* as *arglwydd* 'lord'. Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr, for example, describes Cadwallon ap Madog of Maelienydd, who died in 1179, as *eryr mawrwyr Meruynyawn* 'the eagle [or lord] of the great men of Merfyn's lineage' (GCBMI Poem 21: line 17). In 1216, Prydydd y Moch addresses Llywelyn ap Iorwerth as *eryr ar gedyrn* 'eagle [lord] over the mighty' (GLlLl Poem 24: line 4), and Llygad Gwr in

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about 1258, to cite just one more example among many, calls Llywelyn ap Gruffudd *eryr Snawdwn* 'the eagle of Snowden' (GBFE Poem 24: line 88).   Having attained adulthood and having been granted by Math the cantref of Dinoding, *y kyuanhedwys ef, ac y gwledychwys. A phawb a uu uodlawn idaw ac y arglwydiaeth* (MUM: lines 394—5) Lleu 'settled there and ruled, and everyone was pleased with him and his governance'.(M:59) At that point, he might well have been described by a bard as *eryr Dinoding* (although *eryr Ardudwy*, or *eryr Eifionydd*, using the later names of Dinoding, which the text of *Math* also mentions, would be more satisfying poetically, because of the assonance of these phrases).   It is in his princely and heroic eagle nature that he escapes the attack of Gronw Pebr.5

That attack is more than an attack on his person. It is an assault by the lord of a neighboring territory, Penllyn, upon Lleu's sovereignty, an act of would-be conquest that is epitomized in Gronw's appropriation of Lleu's wife. Immediately following the sentence that recounts Lleu's eagle-flight, the reader is told of the real-world consequences of the attack:

> Yn gyn gyflymet ac yd aeth ef e ymdeith, y kyrchyssant wynteu y llys, a'r
> nos honno kyscu y gyt. A thrannoeth kyuodi a oruc Gronw, a guereskyn
> Ardudwy. Gwedy gwreskyn y wlat, y gwledychu a wnaeth yny oed yn y
> eidaw ef Ardudwy a Phenllyn. (MUM:lines 485—8)

> As soon as Lleu disappeared they made for the court, and that night they
> slept together. The next day Gronw got up and took possession of
> Ardudwy. Having taken possession of the land, he ruled it so that
> Ardudwy and Penllyn were in his control. (M 61)

Gronw's seduction of Blodeuedd , his assault on Lleu, and his seizure of Lleu's lands go

two steps further in the staging of a coup than does the assault on Math's footholder

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5 I take a different approach here to that of scholars who read this episode
mythologically and/or ritually as a kind of shamanic initiation. See for example the
discussion in Eson 2004: 288—375; see also MUM: 100—01.

Goewin at the opening of the tale. Thus, although Lleu is both metaphorically and literally an eagle, he is in both respects an eagle in a state of decay when Gwydion finds him, so that *phan ymyskytwei yr eryr, y syrthei y pryuet a'r kic pwdyr ohonaw* 'when he shakes himself, worms and rotten flesh fall from him' (MUM: lines 516—7; M: 62).' [6] The narrative has come full circle to a bad place, and now Math, the lord who allowed himself to be betrayed, and Gwydion, who engineered that betrayal, must redeem themselves by undoing the damage and restoring the eagle-prince to his proper state, both physically and politically.

To accomplish this, Gwydion begins, not by wielding his *hutlath* 'magic wand', but by singing or chanting an *englyn*:

> Dar a dyf y rwng deu lenn
> Gorduwrych awyr a glenn.
> Ony dywedaf i eu,
> O flodeu Lleu ban yw hynn
>   (MUM:lines 520—3)
>
> An oak grows between two lakes,
> Very dark the sky and the valley:
> Unless I am mistaken,
> This is because of Lleu's flowers.
>   (M:62)

It should be noted that when Gwydion finds Lleu, he is roosting in *dâr* 'an oak tree'. This word appears nowhere near so frequently in bardic poetry as does *eryr*, eagle, but it does occur occasionally as a metaphor for or attribute of a prince. Most famously, Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Coch refers to the slain Llywelyn ap Gruffudd as an *derwin dor* 'an oaken door'. (GBFE Poem 36:line 2) Such epithets and adjectives referring to the oak are relatively rare, however. Perhaps more pertinent is the gnome preserved in the Red

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[6] Note that Davies' English translation switches the imperfect to the present tense.

Book, *Gnawt nyth eryr ymblaen dâr* 'It is customary for an eagle's nest to be in the top of an oak' (R col. 1031: line18): the eagle is in an oak because that is where eagles are wont to roost.

In response to the first *englyn*, *Sef a wnaeth yr eryr, ymellwng yny oed yg kymerued y prenn* 'the eagle lowers himself until he is in the middle of the tree' (MUM: lines 524—5; M:62). It is likely that this movement represents, in part, Lleu's response to the voice of the uncle who raised him. But surely he is responding as well to the power of poetic form in the *englyn cyrch.* The end rhyme of lines 1, 2 and 4, augmented by the rhyme linking the end of line 3 to a word internal to line 4, weave its four seven-syllable lines into an elegant knot. The formal, poetic properties of this piece of language concentrate its meaning, transform it into something that not only describes a situation, but constitutes an object in itself, an object that I would argue holds a certain power by virtue of that formal concentration .

Then Gwydion offers another *englyn*:

> Dar a dyf yn ard uaes
> Nis gwlych glaw, nis mwy tawd [tes]
> Naw ugein angerd (a) borthes.
> Yn y blaen, Lleu Llaw Gyffes.
> (MUM: lines 526—9)

> An oak grows in a high plain,
> Rain does not wet it, no more does heat melt it.
> It has borne one of nine-score powers
> In its crown, Lleu Llaw Gyffes.[7]

This *englyn* poses several textual difficulties, as the bracketed insertion *tes* in line 2 and the hypermetrical *a* in line 3 show. In addition, Lleu's name appears as *Llew* in the manuscripts, but that is the case elsewhere in the text as well, in both of its medieval

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[7] My translation.

manuscript sources.   In fact, it is the required rhyme between the end of line 3 and the interior of line 4 in the first *englyn* that provides some of the best evidence that the correct form is *Lleu*. (MUM: lxxviii—lxix)   In addition, the implications of lines 2 and 3 have been regarded as mysterious: what is the significance of a tree that is affected by neither rain nor heat? And then, what are the *naw ugein angerd* associated with Lleu?[8] Despite the difficulties of the second *englyn*, however, its literal sense is generally clear.

　　　Like the first, the second *englyn* makes a new kind of sense when read in terms of bardic praise poetry. In his first *englyn*, Gwydion recognizes the oak, he names it; it is the noble tree in which Lleu roosts, and it grows in what the tale interprets as Lleu's territory, in Nantlle.[9]   In the second englyn, the oak is Lleu's habitat, his princely court for the present moment, if you will. Like other courts that stand in metonymically for their lords, such as Dinbych in *Edmyg Dinbych*, it is a stable place, offering protection to all who enter its precincts.[10] In the court poetry of the *beirdd y tywysogion*, the patron is often closely associated with his court, a place in which the poet takes delight. As Phylip Brydydd described the court of Rhys Ieuanc at Llanbadarn Fawr in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, *yn llys hil Tewdwr tec y'm hurdit—ynaeth / ac attoeth etwaeth na'm gwaeth wneit* 'in the court of Tewdwr's seed I was honored handsomely, and maybe I would be treated no worse on another occasion' (GDBE Poem 14: lines 7—8). In his elegy for Rhys Gryg, a southern Welsh prince who died in 1233, Y Prydydd Bychan links his lord and his lord's court by employing the adjective *hardd* 'beautiful, splendid,

[8] These questions are discussed in MUM:103—5 and M:244, n. to p. 62.
[9] On the location and onomastic interpretation of the place described in the first *englyn* as *y rwng deu lenn*, see MUM:99—100, n. to lines 511—12.
[10] On *Edmyg Dinbych*, see Gruffydd 2002. The entire poem is a celebration of the fort in which Bleiddudd holds court, and of Bleiddudd for providing the safety and hospitality that his court represents.

excellent' as *cymeriad*, a linking device, between two *englynion*: the first of these ends with the line *Teyrn yn heyrn yn hart* 'splendid sovereign in iron armor', and the next opens with *Hart llys Rys, Ros geithiwed* 'splendid the court of Rhys, captor of Rhos (GBFE Poem 3: lines 16—17). And Prydydd y Moch celebrates Llywelyn ap Iorwerth as *dreic llys eurawc* 'the dragon [lord] of a golden court' (GLlLl Poem 24: line 10). One way of reading the riddle of the second *englyn* is to understand the oak as offering the kind of protection from the elements that a prince's court provided to his followers. That a tree can provide such protection, unless it is a magical tree, makes no literal sense. But even as the buildings that a prince inhabited became with his presence *llys eurawc* 'a golden court', so we might understand the oak to have been transmuted into something more than its natural self by Lleu's presence. As Ian Hughes has written, "the elements—rain and heat—have no effect on the tree because Lleu is perching on it" (2013, p. 104, n. to line 527).

Lleu himself, roosting in the oak, is a prince of *naw ugein angerd* 'nine-score powers'. *Angerdd,* rendered here as 'power' has a semantic range that encompasses (a)*, ardour, . . . power;* (b) *attribute, . . . craft, skill; inspiration*; and (c) *heat . . . vapour,* in both literal and figurative senses (GPC*: s.v.)* It is, in the poetry of the *beirdd y tywysogion*, always a positive thing when found in a lord (or claimed by a poet). The root of *angerdd* is *cerdd* 'poem, song, craft', with an intensifying prefix. It is worth noting that it is a term whose etymology celebrates the association of power and passion with craft and the crafted object—especially the poem. *Angerdd* is used in this context by Prydydd y Moch in his *Bygwth Dafydd ab Owain*, in which he warns the son of Owain Gwynedd to show proper respect to his poet. He claims that

> Gwynnycawd dy glod hynod honni
> O angert a'm kert a'm kymelri
> > (GLlLl Poem 2: lines 39—40)

> Your fame shines forth, made widely known
> by the **angerdd** of both my poem and my rage.[11]

The etymology of *angerdd* may be of no immediate relevance to our understanding of the third line of Gwydion's second *englyn*, where it refers to the *naw ugain angerdd* (special powers informed by ardor?) of Lleu, rather than of Gwydion or any other poet. Nevertheless, the existence of the word, with its semantic scope, speaks to the cultural significance of the craft of poetry in Wales, a phenomenon that is central to my reading of the *englynion* in the Fourth Branch.

Gwydion's celebration of Lleu's princely nature in the second *englyn* draws the mangy eagle down *yny uyd yn y geing issaf o'r pren* 'until he is on the lowest branch of the tree' (MUM: line 530; M: 62). The final *englyn* is explicit in identifying the noble oak as the dwelling place of a noble prince:

> Dar a dyf dan anwaeret,
> Mirein modur ynywet[12].
> Ony dywedaf i [eu],
> Ef dydau Lleu y'm arfet.
> > (MUM: lines 532—5)

> An oak grows on a slope,
> The refuge of a splendid lord.
> If I do not speak a falsehood,
> Lleu will come to my lap.[13]

The first couplet of this third *englyn* links Lleu to his dwelling place, and suggests that both are *mirain*, 'splendid'. Gwydion's conviction that Lleu will now come to him

[11] My translation. On the translation of *a'm kert a'm kymelri*, see GLlLl 32, n. to line 40.
[12] With MUM 105, I read *ynwet* as *ynyuet* 'sanctuary'
[13] My translation.

reflects the praise poet's conviction that his verse should be and will be rewarded with the prince's friendship.   And indeed, with that Lleu *dygwydawd ynteu ar lin Gwydyon* 'dropped down onto Gwydion's knee' (MUM: line 536; M: 62), and Gwydion is able to strike him with the magic wand so that he regains his own *rhith* 'shape'. Then Lleu returns to Math's court in Caer Dathyl to be cared for until he is sufficiently recovered to seek revenge against Gronw, to recover his lands and to rule them successfully, until eventually he succeeds Math as lord of all Gwynedd.

It is in his capacity as poet, as well as in his capacity as magician, that Gwydion has brought about the final transformation of Lleu into himself—the mature hero and lord, a formidable warrior and a ruler who fosters prosperity in his realm. Questions have been raised about the origin and antiquity of Gwydion's three *englynion*.[14] And as we have seen, there are textual difficulties as well that I have elided in my translations. I believe it fair to say, however, that my rendering of the *englynion* is true to their general sense. Moreover, questions of the ultimate source of the *englynion* do not impinge on their attribution by the author of the Fourth Branch to Gwydion, and to the specific moment of Lleu's degradation at the hands of Gronw Pebr.

By inserting the verses at this point in the narrative, whether he has composed them himself or borrowed them from elsewhere, the author celebrates for his audience the power of a poet to make a prince something greater than he is by the power of his praise. Among the terms that poets use for their eulogies are the verbs *arddwyrain* 'to raise up' and *mawrhau*, literally 'to magnify', or make big. Cynddelw states the interdependence of prince and poet explicitly and succinctly in a poem to the Lord Rhys: Ti hebof, nyd

[14] On these difficulties, see MUM:100—1, and the further references cited there.

hebu oet teu (GCBMII 9:173—4), 'You without me, you would have no speech'.

Prydydd y Moch tells Dafydd ab Owain Gwynedd that *Gwell ytt wyf, hael rwyf, no rivedi meirch* (GLlLl 2: 27) 'I am better for you, generous lord, than any number of horses'.

By attributing the *englynion* in the Fourth Branch to Gwydion, a figure known both to tradition and to this text as a powerful magician, the author asserts for poetry the kind of transformative power that the *beirdd y tywysogion* claim for their *molawdau* 'elegies'. By juxtaposing the effect of the *englynion*—to bring Lleu from the top of the oak in to Gwydion's lap—with the effect of a magic wand—to restore Lleu to human form—the author identifies the power of poetry with the more fancifully imagined, but in some ways more tangible, power of the sorcerer to bring about transformations with his *hutlath*. Without violating tradition, he employs the character of Gwydion to underscore the relationship of poetry to magic. Máire Ní Mhaonaigh has written in connection with medieval Irish literature, 'Working within a highly developed creative tradition, each weaver had access to the same well-worn fabric of his forebears and cut his cloth with pre-existing garments in mind' (Ní Mhaonaigh: 32). Similarly, the author of the Fourth Branch draws on traditions associated with Gwydion to weave the figure of a complex magician-poet who can use his powers both to destructive ends and to bring and then restore to manhood the lad who will succeed Math as ruler of Gwynedd.

In the introduction to his edition of the Fourth Branch, Ian Hughes provides a list of all of the references to Gwydion to be found in recorded Welsh tradition. (MUM: lvi—lxvii)15 A review of this dossier shows unequivocally that Gwydion is known to the tradition primarily as a magician, and I am by no means suggesting that he was instead

15 For Gwydion's 'dossier', see also TYP:392—4.

primarily a poet. As we know, however, authors who work with traditional narrative material select, highlight and refract that material to serve their own rhetorical purposes. The Fourth Branch author chose to present Gwydion as someone who could not only adopt *rhith bard* 'the appearance of a poet', but actually *was* a poet.

There would seem to have been precedent on which the author could draw for his representation of Gwydion as poet as well as magician. Hughes draws attention to two *englynion* in a section of MS Peniarth 98 written by the seventeenth-century antiquarian scribe John Davies Mallwyd and billed by him as *hengerdd*. (Huws forthcoming; TYP: 218). John Davies Mallwyd is generally regarded as having been careful about his sources, so we may with some confidence regard these *englynion* as of genuinely medieval origin. An introductory prose passage to the stanzas claims that the *englynion* were sung in connection with *Cad Goddau* 'the battle of the trees'.[16] According to that account, *yr oedd gŵr [ar y naill ochr] yn y frwydr na threchid mohono oni wyddid ei enw. . . . Dyfalodd Gwydion fab Dôn enw'r gŵr—Brân—ac fe ganodd:* 'there was a man in the battle that would never be defeated unless his name was known. . . .Gwydion son of Dôn guessed the man's name—Brân—and he sang:'

> Carngraff fy march rhag ottoyw
> bann blaen gwern ar y asoyw
> Brân ith elwir briger loyw
>
> Neu fal hyn:
>
> Carngraff dy farch yn nydd cad
> bann blaen gwern ar dy angad
> Brân lorgrig ai frig arnad
> Y gorfu Amathaon mad.

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[16] This battle is most fully described and celebrated in a poem in the Book of Taliesin (LPBT:167—239); it is also referenced in TYP (TYP:217—9)

Gwydion ap Don ai kant

My horse is sturdy of hoof under the spur,
A long branch of alder in his left hand
Bran you are called with shining hair.

Or thus

Your horse is sturdy of hoof on the day of battle,
A long branch of alder in your hand,
Bran in a coat of mail and breeches on you
Amaethon the good was victorious.

Gwydion son of Dôn sang it. (MUM: lxiii—lxv)

Both versions of this enigmatic *englyn* suggest that Gwydion has divinatory powers by means of which he is able to identify Brân. Both versions seem to arise from his magician's nature rather than from a bardic impulse, although the second version would also seem to contain an element of praise for Brân in its first three lines. The *englyn* is certainly a piece of formal verse, however. It is similar to the *englyn cyrch* except for the fact that lines 3 and 4 rhyme, rather than line 3 rhyming with an internal syllable in line 4; it is similar to the *englyn proest dalgron* except that its four lines rhyme fully. Problematic on a number of levels—uncertainty about its source and context, substantive variation in the text itself—this *englyn* nevertheless offers at least a trace of a tradition that Gwydion functioned on some occasions through the medium of verse; in other words, there was precedent for both the author of the Fourth Branch and for Gwydion himself as a character to represent him as a poet.

Hughes also points out the connection between the Fourth Branch and the Book of Taliesin, the manuscript collection of poems ostensibly composed by a sixth-century bard possessed of mystical knowledge, magical powers, and preternatural longevity. One

16

one or more of seven characters in the Fourth Branch appear in each of thirteen poems in the Book of Taliesin; Gwydion's name occurs seven times. In *Kat Godeu*, the speaker, evidently Taliesin himself, asserts that

> A'm swynwys-i Vath
> kyn bum diameth.
> A'm swynwys-i Wytyon—
> Mawrut o brithron.
> o Eurwys, o Euron,
> o Euron, o Vodron,
> o pump keluydon—
> athrawon eil math—
> pan ymdygyaed.
>
> Math created me
> before I was completed.
> Gwydion fashioned me—
> great enchantment wrought by a magic staff:
> by Eurwys, by Euron,
> by Euron, by Modron:
> by five enchanters—
> of a kind like godparents—
> was I reared.   (LPBT: Number 5, lines 163—71, p. 182)

Gwydion does not create Taliesin on his own; there are five *keluydon*, 'enchanters' involved, but he is one of them. According to *Kat Godeu*, then, behind the figure of the archetypal poet there is another figure, a conjurer, but a conjurer who is, at least in the context of the Fourth Branch, also himself a poet. This passage not only provides another assertion of the link between the figure of Gwydion and the art of poetry; it also connects poetry with magical power, as do the Fourth Branch *englynio*n. As one of the creators of Taliesin, Gwydion produces the paradigmatic poet through magic: the verb *swyno*, which appears in the third person preterite in the first and third lines of the passage from *Kat Godeu* quoted above and translated by Hughes as 'create', has the sense of 'to conjure, charm'. And the poet so created, in the case of Taliesin, has his own magical powers.

In *Kat Godeu*, Gwydion is not only one of those who bring Taliesin into being. It is also he who conjures up trees to assist the Britons in their battle. He is commanded by God to conjure the trees *trwy ieith ac eluyd* 'by means of language and [materials of] the earth]' (LPBT 5:52, p. 176).17 In this passage, we glimpse again the permeability of the distinction between magic and poetry: both are processes of creation, and both involve language. Not every act of magic—*hudo*, *swyno*—involves language, but some do, including the conjuring of the trees in *Kat Godeu*.

The creators of Taliesin are referred to collectively in *Kat Godeu* as *keluydon* (ModW *celfyddon*). The same term is used in connection with Gwydion in two other Book of Taliesin poems. In *Kadeir Kerrituen,* Gwydion is described as *keluydaf gwr a gigleu* 'the most skillful man I ever heard of' (LPBT 10:13, p. 316). And both Gwydion and Math are referred to as *celfyddon* in *Prif Gyuarch Geluyd* 'The First Artful Bidding' (LPBT 1: 36—7, p. 55) as well. The noun *celfydd* is rendered in GPC as *expert, enchanter . . .artist*; as an adjective, it is glossed, as *skilful.* In related words we find a similar melding of notions of skill, craftsmanship and deceptive ruse. *Celfyddyd*, for example, refers both to *art, craft, vocation,* on the one hand, and to *ruse, wile, trick, magic*, on the other. It is used in the latter sense of Gwydion in the Fourth Branch, where we are told that *yd aeth ef yn y geluydodeu* 'he drew on his skills' (M:49), or 'he betook him to his arts' (Jones & Jones 1948: 49) when he set about conjuring horses and hounds for Pryderi. But *celfydd* and its compounds can also describe poets and the composition of poetry.

17 It should be noted that the editor, Marged Haycock, suggests in a note that it is possible to attach that line to the previous one, As *attebwys Dofyd* 'God answered him' rather than to read it as the adverbial introduction to God's command to Gwydion.

C*elfyddyd* is used by the *beirdd y tywysogion* of their own skills. Meilyr ap Gwalchmai prays that *keluydyt a'm keluydo*, that his 'art may make me skillful' (GMBD Poem 30: line 14), while at the same time associating that art with the divine by referring to God as *Celfydd* in the very next line. Einion ap Gwgon, in a eulogy for Llywelyn Fawr, asks God at the outset to grant him a *keluyt leueryt*, which we can read as a 'skillful utterance' (GDBE Poem 18:lines 3—4). Warning Dafydd ab Owain Gwynedd not to scorn him, Prydydd y Moch asserts that God's skills have been shared with him, *Keluytodeu Reen rannwyd a mi* (GLlLl Poem 2: line 5).

I do not mean to diminish Gwydion's role as a magician—in *Math* and elsewhere in Welsh tradition, magic is at the center of his identity. However, in *Math*, the conflation of the magician and the poet reflects the habitus, so fundamental to the culture of medieval Wales, that identifies poetry simultaneously with the acquired craft of verse informed by traditional learning (*cyfarwyddyd*); with the magical power to transform, whether for good or for ill; and with divine creative power.

Abbreviations

GBFE=Andrews 1996
GCBMI=Nerys Ann Jones 1991
GCBMII=Nerys Ann Jones 1995
GDBE=Costigan 1995
GLlLl= Elin Jones 1991
GMBD=Williams
GPC=*Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*
LPBT=Haycock 2015
M=Davies 2007
MUM=Hughes 2013
R=Evans 1911
TYP=Bromwich 2006

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