

**The Daughters of Modron:**  
**Evangeline Walton's Feminist Re-visioning of the *Mabinogi***

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## Summary

*The Mabinogi Tetralogy* by Evangeline Walton consists of four novels: *Prince of Annwn* (1974), *The Children of Llyr* (1971), *The Song of Rhiannon* (1972) and *The Island of the Mighty* (1970, first published under the title *The Virgin and the Swine*, 1936). This thesis locates the *Tetralogy* as a founding text of modern feminist fantasy fiction by analysing its rewriting of the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*. The analysis demonstrates how feminist debate, Welsh medieval literature and Celtic history combine to produce an important, if hitherto largely ignored, contribution to both fantasy fiction and women's writing.

Walton re-visioned the *Mabinogi* as a tale of a fictional Celtic Wales's transition from a mother-worshipping tribal society to the patriarchal, monotheistic power structure that governed the construction of the medieval text. The fantasy genre which Walton helped form enables the author to use magic as a symbol of female agency. The female characters in *The Mabinogion Tetralogy* with the strongest connection with the fictional deity referred to as the Mother – Rhiannon and Arianrhod – also have the highest degree of magical capabilities. Conversely, those who lose their connection with the Mother – Branwen, Penardim and Blodeuwedd – become subject to the control of their male counterparts. A feminist reading of the *Tetralogy*, which draws upon the work of Luce Irigaray, reveals Walton's series as a story about the cultural demise of Mother-worship and the institutionalisation of a patriarchal society that permanently re-defined gender roles.

An examination of Walton's source material elucidates how the author uses historical research to provide a realistic framework for the *Tetralogy*. By examining how Walton merges history with fantasy, and a medieval text with modern feminist thought, this thesis argues for a re-evaluation of Evangeline Walton as one of the most important developers of feminist fantasy fiction.

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## Introduction

Evangeline Walton (1907-1996) is one of the most innovative but ignored twentieth-century American women writers.<sup>1</sup> Her career spans half a century and encompasses the fantasy, historical fiction and gothic genres. Her first novel, *The Virgin and the Swine* (re-titled *The Island of the Mighty*), was published in 1936 and her last, *The Sword is Forged*, in 1982. By 2010 her entire corpus was out of print. At least two of her novels and many of her short stories have never been published. Yet there are indications of a re-emerging interest in the work of Evangeline Walton. *Fantasy and Science Fiction* magazine printed ‘They That Have Wings’, a previously un-published short story, in their November/December 2011 issue, and Overlook Press reissued their single-volume edition of *The Mabinogion Trilogy* on 29 May 2012.<sup>2</sup> *Above Ker-Is and Other Stories*, a collection of ten of Walton’s fantasy short stories, was also published in 2012.<sup>3</sup> Douglas A. Anderson has discovered a second gothic novel (as yet untitled), a children’s fantasy novel (*The Forest That Would Not Be Cut Down*), a verse-play about the Norse King Harald’s love affair with a witch (*Swan-Wife*) and the remaining two novels of the Theseus trilogy which began with *The Sword is Forged*.<sup>4</sup> These unpublished materials further indicate that Walton’s work encompassed multiple genres, cultures and historical periods. Walton reached her popular and critical zenith in

<sup>1</sup> Her full name was Evangeline Walton Ensley.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Evangeline Walton’ <<http://evangelinewalton.com>> [accessed 3 April 2012]. This information was sourced from the Evangeline Walton official website, which went live on 12 October 2011. The creation of an official website, which is run by representatives of her literary estate, is in and of itself indicative of the renewed interest in Walton’s work. Evangeline Walton, *The Mabinogion Trilogy* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2002). All further references are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text as ‘Walton’.

<sup>3</sup> Evangeline Walton, *Above Ker-Is and Other Stories* (Marcellus: Nodens Books, 2012). Four of the stories in this collection were previously unpublished. See Douglas A. Anderson, ‘Nodens Books’ <<http://www.nodensbooks.com>> [accessed 16 April 2012].

<sup>4</sup> Anderson is Walton’s literary executor. Douglas A. Anderson, ‘Interview: Douglas A. Anderson on Evangeline Walton’, *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, 22 November 2011 <<http://www.sfsite.com/fsf/blog/2011/11/22/douglas-a-anderson-on-evangeline-walton/>> [accessed 3 April 2012].

the 1970s and 1980s with the re-publication of *The Island of the Mighty* in 1970 and her acceptance of the World Fantasy Award for Lifetime Achievement in 1989.<sup>5</sup> Those twenty years saw the most concentrated publication of her work to date, but despite the popularity of her fantasy novels, Evangeline Walton has received little public notice after the 1980s, and less critical attention.<sup>6</sup> This paucity of critical material reflects the marginalization of fantasists in the academic sphere; that Walton is a female fantasist, gothicist and historical novelist makes her not only impossible to categorize but perhaps also marginalized as a writer of genre fiction.

The only recent scholarship on Walton can be found in Audrey L. Becker and Kristin Noone's volume, *Welsh Mythology and Folklore in Popular Culture* (2011).<sup>7</sup> The fact that this initial resurgence of critical interest in Walton's work is focused upon *The Mabinogion Trilogy* reflects its earlier public reception. Zahorski and Boyer report that these four novels—each based upon one of the Four Branches in the collection of medieval Welsh tales commonly referred to as *The Mabinogion*—were the 'most popular with readers [and] received the greatest critical acclaim'.<sup>8</sup> The first and second novels in the series, *The Children of Llyr* and *Prince of Annwn*, were nominated for the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Adult Literature in the Best Novel category in 1972 and 1975, respectively. The third novel, *The Song Rhiannon*, won in the same category in 1973.<sup>9</sup> The recognition given to her work by the fantasy literature readership

<sup>5</sup> 'Walton and her works' <<http://evangelinewalton.com>> [accessed 3 April 2012].

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth J. Zahorski and Robert H. Boyer, *Lloyd Alexander, Evangeline Walton Ensley, Kenneth Morris: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1981), p. 125.

<sup>7</sup> *Welsh Mythology and Folklore in Popular Culture: Essays on Adaptations in Literature, Film, Television and Digital Media*, Audrey L. Becker and Kristin Noone, eds. (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011). See Kristin Noone, ‘“The Rough, Savage Strength of Earth”: Evangeline Walton’s Human Heroes and Mythic Spaces’ (pp. 18-29); Nicole A. Thomas, ‘Branwen’s Shame: Voicing the Silent Feminine in Evangeline Walton’s *The Children of Llyr*’ (pp. 30-41); Deborah Hooker, ‘Disavowing Maternity in Evangeline Walton’s *The Virgin and the Swine*: Fantasy Meets the Social Protest Fiction of the 1930s’ (pp. 42-60). Material from my essay, ‘Branwen’s Shame: Voicing the Silent Feminine in Evangeline Walton’s *The Children of Llyr*’, appears in Chapter II below.

<sup>8</sup> Zahorski and Boyer, *Lloyd Alexander, Evangeline Walton Ensley, Kenneth Morris*, p. 125.

<sup>9</sup> Although *Prince of Annwn* is the first novel in the series it was published last by Ballantine Books, in 1974. The previously-published fourth novel, *The Virgin and the Swine*, was re-titled *The Island of the*

demonstrates that Evangeline Walton was one of the most highly respected authors responsible for shaping the modern fantasy fiction genre in that decade.

Walton's first published novel was the fourth in what eventually became known as *The Mabinogion Tetralogy*; it appeared as *The Virgin and the Swine* in 1936, one year prior to J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*.<sup>10</sup> Yet while *The Hobbit*'s immediate success led to the subsequent publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, and Tolkien's establishment as one of the most influential writers of the fantasy genre, *The Virgin and the Swine* quickly dropped out of print and Walton temporarily disappeared from the literary world. Walton later told her publisher, Betty Ballantine, that 'she had continued to write her version of the Mabinogion [...] but had stored the unpublished manuscripts when her first publisher had not even wanted to *see* any more material on the subject. She had assumed there was simply no interest in fantasy'.<sup>11</sup> She was partially correct. C. W. Sullivan III remarks that realism was the dominant mode for novels written in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Realism was considered by both the elite and mainstream reading public to be 'serious writing' and therefore worthy of study. Sullivan writes that:

newly-formed university English departments, themselves products of the late nineteenth century, developed curricula in modern literature that not only emphasised realistic fiction as worthy of study and analysis but rejected and shunned popular fiction.<sup>12</sup>

According to Patrick Merla the success of the 1965 American paperback edition of *The Lord of the Rings* was the catalyst for the initial popularity of fantasy fiction among

<sup>10</sup> Mighty and re-published in 1970. The second and third novels in the series, *The Children of Llyr* and *The Song of Rhiannon*, followed in 1971 and 1972. The order of publication most likely reflects the fact that Walton revised the novels after Betty Ballantine contacted her about publishing them. 'Walton and her works' <<http://evangelinewalton.com>> [accessed 3 April 2012].

<sup>11</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (London: HarperCollins Children's Books, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Betty Ballantine, 'Introduction', in *The Mabinogion Tetralogy*, pp. 7-12 (p. 9).

<sup>12</sup> C. W. Sullivan III, 'Celtic Studies and Modern Fantasy Literature', in *Welsh Mythology and Folklore in Popular Culture*, pp. 9-17 (pp. 11-12).

adult readers.<sup>13</sup> Merla notes that Lin Carter's *Tolkien: A Look Behind 'The Lord of the Rings'* (1972) contained a wealth of information on other fantasy writers who were previously unknown.<sup>14</sup> Ballantine subsequently hired Carter as a consultant for their new adult fantasy fiction paperback series, and it was Carter who discovered *The Virgin and the Swine*, bringing it to the attention of Betty Ballantine as a possible title for the series.<sup>15</sup> Ballantine then contacted Evangeline Walton and *The Mabinogion Trilogy* was finally published in its entirety. Despite the fact that *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* preceded *The Mabinogion Trilogy* in the public consciousness by up to forty years, Walton is in fact Tolkien's literary contemporary and arguably one of the earliest female writers of modern fantasy fiction. The lack of interest in fantasy fiction and the 'increasing male contempt for women's writing in general' in 1930s America has resulted in an inaccurate evaluation of Evangeline Walton's contributions to both women's writing and the fantasy genre.<sup>16</sup>

This thesis aims to redress this by demonstrating that *The Mabinogion Trilogy* is an innovative confluence of fantasy, feminist debate and medieval Welsh literature which has been critically neglected. By re-visioning the *Mabinogi* as a narrative about the transition from Mother worship to patriarchal monotheism in a fictional pre-Christian 'Island of the Mighty', Walton transforms these four medieval Welsh tales into a feminist critique of the phallocentric depiction of female identity and gender

<sup>13</sup> Patrick Merla, "'What is Real?' Asked the Rabbit One Day', in *Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature*, second edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 337-55 (p. 347). Ballantine Press published Tolkien's novel as the inaugural text of their new fantasy fiction paperback series. Its immediate success led to the search for other fantasy novels and, ultimately, Walton's rediscovery. 'Betty Ballantine: Publishing Pioneer', *Locus Online: The Magazine of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Field* <<http://www.locusmag.com/2002/Issue11/Ballantine.html>> [accessed 4 April 2012].

<sup>14</sup> Merla, "'What is Real?' Asked the Rabbit One Day', p. 347. See Lin Carter, *Tolkien: A Look Behind 'The Lord of the Rings'* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972).

<sup>15</sup> Ballantine, 'Introduction', p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx* (London: Virago, 2009), p. 331. Evangeline Walton is not mentioned in Showalter's history of American women writers. She does include Ursula Le Guin, the fantasy fiction writer who rose to prominence alongside Walton in the 1970s, a choice which reflects the fact that Le Guin received the critical recognition and popular success that has evaded Walton. See pp. 458, 459, 471 and 493.

relationships which are apparent in the medieval text and, implicitly, at work in the twentieth-century Western society in which she was writing. Although Walton never received a formal education, her erudition is evident in the footnotes and author's notes which accompany each of the four novels.<sup>17</sup> I began my own research by looking into her sources, and it became immediately apparent that Walton's *Tetralogy* is structured around a sound knowledge of and respect for the original *Mabinogi*.

### **Walton and the *Mabinogi*: An Evolutionary Journey from Folktale to Fantasy**

The *Mabinogi* is a collection of medieval Welsh tales which can be found in two manuscripts: *The White Book of Rhydderch* (dated c. 1350) and *The Red Book of Hergest* (dated between 1382 and c. 1410).<sup>18</sup> The tales in the Red Book were translated into English by Lady Charlotte Guest and published, in seven parts, between 1838 and 1845 under the new title of *The Mabinogion*.<sup>19</sup> Prior to this publication, the *Mabinogion* was little known outside of the realm of medieval scholarship, according to Rachel

<sup>17</sup> Ballantine, 'Introduction', p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Sioned Davies, trans., *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). *Mabinogion* is in fact a scribal error for *mabinogi*, which is 'derived from the Welsh word *mab*, meaning "son, boy"' (p. ix). Although titled *The Mabinogion Tetralogy* when published by Overlook Press, Walton refers to the medieval collection as 'the *Mabinogi*', a title which specifically refers to the four tales commonly referred to as 'The Four Branches'. This is the title which I will be using throughout this thesis when referring to the Branches. Walton re-visioned the Four Branches (commonly known as 'Pwyll Prince of Dyved', 'Branwen the Daughter of Llyr', 'Manawyddan the Son of Llyr', and 'Math the Son of Mathonwy') as *Prince of Annwn*, *The Children of Llyr*, *The Song of Rhiannon* and *The Island of the Mighty*.

<sup>19</sup> Alan Lee, 'Introduction' to *The Mabinogion*, trans. by Lady Charlotte Guest (London: HarperCollins, 2000), p. iv. William Owen Pughe translated a section of the First Branch in 1796 and the entirety of the Fourth Branch in 1829. Several notable English language translations have been published since Pughe's and Guest's, most prominent among them being those of Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (1948) and Sioned Davies (2007). The Guest translation is the one to which Walton refers and therefore the one which I will be using when directly comparing quotations from the *Mabinogi* and *The Mabinogion Tetralogy*. An American born in Indianapolis, Indiana, Walton was not a native Welsh speaker. She thanks a Professor Robinson of Harvard University for 'a special translation of some obscure passages dealing with Gwydion's metamorphoses' in her forward to *The Island of the Mighty*, p. 429 (this was probably Prof. F. N. Robinson). This acknowledgement, in conjunction with those of her footnotes which provide definitions for Welsh words used in the novels, leads me to believe that, although not fluent in Welsh, Walton may have been studying the language while writing the *Tetralogy*. She recalls that her first reading of the *Mabinogi* was 'after steeping myself in the Irish Twilight'. When she 'was on the hunt for anything Celtic [...] my first clear recollection of the *Mabinogi* is of holding the Indianapolis Public Library's copy in my hands [...] I think there was a Welsh text on one side and English on the other...of course it was Lady Guest's translation'. Zahorski and Boyer, *Lloyd Alexander, Evangeline Walton Ensley, Kenneth Morris*, p. 118. Zahorski and Boyer do not specify which edition of the Guest translation Walton is referring to in the above statement.

Bromwich.<sup>20</sup> The *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* and *Brut y Brenhinedd* were considered the ‘canonical’ Welsh texts while the *Mabinogion* was dismissed as less historical and more ‘fabulous’.<sup>21</sup> The Romantic Revival at the end of the eighteenth century increased scholarly and literary interest in medieval literature, leading to William Owen Pughe’s English translations of *Mabinogi Pwyll* (1796) and *Math fab Mathonwy* (1829); plans to publish Pughe’s translation of the complete *Mabinogion* were abandoned upon his death in 1835.<sup>22</sup> While Guest adopted the title of *Mabinogion* from Pughe, as well as her interpretation of the tales as ‘Juvenilia’, Bromwich asserts that Guest’s translation is entirely her own work and is ‘in several instances more accurate’ than Pughe’s.<sup>23</sup> Guest prioritized the Arthurian tales, which were published in volumes one and two, with the Four Branches appearing in volume three (along with ‘Taliesin’).<sup>24</sup> While initially intended for children, the success of Guest’s translation brought the *Mabinogion* to the attention of Celtsists who had previously dismissed it as unworthy of critical analysis. John Rhŷs published his own translation in conjunction with Gwenogvryn Evans in 1887.<sup>25</sup> Rhŷs and Evans made several important changes to the text as we know it today, one being the removal of ‘Taliesin’, a decision based on the fact that it has ‘no claim to rank with’ either the *Mabinogion* or ‘other tales of the same epoch’, in Rhŷs’s words.<sup>26</sup> The textual alterations performed by Rhŷs and Evans which are most pertinent

<sup>20</sup> Rachel Bromwich, ‘The *Mabinogion* and Lady Charlotte Guest’, in ‘*The Mabinogi*: A Book of Essays’, ed. by C. W. Sullivan III (London: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 3-18 (p. 3).

<sup>21</sup> Bromwich, ‘The *Mabinogion* and Lady Charlotte Guest’, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Bromwich, ‘The *Mabinogion* and Lady Charlotte Guest’, pp. 5-6.

<sup>23</sup> W. O. Pughe defines the *Mabinogi* as ‘Juvenile Tales’ in his *Dictionary* (1773-1803). Guest used the *Dictionary* to assist in her own translation. She was also lent manuscripts by several members of the gentry, including Sir Richard Bosanquet and Lord Mostyn, and was aided in her research by the Cymreigyddion Society of Abergavenny. While Sir John Rhŷs and Gwenogvryn Evans acknowledge the importance of Guest’s contribution in their ‘diplomatic version’ of the *Mabinogion* (1887), they argue that theirs is a more accurate translation. Bromwich, ‘The *Mabinogion* and Lady Charlotte Guest’, pp. 9-12.

<sup>24</sup> Bromwich, ‘The *Mabinogion* and Lady Charlotte Guest’, p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> In the Preface Rhŷs acknowledges the importance of Guest’s translation, but argues that its expense placed it above the reach of the average scholar, and that their ‘more exacting age’ demanded a more accurate translation. Rhŷs and Evans, *The Mabinogion* (London: Macmillan, 1887), p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Rhŷs and Evans, *The Mabinogion*, p. 1.

to this thesis are their identification of *Mabinogi* as a title referring specifically to the Four Branches and the alteration of Guest's order of the tales; by placing the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* in the beginning of the text, Rhŷs and Evans assert they are of as equal, if not greater, importance to the literary history of Wales than the Arthurian tales.<sup>27</sup>

Although the *White* and *Red Books* were written in the Late Middle Ages, Rachel Bromwich points out that the dating of these medieval manuscripts 'gives no indication as to the antiquity of their contents, since the very nature of Celtic tradition is such that it precludes the exact dating of content by linguistic criteria'.<sup>28</sup> The 'Celtic tradition' to which Bromwich refers is the generally accepted theory that the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* were not the original creative work of their medieval redactor. Rather, that redactor was combining tales that had been until that point performed orally. Davies states that the *Mabinogi* 'evolved over centuries before reaching their final written form: as such, they reflect a collaboration between the oral and literary culture'.<sup>29</sup> The oral tales would have been performed by a *cyfarwydd* (a professional reciter). The redactor's repeated references to the *cyfarwydd* indicate that the *Mabinogi* is a passive form of 'collaboration' between the *cyfarwydd* and the redactor.

Many noted scholars have suggested that the tales are Christianized fragments of an older mythology. Derrick S. Thompson summarizes this hypothesis of the *Mabinogi*'s evolution:

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<sup>27</sup> Rhŷs and Evans are adhering to the structure of the *White Book*, which places the *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* first.

<sup>28</sup> Rachel Bromwich, ed. and trans., *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961), p. lxiv. All references to the 'medieval' period or 'Middle Ages' in this thesis specifically refer to the Late Middle period to which the White and Red Books are dated, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>29</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. ix.

The complex would appear to be one of immemorial myths and heroic tales, influenced by historical traditions, and finally welded and moulded by an editor who may well have been a cleric whose moralistic and satirical tendencies are generally, but not always, submerged by his ambition to tell a good story well.<sup>30</sup>

While Thompson provides us with a concise summary of this theory, he was not the first to formulate it. W. J. Gruffydd came to the same conclusion in his 1953 book *Rhiannon: an Inquiry into the First and Third Branches of the Mabinogi*.<sup>31</sup> Gruffydd also posits that in the course of this journey the *Mabinogi* would have accumulated material from outside influences and consequently been altered. He believes that the rarity of contemporary references in the medieval manuscript is ‘significant’ and cites this rarity as evidence that those references are the ‘later editions’ of the clerical redactor.<sup>32</sup> Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan notes the ‘striking’ ‘rarity’ of Christian references in the medieval text. She argues that the introduction of ‘Christian elements into Welsh narrative literature’, including the *Mabinogi*, can be attributed to the intermarriage of the Welsh and Anglo-Normans due to the increased Anglo-Norman presence in Wales around A. D. 1200.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Derrick S. Thompson, *Branwen Uerch Llyr* (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1961), pp. i-xlvii (p. xxx).

<sup>31</sup> W. J. Gruffydd, *Rhiannon: an Inquiry into the First and Third Branches of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1953), pp. 86-87. Gruffydd describes the *Mabinogi* as evolving from myth to folklore, to *cywarydd*, to recited story and finally to the manuscript form found in the White and Red Books. Walton repeatedly cites W. J. Gruffydd in her footnotes and author’s notes.

<sup>32</sup> Gruffydd, *Rhiannon*, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, ‘Medieval Welsh Tales or Romances? Problems of Genre and Terminology’, in *Cambrarian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 47 (2004), 41-58. Lloyd-Morgan’s theory, like Thompson’s, can be found in earlier scholarship. R. R. Davies makes a similar argument in *Conquest, Coexistence and Change: Wales 1063-1415* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 104-5. In addition to Gruffydd, Lloyd-Morgan and R. R. Davies, other scholars who assert that the *Mabinogi* originated from pre-Christian, Celtic tradition include C. W. Sullivan, ‘Inheritance and Lordship in “Math”’, in ‘*The Mabinogi*: A Book of Essays’, ed. by C. W. Sullivan III (London: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 347-66 (pp. 348-9); Patrick K. Ford, ‘Branwen: A Study of the Celtic Affinities’, in ‘*The Mabinogi*: A Book of Essays’, pp. 99-119; Proinsias Mac Cana, *Branwen Daughter of Llyr* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1958). This is merely a small selection of the research available on the topic. A number of other scholars who have written on the *Mabinogi*’s Celtic origins will be referenced in greater detail throughout this thesis.

Previously, the Welsh church was ‘extremely decentralized and closely integrated into the tribal structure of Welsh life’, according to Lynn H. Nelson.<sup>34</sup> The Anglo-Norman church, however, had a strict hierarchical structure controlled by the Duke of Normandy; the Welsh church was ‘Normanized by early conquerors and used as a means of enhancing the authority of the king’, a massive restructuring which effectively destroyed ‘one of the dynamic elements of Welsh tribal life’.<sup>35</sup> Christianity had been ‘firmly established’ in Britain since the fifth century, according to Nora Chadwick.<sup>36</sup> Chadwick refers to this early form of British Christianity as ‘Celtic Christianity’; it was a ‘lukewarm’ practice of the faith that was unorthodox in terms of ritual, organization and interpretation.<sup>37</sup> It is important to note, however, that no concise history of Christianity in Britain exists until the writings of Bede.<sup>38</sup> Therefore any interpretation of Celtic paganism or so-called ‘Celtic Christianity’, whether that interpretation pertains to historiography or the *Mabinogi*, is, at least in part, theoretical.

The theory that the Four Branches were originally pre-Christian, acquiring a Christian gloss only at the hands of their clerical redactor, is supported by J. K. Bolland, who argues that the redactor minimized the non-Christian elements of the *Mabinogi*. Bolland points out that the redactor was writing from his own *Weltanschauung*, and would therefore have found it necessary to Christianize the pagan elements of the

<sup>34</sup> Lynn H. Nelson, *The Normans in South Wales, 1070-1171* (Austin: University of Texas, 1966)..

<sup>35</sup> Nelson, *The Normans in South Wales, 1070-1171*, pp. 161-2. This radically altered version of the Welsh church was now ‘under direct royal domination’, reporting to the Archbishop of Canterbury and, consequently, was less able to address and adapt to the needs of its local parishioners. The newly established, largely Benedictine abbeys ‘exploited the lands’ in order to send profits to their mother abbeys, but could not entirely succeed in ‘supplanting the influence of the native Welsh clergy’ on the local population. The Cistercians, however, were able to establish themselves more firmly in the Welsh uplands, as the creed of their order ‘compelled them to seek out and to develop the wasteland and wilderness’. See Nelson, *The Normans in South Wales, 1070-1171*, pp. 162-4.

<sup>36</sup> Nora Chadwick, *The Celts* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 193. Chadwick notes that post Romano-British inscribed memorial tombstones found in Wales, Cornwall, Devon and Somerset date from the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries. Chadwick, *The Celts*, p. 194.

<sup>37</sup> Chadwick, *The Celts*, pp. 194-5. See also Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (London: Sphere Books, 1974), p. 28-29.

<sup>38</sup> Chadwick, *The Celts*, p. 195. Bede died in 735.

tales.<sup>39</sup> Walton's *Mabinogion Trilogy* removes this Christian gloss, setting the novels in a pagan tribal society that worships a matriarchal pantheon. In a note to *The Island of the Mighty*, titled 'The Making of the Fatal Spear', Walton comments on her process:

I have carefully removed all Christian references and interpolations [from the medieval text], because *The Mabinogi* is held to be really a story of the ancient tribal gods euphemized [sic] into mortal kings and princes (Walton, p. 718).<sup>40</sup>

This note clearly states Walton's belief in the pre-Christian origins of the Four Branches and her intention to re-imagine the stories as they might have been told in Celtic Britain.

The *Tetralogy* depicts this world on the brink of religious and social change. The matrilineal, pagan 'Old Tribes' of Gwynedd are in constant conflict with the patriarchal, monotheistic 'New Tribes' of Dyved and Ireland. As with much of Walton's narrative, this conflict is based on existing historical research. Sir John Rhŷs argues that the *Mabinogi* 'represent in a Brythonicized form the otherwise lost legends of the Welsh Goidels'.<sup>41</sup> There was apparently, according to Rhŷs, a 'hereditary dislike of the Brython for the Goidel', which he believes is proof of their 'having formerly lived in close proximity to one another'.<sup>42</sup> It is possible that Rhŷs is referring to the Irish who

<sup>39</sup> J. K. Bolland, 'The Role of Myth and Tradition in *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', in 'The *Mabinogi*: A Book of Essays', pp. 277-302 (pp. 277-8). Not all scholars believe that the *Mabinogi* is the work of a single author. Sioned Davies argues strongly against this theory in the 'Introduction' to her translation of *The Mabinogion*, p. xi. It is not the purpose of this thesis to debate the issue of single or multiple authors for the Four Branches. Walton refers to the 'monk' who 'wrote down the *Mabinogi*'; as she evidently ascribed to the belief of a single, clerical male redactor, the writer of the Four Branches will be referred to throughout this thesis as the 'redactor'. Evangeline Walton, 'Celtic Myth in the Twentieth Century', in *Mythlore*, 11:3 (1976), 19-22 (20).

<sup>40</sup> This note is concluded by a reference to 'See *The Mythology of all Races*, Vol. III'. This is a thirteen volume collection edited by Louis Herbert Gray and George Foot Moore. Its first volume was published in 1916. Vol. III was published in 1918 and concerns Celtic myth (written by J. A. MacCulloch) and Slavic myth (written by Jan Machal). MacCulloch writes that '[p]robably we are right in assuming that the *Mabinogion* literature contains the débris of Brythonic myths'. John Arnot MacCulloch, Hon. D. D., *The Mythology of All Races*, Vol. III (London: Marshall Jones Company, 1918)

<<http://archive.org/mythologyofall03/gray#page/92/mode/2up>> [accessed 16 April 2012].

<sup>41</sup> Sir John Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx*, Vol. II (London: Wildwood House, Ltd, 1980), p. 636-7. Rhŷs's *Celtic Folklore* was originally published in 1901 and is repeatedly cited by Walton throughout the *Tetralogy*. Rhŷs' Welsh Goidels theory is problematic. The Welsh were originally Brythons, or P-Celts, not Goidels and the Goidelic presence, presumably by invasion, does not seem as large as he suggests. See Myles Dillon and Nora Chadwick, *The Celtic Realms* (London: Cardinal, 1973), p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, p. 554. C. W. Sullivan also cites evidence for a combining of regions in the *Mabinogi*, which he offers as an explanation for why a Northern, matrilineal society is depicted in the

immigrated to Wales after the end of the Roman occupation. The Irish expansion into Dyfed in the fifth century gives some measure of historical accuracy to Walton's identification of her fictional Dyved as belonging to the New Tribes.<sup>43</sup> If the New Tribes were Irish interlopers and the Old Tribes indigenous Celts, this would situate the *Tetralogy* roughly in the late Iron Age, otherwise referred to as the La Tène period.<sup>44</sup> These co-existing societies may have been at very different stages in civilization, and Rhŷs sees evidence of a 'clash of races' in the Four Branches.<sup>45</sup>

Paternity, for example, is something which Rhŷs believes the family groups in the *Mabinogi* had 'a notion of', although, 'on account of [their] promiscuity, [they] had to reckon descent by birth'.<sup>46</sup> This reckoning results in a matrilineal line of succession, such as that practiced by the Picts of Scotland, a society in which the son of the king's sister inherited the throne.<sup>47</sup> The diplomatic marriages of the family of Rhodri Mawr in the ninth century suggest a tradition of matrilineal inheritance in Wales as well.<sup>48</sup> In Walton's fictional Wales the Old Tribes are also matrilineal, and one of the primary themes in the *Tetralogy* is the effect of paternity on this law of inheritance and, more centrally, gender identity. As Rhŷs himself points out, 'fairy literature' is a blend of the 'possible and the impossible, of fact and fancy'.<sup>49</sup> This precisely describes the textual construction of *The Mabinogion Tetralogy*. Walton's application of Rhŷs' theory—that the *Mabinogi* tells the story of a clash of races between the Iron Age Irish and Welsh—

Second and Fourth Branches and a Southern, patrilineal society in the First and Third Branches.

<sup>43</sup> Inheritance and Lordship in "Math", in 'The *Mabinogi*: A Book of Essays', p. 356.

<sup>44</sup> Walton spells Dyfed with a medial 'v' in accordance with Guest's spelling. I will henceforth be adhering to Walton's spellings throughout this thesis, unless directly quoting from a source which uses an alternate spelling. Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Dillon and Chadwick, *The Celtic Realms*, pp. 57-60.

<sup>46</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, pp. 663 and p. 684.

<sup>47</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, p. 684.

<sup>48</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, p. 682. Also see Dillon and Chadwick, *The Celtic Realms*, p. 146.

<sup>49</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, pp. 663 and p. 684.

grounds the text in British history, regardless of whether or not that theory is valid. In her foreword to *The Island of the Mighty* she remarks upon her indebtedness to Rhŷs for the ‘clear, careful analysis of ancient British customs’ that provided her with the foundation upon which to write her *Tetralogy*. She also comments on the historical validity of her Old and New Tribes:

Nobody can prove that the two social systems implied in *The Mabinogion* ever met while both were still in full force—just as nobody can really prove that they didn’t. But when peoples like the Picts first began to suspect what mid-Victorians would have called the ‘facts of life’ they must have gossiped and speculated very much as the people in this book do. Even nowadays there is nothing so laughable as a new idea (Walton, p. 429).

Walton’s acknowledgement that Celtic history is a largely theoretical field is followed by a comment on her own fiction’s contribution to this theory:

Neither has anyone but myself ever suggested that the tribes of Gwynedd and Dyved were of different races. But Pryderi, succeeding his father Pwyll upon the throne of Dyved, shows us that fatherhood must have been an acknowledged and accepted fact there, while in Gwynedd the Pictish custom of the mother-right still prevailed. So it seems valid to picture the strife between the two kingdoms as part of the great prehistoric struggle in the Isle of Britain, the Celtic later invaders being fiercely resented by the Picts or Prydyn, the earlier lords of the island (Walton, p. 429)

These statements demonstrate Walton’s literary engagement with British history, and her technique of merging her own hypotheses with historical sources to create a fictional religious conflict between two tribal societies with widely divergent interpretations of gender roles.

A specific example of Walton’s merging of ‘fact and fancy’ can be found in *Prince of Annwn*, during the chapters when Pwyll is voyaging through Annwn. Walton’s inspiration for the macabre gateway he encounters with its talking skulls was, according to her author’s note ‘Sources—And Thank-Yous’, ‘that Bird who keeps age-long vigil above the skull-adorned pillars of the grim Temple at Bouches-du-Rhone’

(Walton, p. 138).<sup>50</sup> A drawing of this, which looks nearly identical to the preceding description in *Prince of Annwn*, can be found in Myles Dillon and Nora Chadwick's *The Celtic Realms*, which identifies it as the '[o]riginal door-frame of the Celto-Ligurian sanctuary of Roquepertuse (Bouches-du-Rhône)'.<sup>51</sup> This is one of numerous examples of how Walton applies what can be termed 'fact' to flesh out her fiction. The application of archaeology, history and mythology sourced outside the *Mabinogi* adds layers of textual nuance and richness to the original material. '[O]ne of the greatest of the folklorist's difficulties is that of drawing the line between story and history', Rhŷs acknowledges, but Walton is a fiction writer, not a folklorist, and as such she has the freedom to use history in service of her story.<sup>52</sup> The *Tetralogy* deftly merges the *Mabinogi* with the wider body of Celtic folklore, history, archaeology and sociology. Had Walton not strictly adhered to the narrative, adding such a disparate array of material to four short oral tales could have resulted in an unreadable amalgamation of fragmented information. Each novel's plot follows that of its designated Branch, which, when combined with a style that 'retains the sense of something wonderful and strange', creates a confluence of Celtic history, medieval folktale and modern fantasy that was unprecedented when *The Virgin and the Swine* was published in 1936.<sup>53</sup>

The re-titled *The Island of the Mighty* is not the earliest English-language adaptation of the *Mabinogi*, but it is the first by an American woman writer and it is, to

<sup>50</sup> The gateway is described as follows:

A massive stone lintel topped those three pillars. Squarely in its center sat a giant Bird [...] In the huge central pillar above which it perched were three niches, and the lowest was empty, but from each of the two above grinned a fleshless human skull. Each side column held only one niche, but in each of these sat a freshly severed human head (Walton, pp. 44-45).

<sup>51</sup> Myles Dillon and Nora Chadwick, *The Celtic Realms* (London: Cardinal, 1973). The first edition was published in 1967, prior to the publication of *Prince of Annwn*, and given Walton's erudition it is likely that she came across the title.

<sup>52</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, p. 559.

<sup>53</sup> This quotation by Marion Zimmer Bradley was found in an insert provided by Pocket Books with my purchase of Walton's *The Sword is Forged* (New York: Pocket Books, 1983).

date, the only series that is a direct adaptation of the Four Branches.<sup>54</sup> C. W. Sullivan places Walton alongside Alan Garner, Kenneth Morris, Lloyd Alexander, Nancy Bond and Susan Cooper, as writers who use Celtic myth to ‘present the growth and education of a hero in archetypal terms’ in the ‘High Fantasy’ genre.<sup>55</sup> Although all of these writers were publishing during the rise of the modern fantasy genre in the mid-to-late twentieth century, and all of them were, to a greater or lesser extent, inspired by the *Mabinogi*, only Walton wrote adult fantasy and only Walton directly acknowledges the medieval tales within the novels themselves. All of the other writers deviate significantly from the plot of the Four Branches and all of them were writing primarily for the children’s and young adult markets.

Moreover, Sullivan’s conclusion that Walton’s *Tetralogy* ‘present[s] the growth and education of a hero in archetypal terms’ is solely based on his analysis of one novel in the *Tetralogy* (*The Island of the Mighty*) and therefore misses the thematic continuum of religious change and patriarchal suppression which transforms the individual novels into a single epic story of cultural (d)evolution. Sullivan’s decision to ignore the rest of the *Tetralogy* is largely based on his opinion that ‘Walton seems to be in much more complete control of her material and her sources than she is in the later novels’.<sup>56</sup> This statement is based in large part on his erroneous assumption that the rest of the novels were written in response to the popularity of *Island*, when in fact the *Tetralogy* was

<sup>54</sup> Kenneth Morris’ 1914 fantasy novel, *The Fates of the Princes of Dyfed*, tells the story of Pwyll and Rhiannon from the First Branch. Susan Cooper’s young adult novels, *The Dark Is Rising Sequence*, are not an adaptation of the *Mabinogi*, but they do incorporate elements of Welsh myth in addition to Arthurian legend and Norse mythology. The *Sequence* was written between 1965 and 1977. Alan Garner published *The Owl Service*, a young adult novel which sets the story of the Fourth Branch in present day Wales, in 1967. Lloyd Alexander’s *Chronicles of Prydein* series is another young adult fantasy which Alexander acknowledges is only loosely based on the *Mabinogi*, although any reader familiar with the *Mabinogi* will recognize the characters and motifs as adaptations from the Four Branches. The most well-known of the novels, *The Black Cauldron*, was made into an animated Disney feature film in 1985. Lloyd Alexander, *The Black Cauldron* (London: Collins, 1973); Kenneth Morris, *The Fates of the Princes of Dyfed* (Point Loma: Aryan theosophical press, 1914); Susan Cooper, *The Dark Is Rising Sequence* (London: Puffin Books, 2001).

<sup>55</sup> C. W. Sullivan, *Welsh Celtic Myth in Modern Fantasy* (London: Greenwood Press, 1989), p. 150.

<sup>56</sup> Sullivan, *Welsh Celtic Myth in Modern Fantasy*, pp. 14-15.

written in its entirety prior to *The Island of the Mighty*'s re-publication in 1970 and in spite of the fact that it was extremely unpopular when first published in 1936. While I disagree with Sullivan's assertion that *Island*'s literary merits are superior to those of the rest of the *Tetralogy*, his lack of knowledge of the series' history merely indicates the scarcity of information available about Walton's work even at the height of its popularity.

Walton's popularity as a fantasy fiction writer arguably began when Paul Walker reviewed *Island* in the September 1971 issue of the science fiction and fantasy magazine *Luna Monthly*. Walker declared that the 'near perfection of its artistry [...] rivals Tolkien. In the depth and profundity of its characterizations, it surpasses him'.<sup>57</sup> Zahorski and Boyer's 1981 bibliography of Lloyd Alexander, Evangeline Walton and Kenneth Morris concurs with Walker's assessment of Walton's strengths, citing her 'superb character delineation', 'lucid and polished prose style', 'thematic richness', 'skillful plot construction' and 'meticulous treatment of source materials'.<sup>58</sup> Thelma J. Shinn asserts that it is Walton's research into and distance from the medieval past which gives her the knowledge and perspective necessary to 'more completely appreciate and try to recreate that [Celtic] antiquity than could' the *Mabinogi*'s redactor.<sup>59</sup> In examining the *Tetralogy* as a whole, Shinn recognizes what Sullivan initially missed, which is that 'what emerges most strongly in Walton's version [of the *Mabinogi*] is a world in the throes of cultural change'.<sup>60</sup> Orion Books' Science Fiction and Fantasy Masterworks Series includes *The Mabinogion Tetralogy* as one of the 'great' works

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<sup>57</sup> Paul Walker, 'Review', *Luna Monthly: Bibliography, News Reviews, Features from the World of Science Fiction* (1971), reprinted in Zahorski and Boyer, *Lloyd Alexander, Evangeline Walton Ensley, Kenneth Morris*, pp. 114-159. Walker also wrote that Walton 'creates settings that are as sharp and precise as a still life done by a master painter. These settings [...] collectively form secondary worlds that are remarkably well-defined and credible' (p. 129).

<sup>58</sup> Zahorski and Boyer, *Lloyd Alexander, Evangeline Walton Ensley, Kenneth Morris*, p. 127.

<sup>59</sup> Thelma J. Shinn, *Worlds Within Women: Myth and Mythmaking in Fantastic Literature by Women* (Westport: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1986), p. 26.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

which helped define the genre.<sup>61</sup> The ardent tone of these critical evaluations and the declaration that Walton's *Tetralogy* is the equal of and, in some areas, arguably superior to Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* is surprising when one considers that, until 2012, none of her work remained in print.

There may be any number of reasons why Walton's seminal work has been absent from the shelves of bookstores and the minds of critics for the past thirty years, why this rival of one of the great masters of fantasy fiction has not achieved comparable success. While impossible to prove conclusively, this may be explained by the fact that the *Tetralogy* is sourced from medieval Welsh folktales that are little-known outside of Britain (and, one could argue, little-known inside of Britain as well). Full appreciation of a re-visioned fairy tale, folktale or myth requires that the reader have read or at least be conversant with the plot of the original material. Rather than re-visioning the ubiquitous Arthurian legend, as Marion Zimmer Bradley did in *The Mists of Avalon* (which achieved instant and lasting commercial success) or looking to more well-known Continental fairy tales, like the popular fantasy novelist Gregory Maguire, Walton's source material is obscure.<sup>62</sup> If she had adopted a similar technique to that of Lloyd Alexander in *The Chronicles of Prydein* and drastically altered the *Mabinogi* perhaps the *Tetralogy* would be more marketable, yet this would have been in direct contradiction with Walton's initial approach to re-visioning the Four Branches.

In 'For Pedants and Others', Walton's preface to *The Island of the Mighty*, the author writes: 'My original rule was never to alter anything I found in the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*, whatever I might add or subtract [...] but we modern authors have to give our characters reasons for their most unreasonable actions. We lack the

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<sup>61</sup> 'History', Orion Books <<http://www.orionbooks.co.uk/about-orion/history>> [accessed 17 April 2012].

<sup>62</sup> Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon* (London: Penguin, 1993); Gregory Maguire, *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister* (New York: ReganBooks, 1999) and *Mirror Mirror* (London: Headline Review, 2010). *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister* and *Mirror Mirror* retell the fairytales commonly known as 'Cinderella' and 'Snow White', respectively.

glorious freedom of the old bards, and perhaps that is just as well' (Walton, p. 425).

Sullivan points out that Walton's structural changes in *Island* are 'logical revisions' which are 'in keeping with the culture and the oral tradition out of which the written versions [...] may have been formed, Walton remains essentially faithful' to the characters and events in the *Mabinogi*, asserting (via footnotes and author's notes) the historical relevance of her additions.<sup>63</sup>

Walton's balance between 'remaining faithful' to the original text and altering it to suit the purposes of the novels is one of the main focuses of this thesis. I have termed this process 're-visioning' because the *Tetralogy* is neither a meticulously literal novelization of the original text nor a radical reinterpretation.<sup>64</sup> Rather, Walton views the medieval tales through the prism of their medieval cultural milieu, their Celtic history and her modern society, and this perspective alters the reader's own view of the original *Mabinogi*. Ultimately it is debatable whether or not a less faithful approach to the adaptation process would have enabled the *Tetralogy* to achieve lasting commercial success. In fact, Sullivan argues that Walton's use of Celtic mythology enables the reader to understand the world of the text without having read the *Mabinogi*.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to noting that Walton merges direct references to the *Mabinogi* with Celtic myth, Sullivan also points out that the inclusion of both geographical Welsh place-names (Dyved, Gwynedd) and mythological ones (Annwn) combines real-world Wales and 'an aggregate Wales' which are mutually supportive and sustain 'the sense of

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<sup>63</sup> Sullivan, *Welsh Celtic Myth*, p. 16.

<sup>64</sup> I am adopting this term from Adrienne Rich, who defined 'Re-vision' as 'the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction'. Adrienne Rich, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision', in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), pp. 33-49 (p. 35).

<sup>65</sup> Sullivan posits three reasons for the denigration of Celtic myth as a literary influence: Classical myth was considered 'higher brow', the Celts themselves were a marginalized culture, and, what I find to be his most interesting suggestion, they inspired low-brow pulp/pop fiction and 'what serious scholar wants to hitch his [or her] wagon to such a discredited star?' See Sullivan, *Welsh Celtic Myth*, pp. 14 and 84.

awe' in the reader.<sup>66</sup> Ursula Le Guin opines that Walton 'has achieved her own beautifully idiosyncratic blend of humor and heroism; there is no doubt that the Celtic mythos lends itself to such a purpose'.<sup>67</sup> While Walton's direct engagement with her source material might have contributed to the *Tetralogy*'s inability to attain the popular and critical success of Tolkien or Bradley, it is that engagement which is an essential contributing factor to the *Tetralogy*'s literary importance. Richard Matthews asserts that 'Walton remains unsurpassed in rendering' the 'enthralling stories' of the *Mabinogi*.<sup>68</sup>

In 2009 Seren Books published the first title in their 'New Stories from the *Mabinogion*' series: *White Ravens*, by Owen Sheers.<sup>69</sup> Each novella is written by a different author and is based on one of the eleven tales. To date the First, Second and Fourth Branches have been adapted by Russell Celyn Jones (*The Ninth Wave*), Sheers and Gwyneth Lewis (*The Meat Tree*).<sup>70</sup> Each of the novellas can be read without reference to the others and often deviates from its original Branch. The 'New Stories from the *Mabinogion*' series indicates a renewed interest in engaging with the themes of the *Mabinogi*, and the diversity of the novellas in terms of genre and setting indicates that those themes may be made applicable to a wide range of contemporary readers. It therefore seems pertinent to embark on a critical examination of a writer whose re-visioning of the *Mabinogi* was thematically both timely and ahead of its time.

As Tolkien's female counterpart, Walton must be situated within the context of the fantasy fiction genre as well as within the vast field of women's writing. These two disparate fields cannot be extricated when examining the *Tetralogy*. It is the main

<sup>66</sup> Sullivan, *Welsh Celtic Myth*, p. 101.

<sup>67</sup> Ursula Le Guin, 'From Elfland to Poughkeepsie', in *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*, revised edn (London: The Women's Press, Ltd, 1989), pp. 70-82 (p. 78).

<sup>68</sup> Richard Matthews, *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 195.

<sup>69</sup> Owen Sheers, *White Ravens* (Bridgend: Seren, 2009).

<sup>70</sup> They have also published novellas based on three other tales in the *Mabinogi*: 'The Dream of the Emperor Maxen', 'Lludd and Llefelys' and 'How Cilhwch Won Olwen'. See Niall Griffiths, *The Dreams of Max and Ronnie* (Bridgend: Seren, 2010); Horatio Clare, *The Prince's Pen* (Bridgend: Seren, 2011); Flur Dafydd, *The White Trail* (Bridgend: Seren, 2011); Russell Celyn Jones, *The Ninth Wave* (Bridgend: Seren, 2009); Gwyneth Lewis, *The Meat Tree* (Bridgend: Seren, 2010).

contention of this thesis that Walton uses the techniques of the fantasy genre in order to re-vision the *Mabinogi* as a fictional exploration of the motivations behind and consequences of the male assertion of religious and social supremacy, which in the *Tetralogy* occurs with the onset of patriarchal monotheism. In an interview with Paul Spencer which appeared in *Fantasy Review* in 1984, Walton stated that ‘in *The Mabinogion Tetralogy* I tried to picture the waning of the power of women, something which, in these stories, seems to be identical with the waning of magic’.<sup>71</sup> In order to analyse critically how Walton uses the fantastic elements of the *Mabinogi* to ‘picture the waning power of women’ my methodology combines the examination of Walton’s process of literary adaptation with a feminist-psychoanalytic approach. The explanation of my methodology, as well as a brief discussion of Walton’s place in the fantasy fiction genre and the field of women’s writing will be the focus of the next section.

### **Walton, Fantasy Fiction and Women’s Writing: Finding Her Place**

Gruffydd maintains that the characters in the *Mabinogi* ‘are not merely pawns in the story, struts to support the narrative, as they are in folklore tales; they are individuals in their own right, and they impose upon us the acceptance of their integrated character’.<sup>72</sup> Arianrhod, Rhiannon and Evnissyen are characters as nuanced as Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot, yet *Mabinogi* scholarship does not typically focus on character analysis, particularly as regards its female characters. J. K. Bolland points out that ‘[t]he Role of the women in the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* has so far not been adequately defined or examined, though no one would deny that women play a significant part in the tales’.<sup>73</sup> Walton’s *Tetralogy* is unique among *Mabinogi* adaptations in that it expands

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<sup>71</sup> Paul Spencer, ‘An Interview with Evangeline Walton’, *Fantasy Review* 8:3 (March 1984), 8.

<sup>72</sup> Gruffydd, *Rhiannon*, p. 6.

<sup>73</sup> J. K. Bolland, ‘The Structure of the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*’, in ‘*The Mabinogi*: A Book of Essays’, p. 179(Bolland’s essay was originally published in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of the*

the roles of and centralizes the female characters in the original text.<sup>74</sup> Examining Walton's process of re-visioning these characters provides us with an opportunity to, by extension, examine the role of the female characters in the *Mabinogi*.

The fairy tales recorded by The Brothers Grimm and Charles Perrault have been exhaustively analyzed from a psychoanalytic perspective by Bruno Bettelheim, Marie-Louise von Franz and Jack Zipes, among others; these critics have proven that the simplicity of the fairy tale narrative is deceptive.<sup>75</sup> We recognize that fairy and folktales can be interpreted as using magical elements to signify psychological development, repressed fears and sexual desires.<sup>76</sup> Yet critical interpretation of the *Mabinogi* has largely ignored this theoretical approach, focusing instead on its Celtic origins and Irish affinities. Perhaps it is the ambiguous nature of the Branches themselves that has hampered the development of a psychoanalytic reading. The Grimms' and Perrault's stories also have oral origins, but at least we have names for their collectors; scholars cannot even agree on the gender of the *Mabinogi*'s redactor, let alone whether the Branches were intended to be read separately or as a series.<sup>77</sup> Unlike the now-fabled

*Cymroddorion* in 1974).). Sarah Sheehan's intriguing essay on the metamorphic nature of bodies in the Fourth Branch discusses gender as it pertains to the bodies of the male and female characters, but it does not specifically analyze the role of those female characters in the Branch. Kristin Noone and Deborah Hooker's essays in *Welsh Mythology and Folklore in Popular Culture* analyze the transformation of the male heroes in the Branches, and *The Virgin and the Swine* as a form of social protest fiction, respectively. Sarah Sheehan, 'Matrilineal Subjects: Ambiguity, Bodies, and Metamorphosis in the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogi*', *Signs*, 34:2 (2009), 319-42; Kristin Noone, "The Rough, Savage Strength of Earth", in *Welsh Mythology and Folklore*, pp. 18-29; Deborah Hooker, 'Disavowing Maternity', in *Welsh Mythology and Folklore*, pp. 42-60.

<sup>74</sup> Barbara Donley's 1987 novella *Arianrhod: A Welsh Myth Retold* is a feminist reading of the Fourth Branch, but it was published more than a decade after Walton's own adaptation (*The Island of the Mighty*) and its interpretation of the female characters is a radical departure from their characterization in the medieval text. Donley rehabilitates Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd by transforming the former into a loving mother and the latter into a happy divorcée. Donley's modern reinterpretation is markedly different from Walton's in its treatment of these characters, as shall be discussed in Chapter VI below. Barbara Donley, *Arianrhod: A Welsh Myth Retold* (Oakland: Stone Circle Press, 1987).

<sup>75</sup> Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976); Marie-Louise Von Franz, *The Feminine in Fairy Tales*, revised edn (London: Shambhala, 1993); Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (New York: Routledge, 1983).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Sioned Davies argues that '[d]espite many common themes, they were never conceived as an organic group'. Conversely, Bromwich believes that the incorporation of 'a considerable number of triads' in Branches 2-4 is evidence of the talent of the (singular) writer, who 'heighten[s] the dramatic effect of his

story of the Brothers Grimm travelling Europe in search of material, or Perrault entertaining the bourgeoisie in France, we have so many unanswered questions about the *Mabinogi*. Where did the stories originate? Why were they written down? Did the redactor record them verbatim or did they employ a little creative license? These questions are still up for debate after decades of research, and most likely will never be fully answered. While the seeking of these answers is always important, it might perhaps have dominated the field for too long. I believe it is time to explore other possible interpretations of, and to apply different critical perspectives to, the *Mabinogi*.

The decision to apply a feminist-psychanalytic methodology to a critical analysis of *The Mabinogion Tetralogy* is based on my view that Walton's re-visioning of the Four Branches is far more than a fictional adaptation. As demonstrated in the previous section, Walton's intimate engagement with the medieval Four Branches stands alone in the arena of *Mabinogi* fiction. This in and of itself makes the *Tetralogy* a worthy subject of study. However, by combining an examination of Walton's process of re-visioning the medieval text with a feminist-psychanalytic reading of the novels themselves, this thesis will demonstrate that the *Tetralogy*'s adaptation technique allows it to provide a feminist critique of the medieval text. Shinn argues that the medieval writing of oral myth 'freezes' that myth 'into an inflexible expression of the cultural time and place' in which it was written.<sup>78</sup> Walton's re-situating of the medieval *Mabinogi* into a fictionalized version of its mythic Celtic origins 'unfreezes' the Four Branches from the medieval cultural milieu in which it was written, opening up new

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narrative by relating it to a wider field of tradition'. Bolland posits that the use of 'branches' removes the reader's inherent 'tendency' to view each tale as part of a 'literary continuum'. Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. ix; Bolland, 'The Structure of the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*', p. 168; Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, p. lxxxvi. This debate has arisen over the multitude of idiosyncrasies in the Four Branches, which Walton ascribes to the redactor 'having been drunk at the time' of writing; 'He certainly was labouring under difficulties of some kind'. While Walton's theory is impossible to prove (and perhaps not entirely serious), her decision to re-vision the *Mabinogi* as a continuous narrative over the course of four novels indicates that she believed the Branches were more than thematically connected. Evangeline Walton, 'Celtic Myth in the Twentieth Century', *Mythlore*, 19-22 (20).

<sup>78</sup> Shinn, *Worlds Within Women*, p. 30.

possibilities for the reinterpretation of its female characters and the events they, in large part, instigate. J. J. Bachofen opines that myth ‘is a manifestation of primordial thinking, an immediate historical revelation, and consequently a highly reliable historic source’.<sup>79</sup> Bachofen bases this assertion on noting marked similarities between myth and the historical records available at the time of writing. While his assessment of the historical accuracy of myth is contestable and controversial, Walton’s use of historic documentation to support the fictional mythic and social structures in the *Tetralogy* allows her to depict ‘the waning power of women’ as the result of cultural and religious changes that have real-world analogies.

Juliette Wood points out that ‘[a]ncient structures such as myth only survive in significant ways if they continue to have relevance to the context in which they come to exist’.<sup>80</sup> The Christianization of the medieval *Mabinogi* reflects this evolutionary process. Wood argues that:

In approaching later vernacular literature [such as the *Mabinogi*] we need to think in terms of an axis encompassing myths, the literary tales, romances and folk-tales all drawing on the same fund of motifs and themes which are continually modified through time and in the contexts of different genres.<sup>81</sup>

The commonality between the motifs and themes in the *Mabinogi* and those found in myth, folk and fairy tales supports the conclusion that Walton’s *Tetralogy* can be situated within the category of feminist re-writings of folk and fairy tales. Marie-Louise von Franz points out that there is little psychological difference between myth and fairytale characters because they are both archetypal.<sup>82</sup> The mode of feminist-psychoanalytic analysis which has been devoted to reading Cinderella, Snow White and

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<sup>79</sup> J. J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (London: Routledge, 1967), p. 73. It was originally published as *Das Mutterrecht* in 1861. The 1967 edition is the first English language translation.

<sup>80</sup> Juliette Wood, ‘Celtic Goddesses: Myths and Mythology’, in *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*, ed. by Carolyne Larrington (London: Pandora Press, 1992), pp. 118-36 (p. 121).

<sup>81</sup> Wood, ‘Celtic Goddesses: Myths and Mythology’, p. 121.

<sup>82</sup> Von Franz, *The Feminine in Fairy Tales*, p. 5. Marie-Louise Von Franz was a student of Carl Jung.

Little Red Riding Hood may also be applied to Rhiannon, Branwen and Arianrhod. Moreover, the fantasy genre in which the *Tetralogy* was written, and which it helped develop, makes a feminist-psychoanalytic reading apt. Jackson notes that ‘[l]iterary fantasies, expressing unconscious drives, are particularly open to psychoanalytic readings’.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, as ‘the fantastic traces [...] that which cannot be said, that which evades articulation or that which is represented as “untrue” and “unreal”’, it is an ideal genre for feminist re-writing.<sup>84</sup> The fantasy genre enables Walton to articulate and subvert the gender discourse operating in the medieval *Mabinogi*.

Walton’s feminist re-visioning of the *Mabinogi* provides an opportunity for applying a feminist-psychoanalytic approach that is seldom used when studying this medieval Welsh text. Sarah Sheehan argues that there is a trend of conservatism in the study of medieval Welsh and Irish literature which:

extends even to feminist literary scholarship, so that feminist readings of medieval Irish or Welsh literature have seldom used psychoanalysis, for instance, to analyze bodies, gender, or sexuality but have instead tended to rely on the long-established tools and methodologies that are prevalent in the field as a whole.<sup>85</sup>

When Walton was writing the *Tetralogy* psychoanalytic theory was largely based on the works of Sigmund Freud, and although Karen Horney addressed the gaps in Freud’s theories on female psychosexual development in the 1930s, it would be several decades before those theories were concertedly challenged by the feminist movement of the 1970s.<sup>86</sup> In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Luce Irigaray uses direct quotations from Freud’s writings to reveal and challenge the patriarchal assumptions on gender identity

<sup>83</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 6-7.

<sup>84</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy*, p. 37.

<sup>85</sup> Sheehan, ‘Matrilineal Subjects: Ambiguity, Bodies, and Metamorphosis in the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogi*’, *Signs*, 320.

<sup>86</sup> Horney’s *Feminine Psychology* is a collection of essays initially published and/or presented in the 1930s. See Karen Horney, *Feminine Psychology*, ed. by Harold Kelman (London: Routledge, 1967).

which inform his theories on psychosexual development.<sup>87</sup> Irigaray's theoretical work is not only in some cases contemporaneous with Walton's *Tetralogy* (*Speculum of the Other Woman* and *Prince of Annwn* were both published in 1974), it deals with similar feminist issues. The depiction of the Son's rejection of the Mother in *Prince*, which bears a strong resemblance to Irigaray's account of the archaic cultural murder of the mother, is one of several examples of the commonalities between Walton's fiction and Irigaray's theory which will be examined in this thesis.<sup>88</sup> Interpreting the Son's rejection of the Mother, and the consequences this rejection has on both the formation of gender identity and gender relationships, as a fictional form of Irigarayan mythic matricide will elucidate the feminist themes central to the *Tetralogy*. Understanding those themes will reveal *The Mabinogion Tetralogy* to be an important foundational work of modern feminist fantasy fiction with continuing relevance to the study of both genre fiction and women's writing.

Debora Kodish notes that '[w]here folklore scholarship is concerned, the explicit mention of gender has seldom been made but gender relations are constantly present as subtexts, as powerful and present themes within the stories that folklorists tell'.<sup>89</sup> The subtext of gender identity and heterosexual relationships in the *Mabinogi* is transformed by Walton into the main text; the thematic focal point of the narrative is re-visioned through the eyes of its female characters, subverting and critiquing the patriarchal

<sup>87</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985).

<sup>88</sup> The connection between Walton's fictional religious conflict between the Mother, Father and Son and Luce Irigaray's theory of an archaic cultural murder of the mother will be the focus of Chapter I below. In conjunction with my application of Irigaray's theories on female identity and the gender economy, as it specifically pertains to the regulation of male-female relationships, I will occasionally refer to Sigmund Freud's writings on psychosexual development and psychic individuation. 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother' and *Speculum of the Other Woman* are a dialogic engagement with and theoretical challenge to Freud's work. In order to provide sufficient explanation of Irigaray's concepts surrounding female psychosexual development and gender identity, it will be necessary to provide brief accounts of the established theories with which she was arguing. Luce Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1991), pp. 34-46.

<sup>89</sup> Debora Kodish, 'Absent Gender, Silent Encounter', in *Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore*, ed. by Susan Tower Hollis, Linda Pershing and M. Jane Young (Oxford: University of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 41-50 (p. 41).

gender economy which operates in the medieval text. The term ‘gender economy’ can be explained as an Irigarayan ‘economy of representation’, which she defines as:

an organized system whose meaning is regulated by paradigms and units of value that are [...] determined by male subjects. Therefore, the feminine must be deciphered as inter-dict: within the signs or between them, between the meanings, between the lines...and as a function of the (re)productive necessities of an intentionally phallic currency, which for the lack of the collaboration of a (potentially female) other, can [...] be assumed to need *its* other, a sort of inverted or negative alter ego.<sup>90</sup>

The ‘other’ in the *Mabinogi* is always female, represented by the redactor as the ‘inverted or negative alter ego’ of her male counterpart. The most obvious example of this is in the Fourth Branch, where Arianrhod’s villainous, ‘bad’ mother witch is presented as the ‘negative alter ego’ of Gwydion’s heroic, ‘good’ father magician. Arianrhod’s unwillingness to ‘function’ as a ‘(re)productive necessity’ does not prevent Gwydion from forcing her to do so; all but one of the female characters in the *Mabinogi* ‘function’, or are, in a singular instance, created to ‘function’ as child-bearers, providing their husbands with ‘phallic currency’. All are intended for motherhood, and those who resist this patriarchally defined role (Arianrhod) or attempt to escape their marriage (Blodeuwedd) are vilified by the male characters.<sup>91</sup> The ‘meaning’ of the medieval *Mabinogi* is determined by the patriarchal system in which it was written. ‘The feminine’ therefore, like the silent Branwen, can only be found ‘between the lines’ of the original text. By re-locating the *Mabinogi* in a pre-Christian setting, where its characters worship a matriarchal pantheon ruled by a goddess referred to as ‘the Mother’, Walton subverts the phallocentric ‘economy of representation’ that governs the medieval *Mabinogi*, opening the original text for a feminist analysis that had not

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<sup>90</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, p. 22.

<sup>91</sup> The conflict between Arianrhod and Gwydion over the maternal function is examined in Chapters III and VI below. Blodeuwedd’s struggle to create an autonomous female identity is the focus of Chapter VII below.

been attempted in 1936 (and has yet to be attempted) while remaining respectful of its historic and literary validity.

The use of the fantasy genre allows Walton to maintain this carefully constructed balance between critique of and fidelity to the *Mabinogi*. Anne Cranny-Francis states that '[f]eminist writers must engage with, and contradict, traditional narrative patterning in order to (re)construct texts capable of articulating their marginalized, oppositional positioning'.<sup>92</sup> Walton 'engages with' the 'traditional narrative patterning' of the *Mabinogi* by adhering to its plot and dialogue. With a few notable exceptions, all events in the novels occur in the order set down by the original text's medieval redactor. All dialogue in the Branches (as translated by Lady Charlotte Guest), is retained, often verbatim. Most of Walton's expansions are sourced from either her research into Celtic history or other medieval Welsh texts, such as the *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*. The 'contradiction' occurs in the removal of all Christian glosses and in the repositioning of its female characters as the focal point of the omniscient narration, allowing the novels to 'articulate' these women's previously 'marginalized, oppositional positioning' in the original text. The narrative technique which allows Walton to simultaneously 'engage with' and 'contradict' the *Mabinogi* is most evident in its provision of explanations for the seemingly incongruous events in the original text.

Such explanations of what Walton refers to as the 'unreasonable actions' in the *Mabinogi* are frequently provided by a third-person omniscient narrator (Walton, p. 425). Yet the phrasing of these explanations is markedly different from the rest of the narration. The narrator providing these explanations, in addition to stepping out of the story to comment on the action, also refers directly to the *Mabinogi*. The explanations

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<sup>92</sup> Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 15.

offered are not woven into the plot, but phrased as a hypothetical aside. In this instance, the *Tetralogy* is doing something very different from other works of fantasy fiction based on folk and fairy tales or myth. The narrator does not merely acknowledge its source, it makes repeated reference to its narrative quirks, offering possible reasons as just that, possibilities, rather than direct action inserted into the plot. It could be argued that there are two narrators of the *Tetralogy*, the narrator who tells the story and the narrator who comments on the telling of it.

According to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, commentary is the sixth and highest degree of narrative perceptibility. The fifth degree is ‘reports of what characters did not think or say’ or, in other words, an omniscient narrator such as that used by Walton to relate the plot.<sup>93</sup> Such a narration is extradiegetic, meaning it is exterior to the story it narrates.<sup>94</sup> The novel uses ulterior narration, meaning the text is written in the past tense. However, it also uses anterior narration, which Rimmon-Kenan defines as predictive.<sup>95</sup> By analyzing the *Tetralogy* with these distinctions in mind, it becomes clear that the novels have two distinct narrators. The extradiegetic narrator tells the story and relates the characters’ free indirect discourse, giving voice, for example, to the frequently silent Branwen through this technique, and explaining the psychological motivations behind her brother Evnissyen’s mutilation of her husband’s horses. However, there is a second narrator. This narrator is heterodiegetic and located outside the narrative. This is the narrator who uses anterior narration to comment on the story. Although an extradiegetic narrator could conceivably be providing such commentary, the fact that these comments reference an exterior text—the *Mabinogi*—as the explicit source of the novel thus making it clear that the story is not original, places this narrator

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<sup>93</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 97-99.

<sup>94</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, p. 95.

<sup>95</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, pp. 88-90.

outside of the narrative, thus making it heterodiegetic. The use of two separate narrative techniques—extradiegetic/ulterior and heterodiegetic/anterior—makes it clear that there are two separate narrators.

The extradiegetic narrator accepts the *Tetralogy*'s use of magic without question or explanation. When Branwen rescues a starling from the kitchen cat and teaches it to speak, the realism of the narrative style makes this magical act unremarkable. This is fantasy fiction, after all. Readers expect magic. Yet, once again, that second narrator comments on what the original redactor leaves unexplained in the *Mabinogi*'s use of magic:

We do not know how she kept it from speaking in the daytime, or how she taught it where it must go. In those days when the subtle senses were not yet lost, when the walls between the worlds were not yet so firm [...] understanding may have been easier between men and birds (Walton, p. 201).<sup>96</sup>

The reader is not allowed the escapism which magic often provides in fantasy fiction. The heterodiegetic narrator insists on drawing attention to the inexplicable in the *Mabinogi*. Rather than diminishing the literariness of its source material, however, this has the converse effect of raising it to a level of historical importance worthy of such examination. As Rimmon-Kenan points out:

the need to attribute textual segments to speakers as well as the urge to account for apparently false statements and reconcile seeming contradictions exists only when the text is grasped as in some sense analogous to (mimetic of) reality.<sup>97</sup>

This narrator draws the reader's attention to the hows and whys of the magic without denying its literary legitimacy. By utilizing this double narrator technique, Walton is able to work within the fantasy genre without becoming subsumed by it. In the words of Cranny-Francis, feminist writers are particularly able to do this because 'they both recognize and understand [genre conventions] [...] and yet are not contained by them'.

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<sup>96</sup> It is important to note that the narrator uses the word 'men' to represent humankind, a technique which was common in the first half of the twentieth century, when Walton was composing the *Tetralogy*.

<sup>97</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, p. 114.

Feminist genre fiction, she argues, ‘are sites of ideological struggle [which] show the struggle in process’.<sup>98</sup> The explanations provided by the heterodiegetic narrator, in addition to its direct references to the *Mabinogi*, are evidence of the *Tetralogy*’s ‘ideological struggle’ between remaining faithful to the original text while subjecting it to critical scrutiny.

Cranny-Francis believes that constructing new literary modes is most apparent in genre fiction and an ‘essential part’ of producing social change. She writes that ‘[f]eminist genre fiction [...] is an important phase in the development of a feminist consciousness and of the complex feminist subject’.<sup>99</sup> The use of the word ‘phase’ indicates that feminist genre fiction may eventually become an obsolete literary mode once the ‘feminist consciousness’ has ‘fully developed’, a view which is debatable. However, Cranny-Francis also argues that fantasy fiction can have a potentially transformative effect on its readers in the following way:

If fantasy literature can reposition readers to evaluate critically and oppose hegemonic discourses, so modifying their own subject position, then a modification of the social formation is inevitable.<sup>100</sup>

The potential of feminist fantasy fiction to inspire critical evaluation of and opposition to ‘hegemonic discourses’ is most apparent, and perhaps most effective, when those discourses are embedded in the text itself through the feminist re-visioning of established narratives. This potential is hampered by the cultural and critical stigma often attached to the fantasy fiction genre which can prevent both readers and scholars from engaging with it.

Walton’s assumption that there was ‘no interest in fantasy’ in 1930s America is accurate. Paul Lauter argues that the increasing number of PhD students and the growth

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<sup>98</sup> Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction*, p. 19.

<sup>99</sup> Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction*, p. 25.

<sup>100</sup> Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction*, p. 106.

of universities in the United States in the 1920s led to an elite white, male, Anglo-Saxon professoriat that developed the American literary canon.<sup>101</sup> Lauter asserts that this ‘process’ ‘virtually eliminated black, white female and all working class writers from the canon’.<sup>102</sup> Fantasy fiction has been placed outside of this canon. Lucie Armitt points out that the ‘Fanastic’, in a literary analysis, is extra-canonical because it is presumed to be ‘formula fiction’; therefore ‘it is traditional for [...] an academic study of literary fantasy to gesture to the reader with a[n] [...] apology’.<sup>103</sup> No such apology will be offered in this thesis. Rather, I intend to submit Walton’s *Tetralogy* in part as evidence that the fantasy genre has been and continues to be an important literary mode for feminist writers who are intent on challenging the patriarchal discourse that governed the construction of many fairy and folktales, as well as medieval literature such as the *Mabinogi*. This opinion is supported by Adrienne Rich, who states that ‘[w]e need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us’.<sup>104</sup> Fantasy fiction affords feminist writers an opportunity to reinterpret past narratives in order to offer their readership alternative depictions of female identity and gender relationships.

Where Walton can be situated in the context of feminist fantasy fiction depends on one’s definition of the genre. Lin Carter, who re-discovered Walton and chose *The Island of the Mighty* as one of the first titles in Ballantine Books’ fantasy fiction paperback series, actually places her outside of the genre.<sup>105</sup> In what he declares to be the first book on fantasy fiction, Carter defines the genre as a text set in an imaginary

<sup>101</sup> Paul Lauter, ‘Race and Gender in the shaping of the American literary canon: a case study from the twenties’, in *Feminist Criticism and Social Change*, ed. by Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 19-44 (p. 39).

<sup>102</sup> Lauter, ‘Race and Gender in the shaping of the American literary canon’, p. 19.

<sup>103</sup> Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic* (London: Arnold, 1996), p. 1.

<sup>104</sup> Adrienne Rich, ‘When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision’, in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), pp. 33-49 (p. 35).

<sup>105</sup> Lin Carter, *Imaginary Worlds* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), p. 9.

world where magic ‘works’.<sup>106</sup> He places Walton alongside T. H. White, among others, as authors whose fiction cannot be considered as belonging to this genre because they utilize real-world locations and historic periods.<sup>107</sup> By Carter’s definition, then, the vast majority of fantasy fiction cannot be considered as such.<sup>108</sup> This reductive and limiting definition of fantasy fiction must then be broadened considerably. In order to do this I shall look primarily to two of the most influential writers on the subject, Tzvetan Todorov and Rosemary Jackson.

Todorov writes specifically on the fantastic, not the fantasy fiction genre. However, Walton’s fantasy fiction shares characteristics with the fantastic that are essential to understanding the narrative technique she employs in the *Tetralogy*. Todorov asserts that the fantastic occurs in literature not in the appearance of working magic, but in the uncertainty of whether or not the events in the narrative are natural or supernatural. In accordance with this, Todorov declares that the fantastic in literature must satisfy three conditions, the first being ‘*the reader’s hesitation*’ over this supernatural uncertainty.<sup>109</sup> Second, the reader must identify with a character that also experiences this hesitation. This is not a requirement, but Todorov notes that it can commonly be found in literature which employs the fantastic.. Finally, the reader must reject allegorical and ‘poetic’ interpretations of these events.<sup>110</sup> Todorov specifies that the hesitation felt by the reader is over whether the events occurring in the narrative deviate from reality ‘as it exists in the common opinion’, or not.<sup>111</sup> The fantastic as a

<sup>106</sup> Carter, *Imaginary Worlds*, pp. 3 and 7.

<sup>107</sup> Carter, *Imaginary Worlds*, p. 7.

<sup>108</sup> Many fantasy fiction writers employ real-world settings and/or historical time periods in their fiction. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, for example, the main characters enter the fantasy realm of Narnia from World War II-era England. See C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (London: HarperCollins, 2002).

<sup>109</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to Literary Genres* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), pp. 31-33 (original emphasis). Considering that the publication of *The Fantastic* occurred in the same year as Carter’s *Imaginary Worlds*, the latter’s assertion that his was the first book on fantasy fiction is perhaps not quite accurate.

<sup>110</sup> Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 33.

<sup>111</sup> Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 41.

genre only exists in the present tense, he argues. The end of the narrative provides a resolution to the uncertainty; either the events occurring were of supernatural origin, transforming the text into what he terms ‘the marvellous’, or they are revealed to be of natural origin, making the text ‘uncanny’.<sup>112</sup> The doubt which Todorov believes to be necessary for the fantastic is best related by a first-person narrator, because this ensures the reader’s identification with the ‘hesitant’ character.

Based on this definition, Walton’s *Tetralogy*, while a work of fantasy, may also be considered as employing certain characteristics of the ‘fantastic’ in the following ways. Although a third person narrator is used, the creation of the second heterodiegetic narrator who hypothesises on the causes of the magical elements of the original text (as demonstrated in the above example) creates the necessary ‘hesitation’ in the reader over whether those events are natural or supernatural. The heterodiegetic narrator’s refusal to ‘authenticate’, in Todorov’s terms, retains this ‘hesitation’ until the conclusion of the narrative. Jackson concurs with Todorov’s emphasis on the necessity of this uncertainty:

The narrator is no clearer than the protagonist about what is going on, nor about interpretation; the status of what is being seen and recorded as “real” is constantly in question.<sup>113</sup>

The magic in *The Mabinogion Tetralogy* may be considered ‘real’ or the invention of its original tellers, as the reader chooses. Because the characters never question the validity of the magical events in the narrative, the heterodiegetic narrator, never exercising absolute authority over the interpretation of these events, acts as the hesitant character with which the reader can identify.

The double narrators engage in an indirect dialogue with each other and the original text, fulfilling one of Jackson’s criteria for the fantastic, which she describes as

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<sup>112</sup> Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 42.

<sup>113</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy*, p. 34.

‘a mode of writing which enters a dialogue with the “real” and incorporates that dialogue as part of its essential structure’.<sup>114</sup> The incorporation of the ‘real’ socio-cultural milieu of the original text—as seen, for example, in the *Tetralogy*’s use of footnotes that refer the reader to outside sources—grounds the novels in an historical ‘reality’ that does not preclude them from belonging to the fantasy genre. Todorov argues that ‘[f]ar from being a praise of the imaginary [...] the literature of the fantastic posits the majority of a text as belonging to reality—or, more specifically, as provoked by reality’.<sup>115</sup> Walton repeatedly brings the reader’s awareness to the pre-existence of the narrative and to the fact that the medieval text has its own source, creating a complex evolutionary chain that reflects the journey of the tales themselves. This interconnected relationship between the *Mabinogi* and *The Mabinogion Tetralogy* may be described, in Jackson’s words, as a ‘symbiotic relation to the real’.<sup>116</sup> Both are works of fiction which arguably have historical foundations. The inability of either Walton or scholars of the *Mabinogi* to conclusively prove this results in a never-ending ‘hesitation’ on the part of the reader which makes both texts inherently fantastic. The novels are, in a sense, a next step in the *Mabinogi*’s literary evolution, re-visioning the characters and events through a modern lens just as the medieval redactor applied his own socio-cultural perspective to the tales.

The socio-cultural milieu in which Walton was writing was both the America of the 1920s/30s and the 1960s, when she revisited and revised her older manuscripts. In those earlier decades she was writing in generic and ideological isolation. Walton was home-schooled due to childhood illness, so did not participate in the influx of women

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<sup>114</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy*, p. 36.

<sup>115</sup> Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 168.

<sup>116</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy*, p. 20.

rushing to get their degrees at American universities in the 1920s.<sup>117</sup> Her inspiration to write *The Mabinogion Trilogy* was, as stated previously, based on happenstance. She found the Guest translation in her local public library and it occurred to her that there was a connection in the tales between female power and magic. At the time, many women writers were uninterested in writing fantasy.<sup>118</sup> The genre was yet to gain the wider readership it has today. Showalter notes that the 1920s ‘were feminism’s awkward age’.<sup>119</sup> Feminists became ‘disillusioned and exhausted’ by the movement’s political and domestic stagnation, and this determined the tone of their writing, which was dominated by realism.<sup>120</sup> 1936 saw the publication of both *The Virgin and the Swine* and Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* which, despite being a ‘colossal’ success, was derided by male critics.<sup>121</sup> The two novels could not be more different. Walton’s fantasy based on medieval Welsh literature and Celtic myth is a world away from Mitchell’s Civil War romance and even further from the social realism of that decade’s other success, Pearl S. Buck’s *The Good Earth* (1931).<sup>122</sup> When Walton published her first novel the American public was no closer to appreciating it than when she began writing it in the 1920s. Yet, despite the generic dissimilarities between *The Virgin and the Swine* and its contemporaries, they share thematic concerns that transcend genre.<sup>123</sup> Walton’s lack of commercial success is due in part to the fact that she was writing in an unrecognized, unpopular genre, but it also reflects a time when ‘the divisions in [women’s] writing selves produced writing blocks, silences, and many

<sup>117</sup> Treatment with silver nitrate for a childhood respiratory illness permanently tinted Walton’s skin a greyish-blue. Ballantine, ‘Introduction’, p. 8.

<sup>118</sup> A notable exception is Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s utopian novel, *Herland* (1915), which depicts an exclusively female society which reproduces asexually. See Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (Teddington: Echo Library, 2007).

<sup>119</sup> Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers*, p. 296.

<sup>120</sup> Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers*, pp. 296- 330.

<sup>121</sup> Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (London: Macmillan, 1936).

<sup>122</sup> Pearl S. Buck, *The Good Earth* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

<sup>123</sup> The similarities between Walton’s characterization of Arianrhod and the twentieth-century American flapper shall be demonstrated in Chapter III below.

unfinished or unpublished books'.<sup>124</sup> Walton continued to write prolifically despite this initial set-back, but her work would not find an audience until the success of Ballantine Books' 1965 paperback edition of *The Hobbit* instigated the rise of fantasy fiction as a popular and (slightly more) credible genre.

Despite the fact that in the 1970s 'feminist scholars began to seek out and recover lost American women writers and texts', *The Virgin and the Swine* was not discovered by a feminist academic.<sup>125</sup> Walton's rediscovery is tangential to, but not part of, the feminist recovery project. Despite the fact that Merla asserts that Walton's novels are 'not only [one of] the best fantasies of the twentieth century [but] also great works of fiction', Walton has not been, until this point, critically interpreted as a feminist writer.<sup>126</sup> In his introduction to *Imaginary Worlds*, Carter announces this 'first' book of fantasy fiction as 'a book about fantasy, about the *men* who write it'.<sup>127</sup> Of the women fantasists he does include, none are given the page numbers that Walton is.<sup>128</sup> Carter reminds us that Walton 'was about thirty years ahead of her time' in that she was writing in a genre that was as-yet undefined, and describes her as a writer 'without peer, a novelist of incredible perfection and power'.<sup>129</sup> He ascribes the academic neglect of fantasy to the fact that it is presumed to be unserious in tone and content and, with a few

<sup>124</sup> Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers*, p. 336.

<sup>125</sup> Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers*, p. 442. Showalter coined the term 'gynocritics' to refer to the feminist literary recovery project begun in the early 1970s and the study of women's writing as a sociohistorical literary tradition. The gynocritics project was criticized by a number of scholars for focusing on white, heterosexual women writers to the exclusion of black and lesbian writers. One of those critics is Toril Moi, who argues that 'the feminist reader is not granted leave to get up and challenge this voice [of the woman writer]; the female text rules as despotically as the old male text'. However, gynocritics was inarguably responsible for recovering and reevaluating a number of previously marginalized female authors and consequentially instigating a reconsideration of the literary canon. Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 75-80.

<sup>126</sup> Merla, 'What is Real?', p. 340.

<sup>127</sup> Carter, *Imaginary Worlds*, p. 3 (emphasis added).

<sup>128</sup> Carter briefly mentions the 'number of women writers who have [moved] to the fore in modern fantasy in recent years' in Chapter Eight. He lists Joy Chant, Katherine Kurtz and Ursula Le Guin. To Walton he devotes five pages of enthusiastic analysis. This indicates that, for Carter, Walton held a preeminent position among women fantasists and a prominent place among fantasy writers of both genders, a standing which her work has since lost. *Imaginary Worlds*, p. 163 and pp. 169-73.

<sup>129</sup> Carter, *Imaginary Worlds*, pp. 169 and 170.

notable exceptions (predominantly of Tolkien), this presumption still exists in academia.<sup>130</sup> This genre hierarchy explains in part why Walton has been neglected by feminist scholars.

The woman fantasy writer who has gained the attention of feminist scholars is Ursula Le Guin, whose 1969 novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, has been subjected to intense scrutiny.<sup>131</sup> Le Guin's creation of a planet populated by a gender-less race (except during periods of heterosexual procreation) received criticism from the feminist movement both for its ignorance of alternative sexualities and the predominantly masculine characterization of her invented race, the Gethenians. Her response to that criticism, in the essays 'Is Gender Necessary' (1976) and 'Is Gender Necessary?/Redux' (1988) maintains that 'the real subject of the book is not feminism or sex or gender or anything of the sort'.<sup>132</sup> Le Guin's 1976 refusal to admit to a gender discourse in *The Left Hand of Darkness* makes *The Mabinogion Tetralogy* a likely candidate to be considered as the first work of fantasy fiction with an unapologetically feminist theme.

Le Guin's belated acknowledgement of the merits of feminist literature is reflected in *Tehanu*, the final novel in her famous *Earthsea Quartet*.<sup>133</sup> The series was known as *The Earthsea Trilogy* for nearly twenty years because while the first three novels were published in 1968, 1971 and 1972, *Tehanu* was not published until 1990.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Carter, *Imaginary Worlds*, p. 3.

<sup>131</sup> Ursula Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (London: Orion, 1969).

<sup>132</sup> Ursula Le Guin, 'Is Gender Necessary?/Redux', in *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*, revised edn (London: The Women's Press, Ltd, 1989) pp. 135-47 (p. 136). In 'Redux', Le Guin includes a note acknowledging that 'there are other aspects to the book, which are involved with its sex/gender aspects quite inextricably' (p. 136). She goes on to add: 'I think women were justified in asking more courage of me' (p. 146).

<sup>133</sup> Ursula Le Guin, *The Earthsea Quartet* (London: Penguin Books, 1993). Originally published as *A Wizard of Earthsea* (Nashville: Parnassus Press, 1968); *The Tombs of Atuan* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1972); *The Farthest Shore* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973); *Tehanu* New York: Atheneum, 1990).

<sup>134</sup> The primary character in the fourth novel is the eponymous Tehanu, who appears in the second novel (*The Tombs of Atuan*) as a young priestess of an archaic feminist religion who must be rescued by the male protagonist. The trilogy tells the story of a boy magician who grows to manhood over the course of the novels. Only men are allowed to study magic at university in Earthsea. There are few female characters; the notable two being a practitioner of crude women's magic who is depicted as a stereotypical fairy tale witch (*A Wizard of Earthsea*) and Tehanu, whose character is described as

*The Earthsea Tetralogy* remains immensely popular and Le Guin has continued to publish prolifically. It is perhaps no coincidence that the moderately feminist re-visioning of *Earthsea* which occurs in *Tehanu* and which jars with the patriarchal, phallocentric tone of the original trilogy, was published just two years after Le Guin finally acknowledged the potential for a feminist reading of her earlier novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, in ‘Is Gender Necessary?/Redux’. *Tehanu* functions almost as a feminist apology for *The Earthsea Trilogy*, just as ‘Redux’ partially apologizes for the feminist-resistant arguments in 1976’s ‘Is Gender Necessary?’ Le Guin’s reluctance to acknowledge feminist themes in her work and the misogynistic treatment of female magic in *The Earthsea Trilogy* leave Walton as possibly the sole feminist fantasy writer from 1936 to 1983, when Marion Zimmer Bradley published *The Mists of Avalon*. Bradley’s praise of Walton (quoted above) demonstrates that it was not *The Mists of Avalon* which inspired the late-twentieth century trend in feminist fantasy writing that continues today, but the work of Evangeline Walton.<sup>135</sup>

Since the publication of the complete *Tetralogy* in the 1970s, re-visionings of myth, fairy tale and folklore have become increasingly popular. From Angela Carter’s Perrault-inspired short stories in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) to Margaret Atwood’s

suspicious, misguided and ultimately redeemed by her belief in the superiority of the hero’s phallocentric magic, which she is not allowed to practice. *Tehanu* is, on the surface, a radical revision of both the character and the patriarchal society created in the original trilogy. Tehanu and the male protagonist fall in love and, in the course of their romantic relationship Tehanu rediscovers a ‘good’ version of her own magic. Le Guin, *The Earthsea Quartet*, pp. 483-691.

<sup>135</sup> There is textual evidence that *The Island of the Mighty* also inspired Donley’s 1987 novella *Arianrhod*. Her description of Blodeuwedd and Llew’s wedding night is almost entirely sourced from *Island*. Note the following paragraph from Donley’s *Arianrhod*:

He was very tender because she had been made of flowers and seemed to him to be *very fragile*. He dreamed that she was so *insubstantial* that *she faded away* and he was left without her [...] she *lowered her eyes* when she met strangers. But when *she glanced at Llew* her eyes were *flashing* (p. 68. Emphasis added).

The following passages are taken from *The Island of the Mighty*’s descriptions of these same characters: when Llew and Blodeuwedd’s eyes meet, her beauty is ‘a dazzling flash’ (p. 620); her ‘fair, flower-crowned head lowered’ as she walks past the strangers of the court (p. 622); Llew is afraid to touch her during their wedding night because her flesh is ‘insubstantial’ and ‘fragile’. He is afraid it will ‘crumble into petals again if he should touch it’ (p. 623). The textual similarities are obvious.

Homeric revamp in *The Penelopiad* (2005), these contemporary reinterpretations often centre upon a critical evaluation of the role of the female characters in the original narratives, which is either questioned or entirely transformed. The 2012 republication of *The Mabinogion Trilogy* coincides, interestingly, with the release of two cinematic reinterpretations of the Snow White fairy tale, *Mirror Mirror* and *Snow White and the Huntsman*.<sup>136</sup> Both of these films purportedly seek to create a more dynamic portrayal of the Snow White character, one who actively resists the machinations of the Evil Stepmother. From page to screen, there is a widespread cultural interest in adapting the female characters of older narratives to reflect evolving definitions of gender identity. The modernized heroine of fairy tale, myth and folklore, who carries a sword and keeps the company of wolves, is not a new invention. She first appeared in print in 1936, under the title *The Virgin and the Swine*, written by a reclusive young writer named Evangeline Walton.

This thesis will demonstrate that in order to create modern feminist heroines from medieval folktales, Walton was inspired by a much older, more elusive female figure, the Celtic mother goddess. *The Mabinogion Trilogy* tells the story of, as Walton phrases it, ‘the waning power of women’, which is intrinsically connected with their loss of religious authority. The *Trilogy* transforms the fantastic elements of the medieval text into a series of fantasy novels that use magic, whether ‘real’ or ‘unreal’, to represent agency. When the women in the *Trilogy* lose their connection with the Mother goddess and, through her, their magical abilities, they lose the power to control their own narrative arcs. Magic is more than entertainment in the novels; it is the power to speak, to act, to define the self.

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<sup>136</sup> *Mirror Mirror* was released in the UK on 2 April 2012. *Snow White and the Huntsman* was released on 1 June 2012. Nodens Books reissued *The Mabinogion Trilogy* on 29 May 2012.

Chapter One explains the function of the Mother goddess in the *Tetralogy*'s mythic structure. Inspired by the brief references to Dôn in the *Mabinogi* and Robert Briffault's matriarchal theory of human origins in *The Mothers*, Walton's fictional figure of 'the Mother', while repeatedly invoked and discussed by the characters in the novels, never appears in the narrative.<sup>137</sup> Yet the female characters in the *Tetralogy* are all, to greater or lesser extent, her earthly representatives: 'Modron, whose care is the whole world, has many daughters, and all of them are Herself' (Walton, p. 87).<sup>138</sup> This chapter will focus on *Prince of Annwn*, the first book in the *Tetralogy*, examining how it uses pre-Christian archaeological finds and Celtic myth to create a fictional matriarchal pantheon. Pwyll's year in Annwn is transformed into a religious journey, in which the conflict between the Mother and the emerging patriarchal, monotheistic Father god is depicted as a conversation between talking skulls. The rejection of the Mother which the skulls describe will be explained, in Irigarayan terms, as a mythological matricide.<sup>139</sup> This chapter will demonstrate that this spiritual rejection of the Mother for the Father results in a shift from a gender-equal to a patriarchal society in the *Tetralogy*, instigating the transformation of female identity from deity to domestic, creator of life to procreator of man's children.

Chapter Two will provide a close comparative analysis of the two most prominent human mothers in the *Tetralogy*, Rhiannon and Branwen. Walton's version of the kidnapping of Pryderi in the First Branch does not appear until the third novel in the *Tetralogy*, *The Song of Rhiannon*. Transferring this incident to the third novel is evidence of Walton's structural approach to re-visioning the Four Branches as a unified

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<sup>137</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 45; Robert Briffault, *The Mothers: The Matriarchal Theory of Human Origins* (New York: Macmillan, 1931, reprinted Kessinger: No Date). All further references are to the Kessinger edition.

<sup>138</sup> Modron appears indirectly in 'How Culhwch Won Olwen' (one of the Arthurian tales in the *Mabinogion*) as the mother of Mabon, who is described as 'Mabon son of Modron'. Modron has been identified as the Celtic mother goddess by both Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 270 and Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (London: Sphere Books Ltd, 1974), p. 270.

<sup>139</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', pp. 34-46.

narrative. Moreover, the alterations made to this tale-within-a-tale elucidate that Rhiannon plays a role akin to Irigaray's notion of a 'devouring mother' in both the novel and the original text.<sup>140</sup> This larger cultural fear is an intrinsic part of her identification as a Calumniated Wife; the dramatic tension of this folklore motif is considerably heightened by Walton in her treatment of Branwen as well as Rhiannon. This effectively reduces both characters' agency at certain points within the novels. The character who most dramatically demonstrates this is Branwen. Yet rather than radically transforming Branwen's character, Walton retains her dialogic silence, demonstrating the connection between magic, speech and agency in the original text. Both Rhiannon and Branwen suffer as a consequence of bearing children; rather than condemning maternity, however, the *Tetralogy* argues that this is the consequence of limiting the definition of the female identity to a solely procreative one.

Chapter Three further examines this theme in its most contentious form, reading Walton's characterization of Arianrhod as a role-defying pre-modern flapper in *The Island of the Mighty*. The novel was written during a period when the figure of the 1920s flapper captivated the American public with her radical redefinition of female identity and the role of women in the home, at the office and in the bedroom. By reinterpreting Arianrhod as a prototypical flapper who rejects the culturally-determined maternal gender identity Gwydion attempts to assign her, the novel modernizes the medieval themes in the original text, notably that of the *twyllforwyn*, or 'false virgin'. Gwydion's adoption of the maternal role that Arianrhod refuses represents a paternal co-option of pregnancy. In the final novel of the *Tetralogy*, Gwydion functions as the dominant phallic power whose actions will ultimately succeed in enforcing a new, patriarchally-defined female identity.

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<sup>140</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', p. 40.

Chapter Four analyzes the expanded role of Penardim. A new prologue to *The Children of Llyr* transforms this briefly-mentioned woman in the Second Branch into the inadvertent instigator of the cycle of events that ends with Gwydion's paternal maternity. Penardim's narrative provides us with an encapsulation of the *Tetralogy*'s larger thematic story: the delimitation of female identity, which results from the male co-option of pregnancy. The consequences of this delimitation are embodied in the character of Penardim's son, Evnissyen. His actions are interpreted in the novel as the result of his inability to connect with the divine Mother, who is embodied in the novel by his human mother, Penardim. Their story is one of psychological matricide, a microcosm of the larger cultural and religious matricide that is one of the unifying themes of the *Tetralogy*. Evnissyen's death in the Cauldron of Rebirth is revisioned in the novel as a redemptive return to the womb, but the destruction of the Cauldron symbolizes the gradual disintegration of female power that will ultimately result in the institutionalization of patriarchy in the Island of the Mighty. The *Tetralogy*'s focus on restoring the Celtic mythological origins of the *Mabinogi* is evident in its treatment of the Cauldron as a supernatural womb from the Otherworld. Uncovering the Celtic roots of the Four Branches is one of the main functions of the *Tetralogy*'s re-visioning process. The final three chapters of this thesis will focus on this process as evidenced in the reintegration of the supernatural aspects of Rhiannon, Arianrhod and Blodeweudd.

Chapter Five will demonstrate that Rhiannon, as the female character most closely associated with a Celtic goddess in the *Mabinogi*, is also the character with the greatest agency. In order to expand upon this implication in the medieval *Mabinogi*, the novels *Prince of Annwn* and *The Song of Rhiannon* depict Rhiannon as a representative of the Mother goddess. Her magical abilities are increased in both novels, illustrating,

through the re-appropriation of typically masculine symbols, the ability of feminist re-visionings to subvert the phallocentric discourse of older narrative structures.

Chapter Six examines the complex treatment of the character of Arianrhod in *The Island of the Mighty*. Although the novel applies the same technique of re-integrating her character with her Celtic mythological counterpart, her villainization in the original text presents a difficult challenge for the feminist writer. Rather than inverting the good/bad dichotomy operating in the original text, Walton depicts Arianrhod as neither villain nor victim. Instead, the novel critiques the patriarchal discourse of the medieval *Mabinogi*, offering an alternative to feminist writers who continue to engage with reductive categorizations of female characters in folk, fairy tale and mythic narratives.

Chapter Seven focuses upon the figure of Blodeuwedd, another villain of the Fourth Branch who is given a more complex characterization in *The Island of the Mighty*. Although not connected with a Celtic goddess, her supernatural origins—as a woman made magically from flowers—include her, with Rhiannon and Arianrhod, in the category of mythic women in the *Mabinogi*. Blodeuwedd’s deviant actions in the original text are ascribed in the novel as the result of her inability to create a non-reflexive female identity. As the first child of the patriarchal god-head of Mâth and Gwydion, without any connection with the Mother goddess, Blodeuwedd’s rebellion is the result of her growing self-realization that she was created for a solely procreative purpose. The *Tetralogy* concludes with her human death at the hands of her god, Gwydion; her human journey foreshadows the rise of a monotheistic patriarchy that foreshadows the transformation of gender identities, roles and relationships.

A concluding section will demonstrate that the female characters analyzed in these chapters have been re-visioned by Walton as representative figures of a larger

cultural and textual loss. *The Mabinogion Tetralogy* reinscribes the older Celtic origin of the tales into the narrative in order to use the medieval *Mabinogi* as a literary exemplar of the patriarchal submersion of a previously independent, self-determined female identity. The fantasy genre enables Walton to expand upon the magical elements of the original text, transforming magic into a symbol of female agency that stems from woman's identification with a Mother goddess figure which sanctifies procreation, rather than commodifying it. The stronger the female character's identification with the Mother is, the greater their agency. Those characters with magic in the *Mabinogi* have more control over their narrative trajectories. They also, incidentally, have more instances of recorded speech in the Branches. Walton's feminist re-visioning of the medieval text disrupts its phallocentric discourse, using magic to enable the women of the *Mabinogi* to speak up and act out. In doing so, her work helped to both form a genre and initiate a feminist literary approach to medieval narratives.

## Chapter I The Death of the Mother: Mythic Matricide and its Repercussions

### Old Conflicts, New Perspectives

Walton begins the *Tetralogy* with two observations about Welsh attitudes towards women: one associated with the New Tribes and one with the Old.<sup>1</sup> The first is the New Tribes' policy of hospitality, which includes offering one's wife for the use of a guest. The second is the Old Tribes' practice of open sexual relationships. The contrast between these two attitudes towards female sexuality and marriage introduces the conflict that forms the unifying theme of the *Tetralogy*: the decline of a matrilineal, Mother-worshipping society and the emergence of a patriarchal hegemony in Walton's fictional Wales. Walton alludes to Christianity as the source of this hegemony by repeated references to 'Gods from the East' who will one day 'rule the West', but does not directly reference the Christian god as one of them.<sup>2</sup> Religious differences, in conjunction with differing attitudes towards the role of women, form the basis of the conflict of the *Tetralogy* between the Old Tribes of the Island of the Mighty and the infiltrating New Tribes. The Old Tribes retain traces of their former matriarchy in their Mother-worship, matrilineal laws of inheritance, and lack of

<sup>1</sup> Although Wales is directly identified as the setting of the *Tetralogy*, it is a mythic, pre-Christian 'Island of the Mighty': a blend of fact, folklore and theory, as shall be discussed in this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> Although the Christian god is alluded to, other Eastern gods are directly referenced. In the *Mabinogi*, Pwyll is sent to Annwn to defeat the supernatural king Hafgan. In *Prince*, Havgan, who spoke the lines quoted above, is identified by his envoy as 'Havgan the Destroyer', a servant of Nergal, the ancient Sumero-Babylonian deity 'who brings war, pestilence, fever and devastation'. *Encyclopedia Mythica* <[www.pantheon.org](http://www.pantheon.org)> [accessed 8 November 2011]. In *Prince*, Havgan arrives in Annwn in an attempt to defeat 'Brenhines-y-nef'/'Modron'/'the Mother', because '[t]oo long has She queened it here, over you gelded weaklings of the West. She shall learn Her place, the woman's place!' (Walton, p. 67) Pwyll defeats Havgan, but later Arawn states that, although 'Havgan never will burn up your green earth now [...] Many men and women still will burn at wooden stakes because of the fiery power that he brought westward; many more will cringe in fear of what they pretend to love'. Pwyll asks if 'when he comes again he will be gentler?' Arawn replies: 'Yes, yet he or whoever comes in his place will still bring that devil dream of everlasting fire, to be the torment of men' (Walton, pp. 75-76). This description of a gentler, yet still fearful, male God who threatens 'everlasting fire' and will teach the Mother 'Her place', burning non-believers at the stake, alludes to the Christian God. Havgan's mocking assertion that the Western believers in the Mother are 'gelded weaklings' is the first of two direct references in the *Tetralogy* to Mother-worshipping men as symbolically castrated by that worship. The second reference, in *The Children of Llyr*, will be discussed in Chapter IV below.

marital union. Pwyll, the hero of the first novel, *Prince of Annwn*, is the Prince of Dyved, a kingdom of the New Tribes. Therefore he needs a wife to provide him with a legitimate heir. A direct comparison is drawn between the monogamous marital practices of the New Tribes and the polygamous lifestyle of the Old. Particular attention is paid in the description of this lifestyle to the actions of the women, who are portrayed as the sexual instigators: ‘It was different with the Old Tribes, who did not know marriage and whose women slept with men only when it pleased them, although they often pleased’ (Walton, p. 16). The first novel immediately sets up the inter-tribal dissonance which will be played out over the course of the *Tetralogy*, a dissonance which appears to derive from the Tribes’ markedly different attitudes towards the role of women in their societies, and is illustrated by this account of their contrasting sexual practices.

The Old Tribes are represented as practicing a lost pre-Christian system of belief in a fictional Wales which, according to the novel, is reflected in the language itself. In *Prince*, the heterodiegetic narrator comments on the use of the feminine pronoun in the Welsh language to describe the act of raining: ‘[t]he Welsh say, “She is casting rain”, not “it is raining”’. The novel uses this example to provide linguistic evidence in support of a pre-Christian tradition of Mother-worship, momentarily blurring the line between the fictional and historic Wales. The heterodiegetic narrator argues that the modern Welsh language contains trace evidence of a matriarchal belief system that the people of the Old Tribes still adhere to: ‘[r]ain and sun, crops and the wombs of beasts and women, all were ruled by that old, mysterious Goddess from whose own womb all things had come in the beginning’. There are already, however, incursions of patriarchal practice: ‘Men of the New Tribes [...] left Her worship to women, made offerings only to their Man-Gods, who brought them battle and loot’

(Walton, p. 17). The ‘battle’ brought by the Man-Gods to the New and Old Tribes—and often between them—arises most often out of disputes over the ‘loot’, which is commonly a woman. Whether Pwyll’s soldiers are crushing heads in a dispute over Rhiannon’s hand, or Bran is fighting Matholuch’s troop of zombies in order to free Branwen from wrongful imprisonment, that men fight, bargain and deceive one another over women is the catalytic thrust of all four novels.

The conflicts over human women in the *Tetralogy* arise from the contestation between deities—the Mother and the Father—which forms the centrepiece of the first novel. *Prince* uses Pwyll’s journey through the Underworld in the First Branch of the *Mabinogi* to introduce the reader to the combative theologies which underpin Walton’s fantasy universe. The usurpation of the Mother by the Father is a supernatural seizure of power which, the *Tetralogy* argues, instigates the earthly battles of the characters in the novels. This is not a gender war in the literal sense, rather a series of overt and covert attempts on the part of various male characters to put woman in her rightful ‘place’, as Havgan terms it. Women’s subordinate ‘place’ in the patriarchy as chaste wives and procreators of children does not exist at the beginning of *Prince*. The *Tetralogy* re-frames the events of the *Mabinogi* from a feminist perspective to describe how that ‘place’ was carved out.

The Mother is not an active figure in the *Mabinogi*, although she is briefly alluded to, as shall be discussed in the subsequent section. Her character in the *Tetralogy* is an original creation of Walton’s, gleaned from her readings of folklore, history and contemporaneous sociology. This fictional, threatened Mother goddess, created from the historical information available at the time Walton was writing the *Tetralogy*, represents the threatened position of women in Walton’s Iron Age Wales. By re-visioning this time as the turning point in a pre-medieval society’s gender

relations, the *Tetralogy* uses the *Mabinogi* to question the ‘place’ of women in the original text and opens up a space for the reader to formulate questions about that ‘place’ in their own society. This chapter will begin by examining the known sources which provided inspiration for the figure of the Mother in Walton’s *Tetralogy*, as well as some later works on Celtic religion which offer evidence of a culture of Mother-worship. The chapter then turns to the narrative of Pwyll’s underworld journey, examining his function in the novel as the character with whom the reader can identify. The reader shares Pwyll’s journey, discovering the contest between the Mother and the Father as the character does. I argue that this contest, which results in ‘the Son’ leaving the Mother for the Father, is a symbolic act of mythic matricide which can be analyzed as a fictional version of what Irigaray terms the ‘real and cultural’ murder of the mother.<sup>3</sup> Irigaray argues that this murder is the foundational act that leads to the superimposition of a patriarchal power structure.<sup>4</sup> Her psycholoanalytic theory of the origin of patriarchy in Western culture will provide a theoretical framework with which to examine the effects of the cultural rejection of Walton’s fictional Mother on the characters and events in the *Tetralogy*.

The murder of the Mother operates on a symbolic level in *Prince*. The figure of the High Druid—a unique creation of Walton’s—acts as a religious representative of the patriarchal power structure in the novels. This character’s identity, defined by his powerful religious position, and his efforts to end Mother-worship in the Island of the Mighty recall the work of writers such as Heide Göttner-Abendroth and Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor. These writers propound the belief that all human religion began as Mother-worship until it was deliberately suppressed by men intent on

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<sup>3</sup> Luce Irigaray, ‘The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Basil Blackwood Ltd, 1991), pp. 34-46 (p. 40).

<sup>4</sup> Irigaray, ‘The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’, pp. 40-41.

establishing a phallocentric religion.<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that the mythic conflict between the Mother and the Father in the *Tetralogy* may be considered analogous with the mother goddess feminism represented here by Sjöö and Mor and Göttner-Abendroth. The following sections of this chapter will examine how Walton merges scholarship and fantasy to create a fictional Mother deity whose symbolic mythic death is the cataclysmic act that results in the re-definition of female identity.

### **Uncovering a Maternal Genealogy in the *Mabinogi***

The women of the *Tetralogy*, Rhiannon, Penardim, Branwen, Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd, are the last daughters of the great Mother, whose waning influence lies at the heart of the *Tetralogy*. Walton cites Robert Briffault's 'monumental work', *The Mothers*, as the source for her depiction of a Mother-worshipping society.<sup>6</sup> Her summation of his thesis (in 'Sources—and Thank-Yous', published in 1974) is worth noting for what it reveals of Walton's understanding of Briffault and why she may have believed his work to be relevant:

He believed, as I understand him, that civilization first evolved from the efforts of childbearing women to provide for their families, and that when men took over they invented nothing really new until our own machine age appeared, an almost exclusively masculine creation. Pollution has dimmed that last glory a little; I hope I will not be accused of sex bias for saying so; I like penicillin, electric toasters, jet travel, etc., as well as anybody. But when we were superstitious enough to hold the earth sacred and worship her, we did nothing to endanger our future upon her, as we do now. That seems a little ironic (Walton, p. 138).

Walton's desire 'not to be accused of sex bias' does not contradict the status of the *Tetralogy* as a feminist text. It is, in fact, sex bias which the novels argue against. The

<sup>5</sup> See Heide Göttner-Abendroth, *Die Göttin und ihr Heros* (München: Frauenoffensive, 1980) and Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Briffault, *The Mothers: The Matriarchal Theory of Social Origins* (New York: Macmillan, 1931, reprinted Kessinger: No Date). All further references are to the Kessinger edition.

Son's rejection of the Mother in favour of the Father is offered as an example of sex bias that has negative repercussions for the male characters as well as the female ones.<sup>7</sup> This shift in the religious power balance leads to a shift in the power balance of the gender economy as well as the need for both men and women to redefine their gender identities. Briffault's work gave Walton a foundation in sociological theory from which to formulate her own fictional interpretation of this process of cultural transition.

Briffault's *The Mothers* is a sociological study of what can loosely be termed 'the Matriarchal Theory of Social Origins', as the work is sub-titled. Briffault is not, however, strictly arguing in favour of such a theory. Rather, he seeks to prove that the development of the human species was dependent on a social group constructed around its young members, who needed prolonged maternal care. The centrality of the mother created a group without individualistic needs and desires: a communal society which made the development of the human species possible. Such a society lacked the destructive individualism which is epitomized, according to Briffault, by the 'selfishness of a despotic patriarchal male'.<sup>8</sup> Briffault believed that the patriarchal theory of social origins 'is in contradiction with biological facts', of which he gives numerous detailed examples throughout the book, and that, therefore, 'the entire

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<sup>7</sup> The most dramatic example of this can be seen in Walton's depiction of Evnissyen, which shall be the focus of the second half of Chapter IV below.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Briffault, *The Mothers*, pp. 100-1. The book is a product of its time. For example, Briffault uses terminology such as 'low', 'savage' and 'primitive' to characterize non-European ethnic societies. The offensive nature of some of the language reflects popular sociological theories of the early-to-mid twentieth century. Marcel Mauss, in *The Gift* (London: Cohen and West Ltd, 1954), uses the same terminology to describe his own sociological examination of pre-industrial, non-European societies. However, Walton does not use any such language in her own work. Moreover, there is much in *The Mothers* that is not touched upon in the *Tetralogy*. It appears that Walton took from Briffault what was thematically relevant to the story she was telling. What she did use will be elucidated further in the body of this thesis. Thanks to Dr. Erica Moore for assisting me in situating Briffault's work in the chronological history of evolutionary theory.

process of social development calls for reconsideration and reinterpretation'.<sup>9</sup> On a literary level, Walton uses Briffault's theory to provide a partial framework for her 'reconsideration and reinterpretation' of the *Mabinogi*.

The female characters of the *Mabinogi* are the focus of that 'reconsideration and reinterpretation'. By the time all four novels of the *Tetralogy* were published, it had already become accepted knowledge among Celtic scholars that the *Mabinogi* itself is a reinterpretation of older, pagan folklore.<sup>10</sup> John Rhŷs was one of many who believed that the dialogic references to 'the Almighty' and 'God' in the text 'may probably be regarded as [...] comparatively late interpolation[s] due to Christian teaching'.<sup>11</sup> Rhŷs also points out that the men of the Welsh lake legends—who are single and living with their mother—'seemingly [...] belong to a primitive society where matriarchal ideas rule, and where paternity is not reckoned'.<sup>12</sup> He also notes the appearance of an apparently matrilineal tradition in the inheritance of magic 'according to a fixed rule of maternal succession'.<sup>13</sup> 'It is significant', Rhŷs opines, 'that our traditions should connect the potency of ancient wizardry with descent in the

<sup>9</sup> Briffault, *The Mothers*, pp. 100-1. Briffault defines the patriarchal theory of social origins as one which hypothesises that 'the human social group has from the first been patriarchal in organisation and constitution [...] centred round the male as provider and protector of subordinate women and children'. He points out that there is a distinct difference between matrilineal and so-called matriarchal societies and that, in fact, he is not technically arguing a theory of *matriarchal* social origins. This puts him in contradiction with J. J. Bachofen's famous *Das Mutterrecht*, originally published in 1861 (*Myth, Religion and Mother Right*, London: Routledge, 1967), as well as the late twentieth-century work of Heide Göttner-Abendroth, both of whom argue strongly for a specifically matriarchal theory of social origins. According to Briffault, who was, unlike Bachofen and Göttner-Abendroth, a sociologist, it is matrilocal marriage that determines the latter, not the existence of the former condition. In other words, a society can be matrilineal without being matriarchal. Walton's Old Tribes are an example of this. Laws of inheritance adhere to the maternal line, but the inheritance itself is passed on to men. Title and property go to a man's eldest nephew. This will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter (Walton, pp. 186-7).

<sup>10</sup> See W. J. Gruffydd, *Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion* (Cardiff: Cardiff University of Wales Press, 1958), and Sir John Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx*, vol. 2 (London: Wildwood House Ltd, 1980). Gruffydd and Rhŷs are cited by Walton as sources in 'For Pedants and Others', her author's note to *The Song of Rhiannon*, pp. 425-6. For more contemporary sources, see J. K. Bolland, 'The Role of Myth and Tradition in *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', in '*The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays*', ed. by C. W. Sullivan III (London: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 277-302, and Miranda Green, *Celtic Goddess: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers* (London: British Museum Press, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, pp. 621-2.

<sup>12</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, p. 661.

<sup>13</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, p. 637.

female line of succession', although he goes on to note that this provides an explanation for that wizardry's 'crude and infantile' nature.<sup>14</sup>

Rhŷs' *Celtic Folklore* informs Walton's *Tetralogy* as significantly as does Briffault's *The Mothers*. In an article published in a 1976 issue of *Mythlore*, Walton refers to Rhŷs' research as 'turn[ing] the key that let me into his native Welsh wonderland'.<sup>15</sup> His two volume treatise is an encyclopaedic collection and analysis of folklore, myth and legend which persisted in Wales even at the time of its writing, during the turn of the century. At that time, according to Rhŷs, in Glamorgan fairies were referred to as *Bendith eu Mamau*, or 'their Mother's Blessing', a term which Rhŷs believes may refer to Celtic goddesses in Gaul, during the Roman era, that were known as 'the Mothers'.<sup>16</sup> He locates this, or a similar, 'faded ancestral divinity' in Ireland's *Danu* or *Donu* and Wales's 'great "she"' of the Welsh language: Dôn. He queries the origins of 'bi Donn': what does it mean, he asks, to be a 'child of Dôn'?<sup>17</sup> Anne Ross posits an answer to this question in *Pagan Celtic Britain*: Dôn, she argues, was the 'mother of the gods' in Welsh mythology.<sup>18</sup> Ross notes that the extant iconography, although 'essentially limited', when combined with the literary sources, indicates that the mother goddess figure had 'first importance' for the British Celts.

According to Ross:

The name, and doubtless the concepts involved in the type, has been preserved in the insular mythology of the figure of Modron, 'Mother', mother of the

<sup>14</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, pp. 636-7. Rhŷs, to be sure, was also a product of his time. The first volume of *Celtic Folklore* was originally published in 1901.

<sup>15</sup> Evangeline Walton, 'Celtic Myth in the Twentieth Century', in *Mythlore*, 11 (1976), 19-22 (21).

<sup>16</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, p. 171, note 1.

<sup>17</sup> Sir John Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), pp. 207-10.

<sup>18</sup> Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (London: Sphere Books Ltd, 1974), p. 453. Ross does not use the *to bach* over the 'o'. *Pagan Celtic Britain* was first published in 1967, prior to the publication of *Prince*. The breadth of Walton's research makes it probable that she read it. Walton cites Roger Loomis as the source for her identification of the Queen of Annwn with 'Modron the Mother' (Walton, p. 138). For a more recent equation of Dôn with a Celtic mother goddess, see Sioned Davies' translation of *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 240, note 47.

Welsh Mabon, ‘Son’, who can be safely identified with the Maponus of northern Romano-British epigraphy.<sup>19</sup>

Walton also saw a divine Mother in Dôn, as evidenced by her creation of the Mother and the primary role which she plays, albeit indirectly, in the *Tetralogy*. The ‘faded ancestral divinity’ becomes the central figure of Walton’s re-visioning of the *Mabinogi*.

### **A Son Returns to the Mother: Pwyll’s Transformative Underworld Journey**

Although the men of *The Mabinogion Tetralogy* fight over women, the primary conflict between the Tribes is over the divine woman: the Mother. This conflict is illustrated in the first pages of the *Tetralogy* by an encounter between the hero and Arawn (the Death god), and the life-exchanging year that follows. *The Prince of Annwn* opens with Pwyll and Arawn’s *contretemps* over the rights to a kill during a hunting expedition, as does the First Branch of the *Mabinogi*.<sup>20</sup> When Arawn finally reveals himself to Pwyll as the god of Death, he refers to himself as ‘the Firstborn and Servant of the Mother’ (Walton, p. 24). In the pantheon of the *Tetralogy*, the Mother gives birth to all gods and goddesses. It is a matriarchal mythical hierarchy. Pwyll, as a member of the New Tribes, does not worship the Mother. The *Tetralogy* is adhering to the plot of the *Mabinogi* in its sequence of events. However, by opening it with the story of a man from a patriarchal society—who does not believe in magic or the Mother—the reader is positioned alongside the one character in the Four Branches

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<sup>19</sup> Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, pp. 292-3.

<sup>20</sup> In ‘Sources—and Thank-Yous’, Walton recalls her experience re-writing this passage: ‘The *Mabinogi* gives Arawn’s entrance a weird majesty that is truly like a wind from another world; I felt presumptuous for retouching it. But when Arawn assures Pwyll that fighting Havgan will be perfectly safe—just one blow, and it will be all over—he does not exactly build up suspense and scare people. Doubtless medieval audiences and readers already knew what was coming, and cared only for the way in which the old tale was retold [...] [b]ut now we story tellers who crouch over typewriters instead of using harps [...] have to try to keep our readers guessing. So I remodelled the combat scene to resemble the fierce duels of Irish epic heroes’ (Walton, pp. 137-8).

who is most akin to a contemporary individual. The reader follows Pwyll in his journey through Arawn's kingdom (one of many Otherworlds), and as Pwyll's encounters with Annwn's magical occupants gradually awaken him to the existence of the Mother, and the spiritual battle taking place in this fantastic cosmos, so the reader is subtly encouraged to identify commonalities between the fantasy universe and their own.

Early in his journey Pwyll reaches a gateway comprised of three pillars topped with a massive stone lintel. In the centre of the lintel is a giant, red-eyed 'Bird' with feathers of ever-changing colour that 'all melted together into one blackness: a blackness that seized and transformed and conquered all light'.<sup>21</sup> In the central pillar are two niches filled with human skulls whose gazes are 'keen and searching and malevolent'; the third niche is hauntingly empty. Each side pillar has a niche with a freshly-severed head in it, 'glazed eyes still star[ing] in astonishment'. In true fantasy fashion, all four heads speak (Walton, pp. 44-45). The skulls argue with each other over the changing relationship between three deities: the Mother, the Father and the Son. According to one, who appears to have more knowledge than the rest: 'The Man-Gods from the East' are 'draining' the strength of the Mother. Another asks what will happen when the Son returns, and receives the reply: 'This time the Son will not come back. He has joined the Man-Gods'. The questioning skull cries: 'The Son would not betray the Mother! He loves her'. In unison two skulls respond:

He loves the Father now. The Father who claims all power, and soon will overturn and break the Cauldron of Rebirth itself. For the Cauldron is the way of the Teacher, the long slow way, by which all learn at last, and if the Father promises eternal life to His friends, he also promises eternal death to His foes. That is the gift that comes out of the Eastern World to the West—eternal torment, eternal death (Walton, p. 47).

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<sup>21</sup> Thanks to Prof. Stephen Knight for identifying the 'Bird' for me. It is Morrigan, the Irish Goddess, and a death figure.

This dialogue reveals several important elements of the mythology of the *Tetralogy*. The most obvious is the principle of reincarnation, here exemplified by the use of the *Mabinogi*'s Cauldron of Rebirth. The Cauldron is referred to as 'the way of the Teacher' and this is an important distinction between the theology of Mother-worship depicted in the *Tetralogy* and that attributed to the Father, with its divisive afterlife. The Father promises either eternal life or eternal death: heaven or hell, without possibility of redemption after death. The Mother, however, offers life as a learning experience and death as an opportunity to be re-born and enact those lessons in the next life. Yet even reincarnation rejects some: the talking skulls were once the heads of men whose human actions were so terrible that they could not be re-born. Pwyll worships neither of these deities; the Father is an as-yet unknown figure to him. But the New Tribes do align themselves with the 'Man-Gods'. The Mother is, for Pwyll, an object of primitive superstition.

The protesting, questioning skull still believes in the resurgent power of the Mother, despite the assertions of the others: 'The winter may be long and hard', he declares, ' it may bury the Mother in snow, it may lash Her with whips of ice, but in the end She always rises again, young and strong and beautiful' (Walton, pp. 47-48). This image of the Mother's own reincarnation is reinforced by the subsequent appearance of the Birds of Rhiannon.<sup>22</sup> Their singing causes the black Bird to crumble into ash and destroys the gateway: 'In thankfulness and worship, Pwyll raised his arms' to the Birds of Rhiannon (Walton, p. 50). The theological debate between the skulls and the destruction of the sinister gateway by an aspect of the Mother is a spiritual awakening for the sceptical Pwyll. By raising his arms to the Mother, Pwyll

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<sup>22</sup> The Birds of Rhiannon appear more frequently in the *Tetralogy* than they do in the *Mabinogi*, and often have healing powers. They will be analyzed in Chapter V below; Rhiannon's identification as an aspect of the Mother and a sovereignty goddess will be the focal point of that chapter.

is enacting the role of the Son: he who formerly rejected the Mother for the Father has returned to her. Yet, as the reader will see throughout the course of the *Tetralogy*, one man's awakening is not enough to stem the encroaching tide of patriarchal monotheism.

This may be the mythology of a work of fantasy literature, but it has real-world relevance beyond its account of a Celtic pagan religion succumbing to the oncoming tide of Christianity. Walton's fictional pantheon—with the Mother at its head—has been by rejected by the Son—and by symbolic extension all men—in favour of a singular Father god.<sup>23</sup> Irigaray tells a similar story of mythic matricide which contradicts Freud's psychoanalytic theory of a primitive patricide:

When Freud describes and theorizes [...] the murder of the father as founding the primal horde, he forgets a more archaic murder, that of the mother, necessitated by the establishment of a certain order in the polis.<sup>24</sup>

Freud famously looked to the Classical myth of Oedipus to explain his theories of psychosexual development and psychic individuation. Irigaray looks also to the Greeks: to Clytemnestra in the *Orestia*. When Orestes kills his mother Clytemnestra, both he and his sister Electra go mad. Orestes is rescued from his madness because, according to Irigaray, '[t]he matricidal son must be saved from madness to establish the patriarchal order', while Electra (like the Freudian stereotype of the hysterical female) remains mad. The Furies who haunt Orestes 'are women in revolt', states Irigaray, 'rising up like revolutionary hysterics against the patriarchal power in the process of being established'. However, they have yet to instigate a true revolution:

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<sup>23</sup> By this term I am referring specifically to men, not humankind. Although the *Tetralogy* foreshadows the Island of the Mighty's turn to patriarchal monotheism, during the course of the novels it is primarily the male characters who are attracted to this belief. The Son, as a Jesus-figure, acts as a representative for all men. In Christian theology, when Jesus sacrifices himself in order to redeem humankind from past, present and future sin (during the crucifixion in the New Testament), that redemption is only possible because Jesus becomes, symbolically, all of humanity.

<sup>24</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', p. 36.

'The mythology underlying patriarchy has not changed', Irigaray asserts.<sup>25</sup> It is an archaic murder of the mother which leads to the establishment of patriarchal power in Athens. The dialogic account of the Mother lashed with 'whips of ice', 'drained' of her strength and buried in snow, describes her death at the hands of the 'Man-Gods'. In Walton's fictional Wales this mythic matricide opens the door to the establishment of a patriarchal power structure similar to that described by Irigaray.

When the Son leaves the Mother for the Father, the novel's account of this action echoes Freud's theory of successful stages of psychosexual development. The skulls' declaration that the Son 'loves the Father now' describes this figure's transfer of affection from the Mother to the Father. Freud argues that a necessary stage in the psychosexual development of the male was the transfer of his affection from the mother to the father, who becomes the new source of the young boy's self-identification.<sup>26</sup> This occurs, in Freud's view, as the result of the destruction of the Oedipus complex by the castration complex. The threat of castration that characterizes this latter complex 'leads to two reactions', according to Freud: either 'horror of the mutilated creature [woman] or triumphant contempt for her'.<sup>27</sup> Such a transfer has inarguably occurred when the Son rejects the Mother for the Father in *Prince*, and the consequences of it are evident in the dialogue of several of the male characters in the *Tetralogy*, who often express 'horror' or 'triumphant contempt' for their female counterparts.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', pp. 36-37.

<sup>26</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes', in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), pp. 670-8. The problematic of Freud's theories of psychosexual development, particularly the Oedipal and castration complexes and his writings on female sexuality, are well documented.

<sup>27</sup> Freud, 'Some Psychical Consequences', pp. 673-4.

<sup>28</sup> Several examples of this shall be provided later in this chapter and throughout this thesis. See particularly Chapter IV below.

Irigaray acknowledges the existence of those reactions which Freud observed in his male patients, but her opinion differs as to their cause. What Freud believed to be the male's emotional response to the threat of castration, Irigaray believes to be the result of another form of severing. She suggests that the cutting of the umbilical cord—psychical and physical—is an ‘unavoidable and irreparable wound’ to the human psyche.<sup>29</sup> Irigaray argues that, if this wound is left ‘uninterpreted’, or unexamined by the male, the womb then becomes ‘fantasized by many men to be a phallic threat [...] and in the absence of valid representations of female sexuality, this womb merges with woman’s sex [*sexé*] as a whole’.<sup>30</sup> The castration complex may be as much of a myth as any story in the White or Red Books, but Irigaray’s theory offers an alternative interpretation of the misogyny which Freud noted earlier. The ‘horror’ and ‘triumphant contempt’ for the female which the male characters frequently display may be interpreted as resulting from the separation of the Son from the Mother which occurs in the first novel. Havgan’s derisive term for Mother-worshippers, ‘gilded weaklings’, reflects the Freudian fear that self-identification with the Mother results in castration (Walton, p. 67). These emotional reactions govern the actions of several influential male characters in the *Tetralogy*, notably Eurosswydd, who calls the men of the Old Tribes ‘half-men’ in another allusion to Mother-worship resulting in castration (Walton, p 143).

Such dialogic expressions of ‘horror’ and ‘contempt’ for the female are first voiced by Havgan, when he says that the Father will put women in their ‘place’, but they are perhaps most explicitly stated by the character of the High Druid, who appears later in *Prince*. His antagonistic role in the novel—as a religious leader whose hatred of the Mother leads him to plot Pwyll’s murder—provides the most overt

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<sup>29</sup> Irigaray, ‘The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’, pp. 40-41.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

demonstration of masculine ‘contempt’ for women which is expressed by the active attempts of the emerging patriarchy to suppress the worship of the Mother. This suppression takes the form of religious ritual; the High Druid’s symbolic substitutes for the Mother are attempts to ease the transfer of worship from Her to the new Father god.

### **Symbolic Substitution: Re-appropriating Rites and Misappropriating Men**

Book Two of *Prince* begins with a discussion between the High Druid and Pendaran Dyved: a young Druid who will play an increasingly important role in the novel. In the *Mabinogi*, he is the man who fosters Pryderi and who defends Britain while Bran goes to war against Matholuch in Ireland.<sup>31</sup> He retains these roles in the *Tetralogy*, but this dialogue between Pendaran and the High Druid employs one of the tactics the text often uses: that of fleshing out marginal characters in the *Mabinogi* rather than creating new ones. The High Druid has just told Pendaran that Pwyll lost his ability to procreate as the result of his battle with Havgan in Annwn, and that Pwyll can regain it through performing a ceremony which would require him to mate with the symbolic representation of the land of Dyved: a white mare. Pwyll’s refusal to engage in what he sees as a barbaric act has enraged the Druid. The union was designed by the Druids to replace the King’s marriage with the sovereignty goddess.<sup>32</sup> The High Druid tells Pendaran Dyved:

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<sup>31</sup> Lady Charlotte Guest, trans., *The Mabinogion* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), pp. 287-8. ‘Pen’ is a Welsh title meaning ‘head’ or ‘chief’; ‘daran’, or ‘tar(i)an’ might mean ‘shield’. Dyfed is an ancient cantref in Wales. Thus Pendaran Dyved is evidently a title rather than a proper name, meaning, roughly, ‘Chief Shield of Dyfed’. Thanks to Prof. Stephen Knight for this translation.

<sup>32</sup> The explanation provided by the Druid is that Pwyll’s labours ‘drained’ his virility (Walton, p. 87). Such a consequence of Otherworldly battle is more reminiscent of Greek mythology than Welsh, as there is nothing like this in the *Mabinogi*. Walton’s novel *The Sword is Forged*, which tells the story of Theseus and Antiope, indicates that she was also interested in Classical mythology. The use of the Ulster myth—in which a King symbolically marries a white mare—will be explained more fully in Chapter V below, when Rhiannon’s identification as the sovereignty goddess is explored. Evangeline Walton, *The Sword is Forged* (New York: Pocket Books, 1983).

under the Oldest Tribes Queens alone reigned in Dyved, and all of them were the Shadows She [Modron: the Mother] cast among men. When Kings came, they were Her sons at first, and later, when a new people came, Her husbands. Even among us of the New Tribes, no King may yet reign in his own right; he must always wed the old goddess of the land (Walton, p. 87).

This process of gradual usurpation of a Mother goddess figure by a Father god is a theory of religious evolution that has been argued by J. J. Bachofen, Robert Graves, Göttner-Abendroth, Sjöö and Mor, and many others.<sup>33</sup> According to Marie-Louise von Franz, the pre-Christian cult of the mother goddess returned in the cult of the Virgin Mary:

but only insofar as the Church Fathers approved, and if she behaved. The dark aspect of the antique mother goddess has not yet reappeared in our civilization, which must leave a question mark in our minds, because naturally something is lacking.<sup>34</sup>

Von Franz observes this ‘motif’ of the ‘forgotten goddess’ in literature from the vengeful goddesses of Classical mythology to the ‘bad godmothers’ of fairy tales.<sup>35</sup> According to von Franz, the motif endures because it reflects the ‘dark aspect’ of the mother goddess which has been suppressed in women by a patriarchal Western culture.<sup>36</sup> ‘The mother goddess who has been ignored’ appears so frequently in fantastic literature because she represents ‘ignored femininity’, which, von Franz argues, is ‘lacking’ ‘in our civilization’.<sup>37</sup> The suppression of the dark aspect of the female results in the establishment of the saintly, subordinate Virgin Mary as the only spiritual female figure with which women can identify. The High Druid is describing to Pendaran a civilization which is in the process of this type of religious transition.

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<sup>33</sup> See Bachofen, *Mother Right*; Göttner-Abendroth, *Die Göttin und ihr Heros* and ‘Matriarchal Society: Definition and Theory’, trans. Solveig Göttner and Karen Smith, in *The Gift: A Feminist Analysis* (Athanor Book: Roman, 2004), pp. 1-8; Sjöö and Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother*; Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948).

<sup>34</sup> Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Feminine in Fairy Tales* (London: Shambhala, 1993), p. 25.

<sup>35</sup> Von Franz, *The Feminine in Fairy Tales*, pp. 28-31.

<sup>36</sup> Von Franz, *The Feminine in Fairy Tales*, pp. 26-30.

<sup>37</sup> Von Franz, *The Feminine in Fairy Tales*, pp. 29-31.

The New Tribes have not yet entirely ignored the Mother goddess, but they no longer recognize her as an object of worship.

The created character of the High Druid—whose presence in the novel is legitimized by removing the medieval Christian belief system from this re-visioning of the *Mabinogi*—allows the motif of the denigrated Mother goddess to be elucidated for the reader in the form of a theological discussion. An overt explication would normally appear clunky and moralizing if it took the form of insertions by a third person narrator. But by placing it in dialogue, the theme develops gradually and with greater subtlety. Pendaran Dyved's character is used in this instance much as Pwyll was in Book One: a novice being introduced to the secrets of his order mirrors the first-time reader's own position. The reader learns, alongside Pendaran, that by replacing the divine marriage with the Mother with a symbolic one with a White Mare, the Druids in the novels seek to weaken the power of the Mother (Walton, p. 87).<sup>38</sup> The White Mare cannot take power from the king by sharing his reign, nor can she bear the daughters of a race of 'witches' (Walton, p. 87). The High Druid tells Pendaran Dyved that it is '[i]n her name we wield the Queens' ancient power' (Walton, p. 87). The 'ancient power' he is referring to is that of the womb:

A little of Her dwells in every creature that holds a womb [...] wisdom [...] speaks in symbols. The Old Tribes have but one symbol for creation: the womb. Here we have changed that, but children must still have their toys. If the people lose the White Mare too soon, the power of women may wax again (Walton, p. 88).

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<sup>38</sup> This type of mystical marriage of a sovereign to a holy woman was utilized for the purposes of political advantage by Eleanor of Aquitaine, who reportedly secured her son Richard's claim to her inheritance by marrying him to the disinterred corpse of the Saint of Aquitaine. Such symbolic unions attempted to provide religious reinforcement of a man's right to rule. Although the sovereignty myth has here been re-appropriated by a Druid, the Christian appropriation of Celtic ritual was a hallmark of their strategy to win over the pagan British and the literary *Mabinogi* is, arguably, a further example of this.

The resurgence of female power is what the High Druid is striving to prevent, and the union with the White Mare is a ceremonial charade designed to trick men into believing that they are still honouring the Mother, while slowly denigrating her.

‘The day of the Mother is done’, he declares. ‘She must sink back into the Abyss, into that Night which was the Beginning and shall be the End’. The result of this will be:

A day when men will fly higher than birds, when they will fare deeper undersea than the fish. When the lightning shall be shut in little boxes, and serve them like a slave. And all these wonders will be worked by the hands and wits of men. Woman—she who only receives our seed and carries it while it shapes itself in her darkness—how can she claim then to be a creator? The fields we tread shall be ours as are the shoes that also are beneath our feet—no longer a holy trust, no longer *Her* holy flesh, the Breast of the Mother whose milk is our bread (Walton, p. 88. Original emphasis).

This instance of foreshadowing reminds us of Walton’s earlier words in ‘Sources’: ‘when we were superstitious enough to hold the earth sacred and worship her, we did nothing to endanger our future upon her, as we do now. That seems a little ironic’ (Walton, p. 138). Briffault believed that one of the results of cultural advancement was misogyny, that the accumulation of power by men resulted in the deterioration of women’s role in society, and sexual equality would return if we returned to a ‘primitive’ state.<sup>39</sup> This argument is evident in the passage quoted above. The Druid—and other men in the novels, as shall be demonstrated throughout this thesis—desire power, and it is this desire that spurs him on in his theological slight of hand. Yet what is the nature of the power he seeks? Although he foreshadows the technological advancements manifested in the twentieth century, these are just pale precursors to what he is really after: the power of creation. He is the first of multiple male characters in the *Tetralogy* who will attempt to usurp women’s procreative power.

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<sup>39</sup> Briffault, *The Mothers*, pp. 175-7 and p. 180.

The High Druid's re-appropriation of religious maternal symbolism in the first novel evolves into Bran and Matholuch's commodification of Branwen's womb in the second and culminates, in the third novel, with Gwydion's usurpation of procreation when he uses magic to create Blodeuwedd. Each of these actions results in the death of at least one character, suggesting that the power of human creation belongs in the hands of women and their deity, the Mother.

When the High Druid says that 'the fields we tread shall be ours as are the shoes that also are beneath our feet—no longer a holy trust, no longer *Her* holy flesh, the Breast of the Mother', he is referring to the acquisition of land, but not cantrefs. He seeks to re-appropriate the earth by taking it from the Mother. 'Wisdom [...] speaks in symbols' he says, and here the re-appropriation of the earth is more than a desire for the wealth that comes from land ownership, it is a universal symbol for man's re-appropriation of the womb. 'The problem' with such re-appropriation, according to Irigaray, is that:

by denying the mother generative power and by wanting to be the sole creator, the Father, according to our culture, superimposes upon the archaic world of the flesh a universe of language [*langue*] and symbols which cannot take root in it except as in the form of that which makes a hole in the bellies of women and in the site of their identity. In many patriarchal traditions, a stake is therefore driven into the earth to delineate the sacred space. It defines a place for male gatherings founded upon a sacrifice. Women may be tolerated within it as non-active bystanders.<sup>40</sup>

The 'hole in the bellies of women' that Irigaray is referring to in this passage is '[t]he unavoidable and irreparable wound' which results from 'the cutting of the umbilical cord'.<sup>41</sup> This is a symbolic action rather than a physical one. Irigaray argues that the umbilical cord represents the physical/psychological connection with the mother.

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<sup>40</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', p. 41. The importance of male sacrifice in the *Mabinogi* and the *Tetralogy* shall be examined in Chapter IV below, which analyzes the character of Evnissyen and Walton's treatment of the cauldron in the Second Branch.

<sup>41</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', pp. 40-41.

When man severed himself from his maternal origins, the phallus replaced the umbilical cord as the symbol of psychological connection to the father, rather than the mother:

The genital drive is said to be the drive thanks to which the phallic penis takes back from the mother the power to give birth [...] The phallus erected where once there was the umbilical cord? It becomes the organizer of the world and through the man-father, in the place where the umbilical cord, the first bond with the mother, gave birth to the body of both man and woman.<sup>42</sup>

There is more than a simple substitution happening here, however. As Irigaray states the umbilical cord is not merely severed as part of the natural process of psychological separation necessary for psychic individuation to take place, it is strategically cut and then replaced with the omnipresent symbol of masculinity: the phallus. This type of symbolic substitution can be seen in *Prince*, when The High Druid replaced the marriage with the sovereignty goddess—the symbolic and physical representation of marriage with the Mother earth, which would ensure the fertility of the kingdom—with a barren religious pantomime. In doing so, The High Druid effectively severed the king's and, by extension, his people's, connection with the Mother. The woman is now a 'non-active bystander'.<sup>43</sup> The man has become not only king, but creator. A Father god. After all, as the High Druid said, how can Woman claim then to be a creator, when she 'only receives [man's] seed and carries it while it shapes itself in her darkness?' (Walton, p. 88) When the Father becomes the source of all life, the womb becomes nothing more than a receptacle for semen.

The mythic matricide of the Mother, therefore, results in the denigration of the women in the *Tetralogy* and the transformation of the Island of the Mighty from a matrilineal to a patriarchal society. Walton's fictional figure of the Mother, and the

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<sup>42</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', p. 38.

<sup>43</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', p. 41.

consequences of her demise, creates a narrative strikingly similar to Irigaray's psychoanalytic theory of mythic matricide as the symbolic act which instigated the establishment of a patriarchal power structure in Western society. The High Druid's effort to provide a symbolic ritual as replacement for a sovereign marriage is akin to symbolically replacing the umbilical cord, 'the first bond with the mother', with the phallus, his Father god. In doing so, he seeks to establish a patriarchal order which would relegate woman to her as-yet-undefined 'place'. The gradual dissolution of the matriarchal religion in the *Tetralogy* reflects the dissolution of Dôn in the *Mabinogi*. Dôn barely survives in the Four Branches, supplanted entirely by the Christian god; what role she might have played in the oral version of these stories will never be known. By keeping the Mother in shadow, and under threat, the *Tetralogy* remains faithful to the narrative of the medieval text while simultaneously questioning its gender politics. Nowhere is this balance more carefully maintained than in its treatment of two of its human mothers, Rhiannon and Branwen, who shall be the focus of the next chapter.

## Chapter II Ambiguous Identities: Rhiannon and Branwen Contend with Traditional Gender Roles

### **Doing One's Duty: Sovereign Marriage and Narrative Idiosyncracies**

Rhiannon is the only female character of the *Mabinogi* to appear in more than one branch. She has a primary role as Pwyll's wife in the First Branch and then as Manawyddan's in the Second. Rhiannon's first marriage makes her Queen of Dyved. Her second pairs her with a god.<sup>1</sup> Rhiannon's marriages with men of sovereign power are not unique to the women of the *Mabinogi*. Branwen is married to the king of Ireland and Blodeuwedd to the heir of the throne of Gwynedd. These last two are, however, arranged marriages: the matches are conceived by men for political purposes and the woman's consent is not strictly necessary. Rhiannon is unique among the wives of the *Mabinogi* in that she chooses both her consorts; in the case of her first marriage, she flees an arranged marriage in the Otherworld to seek Pwyll, effectively proposing to him.<sup>2</sup> Rhiannon is also the only female in the *Mabinogi* and

<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that 'Manawydan has no supernatural attributes' in the *Mabinogi*, as Manawyddan son of Llyr he has the same name and patronymic as Manannán mac Lir, the Irish god of the sea, and in *The Song of Rhiannon* and *The Island of the Mighty*—the two novels in which Manawyddan appears—supernatural abilities are attributed to him. See Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 232–3, note 22. Davies' spellings often differ from Walton's, who was working from the Guest translation. For consistency's sake I will use those of Walton, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> Marriage is a complex concept in medieval Welsh law. It is difficult to pin down an exact period in the Middle Ages for the laws which I am going to discuss here and elsewhere in this thesis. There are forty legal manuscripts written in Welsh between the early thirteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The earliest record of Welsh law is referred to as *The Law of Hywel Dda*. The English translation to which I will be referring was made and edited by Dafydd Jenkins from BL Cotton Titus D. II, a manuscript probably prepared for a Welshman acting as legal advisor to royal authorities in Cardiganshire in the fifteenth century. Hywel Dda was the grandson of Rhodri Mawr. He inherited the kingship of Dyfed from his father-in-law in 904; by 942 he was king of all but the south-east of Wales, through inheritances received from his father (Llywarch ap Hyfaidd), uncle and brother (p. xii). According to Jenkins, 'Hywel turned the course of Welsh law' (p. xvi) during his reign in the tenth century, and those laws were 'still a living force in parts of Wales' when BL Cotton Titus D. II was prepared approximately five hundred years later (p. xxi). My references to medieval Welsh law will either be taken from Jenkins or from another of his edited works, *The Welsh Law of Women*. The series of essays in this collection are based on three medieval manuscripts referred to as the Cyfnethr, Blegywryd and Iorwerth Redactions, which date from approximately the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. According to R. R. Davies, written marriage contracts only survive in Wales from the late fifteenth-sixteenth

the *Tetralogy* who has a ‘happy ending’. Branwen literally dies of a broken heart, Arianrhod disappears from the Fourth Branch and drowns in *The Island of the Mighty*, and Blodeuwedd is transformed into an owl as punishment for adultery and attempted murder. Rhiannon is the only woman who survives her story.<sup>3</sup>

Her survival may be unique among the women of the *Mabinogi*, but her suffering is not. Motherhood appears cursed in the Four Branches. Prior to the beginning of the Second Branch Penardim bears a son who murders his nephew by the end of that Branch. Branwen, the mother of that nephew, watches helplessly while her only child is thrown into the fire. Arianrhod is forced to bear two children she does not want and Blodeuwedd has none at all (whether she wants any is questionable, but her barren marriage would be a source of social shame for any medieval wife in Wales and prefigures that marriage’s eventual abolition).<sup>4</sup> Rhiannon is the only mother whose child is both wanted and reaches adulthood. That child is, of course, a son. None of the women of the Four Branches gives birth to a daughter (none is mentioned in the text, at any rate). Although the law of inheritance in the text

centuries, and these only for ‘wealthier native families’(p. 95). This is indicative of the multiple legal definitions of marriage in medieval Wales, as interpreted by Davies in *Conquest, Coexistence and Change: Wales 1063-1415*: ‘Welsh society [...] regarded marriage as a contract, not as a sacrament. The contract could be terminated with the agreement of both parties and a new contract concluded with another partner’ (p. 127). Seven appears to be the magic number of medieval Welsh marriages: common law marriages were legally recognized after seven years, and there are separate terms for marriage before and after seven years have passed. See *The Law of Hywel Dda* (p. 16). A woman became marriageable between the ages of twelve and fourteen. She could be offered in marriage by her father but she could also offer herself, as is indicated in the following passage from *The Law of Hywel Dda*: ‘Whosoever gives a woman to a man, it is for him to pay her *amobr* [...] if she gives herself, let her pay her *amobr*, for she herself was the bestower’ (p. 49. Emphasis added). *Amobr* is a fee payable to a woman’s feudal lord, originally on the loss of her virginity after marriage. Rhiannon is, therefore, well within her legal rights to choose her own husband, but she is unique in that she is the only woman in the *Mabinogi* who ‘gives herself’. Dafydd Jenkins, ed. and trans., *The Law of Hywel Dda: Law Texts from Medieval Wales Translated and Edited* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986), p. xxi; Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owens, eds., *The Welsh Law of Women* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980); R. R. Davies, ‘The Status of Women and the Practice of Marriage in late medieval Wales’, in *The Welsh Law of Women*, pp. 93-114; R. R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence and Change: Wales 1063-1415* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Christopher McAll, ‘The Normal Paradigms of a Woman’s Life in the Irish and Welsh Texts’, in *The Welsh Law of Women*, pp. 7-22 (p. 8).

<sup>3</sup> Rhiannon’s singular survival is, I believe, the result of her mythological origins, which will be examined in Chapter V below.

<sup>4</sup> R. R. Davies reports that in Wales, between 1063 and 1415, a wife’s ‘prime role was that of a begetter of children’. See *Conquest, Coexistence and Change*, p. 127.

is matrilineal, the society in which these women live is still a patriarchy. Men inherit, not women, so in giving birth to men, all four mothers in the Four Branches (Rhiannon, Penardim, Branwen and Arianrhod) have fulfilled their biological duty in providing future kings. In addition to being the only mother with a surviving son, Rhiannon is also the only woman who marries twice. W. J. Gruffydd believes that this second marriage is an example of the *Mabinogi*'s evolution: from myth, to folklore, to the *cyfarwydd*, to the written work of a clerical redactor.<sup>5</sup> In the course of this journey the stories would have accumulated elements from outside influences and been altered accordingly.

Gruffydd cites as an example Manawyddan's marriage to Rhiannon in the Third Branch, which he believes can be explained by unidentified legends in which Manawyddan is the King of Annwn. When Pwyll and Arawn trade lives for a year, Arawn would have shared Rhiannon's bed, thus making him the father of her son, Pryderi.<sup>6</sup> As the extant texts are dated c.1350 (*The White Book of Rhydderch*) and between 1382 and c.1410 (*The Red Book of Hergest*) respectively, we can only speculate about earlier variations of the narratives of the Four Branches.<sup>7</sup> As the two surviving versions of the stories, these manuscripts are definitive. If we then refer to the First Branch as the definitive version of the events it narrates, Gruffydd's hypothesis—that Manawyddan (as King of Annwn) and Rhiannon conceived Pryderi while Pwyll was playing Lord of the Underworld for a year—is clearly invalid

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<sup>5</sup> W. J. Gruffydd, *Rhiannon: an Inquiry into the First and Third Branches of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1953), pp. 86-87. Gruffydd is another of Walton's sources, and while the specificity of his evolutionary chain is ultimately unverifiable, it is supported in the main by scholars such as Sir John Rhŷs, C. W. Sullivan III, and Proinsias Mac Cana. In Sioned Davies' Introduction to her recent translation, she states that the *Mabinogi*'s 'roots lie in oral tradition, and they evolved over centuries before reaching their final written form: as such, they reflect a collaboration between the oral and literary culture'. A *cyfarwydd* is a professional reciter, comparable (to an extent) to the *filid* of Ireland. See Sullivan III, 'Inheritance and Lordship in *Math*', in '*The Mabinogi*: A Book of Essays', ed. by C. W. Sullivan III (London: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 347-66; Mac Cana, *Branwen Daughter of Llyr* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1958); Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. ix.

<sup>6</sup> Gruffydd, *Rhiannon*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>7</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. ix.

because Pwyll and Rhiannon's meeting and marriage do not take place until *after* his year in Annwn.<sup>8</sup> However, although Gruffydd's argument lacks credibility when aligned with the narrative as set forth in the extant text, he does not claim that it is true of the version of the story that survives in that text. Gruffydd bases his hypothesis not on the chronological sequence of events as laid out in the extant manuscript, but rather on a comparison with its Irish cognate, in which Pryderi's counterpart, Mongán, is the son of Manawyddan's counterpart, Manannán. The marriage between Manawyddan and Rhiannon is perhaps, according to Gruffydd, the attempt of a *cyfarwydd* to reconcile the discrepancy between differing traditions: one in which Manawyddan is both the Lord of Annwn and Pryderi's father, and a later version in which the Lord of Annwn is no longer Manawyddan, yet the latter is still identified as Pryderi's father.<sup>9</sup> It is conceivable that Walton came across Gruffydd's argument in her reading, and the atypical choice she makes—to make a major alteration to the chain of events in the First and Third Branches—may have been an attempt to reconstruct the earlier version assumed by Gruffydd's argument.

*Prince of Annwn* re-tells the First Branch largely as it survives in the medieval manuscripts. It describes Pwyll's hunt, his encounter with Arawn, his year in Annwn, his meeting with Rhiannon on Gorsedd Arberth, their tricking of Gwawl to effect her escape from the engagement, and their happy marriage. Thus far the narrative of the novel is in accordance with the First Branch. Roughly halfway through the Branch the phrase ‘once upon a time’ appears.<sup>10</sup> The novel embraces this apparent *non sequitur*

<sup>8</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 3-18.

<sup>9</sup> Gruffydd, *Rhiannon*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>10</sup> Lady Charlotte Guest, trans., *The Mabinogion* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 6. I reference Guest here because this is the English version Walton was working from and, as stated in the Introduction, when directly quoting from the *Mabinogi* I will use the Guest translation. Guest's dialogue is pseudo-medieval (e.g., ‘thee’, ‘canst’, ‘hath’, etc). Interestingly, Walton’s phrasing, while it closely mirrors Guest’s syntax, has even greater similarities with the more modern language of Davies’ 2007 translation. This most likely reflects the fact that Walton modernized the dialogue for her twentieth-

by beginning a new Book within the novel. Pwyll's encounter with Rhiannon on the mystical mound of Gorsedd Arberth—which occurs in both the First Branch and Book Two of *Prince* after ‘once upon a time’—has been viewed by many scholars as further evidence of the fragmentary nature of the Branches. J. K. Bolland posits that the use of ‘branches’ to divide the *Mabinogi* removes the reader’s inherent ‘tendency’ to view each tale as part of a literary continuum.<sup>11</sup> Bolland’s is just one argument in favour of viewing each Branch as an independent tale. Davies provides another: ‘despite many common themes’, she writes, ‘they were never conceived as an organic group, and are certainly not the work of a single author’.<sup>12</sup> Bolland and Davies speak for only one side of the critical argument surrounding the construction of the Four Branches. Conversely, Derrick S. Thompson believes that ‘[t]he complex [of the Four Branches] would appear to be one of immemorial myths and heroic tales, influenced by historical traditions, and finally welded and moulded by an editor who may well have been a cleric’.<sup>13</sup> As already suggested, Walton follows the argument set forth by Gruffydd, among others. It is not the purpose of this thesis to attempt to resolve this debate, but in order for us to understand the methodology behind the construction of *The Mabinogion Tetralogy*, it is essential to outline Walton’s own position.

The alterations Walton made to the structure of the First and Third Branches in her novels *Prince of Annwn* and *The Song of Rhiannon* will, I believe, provide the clearest indication that she shared the opinion outlined by Thompson above, rather than aligning herself with those scholars, such as Bolland and Davies, in favour of a

century readership. The phrase ‘Once upon a time’ also appears at the same point in the narrative of the First Branch in the Davies translation. Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> J. K. Bolland, ‘The Role of Myth and Tradition in *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*’, in ‘*The Mabinogi*: A Book of Essays’, ed. by C. W. Sullivan III (London: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 277–302 (p. 168).

<sup>12</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. ix.

<sup>13</sup> Derrick S. Thompson, *Branwen Uerch Llyr* (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1961), pp. ix–xlvii (p. xxx).

less unified, univocal construction. That the text is fragmented is undeniable. One of the ways the *Tetralogy* resolves this fragmentation in the source text is by dividing each novel into Books, thus clearly demarcating for the reader shifts of narrative focus and transitions into new phases of the lives of the characters. Thus, Book Two of *Prince of Annwn* begins at the ‘once upon a time’ moment in the First Branch.

In opening this chapter with a summary account of the women in the *Mabinogi* and the construction of the text, I have laid the groundwork for an examination of Walton’s re-visioning of both the female characters and the medieval narrative. As those female characters have a catalytic effect on the events of that narrative, these two areas of the texts are inextricably intertwined. In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I will provide a close comparative reading of Rhiannon and Branwen in the *Mabinogi* and Walton’s novels *Prince* and *Children of Llyr*, analyzing how Walton creates her fictional characters from folklore motifs.

### **Defective Bodies and Devouring Mothers**

When the High Druid is conversing with Pendaran Dyved in *Prince*, he informs Pendaran that Pwyll lost his fertility in Annwn. The *Mabinogi* hints at a procreative problem in the First Branch, when, after three years of marriage without an heir (whether there was a female child is not mentioned) the worried noblemen of the land meet with Pwyll and recommend he seek another, more fruitful, wife:

Lord [...] we know that thou art not so young as some of the men of this country, and we fear that thou mayest not have an heir of the wife whom thou hast taken. Take therefore another wife of whom thou mayest have heirs. Thou canst not always continue with us, and though thou desire to remain as thou art, we will not suffer thee.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 16.

The surface concern of these ‘foster-brothers’ of Pwyll, ‘whom they loved’, according to the *Mabinogi*, masks the underlying threat in this statement. The noblemen are clearly concerned about the chaos that would ensue if their king dies without an heir, and are informing him that if he does not leave Rhiannon for a more fertile wife, they will force him to. Pwyll responds to this by asking for a year’s grace. If Rhiannon does not bear a healthy son by then, he ‘will do according to [their] wishes’.<sup>15</sup> Pwyll’s decision is equivocal. He seeks to pacify his noblemen while retaining his wife, at least for another year, and Walton alters little of the language and none of the substance in her version of events, mitigating none of Pwyll’s political manoeuvring. It is apparent that Rhiannon will be cast out should she not produce the requisite heir in the allotted time frame, indicating that, although she has some agency in her ability to choose Pwyll as her husband, her primary function is still as a producer of heirs. When she does give birth to a son, it promptly disappears on the night of its birth while she and her attendants sleep. The six women brought in to ‘watch the mother and the boy’, fearful for their lives should they be blamed, kill some pups and smear the blood on Rhiannon’s face and hands. When she awakes and asks for her child, they tell her that she fought them in the night and ‘devoured’ him.<sup>16</sup>

The women in the *Mabinogi* describe ‘the blows and the bruises [they] got by struggling’ with Rhiannon. They say they ‘never saw any woman so violent as thou’.<sup>17</sup> Walton’s version picks up on the ‘violent’ details in the original text—the ‘bruises’ on the women, the blood they smear on Rhiannon’s hands and mouth, and the use of the word ‘devoured’—and has her women tell a more overtly grotesque tale. The novel describes their beating each other to create those ‘blows and bruises’, then exclaiming as one: ‘this madwoman rose up and such demon’s strength was on

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>17</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 14.

her [...] Before our eyes she tore her own son limb from limb and ate him raw!'  
 (Walton, p. 307) By increasing the gruesome nature of the act, although known by the reader of either text to be false, the novel heightens the fear of the devouring mother that causes Pwyll's 'foster-brothers' to believe the women's story. Walton's gruesome version is a realized nightmare for the men who condemn Rhiannon. I believe there is a more complex explanation for this tale of cannibalism in the *Mabinogi* than a fantastical scapegoating. In order to understand why it is so easy for the women's lie to be believed, it may be helpful to read it in light of Luce Irigaray's writing about a larger cultural fear of the devouring mother:

The mother has become a devouring monster as an inverted effect of the blind consumption of the mother. Her belly, sometimes her breasts, are agape with gestation, the birth and the life that were given there without any reciprocity.<sup>18</sup>

'The womb', according to Irigaray, 'is fantasized by many men to be a devouring mouth [...] a phallic threat'.<sup>19</sup> She argues that the life-giving properties of the womb and the life-sustaining properties of the breasts become 'inverted' into an 'abyss' by men who have not acknowledged the 'unavoidable and irreparable wound [that] is the cutting of the umbilical cord'.<sup>20</sup> By re-imagining Freud's castration complex, Irigaray expands upon his reading of the womb as the originary site of the uncanny because it is 'man's' first home. In 'The Uncanny' (1919), Freud noted that many of his neurotic male patients:

declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This uncanny place, however, is the entrance to the former *Heim*

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<sup>18</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1991), pp. 34-46 (p. 40). The translator's use of the word 'agape' here is an interesting choice, considering Irigaray's examination of Greek myth in this essay. *Agape* is a Greek word for love: specifically divine and/or unconditional love. The Christians use it to describe God's love for His children, but it can also easily be applied to a divine maternal figure, such as Walton's figure of the Mother. The connotations of 'agape' in English are, of course, those of an open mouth, which makes it an appropriate choice to describe the threatening figure of the devouring mother, who simultaneously gives life to and consumes her children.

<sup>19</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', pp. 40-41.

[home] of all human beings [...] In this case too, then, the uncanny is what was once *heimisch*, familiar; the prefix ‘*un*’ [‘un-’] is the token of repression.<sup>21</sup>

Freud uses the etymology of the German word *unheimlich*, contrasted with its root word, *heimlich*, in order to explain that the uncanny is that which unconsciously reminds one of forbidden and therefore repressed desires. Irigaray goes a step further than Freud, identifying the repressed affect in men as the trauma of birth, which she reframes in terms of the severing of the umbilical cord. Freud argued that the uncanny was perceived most strongly when the division between imagination and reality was partially or entirely effaced. This effacement, according to Freud, often takes place ‘when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes’.<sup>22</sup> Irigaray focuses on the uncanny’s associations with the womb as the first home, interpreting the psychological fear of the devouring mother as a response to the trauma of an initial separation from the mother, which occurs at birth. The cutting of the umbilical cord signifies that separation. When the sexual organs of the female ‘take over’ her ‘full function’—when women’s role becomes solely procreative, as in the case of Rhiannon upon her marriage to Pwyll in the *Mabinogi*—it is a short psychological step from fearing the womb to fearing the woman.

It is not entirely relevant that Rhiannondoes not actually perform the cannibalistic action associated with the devouring mother. The important factor is that

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<sup>21</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols, trans. and ed. by James Strachey, XVII (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1995), pp. 217-56 (p. 245. Original emphasis). *Heimlich* is a word with a multiplicity of meanings, all of which Freud provides in ‘The Uncanny’: ““uncanny” is obviously the opposite of “*heimlich*” [“homely”], “*heimisch*” [native]—the opposite of what is familiar” (p. 220). Freud later provides the Grimm’s dictionary definitions of *heimlich*, two of which lead him to the ‘discovery’ that uncanny is a ‘sub-species’ of *heimlich*, rather than its direct opposite: “[f]rom the idea of “homelike”, “belonging to the house”, the further idea is developed of something [...] concealed, secret; and this idea is expanded in many ways [...] [t]he notion of something hidden and dangerous [...] so that “*Heimlich*” comes to have the meaning usually ascribed to “uncanny” (pp. 225-6. Emphasis removed except for ‘*heimlich*’). So although uncanny can roughly be defined as ‘un-homely’, Freud argues that this opposition is derived from the secretive, and therefore inherently dangerous, nature of the *heimlich* itself. As we can see, the English ‘uncanny’ barely scratches the surface, and lacks the connotations with the home or homely addressed by Irigaray.

<sup>22</sup> Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, p. 244.

she is cast—or miscast—in this mythological role. In fact, it is the *miscasting* of Rhiannon that is of primary importance in both texts. In the *Mabinogi* and Walton's novel, Rhiannon is not the devouring mother. The narrative structure of both stories stages the kidnapping before the discovery of the child's disappearance and describes the plotting and framing of Rhiannon prior to the false accusation, removing any mystery from the tale. The devouring mother is a hoax. The coating of Rhiannon's hands and mouth in dog blood is a symbolic displacement of blame just as the fear of the devouring mother is a psychological displacement.<sup>23</sup> The uncanny womb, specifically the vaginal opening through which the child is born, is inverted in both texts into another maternal opening: the mother's devouring mouth which takes life even as it gives it. Although she does not cause the separation from her child, Rhiannon is blamed for it and transformed into an object of fear.

This section of the First Branch enacts a deeply-rooted psychological fear that is embodied—and simultaneously masked by—ceremonies such as the marriage with the White Mare. Myth removes the ceremonial layers of social interaction which disguise these fears. The events in myth, folk and fairytales use magic to act out repressed fears and desires. According to Rosemary Jackson, the fantastic in literature operates in a similar way:

To introduce the fantastic is to replace familiarity, comfort, *das Heimlich*, with estrangement, un-ease, the uncanny. It is to introduce dark areas, of something completely other and unseen, the spaces outside the limiting frame of the ‘human’ and the ‘real’, outside the control of the ‘word’ and the ‘look’.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> In both the *Mabinogi* and the novel the dog is a stag-hound bitch that has just given birth to a litter. The puppies are slaughtered by the women and the blood smeared on Rhiannon's mouth and hands. This act creates a connection between Rhiannon and the stag-hound which strengthens her identification as Dyved's sovereignty goddess (see Chapter V below). Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 13 and Walton, *The Song of Rhiannon*, p. 307.

<sup>24</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 179.

The fantastic allows Walton to place the *Mabinogi* ‘outside the control of the “word”’. That word may be referred to in Irigaray’s terms as *langue*, or ‘the father tongue’.<sup>25</sup> By re-visioning the *Mabinogi*, the *Tetralogy* seeks to uncover the sacrificed ‘mother tongue’. When Rhiannon begs the women not to charge her falsely in the *Mabinogi*, she says ‘the Lord God knows all things [...] [i]f you tell me this from fear, I assert before Heaven that I will defend you’.<sup>26</sup> Walton’s re-writing of this passage is syntactically almost identical, but crucially replaces the Christian father God with the Mother: ‘by the Mothers in Whose shape we are all fashioned, charge me not falsely! If you lie because fear is on you, I will defend you’ (Walton, p. 307). By retaining the meaning and even the syntax of the original text but replacing it with an exhortation to the Mother rather than the Father God, Walton removes the Christian references in order to reconnect the *Mabinogi* with its presumably pre-Christian origins, specifically the subsumed figure of the Mother goddess. While the ambiguity of those origins problematises the possibility that Walton is engaging in an act of historical recovery, the resituation of the narrative to a pre-Christian setting may be interpreted as an act of textual re-visioning. By removing the references to a paternal, singular ‘God the Father’ and subsequently substituting a pantheon governed by a maternal deity, Walton utilizes contemporaneous historical research to re-vision the Four Branches as a *cywbarwydd* might have narrated them prior to their medieval literary construction. Irigaray argues for the necessity of moving ‘outside the limiting frame’ of the patriarchal ‘human’ and ‘real’ to ‘reproduce the living bond with [the mother]’.<sup>27</sup> In order to centralize the figure of the Mother, Walton re-locates the text outside of the ‘limiting frame’ of its medieval context.

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<sup>25</sup> Irigaray, ‘The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’, p. 41.

<sup>26</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Irigaray, ‘The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’, p. 42.

This process is further exemplified by the structure of this passage in the *Mabinogi*. Although the story of Rhiannon's punishment is located in the First Branch of the *Mabinogi*, in the *Tetralogy* it is recounted by a new character in the third novel, *The Song of Rhiannon*, which otherwise re-visions the plot of the Third Branch. This scene plays with the *Mabinogi*'s multiple identities as oral and written myth by including Rhiannon's punishment as a tale told by an old woman to Pryderi and Manawyddan. The woman is poor and the setting is at night, in her meagre home, in front of the fire. These details, combined with the fact that the story is 'recited' almost exactly as it is in the *Mabinogi*, mimic the experiences recounted by male folklorists such as Rhŷs.<sup>28</sup> The listeners of the tale are the woman's husband, Pryderi and Manawyddan, who are the recipients of the couple's hospitality. None of these characters takes the reader's position, as Pwyll and Pendaran did in the first novel. Pryderi has heard the story of his kidnapping before, and Manawyddan is familiar with it as well, for reasons which are revealed later in the novel. The reader, in this instance, inhabits the role of the folklorist. They are re-enacting a scenario that has become a cliché: the poor, native woman is 'discovered' by the male folklorist, who receives her hospitality as a guest and audience member. The story she tells is always indigenous and therefore reflective of her culture, which is cast by the folklorist as marginalized by his modern society. The rural setting, poverty and female identity of the speaker are idealized as remnants of a dying oral and matriarchal culture, the two being inextricably linked.<sup>29</sup>

This scene in the novel humorously embraces the cliché while subtly undermining it. The elderly woman is of the Old Tribes, positioning her as a member

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<sup>28</sup> Walton, pp. 299-318 and Guest, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 16-21.

<sup>29</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the gender stereotypes perpetuated by male folklorists, the problematics of a male-defined, artificially-constructed female oral culture and the folklorists' idealisation of that culture, see *Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore*, ed. by Susan Tower Hollis, Linda Pershing and M. Jane Young (Oxford: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

of the dying culture threatened by the incursions of the New Tribes, to which Pryderi belongs. Her husband is a shepherd and they live in a ‘hut’, indicating her poverty and indigent identity (Walton, p. 302). When she begins to tell her tale, Manawyddan briefly adopts the condescending tone of the male folklorist: ‘Here in this lonely place a chance to talk means much to her. And perhaps she is wiser than she seems’ (Walton, p. 304). Manawyddan views himself and Pryderi as graciously allowing the old woman a chance to perform, just as the male folklorist assumes his request for a song or story is a rare and flattering opportunity for the female performer.

However, the character of the old woman inverts the stereotype of the gracious, grateful subject of study. She ‘cackles’ with sarcastic laughter and ‘launches’ into her story ‘eager as a starving man sitting down to meat’ (Walton, p. 304). When interrupted by the asides of Pryderi and Manawyddan she looks at them ‘indignantly’ and ignores the attempts of her husband to soften the more bitter edges of her version. The old woman acts as a *cyfarwydd*, reciting a story familiar to her audience, but adding her own interpretation. The sequence of events in the tale may be as they are in the First Branch, but in the third novel of the *Tetralogy* they are told from a female perspective. Her voice usurps that of the medieval male redactor, reappropriating the narrative in order to offer an alternative interpretation of it.

The *Mabinogi* casts no judgment upon the actions of the women, although it offers a slight condemnation of lying which is spoken by Rhiannon. In the novel’s version, the old woman blends sarcasm with insight, revealing the jealousy and fear which motivated the women:

They cannot have been happy, those six fine ladies—each of them had a daughter or a sister that she said would have brought Pwyll four fine boys in those four winters instead of only one. A bitter pill it must have been, too, to know that now, because of her one son, this stranger woman would queen it over them forever. But they dared not say so; they had to pretend to be proud and happy. [...] They knew that they must guard that mother and son as each

would her own two eyes. Yet by midnight every last one of them was fast asleep (Walton, p. 306).

This passage humanizes these women without excusing their actions. They play a vital role in ensuring Rhiannon's character identification as a Calumniated Wife.<sup>30</sup>

Juliette Wood applies the motif to the characters of Rhiannon and Branwen, pointing out that 'their persecution stems from the fact that these women are foreigners, intruders, as it were, into a world which will not readily accept them'.<sup>31</sup> The story-teller refers to Rhiannon as a 'stranger woman', not a 'strange woman'. Her 'strangeness' is not a character trait; it is Rhiannon's socially-perceived identity. Moreover, 'stranger' is placed before 'woman' and before 'queen', linguistically positioning her foreign status as more important than her gender, her political role, or even her name, which is not given. The 'fine ladies' do not count her as one of them, with a shared gender bond. She is a 'stranger' before she is a 'woman'; more importantly, she is a magical stranger from an Otherworld, not originally human and therefore an object of fear. The old woman's repetition of 'their Queen, the stranger' reinforces Rhiannon's isolated alien status (Walton, p. 306).

It is her foreignness which makes her especially vulnerable to persecution by her husband's people. However, as Wood points out, '[t]he Calumniated Wife is usually a passive figure, while it is the opposite quality in Rhiannon that gives the Welsh version much of its artistry'.<sup>32</sup> Rhiannon's active quality is demonstrated in the First Branch by her initial reaction to the women's accusation: 'If you tell me this from fear, I assert before Heaven that I will defend you [...] you will receive no evil

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<sup>30</sup> The folklore motif of the Calumniated Wife can be briefly described as such: a wife's new-born child is taken from her by a jealous party; she is accused of the crime and punished. See Antti Aarne, *The Types of Folklore: A Classification and Bibliography*, trans. by Stith Thompson (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1961), p. 42.

<sup>31</sup> Juliette Wood, 'The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature', in 'The Mabinogi': A Book of Essays, ed. by C. W. Sullivan III (London: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 61-78 (p. 62).

<sup>32</sup> Wood, 'The Calumniated Wife', p. 70.

by telling the truth'.<sup>33</sup> Rhiannon expresses sympathy for their fear of punishment and offers her protection, rather than reacting with fear for herself or anger over the accusation. The latter two emotions would be understandable considering the treacherous position she has been placed in, and the *Mabinogi*'s treatment of her character is saintly in both its fearless sympathy for the women and its repetitious evocations of 'the Lord God's' omniscient ability to sense when one is lying.

The version told by the old woman in the novel humanizes Rhiannon by significantly altering and expanding the dialogue. Rhiannon repeatedly questions the women, begging them to tell the truth. She draws upon her role as a new mother to gain their sympathy: 'Is not my woe great enough? [...] The sorrow of a mother that has lost her child? What evil will come upon you for telling the truth? (Walton, p. 307) The structure of the passages is the same in both texts: Rhiannon evokes the name of a deity in order to add religious weight to her demand for truthfulness. The women are reminded of the deity's omniscient power, which reinforces that weight. Rhiannon acknowledges the women's fear of retributive punishment for falling asleep and offers her protection. The replacement of the Christian God with the Mothers is typical of the *Tetralogy*'s re-writing of the *Mabinogi*. Walton uses nearly-direct quotations from the source material while re-appropriating them for the Mother of the novels, as quoted above, when Walton replaces 'the Lord God knows all things'<sup>34</sup> with 'by the Mothers in Whose shape we are all fashioned' (Walton, p. 307). Yet this is not just a simple case of substituting one deity for another. The use of the exclamation mark, the repeated questions and the expression of her maternal loss re-casts Rhiannon as grieving mother, not saintly victim. Speech from the *Mabinogi* is

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<sup>33</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

expanded and altered in order to uncover the ‘mother tongue’ that has been gradually eroded by its increasingly patriarchal narrators.

This characterization is generally maintained throughout the novel, barring one intriguing particular. The tale told by the old woman in *Song* deviates from the First Branch in her account of Rhiannon’s punishment. In the *Mabinogi* as well as the novel, Pwyll refuses to divorce her, as asked by his ‘nobles’, because she fulfilled her obligation to bear him a son.<sup>35</sup> This striking instance of loyalty on the part of the husband for his wife is unique in the Four Branches. The second Calumniated Wife, Branwen, will not receive the same treatment, as we shall see later in this chapter. In addition to this unusual demonstration of spousal fidelity, the *Mabinogi* accords Rhiannon the extraordinary power of soliciting and effectively choosing her own punishment: ‘Rhiannon sent for the teachers and the wise men, and as she preferred doing penance to contending with the women, she took upon her a penance’.<sup>36</sup> The novel, however, places this power in the hands of Pwyll. Although he defends Rhiannon in the same manner as his *Mabinogi* counterpart, Pwyll is described as acquiescing to the ‘rage’ of his men, convening the council himself ‘lest she be butchered or burned alive behind his back’ (Walton, p. 307). This is an isolated example of the novel taking agency from a female character. The choice effectively increases the reader’s sense of Rhiannon’s isolation in a society which even her husband, the king, has little control over. By placing her judgement in the hands of those who view her as an ‘other’, Rhiannon’s status as a Calumniated Wife is reinforced. Rhiannon joins Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd as female characters punished for acting outside the parameters of their societally-determined female role.

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<sup>35</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

The punishment meted out by the council of druids is the same as that in the *Mabinogi*: Rhiannon is to spend seven years at the gate of the city, asking entrants if they wish her to carry them in on her back. In both texts, it is stated that few take her up on her offer.<sup>37</sup> Her punishment ends when the couple who have been fostering her son return him to court. The kidnapping is indirectly explained in the *Mabinogi* as the work of a disembodied ‘claw’ which attacks a foal in the house of a man named Teyrnon. When Teyrnon severs the arm, the boy appears.<sup>38</sup> The inference is that the arm belonged to the monstrous creature which had inexplicably kidnapped Pryderi, and that when it lost its arm, it dropped him. The tale the old woman tells recounts the same events; in her version, the owner of the ‘claw’ and the motivation behind the kidnapping are kept a mystery until the end of the novel, when it is revealed to be an attempt to punish Rhiannon for breaking her Otherworld engagement to marry Pwyll. By removing this passage of the First Branch from the narrative of the first novel of the *Tetralogy*, the focus of *Prince* remains fixed upon establishing the conflict between the Old and New Tribes and the Mother and Father god, which is the central theme of the *Tetralogy*. Its new location, at the beginning of the third novel, acts as a reminder to the reader of the characters and their relationships in the *Prince of Annwn* before developing them further in *The Song of Rhiannon*. It also affords an opportunity for Walton to play with the folkloric tradition of recording oral stories, and subtly reminds the reader of the origins of the myth it is re-visioning.

In Walton’s re-visioning, the dramatic tension of the Calumniated Wife motif is heightened by increasing the violence and emotive language, by reducing Rhiannon’s agency, and by making the kidnapping itself a punishment for her earlier

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<sup>37</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 14 and Walton, p. 308. The punishment is an odd one, perhaps more easily understood when Rhiannon’s identification as the horse goddess Epona is made clear in Chapter V below.

<sup>38</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 14.

actions. Her loss of power and identification as a ‘stranger woman’ emphasises the importance of the Calumniated Wife’s foreign status; she is an easy scapegoat because she is an outsider. By relocating the story from the re-telling of the First Branch in *Prince* to the re-telling of the Third Branch in *Song*, Walton acknowledges the fragmentary nature of the *Mabinogi* while maintaining a cohesive narrative. The invented character of the old woman playfully subverts gender stereotypes and gives an assertively feminist reading to the tale by removing it from the ‘father tongue’ and replacing it with a female voice who critiques the actions of Pwyll’s council, a commentary which does not exist in the original text.<sup>39</sup> Although not in fact a devouring mother, Rhiannon is only restored to her rightful place in her society when her son—the male heir—is restored to his kingdom. Although Pryderi, like Pwyll, eventually returns to the Mother, Rhiannon’s punishment sets a precedent for female scape-goating in the *Mabinogi*. In the *Tetralogy*, it is recounted after the second Calumniated Wife, Branwen, has died. By telling Branwen’s tragic Calumniated Wife tale first, Rhiannon’s social and maternal restoration loses much of its force as a happy ending. The reader is fully aware that the narrative could have ended in death instead of reunion.

### **Branwen’s Shame: The Silent Female in the Second Branch**

The character of Branwen provides the title for the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi*, yet she does not speak until the climax of the story. Branwen, the sister of King Bendigeidfran, is married to Matholuch, King of Ireland, shipped off to that island, bears a son, and is confined to a life of slavery in the castle before uttering a single word. The other women of the *Mabinogi* (Rhiannon, Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd) are

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<sup>39</sup> The old woman refers to Rhiannon’s punishment as her ‘doom’ and states that ‘few would ride upon her back, for we folk of Dyved have hearts in our breasts’ (Walton, pp. 307-8). Both statements imply that Rhiannon’s judgement was undeserved and unduly severe.

headstrong, powerful and always outspoken. Yet Branwen, one of the ‘three chief ladies’ of Wales, ‘the fairest damsel in the world’, apparently has nothing to say for herself.<sup>40</sup> Or, rather, she has no say in the trajectory of her story. The events of the Branch named after her seem to swirl around her, happen to her, as a child puts a doll through the motions of eating, dressing and marrying. When Branwen sails to Ireland, her brothers ‘looked at her until she shrank to the size of a child, dwindled to the size of a doll’ (Walton, p. 190). It is her brother Bendigeidfran—or Bran, as he is referred to most often in the novel—who first thinks to use Branwen as a doll to do his bidding.

Her union with Matholuch is the first arranged marriage in the history of Walton’s fictional Island of the Mighty, although no such distinction is made in the Second Branch. Walton’s alteration, while not consistent with the original text, reflects the complex process of re-visioning earlier material. Gruffydd describes the *Mabinogi* redactor’s task as a difficult one:

He had to make the best he could out of unpromising material which had already been distorted during the centuries when it had passed from cyfarwydd to cyfarwydd, and the particular version on which the author based the final account was by no means the least contaminated [by this transmission].<sup>41</sup>

This contamination is exemplified by the treatment of God in Davies’ and Guest’s translations of the *Mabinogi*. There are nine dialogic references to God in Davies’ translation of the Second Branch and none in Guest’s.<sup>42</sup> In Davies’ translation, each

<sup>40</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 21.

<sup>41</sup> Gruffydd, *Rhiannon*, pp. 3-4. Gruffydd also notes that ‘the author of the *Mabinogi* has been unusually successful in dissociating himself from the modern world of his own generation’ during its composition.

<sup>42</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 21-34 and Guest, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 19-32. Davies’ translation is generally considered to be the more accurate of the two, but there is no difference in plot and, surprisingly, little in dialogue. A comparison of these two versions of the Second Branch reveals that the most significant difference between them (for the purposes of this thesis) is, indeed, in religious references. Guest occasionally uses ‘Heaven’ where Davies uses ‘God’, but there are only three references to ‘Heaven’ in the former’s translation. In the six other places where Davies uses ‘God’, Guest makes no religious reference at all. This is not to suggest that there is not an overtly Christian tone to the Guest translation. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, in her translation of the First

use is perfunctory and easily inserted or removed without noticeable alteration of the story. This noticeable difference in religious tone in just two English translations of the Second Branch reveals a translator's ability to significantly alter—purposefully or inadvertently—the religious tone of a text. As we have seen in the earlier dialogic examples from the First Branch, Walton replaces all of Guest's references to God or Heaven with ones to the Mother.

This exemplifies Walton's decision to adhere to the pre-Christian origin of the story—as she has interpreted it—while maintaining a fidelity to the written tales.<sup>43</sup> This technique is one which Gillian Beer advises in 'Representing Women: Re-presenting the Past'. Rather than placing pre-modern texts in a modern context, she suggests 're-presenting' them by 'engaging with the *difference* of the past in our present'.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, in 'Women's Rewriting of Myths', Diane Purkiss discusses the problematic approach of:

rewriting the myth—changing the narrative, changing the position of the speaker, changing the spaces available for identification—[such writers] are held to be at once making a dramatic break with the myths as told by the fathers, and also to be recovering the dark, secret, always unconscious truths which the fathers have struggled to repress.<sup>45</sup>

Such a technique, Purkiss argues, does not uncover a lost feminine, because the authors 'refer to a femininity which is itself a product of the culture and language which represses it'. She goes on to argue, '[f]emininity is, precisely, that which is

Branch Rhiannon calls upon the 'Lord God' (p. 14), and the 'Heaven' mentioned in the Second Branch would have been generally assumed by Guest's nineteenth-century Western readers to be the Christian heaven.

<sup>43</sup> These are the Four Branches as translated in the nineteenth century by Lady Charlotte Guest. Walton also received English-language translations from a professor F. N. Robinson of Harvard University, as stated above. While Walton was not working directly from the extant manuscripts, her erudition, demonstrated throughout this thesis, makes it apparent that she was aware of the medieval dating of those manuscripts.

<sup>44</sup> Gillian Beer, 'Representing Women: Re-presenting the Past', in *The Feminist Reader*, ed. by Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1997), pp 77-90 (p. 80).

<sup>45</sup> Diane Purkiss, 'Women's Rewriting of Myths', in *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*, ed. by Carolyne Larrington (London: Pandora Press, 1992), pp. 441-57 (p. 444).

excluded from patriarchal representations and can only be glimpsed in their gaps and silences'.<sup>46</sup> Branwen, as depicted in the *Mabinogi*, must be located in the 'gaps and silences' of the original text. Her lack of recorded speech in the Second Branch stands in sharp contrast to that of Rhiannon and Arianrhod. In re-visioning Branwen, Walton primarily uses interior monologue to recover her voice without 'making a dramatic break with the myths as told by the fathers'. In other words, without adding a significant amount to Branwen's allotted speech. Rather than breaking with the dialogic structure of the Second Branch, Walton uses Branwen's silence in a way that Purkiss might not approve of: to recover 'the dark, secret, always unconscious truths which the fathers have struggled to repress'. Walton demonstrates that it is possible for feminist authors to attempt such a recovery without inadvertently reinforcing the patriarchal power structure of the original text. In *The Children of Llyr*, silence becomes a metaphor for Branwen's lack of agency, and Walton's deft handling of it reveals the active character beneath the repressed persona.

As Derrick S. Thomson points out in his introduction to the Welsh-language *Branwen Uerch Llyr*, 'Branwen might well be described as a novel compressed to the dimensions of a short story'.<sup>47</sup> He goes on to describe the novelistic elements of the Branch:

It is a story which constantly retains its interest, by means both of plot construction and of character delineation. These main qualities of the tale are never subordinated to the incidental antiquarian tricks and trapping which the average story-teller of this period would probably have found difficult to control. But the redactor is true to his time and to his class in that he does not entirely expunge these trappings from his story.<sup>48</sup>

The same could be said of *Children*. Walton does not attempt to modernize the story. She retains the plot, characters and setting while changing the format from

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<sup>46</sup> Purkiss, 'Women's Rewriting of Myths', p. 448.

<sup>47</sup> Thomson, *Branwen Uerch Llyr*, p. xlvi.

<sup>48</sup> Thomson, *Branwen Uerch Llyr*, pp. xlvi-xliii.

‘novelistic’ to novel. The major change made is the removal of the narrative to a pre-Christian past. One could argue that this is, in fact, not a change at all, but a stripping away of the Christian tone which was incorporated at a later date. Thompson makes note of the ‘thoroughly Christian “milieu” of the Branch’, which, he adds, ‘may well have taken its shape in the mind of a clerical redactor’.<sup>49</sup> Walton’s critical indebtedness to Rhŷs suggests that she was inspired by his theory that the family groups in the *Mabinogi* were pre-Christian Picts.<sup>50</sup> Although this choice is not textually problematic when adapting the Second Branch, due to the minimal number of Christian references in the original text, utilization of Rhŷs’ theory allows for greater moral and ethical debate within the story. This enables the text to achieve what Susan Sellers refers to as a ‘balancing act’ between following and altering established narratives. Sellers argues that using the material given enables the author to open the text from the inside out.<sup>51</sup>

Opening the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi* is akin to opening a set of Russian Matryoshka dolls. Branwen is at its center, but she is shrouded in layers of silent submission. In *Branwen Daughter of Llyr*, Proinsias Mac Cana spends most of the book discussing the Second Branch’s Irish connections. His analysis of the character of Branwen is less than thorough:

Branwen herself is a shadowy wilting figure of whom it might be said with some truth that she never comes to life until she comes to die [...] she is but a shadow [...] Branwen [is] morally passive throughout to whatever fate and her superiors have in store for her...this passiveness adds to the sense of inevitability in Branwen’s tragedy, so that her lack of character may be to some degree its own compensation.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Thomson, *Branwen Uerch Llyr*, p. xliv

<sup>50</sup> Sir John Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx*, Vol. II (London: Wildwood House Ltd, 1980), p. 684.

<sup>51</sup> Susan Sellers, *Myth and Fairytale in Contemporary Women’s Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1958), pp. 179-80.

<sup>52</sup> Proinsias Mac Cana, *Branwen Daughter of Llyr* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 27-30.

It is unclear from this passage whether Mac Cana is referring to Branwen's lack of character delineation, her lack of moral character, or both. If the former, there is little evidence to the contrary. If, however, Mac Cana is equating Branwen's lack of dialogue in the Second Branch with moral passivity, I would argue that he has failed to open the last Matryoshka. The novel sheds light on Branwen's character by using her actions in the Second Branch, in conjunction with interior monologue, to uncover a figure that is not as passive as she appears to be.

### **Marital Experiments: Exogamy and Arranged Marriage in the Old Tribes**

Although I will argue that Walton offers a more assertive interpretation of the character of Branwen in *Children* than Mac Cana does in *Branwen Daughter of Llyr*, Walton does not ignore or attempt to mitigate Branwen's lack of agency in the original text. This is made most apparent in Walton's treatment of Branwen's marriage. The novel describes the psychological motivations and political manoeuvres behind Walton's version of Branwen's arranged marriage to Matholuch, using it as a vehicle for debating issues of patriarchy and primogeniture. Their marriage is described as the first of its kind in the fictional Island of the Mighty: 'Never had a woman of the Old Tribes left her kin and her island save as the victim of fraud or force. Such a thing was unheard of, incredible' (Walton, p. 160). Bran even expresses a note of outrage at Matholuch's request for Branwen's hand, stating: 'I am no king of the Eastern World to give my sister away like a cow' (Walton, p. 160). By referring to Bran's people as 'the Old Tribes', the novel clearly places them in a past not only for the reader, but in the world of the novel as well. Theirs is a fading society. Matholuch's arrival by fleet of ships can be seen as a cultural invasion. By

transforming a standard political marriage into a revolutionary act, the novel highlights the gender stereotypes implicit in such an arrangement.

Bran ostensibly requests his sister's consent, stating: 'let the girl get a look at him, and we will talk about it' (Walton, p. 160). The demand for her approval affords greater agency to Branwen than she has in the *Mabinogi*, where she is 'bestow[ed]' on Matholuch before she even appears in the narrative.<sup>53</sup> It becomes clear, however, that both Bran and Matholuch are motivated to arrange this marriage by desires which have nothing to do with Branwen's wants or needs. Caradoc, Bran's only issue, is the first acknowledged son of a High King of the Island of the Mighty and as such, Bran secretly wants Caradoc to rule after him (Walton, p. 153). Yet, according to the matrilineal society of the Old Tribes as depicted in the novel, Branwen's sons will inherit after Bran's death. Matholuch is consumed by a similar patriarchal greed. Although aroused by Branwen's physical form, 'he never forgot what else that lovely body was: a strategic treasury, the shaping place, the gateway into this world of kings to come. Of the lords of this island that was greater than his own' (Walton, pp. 161-2). Bran wants to change the laws of inheritance, allowing his biological son to inherit the throne after him, and he thinks his course will be smoother with Branwen married to another king in Ireland. Matholuch wants to use the current laws of inheritance in order to gain power over the Island through the son he hopes to have with Branwen: the rightful heir to the throne. Thus each man, while unwittingly divided in purpose, seeks the same solution to their similar desire.

Yet what of Branwen's desire? The text speaks through her silence: 'Her eyes begged him [Matholuch] to make her go, yet not to make her. To do the impossible, and take the pain out of sorrow' (Walton, p. 161). She is torn between love for her

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<sup>53</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 21.

family and passion for this new man, and her position is reflective of the culture in which her literary character was first created. ‘Branwen [...] has divided loyalties’, according to Thomson.<sup>54</sup> The divided loyalties of the Welsh woman in the Middle Ages are explained by Morfydd E. Owen: ‘Her links were dual. They lay both with the kin into which she was born and with the kin with which she was associated through her husband after marriage’.<sup>55</sup> However, as the first “wife” in an arranged marriage, Branwen can not fully understand either the game in which she is participating, or her role in it. She is, therefore, unable to move in any other direction than that towards which she is guided by forces far more powerful than her own. The power of these forces, embodied by Bran and Matholuch, lies not just in their dominant political position, but in the claim each one has on her affections. Branwen is moved by love more than duty, another result of the novel’s alteration of the source material, and one which may give the reader greater sympathy for her character. Love for Branwen plays no part in the actions of Bran and Matholuch. She is, for them, ‘a use-value...an exchange value...in other words, a commodity’, to use Irigaray’s terms.<sup>56</sup> Branwen’s arranged, exogamous marriage positions her as the ‘commodity’ which Bran and Matholuch exchange in order to pursue their political end-game.

In ‘Another “Cause”—Castration’, Irigaray explains how Freud’s application of the castration complex to the female infant is based on the assumption that women are merely the inverse of the male; for Freud and his proponents, a woman’s sexual identity can only be understood as the copy of a man’s, with the notable lack of a penis. Irigaray argues that this incorrect assumption reinforces the sexually developed female’s role as the prop of the male sexual ego and guarantor against castration. She

<sup>54</sup> Thomson, *Branwen Uerch Llyr*, p. xliv.

<sup>55</sup> Morfydd E. Owen, ‘Shame and Reparation: A Woman’s Place in the Kin’, in *The Welsh Law of Women* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980), pp. 40-68 (p. 40).

<sup>56</sup> Luce Irigaray, ‘This Sex Which is Not One’, in *Feminisms*, revised edn, ed. by Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007) pp. 363-69 (p. 368).

writes that ‘in her role as ‘wife’ she will be assigned to maintain coital homeostasis, “constancy”. [...] She is wholly devoted to giving life...source and re-source of life’.<sup>57</sup> Irigaray’s argument—that the ‘wife’ role is a solely procreative one, the ‘wife’ lacking identity and purpose beyond that of child-bearer—shares many similarities with Morfydd Owen’s analysis of the role of the medieval Welsh woman as reflected in the contemporaneous legal manuscripts:

In a society dominated by kin groups of male agnates [...] the position of woman was inevitably one of juridical inferiority and dual ties [...] in most legal institutions, she, like the dumb and the mad, was regarded as a non-person recognised by society only as an appendage to some male with whom she was connected by ties of blood or by bonds of marriage.<sup>58</sup>

Owen’s referral to this woman as ‘an appendage to some male’, that male being either kin or husband, resonates with Irigaray’s analysis of the woman as a ‘commodity’, whose value is recognized only in terms of ‘exchange’ between men. Although Owen is writing about the role of women in the Middle Ages, while Irigaray is describing a cultural idea of woman, both writers come to the same conclusion: the wife is an ‘appendage’ to a man, and as such is ‘wholly devoted to giving life’.

The *Mabinogi*’s account of Branwen’s marriage reflects the social role of the medieval Welsh wife as defined by Owen. As Matholuch’s wife, Branwen’s sole purpose is to produce a male heir in order to provide proof of her husband’s virility, and ensure his immortality, by providing him with a name-sake who will carry his genetic identity into the next generation. Walton’s fictional reinterpretation in *Children* retains the medieval Branwen’s social role, as depicted in the source material, in order to critique it. Whether an ‘appendage’ to a more powerful male, or a ‘commodity’ to be exchanged between men, Branwen is a ‘non-person’, negated by

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<sup>57</sup> Luce Irigaray, ‘Another “Cause”—Castration’, in *Feminisms*, revised edn, ed. by Robyn R. Warhol and Diance Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), pp. 430-7 (pp. 434-4).

<sup>58</sup> Owen, ‘Shame and Reparation’, p. 40.

her gender. Bran and Matholuch minimize Branwen to the size of her uterus, making it impossible for her to retain her sexual freedom. Ultimately, this loss results in the loss of her physical freedom as well.

### **How Quiet is too Quiet? The Debate over Branwen's Moral Passivity**

If, in the *Mabinogi*, Branwen is a victim of these men's desire for power through paternity, does this confirm Mac Cana's belief in her moral passivity? Surely Walton's novel would have made a stronger feminist argument had it made Branwen more assertive by altering her character in addition to altering the plot. A Branwen who refused to become a 'non-person', by adopting the role of 'wife' in a marriage arranged without her consent, might have resonated more with twentieth-century feminist readers. Such radical reinterpretations of folklore and myth are quite popular, for obvious reasons.<sup>59</sup> Barbara Donley's *Arianrhod* is the only radical feminist reinterpretation of the *Mabinogi* that I am aware of at the time of writing, and it would be interesting to see more work done in this vein, yet I would argue that Walton provides an example of how feminist rewritings of myths and/or fairy tales can retain the original narrative while simultaneously critiquing it.

Transforming Branwen's character into an independent female who refuses an arranged marriage would alter the text so dramatically that it would change the entire

<sup>59</sup> Owen Sheers's inter-textual technique in *White Ravens*, weaves the Second Branch with a World War II-era Branwen and a twenty-first-century woman named Rhian. Sheers' Branwen has the same fate as her medieval counterpart, but Rhian is told at the end of the novel to '[b]e more of a man than either your grandfather or your father ever were' (Bridgend: Seren Press, 2009), p. 178. Barbara Donley's *Arianrhod: A Welsh Myth Retold*, keeps the medieval setting but puts a contemporary feminist spin on the Fourth Branch (Oakland: Stone Circle Press, 1987). The feminist merits of postmodern reinterpretations of fairy tales (particularly the work of Angela Carter) have been widely analyzed by critics and scholars. See Cristina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990); Susan Sellers, *Myth and Fairy Tale in Contemporary Women's Fiction*; Lucie Armitt, *Contemporary Women's Fiction and the Fantastic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000).

plot. Walton's decision to 'add only, never alter' anything in the *Mabinogi* is evident in the novel's adherence to the plot. This choice is in accordance with Beer's opinion on re-writing historical material, which stresses the eternal present of the original text. When written, the Second Branch was set in an ambiguous time period: the original manuscript does not date the events it recounts. According to Beer, historical literature such as the *Mabinogi* is only considered historical by the contemporary reader; these texts reflect the cultural climate in which they were created. They are not, therefore, objects upon which we can impose our own present ideologies, particularly in regards to gender identity. Beer points out that:

[u]nless we believe in fixed entities—man and woman—we need to be alert to the processes of gender formation and gender change. We cannot construe this in isolation from other elements within a culture, and, moreover, we shall better discover our own fixing assumptions if we value the *unlikeness* of the past.<sup>60</sup>

A novel (in both senses of the word) representation of the Second Branch, even if set roughly in the time period of its oral origins, cannot ignore the cultural milieu in which the manuscript was created. That milieu affects the formation of the characters' identities. Beer argues that, rather than trying to re-make a character in one's contemporary image, respecting the differences of previous conceptions of 'man' and 'woman' might enable us to recognize our own preconceptions about gender identity. Moreover, we must understand that male and female characters depicted in medieval literature such as the *Mabinogi* reflect medieval conceptualizations of gender identity that differ from those portrayed in modern fiction.

Feminist reinterpretations of the *Mabinogi* which choose to disregard the medieval cultural context in which it was written clearly have literary merit as an important process of reinterpreting myth for a contemporary readership. However,

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<sup>60</sup> Beer, 'Representing Women, Re-presenting the Past', p. 81 (original emphasis).

Walton's stated aim in her reinterpretation, to retain as much of the *Mabinogi* as she could, indicates that she considered that context an essential element of the narrative. I would argue that this approach does not mean that *The Mabinogion Trilogy* is a non-feminist, or even a conservative feminist work. Neither the fidelity to the original material, nor the feminist reinterpretation, undermine each other because Walton employs the narrative, dialogue and history of the *Mabinogi*'s evolution in service of her feminist re-visioning. We have seen this already in Chapter I. Walton's use of an obscure maternal deity, Dôn, who is only mentioned once in the *Mabinogi*, formed the nucleus around which she created her fictional Mother goddess: a figure who becomes a source of feminist theological debate in the first novel of the *Tetralogy*. Throughout this thesis I will provide multiple examples, and a fuller explanation, of this technique, but I believe the most concise and effective is an examination of how Walton works with Branwen's silence.

Although *Children* was written in the twentieth century, the character of Branwen is not a twentieth-century creation. She emerged from a society which regards her as a 'non person': an 'appendage' to her male kin or husband. In Walton's re-visioning, Branwen must marry Matholuch for reasons both cultural and narrative. It is Branwen's marriage that instigates the war in Ireland which forms the main action of the Second Branch. And as Bran's 'appendage' in the *Mabinogi*, Branwen has little control over what man he chooses as her husband. When he gestures towards getting a token consent from her in *Children*, Bran's language does not evince consideration of or respect for her opinion: 'let the girl get a look at him', he says. Bran does not refer to her by name or even, indeed, as an adult. On the surface, the addition of this demand for Branwen's approval of her future husband appears to be a feminist improvement over the original text, which contains no such reference.

However, by adding the gesture but choosing imperative, infantilizing language, Walton highlights Branwen's subordinate position in the original text. This is reinforced by the inclusion of Manawyddan's negative reaction to the arrangement (in the form of interior monologue) and by his reference to Branwen as 'the girl': '*Will he [Bran] send the girl away with strangers? So far away that we know what happens to her only by hearsay? Rob her of her home, and her children of their heritage? Can he dole on Caradoc enough to do that?*' (Walton, p. 160. Original emphasis) When Bran justifies the marriage by referring to Branwen's 'liking' of Matholuch, Manawyddan reminds him that 'in Ireland the New Tribes have won the mastery; they who think that man should be master over woman' (Walton, p. 163). Manawyddan serves two purposes here: his interior monologue foreshadows Branwen's role as a Calumniated Wife and his recorded speech reiterates the distinction between the gender relationships in the Old and New Tribes. His voice is expanded significantly in *Children* in order to provide a critique of the arranged marriage. Manawyddan's interior monologue and dialogue portray Bran as a man so blinded by his personal agenda that he is willing to sacrifice 'the girl' to achieve his own ends.

Branwen's lack of agency is symbolized by her silence in the Second Branch and in the novel. In both texts she is a princess, the mother of kings even before her marriage; in the novel she is also a member of a society which gives her the right to choose her partner(s). The novel's alteration of the marital practices of Branwen's society highlights the patriarchal machinations behind arranged marriages. By making the marriage a unique event it can be used as a source of debate between Manawyddan and Bran, just as the 'marriage' with the white mare is used in *Prince* to instigate debate between Pwyll and the High Druid. The juxtaposition of plot points and recorded speech from the *Mabinogi* with Walton's original material transforms

the marginalized characters and unremarkable events in the source material into influential figures and incidents open to questioning and reconsideration, specifically, in *Children*, a reconsideration of women's role in arranged marriages. Branwen's is one such incident. The *Mabinogi* reports her last words: 'Alas [...] woe is me that I was ever born; two islands have been destroyed because of me!'<sup>61</sup> In the novel her final speech appears at first reading to be not much more than a slightly altered version of the original: 'Sorrow that is my sorrow! Woe that ever I was born! For the good of two islands has been destroyed through me' (Walton, p. 283). However, the substitution of 'through' for 'because' dramatically alters the interpretation of the passage. In the *Mabinogi*, Branwen directly blames herself for the war which causes the 'destruction' of Ireland and Wales. In the novel, she refers to herself as a conduit for this 'destruction', rather than the instigator of it. In Walton's re-visioning, Branwen's interior monologue and free indirect discourse draw attention to the fact that she has been treated as a 'commodity' by the men whom she is wholly dependent on, used as a scapegoat or excuse for violent action. Just prior to her last speech in *Children*, the novel reports her interpretation of her role in the war: 'Were all those dead any less dead, was her misery any less because she had not been to blame?' (Walton, p. 282) The novel uses Branwen's interior monologue to emphasise her role as an 'exchange value' between men who use her as a means to a political end, whether that be putting their own son on the throne or usurping someone else's. Her death in *Children* functions as a tragic sacrifice to patriarchal power games.

The war which leads to that death is caused by a series of actions undertaken by the men ostensibly responsible for Branwen. The Calumniated Wife motif used in the Second Branch is introduced when her husband's 'foster-brothers' advise him to

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<sup>61</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 30.

use her as a scapegoat for the insulting action of her brother Evnissyen.<sup>62</sup> In the *Mabinogi*, Branwen is silent upon receipt of her punishment. The novel, however, uses free indirect discourse again in order to give ‘voice’ to this normally mute character. When Matholuch orders her from his bed and into slavery, the novel views him through her eyes:

All the pride in her, and all the hope that she, the strong and beautiful, might lie with heroes and bear the mighty ones of the earth... This was the man she had loved, and allowed to father her child. This was her shame, and the shame of the Island of the Mighty! *But most of all your shame, your sorrow, Branwen, you who are alone* (Walton, p. 196. Original emphasis).

The narrative structure uses free indirect discourse, interrupted by interior monologue, to enable Branwen to speak in her silence, as it did earlier when describing Branwen’s torn loyalties. The revelation of her husband’s true nature has erased any trace of affection she held for him, leaving her with the realization that she willingly gave herself to someone she now considers unworthy of her. Two sources of shame are identified in this passage: social and personal. As a princess of the Island of the Mighty, Branwen recognizes that her actions, even her desires, reflect upon the people she represents. This could be gleaned from a reading of the Second Branch, but the novel also gives Branwen an emotional reaction independent of her social role. It separates ‘her shame’ from ‘the shame of the Island of the Mighty’.

Although Branwen identifies herself in procreative terms, as one given to ‘bear the mighty ones of the earth’, the fact that she also describes herself as ‘strong and beautiful’ adds another layer to her characterization in the novel. Beneath the silence is the princess of the Island of the Mighty, but this passage indicates that beneath the princess is a female character with a self-identification that is not dependent on her political position. This is not evident in the *Mabinogi*. Branwen may

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<sup>62</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 25.

be vocally silent, but in Walton's re-visioning she is not the morally passive victim of Mac Cana's interpretation. The novel's reinterpretation of the magic in the Second Branch illustrates this point. In the original version, Branwen teaching a starling to speak during her captivity; she sends the bird to Bran asking for his aid.<sup>63</sup> This is the single moment in the Branch when Branwen acts independently of a man. But although she is teaching the bird to speak, there is, once again, no recorded speech of hers in the passage. The novel uses this event to draw attention to the connection between vocalization, magic and power in the *Mabinogi*. As the most silent woman in the Four Branches, Branwen is the least powerful. In the novel, speech, specifically magical speech, is directly identified as her source of power:

She had a tongue beside her tongue, and in the end it would pierce her enemies like a spear. She was a smith, and that tongue was the sword she was forging. She became as wily as a serpent, as persistent as death [...] She poured power out of herself, she could feel mind and will flowing out of her like blood, into that little feathered shape (Walton, pp. 200-1).

The 'tongue beside her tongue' is Branwen's magical ability, and with it she transforms into a deadly 'serpent', the similes ascribing her with attributes of 'wiliness', 'persistence' and 'power' which are never directly stated in the *Mabinogi*, although the action in this passage is the same as that described in the original text. Her magical speech is described as a weapon, a 'spear' or 'sword' that she 'forges' and then uses to kill her enemies. The image of Branwen's vocal weapon 'pierce[ing] her enemies', her death-like persistence, and her will described as 'flowing out of her like blood', are descriptions that transform the mute princess of the Second Branch into a violent warrior. As in the original text, this is the only episode in the novel in which Branwen acts entirely of her own volition, and the fact that it is magical speech

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<sup>63</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 25.

which gives her this agency indicates that the *Tetralogy* views magic and language as the sources of women's power in the *Mabinogi*.

However, the comparison of Branwen to a warrior who brings death in the preceding passage foreshadows the war that indirectly results from her action. Branwen is stymied by the men who seek to control her 'use-value'. Walton's reinterpretation of the Calumniated Wife motif in the Second Branch argues that Branwen's physical captivity is a metaphor for her subordinate social position. Branwen is literally held captive due to the fact that Bran and Matholuch have projected onto her the identity of mother-wife: a role that is circumscribed by her dual ties with them. Captivity is also used by Irigaray as a metaphor to describe the 'silence' and 'subjugation' of women by men whose 'archaic projection' of female identity allows them no 'autonomous and positive representation of [their] sexuality'.<sup>64</sup> Women have become, Irigaray argues, the wife-mother whose job it is to protect the libidos of men at the expense of their own. The Calumniated Wife motif in the Second Branch, in which Branwen is punished for her brother's crime, could be read as Matholuch's refusal to acknowledge Branwen's 'autonomous and positive representation' of herself. Once again, she is only identified by her relationship to a man: in this instance, her brother Evnissyen. The novel's use of interior monologue and free indirect discourse creates a character that has a self-perception independent of the men who surround her; Branwen's free indirect discourse and recorded speech both indicate that she does not allow their projections to define her identity.

In *Children*, Walton adds dialogue to the scene in which Matholuch sends Branwen from his bed and into slavery. This rare addition to Branwen's recorded speech vocalizes her independent self-perception:

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<sup>64</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', pp. 42-43.

[I]t is more shame to me to lie in a coward's bed than in his kitchen. That is my disgrace and my sorrow that there is no amending—that ever I should have lain with you! (Walton, p. 196)

This passage also gives a reason for Branwen's initial lack of resistance to her captivity. Walton's Branwen would rather be enslaved than sleep with a man she does not respect. The Calumniated Wife motif in the Second Branch, like that in the First, is used by Walton in the *Tetralogy* to open up space for feminist discussion. Branwen's character makes a statement about sex in heterosexual relationships: that respect and desire for one's partner are mutually inclusive. The novel uses the original material to argue that a woman's elevated social status is worth very little without agency and self-respect. This argument is further reinforced by the connection Walton's novel draws between Branwen's silence and her lack of agency in the *Mabinogi*. This connection is exemplified in the re-visioned scene with the starling, where Walton compares the tongue to a weapon. Although Branwen is unable to fully emerge from her culturally-imposed silence, her passivity is portrayed as the result of that cultural imposition, not as a form of moral weakness.

This passage exemplifies the balance which the text achieves between maintaining a fidelity to the medieval narrative and using that narrative as a self-reflexive critique. Rather than bringing Branwen into the twentieth century, the novel draws out the Branch's use of the much older folklore motif which we have already seen in the First Branch: that of the Calumniated Wife. In the Second Branch, Branwen is an exemplary wife. She gives gifts, gains honour and friends and gives birth to a son.<sup>65</sup> The Branwen of the novel is no different. There is no act at this point in either narrative to suggest a motive for her punishment. Mac Cana argues that this places Branwen firmly outside the Calumniated Wife motif in the Second Branch,

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<sup>65</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 21.

pointing out that her ‘punishment is not appropriate to her alleged crime’.<sup>66</sup> The reasoning for it in the *Mabinogi* is so obscure that he believes it is the result of interference by a later redactor.<sup>67</sup>

Evnissyen, after hearing of his sister’s marriage, arranged without his participation, takes vengeance on the horses of the Irish, cruelly mutilating them.<sup>68</sup> In the novel, Branwen reacts to the news with disbelieving laughter (Walton, p. 167). Later, when Matholuch prepares to leave without her, ‘[s]he tried to scream his name, but a sudden growth in her throat choked her [...] She had not wept, but her silence had been worse than weeping’ (Walton, p. 168). Again, the novel does not merely work around Branwen’s silence. That silence becomes a tool to describe the way in which her character reacts to these traumatic events. Branwen is an outwardly passive figure: a characteristic which makes her the ideal Calumniated Wife.<sup>69</sup> And although she is an acknowledged scapegoat, rather than an accused criminal, Wood argues that, ‘the Welsh stories preserve both the structure and the cultural tensions of the Calumniated Wife motif’.<sup>70</sup> Branwen is a queen in a foreign land, accused of a crime of which she is innocent, and imprisoned for it.

Bran had already offered recompense for the mutilation of the horses with gold, new horses and a Cauldron of Rebirth. Matholuch accepted and the marriage went forward. In the novel, these gifts are referred to as ‘face-price’. The term is historically accurate. *Sarhaed*, or ‘insult price’, derives from the older *gwynebwerth*, meaning ‘face’ or ‘honour price’, according to Morfydd Owen.<sup>71</sup> *Gwynebwerth* is given in recompense for breaches of socially acceptable conduct, in addition to

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<sup>66</sup> Mac Cana, *Branwen Daughter of Llyr*, p. 161.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 24.

<sup>69</sup> Wood, ‘The Calumniated Wife’, p. 70.

<sup>70</sup> Wood, ‘The Calumniated Wife’, p. 69.

<sup>71</sup> Owen, ‘Shame and Reparation: Women’s Place in the Kin’, in *The Welsh Law of Women*, ed. by Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Own (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980), pp. 40-68 (p. 46).

physical assault: ‘In the case of a woman it immediately affected any male on whom she was dependant’.<sup>72</sup> The concepts of shame and honour behind *sarhaed* and *gwynebwerth* were deeply imbedded in medieval Welsh society.<sup>73</sup> The narrator’s use of the phrase ‘face-price’ and, more importantly, its treatment of Branwen as a victim of shame culture are yet more examples of the novel’s adherence not only to its source material, but to the historic milieu from which it came. The mutilation of the horses is used by both texts as the reason for forcing Branwen into slavery, in keeping with the Calumniated Wife motif. Wood remarks that ‘[t]he accusation of the wife by her husband’s people is unique among the Welsh tales’,<sup>74</sup> and Branwen’s punishment, according to Owen, is ‘a very obvious example of one kind of *sarhaed*'.<sup>75</sup> Bran is now placed, as her brother, in the position of being both morally and legally responsible for effecting her rescue. The tables have turned, and it is now Matholuch who owes Bran *wynebwerth*.<sup>76</sup> Branwen ceaselessly shifts from one man’s dubious protection to another’s, a process which results in her imprisonment and, ultimately, her death.

### Blood and Wynebwerth: The Kinship of Shame

Both Matholuch and Bran are keenly aware of Branwen’s value. In medieval Wales a woman’s ‘role in society was an important and delicately balanced one [...] for she was the genetrice in whose person lay the future of her husband’s kin, and her own kin was well aware of this role and conscious of the need to preserve her honour’.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Owen, ‘Shame and Reparation’, p. 47.

<sup>73</sup> Rhŷs explains *gwynebwerth* in *Celtic Folklore*, so Walton would have been aware of it. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, p. 634.

<sup>74</sup> Wood, ‘The Calumniated Wife’, p. 62.

<sup>75</sup> Owen, ‘Shame and Reparation’, p. 59.

<sup>76</sup> Rhŷs’ spelling, *gwynebwerth*, is the full form of the word. The ‘g’ is dropped when converting to the feminine, so I will be using the term *wynebwerth* in the next section, which discusses face-price for Branwen and Gwenyvere in Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, p. 636.

<sup>77</sup> Owen, ‘Shame and Reparation’, p. 40.

These lines echo Matholuch's earlier reference to Branwen's body as a 'strategic treasury'. And although Bran shares this viewpoint, he also understands that her biological importance places him in charge of guarding her honour. Just as he is responsible for arranging her marriage, which resulted in her enslavement, he is responsible for extracting her from it. The *Mabinogi* never explains the reason why Bran is responsible for rescuing Branwen, perhaps assuming that it would be as obvious to the reader as it was to the redactor. A possible interpretation of Bran's actions is love for his sister, but his character's motivations are more complex, and less personal, than a contemporary reader might initially suspect. Therefore I find it useful to compare this aspect of the Second Branch, and Walton's re-visioning of it, with Malory's 'Tale of Sir Launcelot and Quene Gwenyvere' in *Le Morte Darthur*. The language used to describe Launcelot's responsibility for Gwenyvere evokes a similar connection between personal affiliation and public honour in their relationship as that which exists between Bran and Branwen. Launcelot reminds Gwenyvere that 'the boldenesse of you and me woll brynge us to shame and sclaundir; and that were me lothe, to se you dishonoured'.<sup>78</sup> Were she to be 'dishonoured', the shame placed on him is akin to *wynebwerth*. Launcelot is clearly aware of this: 'if that ye falle in ony distresse thorowoute wyllfull foly, than ys there none [other remedy] other helpe but by me and my bloode'.<sup>79</sup> Launcelot is responsible for Gwenyvere because of their intimate relationship, just as Bran is responsible for Branwen because of their kinship.

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<sup>78</sup> Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), p. 589. *Le Morte Darthur* was first printed in 1485 after Malory's death, but derived from thirteenth-century stories and was completed by him between 4 March 1469 and 3 March 1470 (p. xxvi). Although a span of sixty years separates Malory's work from the latest possible date of *The Red Book of Hergest*, the three Arthurian Romances in the *Mabinogion*: 'The Lady of the Fountain' (pp. 151-72), 'Peredur Son of Evrawc' (pp. 173-206) and 'Geraint Son of Erbin' (pp. 207-38) include the White and Red Books, with *Le Morte Darthur*, as works of medieval British Arthurian literature. Moreover, the dialogue in the 'Tale of Sir Launcelot and Quene Gwenyvere' articulates a medieval conception of shame as it pertains to personal affiliation and public behaviour that directly affects the actions of Bran in the Second Branch, but which is never overtly stated. A comparison with specific passages in *Le Morte Darthur* may illuminate a concept that would otherwise be difficult to elucidate for the reader.

<sup>79</sup> Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, p. 589.

Blood in both instances symbolizes the connection between these two characters and the responsibility which the male has to protect the female with his life, if necessary.

This responsibility is legal as well as moral. When Branwen is imprisoned in the *Mabinogi*, her shame is akin to Gwenyvere's when she is wrongly accused of murder. It is a public act done to her, but which also affects those with whom she shares her 'dual ties': her kin. Both honour and shame have been laid on Branwen's shoulders in equal measure. She is the scapegoat for one king and the mother of another. She is, in a sense, a gateway through which all men must pass in their quest for power. Even slavery cannot degrade her intrinsic value. Though her husband and his people no longer want her as their queen, she has still given birth to a king. Her son, Gwern, is the first in line to rule both Ireland and Wales.

The novel combines in the character of Branwen the modern notion of personal guilt and the pre-modern shame culture in which she lived.<sup>80</sup> In the novel, the description of Branwen's final statement on the war between Ireland and Wales, and her subsequent death, can be read by the modern reader as arising from feelings of guilt. But the word Branwen repeatedly uses in the novel is 'shame': 'This was her shame, and the shame of the Island of the Mighty!' (Walton, p. 196) Guest's translation does not use this word in the Second Branch; it is an inclusion of Walton's. The repetitive use of the word 'shame' in both Branwen's recorded speech and her interior monologue is an indirect reference to the medieval socio-political climate in which the extant manuscripts were written. In the *Mabinogi*, Branwen, as princess of the Island of the Mighty, is a public body. She is a physical as well as a figurative representative of her country, therefore her treatment by Matholuch reflects not only on her kinsmen, but on every citizen of Wales.

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<sup>80</sup> Owen, 'Shame and Reparation', pp. 40-68.

Gwenyvere, as Queen, is also a public body whose punishment reflects upon the people she represents.<sup>81</sup> When Arthur disavows his responsibility for her, asking someone else to fight in his stead, she has no means of defending her own honour. When Launcelot returns to Camelot to fight Sir Mador on her behalf he states simply, ‘Wytte you well Y ought of right ever to be in [...] my ladyes the Quenys quarrel to do batayle’. Although love can be read into the text as a motivation, nowhere is the word mentioned.<sup>82</sup> This is Launcelot’s battle because, as he said earlier, ‘if that ye falle in ony distresse thorowoute wyllfull foly, than ys there none [...] other helpe but by me and my bloode’.<sup>83</sup> Bran’s blood-ties to Branwen are more direct; their kinship heightens his degree of responsibility. Branwen’s shame affects Bran as if it were his own. In medieval Wales, ‘expulsion from the marriage bed is regarded as one of the three shames of a wife’.<sup>84</sup> Before Christianity became the prevalent religion in the country—as late as the fourteenth century—mutually consented cohabitation between a man and a woman was considered a legal marital union, giving the woman the status of wife.<sup>85</sup> The *Mabinogi* only states, ‘[a]nd when it was more pleasing to them to sleep than to carouse, they went to rest, and that night Branwen became Matholwch’s

<sup>81</sup> In ‘The Tale of Sir Launcelot and Quene Gwenyvere’, Gwenyvere finds herself falsely accused of murdering Sir Patryse with a poisoned apple while hosting a private dinner for the knights of the Round Table. When Sir Madore accuses Gwenyvere of the crime, Arthur is unable to defend her honour as her husband because his role as king necessitates that he act as a ‘ryghtfull juge’ in the matter. He asks her kinsman, Sir Bors, to fight in his stead, but Bors fears this will damage his relationship with his fellow knights, so he seeks Sir Launcelot. Launcelot’s emotional and (implied) sexual relationship with Gwenyvere creates a kinship tie between them which makes him a suitable replacement to defend her honour. See Malory, ‘The Tale of Sir Launcelote and Quene Gwenyvere’, in *Le Morte Darthur*, pp. 588-645 (p. 591).

<sup>82</sup> In fact, Launcelot declares his responsibility for Gwenyvere is due to the fact that her husband granted him his knighthood and the Quene herself retrieved his lost sword when ‘I had need thereto; and ells had I bene shamed among all knyghtes. And therefore [...] I promised her at that day ever to be her knight, in ryght other in wronge’. Launcelot acts to defend Gwenyvere’s honour in the face of a shameful charge because of the allegiance he owes to her husband as the man who granted him his knighthood and because she previously helped restore his honour (symbolised by the lost sword) in a potentially shameful situation. Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, p. 597.

<sup>83</sup> Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, p. 589.

<sup>84</sup> Owen, ‘Shame and Reparation’, p. 59.

<sup>85</sup> Jenkins and Owen, *The Welsh Law of Women*, p. 104.

bride'.<sup>86</sup> If he was satisfied that she was a virgin then their intercourse would effectively constitute a legally-binding marriage. Therefore, by ejecting her from his bed, Matholuch has relinquished his role as her husband, thus returning her to Bran's protection.

Branwen believes that the body which coupled with Matholuch is 'soiled', that it has 'betrayed her' by desiring him. Branwen's free indirect discourse states her character's belief that it is 'not worthwhile to fight, to try to save anything so cheapened, so degraded as herself' (Walton, pp. 198-9). The language in this passage expresses emotional reactions both public and private. Branwen feels 'betrayed' by her own sexual desires: an expression of personal guilt. But she also feels 'cheapened' and 'degraded', which indicates an awareness of the potentially negative public perception of her marriage; her 'use-value' has been 'cheapened' because she shared her bed with someone whom the public would no longer recognize as her social equal. Yet the novel also uses this interior monologue to reinforce the activity behind her silent passivity: '*I will not break. I am a princess of the Isle of the Mighty, and before I am a person, and I will do the duty of both*' (Walton, p. 199. Original emphasis). The novel's use of interior monologue and free indirect discourse allows the reader to witness the internal conflict behind her silence, rather than bulking out the narrative with extraneous action or altering her character as depicted in the original text.

### **'A hole in the texture of language': The Mother Becomes the Mother-Wife**

Branwen's ability to communicate with the bird, which acts as a surrogate voice for this so-often silent/silenced character, is the only moment in either the *Mabinogi* or the novel in which her actions are entirely self-directed. It is an element of the

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<sup>86</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 21. 'Matholwch' is Guest's spelling. I use Walton's throughout to maintain consistency, unless directly quoting from Guest.

fantastic, but it is also symbolic of Branwen's position as a woman living in a society where her language is circumscribed by a patriarchal power structure that 'privileges the masculine genre to such an extent as to confuse it with the human race', to use Irigaray's phrasing.<sup>87</sup> This masculine genre is composed of 'a universe of language [*langue*] and symbols' that has been 'superimpose[d] upon the archaic world of the flesh [...] the fertility of the earth', which, for Irigaray, is directly associated with the womb.<sup>88</sup> Irigaray terms this 'superimposition' '[a] hole in the texture of language'.<sup>89</sup> When Branwen marries into the New Tribes in the novel, she enters a society in which the Son has abandoned the Mother for the Father. This is a culture that believes 'honor leaves the man who is a woman's tool' (Walton, p. 193). In an additional dialogue between Branwen and Manawyddan, she acknowledges man's need for a maternal figure: '[t]here are times when every man needs the mother in his woman' (Walton, p. 189). The reference here blurs the lines between the spiritual Mother and an occasionally maternal wife, which Branwen says men need because '[t]he Gods did not give us Their own strength' (Walton, p. 189). This statement directly acknowledges a separation of man from the 'Gods', and a resultant need for a maternal figure. This separation results in a 'hole in the texture of language', and the 'superimposition' of a patriarchal discourse which can never quite fill that hole. In the *Mabinogi* this 'hole' results from the submersion of Dôn, the Mother goddess figure in the text, and the imposition of a Christian, patriarchal power structure which governs the characterization of the women of the Four Branches.

Thus, Branwen has no language of her own with which to express her needs and desires. She can only adopt the terms and symbols approved by her brother and husband. In a text which uses dialogue as a method of articulating meaning, whose

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<sup>87</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', p. 39.

<sup>88</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', p. 41.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

source was passed down through the centuries through the medium of the spoken word, verbal language—not text—is the primary source of agency. Branwen, whose name is the female version of her brother's and means ‘beautiful raven’ in Welsh, must communicate through the medium of her avian counterpart; the bird she is named for provides her with the agency she lacks.<sup>90</sup> Yet that speech-act results in the death of her son and three of her brothers, and Branwen's final cry of self-blame and subsequent death transform her into the murdered mother forgotten by Freud.<sup>91</sup> Irigaray referred to this mother as ‘the woman who was torn apart between son and father, between sons’.<sup>92</sup> In this instance, the ‘sons’ and ‘father’ can easily be replaced with the words ‘brothers’ and ‘husband’. Branwen is the victim of a masculine drive to replace the Mother with the Father, to insure Bran's and Matholuch's immortality through their sons, who will bear their names because they are no longer their Mothers' children. This proper name acts as a ‘coating—an extra-corporeal identity card’, according to Irigaray.<sup>93</sup> In the novel, when Evnissyen throws Branwen's son into the fire, he claims it is because ‘[h]e is the seed of Matholuch. A shame to her, and a danger to us!’ (Walton, p. 207) Gwern is no longer identified by his connection with his mother, Branwen, except as a source of her ‘shame’. His character is defined entirely by his father.

The fear of the ‘devouring monster’ mother, which is displaced onto Rhiannon in the First Branch, has been diminished in the *Tetralogy* by the separation of men from the spiritual Mother and the increasing commodification of women. The

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<sup>90</sup> From ‘bran’, meaning ‘raven’, and ‘gwen’, meaning ‘fair, white, or blessed’. Thanks to Prof. Stephen Knight for clarifying this for me.

<sup>91</sup> In both the Second Branch and *Children* Branwen is described as dying of a literally broken heart. See Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 30 and Walton, p. 283.

<sup>92</sup> Irigaray, ‘The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’, p. 38.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

connection between man's discovery of paternity and the transformation of woman into a 'commodity' is directly stated by Mâth in the novel:

Yet woman, though she ceased to be a king and man protected her, was still reverenced as the source of life. Only now when man is learning that she cannot give life without him does he begin to scorn her whom he protects. So she that created property will become property (Walton, p. 210).

Walton's re-visioning of the Second Branch reads Branwen's silence as a symbol of her status as property, and it is her silence that ultimately destroys her. Irigaray highlights the importance of speech as a source of female agency: 'Silence is all the more alive in that speech exists. Let us not be the guardians of silence, of a deadly silence'.<sup>94</sup> By adhering to the plot that ends in Branwen's death, the novel emphasises the power of women's speech in the *Mabinogi*. Branwen's silence is indeed 'deadly'.

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<sup>94</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', p. 44.

### **Chapter III ‘New Women’ and Medieval Texts: Arianrhod brings Modernity to the *Mabinogi***

#### **Playing Against Type: Arianrhod as a Prototypical Flapper**

Unlike Branwen and Rhiannon, who can be identified as examples of a particular folklore motif (that of the Calumniated Wife), Arianrhod seems to defy types rather than adhere to them. She is a mother who claimed to be a virgin moments before giving birth—a mother who attempts to deny her own son the right to a name, social standing, and children of his own. Arianrhod is also the only female character in both Walton’s *Tetralogy* and the *Mabinogi* who has property of her own, and significant property at that. Caer Arianrhod is identified by Davies in her notes as ‘the Fort of Aranrhod’: ‘the name given to a rock formation visible at low tide, less than a mile from Dinas Dinlleu on the Caernarfonshire coast’.<sup>1</sup> Arianrhod is Mâth’s niece, meaning her brother, Gwydion, will inherit the kingdom of Gwynedd and her first-born son will inherit it from Gwydion. The potential mother of kings, however, has no interest in procreation.

In *The Island of the Mighty*, Arianrhod compares childbirth to ‘a miracle that has grown stale through overmuch happening’ (Walton, p. 351). Her dismissal of the ‘miracle’ of childbirth is a reaction unique to the mothers in the *Tetralogy*. Rhiannon confronts the women who accuse her of eating her son by appealing to their maternal sympathy, and Branwen tries to grab Gwern from the fire after Evnissyen throws him in.<sup>2</sup> Both mothers mourn the loss of their sons. Conversely, Arianrhod states that she does not love her son Llew and later orchestrates the murder of her other son, Dylan,

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<sup>1</sup> Sioned Davies, trans., *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 242. ‘Aranrhod’ is the spelling used by Davies, although in the same note she acknowledges the occasional use of the spelling ‘Arianrhod’, which Walton has used. I will in this case, as in all others, adhere to Walton’s spelling unless directly quoting from a source which uses the alternate version.

<sup>2</sup> These scenes can be found in Walton, p. 307 and p. 243.

by manipulating both him and her brother Govannon.<sup>3</sup> The novel describes her actions as breaking ‘that ancient law upon which the being of the race depends: that a woman shall guard, not take, the lives of the children she has borne’ (Walton, p. 679). The language in this sentence makes a notable distinction between Arianrhod’s offenses against the ‘ancient law’ and her initial intention to not bear children at all. Arianrhod is condemned for killing ‘the children she has *borne*’, not for not wanting them in the first place. Gwydion forced Arianrhod to give birth, and Mâth compares this act to ‘breeding her like a beast’. He foresees that ‘many of those men who are to come will [force women into childbearing] for pride’s sake and lust’s and this [...] will lower the rank and degrade the ancient dignity of woman’ (Walton, p. 587). Mâth’s gift of foresight in the novel provides a link between the past world of the *Tetralogy* and the twentieth-century America in which Walton was writing. It is my contention that Arianrhod’s character in *Island* was re-written in a way which addresses, specifically, the controversy surrounding the flapper: the embodiment of the American ‘New Woman’ of the 1920s, who is largely credited with ushering in the era of the modern American woman.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> When Arianrhod hears of Llew’s presumed death, she responds by saying ‘Had I loved my son I would have avenged him’ (Walton, p. 659). The novel adds a new event to the plot of the Fourth Branch—the return of Dylan—in order to provide an explanation for another of its seemingly random insertions: his death at the hands of his uncle Govannon. See Lady Charlotte Guest, trans., *The Mabinogion* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 51. In the novel Dylan returns from the sea to meet his mother. Arianrhod tricks Govannon into believing that Dylan is Llew’s murderer, which leads Govannon to kill him. The weapon of choice in the novel is poison, but Walton retains the blow described in the *Mabinogi* by transforming it into a mercy killing, once Govannon realizes that Dylan is his nephew (Walton, pp. 666-7). Arianrhod’s actions lead her to a psychological place where she is described in the novel as having ‘no hates left to satisfy [...] no purpose [...] nothing. She had undone all others and had not repaired herself’ (Walton, p. 668).

<sup>4</sup> This controversy would have been highly publicized during Walton’s adolescence, in the 1920s, and was still debated among historians in the 1930s, when *Island* was published. See B. June West, ‘The “New Woman”’, in *Twentieth Century Literature*, 1:2 (1955), 55-68; James R. McGovern, ‘The American Woman’s Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals’, *The Journal of American History*, 55:2 (1968), 315-33; Kenneth A. Yellis, ‘Prosperity’s Child: Some Thoughts on the Flapper’, *American Quarterly*, 21:1 (1969), 44-64; Estelle B. Freedman, ‘The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s’, *The Journal of American History* 61:2 (1974), 373-93; Joshua Zeitz, *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women who made America Modern* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006). McGovern argues that it was the Progressive-era American woman, not the flapper, who truly revolutionized the female identity, but he appears to be in the minority. Freedman in

Arianrhod's rejection of motherhood is just one of several characteristics Walton's literary creation has in common with the flapper of the 1920s.<sup>5</sup> By incorporating elements of this transformative female archetype into her version of a fictional medieval character, Walton merges the medieval and the modern in a figure that challenges the gender stereotypes of both periods. This chapter will begin by exploring the evidence for and implications of Arianrhod's characterization as a prototypical flapper in *The Island of the Mighty*, before examining the significance of virginity in the novel. The flapper was certainly not accused of falsely claiming to be a virgin, as Arianrhod is in both texts; however, this chapter will demonstrate that the novel manages to reconcile this anomaly by framing it as another of Arianrhod's gender-defying acts.

In 1974 (the year that Ballantine published *Prince of Annwn*, the last book of the *Tetralogy* to be published by Ballantine in the 1970s), Estelle B. Freedman published an article in *The Journal of American History* called 'The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s'.<sup>6</sup> Freedman was intent on re-evaluating the causes for the decline of feminism after American women won the right to vote in 1920. She focuses in particular on the so-called 'New Woman' of the 1920s and the feminist movement of that decade, arguing that 'no new questions have been asked about women in the 1920s since the initial impressionistic observations were made'.<sup>7</sup> These 'initial impressionistic observations', Freedman argues, erroneously view the

particular focuses upon the historical treatment of the flapper. Her article usefully cites several historians and scholars from the 1930s onwards.

<sup>5</sup> According to Kenneth A. Yellis, '[t]he term "flapper" originated in England as a description of girls of the awkward age, the mid-teens. The awkwardness was meant literally, and a girl who flapped had not yet reached mature, dignified womanhood'. A type of dress, with "long, straight lines to cover her awkwardness" was developed and advertised as a 'flapper-dress'. The silhouette created by these 'flapper-dresses' became the ideal aesthetic for women in post-war America. The women who wore them then became known as 'flappers'. Yellis, 'Prosperity's Child: Some Thoughts on the Flapper', 49.

<sup>6</sup> Freedman, 'The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s', 372-93.

<sup>7</sup> Freedman, 'The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s', 373.

1920s as the decade when women gained total social and economic equality with men, focusing on the flapper as the liberated—and dangerous—emancipated female:

[W]omen in the 1920s began to be presented as flappers [by historians], more concerned with clothing and sex than with politics. Women had by choice, the accounts suggested, rejected political emancipation and found sexual freedom [...] While critics claimed that women had achieved equality with men, they issued subtle warnings of moral and family decay.<sup>8</sup>

Freedman argues that historians have consistently focused on the sexualized flapper, almost to the exclusion of the political aspect of the ‘New Woman’, and that the accounts of this model of women’s emancipation were exaggerated. The liberation of the ‘New Woman’ was largely found in her freedom from the kitchen, not her presence in the voting booth.

Yet women workers were seen as just as much, if not more than, a threat as women voters. B. June West writes:

[E]ven later than the 1930s, there was still a continuing resistance against the economic independence of women. Husbands did not like to have their wives employed because the resulting economic independence meant that the wives were economic rivals [...] and were not subject to domination.<sup>9</sup>

Women’s economic independence, West argues, ‘put [them] in a bargaining position [...], Women who were financially independent could choose to make marriage secondary’.<sup>10</sup> As the chatelaine of her own castle, Arianrhod has the financial independence needed to ‘make marriage secondary’. She declares that she has ‘no desire for marriage’ and that she ‘will not have children’ (Walton, p. 533). Her intention to lead a life without husband or children is viewed by her brother as a rejection of her ‘duty’ (Walton, p. 523). Throughout the novel he repeatedly attempts to force the role of mother upon her, but no form of guile, trickery or persuasion is successful.

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<sup>8</sup> Freedman, ‘The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s’, 379.

<sup>9</sup> West, ‘The “New Woman”’, 56.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Arianrhod's refusal to 'do her duty by the race of Dôn'—by bearing Gwydion an heir to the throne—thwarts his desire to have a biological son who will inherit Gwynedd from him. Rejecting this role is a rejection of her female identity as defined by her society via Gwydion, whose threatened position of authority mirrors that of the 1920s husband whose wife has decided to enter the workforce rather than stay home with the children. The solely maternal role that women inhabited into the 1920s was being challenged by the 'New Woman', and this was reflected in the literature of the time. 'Literary flappers of the 1920s' rejected child-bearing, according to James R. McGovern.<sup>11</sup> In *The Plastic Age*, a novel which centres upon the collegiate experiences of a young man, the flapper is personified by the worldly Cynthia who rejects the proposal of the virginal protagonist because she 'knew only too well that she could lead him to hell'.<sup>12</sup> The flapper is 'fast'—“just as fast as the fellows”—because “the old double standard has gone all to hell”.<sup>13</sup> According to one of the male characters, “a single standard” of sexual behaviour applies to both genders. The 'standard flapper' is described as sexually permissive, and while there is some stigma attached to a 'fast' girl by the narrator the above dialogue illustrates that the 'single standard' practised by the flapper was becoming widely accepted by the younger generation.<sup>14</sup>

For Marks the flapper is an object of pity, on the road to 'hell'. For Anita Loos, she is an object of derision. In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* Loos utilizes first person narration to depict the flapper as simultaneously dim-witted and manipulative, a type of glorified prostitute who cultivates 'friendships' with various unsuspecting

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<sup>11</sup> McGovern, 'The American Woman's Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals', 329.

<sup>12</sup> Percy Marks, *The Plastic Age* (New York: The Century Co., 1924), p. 320.

<sup>13</sup> Marks, *The Plastic Age*, p. 157.

<sup>14</sup> Marks, *The Plastic Age*, p. 10.

men in return for trips to Paris and diamond tiaras.<sup>15</sup> Loos's scathing portrait never resolves for the reader the inherent contradictions in her protagonist. The text is written in deliberately poor style, yet at points Lorelei's ignorance appears contrived, as when she describes murdering one such male 'friend':

I mean one evening when I went to pay a call on him at his apartment, I found a girl there who really was famous all over Little Rock for not being nice. So when I found out that girls like that paid calls on Mr Jennings I had quite a bad case of hysterics and my mind was really a blank and when I came out of it, it seems that I had a revolver in my hand and it seems that the revolver had shot Mr Jennings.<sup>16</sup>

The humour in the passage is derived from the reader's understanding that Lorelei herself is not a 'nice' girl; her displacement of blame for Mr Jennings's murder onto the revolver itself seems calculatedly obtuse.

While Marks and Loos differ widely in their characterization of the flapper, one novel portraying her as a fallen angel, the other as a sexual con artist, what both Cynthia and Lorelei have in common is their adoption of a stereotypically masculine attitude towards sex. Both characters are implicitly sexually active without ever experiencing any consequences from this activity. The characterization of these 'literary flappers' as daring practitioners of safe-sex reflects the increased availability of birth control in America. The National Birth Control League was founded in 1914, opening its first clinic in 1919.<sup>17</sup> Yellis writes that the 'New Woman' 'had now taken to [...] using contraceptives and in general refusing to bear the burdens and accept the limitations as well as the prerogatives of femininity as it had long been understood'.<sup>18</sup> By asserting her right *not* to have a child, Arianrhod's refusal 'to bear the burdens and

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<sup>15</sup> Anita Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (New York: The International Magazine Co., 1925).

<sup>16</sup> Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, p. 48.

<sup>17</sup> McGovern, 'The American Woman's Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals', 332.

<sup>18</sup> Yellis, 'Prosperity's Child', 46.

accept the limitations [...] of femininity', as defined by the fictional tribe of Gwynedd in the novel, makes her character synonymous in this aspect with Cynthia and Lorelei.

It was not just in the rejection of unlimited pregnancies that the flapper transgressed the previously-defined boundaries of femininity. The flapper's frank embrace of her own sexuality, and her refusal to sacrifice that sexuality in order to avoid childbearing, led to a widespread fear that the state of marriage in America was in crisis.<sup>19</sup> According to West, '[t]he frequency of divorce and a certain brittleness in attitudes toward marriage are quite evident in the writings of the period'. It became commonplace for women 'to assume an aggressive attitude' when it came to instigating sexual liaisons. Women, traditionally the pursued, became the pursuers.<sup>20</sup> McGovern argues that the flapper—who 'joined men as comrades'—actually became 'desexualized' due to the 'narrowing' of the 'differences in behaviour of the sexes'.<sup>21</sup> The flapper appears to have been emblematic of the hypersexual and/or masculinised 'New Women' who:

act like men, talk like men, think like men. [...] In the bobbed hair fad they are aping men's short hair. They use men's razors, drink men's drinks, tell men's stories, write smutty books and read smuttier ones. And so on through a long recital of the manner in which women had pre-empted formerly masculine prerogatives.<sup>22</sup>

The typically 'masculine prerogative', to have sex without the consequence of pregnancy, was becoming an increasingly feminine one due to the growing availability of birth control.

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<sup>19</sup> West, 'The "New Woman"', 60. Freedman asserts that the flapper is a sexualized stereotype of the 'New Woman'. See Freedman, 'The New Woman: Changing Views', 393.

<sup>20</sup> West, 'The "New Woman"', 60.

<sup>21</sup> McGovern, 'The American Woman's Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals', 322.

<sup>22</sup> This is a quotation from a contemporaneous newspaper editorial written by an unidentified male and reproduced in West, 'The "New Woman"', 59.

Arianrhod also engages in sexual relationships with multiple men without intending to marry them or bear their children.<sup>23</sup> The scene in which she gives birth to her two sons is given scant detail in the *Mabinogi*:

[S]he stepped over the magic wand, and there appeared forthwith a fine chubby yellow-haired boy. And at the crying out of the boy, she went towards the door. And thereupon some small form was seen; but before any one [sic] could get a second glimpse of it, Gwydion had taken it, and had flung a scarf of velvet around it and hidden it.<sup>24</sup>

Walton's expanded version relates this scene from Arianrhod's point of view, giving the reader a visceral insight into her labour: 'It seemed to her that her whole body was tearing itself to pieces [...] [An] awful rending [...] seemed to be splitting her apart'. Mâth and Gwydion witness 'her start and shudder as if in the grip of a sudden convulsion' (Walton, p. 538). Rather than fleeing without any apparent cause, as in the Fourth Branch, in the novel Arianrhod is 'startled [...] into a fuller consciousness of all that this [the child] meant to her' before she runs towards the door, convulses into a second labour, 'swayed a second and shuddered', then flees (Walton, p. 538). Rather than narrating this important scene as a series of abrupt actions witnessed via a distancing omniscient third person narrator, Walton's re-visioning focuses upon the mind and body of Arianrhod. The shock of being forced to give birth is described as a physical torture that leaves her physically weak and 'stunned' (Walton, p. 538).

Because the earlier dialogue between her character and Gwydion establishes her reasons for choosing not to have children, the novel provides a motivation for her flight that is lacking in the original text. Although she is condemned by multiple characters in the novel for her later, violent actions against her children, this scene and the earlier dialogue firmly establish Arianrhod's attitudes towards childbirth in a way

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<sup>23</sup> In the novel Arianrhod's sons have two different fathers. See Walton, p. 660.

<sup>24</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 51.

that mitigates the narrative shock of her hasty departure at the end of the scene. Arianrhod is not revised by Walton into a wholly sympathetic feminist icon, but neither is she the senselessly vindictive witch of the *Mabinogi*. Her economic and social independence, sexual freedom and unapologetic intent to remain childless while enjoying that freedom make her kin to the financially and sexually independent flapper.

Walton's more nuanced interpretation of the flapper has its contemporaneous counterpart in the short stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Ardita, the heroine of 'The Offshore Pirate', describes herself as a "[v]irtuous flapper".<sup>25</sup> Unlike the shameful Cynthia and the disingenuous Lorelei, Ardita, like Arianrhod, is a 'supreme egotist' whose egoism is entirely 'natural' and does not detract from her 'unquestioned charm'.<sup>26</sup> She initially chooses a fiancé in order "to get away from the young fools that spend their vacuous hours pursuing me around the country".<sup>27</sup> Ardita's disdain for her many suitors (and ultimate rejection of that fiancé) bears comparison with Arianrhod's adoption of the virgin role in order to avoid unwanted marriage proposals. Ardita's philosophy of 'courage as a rule of life, and something to cling to always' resembles Arianrhod's refusal to confine her actions to those deemed socially acceptable.<sup>28</sup> Both characters share what West observes as the literary flapper's 'over-exaggerated frankness of behaviour' which 'was compatible with frankness of speech'.<sup>29</sup> Arianrhod's blunt depiction of marriage as a 'yoke' and childbirth as a 'miracle grown stale through overmuch happening' are just two examples of her 'frankness of speech', a tone of blunt social criticism which remains consistent

<sup>25</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: Novels and Stories 1920-1922* (New York: The Library of America, 2000), pp. 253-83 (p. 256). Originally published as 'The Offshore Pirate', in *Flappers and Philosophers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), pp. 3-48.

<sup>26</sup> Fitzgerald, 'The Offshore Pirate', p. 262.

<sup>27</sup> Fitzgerald, 'The Offshore Pirate', p. 256.

<sup>28</sup> Fitzgerald, 'The Offshore Pirate', p. 273.

<sup>29</sup> West, 'The "New Woman"', 66.

throughout the novel, and further evidence of which will be given throughout this chapter. In the *Mabinogi* Arianrhod is an inexplicable anomaly, a vindictive, violent woman without apparent motivation who simply disappears midway through the Branch. The novel retains her actions, and much of her speech, while incorporating additional speech that reflects the opinions of a popular social and literary figure, one which had a significant impact upon female identity in the time of Walton's writing. Utilizing the characteristics of the flapper gives the medieval Arianrhod modern relevance; her character arc becomes a critical commentary on the idealized maternal figure in both the original text and the modern American society in which the novel was initially published.

The next section will demonstrate that Arianrhod's revised character in *Island* functions as a commentary on the twentieth-century American society in which Walton was writing. The subsequent section will examine the way in which the novel uses the figure of the *twyllforwyn*, or 'false virgin', to analyze the gender stereotypes implicit in the original text. What these critiques of the medieval and modern have in common is the novel's consistent assertion that the maternalized female stereotype apparent in the Fourth Branch's treatment of Arianrhod still exerts a powerful influence on the modern woman, and that such an influence has a deleterious effect on female identity and heterosexual relationships. Irigaray's argument in *Speculum of the Other Woman*—that maternity and motherhood are the determining factors in female identity prior even to the onset of puberty—offers theoretical support for the importance of *The Island of the Mighty* as an innovative feminist challenge to this circumscribed female role.

### **What is She Worth? Valuing and Valorizing the Female**

In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray argues that ‘the culturally, socially, economically valorized female characteristics are correlated with maternity and motherhood’. Therefore: ‘everything concerning woman’s allotted role and the representations of that role proposed or lent to her would be decided even before the socially recognized specificity of her intervention in the sexual economy is practicable’.<sup>30</sup> Irigaray is asserting here that the female child’s gender is socially determined at birth, rather than at the age in which menstruation has occurred and pregnancy is, therefore, ‘socially recognized’ as ‘practicable’. Therefore, the female child has been circumscribed into her ‘allotted role’ before she is even able to perform it. She has already been tutored in the correct ‘representations’ of that role, which have been defined by the culture, society and economy of gender in which she lives. The most important ‘representation’ of her proscribed gender is ‘maternity and motherhood’. Because this is the ability most valued in even the nascent female, from birth she is inculcated in the maternal qualities which are considered her only socially accepted purview. The role of ‘female’ has already been defined for the infant girl, who must adopt the ‘feminine’ attributes proscribed for her in order to become an accepted member of her society.

Irigaray’s argument—that the female gender is socially defined and motherhood is the primary characteristic of that definition—may be applied to this reading of the character of Arianrhod in *Island* as a protestor against this definition of female identity. Gwydion states that maternity is Arianrhod’s ‘role’ in their society, but she refuses to perform it, to the point of abandoning her children once they have been borne. No so-called maternal characteristics are attributed to Arianrhod in the

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<sup>30</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 25.

novel; in fact, once they are born her primary actions in the novel (as in the Fourth Branch) are centred upon the destruction of her children. She functions as a villain in the *Mabinogi*. It could be argued that by making Arianrhod the instigator of Dylan's death in the novel, Walton's depiction of her character is even more villainous than in the original text. However, it is my contention that the novel in fact portrays a less stereotyped Arianrhod than appears in the Fourth Branch. By inventing dialogue in which Arianrhod argues against marriage and maternity as necessary components of women's role, the novel offers an alternative interpretation of female identity not present in the original text. The Arianrhod of the Fourth Branch supports 'the culturally, socially, economically valorized female characteristics [which] are correlated with maternity and motherhood' by playing the role of the villain because she refuses to adopt those characteristics.<sup>31</sup> In the novel Gwydion extols the virtues of childbirth for women; he refers to breastfeeding as 'the miracle that is greater than magic' (Walton, p. 531). Arianrhod rejects his interpretation of motherhood as a 'miracle' that it is her 'role' to perform. She questions why she should 'suffer to bring forth a child when there are so many new spells to be learned and so much in the world to be enjoyed?' (Walton, p. 531) The novel transforms Arianrhod's character in order to challenge the *Mabinogi*'s vilification of this woman who chooses not to accept her 'allotted [maternal] role'.<sup>32</sup>

This challenge to the medieval text's narrow definition of 'female characteristics' offers a depiction of femininity that does not exist in the *Mabinogi*, that of a woman who chooses education over motherhood. Walton's citation of Briffault's *The Mothers* as an inspiration for her invented pre-Christian world is evident in the novel's depiction of marriage as 'bondage' and a 'yoke' on women

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<sup>31</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

(Walton, p. 531). Briffault argues that, in societies in which married women did not work, they are ‘little more than sexual slaves’.<sup>33</sup> He points out that women who are able to perform economically profitable work have increased levels of independence, an observation which he uses to support his broader argument for equal gender opportunity in employment. This connection between work and independence for women is apparent in the increase in American women’s employment in the 1920s. Although making not much more than \$22 a week (the average cost of urban living being between \$20 and \$25 per week), women were leaving home to work in the city in unprecedented numbers.<sup>34</sup> Arianrhod’s desire to leave her rural Caer for Mâth’s court in order to increase her knowledge of magic mirrors those young women leaving home to lead self-directed lives. Joshua Zeitz describes them as frequenting cabarets, dancehalls and amusement parks.<sup>35</sup> Arianrhod’s own words in *Island* express the voracious enthusiasm with which the 1920s working woman embarked upon city life: there is ‘so much of the world to be enjoyed’ (Walton, p. 531).

That enjoyment was inhibited, however, by the reality of wage inequality and the stigma against working women, who were often perceived as encroaching upon a traditionally masculine arena. According to Susan Ware, the fields hardest hit during America’s Great Depression were traditionally dominated by men. Women during that time did not generally seek jobs in so-called masculine fields, yet Ware asserts that they were stigmatized as interlopers taking employment opportunities from their male counterparts. The incursion of women in the already impoverished job market had the adverse effect of reinvigorating the stereotype that woman’s ‘allotted role’

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Briffault, *The Mothers: The Matriarchal Theory of Social Origins* (New York: Macmillan, 1931, reprinted Kessinger: No Date), pp. 188-90. All further references are to the Kessinger edition.

<sup>34</sup> Zeitz, *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women who made America Modern*, pp. 30-36.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

was in the home.<sup>36</sup> Women are ‘economically valorized’ for their biological ability to gestate the next generation, not for any potential contributions they might make to the market economy. Gwydion values Arianrhod only as the potential mother of his child, and he is threatened by her study of magic, even though it does not incur upon his position as Mâth’s successor. In the *Mabinogi* Gwydion is Mâth’s nephew, but in the novel he is also Mâth’s student. Gwydion offers to teach Arianrhod ‘all the magical secrets that I dare reveal’, but she tells him that he has ‘always been jealous of his secrets’, and that ‘if I go to Mâth I might learn more’ (Walton, p. 532). The battle of curses which comprises the only interaction between Arianrhod and Gwydion in the Fourth Branch is expanded in *Island* into a battle over the limitations of Arianrhod’s ‘role’. In the novel, Arianrhod is attempting to redefine that role by rejecting motherhood and pursuing what she views as her life’s work, just as the flapper left home to join the work-force in the city. Both struggle to instigate a broader definition of ‘woman’s allotted role’.

The flapper did not, however, succeed in broadening the parameters of that role.<sup>37</sup> Nor does Arianrhod. Her failure to achieve her stated goal of uniting ‘the

<sup>36</sup> Susan Ware, ‘Women and the Great Depression’, *History Now*, 19 (2009) <[www.gilderlehrman.org](http://www.gilderlehrman.org)> [accessed 25 May 2010] (para. 5 of 11).

<sup>37</sup> It is tempting to assume that the women’s movement in the 1920s was a complete success, and that the flapper permanently redefined the role of women in American society. This positive interpretation of the ‘New Woman’ is reflected in B. June West’s 1955 assertion that ‘[i]f she chooses, she wants to have both a profession—a job—and family life with a husband and a child or children’. McGovern argues in 1968 that the earlier Progressive era, rather than the 1920s, instigated a ‘revolution in manners and morals, particularly as it affected women, [which] took the twofold form of more permissive sexuality and diminished femininity’. A year later, Yellis states optimistically that although ‘[t]he new woman seemed to go into eclipse during the period of anxiety [...] the changed circumstances of World War II [...] brought her out again’. Yet Freedman questions the emphasis placed on the transformative effect of the flapper, asking in 1974 ‘What happened to feminism during the decade after the political goal of suffrage had been achieved?’ She cites historian Frederick Lewis Allen, among many others, who saw a decline in feminism by the end of the twenties. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties* (New York: Perennial, 2000). *Only Yesterday* was first published in 1931. Freedman’s comprehensive account of contemporaneous literature on the feminist movement of the 1920s reveals that:

[t]he portrayal of the 1920s as a period of full equality, when in fact discrimination in education, hiring, salaries, promotions, and family responsibilities was abundant, has perpetuated a myth of equality, one which has helped undermine women’s attainment of

knowledge of the women of Dyved with the knowledge of the women of Gwynedd' (Walton, p. 531) is a fictional reflection of the 'New Woman's' ultimate inability to transform the political gains and social evolutions of the 1920s into lasting, widespread cultural change. In this interpretation of the Fourth Branch, Arianrhod's character becomes a pre-modern prototype of that most modern of female archetypes. This is the most explicit example of the *Tetralogy*'s incorporation of contemporary cultural elements into its re-writing of the *Mabinogi*. Most of its engagement with modern American society takes place in the form of dialogic debates about gender roles, marriage and childbirth. The revision of Arianrhod into a prototypical flapper makes her character a starkly modern contrast with Rhiannon and Branwen, whose depictions centre upon Walton's use of the original text's medieval folklore motifs and, as is the case with Rhiannon, Celtic religious iconography.<sup>38</sup>

By modernizing Arianrhod, the novel is closely engaging with the pertinent feminist issues of its initial readership in the mid 1930s. Arianrhod's death—an extensive additional chapter in the novel—reflects the flapper's disappearance from Depression-era America; she fails in her search for independence and fulfilment, just as the feminist movement of the 1920s failed to build on the momentum of its early political success. Elaine Showalter writes that '[e]x-feminists' were 'disillusioned and exhausted' in the 1920s.<sup>39</sup> Freedman informs us that 'the 1920s were not the years of economic prosperity for women described so proudly [in] earlier [accounts];

group consciousness. Similarly, to write and teach—on the basis of unsubstantiated observations—that women were politically apathetic but sexually active during the 1920s is to create sexually stereotyped historical roles for women. Historians' use of the 'sexual revolution' as an explanation for women's history in the 1920s was perhaps an extension of their own inability to conceive of women outside of sexual roles.

Freedman, 'The New Woman: Changing Views', 37-3 and 393; West, 'The "New Woman"', 67; McGovern, 'The American Woman's Pre-World War I Freedom', 333; Yellis, 'Prosperity's Child', 64.

<sup>38</sup> This shall be the analytical focus of Chapter V below.

<sup>39</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx* (London: Virago, 2009), p. 296.

professional gains were minimal, industrial wages discriminatory, and unionization difficult'.<sup>40</sup> Arianrhod's failure to achieve her educational goals while maintaining her independence is a fictional representation of an experience shared by countless American women at the time. Her character in *The Island of the Mighty* transforms the Fourth Branch into a timely commentary on women's struggle to create a new definition of the female identity in the early twentieth century. The subsequent section will explore more specifically how Walton reconciles the medieval virginity test in the Fourth Branch with her modern take on Arianrhod.

### **The Unrepentant *Twyllforwyn*: Failing the Virginity Test**

Walton's treatment of Arianrhod in *The Island of the Mighty* is arguably, in part, a commentary on the twentieth century's conflicting attitudes towards women's pursuits of economic independence and scholarship. In the novel, Arianrhod acts as a representative of the so-called modern woman: an economically independent scholar, who rejects marriage and children in order to pursue academic goals. As the chatelaine of Caer Arianrhod she has land, property and subjects. Yet it is not Arianrhod the ruler who Walton chooses to focus on. Her Arianrhod is a scholar of magic, specifically women's magic. In the universe of the novel, she is a feminist revolutionary who seeks, as she states it, to 'marry the knowledge of the women of Dyved to the knowledge of the women of Gwynedd' (Walton, p. 531). This union would reconcile the women of the Old and New Tribes, paving the way for a powerful, influential female presence in Wales. Arianrhod represents that actualized presence, and as such is simultaneously an attractive and dangerous figure.

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<sup>40</sup> Freedman, 'The New Woman: Changing Views', 392-3.

Her property would make her an appealing marriage prospect. As a woman with her own *caer*—meaning ‘castle’ or ‘fortified city’—Arianrhod has greater economic and social freedom than any other female character, in the *Mabinogi* or the *Tetralogy*. As a member of the nobility, should she wish to marry, the Arianrhod of the *Mabinogi* would need to retain her virginity. Jane Cartwright notes that ‘the message implicit [in the Fourth Branch] is that virginity and fertility were not personal, private matters, for they were of extreme importance to the kin group as a whole’.<sup>41</sup> The public importance placed upon a woman’s virginity is evident in the extant medieval Welsh legal manuscripts. A medieval Welsh wife was given *cowyl*, or payment, after the successful demonstration of her virginity on the wedding night.<sup>42</sup> By claiming to have retained her virginity, and having that claim subsequently disproved, in the *Mabinogi* Arianrhod is revealed to be a *twyllforwyn*, or ‘false virgin’. If this revelation was discovered by her husband, the consequences would be severe. A husband’s claim that his wife is a *twyllforwyn* must be corroborated by her *cyfneseifiaid*, or ‘next of kin’. If they do corroborate, after nine nights of marriage—during which the wife lives in the seclusion of the marriage bed—the pair are legally separated. Cartwright and McAll both record a practice of then giving the woman a one year-old steer with a greased tail. If she can hold on to the tail for a set length of time, she can keep the steer. There is also mention in the legal texts of the wedding guests being called into the room to watch the new bride’s nightshirt being severed from her ankles to her genitalia.<sup>43</sup> This farcical scene is witnessed by the populace, and indicative of the public mockery, social isolation, and poverty that face the

<sup>41</sup> Jane Cartwright, ‘Virginity and Chastity Tests in Medieval Welsh Prose’, in *Medieval Virginities*, ed. by Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salih (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 56-79 (p. 63).

<sup>42</sup> Christopher McAll, ‘The Normal Paradigms of a Woman’s Life in the Irish and Welsh Texts’, in *The Welsh Law of Women*, ed. by Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980), pp. 7-22 (p. 9).

<sup>43</sup> Cartwright, ‘Virginity and Chastity Tests in Medieval Welsh Prose’, p. 63.

shamed woman.<sup>44</sup> In the *Mabinogi*, Arianrhod is arguably only spared this because her lie was discovered through the virginity test performed by her uncle, not by a husband on her wedding night, and because she has the financial protection afforded by being an independent landowner.

Although it is unknown whether these punishments were ever enforced, their record in the extant legal texts indicates the premium placed on a woman's virginity in the Welsh society of that time.<sup>45</sup> The virginity test itself was, however, extremely problematic in the Middle Ages. Although evidence of bleeding was important in determining a bride's virginity, Kathleen Kelly maintains that it was generally understood that bleeding could occur due to manual penetration or injury, and therefore 'could not serve as a reliable sign of virginity'.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the outcome of the ordeal was determined by interested parties who did not always agree on their interpretation. The results were ambiguous at best.<sup>47</sup> Kelly also reads virginity and chastity tests as a medieval literary trope, therefore the use of such a test in the Fourth Branch incorporates a literary convention of the time.<sup>48</sup> Considering the severity of the social consequences faced by a *twyllforwyn*, it is logical for the Arianrhod of the *Mabinogi* to assert that she is a virgin. However, the shift in the setting of the novels, to a pagan society without marriage laws, makes such an assertion problematic. Walton's Arianrhod has no need to retain her virginity. Yet the crux of the events in

<sup>44</sup> McAll, 'Normal Paradigms of a Woman's Life', p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> As noted in Chapter II above, three of the surviving medieval Welsh legal manuscripts from which McAll gathered his information date from approximately the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These manuscripts also include *The Law of Hwyl Dda*, which, according to its modern English translator and editor, Dafydd Jenkins, was still active in Wales in the fifteenth century. The dating of the *Mabinogi* manuscripts from which the English translations by Guest and Davies were made is c. 1350 (*The White Book of Rhydderch*) and between 1382 and c.1410 (*The Red Book of Hergest*), therefore the surviving edition of the Fourth Branch was composed during a time when these laws (or some variation thereof) regarding female virginity would likely still have been in effect.

<sup>46</sup> Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 28.

<sup>47</sup> Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p. 69.

<sup>48</sup> Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p. 65.

the Fourth Branch is the discovery that she is a *twyllforwyn*, making it necessary for an author intent on adhering to the plot of the *Mabinogi* to retain this event.

Roberta Valente likens the virginity test to Goewyn's rape. When Mâth returns from war and Goewyn tells him that his nephew Gilvaethwy raped her with the aid of Gwydion, he punishes the brothers by transforming them into male and female forest animals, forcing them to mate with each other. Owen argues that 'the most extreme violation a girl [in medieval Wales] might suffer was the forcible termination of her virginity by rape'.<sup>49</sup> Valente believes that Mâth's punishment of Gilvaethwy and Gwydion was 'chosen [...] to teach them the vulnerability of the female role when men are unconcerned with the codes that protect women'.<sup>50</sup> Payment on behalf of the perpetrator would be due to her lord, the king, and the woman, who receives her *sarhaed*, or honour-price. 'The implication of this rule is that the safe keeping of virgins lay within the king's [...] protection', according to Owen.<sup>51</sup> Mâth enacts this protection in its most extreme form by marrying Goewyn. When Arianrhod retreats to her own home after the failed virginity test, Valente believes she 'functions as her own protector'.<sup>52</sup>

The ability to protect herself from retributive punishment affords Arianrhod greater agency and independence than Goewyn, as well as the other women in both the *Mabinogi* and the *Tetralogy*, yet the test itself can be seen as a punishment. Valente's likening of Arianrhod's virginity test to Goewyn's rape is appropriate when we consider the form which the test takes. The appearance of a virginity test in the

<sup>49</sup> Morfydd E. Owen, 'Shame and Reparation: Women's Place in the Kin', in *The Welsh Law of Women*, ed. by Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980), pp. 40-68 (p. 49).

<sup>50</sup> Roberta L. Valente, 'Gwydion and Aranrhod: Crossing the Borders of Gender in *Math*', in 'The *Mabinogi*: A Book of Essays', ed. by C. W. Sullivan III (London: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 331-45 (pp. 337-8).

<sup>51</sup> Owen, 'Shame and Reparation', p. 49.

<sup>52</sup> Valente, 'Gwydion and Aranrhod', p. 339.

*Mabinogi* may not be an unusual occurrence in medieval literature, but the test itself is. Mâth's magic rod, when stepped over by a woman who has had sex, forces that woman to give birth to the potential child or children resultant from those acts. In the novel Gwydion provides an explanation for this by stating that the wand Mâth uses to test Arianrhod's virginity is charmed so that:

if she who called herself a virgin had ever held within her man's seed [...] it should come forth from her in that state of fruition which it would naturally have reached during the time that it had lain within her; or should so have lain (Walton, p. 541).

In this sense, the virginity test in the Fourth Branch is an ideal one because it provides incontrovertible proof of a woman's chastity; it reinforces 'the notion that the body is a readable body', as Valente phrases it. Moreover, Mâth's rod functions as a phallic symbol that magically penetrates Arianrhod during the test, seeking to expose the mysteries of her body for the judgement of an authoritative male audience.<sup>53</sup> The medieval scientific view of the male and masculine as 'ideal' cast the female and feminine as inherently flawed.<sup>54</sup> There are, in fact, no diagrams of the female body in the surviving medieval Welsh medical texts.<sup>55</sup> To borrow a metaphor from Kelly:

'[t]he male body was the uncorrupted base text [...] the female, an imperfect copy'.<sup>56</sup>

In the *Mabinogi* Arianrhod's shame—evident when she is faced with one of the two sons she inadvertently gave birth to during the test—and her efforts to curse that son out of existence, are the direct result of being discovered to be a *twyllforwyn*. They are an attempt to avoid the social consequences that stem from this identification. In the novel, due to the removal of the medieval Christian context,

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<sup>53</sup> The *hutlath*, Mâth's magic rod, 'is his instrument of knowledge' as well as a phallic symbol, according to Sarah Sheehan. It carries with it 'an overtone of violation'. Sarah Sheehan, 'Matrilineal Subjects: Ambiguity, Bodies and Metamorphosis in the Fourth Branch of *Mabinogi*', *Signs* 34:2 (2009), 319-42 (325-6).

<sup>54</sup> Cartwright, 'Virginity and Chastity Tests in Medieval Welsh Prose', p. 72.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p. 21.

another source for this shame is needed in order to justify her curses. The characters in the novel place no value on virginity, other than as an unexplained necessity for Mâth, and while it is not the purpose of this section to explore his unique physical dependency, it is worth noting that it reflects the importance placed on a woman's virginity by the society in which the original text was written. Mâth, as king, is both guardian of, and sustained by, the chaste, controlled and controllable female body.<sup>57</sup>

Arianrhod, learned in the ways of the New Tribes, recognizes that, in her own words, 'there is something precious and rare in the idea of a virgin. It gives a woman a prestige and a glamour—and a value that she never had before' (Walton, p. 531). Arianrhod recognizes the symbolic power of the virgin, embodied by the Virgin Mary of the Christian tradition and used to great political effect by Queen Elizabeth I. Arianrhod tells Gwydion: 'To the people it is a mystery [...] They think it makes me stronger in magic' (Walton, p. 531). The virgin status, then, is something which Arianrhod claims in order to further her aim to unite the knowledge of the women of the Old and New Tribes. When Gwydion confronts her on the falsehood of her claim, she tells him: 'the women of Gwynedd have always been free. One can take what one pleases of new customs and leave the rest' (Walton, p. 530). Arianrhod's intention to remain free—to adopt new customs for her own purposes while retaining those of the Old Tribes that suit her needs—hints at the flapper's transgressive adoption of formerly forbidden masculine characteristics, particularly as regards sexual behaviour outside of marriage. McGovern states that the adoption of this and other 'masculine

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<sup>57</sup> The virgin footholder role which Goewin initially performs in the Fourth Branch is probably derived from the *troedyavc*, or foot-holder, usually a young man who would act as one of the king's protectors by holding his feet in his lap, with his back to the fire, until the king retired for the night. By replacing the young man with a female virgin, the *troedyavc* becomes weighted with oddly maternal symbolic significance. The positioning of the king, with his feet at the entrance to the womb, appears to be a visual metaphor for his place of origin, yet the fact that the woman is a virgin reinforces the king's role as a guardian of the chaste woman. He implicitly controls procreation. See Cartwright, *Virginity and Chastity Tests in Medieval Welsh Prose*, pp. 59-60.

norms' allowed the 'New Woman' to determine her own identity.<sup>58</sup> Arianrhod's decision to retain her Tribe's liberal attitude towards female sexuality reflects the flapper's rejection of the restrictions placed on female sexual behaviour prior to marriage. Arianrhod may call herself a virgin, but she has no intention of practicing chastity.

For Arianrhod, the power of a woman's virginity does not lie in the physical body, but the body public; her society's belief in her supernatural abilities is substantially increased when she adopts the title of 'virgin'. It grants her a mystique and a special status which serve her in her quest for knowledge and power. Jean Markale remarks upon the powerful symbol of the virgin woman in Celtic tradition: 'virginity is not physical but purely moral, and concerns only the independence of the woman from the man. The non-Christian virgin is the free woman [...] a [...] symbol of renewal, youth, and [...] sexual freedom'.<sup>59</sup> This is the mystique which Arianrhod is seeking to acquire by adopting the virgin pose. For her, 'virgin' is merely a signifier which gives her 'prestige' and 'glamour' in the eyes of the people she governs. It is the symbol which she believes to be invested with religious and social significance, not the practice. Gwydion believes the opposite. He tells her, 'if there is a mystic might in virginity, it lies in the fact, not the name. And you have traded lovely things for that barren lie [...] a child at your breast and the miracle that is greater than magic'. But Arianrhod devalues the representation of the female role that Gwydion is attempting to invest with spiritual significance, and replies: 'It is a miracle that has grown stale through overmuch happening [...] It is a thing that almost any woman can do. And I would do new things' (Walton, p. 531).

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<sup>58</sup> McGovern, 'The American Woman's Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals', 318-19.

<sup>59</sup> Jean Markale, *Women of the Celts*, trans. by A. Mygind, C. Hauch and P. Henry (Salisbury: The Anchor Press Ltd, 1975), p. 133.

Arianrhod's valuation of virginity in the novel—as a guarantor of her independence from men and an additional source of public 'prestige'—represents that of the pagan Celtic, insofar as we are able to determine it. More importantly, however, her eagerness to adopt new customs and adapt them for her own purposes—to in effect reap the rewards of virginity while also enjoying the benefits of sex—hints at the flapper's embrace of sexuality for its own sake. Arianrhod shares the 'New Woman's' intention to have a full sexual life without the consequences of unwanted pregnancy. Taking a public vow of chastity—in addition to giving her additional 'prestige' in the eyes of her people—effectively secures her against potential marriage proposals which, if she accepted, would demand pregnancy. In the novel, Arianrhod's unwillingness to have children is a part of her identity, rather than a characteristic for which she is vilified. Her character in *Island* is initially focused on the pursuit of her goal to unite women's knowledge and magic across the borders of Wales, a goal which threatens Gwydion's own pursuit of Gwynedd's supremacy over the New Tribes. His determination to impregnate Arianrhod reflects the medieval male's dependence on a fertile wife, as well as the early twentieth-century man's fear of the 'New Woman', who 'threatened not only traditional morality, but made an assault on the prerogatives of traditional masculinity as well' by 'competing with men in the business world to an unprecedented degree'.<sup>60</sup> For Gwydion, Arianrhod is both competition and his only hope at having a biological male heir, since it is her son who will inherit from him. The novel modernizes the medieval Arianrhod's role as a *twyllforwyn* by merging it with the characteristics of the 'New Woman', effectively critiquing the vilification of the sexually active, non-maternal woman by both the protestors against the 1920's women's movement and the *Mabinogi* itself.

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<sup>60</sup> Yellis, 'Prosperity's Child', p. 46.

That Arianrhod is the villain of the Fourth Branch confirms that text's condemnation of the sexually active, yet non-maternal, woman. Kelly argues that, although 'the ordeal [of the virginity test] is predicated upon the notion that the body is a readable body, [in practice it] confirms not the certainty of the body, but its dubiety'. Simply designating the female body as a 'repository of truth' does not make it one.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the medieval literature about virginity and chastity tests 'suggests that the various medieval secular and ecclesiastical institutionalizations of punishment [for failing the test] represent a failure of discipline, an inability to create absolutely docile female bodies'.<sup>62</sup> This is the failure of the male, not the female, who is already condemned as imperfect. Moreover, although the test is 'ostensibly about the women who are forced to undergo it, [it] is really about the men who insist upon it'.<sup>63</sup> Kelly notes that, although a threat is often implied or stated if the woman 'fails' (as we have seen in our examination of medieval Welsh law), 'most men disavow the "evidence" of the ordeal, for to exile, divorce or kill one's wife—someone's daughter, sister, or cousin—threatens the foundation upon which homosociality is built'.<sup>64</sup> The consequences for failing the virginity test in medieval literature are less 'a reflection on [the woman and more of] a commentary on the precarious status of the husband, a status which is paradoxically dependent upon his wife's behaviour'.<sup>65</sup>

As Arianrhod is unmarried in both texts, the two men most directly affected by her sexual behaviour are Mâth, who needs a virgin to survive, and Gwydion. As her *cyfneseifiaid*, in the *Mabinogi* Gwydion has a financial and social stake in her virginity. In the novel, his obsessive preoccupation with his sister's false virginity provides an opportunity for debate on the relative merits of female virginity and

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<sup>61</sup> Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p. 66.

<sup>62</sup> Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p. 79.

<sup>63</sup> Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p. 65.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p. 65.

motherhood. In a conversation which takes place prior to the test, Gwydion asks her if she believes that virgin status makes her better than their mother, superior to any woman who chooses to give birth, and Arianrhod's response is striking: 'What is "better"? [...] I do not know. I only know that I am different [...] that my desires are not her desires, and that I live in my time, not hers' (Walton, p. 531). In actuality, Arianrhod is living before her time, in both the *Mabinogi* and the novel. According to Irigaray, it is not virginity, but '[t]he maternal function [which] underpins the social order'.<sup>66</sup> The 'social order' of both the original text and the novel is also founded upon the 'maternal function' of women. This is evidenced by the fact that Arianrhod's abandonment of her children leads to a battle of curses between her and her brother that results in multiple deaths. By maintaining a false chastity which requires that she not bear children, Arianrhod is contradicting her socially-determined gender identity and thus poses a very real threat to that society. The *Mabinogi* reaffirms the importance of the 'maternal function' in both its plot, as stated above, and its characterization of Arianrhod as a villain who disappears after casting her last curse. The novel's retention of the plot underscores the 'maternal function' of women; however, its expansion and modernization of Arianrhod's character offers a critique of that 'function' which does not exist in the original text.

In her examination of this 'function', Irigaray asks: '[w]hat of the woman outside her social and material role as reproducer of children, as nurse, as reproducer of labour power?'<sup>67</sup> This unanswered question may easily be asked of Arianrhod in both the medieval text and the modern novel. Because she refuses be a 'reproducer of children', to accept her 'social and material role', Arianrhod inadvertently places herself outside of both the medieval society of the *Mabinogi* and the pre-medieval

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<sup>66</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1991), pp. 34-46 (pp. 35-38).

<sup>67</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', p. 35.

world of the novel. Markale remarks that, in the *Mabinogi*, Arianrhod ‘no longer had a role in the new, male-dominated society, which allowed her only the subordinate position of a mother subject to patriarchal authority’.<sup>68</sup> This perspective can be seen in the fact that her character arc, unlike those of Rhiannon, Branwen and Blodeuwedd, comes to no real conclusion in the original text. She simply disappears once she has fulfilled both her social and narrative functions by giving birth to Llew and serving as Gwydion’s main antagonist.<sup>69</sup>

As the twentieth century saw women fighting for the right to control their sexual and procreative bodies, Walton discovered the story of a medieval woman undergoing the same struggle. Her novel uses the *Mabinogi* to debate female and male perceptions of women’s physical role in a patriarchal society. Showalter writes that the ‘major experiences of women’ in 1930s America ‘tended to include menstruation, loss of virginity, pregnancy, childbirth, and abortion. All these subjects occurred in women’s writing of the time’.<sup>70</sup> Virginity, pregnancy and childbirth are all significant themes in the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogi*. By retaining the plot of the original text, but modernizing its main female character, Walton reinforces the continuous relevance of the medieval text. The complex nature of sexuality, the relative values of virginity and maternity, are issues which preoccupied the medieval writer and readers of the *Mabinogi*, and they are issues which were central to the women’s movement in the 1930s, when *The Island of the Mighty* was first published.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Markale, *Women of the Celts*, p. 131.

<sup>69</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 55.

<sup>70</sup> Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers*, p. 335. See Meridel Le Sueur, *The Girl* (Albuquerque: West End Press, 1978). *The Girl*, written about a group of women dealing with issues of maternity, abortion and relationships during the Great Depression, was considered too radical when first written in 1939 and was not published until discovered by the feminist recovery project in 1978. See also Tess Slesinger, *The Unpossessed* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1934).

<sup>71</sup> These issues were also still central to the women’s movement of the 1970s, when *Island* was re-published. Roe v Wade, the Constitutional Amendment which legalized abortion in America, was passed in 1973, three years after the re-publication of *Island*.

The novel's narrative approach treats the *Mabinogi* as mythic history. The extradiegetic narrator is positioned much as the old woman who recounts the story of Pryderi's kidnapping in *Song*. She is a teller of tales, not an inventor of them. The heterodiegetic narrator functions as a commentator. Both are allowed to re-interpret, or re-position, certain characters and events, but ultimately the myth has a biblical authority which supersedes the author's role as creator. Although Arianrhod would like to live in 'her time', where she can create her own gender identity by adopting those aspects of different cultures that are most advantageous to her pursuits, the novel implies that that time does not yet exist. Arianrhod states that she is 'different' from her mother. She asserts: 'my desires are not her desires, and [...] I live in my time, not hers' (Walton, p. 531). These sentences evoke the self-determinism of the 'New Woman'; this woman identified herself as belonging to and shaping a generation distinct from that of her Victorian mother. In Walton's re-visioning of the Fourth Branch, Arianrhod is a 'new woman' in the wrong generation. Rather than belonging to an era of feminists and flappers in the 1920s, Arianrhod is isolated by a pre-Christian culture that is growing increasingly conservative. In this sense, her character arc reflects feminists' increasingly marginalized position in the 1930s. Arianrhod—a mother who claims to be a virgin—lives on the cusp of a dangerous transition for women, when earlier freedoms are being gradually eroded by men who seek to control the uncontrollable, unknowable female body.

### **Violating the Natural Harmonies: Incest and Male Maternity**

Like Bran, Matholuch and Pwyll before him, Gwydion seeks to control the female body through forced maternity. Gwydion shares these men's desire to have an acknowledged son and heir. In accordance with the matrilineal laws of inheritance of

the Old Tribes, Arianrhod's son will inherit from him, and Gwydion too seeks to marry the customs of the Old and New Tribes, by marrying his sister. His heir would then be both his sister's child and his biological son. Gwydion's proposal is radical only in that he is asking for marriage (an open marriage, where they would be free to take other lovers), not in the proposal's incestuous nature. Arianrhod declines because she does not want marriage of any kind, but the passage indicates that the two have already been lovers for years (Walton, p. 532). Their incestuous relationship is not made explicit in the Fourth Branch, yet it has been noted by several scholars that the 'small form' which Arianrhod drops after her failed virginity test is most likely Gwydion's son.<sup>72</sup> In the novel, their sexual relationship is not considered taboo. When Arianrhod remarks that the New Tribes' custom of marriage is inexplicably refused to siblings, Gwydion states that their 'own people would not know the difference' (Walton, p. 532). It is likely Briffault's recitation of multiple tribes that openly recognize incestuous unions allowed Walton to firmly establish the sexual aspect of Arianrhod and Gwydion's relationship.<sup>73</sup>

Whether Llew in the *Mabinogi* is the product of an incestuous relationship between Arianrhod and Gwydion or not is open to debate. Certainly it is never overtly stated in the original text. However, Llew is inarguably Arianrhod's biological son, and because Gwydion has taken on the responsibility of fostering him, he becomes Llew's 'socially acknowledged father', according to medieval Welsh law.<sup>74</sup> The paternal connection is, arguably, stronger than social acknowledgment. The first child Arianrhod 'drops', in both the Fourth Branch and *Island*, is a normally-sized infant

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<sup>72</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 51. See Miranda Green, *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers* (London: British Museum Press, 1995) and Markale's *Women of the Celts* for an analysis of the likely incestuous nature of Gwydion and Arianrhod's relationship.

<sup>73</sup> Briffault, *The Mothers*, p. 97.

<sup>74</sup> T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 177.

son who is christened ‘Dylan’ and, when baptized in the ocean, immediately adapts to his new habitat and swims away.<sup>75</sup>

The first child is easily explained but the second less so. The ‘small form’ that Arianrhod drops when she flees Mâth’s room after Dylan’s birth is retrieved by Gwydion and wrapped in ‘a scarf of velvet’, according to the Fourth Branch.<sup>76</sup> Gwydion hides the bundle in a chest at the foot of his bed, until one morning when a cry from the chest causes him to open it and discover the infant inside.<sup>77</sup> This metaphor for the womb is expanded upon in the novel. Gwydion touches the chest ‘tenderly, as if the wood had been living flesh’ (Walton, p. 542). The servants in his castle see him ‘standing awake and alone at dead of night, murmuring spells over a chest’ (Walton, p. 543). ‘Here at last’, he says, ‘is my desire, shaping under my hand’ (Walton, p. 542). Gwydion’s murmuring to the chest, which he treats with the tenderness of ‘living flesh’, coupled with his expression of a desire ‘shaping under my hand’, is all language that reflects gestation. Gwydion treats the chest as if it was living flesh, specifically his flesh. The chest is his private property and located at the foot of his bed. Gwydion, in both texts, is sleeping in his bed when Llew is ‘born’; their respective positions mimic that of a woman birthing a child (Walton, p. 545).<sup>78</sup> Valente observes that it is Gwydion who takes on the maternal role, gestating Llew in the chest and raising him, giving him the things his biological mother should—but has denied him.<sup>79</sup> The chest becomes Gwydion’s womb and magic his replacement for the nourishment provided by the umbilical cord.

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<sup>75</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 51. Dylan’s abrupt leap into the ocean is unexplained in the *Mabinogi*. In the novel his father briefly appears and is identified by Arianrhod as a form of ocean-dwelling god (Walton, p. 541-2).

<sup>76</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 51.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 51.

<sup>79</sup> Valente, ‘Gwydion and Aranrhod’, p. 336.

Despite his ability to supplant Arianrhod's body with his own magic, this is not quite a substitution of the umbilical cord with the phallus. Llew was still conceived 'normally' and, as will be discussed in Chapter VI, he still needs his biological mother to provide him with name, arms and a wife. It is, however, a significant step towards that severing. The novel describes Gwydion as 'the first historical inventor of the incubator, and by far the most successful' (Walton, p. 545). Llew is 'his masterpiece' and 'perhaps more intimately his than any other child has ever been any other man's' because '[h]e had not got [him] save by dint of wishing and willing and plotting and labouring' (Walton, p. 545). That 'wishing', 'willing', 'plotting' and 'labouring' are what distinguish Gwydion from the other men in the *Tetralogy* who seek to re-appropriate the womb. Moreover, the word 'labouring' reinforces Gwydion's maternal identification. Bran and Matholuch do not think beyond their socially-defined gender roles as kings and givers of seed. Gwydion uses his magic to think outside/inside the box, adopting the female role when Arianrhod refuses to. Yet this adoption on his part does not extend to a reconsideration of Arianrhod's identity. In Chapter VI we will see how he continues to 'will' and 'plot' in an attempt to force her to adhere to the maternal mode he himself has already rendered obsolete.

### The Bondmaids of Men

Arianrhod, unlike Branwen and even Rhiannon, is the only woman in the *Mabinogi* who ‘walks away from her shame’ and rejects her maternal responsibilities.<sup>80</sup> In *The Island of the Mighty*, Mâth tells Gwydion that he and Arianrhod between them are:

fast forcing in the ways of [the New Tribes] and doing away with [...] all that has been through the ages. And even as you do it, you thwart each other, as the want of men and women is. Nor do you clearly see whither you are going, or the nature of the times you bring in, you who seek only your own desire! (Walton, p. 558)

Mâth reminds Gwydion that, although Arianrhod’s lack of maternal love violates the ‘Ancient Harmonies’, she ‘had been used as a tool to bring forth a child she did not want’ (Walton, pp. 582-8). By forcing Arianrhod to bear these unwanted children, Gwydion has acted in the role of a tyrant.

And if men become tyrants, they shape for themselves the doom of tyrants, who are always betrayed [...] For the recognition of fatherhood will enslave women. It will no longer leave her absolute ownership of her own body, that it will place at one man’s pleasure, his to demand rather than hers to give or withhold as her heart bids. It will likewise make it a crime for that body of hers to be aware of any but the one man, while his still retains its ancient freedom. And the end of it all will be that there will be no free women left in the world [...] All women will either submit their flesh to the yoke of marriage, or hire it out for gold and silver in base barter; and both alike will be the bondmaids of men (Walton, p. 588).

Mâth functions as a modern feminist voice in the text. His foreshadowing links the pre-modern setting of the novels (and, implicitly, the original text) with the contemporary world of the reader. Gwydion’s actions are not merely critiqued, they are commented upon as indicative of future trends in heterosexual relationships. The argument that forced maternity will ‘no longer leave [woman] absolute ownership of her own body’ reflects Irigaray’s assertion that ‘the culturally, socially, economically valorized female characteristics are correlated with maternity and motherhood’, and

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<sup>80</sup> Valente, ‘Gwydion and Aranrhod’, p. 336.

that this leads to the commodification of women.<sup>81</sup> Arianrhod's murder of her sons may not make her as sympathetic a character as Branwen or Rhiannon, but the *Tetralogy* clearly positions her alongside them as a 'commodity' or 'exchange value', to use Irigaray's phrasing, who will be traded for either 'the yoke of marriage' or 'gold and silver' (Walton, p. 588).

The woman who attempts to act 'outside her social and material role as reproducer of children' is relegated to a position outside the social order. She can only be either a wife or a prostitute, and both positions, as Mâth observes, makes her a 'bondmaid' to men. When Gwydion forced Arianrhod into a virginity test which he knew she would fail, then incubated the child she did not want he, in the words of Irigaray, 'transformed his penis [*sexe*] into an instrument of power so as to dominate maternal power'.<sup>82</sup> In doing so, according to Mâth, he took away her 'absolute ownership of her own body'. This statement mirrors Irigaray's reminder that '[women] are the guardians of the flesh; we do not have to abandon that guardianship, but to identify it as ours by inviting men not to make us "their bodies", guarantors of their bodies'.<sup>83</sup> The *Tetralogy*'s re-visioning of the relationships between Arianrhod and Gwydion, Branwen, Bran and Matholuch, Rhiannon and Pwyll, reflect the dissolution of female sexual autonomy caused by man's desire to control procreation, and their anxiety over their own reproductive capacities, as is evidenced by the fact that Gwydion, Bran, Matholuch and Pwyll's need to create a biological heir drives much of the plot of the first three novels in the *Tetralogy*. Despite the significant differences in genre and time period between Walton and Irigaray, it is evident that the feminist position of Walton's *Tetralogy* anticipates, in many important areas, that of Luce Irigaray. Both writers' texts are concerned with the control men have over

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<sup>81</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, p. 25.

<sup>82</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', p. 42.

<sup>83</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', p. 43.

women's bodies, specifically their procreative abilities. Walton and Irigaray come to a similar conclusion, which is that limiting female identity to her maternal function effectively results in the social servitude of women in a gender economy controlled by men. Walton reinforces this argument by incorporating the modern flapper into her depiction of Arianrhod, which enables her to critique the gender economy operating in both the medieval *Mabinogi* and twentieth-century American society.

## Chapter IV Mother Love as ‘mad desire’: The Consequences of Maternal Disconnection

### ‘The Dark Woman’: Re-Discovering Penardim

Penardim’s story, as created in *The Children of Llyr*, exemplifies the *Tetralogy*’s treatment of the female characters in the *Mabinogi*. Women who have been marginalized, or, as in Penardim’s case, almost entirely obscured by their male counterparts, become equally compelling characters with independent story arcs. In the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi* Penardun, as she is referred to in Guest’s translation, is mentioned once in the opening paragraph as the daughter of Beli son of Manogan and the mother of the children of Llyr. The original text mentions that these children have two brothers ‘by the mother’s side [who] were the sons of Eurosswydd’.<sup>1</sup> This is the only reference to Penardun/Penardim in the original text, which is surprising considering the fact that her children—Bran, Manawyddan, the twins Nissyen and Evnissyen, and, of course, Branwen—are the key players in the

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<sup>1</sup> Lady Charlotte Guest, trans., *The Mabinogion* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 19. Davies’ spelling, ‘Penarddun’, differs from both Guest’s and Walton’s. Sioned Davies, trans., *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 22. All three spellings alter the pronunciation, but there is no doubt that Guest, Walton and Davies are referring to the same character. Penardun/Penarddun/Penardim is referred to by all three writers as the daughter of Beli, whom Davies identifies as ‘Beli the Great’, one of the ‘legendary rulers and defenders of Britain’. Davies mentions that ‘[m]ajor Welsh dynasties claimed descent from Beli’ and that ‘some scholars have argued that he is an ancestor deity cognate with the Gaulish god Belinus. [...] There existed many traditions concerning Beli and his sons at one time, independent of classical accounts’. Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 233, note 22. As the daughter of a Welsh ruler, Penardim’s first-born son will inherit his throne, as will Branwen’s son Gwern and Arianrhod’s son Llew. Beli is mentioned in two other tales in the *Mabinogi*, ‘Lludd and Llefelys’ and ‘The Dream of the Emporer Maxen’. Guest, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 69 and 73. The three name changes pertinent to this chapter are Penardim’s twins and their father. Davies uses the spellings ‘Nysien’ and ‘Efphysien’ for the twins and ‘Eurosswydd’ for their father. Walton uses Guest’s spellings: ‘Nissyen’, ‘Evnissyen’ and ‘Eurosswydd’. Her alteration of Guest’s ‘Penardun’ to ‘Penardim’ is the only example I have found of a proper noun spelling difference between the *Tetralogy* and the Guest translation. Walton retained more complex spellings, such as ‘Llyr’ and ‘Pwyll’, so the shift from ‘-dun’ to ‘-dim’ cannot be explained as an aid to an American reader’s pronunciation. Interestingly, ‘dim’ in Welsh means ‘nothing’ and is still used as a form of negation in modern Welsh, similar to the French ‘ne pas’. Perhaps the alteration of Penardim’s name in the novel is a subtle indicator of her subsumed status in the *Mabinogi*. Her shadowy existence in the original text is also reflected by the novel’s reference to her as ‘the Dark Woman’ (Walton, p. 149). This would give credence to the supposition that Walton had some working knowledge of Welsh. I will be adhering to Walton’s spelling throughout.

Second Branch. The only information provided about this shadowy figure is her father's name and the fact that her twin sons are the half-brothers of her other children. The novel utilizes this minor detail in the *Mabinogi* as the springboard for a new origins story. Their conception, unwritten in the Second Branch, becomes a complex examination of sacrifice, one which prefigures Evnissyen's own at the end of the novel. Aptly titled 'The Beginning', the 22-page prologue to *The Children of Llyr* transforms 'Penardun', a name, to 'Penardim', a woman, who makes a sacrifice which will drastically affect her children, grandchildren, and the future of the Island of the Mighty.

In this chapter I will examine Penardim's re-visioned story and the consequences her actions have upon her son, Evnissyen, as depicted in *The Children of Llyr*. Mother and son provide a fascinating case study for my thematic reading of Walton's *Tetralogy*. As the oldest (entirely human) central female character in the *Tetralogy*, Penardim represents the women of an earlier generation; she has heretofore been untouched by the combative patriarchy that destroys her daughter Branwen.<sup>2</sup> The socio-cultural environment of Penardim's generation is used in the novel to contrast with that of Branwen's. Penardim is the only example the *Tetralogy* provides of a woman in a non-monogamous, non-marital heterosexual relationship. Therefore, the sacrifice she makes which leads to the conception of the twins becomes a catalytic action that permanently, albeit not abruptly, alters the gender economy of the fictional Island of the Mighty.

*The Children of Llyr* could more appropriately be titled *The Children of Penardim*. The novel is based on the Second Branch, which narrates the doomed

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<sup>2</sup> I am discounting Rhiannon in this instance because, although significantly older than Penardim, she does not come from an earthly culture in either the folklore or the novels. Her associations with Celtic iconography, and Walton's application of this material in her depiction of Rhiannon's character will be the focus of Chapter V below.

journeys of Penardim's offspring, two of which are, of course, not Llyr's (only Manawyddan survives the war with Ireland). Evnissyen exemplifies the Son who rejects the Mother in favour of the Father, as discussed in Chapter I. His final act is one of self-destruction and redemption, indicating to the reader that, although the individual may attempt reunification with the Mother, true union—as embodied in Pwyll and Rhiannon's marriage in the first novel—is no longer possible. Bran and Matholuch's attempts to dictate the terms of procreation are successful insofar as they permanently render woman a 'use-value'. Branwen is treated by both men as a commodity in the patriarchal inheritance market. For Matholuch, her 'use-value' is as the bearer of his heir; in exchange for his sister's procreative abilities, Bran gets the opportunity to establish his own biological son as his heir. As inheritance is matrilineal in both texts paternity is presumably irrelevant. In the novel, Evnissyen's obsession with his own paternity leads to a self-alienation that triggers his violent trajectory.

The first half of this chapter will examine the novel's invented story of Penardim, focusing on the implications of her sacrifice for the gender economy at work in the *Tetralogy*, particularly as it impacts upon her son Evnissyen. The psychological motivations behind his own sacrifice—and the violent actions which lead to it—will provide the material for this chapter's second half. The novel significantly expands upon Penardim's character in the Second Branch in order to, in large part, provide a psychological explanation for the trajectory of bloodshed that Evnissyen instigates. More importantly, this expansion epitomizes the *Tetralogy*'s approach to re-visioning the *Mabinogi*; probing the inexplicable, silent areas of the original text allows Walton to adapt and modernize its themes without altering the narrative structure.

### In ‘The Beginning’: Gender Identification in the Old Tribes

The emphasis the *Tetralogy* places on the women of the *Mabinogi* takes the stories back to their pre-Christian, pre-patrilineal origins. Rhŷs writes that the ‘idea of an ancestress as against that of an ancestor is abundantly countenanced by dim figures like that of Don of the *Mabinogion*'.<sup>3</sup> Walton draws the ‘dim figure’ of Penardim into the spotlight of her re-visioned narrative. As an ‘ancestress’ eventually erased by an ‘ancestor’, her character bridges the gap between the *Tetralogy*’s matrilineal past and the patriarchal present of Walton’s contemporary readership. Penardim’s significantly expanded story encapsulates the cultural devaluing of woman through man’s appropriation of sexual and procreative power. These are issues which Luce Irigaray has discussed at length in her work. Interpreting Penardim’s connection with the Mother as an ideal Irigarayan mother-daughter relationship will help to elucidate the incipient gender politics in the prologue to *The Children of Llyr*.

A significant complicating factor in those gender politics is the matrilineal laws of inheritance practiced by the Old Tribes. As the grandson of King Beli, Penardim’s eldest son will inherit his throne, regardless of who his father is. Marriage—as a contractual union sanctified by a religious body—does not exist in Penardim’s world, nor does the knowledge of the male role in conception: ‘Penardim did not call Llyr husband, nor did her children call him father. The Old Tribes had no such words’ (Walton, p. 141). Penardim lives in a world at the beginning of a religious revolution, one which would redefine gender identities as it redefined deities. As a member of the Old Tribes, Penardim has the same sexual freedom as a man. She can choose her partner(s). Penardim’s son will become the ruler of his mother’s people, rather than his father’s, because she cannot be sold via marriage

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<sup>3</sup> Sir John Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx*, vol. II (London: Wildwood House Ltd, 1980), p. 454.

contract to produce children for another bloodline. The Old Tribes also do not understand the biological causes of procreation. They believe that children are a gift of the Gods, not the product of sexual intercourse. Therefore, Beli's children are not believed to be of royal descent through him. They are not, in fact, even believed to be *his* children: 'Children are the gifts made to women by the Mothers, by the ancient Powers that bring spring and summer. Their beginning is among the Mysteries [...] Better to leave such matters to the Gods; a man should not presume too far' (Walton, p. 141). By contrast, the New Tribes—the worshippers of a religion implicitly Christian—have learned of the male's role in conception and are patrilineal as well as patriarchal. The clash of this knowledge—held by Eurosswydd, a king of the New Tribes—with the Old Tribes' matrilineal rule of succession, bears destructive fruit in the womb of Penardim.

In the world of the *Tetralogy*, the Mother is the origin of all Gods and Goddesses, all worlds, and all life. The Old Tribes' matrilineal practice and their belief that women are the sole human creators of children are two important examples of their intimate religious connection with the Mother. This connection is not, however, maintained by the New Tribes, which are personified in 'The Beginning' by Eurosswydd. His conflict with Penardim is essentially a cultural skirmish between the Old and New definitions of female identity. Penardim's character in the novel represents a female identity that, in its close connection with the Mother, can arguably be read as an ideal Irigarayan daughter, one who has prevented her commodification in the gender economy by retaining her connection with the mother. Irigaray theorizes that women need to learn to identify with the mother in themselves in order to gain control over their sexual and procreative bodies, rather than identifying with an external father figure, as Freud believed.

In ‘The Limits of Transference’, Irigaray argues that Oedipal law, as written by Freud, ‘forbids the daughter’s return to the mother’ and thus ‘cuts her off from her beginnings, from her genesis, from her birth, from her childhood’.<sup>4</sup> The result of this male-imposed dislocation is the self-exile of the woman who is reduced to the position of an ‘errant beggar in relation to values she will never be able to appropriate’.<sup>5</sup> These values are impossible for the woman to ‘appropriate’ because they are not self-determined. Rather, they are inscribed into her culturally-determined gender identity by the patriarchal society in which she lives, one which has a vested interest in controlling the gender economy by circumscribing the female role. The most primal and primary of these values is sexual; woman’s body is the commodity of man. Irigaray contends that, as a result of their commodification, women are strangers to their own bodies; in sexual relationships they are forced to ‘take-give without mediation, commune unknowingly with, and within, a flesh they do not recognize [...] to which there is supposedly no debt and no possible return’.<sup>6</sup> The woman in exile is constantly trying to get back to herself, to her origins. Irigaray describes this incessant attempt to merge the mother and the daughter:

Woman must ceaselessly measure herself against her beginning and her sexual determination, re-engender the maternal in herself, give birth in herself to mother and daughter in a never-accomplished progression. She becomes woman who can in herself unite in her body-womb the most secret, the deepest energies, to life in the light of day.<sup>7</sup>

This complex concept may perhaps be best understood as the result of the symbolic severing of the umbilical cord and the matricide upon which Irigaray asserts that our patriarchal culture is founded. The removal of the psychic connection with the Mother results in the woman’s disconnection from her origins. This argument responds

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<sup>4</sup> Luce Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 237.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Luce Irigaray, ‘The Limits of Transference’, in *To Speak is Never Neutral*, p. 237.

<sup>7</sup> Irigaray, ‘The Limits of Transference’ pp. 240-1.

directly to Freud's essays on female sexuality and psychosexual development, which he famously termed a 'dark continent'.<sup>8</sup> Freud attempted to shed some light on this 'dark continent' by applying his theoretical stages of male psychosexual development, specifically the Oedipal and castration complexes, to the female. However, unlike the little (heterosexual) boy, who retains the mother as the love-object and learns to identify with the father, the little (heterosexual) girl must transfer her affections from the mother to the father. The shift from mother to father as 'love-object' was, according to Freud, 'important for the [psychosexual] development of the female'.<sup>9</sup> With this transfer of affection comes the 'marked lowering of the active sexual impulses and a rise of the passive ones'. Thus 'the path to the development of femininity'—which had heretofore been 'restricted' by the 'attachment to her mother which she has to surmount'—'now lies open to the girl'.<sup>10</sup> The 'passive' sexual impulses are, according to Freud, characteristic of so-called normal female sexuality. Irigaray contends that, rather than being a 'normal' stage in female psychosexual development, this shift from mother to father as 'love-object' is culturally enforced by men who seek to commodify women as procreative bodies. As a result, a woman needs to 're-engender the maternal in herself'; in other words, to return to the mother (in herself) as the 'love-object', rather than man as an external father figure.<sup>11</sup> Irigaray argues that '[t]he relationship with the mother is a mad desire because it is the "dark continent" par excellence. It remains in the shadows of our culture; it is its night and its hell. But men can no more, or rather no less, do without it than can women'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Question of Lay Analysis', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XX, trans. and ed. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1995), pp. 179-258 (p. 212).

<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Female Sexuality', in *Sigmund Freud: 7. On Sexuality*, trans. and ed. by James Strachey (London: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 369-92 (p. 371).

<sup>10</sup> Freud, 'Female Sexuality', pp. 387-8.

<sup>11</sup> Irigaray, 'The Limits of Transference', p. 237.

<sup>12</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother,' in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1991), pp. 34-46 (p. 35).

By transforming Freud's (in)famous phrase from an obfuscation of female sexuality into a commentary on the submerged 'relationship with the mother', Irigaray reminds her readers of the dangers of that submersion and the necessity of a cultural reaffirmation of that relationship for both genders.

Penardim, as imagined in Walton's novel, has no need to 're-engender the maternal in herself' because she is born knowing that her existence is a gift of the Mothers, that she herself is a representative of the Mother on earth and her children, the fruit of her 'body-womb', come from those most 'secret [...] deepest energies'.<sup>13</sup> Irigaray describes the Mother as below or, one might say, within, the daughter: 'Mother is she who in shadow is in possession of the subterranean resource; daughter is she who moves about on the surface of the earth, in light'.<sup>14</sup> The language used to describe Penardim is predominantly focused on light and shadow. She is first described to the reader as 'a torch shining in a dark quiet place' and her room is referred to as the 'Sunny Chamber'. To these images of light are added a reminder of 'the powers of her ancient royal line that was younger only than the Gods' (Walton, pp. 146-8). Penardim's power is symbolized by light in the novel, reminding us of Irigaray's description of the daughter 'moving [...] in light' whose sexuality is the inverse of Freud's 'dark continent'. Penardim is a daughter of light because of her inward connection to her maternal origins; she has accomplished the 'never-accomplished progression' of uniting Mother and daughter.

In fact, Penardim's (female) gender imbues her with a spiritual connection through pregnancy which Llyr, as a male, is incapable of possessing. Hélène Cixous asserts that the respectful appreciation of the differences between male and female

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Irigaray, 'The Limits of Transference', p. 241.

sexuality will result in a more equal exchange in the gender economy. She writes that the womb is ‘[n]ot the shaft [but] [t]he vessel’.<sup>15</sup> This difference between ‘shaft’ and ‘vessel’ is one which, through greater understanding of its ‘noncoincidence, asymmetry’, can ‘lead to desire without negativity, without one of the partner’s succumbing [...] a type of exchange in which each one would keep the *other* alive and different’.<sup>16</sup> This reciprocal exchange is enacted in the novel by Penardim and Llyr’s mutual acknowledgment of the other as independently defining their gender: ‘man and woman meant only Penardim and Llyr. All others were but sexless, secondary shapes floating outside the rich warm island of being that was these two’ (Walton, pp. 141-2). Penardim and Llyr exist in counterpoint to one another; ‘vessel’ and ‘shaft’ are accepted by both characters as a mutually occurring ‘noncoincidence, asymmetry’, rather than a Freudian division into ‘active’ and ‘passive’ sexual identities. The novel’s unique expansion of Penardim and Llyr’s relationship is the only example in the *Tetralogy* of a relationship founded upon a ‘desire’ that does not require ‘one of the partner’s succumbing’; Penardim is not assigned a use-value by Llyr.

As a member of the patriarchal New Tribes, Eurosswydd cannot comprehend their partnership, and his attempts to sever it in ‘The Beginning’ consequentially result in the separation of Penardim from the Mother. The title of the prologue—echoing as it does Genesis 1:1 in the Bible—frames this new narrative as the *Tetralogy*’s Garden of Eden story. The events in it take place prior to any in the four novels. Penardim and Llyr ‘exist’ in an Edenic ‘rich warm island of being’, yet the Adam and Eve correlation is upended by the fact that Penardim’s kinship with Beli places her in a politically and culturally superior position to Llyr. Penardim’s ‘Fall’ is

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<sup>15</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays’, in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans by Betsy Wing (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 63-132 (p. 88).

<sup>16</sup> Cixous, ‘Sorties’, p. 79 (original emphasis).

her sacrifice, and it is one which leads to her expulsion from that island. Just as Eve's punishment (the pain of childbirth) was visited on all women, according to the Bible's creation myth, the novel insinuates that the consequences of Penardim's actions permanently weaken the social position of women in the *Tetralogy*'s fictional universe. Rather than being 'a gift from the Mothers', children will become products which women will be expected to produce for the man who has bought her. This is evident in the novel's re-telling of Branwen's arranged marriage, as seen in Chapter II. Conception, once a supernatural mystery, becomes a competition in *The Children of Llyr*. In the next section I will analyze the text's treatment of this competition in 'The Beginning'.

### **Which Came First, the Sperm or the Egg? The Competition over Conception**

Eurosswydd mab Maelgwn is the instigator of that competition. As a chief of one of the New Tribes he owes tribute to Beli, and it is Llyr who comes to collect it at the beginning of 'The Beginning'. Eurosswydd does not want to pay his tribute. The relationship between the Old and New Tribes is tenuous and fraught with bitter memories. He is jealous of Llyr's close association with the King, made closer by his relationship with Beli's daughter, Penardim. The novel states that 'he felt himself unjustly made small, and the idea of paying taxes to Llyr made him feel smaller, and he was a man who liked to feel large' (Walton, p. 142). The repetitive phrasing and short sentence structure reflect Eurosswydd's dogmatic mind. The verbal conflict which ensues after he announces his refusal to pay tribute reaches a climax when Eurosswydd threatens to murder Llyr in order to prevent him from telling Beli. Llyr responds: 'Death is a fair woman, Eurosswydd; or so some say. But are you so much in love with her that you would throw yourself into her arms for the pleasure of

pushing me into them first?' (Walton, p. 143) The personification of Death as a 'fair woman' instigates an inebriated, enraged response from Eurosswydd that is a succinct illustration of the New Tribes' attitude towards women:

[I]t is not into the arms of any woman I wanted that I ever would push you! *I am a man*—I keep my women to myself. Not like you honorless bastards, you *half-men*, that come when you are called and go when you are bidden, obedient as puppy dogs to your women's lusts! Women! I know a better name for them [...] I would take a whip to all their backs—these strutting sluts of your Old Tribes—and teach them what a man is (Walton, p. 143. Emphasis added).<sup>17</sup>

Eurosswydd refers to the men of the Old Tribes as 'half-men'. In his mind, the sexual equality celebrated by their women has effectively castrated their men. Eurosswydd is a 'man' because he has maintained what Cixous terms '*phallic primacy*', a phrase which she is appropriating from Freud. Cixous argues that 'reaffirming' '*phallic primacy*' is an '(unconscious?) stratagem and violence of masculine economy' which 'consists in making sexual difference hierarchical by valorizing one of the terms of the relationship', that is to say, one sex/organ over the other.<sup>18</sup> By making the phallus the primary sex/organ, the female becomes subordinate in the gender economy. According to Cixous, man is driven to '*phallic primacy*' by 'the fear of expropriation, of separation, of losing the attribute. In other words, the threat of castration has an impact'.<sup>19</sup> The 'strutting sluts' of the Old Tribes, who worship the Mothers, venerate a sex/organ which Eurosswydd can only see as a void, an 'abyss,' as Cixous terms it, which 'functions as a metaphor both of death and of the feminine sex'.<sup>20</sup> Llyr's female personification of Death, therefore, is an apt comparison. Castration for Eurosswydd represents a loss of masculine identity which is equivalent to losing one's human identity, as evidenced in the above quotation. When Eurosswydd calls the men

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<sup>17</sup> All American spellings in the Walton have been retained.

<sup>18</sup> Cixous, 'Sorties', p. 80 (original emphasis).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Cixous, 'Sorties', p. 80.

of the Old Tribes ‘half-men’, he is vocalizing his belief that, by allowing ‘their’ women to have the same sexual freedoms as a man, they are effectively castrating themselves.

Eurosswydd speaks for the medieval man, who would have viewed Llyr as a cuckold. The derogatory terminology used in this speech—he calls the men ‘bastards’ (which would only be an insult in the New Tribes) and ‘puppy dogs’—is designed to emphasise what he views as their subservient position. Tellingly, he also calls them ‘honorless’ (Walton, p. 143). Just as brides were subject to virginity tests, medieval wives were also subjected to chastity tests to prove their sexual fidelity. Kelly opines that, although the chastity test is ‘ostensibly about the women who are forced to undergo it, [it] is really about the men who insist upon it’.<sup>21</sup> She notes that, although a threat is often implied or stated if the woman ‘fails’, ‘most men disavow the “evidence” of the ordeal, for to exile, divorce, or kill one’s wife—someone’s daughter, sister or cousin—threatens the foundation upon which homosociality is built’.<sup>22</sup> The consequences of a failed chastity test in medieval literature are less ‘a reflection on [the woman who failed it] as it is a commentary on the precarious status of the husband, a status which is paradoxically dependent upon his wife’s behaviour.’<sup>23</sup> In Eurosswydd’s eyes, Llyr is without honour because Penardim is not ‘chaste’; she may take other lovers. Moreover, the fact that she is freely allowed to do so makes Llyr not only ‘honorless’ and half a man, it also makes him less than her equal, an ‘obedient’ puppy dog who is the slave of a lascivious woman.

His speech in the novel antagonizes the men of the Old Tribes into drawing their swords, but Llyr prevents a battle by appropriately challenging Eurosswydd to

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<sup>21</sup> Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 65.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity*, p. 65.

hand-to-hand combat the following morning. Eurosswydd circumvents this by imprisoning Llyr. He sends a message to Penardim with an unconditional offer: one night of sexual intercourse with Eurosswydd in exchange for Llyr's life and freedom. This plot device is imported by Walton into her narrative re-telling of the Second Branch from Triad 52 in the *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*. Called 'Three Exalted Prisoners of the Island of Britain', the Triad lists 'Llyr Half-Speech' as one who was imprisoned by Eurosswydd.<sup>24</sup> The brevity of the Triads does not offer a motivation for the imprisonment or even a connection between 'Llyr Half-Speech' and the Llyr of the Second Branch, but Walton has made the connection between this Triad and Penardun in the *Mabinogi*: the wife of a man named Llyr who also has twin sons by a man named Eurosswydd. According to Rachel Bromwich, in the introduction to her translation of the *Trioedd*, the *Mabinogi* incorporates 'a considerable number of triads' in Branches Two, Three and Four. Bromwich believes this is evidence of the talent of the writer, who 'heighten[s] the dramatic effective of his narrative by relating it to a wider field of tradition'.<sup>25</sup> The same could be said of Walton, who teases out the connection between Triad 52 and the first paragraph of the Second Branch to form a cohesive origins story for the most pivotal character in both the Second Branch and the novel: Evnissyen.

In *Children*, Eurosswydd, his father, wants vengeance for being made to feel 'small'. He is, as Penardim summarizes, 'a small man trapped in his own big words, and there is nothing more dangerous than that' (Walton, p. 147). He sees two benefits which will come to him from this one night. The first is the most obvious, given his previous speech about the women of the Old Tribes. Eurosswydd views women as possessions; by taking Llyr's most precious possession, albeit for one night only, he

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<sup>24</sup> Rachel Bromwich, ed. and trans., *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961), p. 140. This is the spelling of the character's name given by Bromwich.

<sup>25</sup> Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, pp. lxxxvi-lxxxvii.

will have taken something from Llyr which can never be returned: pride. He will have proven himself master over Llyr's woman. The second benefit is far more insidious. Eurosswydd has knowledge that Llyr does not, knowledge which will prove to be the undoing of the Island of the Mighty. He knows that Penardim's children are also, biologically, Llyr's. He could accept money in exchange for Llyr's life, but Llyr's children would still inherit Beli's throne. The following passage uses free indirect discourse, interrupted by interior monologue, to reveal the primacy given to the man's role in conception by Eurosswydd: 'That pride never could be taken from Llyr. His seed would lord it over the New Tribes in days to come. *Over my own children, whatever vengeance I take*' (Walton, pp. 145-6. Original emphasis). Eurosswydd has denigrated the 'vessel'—the womb—to a mere transportation device by which he will enter a world of power he could not otherwise penetrate. His procreative manipulations reflect Cixous's observation that 'Man's cleverness was in passing themselves off as fathers and "repatriating" women's fruits as their own'.<sup>26</sup> When the patriarchal society of the New Tribes infiltrates the matrilineal society of the Old, the laws of inheritance in the Old Tribes alter to reflect the paternalization of the child.

Cixous refers to a time when 'the sons stop being sons of mothers and become sons of fathers'.<sup>27</sup> The shift which she is describing is similar to that which forms the basis of Briffault's argument in *The Mothers*: the shift from a matriarchal to a patriarchal social structure. Briffault observes that, in various tribal cultures, 'the children are part of the group of the mother and not of the group to which the father belongs'.<sup>28</sup> Briffault believed that this tradition, in conjunction with matrilineal

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<sup>26</sup> Cixous, 'Sorties,' p. 101.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Briffault, *The Mothers: The Matriachal Theory of Social Origins* (New York: Macmillan, 1931, reprinted Kessinger: No Date), p. 187. All further references are to the Kessinger edition. Briffault's theory is largely founded upon these observations, and the belief that these so-called 'primitive' societies were remnants of an earlier stage in human evolution. The theory that the human

inheritance laws, could be found in societies ‘long after every other trace of matriarchal organisation has passed away’.<sup>29</sup> It is important to note that the Old Tribes, while matrilineal, are not technically a matriarchy. They are not entirely patriarchal either, but rather hover tenuously between the two. The talking heads in Walton’s *Prince*, who tell Pwyll that the Son ‘loves the Father now’, are referring to a divine transfer of affection from the Mother to the Father which prefigures the human shift from matrilineal to patrilineal inheritance which Bran instigates. This is one of the primary themes of the *Tetralogy* (Walton, p. 47). The practical effect of this expatriation from the Mother is the shift in parental identification from the maternal to the paternal. The knowledge that ejects the Old Tribes from their Edenic Island of the Mighty in ‘The Beginning’ is the introduction of paternity. The novel argues that when inheritance laws alter to reflect this, when sons become the sons of their father, the mother loses her primacy. The female’s reproductive power becomes less important than the male seed; consequently an individual’s origins lie with their father, rather than the mother (either human or divine). The woman’s connection to

race originally worshipped a maternal deity has a long-standing and varied scholarly tradition. Bachofen founded his own matriarchal theory in mythology nearly a century earlier than Briffault. In *Myth, Religion and MotherRight*, he argued for the cultural importance of the bond between a mother and child, referring to it as ‘[t]he relationship which stands at the origin of all culture’. Bachofen believed that the expression ‘mother country’ indicates that ‘origin in a common womb is regarded as the closest bond, as the true and originally the only relation of kinship’, and that ‘[t]he idea of motherhood produces a sense of universal fraternity among all men, which dies with the development of paternity’. In 1975 Sjöö and Mor looked to ancient iconography and art to provide evidence for their argument that humans initially worshipped a female deity whom they refer to as *The Great Cosmic Mother*. Irigaray might say that this phenomenon is merely one aspect of our attempt to ‘re-engender the maternal’ by seeking to resurrect (and, in some cases, recreate) a –perhaps mythic—originary, Mother-worshipping, matriarchal society. Walton’s *Mabinogion Tetralogy* imagines the pre-Christian, British Celts as believers in a pantheistic mythology with a Mother figure as the deity from which all the subordinate gods originated. These novels are the first works of fantasy fiction which incorporate this theory into their universe’s mythology; now there are several fantasy fiction works which have a similarly feminist mythology, for example, P. C. Cast’s *Goddess Summoning* series (London: Penguin, 2011), Natalie J. Damschroder’s *Goddesses Rising* series (Fort Collins: Entangled Publishing, 2011) and Alicia Fields’ *The Goddesses* series (London: Penguin, 2006). These are just a few examples of this trend in twenty-first century fantasy fiction, which *The Children of Llyr* anticipated by approximately forty years when it was first published in 1971. J. J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion and Mother Right* (London: Routledge, 1967), pp. 79–80; Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

<sup>29</sup> Briffault, *The Mothers*, p. 253.

the Mother through this power is therefore devalued and ultimately lost, leading to the separation of Mother and daughter. The womb becomes an empty vessel, useless unless filled with male seed. By putting his own seed in Penardim's womb, Eurosswydd is attempting to build a monument to his ego that will outlast his own life: a throne for his son.

Yet what manner of man will that son be? When Penardim consults the Druids, they make it very clear what the consequences of her acquiescence may be:

No woman of the Old Tribes ever yet has sought a man and conceived his child save when it sang through her being. That music is life's source and love's delight. It is the one chance of man and woman to be as Gods and to fashion breathing life. You who would go to a man you hate, who seeks you only for spite—will you open the door of your body to what may come?  
(Walton, p. 148)

In the novel the Druids believe that it is the nature of the sexual act which determines the nature of the child it produces. Most tellingly, the term '*his* child' reveals that the Druids possess some knowledge of paternity. However, the ability to conceive still rests with the woman; procreation only occurs when that child 'sang through *her* being' (emphasis added). The vagueness and poeticism of the language reflect the mystical powers attributed to the women of the Old Tribes. Conception is a spiritual, not a scientific, event. It is a moment when human beings are 'as Gods' and, as such, they have access to other worlds. 'There are dark beings', the Druids tell Penardim, 'that lurk between the worlds, seeking bodies and birth [...] here where we live [...] close to the Mothers, no woman's body has yet been a door to let them in' (Walton, p. 147). By opening her body to Eurosswydd, Penardim is told that she is opening a door to a world which may bring forth a 'tyrant' (Walton, p. 147).

This fear reinforces the weight which the Old Tribes give to the constitution of the sex act in determining the constitution of the child.<sup>30</sup> The novel uses the supernatural elements of the fantasy genre in order to magnify the destructive consequences of rape. The Druids' spiritual belief in reincarnation views sex as a physical connection between worlds, that it is the context of the sexual act which determines what type of waiting human spirit will be reincarnated. The defining characteristic of successful reproduction in the Old Tribes is not, therefore, the production of a healthy male heir, but the character of the child produced, regardless of gender or legitimacy. Moreover, reproduction itself is not valued above consent or even mutual enjoyment in the act. The sex between Eurosswydd and Penardim would be motivated by his hatred and her fear, overshadowed by the threat of violence, and should a child be produced, it would be characterized by these traits.

Despite their vehement objection, it is clear from the dialogue in the novel that the final decision rests with Penardim. When one of her women points out that Llyr might be angered by Penardim having intercourse with Eurosswydd, she stresses both her sexual freedom and personal autonomy: 'Where a woman of our people sleeps, and with whom, is for her to say. So it always has been, and so it always will be' (Walton, p. 148). This statement clearly asserts that women in the Old Tribes have

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<sup>30</sup> The act which Penardim is considering may be read as 'coercive sex', as described by Jane M. Ussher in *Fantasies of Femininity*. According to Ussher, coercive sex is a form of rape in which a person engages in unwanted intercourse with another because they have been coerced by that second party. Often this coercion takes the form of a threat, as in the case of Eurosswydd's threat to murder Llyr should Penardim not comply. The motivation for ostensibly acquiescing to the act is fear, not desire or love. This is rape without 'force as men understand it', writes Ussher, yet the threat of death is still 'the fear at the centre of most acts of rape'. These rape cases are difficult to prosecute because coercion, rather than violence, is used as a means of manipulating the woman into supposedly consenting. Penardim is coerced by Eurosswydd into the act in order to save the life of her lover and it is clearly portrayed by the novel as a rape, as will be elucidated presently. The legal and cultural understanding that rape could be perpetrated by coercion, rather than violent force, was relatively new when Ussher was writing in the late 1990s. Yet 'The Beginning' depicted the psychological and physical repercussions of 'coercive sex' in a novel published in 1971. As with her re-visioned Arianrhod, Walton's *Tetralogy* is able to transform the *Mabinogi* into a modern feminist novel that was, in this instance particularly, ahead of its time in terms of the women's issues it was addressing. Ussher, *Fantasies of Femininity: Reframing the Boundaries of Sex* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), pp. 371-401 (original emphasis).

sexual autonomy; Penardim is not, as Eurosswydd believes, Llyr's possession. Yet his ignorance is irrelevant; Eurosswydd has assigned her body a commercial value which she accepts. The use-value Penardim holds for Eurosswydd has been determined by the men in her life, although she does not realize it. According to Irigaray, 'Women are marked phallicly by their fathers, husbands, procurers. And this branding determines their value in sexual commerce'.<sup>31</sup> Penardim is 'marked phallicly' by her brother Beli and her lover Llyr; as a sister to the current king, lover to his ambassador and mother to the future king, Penardim is an extremely valuable commodity to Eurosswydd. A woman's value is determined by the 'need/desire' of the men around her, according to Irigaray. Thus, Eurosswydd's 'need/desire' to shatter Llyr's pride and secure his immortality by putting his own flesh and blood on the throne, make the sexual possession of Penardim an imperative. Placing a use-value on Penardim's body marks her as a commodity to be exchanged between Eurosswydd and Llyr, although the person acting on Llyr's behalf is Penardim herself. Irigaray writes that 'Woman is never anything but the locus of a more or less competitive exchange between two men, including the competition for the possession of mother earth'.<sup>32</sup> This competition is a procreative one in the novel, the possession of mother earth insured through the conception of a male heir who may inherit via his mother, but whose paternity has become his primary form of identification. In the next section I will argue that the exchange between Eurosswydd and Penardim can be read as a gift-exchange as defined by Marcel Mauss in *The Gift*. However, Eurosswydd's quest for possession of the throne of Penardim's tribe violates the terms of the gift-exchange and transforms it into what Cixous terms a 'gift-that-takes'.<sup>33</sup> What began as an

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<sup>31</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'This Sex Which is not One', in *Feminisms*, revised edn, ed. by Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), pp. 363-9 (p. 368).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Cixous, 'Sorties', p. 87.

exchange becomes a sacrifice that will consequentially lead to Evnissyen's own sacrifice at the end of the novel.

### **The ‘gift-that-takes’: Violating the Principles of the Gift Exchange**

In the novel Penardim’s valuation of her self is clearly distinct from Llyr: ‘I am not giving away lands or goods of my man’s, that he might ask account of if he were fool enough to want to die for them’ (Walton, p. 148). This statement indicates that she does not identify her self as having a use-value equitable with a commodity, such as property, that can be exchanged. Her character exists outside of the male-controlled gender economy analyzed by both Irigaray and Cixous. When Penardim decides to participate in the gift-exchange with Eurosswydd, she does so not because she believes her use-value is that which he has determined, but because she ‘cannot let Llyr die’ (Walton, p. 148). However, by entering into the exchange, is she not sacrificing her own value for that which Eurosswydd has set for her, allowing him to phallicly mark her? It could be argued that Penardim chooses to become a commodity. That by agreeing to the terms set by Eurosswydd, Penardim becomes complicit in her own subjugation. That subjugation is an historical first for the Old Tribes. When she accepts Eurosswydd’s terms, Penardim places herself in a foreign cultural context, allowing her self to be sold at a price she has no corresponding value for. The novel questions the extent to which women have agency in coercive sex, which can be further elucidated by reading Penardim and Eurosswydd’s interaction as a form of gift-exchange.

Their first physical encounter is the traditional host’s kiss; this is an act which Penardim can reciprocate without subscribing to the terms of the exchange. The language used to describe the kiss clearly defines it as initiated by Eurosswydd: ‘he

gave her the host's kiss of greeting, and she gave it back again' (Walton, p. 149).

When they enter his bedroom, however, Penardim is opening the door of her body to an exchange whose rules she is unfamiliar with. This is sex outside of 'the rich warm island of being' that she inhabited with Llyr not because it is with a different man, but because the terms of the exchange have been redefined. The sexual intercourse Eurosswydd has with Penardim is not, essentially, '*intercourse*'. The definition of the word suggests that there is, in fact, an exchange happening.<sup>34</sup> In *The Gift*—a sociological examination of gift-exchange in tribal societies—Marcel Mauss notes that a 'bond [is] created by the transfer of a possession [...] this bond created by things is in fact a bond between persons [...] [h]ence it follows that to give something is to give a part of oneself'.<sup>35</sup> The bond created by the gift-exchange is personal, according to Mauss, rather than merely legal. His statement that the gift given in the exchange is metaphorically 'a part of oneself' may literally be applied to the exchange in the novel, as both Penardim and Eurosswydd will be giving each other parts of their physical bodies.

The rules of gift-exchange, as elucidated by Mauss, dictate that Eurosswydd is honour-bound to give her something in return for her coerced 'consent'. The release of Llyr is not equitable, as he is a stolen possession. Eurosswydd recognizes that the tribute he owes Beli also forms a bond between himself and the Old Tribes, and he is

<sup>34</sup> Of the nine definitions of 'intercourse' provided by the Oxford English Dictionary, some form of the word 'communication' is used six times. 'Between' is used as many times and 'inter' precedes at least four words. The most interesting definition I found was 'a passage in', which appears to link with the second half of the word 'intercourse'; course, as a noun, always implies motion. Thus we have 'intercourse': reciprocal movement between people. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1989. Available at <<http://dictionary.oed.com>> [accessed 9 June 2009].

<sup>35</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (London: Cohen & West Ltd, 1954), p. 10. Mauss, writing in the 1950s, was researching the concept of the gift-exchange in co-existing societies which he termed 'archaic'. These are similar in structure to the 'primitive' tribes researched by Briffault (Mauss's terminology is similarly 'archaic'). As a pre-industrialized island, where monotheism is viewed as an interloper by the more established pagan tribes, the Celtic Britain of the *Tetralogy* certainly falls into the category of an 'archaic' society as defined by Mauss. Thus, his evaluations of the gift-exchange in such societies may reasonably be applied as an analytical tool which will enable us to better understand the nature of Eurosswydd and Penardim's interaction.

not satisfied with what he receives in exchange. He resents the bond itself, and in his desire to break it, forges a new one with Penardim. Eurosswydd is not playing by the rules. His gift-exchange is a false one; he fully intends to take without reciprocating. He is acting out his part in a gift-exchange that may be defined as Cixous' ‘gift-that-takes’. Cixous describes this as a ‘gift [that] brings in a return [to the giver]. Loss [...] is turned into its opposite and comes back to him as profit’.<sup>36</sup> Eurosswydd fully intends to give Penardim something: his seed. This microscopic gift might eventually yield him, through the child who could inherit Beli’s throne, a kingdom as his ‘return’, making it an exemplary ‘gift-that-takes’. Eurosswydd is, in Cixous’s terms, seeking to ‘reenforce his phallocentric narcissism. She points out that ‘[m]asculine profit is almost always mixed up with a success that is socially defined’.<sup>37</sup> By physically penetrating Penardim, Eurosswydd seeks to usurp the throne of her tribe by placing his biological son upon it. His ‘masculine profit’ will be the social and political benefits he receives from controlling both the New and Old Tribes.

The transition between the ‘host’s kiss’ and the act that follows is abrupt: ‘[s]he went into his hall and ate with him, and later she went to his bed’ (Walton, p. 149). The juxtaposition of the benign ‘host’s kiss’ and shared meal with the euphemistic ‘went to his bed’ syntactically reinforces for the reader the two types of exchange happening in this scene; one which is equal and one which is not. The active verbs are ascribed to Penardim, but the possessive nouns are Eurosswydd’s. This is more significant than a rote grammatical exercise. Penardim is ostensibly given the agency to act, but those actions are circumscribed within Eurosswydd’s property, signifying that the terms of this unequal gift exchange—and thus Penardim’s actions—are dictated by him. Eurosswydd is described as greeting her with ‘his high

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<sup>36</sup> Cixous, ‘Sorties’, p. 87.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

neighing laugh'. He 'flung out his arms' to her (Walton, p. 149). His unconstrained physical exuberance is contrasted with the descriptions of Penardim's own physical sensations: 'She felt like a Bowman who had been standing rigid, cramped, for hours, every thought and nerve and muscle fixed on keeping his arrow aimed, his arm steady' (Walton, p. 149). The language in this passage reinforces Penardim's physical confinement within the gift-exchange. She is positioned in a combative relationship with Eurosswydd in which she is forced to wait for him to initiate the encounter. It is evident from a close reading of the text that this is not only a fictional depiction of coercive sex, but one which argues that coercive sex is a form of rape.<sup>38</sup>

Although Penardim has ostensibly chosen to enter into the gift-exchange with Eurosswydd, effectively accepting the use-value he places upon her, she retains within her self an independent personal value:

*He cannot enter you. Your flesh is not you; it is a garment that you have not always had and that will be replaced [...] Leave the body there upon the bed; let him have it. You are separate from that; you must be* (Walton, p. 150. Original emphasis).

By taking the reader inside Penardim's thoughts, rather than describing the encounter, the text emphasizes her central role in the narrative. It also takes this opportunity to make an important distinction: Penardim's self is not Penardim *herself*. This is more than a semantic quibble. The statement 'Your flesh is not you' indicates that her body is not the 'you' Penardim is addressing (Walton, p. 150). This suggests that Penardim views her identity as being separate from her body; thus, by leaving the body,

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<sup>38</sup> This depiction may not appear radical to the twenty-first century reader, but when the novel was published 'coercive sex' as a form of rape was not legally recognized by the United States. What does or does not constitute consent remains a divisive point for law-makers. For example, marital rape was still not recognized by seven states in the U.S. as late as 1990 because it was assumed that marital vows constituted permanent consent. Jane M. Ussher, *Fantasies of Femininity*, p. 401. When *Children* was published in 1971, Walton chose to begin her story with an additional prologue that would have been extremely controversial for its readers. This decision makes it evident that the *Tetralogy* was in part deliberately using the *Mabinogi* to provide a narrative framework for what were then new feminist ideas.

Penardim is seeking to retain her self, her identity. Because of Penardim's unity with the Mother, she remains in complete possession of her identity as female and woman even as Eurosswydd believes he has possession of her.

Irigaray argues that it is 'the non-establishment of the sexual identity of both sexes [which] results in the fact that man, the people of men, has transformed his penis into an instrument of power so as to dominate maternal power'.<sup>39</sup> The phallus is able to symbolically 'dominate maternal power' because women and men have been unable to 'establish' their sexual identities. This 'non-establishment' is particularly evident in women, as demonstrated by Freud's identification of female sexuality as an undiscovered, perhaps unknowable, 'dark continent'.<sup>40</sup> Penardim, conversely, is one of the few female characters in the *Tetralogy* whose identity is self-determined.<sup>41</sup> In uniting the Mother and daughter within her self, Penardim is capable of recognizing the line of separation between the body and the self. Her sexuality is more than her sex/organ and she is more than her sexuality: '*Leave the body there upon the bed; let him have it. You are separate from that; you must be*' (Walton, p. 150. Original emphasis). At the moment of penetration, Penardim is able to mentally leave her body on the bed and withdraw to her 'deepest energies', to the protection of the Mother within her, to whom she psychically cries out. Penardim adheres to the terms of the gift-exchange. However, Eurosswydd ultimately does not get all he wants because he cannot distinguish the body from the self. His lack of connection with the Mother has reduced his own identity—and, in his perception, the identities of others—to the physical form. Sex is equated with domination for Eurosswydd. Yet, although he may be able to physically penetrate Penardim, he cannot possess her.

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<sup>39</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', p. 42.

<sup>40</sup> Freud, 'The Question of Lay Analysis', p. 212.

<sup>41</sup> As argued in Chapters II and III above, Rhiannon and Arianrhod are the other two.

Eurosswydd realizes this the moment he reunites Penardim and Llyr. He sees that ‘those two still stood together and against him, as if in some druid circle that he could not enter. He kept reminding himself that that was not true; he had had the woman’ (Walton, p. 151). Yet all he had was what he asked for: her body, not her self. It is telling that, in this moment of dim realization, Eurosswydd refers to her as ‘the woman’. Penardim is nameless to him: a commodity that has been consumed. Yet in failing to separate her from Llyr, Eurosswydd has failed, in part, in his consummation. Penardim retains her value and Llyr his honour. Mauss observes that, in tribal societies, ‘[if] things are given and returned it is precisely because one gives and returns “respects” and “courtesies”’.<sup>42</sup> By disrespecting the rules of the gift-exchange, seeking the ‘gift-that-takes’, Eurosswydd has in fact lost. He is incapable of understanding the most fundamental premise behind the gift-exchange. Mauss eloquently summarizes that principle as such: ‘in giving [gifts], a man gives himself, and he does so because he owes himself—himself and his possessions—to others’.<sup>43</sup> In breaking the bonds forged by the gift-exchange, Eurosswydd has essentially left the society, placing himself in an extremely vulnerable position. And unlike Llyr, who returns to his tribe with his head and his relationship intact, Eurosswydd’s death is described as a negligible event: ‘[h]e went and men forgot him, because he had not been memorable; also he had gone in fair fight, so that neither New Tribes nor Old need hold a grudge’ (Walton, p. 151). Eurosswydd’s death is ‘fair’ because he has transgressed the behavioural codes of his society, by violating first the rules of hospitality, when he imprisoned Llyr, then the terms of the gift-exchange with Penardim.

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<sup>42</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>43</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 45.

It is Penardim, in a reversal of traditional gender roles, who is the rescuer, the saviour who literally cuts Llyr's bonds. As she does so, she tells him, 'I have paid dearly for your life, Llyr. Do not make that go for nothing' (Walton, p. 150). Despite her ability to separate her self from her body, Penardim has made a tremendous sacrifice. By allowing Eurosswydd to assign a use-value to her, she has lessened her own value. She has lost something of her self in this exchange. Woman, Cixous writes, 'doesn't try to "recover her expenses". She is able not to return to herself [...] pouring out, going everywhere to the other'.<sup>44</sup> Cixous argues that this form of female giving is enabled by the fact that woman's identity is less 'narrow' and 'restricted' than man's. Woman is able to give without expecting a 'return' in large part because 'she is not the being-of-the-end (the goal) [...]. If there is a self proper to woman, paradoxically it is her capacity to deappropriate herself without self-interest'.<sup>45</sup> Penardim participates in the gift-exchange without expecting to get a 'return' beyond the agreed-upon restoration of Llyr; her gift is essentially 'without self-interest'. This is evidenced by the fact that her interior monologue during the act is briefly interrupted when she silently shouts '*No! Oh Mothers, no!*' (Walton, p. 150. Original emphasis) Despite her rationalizations, her ability to remember the distinction between her physical and emotional selves, at what could conceivably be the moment of penetration, she instinctively resists.

Cixous argues that '[a] woman, by her opening up, is open to being "possessed", which is to say, dispossessed of herself'.<sup>46</sup> In giving her body to Eurosswydd, however briefly, Penardim enters into a rigged gift-exchange. His sexual possession leads to her personal dispossession, hinted at when she tells Llyr 'I have paid dearly for your life' (Walton, p. 150). Yet, prior to the act, her character views

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<sup>44</sup> Cixous, 'Sorties', p. 87.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Cixous, 'Sorties', p. 86.

the exchange as not only equitable, but weighted in her favour: ‘Not to escape one night’s misery will I lie all the nights of my life without Llyr by my side’, she tells the druids. ‘[I]t is my man I am thinking about now’ (Walton, p. 148). She compares what she is about to undergo with childbirth: ‘though this is worse [...] like that it will pass’ (Walton, p. 148). Her pragmatism is unusual when contextualized by the politically, physically and emotionally dangerous situation which she has been forced into. The comparison to childbirth is also apt, considering the repercussions it will have. The novel places Penardim’s character in a situation that most feminist readers would expect her to resist, but, as is the case with all the women in the *Tetralogy*, she must make the choice that allows the narrative to adhere to the original text.

Had Penardim taken the advice of the Druids and let Llyr die, rather than offer up her body to such an exchange, Evnissyen would not have been born and the plot of *Children* would have been dramatically different from that of the Second Branch. This is the unanswered question of the novel: what would the future of the fictional Island of the Mighty look like if she had made a different choice? Eurosswydd used his gender to restore his pride. Penardim used hers to restore her lover, and in doing so, sacrificed her own pride. For the first time in the history of the Old Tribes, a woman has allowed a man to place a value on her body. Although the price—Llyr’s life—may be worth paying, the sacrifice noble, a seismic shift has taken place in the gender economy. Llyr senses this; he also refers to Penardim as ‘woman’ and orders her to cut the ropes around his legs (Walton, p. 150). Although the novel describes them as standing united against Eurosswydd, Llyr’s speech suggests that Penardim’s actions have lessened her value in his eyes as well as her own. Neither will view the other as they once did. And although Llyr returns to kill Eurosswydd and thus take his vengeance, he cannot take back what Penardim willingly sacrificed.

She did, in fact, take something from that exchange: twin sons, Nissyen and Evnissyen. The former, according to the *Mabinogi*, can generate peace between any warring persons; the latter can generate war between any peaceful persons. Their dichotomous characters embody the contradictory nature of the act which produced them, according to the mythos of the novel: Penardim's loving sacrifice and Eurosswydd's selfish violation. Penardim sacrificed her body for the man she loved and the fruit born of that sacrifice will prove deadly to her entire family. The novel refers to her as 'Penardim the Dark Woman' (Walton, p. 149). As she leaves on the eve of her sacrifice, the Druid looking after her sees more than her shrinking figure:

Night falls now, a World Night, and a dark age draws on. The end of all we have known, the beginning the new. Well, so long as all be part of the Great Going-Forward, so long as good comes again at last, rising out of evil (Walton, p. 149).

This passage foreshadows the events of the narrative of *Children*, which follows the war between Wales and Ireland recorded in the Second Branch. But this is not the 'World Night' the Druid is speaking of. 'The end of all we have known' may refer to the subtle, yet more significant, change effected by Penardim's sacrifice. The use-value she allowed to be assigned to her will ultimately be assigned to all women in the *Tetralogy*, until the day comes when a man decides to take on the powers of creation himself.

The novel's invented prologue to its re-visioning of the Second Branch offers a psychological motivation for the most destructive character in the *Mabinogi*. The druid's warning of the potential for a 'dark being' to be created as a result of her sacrifice foreshadows Evnissyen's birth (Walton, p. 147). The use-value assigned to Penardim is later assigned to her daughter, Branwen. Unlike the first wife in the *Tetralogy* (Rhiannon) Branwen becomes a victim of the gender economy inadvertently instigated by her mother. That economy is one which privileges the

paternal. Penardim's dispossession from the Mother—evidenced by her unsuccessful attempt to emotionally remove herself from Eurosswydd's bed—pre-figures her son's alienation from her. The second half of this chapter will argue that it is that alienation—his separation from the mother (both human and divine)—which triggers his actions in the novel. Evnissyen's story is re-visioned as a destructive separation from and cathartic return to the Mother.

### **The Son of Eurosswydd: Reckoning Paternity in a Matrilineal Society**

The Druids warned Penardim that '[t]here are dark beings that lurk between the worlds seeking bodies and births [...] tyrants and torturers [...] will you open the door of your body to what may come?' (Walton, pp. 147-8) Penardim does, of course, open the door of her body to Eurosswydd, and the twins she gives birth to as a result embody the dichotomy of what may come from between the worlds, according to the *Tetralogy*. The *Mabinogi* states that Nissyen 'would make peace between his kindred, and cause his family to be friends when their wrath was at the highest', while Evnissyen 'would cause strife between his two brothers when they were most at peace'.<sup>47</sup> This prolepsis foreshadows the internal and external conflicts which form the climax of the Second Branch. Walton's novel symbolizes the twins' opposing personalities through a simple descriptive device: Nissyen wears a green cloak, Evnissyen a red, 'whirling round him like a flame hissing over dry leaves' (Walton, p. 157). Fire imagery is used repeatedly to describe Evnissyen's features and the anger which distorts them, acting as a metaphor for his unpredictable fury.

The source of this anger is unexplained in the *Mabinogi*; in the novel a motivation is provided by the addition of his conception story. Evnissyen is described

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<sup>47</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 19.

as believing he has an inferior status to that of Bran and Manawyddan because he is not a child of Llyr. Nissyen succinctly explains this:

He thinks always that you two hold it against him because he is Eurosswydd's son [...] whenever anyone has been angry with him he has thought that that was the reason—not anything that he himself has done (Walton, p. 157).

Evnissyen's character supported this statement with his earlier words:

[W]hatever I do is always wrong. I should be used to your thinking that, you sons of Llyr. You are both better than I; all my brothers are better than I. I have always had the pleasure of knowing that everybody thought that (Walton, p. 154).

By aligning Nissyen—also a son of Eurosswydd—with Bran and Manwyddan, Evnissyen reveals more than he intends to. Although he is ostensibly jealous of the ‘sons of Llyr’ he cannot help referring to ‘all my brothers’, thus making it clear that he is aware there is a distinction made between himself and his twin. Nissyen’s antipodal personality turns his source of connection with Bran and Manwyddan into a bone of contention at which Evnissyen repeatedly gnaws. Manwyddan contravenes Evnissyen’s statement by referring to him as ‘son of my mother’, placing the burden of parental importance on Penardim—their biological link with their other brothers—rather than Eurosswydd (Walton, p. 154). Both are dead. Evnissyen’s narrative arc repeatedly asks the question: which parent left the indelible biological imprint?

Evnissyen has chosen to define himself by his biological father; in this sense, he has accomplished what the talking heads in *Prince* foreshadowed, and left the Mother for the Father. More importantly, he chooses to believe that is how he is defined by others, most notably by his half-brothers. Nissyen has chosen to define himself through both father and mother; by placing equal importance on both his biological parents, Nissyen maintains a connection with all of his siblings. He tells his twin: ‘I too am Eurosswyd’s son. I have never felt that hate’ (Walton, p. 174). By

negating Penardim's role in the formation of his identity, Evnissyen effectively isolates himself not only from his brothers and sister, but from his society and, indeed, from himself. His disconnection from Penardim creates in Evnissyen an Irigarayan 'mad desire' for the mother, demonstrating the necessity of the maternal relationship for the formation of male as well as female identity.<sup>48</sup>

Earlier in this chapter I argued that it is Penardim's relationship with the Mother that enables her character to retain possession of her self despite the sacrifice of her body she makes for Llyr. Yet it was that act of sacrifice which caused a schism in woman's relationship with the Mother and a seismic shift in man's view of woman in the fictional gender economy of the *Tetralogy*. That same act of sacrifice results in a schism in man's relationship with the Mother in the novels, and we can see this embodied by the conflict within Evnissyen and the heinous acts which are its by-products. Evnissyen's character, as re-visioned in *Children*, provides the *Tetralogy*'s most compelling argument for the importance of man retaining his connection with the Mother.

On the eve of Penardim's sacrifice, the Druid watching her leave foreshadowed a 'World Night' that would fall on the Island of the Mighty. This shadow gains form in the character of Evnissyen. Although Nissyen is presented as the peaceful counterpoint to his twin's warring nature in both the novel and the Second Branch, his influence on the events of both texts is indirect. Until the climax, Nissyen's agency lies in the prevention of his twin's actions, rather than in any direct action of his own. Even then, he is unable to prevent the two acts which lead to war between the Irish and the Welsh, thus upsetting the equilibrium between peace and war which the twins personify. The 'World Night' of the *Tetralogy* is caused by the

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<sup>48</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', p. 35.

Old Tribes' discovery of paternity and Evnissyen's insistence on pushing his biological mother—and, through her, his relationship with the divine Mother—to the shadows. Evnissyen's anger is not the result of having a different biological father. His sense of inferiority does not derive from being the son of Eurosswydd, rather than a child of Llyr. He is fuelled by the 'mad desire' Irigaray describes, a refusal to acknowledge his need to connect with his Mother(s), who inhabit him nonetheless. By rejecting Penardim in favour of Eurosswydd, he also rejects the divine Mother, thus creating a schism within himself which he projects onto his relationship with his brothers, who have maintained those connections. It is his internal disconnect which creates the fraternal discord.

This discord is evident from the beginning of the novel, in a discussion between the brothers about patrilineal inheritance. As outlined in Chapter II, Caradoc is the first acknowledged son of a High King, although under the Old Tribes' matrilineal laws he has no right to the throne. Evnissyen vocalizes Bran's suppressed paternal wish when he asks, 'Why should not the boy have all that kings' sons in the Eastern World already have?—what many think that some day all kings' sons will have!' (Walton, p. 154) Manawyddan, Penardim's second son and counsellor to Bran, responds: 'All the Island of the Mighty might become chaos, with sons and nephews fighting one another for inheritance' (Walton, p. 155). Manawyddan's remark foreshadows the forthcoming events in the novel, which are propelled by Bran and Matholuch's competition over whose son will inherit the throne of the Island of the Mighty.

Manawyddan predicts that clashes over inheritance will result from a switch to a more contentious patrilineal inheritance law. His reasoning in the novel may be

partly inspired by Briffault, who argues that the acquisition of personal property through inheritance led to the creation of ‘individualistic instincts’:

It is not the operation of innate individualistic instincts that has given rise to the acquisition of personal property; it is, rather, the acquisition of personal property which has brought about the development of individualistic feelings.<sup>49</sup>

He opines that ‘the feeling of individuality [...] can be strongly developed only where the interests of the individual are in sharp opposition with those of others’.<sup>50</sup>

Briffault’s influence on Walton’s *Tetralogy* is evident in Manawyddan’s speech. It is this opposition which is key to explaining Manawyddan’s fear of the ‘chaos’ which would result from establishing Caradoc as Bran’s successor, rather than Branwen’s first-born son. Although they are referred to as ‘the children of Llyr’, the line of succession is biologically determined by their mother, Penardim. It may be less direct—in both texts Bran indirectly inherits his kingship from his mother, Penardim, who was the first-born sister of the previous King—but it is unquestionable. In the novel his claim to the throne is inarguable because he has a divine right of kingship. In a society which views children as the product of their biological mother’s connection with the Mother-deity, establishing legitimacy is not an issue. Evnissyen’s assertions that Bran should place his biological son on the throne—rather than Branwen’s—becomes a source of conflict for Manawyddan and Bran. This disagreement in the opening scenes of the novel establishes Evnissyen’s inherent ability to create discord and introduces the conflict between matri- and patrilineal inheritance which will ultimately lead to the war at the narrative’s climax.

The matrilineal rule of succession, which is the foundation of the power structure of the Old Tribes, was inspired by Briffault’s ‘matriarchal theory of social

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<sup>49</sup> Briffault, *The Mothers*, p. 65.

<sup>50</sup> Briffault, *The Mothers*, p. 64.

origins'. He synopsises his theory thus: 'In the higher forms of life what has been called the "social instinct" is the outcome of development [...] of maternal care'.<sup>51</sup> His reasoning for this theory is that the length of time required by the human mother to care for her offspring establishes bonds between that offspring and every member of the group: 'The relation has become a deep-seated necessity of [the child's] nature, the bond a permanent one. He is no longer an isolated individual, but a social being'.<sup>52</sup> The formation of the social group, Briffault argues, is the foundation of human society. Without it, humanity would not have advanced. Briffault goes so far as to maintain the pre-eminence of the maternal connection over paternity and communal life over monarchy:

Had the incipient human social group been a herd or horde ruled by the selfishness of a despotic patriarchal male, the operation of those factors [the transition from individualism to society] would have been subject to a heavy, if not indeed a fatal, handicap.<sup>53</sup>

The social importance which Briffault invests in the mother-child relationship had a significant impact upon the novel's characterisation of Evnissyen. Because he refuses to identify himself as the son of his mother, he feels isolated from the 'human social group' formed by his siblings, and this emotional isolation turns out to be his literally fatal handicap.

It was Briffault's contemporaneous sociological theory which inspired Walton's treatment of the fictional Old Tribes, but the later writings of Irigaray and Cixous provide a psychoanalytic perspective on the importance of the mother-child relationship—to the individual and society—that may enable us to better understand the connection the novel draws between Penardim's sacrifice in the prologue and Evnissyen's actions later in the novel. Cixous, in 'The Laugh of the Medusa', writes:

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<sup>51</sup> Briffault, *The Mothers*, p. 66.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Briffault, *The Mothers*, p. 66.

'In women there is always more or less of the mother who [...] nourishes, and who stands up against separation; a force that will not be cut off'.<sup>54</sup> Although she later calls for 'demater-paternaliz[ation] [...] to avoid the cooption of procreation', she also reiterates the importance of gestation within society: 'Women know how to live detachment; giving birth is neither losing nor increasing. It's adding to life an other'.<sup>55</sup> Although Cixous places her emphasis on the importance of the mother within women, as Irigaray does, the fact that she identifies the mother as a force for unification—'against separation', which was the Freudian model of psychosexual development—also speaks to Briffault's identification of the mother as the unifying force of human society. The mother-child relationship is the nucleus around which all other human connection forms, he argues. Irigray urges her readers to reclaim this relationship by 'situat[ing] ourselves within this female genealogy so as to conquer and keep our identity'.<sup>56</sup> One's maternal predecessors form a necessary part of self-identification. When that genealogy is unacknowledged, Irigaray argues, the individual becomes disconnected from their sexual and emotional identity. She illustrates this point with a reference to Greek mythology, reminding us that 'Orestes kills his mother because of the rule of the God-Father and his appropriation of the archaic powers of mother-earth require it. He kills his mother and goes mad as a result'.<sup>57</sup> Evnissyen's own madness is explained in the novel as the result of his refusal to situate himself within his 'female genealogy'. He is described as believing:

he had been wronged and insulted all his life [and that belief] was by now so deep-rooted that he never bothered to think who had wronged him or how, only revenged himself constantly upon all (Walton, p. 155).

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<sup>54</sup> Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in *Feminisms: an anthology of literary theory and criticism*, revised edn, ed. by Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), pp. 367-62 (p. 352).

<sup>55</sup> Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', p. 359.

<sup>56</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', p. 44.

<sup>57</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', p. 37.

In the novel, Evnissyen's refusal to accept his place in his sibling's female genealogy results in a 'deep-rooted' feeling of personal injury that leads to his social isolation, which manifests as a violent form of madness.

The children of Llyr live in a society governed by a female genealogy. Bran has inherited the throne via his mother. Therefore, by declaring Caradoc his biological offspring, Bran sets a precedent even without giving Caradoc the throne. It is the labelling of Caradoc that is important, not the crown itself. By shifting the biological importance from maternity to paternity, Bran minimizes the importance of the female genealogy, designating the father as the child's form of identification. This action not only diminishes the social significance of the mother-child relationship, it is also a masculine 'cooption of procreation'. Cixous specifically argues that both maternalization and paternalization are forms of procreative 'cooption', but here the novel's perspective differs. It is specifically paternalization, as instigated in the Old Tribes by Bran, which is viewed as a threat to the role of women in this fictional society.<sup>58</sup>

Evnissyen's only political power in both texts lies in his status as a son of Penardim—his female genealogy—and although he chooses to suppress his connection with his biological mother, he does use it as leverage. When Bran acts upon his paternal desire by facilitating the first exogamous marriage in the Old Tribes, he does so without Evnissyen's knowledge. When Evnissyen returns to find Branwen married, the *Mabinogi* records his words:

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<sup>58</sup> Manawyddan offers one argument against paternalization when he asserts that 'chaos' would ensue if men started claiming biological sons as heirs (Walton, p. 155). As Bran's son, Caradoc possesses something no man of the Isle of the Mighty has previously had: a direct genetic connection to the King. In short, he has leverage, along with any other sons Bran may have, and any sons of his brothers. Caradoc himself shows no desire to rule and, most importantly, neither does Evnissyen. His character in the novel is not motivated by the wish to possess a crown, or immortality through powerful offspring, as Bran is. The fourth novel in the *Tetralogy* provides a far more dramatic fictional example of the destructive consequences of paternal 'cooption of procreation' when Gwydion twice takes the powers of gestation into his own hands. This will be examined in detail in Chapter VII below.

And is it thus they have done with a maiden such as she, and moreover my sister, bestowing her without my consent? They could have offered no greater insult to me than this.<sup>59</sup>

The chapter which details these events in *Children* is aptly titled ‘The Insult’, and the meaning is two-fold. The next section will examine how Walton utilizes her knowledge of Celtic mythology to contextualize a seemingly extemporaneous incident in the Second Branch in a way that both adheres to its literary cultural context and reinforces its reading of Evnissyen as driven by a ‘mad desire’ for the mother.

### **Adding Injury to Insult: An Explanation of the Extemporaneous**

The insult done to Evnissyen in the *Mabinogi* is real. As a son of Penardim, he holds an important position in the circle of power surrounding Bran, thus his participation in the brokering of the marriage is expected. In the novel, his words in response to discovering that Branwen has been betrothed without his counsel are similar to his speech in the Second Branch, quoted above. Once again, the *Tetralogy* adheres to its source material by retaining the majority of the syntax of the passage and investing the *Mabinogi* with a textual authority little evident in other fictional adaptations: ‘Is it so they have dared to deal with a girl like Branwen—giving her to a dog of an outlander? My own sister too, and my counsel unasked? My brothers could have put no greater shame on me than this’ (Walton, p. 166). Despite the similarities between the two passages, they are not interchangeable. In particular, the replacement of the ambiguous ‘They’ with ‘My brothers’ further indicates that Evnissyen’s character in the novel is motivated by fraternal jealousy. This is also the first example where the novel applies the word ‘shame’ to a situation in which the shame is felt second-hand.

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<sup>59</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 21.

The word ‘insult’, used in the original text, would appear to be more directly applicable. Evnissyen views the exogamous marriage of his sister ‘to a dog of an outlander’ as an insult to himself as well as her. In accordance with the laws of this fictional shame culture, in which the actions of one’s kin directly impact upon one’s own socially-perceived identity, the shame that was put on Branwen by marrying her to a member of the New Tribes also puts shame on Evnissyen as her brother and fellow tribal member.<sup>60</sup> Because his counsel was unasked in the brokering of it, Evnissyen is placed in the position he continually places himself: that of the outsider.

Evnissyen’s reaction is to avenge the insult done to him by insulting the Irish in turn. He murders the man who informs him of the marriage and brutally mutilates the horses the man has been guarding. The murder is an addition of the novel. In the *Mabinogi* Evnissyen immediately disfigured the horses until they were ‘rendered useless’.<sup>61</sup> The mutilation is viewed by some critics to be a scene so random that it must have been added by a later redactor. Mac Cana refers to it as a ‘sub-tale’ which ‘is not satisfactorily integrated into its context’.<sup>62</sup> The fact that it is used—after a significant amount of time has passed in the narrative trajectory of the Branch—to explain Branwen’s punishment by the Irish appears to reinforce this view. However, the novel uses ulterior narration in order to describe Evnissyen’s internal reaction; by making his motivation for the mutilation more explicit, this ‘sub-tale’ becomes fully integrated into the tale proper. The following passage of free indirect discourse elucidates the emotional impetus behind Evnissyen’s actions:

It seemed to him that Bran and Manawyddan had arranged this marriage on purpose to punish him, to show him and all the Island of the Mighty of how little account he was in their counsels or in any great matter, the least of the sons of Penardim (Walton, p. 166).

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<sup>60</sup> The shame culture created by Walton in the *Tetralogy* is thoroughly explained in Chapter II above.

<sup>61</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 21.

<sup>62</sup> Proinsias Mac Cana, *Branwen Daughter of Llyr* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1958), p. 157.

This passage reinforces Evnissyen's feelings of separation from the rest of his brothers. The fact that he refers to himself as a son of Penardim, rather than a son of Eurosswydd, makes it clear that even when he nominally accepts his mother it does not eliminate his sense of personal inferiority.

While he is mutilating the horses, the heterodiegetic narrator describes that 'in his own mind he was cutting this off Bran, and that off Manawyddan', making the action in the novel more than a disproportionately violent retribution for the insult (Walton, p. 166). The horses become scapegoats for the brothers whose connection to Penardim—and therefore to the divine Mother—are the sources of Evnissyen's alienation and his resentment of that alienation. Rather than looking to himself and his rejection of his mother as the origin of these feelings, Evnissyen has displaced them onto the sons of Llyr. Because he is unable to attack them, he attacks the horses. Evnissyen realizes that his 'revenge was incomplete' yet feels that 'for once in his nervous, self-harried life, he was happy' because he 'was spoiling complete beauty, and there is a kind of miracle in being able to undo such a miracle as that' (Walton, p. 166). The act of mutilation gives Evnissyen power through domination and destruction. It momentarily satisfies the 'mad desire' he feels for the mother he has disowned because it allows him to inflict a displaced revenge upon the brothers who embody the maternal connection he lacks. By rendering the horses useless, he symbolically 'undoes the miracle' of maternal affiliation.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Horses had cult significance in Celtic society. They are found frequently in the extant iconography as both symbols of war and in conjunction with the goddess Epona, who appears in diminished form as Rhiannon in the *Mabinogi*. Epona/Rhiannon is variously depicted with a horse, birds and a cornucopia. The cornucopia being a symbol of earthly fertility aligns her with the various Celtic mother goddesses. Disfiguring horses is therefore an act of sacrilege against a living symbol of a maternal deity. The identification of Rhiannon with Epona will be explained in Chapter V below. By mutilating the horses, Evnissyen's action in Walton's novel may be interpreted as a symbolical mutilation of the body of the Mother. Walton's use of the mythic figure of Epona in her characterization of Rhiannon, elucidated in Chapter V below, demonstrates that she was at least partially aware of the importance of the horse in Celtic society. See Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (London: Sphere Books Ltd, 1975), pp. 268-9 and pp. 286-7; 'The Symbolic Horse in Pagan Celtic Europe: An Archaeological Perspective', Miranda

While the use of ulterior narration provides a motive for Evnissyen's actions, it is the anterior narrator who further contextualizes the mutilation of the horses scene within the narrative by providing an explanation for the length of time which passes between Branwen's removal to Ireland and her punishment. The novel employs a concept called *gessa* to explain why Matholuch's people did not seek retribution for over a year. Matholuch explains to Branwen that the 'druids I had with me laid it upon them as *gessa* not to speak of it' (Walton, p. 192). According to James McKillop's *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*, *gessa* (the plural of *géis*) is '[t]he idiosyncratic taboo or prohibition placed upon heroes and prominent personages in Irish narratives'.<sup>64</sup> McKillop explains that '[i]n certain contexts the imposition of a *geis* may require a positive demand or injunction or may specify other actions as forbidden or unlawful'.<sup>65</sup> Walton utilizes *gessa* in order to provide an explanation for the year of silence—and Branwen's delayed punishment—that make it anomalous for *Mabinogi* scholars. In the novel the anterior narrator hypothesizes why the *gessa* was broken:

[O]ne of the men who had sailed with Matholuch got drunk and talked. Maybe with the High Druid dead the ancient terrible bonds of *gessa* seemed less frightening, maybe too some of the lesser druids worked on him, fearing the King who had new ideas and wanted to open up new roads. Anyhow he did talk, and though the Gods may have attended to him thereafter, the men of Ireland attended to Matholuch (Walton, p. 193).

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Aldhouse Green, in *The Horse in Celtic Culture: Medieval Welsh Perspectives*, edited by Sioned Davies and Nerys Ann Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 1-22; 'The Triads of the Horses', Rachel Bromwich, in *The Horse in Celtic Culture*, pp. 102-20; 'The Horse in Welsh Folklore: A Boundary Image in Custom and Narrative', Juliette Wood, in *The Horse in Celtic Culture*, pp. 162-82; 'Horses in the *Mabinogion*', Sioned Davies, in *The Horse in Celtic Culture*, pp. 211-40.

<sup>64</sup> James McKillop, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*, in *Oxford Reference Online* <<http://www.oxfordreference.com>> [accessed 23 February 2010]. A prominent example of *gessa* in Irish mythology occurs in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in the form of the hero Cú Chullain's many personal taboos (such as his inability to eat any meat offered to him by a woman). Thomas Kinsella, trans., *The Táin* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970). The unique conditions which must occur in order for Llew to be successfully killed in the *Mabinogi* are another form of *gessa*. Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 57. There are, as evidenced above, multiple spellings for this word. I will be using Walton's, which is *gessa*.

<sup>65</sup> McKillop, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*, in *Oxford Reference Online*.

The novel's employment of *gessa* to explain the delay between the mutilation episode and Branwen's punishment for it epitomizes Walton's use of ulterior and anterior narrators to contextualize extemporaneous events in the *Mabinogi*. Rather than eliminating scenes that may arguably not have existed in the oral versions of these tales, the *Tetralogy* remains textually faithful to the extant manuscripts. The use of *gessa*—as well as that of *sarhaed* and *gwynebwerth* elsewhere in the novels—indicates Walton's scholarly approach to her re-visioning of the Four Branches. By utilizing terminology appropriate to the literary and cultural milieu of the medieval *Mabinogi*, Walton provides historically accurate reasons for events which may otherwise have been anomalous to the modern reader. Similarly, the novel's expanded symbolic significance of the cauldron seamlessly integrates it within the mythology of the fictional *Tetralogy* while retaining its original designation in the *Mabinogi*.

### **The Children of the Cauldron**

The mutilation of the horses is the second insult of the chapter, and it leads to the giving of *gwynebwerth* to the Irish in the form of a cauldron. Anne Ross notes that 'the cauldron of healing and regeneration is a regular attribute of the [Celtic] tribal god in his role as leader of the tribe into battle'.<sup>66</sup> These attributes are evident in the *Mabinogi*'s cauldron, which comes from a supernatural world and has the ability to restore animation to the dead, and which is given by one tribal leader to another as *gwynebwerth*. The cauldron has greater symbolic significance in the novel, as it is identified as the supernatural womb in which souls are regenerated. The cauldron becomes, by extension, identified with Branwen: 'that symbol of the cup within her

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<sup>66</sup> Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, p. 237. The significance of the cauldron in Celtic mythology is evident in the extant iconography as well as in the recovery of Iron Age cauldrons across Britain and Europe, the Gundestrup cauldron being one of the most famous examples. The Irish Dagda, referred to as 'the good god', was also depicted with a cauldron. Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, p. 314.

body—the power of birth and rebirth, the power of woman' (Walton, p. 277). Use of the cauldron in the human world results in the creation of zombies: a silent murderous horde that Matholuch employs to turn the tide of the war. The novel's feminist re-visioning of the *Mabinogi* reads the cauldron as a metaphor for the consequences of the cooption of procreation and the commodification of women. Ownership of the cauldron passes from Bran to Matholuch as a form of dowry, ensuring the successful transfer of Branwen from brother to husband after Evnissyen's actions threaten their arrangement.

John Winterburn hypothesizes that cauldrons were given to ceremoniously seal an agreement between Iron Age tribes in Britain. In his article, 'The Chiseldon Cauldrons', Winterburn records his visit to the archaeological dig that excavated twelve early Iron Age cauldrons and discusses the potential significance of the cauldron for those who deliberately buried them.<sup>67</sup> The cauldrons were interred at what was formerly a crossroads, potentially indicating—along with their number and the two ox skulls discovered with them—that they were used at a ceremonial feast between two or more tribes. Perhaps, Winterburn suggests, the interment was in celebration of a peace treaty or marriage. One of the cauldrons was deliberately severed into multiple pieces prior to the interment.<sup>68</sup> Winterburn offers no explanation for this severing or the burial, but according to Miranda Green, early Iron Age cauldrons were unable to be moved, and may have been too fragile for cooking purposes, suggesting they served a purely ceremonial purpose. The famous Gundestrup cauldron—also from the Iron Age and decorated with apparently Celtic

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<sup>67</sup> John Winterburn, 'The Chiseldon Cauldrons', *Current Archaeology*, 18 (2008), 25-32.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

imagery—was found deliberately broken as well.<sup>69</sup> These intentionally broken Iron Age cauldrons provide archaeological examples of the destruction of the mythic cauldron in the *Mabinogi*, which is severed into four pieces by Evnissyen in order to stop the war.<sup>70</sup> The supernatural and/or religious properties of the cauldron in Celtic and Iron Age societies is ‘ambiguous’ at best, as Green notes in ‘Vessels of Death: Sacred Cauldrons in Archaeology and Myth’.<sup>71</sup> In the *Mabinogi* and the novel the cauldron given by Bran to Matholuch is more than payment for *gwynebwerth*; it is an item of spiritual importance. As Davies notes in her translation of the Second Branch, ‘cauldrons played a significant part in Celtic ritual’, as evidenced by both archaeological finds like the Chiseldon and Gundestrup Cauldrons, and literature such as the *Mabinogi*.<sup>72</sup> Alfred Nutt believed that the Cauldron in the Second Branch can be considered analogous to the Grail in its life-restoring properties.<sup>73</sup> His argument is based on the hypothesis that Bran the Blessed was originally Cernnunos, a Celtic god of the Underworld, which would explain why Bran is the guardian of a life-restoring

<sup>69</sup> Myles Dillon and Nora Chadwick identify it as Celtic in *The Celtic Realms* (London: Cardinal, 1973), pp. 358–9. They compare its scrollwork and imagery with that of the Aylesford Bucket, found in a circle of pit burials in Aylesford, Kent (p. 371).

<sup>70</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 29.

<sup>71</sup> Miranda J. Green, ‘Vessels of Death: Sacred Cauldrons in Archaeology and Myth’, *The Antiquaries Journal*, 78 (1998), pp. 63–84 (p. 64). My thanks to Prof. Green for an informative discussion on cauldrons as symbolic objects in the Iron Age and beyond.

<sup>72</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 233. The vagueness of Davies’ statement reveals how little is known of Celtic religious practices, particularly the ‘significant part’ the cauldron played in such rituals. Perhaps it is the partially speculative nature of much of Celtic research, due in large part to the paucity of extant writings, which makes it an attractive time period for fantasy writers. The author may have free imaginative rein with little fear of reprisal from the ‘pedant’, to borrow Walton’s term. Two prominent examples of fantasy series set in Celtic Britain are Bernard Cornwell’s and Mary Stewart’s Arthurian trilogies (the latter technically includes a fourth novel, although it is not nominally part of the series). Cornwell’s trilogy is set in an undefined time during the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain. It depicts Arthur as a Celtic warlord fighting a losing battle against the foreign invader. Mary Stewart’s series is told from Merlin’s perspective. In her version, Merlin is the son of a Roman captain and a British woman. The series begins approximately a decade after the Romans left Britain, prior to the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons. Bernard Cornwell, *The Winter King* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), *Enemy of God* (1996) and *Excalibur* (1997); Mary Stewart, *The Crystal Cave*, *The Hollow Hills*, *The Last Enchantment*, *The Wicked Day* (London: Hodder Paperbacks, 2012). Cornwell’s trilogy is similar to Walton’s in that he provides detailed Author’s Notes for each of his novels, explaining how he incorporated research of both the Arthurian tradition and Celtic history into his re-visioning of the legend.

<sup>73</sup> Alfred Trübner Nutt, *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail: With Especial Reference to the Hypothesis of Its Celtic Origin* (London: Publications of the Folk-Lore Society, 1888), p. 187–8.

object in the Second Branch.<sup>74</sup> Nutt argues that, with the incursion of Christianity in Britain, the pagan cauldron of resurrection ‘transformed’ into the cup of the Last Supper.<sup>75</sup>

In *Children*, Walton invents a similar history for the cauldron in addition to increasing the importance of the regenerative quality it possesses in the Second Branch. In the *Mabinogi* and the novel it has a ‘property’ that gives back all power of animation to a dead man except that of speech.<sup>76</sup> The regenerative power ascribed to cauldrons by the Celts is evident in the iconography on the Gundestrup cauldron. One of its most dominant, elaborately figured panels depicts a troop of warriors being placed headfirst into a bowl by a large, god-like figure, then re-emerging to fight another day. Although recovered in Denmark, Ross discusses it in *Pagan Celtic Britain* as further archaeological evidence that, for the Celts, the cauldron was a supernatural object with the ability to restore life.<sup>77</sup> The dead men who emerge alive from the bowl on the Gundestrup cauldron are a figurative depiction of the cauldron’s identical purpose in the *Mabinogi*. In addition to being the most powerful magical object in the Four Branches, the cauldron is also the only one which is given an origins story.

The cauldron arrived on the shores of Wales in the hands of Llassar Llaesgyvnewid and his wife, Kymideu Kymeinvoll, Otherworld beings who entered the human world through a lake and whose offspring caused such destruction in Ireland that Matholuch attempted to burn them alive in an iron house. Llassar and Kymideu escaped with the cauldron and were integrated into the society of Wales by

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<sup>74</sup> Nutt, *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail*, p. 211. Nutt cites as reference a conversation with the folklorist John Rhŷs and admits that there is little textual evidence for this hypothesis.

<sup>75</sup> Nutt, *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail*, p. 224.

<sup>76</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 23.

<sup>77</sup> Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, p. 193, p. 194, pp. 378-9 and p. 384.

Bran.<sup>78</sup> The entrance of Llassar and Kymideu into the human world through a body of water indicates to the reader that the couple is supernatural. Water is often used in Celtic myth as a portal to Annwn—‘the unknown world’—whose residents were believed to visit the human world.<sup>79</sup> Llassar carries the cauldron on his back and Kymideu a baby in her womb.

It is her approaching delivery that Llassar provides as explanation for their irruption into the human world. In the novel their son Keli explains that his parents stole what he refers to as ‘Pair Dadeni, the Cauldron of Rebirth’ in order to ‘set mankind free from the Gods forever, free to shape his own destiny’.<sup>80</sup> In the Otherworld from which his parents came, the Cauldron was the womb ‘in which memory must be drowned before each soul could rise from it to return to earth and find a new body in the warm womb of a new mother’ (Walton, p. 247). The belief in the transmigration of souls is of indigenous, pre-Celtic origin, according to Rhŷs, and has connections with druidic religious beliefs.<sup>81</sup> Walton ascribes this belief to her fictional Old Tribes, thus the cauldron becomes weighted with spiritual as well as supernatural significance. This vessel of transmigration is ‘alien to earth’, thus, when ‘carried away by sacrilege’ it becomes a ‘poisoned, perverted shadow of itself’ (Walton, p. 258). The cauldron may have been a perverted womb symbol for the redactor of the *Mabinogi* as well; Llassar carries his on his back and Kymideu hers in front. Kymideu’s hyper-fecundity is grotesquely mimicked by the cauldron’s ability to reanimate the dead.

Bran appears dimly aware of this when he describes the being that would rise from the cauldron: ‘it would not be himself [...] but some other thing in his body,

<sup>78</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>79</sup> Sir John Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx*, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), p. 143.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Pair Dadeni’ is the Welsh term for the Cauldron of Rebirth. ‘Dadeni’ means ‘regeneration’ or ‘resurrection’.

<sup>81</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, p. 658.

something unable even to think in the tongues of earth. But he would fight like the demon he probably would be' (Walton, p. 177). Although the *Mabinogi* does not describe the Irish corpses that rise from the cauldron during the war, Green asserts:

[T]he Otherworld affiliations of the vessel are indicated by the dumbness of those regenerated [...] Their inability to speak marks them [...] as [...] belonging to the world of the dead [...] they are automata, zombies, undead.<sup>82</sup>

*The Children of Llyr* uses animalistic imagery when describing an added scene in which Matholuch tests the powers of the cauldron. The dead man is the guard Evnissyen murders prior to mutilating the horses; here the narrative has inserted a seemingly extraneous action in order to demonstrate to the reader the 'poisoned, perverted' nature of the cauldron. The 'It' that is resurrected is described as having 'greenish' eyes in which 'the dead firelight seemed to glow on within'. Its nostrils work 'like a dog's' and its scream is 'inhuman'. It does not recognize the faces of its fellow soldiers and immediately tears the throat out of the nearest with its teeth: 'Before the swords and the combined weight of all there brought it to earth, it had seized two more men and knocked their heads together, so that their skulls smashed like eggshells' (Walton, p. 181). The use of the impersonal pronoun 'it', super-human strength and animalistic violence reinforce the message implicit in the text, which is that the nature of the cauldron is indeed 'ambiguous', but its ambiguity is dependent on the hands that wield it. The importance placed upon the user of the cauldron recalls that which the Druids place upon the partners in the sex act in 'The Beginning'. In the *Tetralogy*'s mythos, the creators of life are attributed with the power to determine the nature of the human being they produce. In a world which operates on the principle of reincarnation, procreation is not something which should be undertaken lightly. The cauldron provides a mythological example of the *Tetralogy*'s argument that masculine

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<sup>82</sup> Green, 'Vessels of Death', p. 64.

cooption of pregnancy, for the purposes of political gain and sexual dominance, results in progeny who are unable to independently determine their identity or integrate within their society.<sup>83</sup>

In the Otherworld, the cauldron is a source of life for all humanity, which is gifted with individual identity and agency: a voice in the literal and symbolic senses. In the human world, in the hands of men, it becomes a source of non-life, a womb which gives birth to forms whose lack of individuality and agency is symbolized by their inability to speak. Their only defining characteristic is an unmitigated violent rage. The Cauldron of Rebirth was never intended by any deity to replace the human womb in the novel; its arrival in the human world is referred to as a ‘sacrilege’ (Walton, p. 258). This is evidenced by the novel’s reference to it becoming a ‘poisoned, perverted shadow’ of itself when brought to earth (Walton, p. 258). The cauldron is a spiritual womb in the novel, akin in its purpose to the River Lethe of Greek mythology, but with a more direct maternal symbolism. It is a womb ‘in which memory must be drowned before each soul could rise from it to return to earth and find a new body in the warm womb of a new mother’ (Walton, p. 247). Without the biological mother, the cauldron can not re-birth a human being. This is evidenced by the fact that, in both texts, it can restore motor function but not speech, indicating that the re-born being is not entirely human. The undead may be described as animalistic in their violence, but they do not have the basic needs of any life form, such as food or sleep. Again, the novel reinforces the primacy of the maternal in the formation of the individual. Evnissyen himself—a man who finds happiness in

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<sup>83</sup> There are multiple examples of this in the *Tetralogy*. Evnissyen, a child born of rape, becomes a killer. An Otherworldly womb misused by humans creates a violent zombie army. In the fourth novel, *The Island of the Mighty*, Blodeuwedd is another example of a human whose identity is determined by her creator, to disastrous effect. I will discuss this in Chapter VII below. Conversely, the children born of happier unions, like Rhiannon and Pwyll’s son Pryderi, Arianrhod’s sons, who were both conceived consensually (although not born so), and the children of Penardim and Llyr, are depicted as confident leaders of their societies.

torturing animals and sowing dissension between his brothers—could be seen as akin to this tribe of soulless automata due to the violence and dissension which are the identifying character traits of both his character and the children of the cauldron in the novel and the Second Branch. While he waits for his nephew to approach him before he throws him into the fire, the novel describes his hands between his knees, hidden because they ‘writhe’ like ‘twisting, spitting snakes’ (Walton, p. 241). *Children’s* depiction of Evnissyen uses increasingly animalistic imagery, as his character becomes more like the undead of the cauldron. And although he is a much more complex individual than those undead, his negation of his earthly mother has resulted in the loss of his own humanity. He is driven by a ‘mad desire’ for the mother, and his madness causes him to commit acts of violence against his own family.

Evnissyen’s reasoning for Gwern’s murder, as his character explains to Bran, is Gwern’s paternity: ‘Our sister made his flesh—fair flesh—but the seed it was shaped round would have rotted the heart out of it’ (Walton, p. 244). For Evnissyen, forever identifying himself solely through his father, that Gwern was his sister’s son is irrelevant. His character in the novel paternalizes Gwern. It is Matholuch’s nature which would determine his son’s, according to Evnissyen, not his mother’s, making that son a threat. Gwern is viewed by his uncle as a biological imposter; he may inherit the throne through his female genealogy, but his identity will be characterized by his father. The original text does not provide a reason for the murder. The novel, however, seamlessly incorporates it into Evnissyen’s fixation on paternal identification.

Evnissyen believes he has pre-emptively saved the Island of the Mighty by murdering a future traitor. He is also again acting on Bran’s muted concerns for his own son. If Gwern survived, his matrilineal legacy would have placed him above

Caradoc as High King of Wales. Evnissyen, in his role as war-monger to Nissyen's peace-maker, acts as a continually exorcized demon—the demon of his society's most dangerous desires. The selfishness and violence which are directly caused by his myopic obsession with the father embodies Manawyddan's fear, recorded in the first chapter of the novel, that paternalization leads to destructive 'clashes' over inheritance. This is later confirmed when Caswallon slaughters the men left to guard Wales during the war, including Bran's son and prospective heir, Caradoc, in a bid to gain the throne (Walton, p. 270-6). Evnissyen's actions foreshadow the 'chaos' which would result from demolishing the Old Tribes' matri-lineage in order to establish a patrilineal law of inheritance. His character acts as a representative for all men who reject the mother for the father. By denying his connection with Penardim, Evnissyen isolates himself from his family, his tribe, and ultimately humanity. Nissyen's death—an act of sacrifice for his twin—effectively severs Evnissyen from his only source of earthly connection (Walton, p. 253). Without the one human being who shares his connection to his father, Evnissyen is finally forced to return to the mother. When he crawls into the cauldron the novel describes him as being '[i]n the very womb of the universe' (Walton, p. 256).

The novel does not add a significant amount of description to Evnissyen's death. As in the *Mabinogi*, he stretches himself so that 'the Cauldron burst, and the heart of Evnissyen burst with it' (Walton, p. 257). Evnissyen's death of a broken heart—oddly reflecting Branwen's, as does his statement of contrition in the Second Branch: 'Oh God [...] woe is me that I am the curse of the mountain of the men of the Island of the Mighty'—is as poignant in the *Mabinogi* as it is in *The Children of Llyr*.<sup>84</sup> His sacrifice is the inevitable result of his mother's sacrifice: the act which led

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<sup>84</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 32.

to his conception. Was Evnissyen a demon as the druid foretold, a being which slipped in through the open door of Penardim's body when she sacrificed a portion of her self to Eurosswydd? In the novel, he identifies himself as 'the cause of this slaughter' and declares 'shame be upon me if I do not seek their deliverance', words which mirror those he speaks in the Second Branch (Walton, p. 256).<sup>85</sup> Evnissyen is not the 'tyrant' feared by the Druids, but he is certainly a 'dark being'. Just as the misappropriation of the cauldron by men intent on conquest perverts the nature of the beings it creates, the misuse of sex for purposes of possession and power perverts the nature of the child created from that misuse.

By twisting the rules of the gift exchange to achieve his own ends, and by willingly sacrificing her self, Eurosswydd and Penardim created Evnissyen and the violent trajectory he hurtles through in the novel. Although his ultimate action gives him some measure of redemption through penance, he is not resurrected and neither are the men and women who died, directly or indirectly, at his hands. Pendaran Dyved reappears in the novel—as he does in the Second Branch—to foreshadow the result of Evnissyen's war and Caswallon's mass murder for this fictional Wales:

The Island of the Mighty will have many kings now, but none will reign in peace [...] And in the end fair-haired invaders will sweep over all and subject us [...] Bran might have prevented that had he not given away his sister and the Cauldron, that symbol of the cup within her body—the power of birth and rebirth, the power of woman. Now for ages women will be as beasts of the field and we men will rule, and practice war, our art. By it we will live—or by it, rather, we will struggle and die (Walton, p. 277).

The novel alludes here to the multiple invasions of Britain by 'fair-haired' continental Europeans. While the *Tetralogy* is categorized as fantasy, not historical fiction, a link is being made in this passage between these fictional indigenous tribes' eventual loss of sovereignty and the usurpation of procreative power by Bran and Matholuch. The

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<sup>85</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 29.

theft of the cauldron and its misuse at the hands of Matholuch becomes a metaphor for the masculine cooption of procreation. It is perhaps a mighty leap from female subjugation to political instability, but Evnissyen's character serves as an extreme version of the psychological and cultural consequences of rejecting the Mother.

Unlike Pwyll, whose return to the Mother grants him a fruitful kingship, Evnissyen's return, while redemptive, is unavoidably destructive. Evnissyen re-enters the womb to destroy it. Neither he nor the cauldron can survive. Both are 'perverted' and 'poisoned' by their separation from the Mother. The deliberate breakage of ceremonial cauldrons in the Iron Age is reflected in the *Mabinogi* with the inclusion of this episode in the Second Branch, and later re-visioned by Walton as a symbolic act of matricide. The misuse of the cauldron signals the beginning of the virtual enslavement of women. This connection is made by symbolically linking the misappropriated cauldron with Branwen's coopted body. The novel transforms the Second Branch into a dramatic argument that the murder of the Mother results in the subordination of women. Irigaray makes the same argument in 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', when she asserts that it was a cultural act of mythic matricide that instigated the institutionalization of patriarchy: 'what is now becoming apparent in the most everyday things and in the whole of our society and our culture is that, at a primal level, they function on the basis of a matricide'.<sup>86</sup> In Walton's version of the Second Branch, the destruction of the Cauldron of Rebirth symbolizes the matricide that will lead to the institutionalization of patriarchy in this fictional society. The story of Penardim and Evnissyen is a story of psychological matricide, and it acts as a microcosm for the theme of the *Tetralogy*. The denigration of the female in the *Mabinogi* is most explicit in the erosion of her supernatural abilities, and it is this

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<sup>86</sup> Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', p. 36.

denigration which forms the focus of the final three chapters of this thesis. As we shall see, the characters of Rhiannon, Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd have roots in Celtic mythology which were gradually submerged by centuries of medieval Christian theology. Uncovering those roots is one of the primary focuses of the *Tetralogy*.

## Chapter V Rigantona/Rhiannon: Reintegrating the Sacred

### Divinity and Discourse: How an Ancient Religion Creates a New Language

The figures of Rhiannon, Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd are foregrounded as mothers, wives and queens in the *Mabinogi*. Yet it is clear, upon close reading of the text, that these roles are the domestic detritus remaining after countless years of the tales' exposure to the elements of artistic and religious change. This chapter will argue that Rhiannon's religious significance in British Celtic culture was diminished (intentionally or otherwise) by the *Mabinogi*'s medieval Christian redaction. Walton reinvests Rhiannon with that significance by expanding her role in the fictional pantheon of the *Tetralogy*. As J. K. Bolland writes, 'after a new religious pantheon displaces the old, figures who were once gods lose some of their divine stature'.<sup>1</sup>

Green hypothesizes that the absence 'of any references to a cohesive religious system, ritual practices or worship' in texts such as the *Mabinogi* may be the result of Christian redactors who sought to 'sanitise' Celtic pagan tradition by 'demoting the divine beings' and 'trivialising the divine'.<sup>2</sup> Rhŷs points out that the continued status of pagan wells as sources of spiritual power is evidence of the persistence of Celtic beliefs in the newly Christian society. They outlasted their Christian re-branding.<sup>3</sup> The supernatural attributes of Rhiannon's character in the First and Third Branches provide evidence that fragments of this Celtic goddess have survived despite the Christian re-branding of the *Mabinogi*. Walton expands upon these remnants of an

<sup>1</sup> J. K. Bolland, 'The Role of Myth and Tradition in *The Mabinogi*', in 'The Mabinogi': A Book of Essays, ed. by C. W. Sullivan III (London: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 277-302 (p. 277).

<sup>2</sup> Miranda Green, *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), p. 14. Green is joining several *Mabinogi* scholars who previously asserted this argument, including Bolland, Gruffydd and Rhŷs. J. K. Bolland, 'The Role of Myth and Tradition in *The Mabinogi*'; W. J. Gruffydd, *Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1958); Sir John Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx*, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901) and vol. II (London: Wildwood House Ltd, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, p. 400.

older mythology when re-visioning Rhiannon to imagine what her original role might have been in the pre-Christian narratives of the First and Third Branches.

Just as the wells in Britain retain their pagan spirituality, albeit with a Christian gloss, so too do the figures of Rhiannon and Arianrhod retain traces of their divinity in the *Mabinogi*. Of the three women I will discuss in these final three chapters, all of whom have a powerful magical presence in the Four Branches, Blodeuwedd alone has not been found to be connected with a Celtic goddess. However, she is explicitly described in the original text as being made of flowers, not ‘from the race [of humans] that now inhabits this earth’, as Arianrhod’s curse dictates.<sup>4</sup> Although not originally a Celtic deity, Blodeuwedd’s natural origin and magical creation make her a creature that is not entirely human. Thus she joins Rhiannon and Arianrhod in their position as outsiders within their society. All three are women of high earthly status—queens and princesses—and Walton’s *Tetralogy* returns their unearthly power to them.

This power is returned to them primarily through the medium of language, specifically spoken word. The dialogue in the *Tetralogy* reappropriates the masculine discourse of the medieval *Mabinogi*, allowing its female characters to transgress the boundaries of their medieval gender identities. This re-appropriation is most evident in the depictions of Rhiannon and Arianrhod, and is achieved through the use of dialogue, free indirect discourse, interior monologue and imagery. Such techniques allow Walton to re-create these female characters from a feminist perspective without altering the plot of the original text. In doing so, Walton creates an alternate, parallel discourse that challenges the patriarchal discourse operating in the medieval text. In

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<sup>4</sup> Lady Charlotte Guest, trans., *The Mabinogion* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 55.

*To Speak is Never Neutral*, Irigaray explains that such a discourse is both pervasive and exclusionary:

A perpetually unrecognized law regulates all operations carried out in language(s), all production of discourse, and all constitution of language according to the necessities of *one* perspective, *one* point of view, and *one* economy: that of men, who supposedly represent the human race.<sup>5</sup>

The medieval Christian redactor of the extant manuscript was (re)producing a discourse governed by the ‘*one* perspective, *one* point of view, and *one* economy’ of a society in which men ‘represent[ed] the human race’. While each Branch of the *Mabinogi* contains at least one central female character, her agency is circumscribed by the patriarchal discourse of the medieval text. Each of these women have at least one instance of recorded speech, and those who speak the most frequently (Rhiannon and Arianrhod) have the most agency. Yet none of them escapes punishment at the hands of the male characters. I would argue that, in Walton’s re-visioning of the Four Branches, Rhiannon, Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd all utilize this masculine discourse—the only one available to them—in ways which contravene the parameters of female behaviour as defined by the patriarchal society depicted in the *Tetralogy*. Such contravention produces a *new* discourse, one which offers a second perspective, point of view, and economy. But rather than try to replace the discourse of the men of the *Mabinogi* by villainizing them, or altering the narrative to create so-called happy endings for Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd, these women speak a parallel discourse which subverts the original in order to more effectively illuminate the misogynist *modus operandi* at work in the original text.

All three women use magic to do this, in various ways and with varying degrees of success. The magic used by the women in the *Tetralogy* predominantly

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<sup>5</sup> Luce Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 227 (original emphasis).

takes the form of the spoken word, and often integrates dialogue or scenes from the original text. Arianrhod's curses and Branwen's linguistic training of the starling are the two most prominent examples of magical language providing agency in the *Mabinogi*. The *Tetralogy* affords this same agency to Rhiannon, whose dialogue in the First and Third Branches, while extensive, is not directly connected with her supernatural attributes. In the *Tetralogy*, however, those attributes become the defining feature of her character, and they are exemplified by her linguistic power. Her mouth is the focal point of Manawyddan's amorous fixation because 'it had all knowledge' (Walton, p. 355). *Prince of Annwn* and *The Song of Rhiannon* reintegrate the sacred Rhiannon with the human Rhiannon of the *Mabinogi* in order to create a parallel discourse from an alternate, feminist point of view. This discourse re-appropriates typically phallocentric language to offer its readers another perspective on the Four Branches, which is that the medieval text's representation of these characters reflects the gradual dissolution of female power.

### **Song and Sorcery: Epona Rides Again**

Rhiannon enters the *Mabinogi* on a white horse. The reader has already been prepared for the appearance of something magical by a courtier's statement that anyone who sits on Gorsedd Arberth will see 'a wonder'.<sup>6</sup> It is clear from the text's dialogic cue that Rhiannon is a supernatural being. The warning of the 'wonder' Pwyll will see is almost immediately followed by Rhiannon's appearance. She is described as clothed in 'shining gold' and her horse is 'large' and 'pure white'.<sup>7</sup> The 'shining' fabric of her garment indicates that she and her horse have an Otherworldly origin, as does that horse's white colour and its ability to remain out of reach of its pursuers, despite its

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<sup>6</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

apparently slow pace.<sup>8</sup> Rhiannon's initial appearance in the Branch on horseback, as well as her unique punishment—to mimic a horse by carrying travellers into the city on her back—has led many scholars to identify her as a literary evocation of Epona, the Celtic horse-goddess.<sup>9</sup> The cult of Epona was 'widespread' in Celtic Europe, although her worship appears to have originated in Gaul.<sup>10</sup> Most Celtic gods and goddesses 'possessed several attributes', according to Nora Chadwick.<sup>11</sup> In the extant iconography Epona is depicted either astride or beside a horse, which sometimes has a foal with it. Occasionally she carries a cornucopia. The foal and the cornucopia are both Celtic fertility symbols. Epona's association with 'fecundity and maternity' is strengthened by her frequent appearance in iconographic contexts with mother goddesses in Gaul.<sup>12</sup> The novels *Prince* and *Song* incorporate the multiplicity of

<sup>8</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 6-10. White is used in the *Mabinogi* to denote Otherworldly creatures, such as the hounds of Annwn in the First Branch. See Sioned Davies, 'Horses in the *Mabinogion*', in *The Horse in Celtic Culture: Medieval Welsh Perspectives*, ed. by Sioned Davies and Nerys Ann Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 121-40 (p. 126). Davies also points out that, in the *Mabinogi*, 'the horse is closely integrated with his rider'. A supernatural horse in the original text would, therefore, have a supernatural rider, just as the white hounds that appear earlier in the Branch have a supernatural owner, Arawn. See Davies, 'Horses in the *Mabinogion*', p. 133.

<sup>9</sup> See W. J. Gruffydd, *Rhiannon: An Inquiry into the First and Third Branches of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1953), pp. 102-5; Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 50; Sioned Davies, trans., *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 230. Juliette Wood argues that the link between Rhiannon and Epona has 'become perhaps too readily accepted'. She points out that Epona's relationship with the horse is positive—they often appear side-by-side in the extant iconography—while Rhiannon's is associated with punishment. Juliette Wood, 'The Horse in Welsh Folklore', in *The Horse in Celtic Culture: Medieval Welsh Perspectives*, ed. by Sioned Davies and Nerys Ann Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 162-82 (pp. 170-2). Walton never uses the name Epona in the *Tetralogy*, but she does identify Rhiannon as a goddess, as shall be discussed in this chapter. Regardless of the relative validity of equating Rhiannon with Epona, the assertion is so wide-spread among *Mabinogi* scholars as to make its inclusion necessary here.

<sup>10</sup> Nora Chadwick, *The Celts* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), p. 154.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britian*, (London: Sphere Books Ltd, 1974), p. 267. Ross states that it is unclear whether these mother goddesses 'are to be regarded as separate [...] in these instances, or if they are merely symbolic of her procreative powers, and are actually one and the same as Epona'. Green notes that Epona, although fundamentally a horse goddess, 'was [also] a divinity of plenty, healing and death, and in this respect she shared many of the functions of the mother goddess'. Epona is also pictured carrying a scarf, which symbolized the beginning of a horse race, and a key, which was a chthonic symbol of entrance in the Underworld. The horse race which comprises Rhiannon and Pwyll's first encounter in the *Mabinogi* would seem to strengthen her associations with Epona in the medieval text. In *Prince*, she first appears to Pwyll as a nameless goddess in the Underworld, hinting at the chthonic symbolism associated with Epona. Miranda Aldhouse Green, 'The Symbolic Horse in Pagan Celtic Europe: An Archaeological Perspective', in *The Horse in Celtic Culture: Medieval Welsh Perspectives*, ed. by Sioned Davies and Nerys Ann Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 1-22 (p. 14).

symbols connected with Epona in their depiction of Rhiannon as a goddess who chooses to become human in an effort to return Mother worship to the New Tribe of Dyved.

The connection between Rhiannon and Epona may be evident in both the *Mabinogi* and the *Tetralogy* by the concern she expresses for Pwyll's horse. Rhiannon's first recorded speech in the original text is: 'it were better for thy horse hadst thou asked [me to stop] long since'.<sup>13</sup> Prince describes Pwyll spurring the animal on: 'He drove his spurs into Kein Galed's sides, that never before had felt them' (Walton, p. 99). The novel's naming of Pwyll's horse is not arbitrary. Walton has chosen the name attributed to Gwalchmei's horse in the Triad of the 'Three Sprightly Steeds'. Gwalchmei is a character that appears in a series of triads in *The Black Book of Carmarthen* and in the tale 'Geraint' in the *Mabinogion*.<sup>14</sup> Although there is no direct reference to the Triads in the novel, choosing to name Pwyll's horse after Gwalchmei's can hardly be coincidence. By giving a name to a nameless horse that formerly belonged to a character of the Triads, Walton creates a subtle link between the *Tetralogy*, its source, and the greater body of medieval Welsh literature. Moreover, the naming of the horse anthropomorphises it, as does the fact that it communicates with Pwyll on one occasion (Walton, p. 99). The anthropomorphism of animals is a common technique in fantasy literature, but in this instance it also serves to reinforce Rhiannon's presumed earlier manifestation as Epona. By depicting Rhiannon using her birds to heal Kein Galed—an additional scene not in the original

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<sup>13</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Rachel Bromwich, 'The Triads of the Horses', in *The Horse in Celtic Culture: Medieval Welsh Perspectives*, ed. by Sioned Davies and Nerys Ann Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 102-20. 'Keincaled', as Bromwich spells his name, is listed as Gwalchmei's mount in the Triad of the 'Three Sprightly Steeds', but although Gwalchmei appears multiple times on a horse in 'Geraint', that horse is never named. This second inclusion in the *Tetralogy* of material from the Triads reinforces the evidence given in Chapter IV above that Walton was familiar with the larger body of medieval Welsh literature. See Bromwich, 'The Triads of the Horses', pp. 113-4.

text—the novel strengthens her associations with these two important symbols associated with Celtic mother goddesses. The birds are described as flying from her: ‘[they] left her crown of light, and circled, still singing, round Kein Galed’s head. His breathing ceased to whistle, his sides grew smooth again, unmarked by sweat or blood’ (Walton, p. 101). This brief additional moment utilizes the birds of Rhiannon, which are unmentioned in the First Branch but appear prominently in the Second, to underscore the power which she is afforded by her divinity: ‘I will do what I can [to heal the horse]’, she says (Walton, p. 101). The use of the word ‘I’ indicates to the reader that the birds are part of Rhiannon, rather than the work of sorcery.

The supernatural connection between Rhiannon and the birds is explicitly described in *Prince*. In the First Branch the horse race is Pwyll and Rhiannon’s initial meeting, and in *Prince* it is the first instance in which Rhiannon is named. However, the novel places their initial encounter during Pwyll’s year in the Otherworld. In both texts this year takes place prior to Rhiannon’s appearance on Gorsedd Arberth. In *Prince* Pwyll sees a woman in an orchard whom he cannot look in the face, by which he knows she is a Goddess. This unnamed woman is surrounded by birds of her own creation. As Pwyll watches, she whittles them out of apple-wood until the finished creations become flesh. By contrast, the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* mentions the birds of Rhiannon only in the Second Branch, when they sing to the seven surviving soldiers at Harlech.<sup>15</sup> Rhiannon’s status as a Mother Goddess is reinforced in *The Prince of Annwn* by the fact that she is the creator of her birds. Unlike many of Walton’s additional scenes, this passage in the novel does not contextualize an

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<sup>15</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 30. The birds are not ascribed to Rhiannon in the Guest translation but they are in the Davies. See Sioned Davies, trans., *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 32. As stated in the Introduction above, it is apparent that Walton had access to other translations despite the fact that the Guest is the only one she cites. Gruffydd hypothesises that Rhiannon’s birds connect her with another Great Mother goddess: one of Crete, who was portrayed with doves. See Gruffydd, *Rhiannon*, p. 102.

extemporaneous event in the original text. There is no evident narrative purpose for Rhiannon's actions. Rather, it is the imagery which provides the interpretive meaning here. The birds, which are literally shaped by Rhiannon, reflect the avian iconography often associated with Celtic mother goddesses. The orchard setting, with its connotations of fecundity, symbolizes Rhiannon's role, in both texts, as a sovereignty goddess: 'All that lives and breathes in Dyved is part of Me', she tells Pwyll (Walton, p. 39).

In this statement Rhiannon makes explicit her supernatural connection with Pwyll's kingdom. By this connection Walton identifies her as a goddess of sovereignty. According to Catherine A. McKenna, the first feature of the sovereignty myth is that a man must claim his kingship through union with the goddess of sovereignty.<sup>16</sup> Walton cites Giraldus Cambrensis' account of this ritual in 'Sources—and Thank-Yous', when she refers to a royal initiation ceremony where a man must simulate sex with a white mare, who is then slaughtered and its blood drunk by the prospective ruler in a ritual that symbolically connects the king to the land he governs (Walton, p. 137).<sup>17</sup> Green hypothesises that, in the *Mabinogi*, 'Rhiannon may have been both woman and horse'.<sup>18</sup> In *Prince*, the anthropomorphised horse and Rhiannon's healing of it suggest a similar supernatural link between her character and Kein Galed. Although McKenna and Green are referring to metaphoric sexual congress, in *Prince of Annwn* the act is literal. Rhiannon identifies herself as one who has 'been Queen of Dyved from old. No man before you ever has called himself King

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<sup>16</sup> Catherine A. McKenna, 'The Theme of Sovereignty in Pwyll', in 'The Mabinogion': A Book of Essays, ed. by C. W. Sullivan III, pp. 303-30 (p. 317-20). Green notes that the similar sizes of paired female and male deities in Romano-Celtic iconography may indicate their equivalent power status. The symbolism in such iconography expresses the 'well-being, prosperity and plenty' of which their union is the source. See Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, pp. 117 and 136.

<sup>17</sup> The text to which Walton was referring is Gerald of Wales' *Topographia Hibernica*. For an English translation see Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, trans. by John O'Meara (London: Penguin, 1982),

<sup>18</sup> Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 51.

there save by right of Me. Only you have mocked Me, and sworn that you could hold the land by your own strength' (Walton, p. 39). This statement, with its use of the capital 'M', places Rhiannon in the position of Dyved's goddess of sovereignty. Pwyll's character refers to an event that does not occur in the *Mabinogi*, in which his druids asked him to mate with a white mare. His refusal was tantamount to relinquishing his kingship. Although Rhiannon approves of Pwyll's decision to reject the white mare—she calls the ritual 'foul foolishness' (Walton, p. 39)—his druids respond to his refusal by repeatedly attempting to kill him. As one who has rejected symbolic union with the goddess of sovereignty, Pwyll is no longer the rightful king of Dyved and will consequently be unable to reproduce. In the novel Pwyll's marriage to Rhiannon is a literal, rather than symbolic, union with the sovereignty goddess, who chooses a mortal mate as her earthly king.

Rhiannon's duty to provide Pwyll with an heir is necessitated by both the patrilineal laws of succession of the New Tribes and her role as the goddess of sovereignty. Therefore, her barrenness has repercussions for her kingdom as well as for her marriage. Rhiannon's statement, that '[a]ll that lives and breathes in Dyved is part of Me', indicates that she is the creator of Pwyll's kingdom. Her character in the novel embodies the land, therefore her barrenness is Dyved's barrenness. The mythic connection between Rhiannon's body and the land of Dyved is brought to bear in the Third Branch of the *Mabinogi* and Walton's re-visioning of it: *The Song of Rhiannon*. When Rhiannon is captured by the Grey Man, all mammalian life disappears from Dyved. It is only when Manawyddan negotiates the release of Rhiannon from her magical captivity that the human and animal populations are also restored.<sup>19</sup> In the original text the causal link between Rhiannon's disappearance and the disappearance

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<sup>19</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 37-43.

of all mammalian life suggests that her character might have been a sovereignty goddess in a former incarnation. As with the Epona hypothesis, however, it can only remain hypothetical. The medieval text's Christian overtones prohibit any direct reference to Rhiannon as a deity. Like many critics before (and after) her, Walton revisions Rhiannon as a Mother Goddess by utilizing the pre-Christian Celtic subtext in the First and Third Branches. Her characterization of Rhiannon aligns with recognized *Mabinogi* scholarship. Moreover, this interpretation of a divine Rhiannon illustrates the *Tetralogy*'s connection between magical power and agency.

Although The First Branch tells a story of a woman being betrothed against her will, the Rhiannon of the *Tetralogy* declares: 'Too much of [The Goddess] is in me for me to be run down by brute strength [...] I can give, but I cannot be forced' (Walton, p. 102). Her divine status is exemplified by her commanding dialogue and use of magic to control, to a greater extent than any other female character in the *Tetralogy*, the action of the novels. Rhiannon's ability to direct the action in the *Mabinogi* is most evident in the First Branch. She seeks Pwyll and advises him during the course of their eventful courtship. At one point she even insults him.<sup>20</sup> The only other female character in the Four Branches who verbally attacks a male character is Arianrhod.<sup>21</sup> Both of these women have magical abilities in the original text, and, as stated earlier, scholars have connected both of them to Celtic deities. The license to talk back to a man is apparently only the province of former goddesses in the medieval *Mabinogi*. The novel adds a dialogue between two of Pwyll's men after Rhiannon's insult, in which one of them states: 'A man must know how to handle women. [...] Pwyll had only to knock a tooth or two out and then she would keep her mouth shut' (Walton, p. 120). This brief statement by an unnamed character

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<sup>20</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 55. Branwen also insults a man, her husband Matholuch, but only after she has been consigned to imprisonment. See Chapter II above.

emphasises the subordinate position of women in the gender economy of the New Tribes and their interpretation of women's speech as an attempt to usurp masculine supremacy. Rhiannon's insult is tantamount to a momentary reversal of the patriarchal gender hierarchy.

This incident, taken from the original text, affords an opportunity for the *Tetralogy* to offer a masculine perception of women's speech that merges language and gender dominance. Insulting Pwyll briefly subordinates him. In the *Mabinogi* the power to speak is also the power to critique and to dissent; Branwen's silent submission in the Second Branch provides ample evidence of this. In contrast, Rhiannon, who has more recorded speech in the Four Branches than any other female character, is also afforded greater agency to direct the course of events of her Branches. It is Rhiannon who tells Pwyll how to defeat her unwanted fiancé. She uses magic to do so, and *Song* makes alterations to the plot of the Third Branch of the *Mabinogi* that extend her magical influence throughout the *Tetralogy*. In an additional side-plot, Caswallon removes Dyved's standing stones, which are described as a 'Holy Place' (Walton, p. 350). The absence of the stones results in a drought: 'the sun burned down upon the broad brown breast of the Mother, as if hating Her and all the life that sprang from Her' (Walton, p. 351). Rhiannon takes her women into a place in the woods where, by moonlight, 'what rites they performed then no man knew. Only shepherds and goatherds heard their singing, faint and far off, and loved the sound, yet shivered at it' (Walton, p. 351). The performance of these rites under the moon is in accordance with the moon's connection with the menstrual cycle and fertility.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Jean Markale, *Women of the Celts*, trans. by A. Mygind, C. Hauch and P. Henry (Salisbury: The Anchor Press Ltd, 1975), p. 142. Astral deities are ubiquitous in ancient mythologies across the world. There are a multitude of sun gods and moon goddesses, but the twins Apollo and Artemis from Greek mythology, and Ra and Isis from Egyptian mythology, are perhaps the most well-known in the Western world. Walton's masculine personification of the sun and feminine personification of the moon does

The novel personifies ‘her pale, battered, stare, like a golden face mauled by fiends’ (Walton, p. 354). The sun in this passage is personified as well; it becomes an aggressive masculine presence, one which ‘hates’ the Mother and all she gives life to, while the female moon, like the earth, is described as the victim of its violent attack. The stones removed from Dyved are identified in the novel as ‘the first born of the Mother’ (Walton, p. 351). Their function is to provide a form of supernatural protection of Rhiannon’s land from this destructive masculine figure. Once removed, the hatred of the Mother which they held at bay is allowed to ‘burn’ down upon her ‘brown breast’.

The language used in this passage depicts an act of gender violence. The stones’ forcible removal also removes a physical and psychical link between the Mother and Dyved. Once that link is gone, the ‘hatred’ of the sun towards the Mother earth is unleashed and the formerly fertile land begins to die. In the novel the stones, despite their phallic shape, are symbolic of the connection between the Mother and the earth, a connection which restrains the aggressive hatred of the male sun. When this connection is severed by the forcible removal of the ‘Holy’ ‘first born of the Mother’, the balance maintained by Her presence tips precariously towards a violent patriarchal natural rule. Rhiannon staves it off with verbal magic and returns the rain to Dyved, saving the harvest. Once again she is enacting her role as sovereignty goddess by protecting the fertility of the land. During these rites, the women remain hidden in the forest while the reader overhears their singing, a sound which, by evidence of the reaction of the male characters, is both beautiful and fearful, as is Rhiannon herself.

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not deify them, but the binary opposition was likely inspired by one or more of these mythological pantheons.

The singing of Rhiannon and her women is a further example of the *Tetralogy*'s use of speech to signify agency. Branwen's ability to impart language to the starling facilitates her liberation from an oppressive husband.<sup>23</sup> Arianrhod's spoken magic allows her to actively resist the maternal gender role being forced upon her by Gwydion.<sup>24</sup> Rhiannon's use of magical song gives her a power over Dyved that far exceeds her sovereign husband's, illustrated by the fact that she is able to verbally (and publicly) insult him with impunity. The added incident of drought alleviated by Rhiannon's song foreshadows the magical removal of all humans and animals from Dyved, an event which occurs in the Third Branch. Rhiannon's presence and absence is inextricably linked with the presence and absence of mammalian life in the *Mabinogi*, a connection which is strengthened in the *Tetralogy*. The original scene is retained in the novel, but by creating an additional episode closely modelled on the old, Walton is able to foreground her interpretation of Rhiannon as a Celtic deity.

This magical singing reflects the title of the novel, *The Song of Rhiannon*, which indicates to the reader that the Third Branch of the *Mabinogi* has been re-visioned as Rhiannon's song, Rhiannon's story. By reinvesting her character with its pre-Christian divinity, the novel utilizes the Celtic subtext of the *Mabinogi* to create an alternate discourse that subverts the original. To the 'one [patriarchal] language' of the First and Third Branches Walton adds a parallel, feminist language, instigating a dialogue between the medieval tales and the twentieth-century Western society of her readers. The next section will examine specific examples of this parallel language through the critical lens of Irigaray's work on gendered discourse. Her theory that 'the language of man' prohibits the vocalization of an alternate female perspective will

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<sup>23</sup> See Chapter II above.

<sup>24</sup> The importance of Arianrhod's curses as a source of agency will be fully analyzed in Chapter VI below.

enable us to understand how Walton uses her deified Rhiannon as a mouthpiece of an alternative ‘language of woman’.

### **‘Woman of the House’: The Magical Re-appropriation of Male Logic**

The connection in the *Tetralogy* between magic, language and power is most aptly illustrated by a new scene in *Song* that expands upon Rhiannon and her family’s exile in the Third Branch. Rhiannon is never mentioned during this passage in the original text. Although it is assumed that she accompanies Manawyddan, as their marriage occurs just prior, she promptly disappears from the narrative.<sup>25</sup> Conversely, the novel’s reinterpretation of this episode features Rhiannon as its primary character. In an additional scene, Rhiannon is referred to by an unnamed character as ‘Woman of the house’, and is asked to ‘tell your man to make haste with my master’s shield’ (Walton, p. 371). This recorded speech inverts the colloquial phrase ‘man of the house’, placing Rhiannon in the position of matriarch. The novel draws upon Rhiannon’s verbal direction of Pwyll in the First Branch by giving her an equivalent power over Manawyddan, who is referred to as ‘your man’, suggesting at least a balance of power in the relationship, if not Rhiannon’s dominance.

The novel utilizes her character’s divinity in order to demonstrate that dominance. Rhiannon is described as using her magic to control the language of this male character, forcing him to speak:

Her eyes were eyes no longer. They were spears, they were arrows, plunging into his. They were inside him, in the depths of him, and against his will his mouth opened. His tongue did her bidding, not his own (Walton, p. 372).

This passage references the original text, when Manawyddan and Pryderi find their lives repeatedly in danger. Manawyddan is depicted as the discoverer of the plot and

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<sup>25</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 34-38.

the orchestrator of the escape, but in the novel Rhiannon usurps his role. Her divinity manifests as an ability to literally control ‘the language of man’. The imagery used to describe Rhiannon’s forceful control of this man’s speech overshadows the magical elements of the scene. Rhiannon’s eyes, compared to ‘spears’ and ‘arrows’, are phallic in their ability to ‘plunge’ ‘inside’ the man ‘against his will’. Walton’s reappropriation of explicitly phallic imagery underscores the fact that Rhiannon’s ability to control speech enables her to forcibly seize the dominant power position which is held by men in the original text. The use of magic allows Rhiannon to transgress the gender boundaries defined by the New Tribes in the *Tetralogy*. Walton’s treatment of Rhiannon repeatedly reinforces the conflict caused by her non-gender specific behaviour. Her character in these novels employs language to usurp narrative and dialogic control from the previously unchallenged masculine perspective. In the scene quoted above, Rhiannon mimes a phallocentric discourse in order to take power away from a male character. Yet does that necessarily mean the *Tetralogy* is succumbing to such a discourse?

In *To Speak is Never Neutral*, Irigaray argues that phallocentrism is embedded in language. ‘A sexed subject’, she writes, ‘imposes his imperatives as universally valid [...] He still, and always, comes back to the same logic, the only logic: of the One, of the Same. Of the Same as One’.<sup>26</sup> She asks:

What if that other speaking nature [woman] acceded to (her own) language? What if that ‘subjectum’ heretofore non-subjectifiable unveiled herself as the source of another logic? In what ways would the status of the subject and of discourse be disrupted?<sup>27</sup>

The ‘One’ logic is male logic, which is embedded in a patriarchal language that assumes the male ‘perspective’ is synonymous with the female ‘perspective’. The

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<sup>26</sup> Luce Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral*, p. 228.

<sup>27</sup> Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral*, pp. 232.

phrase ‘the same as One’ states that male logic, male ‘imperatives’, subsume female logic and female ‘imperatives’; phallocentric language can speak for all genders because they are ‘One’ and the ‘Same’. Irigaray argues that this conclusion is fundamentally flawed because it is based on the erroneous assumption that the ‘sexed subject’ can be ‘universally valid’. She challenges readers to question what the consequences would be of introducing ‘another [female] logic’ into language. How would ‘the status of the subject and of discourse be disrupted?’ The novels’ re-appropriation of a masculine lexicon disrupts Rhiannon’s status as biological and symbolic female in the original text. As an ostensibly faithful re-interpretation of the *Mabinogi*, the imagery associated with Rhiannon in *Prince* and *Song* ought to align with her traditionally feminine characterization in the First and Third Branches. Yet the added scene in which she uses magic to forcefully control the language of a male character appears to contrast with her earlier magical acts in the novels; healing Kein Galed and restoring life to Dyved are acts which are more in keeping with her traditionally female role as a sovereignty goddess. In this instance, however, the novel deliberately uses phallocentric language in an attempt to briefly ‘unveil’ Rhiannon as ‘the source of another logic’, one which is not confined by cultural definitions of gendered speech.

Walton reappropriates phallic imagery and references to stereotypically masculine weaponry—her eyes become ‘spears’ and ‘arrows’—in order to disrupt the discourse of the original text. Controlling masculine language is described in the text as an act of warfare that subverts the superior status of the male subject just as it disrupts patriarchal discourse. The novel creates a Rhiannon who ‘accedes’ to ‘(her own) language’, which is inextricably connected with magic. Yet this disruption is not wholly successful in the *Tetralogy*. Her anomalous gender identity challenges the

‘Same as One’ logic adopted by the female characters in *Prince and Song*, who have accepted their male-defined gender roles. Walton uses language and plot to create a character who acts in ways which are not considered ‘feminine’ or even ‘female’ by other characters in the text: ‘I hoped he would marry a good, solid, buxom earth-girl this time’, says one of Pwyll’s soldiers, ‘You cannot tell, with these women of Faery’ (Walton, pp. 119-20).<sup>28</sup> Rhiannon’s magical nature is considered implicitly unfeminine and un-female by the male characters of the novel, irrespective of Pwyll. As a ‘woman of Faery’, she is not ‘good’ or ‘solid’ or ‘buxom’. These adjectives represent specifically female qualities of obedience and constancy that are defined as positive feminine attributes by *men*. There is no mention of a female character defining her own gender in this passage. The soldier’s vague statement of concern, ‘You cannot tell, with these women of Faery’, indicates that Rhiannon’s gender identity is implicitly unknowable because she is not a human female. She does not play by the same patriarchal rules as the ‘solid’, knowable women of the New Tribes. She is not ‘buxom’, a word choice which indicates that she will not comply with the male dictates of acceptable female behaviour.

Nor does she comply, in either text, as evidenced by her escape from her arranged engagement and her insult to Pwyll. His first words to Rhiannon in both texts are words of entreaty. Her supernatural horse makes it impossible for him to chase her down; he must beg her to stop. The novel underscores the aberrant nature of Pwyll’s request by prefacing it with a brief explication of the New Tribes’ gender interactions: ‘Men of the New Tribes could be kind to women, but they asked no favors of them; the suppliant must always be the woman’ (Walton, p. 100). Rhiannon’s often superior power position in her relationship with Pwyll is aberrant in

the *Mabinogi*; no other female character is ever begged by a man. The novel spells out this aberrance, reinforcing for the reader that the men in the New Tribes are the dominant gender; when Pwyll steps out of his culturally-inscribed gender role by becoming ‘the suppliant’, it is because Rhiannon is already acting outside of hers by refusing to lose the race. Any magical and/or agentive action that Rhiannon undertakes is considered transgressive of her gender and thus the opposite of ‘good’ in the eyes of Pwyll’s men.

Rhiannon’s ability to transgress this circumscribed gender identity is intimately connected with her divinity. This is evidenced by the fact that Rhiannon controls the contest between Gwawl and Pwyll for her hand. The scene in the First Branch in which Gwawl manipulates Pwyll into making his oath includes Rhiannon’s instructions on how they will defeat him.<sup>29</sup> The novel eliminates this dialogue from the narrative, briefly mentioning that such instructions are given. The only recorded speech is Rhiannon’s: ‘Great will be the sacrilege. Perhaps, if I were a whole Goddess, instead of a mere aspect of one, I could think of a better way’ (Walton, p. 118). The replacement of a dialogic explanation with a line of foreshadowing heightens the suspense of the narrative. Beyond that, Rhiannon’s comment that she is merely an ‘aspect’ rather than a ‘whole Goddess’ hints at the novel’s source and its present state as a series of fragmentary medieval manuscripts. Just as Rhiannon has lost the wholeness of her divine identity, so the *Mabinogi* retains only fragments of its pagan past. Gruffydd holds a similar opinion and offers as evidence Rhiannon’s matronymic origins. Rhiannon is derived from Rigantona, an ancient title meaning ‘Great Queen’.<sup>30</sup> Gruffydd cites the iconography of cornucopia associated with

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<sup>29</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> Gruffydd, *Rhiannon*, p. 98. Green makes a speculative linguistic analysis of Rhiannon as a possible combination between the Welsh *Rhiain*, meaning ‘maiden’, and *Annwn*, meaning Underworld, hypothesising that Rhiannon’s name combines these two words. If correct, this would give her the

Epona/Rhiannon—a symbol of fertility which draws comparisons with Demeter and thus the sovereignty myth as analysed by McKenna.<sup>31</sup> The *Tetralogy*'s interpretation of Rhiannon's character as a fragmented 'aspect' of a Goddess is a fictionalization of her status in the First and Third Branches as a 'Great Queen' whose pre-Christian divinity has been subsumed by the patriarchal Christian discourse of the text.

### **The Bright World and 'the dark continent': Even Gods can Forget the Mother**

Rhiannon's decision to marry Pwyll is interpreted in *Prince* as a relinquishment of the last remnants of her divinity. Heveydd's Hall, described in the original text as a 'palace', is located in the novel in an Otherworld called 'The Bright World' (Walton, p. 107).<sup>32</sup> The Bright World is more evolved than Annwn or the fictional earth in the *Tetralogy*; its inhabitants have ostensibly transcended violence. When Heveydd reminds Rhiannon of the ills of mortal life which she will face if she marries Pwyll, she responds by saying, 'I have borne them many times before' (Walton, p. 111). This reference to Rhiannon's multiple lives—as deity and mortal woman—is expanded by Heveydd's reference to his own past rule of Dyved (Walton, p. 112). The novel invents a pre-history for Rhiannon and Heveydd in which the paternal relationship between them was once reversed. When Rhiannon arrives in the Bright World she:

became daughter to you who once called me mother. I erred, but not enough of the Goddess is in me to tell me which time: when I did not come here first, to try to keep this lovely world sweet and clean, without pride, or when I fled from earth that had grown vile. Mothers can sway their sons; I might have lightened the darkness sooner had I stayed [on earth] (Walton, pp. 111-2).

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designation of Goddess of the Underworld, perhaps represented in the key occasionally found in iconographic representations of Epona. See Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 50.

<sup>31</sup> Gruffydd, *Rhiannon*, pp. 104-5. He goes on to argue that '[t]hose who still persist in the nineteenth-century distrust of tradition may well be reminded that a vestige of the *Taurobolium* [...] part of the Great Mother ritual, survived into the time of Queen Elizabeth'.

<sup>32</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 9.

Reversing the power dynamics of this relationship between deities is a mythological reflection of the reversed power dynamics in Rhiannon's relationship with Pwyll.

Rhiannon identifies herself as a Mother Goddess who has lost her status. There is 'not enough of the Goddess' in her, a statement which echoes her earlier identification of herself as an 'aspect' of a Goddess. That 'aspect', however, is sufficient to enable her to have a more equitable marriage with a man who comes from a traditionally patriarchal society. Although not exempt from punishment, as evidenced in Chapter II in this thesis, Rhiannon's character in the *Tetralogy* is more agentive and assertive than in the original text. The *Tetralogy* draws upon scholars' identification of the Rhiannon of the *Mabinogi* as an echo of a much more powerful Mother Goddess in order to create a supernatural character that is caught between divinity and mortality.

This tension has narrative repercussions. The Rhiannon of the *Tetralogy* is a character who chooses to return to earth not because she is in love with Pwyll, but because she wishes to use her remaining power to prevent a war between the Old and New Tribes, just as, in her former incarnation as a Mother Goddess, she kept peace in Dyved with Heveydd. The dialogue between herself, Heveydd and the Grey Man in *The Prince of Annwn* foreshadows the events in *The Children of Llyr*. Beli is still alive, and Rhiannon worries that Pwyll, as a warrior king, will back Caswallon against Bran as successor upon Beli's death, instituting patrilineal inheritance in the Old Tribes and thus instigating a war between the two potential kings (Walton, p. 112). Pwyll's marriage with a sovereignty goddess, she believes, will prevent this patriarchal conflict.<sup>33</sup> These references to characters and events in subsequent novels, which the reader will not yet have encountered, strengthen the links between the novels in the *Tetralogy*, making them a cohesive whole. Rhiannon is represented in

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<sup>33</sup> Rhiannon achieves her goal in the *Tetralogy*. Pwyll does not support Caswallon and her son, Pryderi, fights on Bran's side during the war with the Irish. The sovereignty marriage does, for a time at least, bring peace to Dyved (Walton, p. 261).

*The Children of Llyr* by her son and her birds, creating a biological and supernatural thread between the first novel and the third, in which she once again appears as a main character. These inclusions exist in the *Mabinogi* as well, but the birds of Rhiannon only appear in the Second Branch. By incorporating them into *Prince*'s re-visioned First Branch, their importance as symbolic representatives of the goddess Rhiannon is maintained throughout all three novels, extending her influence on the characters and events in the *Tetralogy*.

Rhiannon left the Bright World to marry Pwyll but this is not a straightforward case of a goddess falling in love with a mortal. Rhiannon is using her position as the sovereign goddess to create a marriage that will make Dyved peaceful as well as fertile in an attempt to stave off the inevitable war between the Old and New Tribes. This choice is, however, a sacrifice. Heveydd and the Grey Man tried to impress upon her the evils of mortality: pain, old age, childbirth. In an added scene one of Rhiannon's ladies of the Bright World shudders at the thought of what Rhiannon will lose: 'When she wakes her flesh will be mortal, no more light will come from it, ever again' (Walton, p. 134). Images of light are used to describe the immortal Rhiannon in *Prince*; in Annwn '[h]er body shone like the sun' and on Gorsedd Arberth she has a 'crown of light' (Walton, pp. 38 and 101). When Manawyddan marries her in *Song* time has 'clawed' at her golden hair, 'but her beauty shone on through the aging flesh, as the light shines through an alabaster lamp' (Walton, p. 326). These descriptions of an incandescent Rhiannon are similar to the metaphor used to compare Penardim to 'a torch shining in a dark quiet place' (Walton, p. 146). Pendarim loses her light, becoming 'the Dark Woman' when she sacrifices her self for Llyr (Walton, p. 149). Light imagery is only used to describe female characters in the *Tetralogy*, specifically Penardim and Rhiannon, and in the case of the latter it is directly associated with her

supernatural attributes. That the former loses hers but even a mortal, aging Rhiannon does not, indicates that she is able to retain her connection with the Mother, the ‘aspect’ of the Goddess that is an inherent part of her character.

Yet even this ‘aspect’ is not enough to make her worthy of the Bright World. According to the Grey Man, Rhiannon was ‘so mulishly self-willed’ that she ‘belonged on earth’ (Walton, p. 418). Ironically, it is this quality of Rhiannon’s that marks her as *un-human*, according to the men of earth. Manawyddan’s only defence of Rhiannon’s actions is ‘[t]he woman had a right to choose her man’ (Walton, p. 418). Yet this single line is far more persuasive as a defence due to its echoing of Rhiannon’s words in *The Prince of Annwn*: ‘I can give’, she tells Pwyll, ‘but I cannot be forced’ (Walton, p. 102). The Grey Man’s paragraphs of speech appear circuitous and hyperbolic by contrast. His belief that Rhiannon’s mulish ‘self-will’ is a characteristic unworthy of the Bright World is a patriarchal stance which implies that that world, and its inhabitants, is more closely akin to earth than it appears. Rhiannon acknowledges that the act of violence against Gwawl will be a ‘sacrilege’ to the Bright World, but she also speaks out strongly against the dangers inherent in that World’s pride and lack of pity for humanity (Walton, p. 111). The Grey Man and Heveydd inhabit the role of patriarch and Rhiannon that of the royal daughter being forced into an arranged marriage. These are strikingly earthly power dynamics being enacted in an Otherworldly society which has supposedly evolved beyond those dynamics.

Rhiannon’s recognition of the shadows lurking in the Bright World leads to her decision not merely to ‘choose her man’, but to use the supernatural power left her to choose one who will give her earthly power, a power which she uses to maintain peace in the land which she created. The re-visioned Rhiannon of the *Tetralogy* unites

divinity and humanity, male and female, resulting in a more powerful Rhiannon than that in the *Mabinogi*. The *Tetralogy* draws upon the myth behind the mythology in order to create a character who is a Mother, a Goddess and a Queen. The combination of the supernatural and the human inherent in these roles affords her greater agency and a more extensive influence across the novels of the *Tetralogy* than the other female characters, who have lost their connection to the Mother.

Rhiannon's ability to use her gender as a positive magical force is owing to her status as a Mother Goddess. Irigaray writes about a similar ability of women to retain a connection with what she terms 'mother-nature'. Women, she argues, are better able than men to identify with 'mother-nature' because they do not fear that this identification will result in a 'loss of their sexual identity':

Women need not, as men do, distinguish themselves from the mother-nature who produces them; women can remain with her in affection, can even identify with her, without loss of their sexual identity.<sup>34</sup>

Conversely, man is unable 'to give meaning to his natural beginning, to predicate his relation to a matter-mother who is his origin [...] he exists as a man by separating himself from her, by forgetting her, by breaking off any ties of contiguity-continuity, by suspending all sympathy'.<sup>35</sup> Rhiannon is a literary embodiment of this concept. Although, as evidenced in both texts, she 'remains with [mother-nature] in affection', through her identification as both Epona and a sovereignty goddess, her gradual divine disintegration is mirrored in the (d)evolution of her name, from Rigantona—Great Queen—to Rhiannon. This linguistic erosion is the result of the appropriation of her myth by an increasingly patriarchal language. The rule of the Bright World, as embodied by the patriarchal male figures of Heveydd and the Grey Man, has broken

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<sup>34</sup> Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral*, p. 229.

<sup>35</sup> Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral*, pp. 228-9.

all ties with the Mother, of whom Rhiannon is a partial representative figure. It has lost ‘sympathy’ in more than one sense of the word. It has lost an empathetic contiguity with earth. Heveydd briefly recognizes this when he says, ‘maybe we have all grown careless, forgetful of the laws of the Mother, here so far from the darkness of Her womb’ (Walton, p. 126).

His words may recall for us Irigaray’s engagement with Freud’s interpretation of female sexuality as a ‘dark continent’. Our relationship with the mother, she argues, is the ““dark continent” par excellence’ because it has been submerged by a patriarchal society fearful of losing control over its phallocentric gender economy.<sup>36</sup> In the *Tetralogy*, the ‘darkness of Her womb’ is the embodiment of the ‘dark continent’ of female sexuality. Heveydd’s statement recognizes that a loss of this intimate connection results in a disconnection from ‘the laws of the Mother’, leading to the emergence of violence in the Bright World. The *Tetralogy* also links the loss of a relationship with the Mother, which is represented by masculine mis-appropriation of the womb, with violence in *Children*, when Evnissyen’s inability to acknowledge his birth mother leads to the perverted misuse of the Cauldron of Rebirth, the symbol of ‘the power of woman’ (Walton, p. 277). The Bright World’s disconnection from the womb is evidenced by Heveydd and the Grey Man’s treatment of Rhiannon. Despite the fact that she was once their Mother, as soon as she loses this superior position and becomes Heveydd’s daughter, both he and the Grey Man adopt the patriarchal attitudes of the earth they so despise. This mirroring reflects Rhiannon’s mythological demotion in the medieval *Mabinogi*. Even an evolved, non-violent Otherworld such as the Bright World is being affected by the changing definitions of male and female roles on earth. Both Worlds are infected with a growing misogyny.

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<sup>36</sup> Luce Irigaray, ‘The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1991), pp. 34-46 (p. 35).

The brief mention of Rhiannon's rape by Pwyll's forefather, and her subsequent retreat to the Bright World, is indicative of this. By descending to earth she loses immortality, but not her identity. Although no longer divine, her gender allows her to understand what the more supernaturally powerful Heveydd and Grey Man cannot: 'You men and your Gods!' she says, 'You mock at the Mother for snail slowness, for creating blindly in the dark. Yet when you create without Her, swiftly and in the light, you will create blindly indeed' (Walton, p. 135). Man's logic, that 'Of the Same as One', refuses to recognize that 'The Mother is mighty; She has *many bodies*, and your world is but one of them' (Walton, p. 135. Emphasis added). The multiplicity of the Mother is evident in the fact that Rhiannon is never identified as *the* Mother; rather she is one of the Mother's 'many bodies'.

Heveydd and the Grey Man's hurry to raise the Bright World above all others as the ideal, the 'One' whose logic should become the 'Same' as that of other worlds, makes the Grey Man's actions against Dyved understandable within the framework of his patriarchal discourse. For the Grey Man, Dyved and its inhabitants are playthings: 'We can see your thoughts and if we please we can play with them, as a cat with mice' (Walton, p. 421). The disrespect with which he treats human beings was already directed at Rhiannon before she became one. Yet he does not 'play' with her as he 'plays' with Manawyddan. Their contest is between an immortal and mortal man. The Grey Man and Rhiannon are involved in a conflict between divinities. Although Rhiannon sacrificed her immortality, the Grey Man seeks retribution for Gwawl that is disproportionate to her crime. Manawyddan points this out: 'You, to avenge a few weals on the back of a man who tried to take a woman against her will, had a babe torn from its mother's arms to be the prey [to] a monster of the Underworld' (Walton, p. 418). All of Rhiannon's sufferings are the result of her refusal to participate in the

patriarchal discourse of the Bright World. She knew that she was committing a ‘great sacrilege’ and most likely expected repercussions from it, but ultimately, the ‘aspect’ of the Goddess within her gave her sufficient power to triumph over the ostensibly superior Grey Man. When she is returned to earth after her captivity:

[t]he gladness outshone the gold of her robe, that was such a dress of shimmering light as she had worn when she first appeared to Pwyll upon that same Mount, long ago; only shot with silver now, as her hair was shot with silver (Walton, p. 420).

This descriptive connection between Rhiannon’s first appearance on Gorsedd Arberth, and her last in the *Tetralogy* uses imagery of light and colour to emphasize her personal fulfilment and, more importantly, the fact that aging has not dimmed her power. The gold gown turned to silver symbolizes her mortality; the fact that it is still the same dress of ‘shimmering light’ that she wore when she was a goddess of the Bright World indicates that Rhiannon has achieved a union of divinity and humanity.

Reintegrating the Celtic mother goddess with a female character in the *Mabinogi* enables Walton to re-vision Rhiannon and her narrative arc as a potent exemplar of the *Tetralogy*’s thematic argument. In the original text, magic enables women to interrupt its patriarchal discourse, to speak up and act out, but ultimately none of them are exempt from a punitive ‘male logic’. The *Tetralogy* interprets this magic as representative of a lost connection with the Mother that, if regained, enables its female characters not only to interrupt patriarchal discourse, but to re-appropriate it. Walton’s depiction of Rhiannon uses the remaining ‘aspect’ of the Goddess from her pre-Christian character to create ‘another language’, one which offers an alternate, feminist perspective of the Four Branches. The following chapter will examine how Walton applies the same technique to her characterization of Arianrhod in *Island of*

*the Mighty.* As we shall discover, reintroducing the sacred is not as straightforward when the divine is also a villain.

## Chapter VI The Moon Curses the Son: Arianrhod's Revenge

### Victimization and Vilification: Rejecting the ‘good/bad’ Dichotomy

Walton applies the same technique of reintegrating Celtic mythology to her characterization of Arianrhod as she does to Rhiannon. However, as depicted in the *Mabinogi*, Arianrhod presents complications for a feminist re-interpretation which Rhiannon does not. Rhiannon’s characterization in the original text is consistently positive—even during her punishment the redactor depicts her as an innocent victim—whereas Arianrhod functions as Gwydion’s antagonist. Moreover, Rhiannon can be identified as a sovereignty goddess whose mythological functions are those of protection and nurture, and whose iconography identifies her as a source of fecundity and fertility. Conversely, Arianrhod’s character is explicitly anti-maternal. Her sole aim in the original text is to deny and diminish the existence of her child.<sup>1</sup> Although Gwydion is the protagonist of the Fourth Branch he is an ambiguous figure. His instigation of a war with Dyved and enabling of Goewyn’s rape make his own character morally complex but, nevertheless, it is Gwydion whose motivations the reader is privy to and Gwydion who survives the Branch, with his son and his kingdom intact, whereas Arianrhod remains a cipher whose motives are obscure at best. Her actions are reactions, utilized to provide a source of conflict for Gwydion.

Conflict in the *Mabinogi* also provides the narrator with an opportunity to introduce magic into the text; Arianrhod and Gwydion’s curse contest is a supernatural enactment of their interpersonal conflict. This chapter will analyze Walton’s reintegration of Celtic mythology into her depiction of Arianrhod in *The Island of the Mighty*, arguing that the novel’s confluence of mythology, Celtic

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<sup>1</sup> I am referring to her second-born son, Llew. After her first-born’s post-baptismal disappearance into the ocean he has no impact on the subsequent narrative. See Lady Charlotte Guest, trans., *The Mabinogion* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 51.

folktales and fantasy allows for the creation of a character which is neither immoral nor morally rehabilitated, neither villain nor vindicated heroine. J. K. Bolland argues that the use of fantasy motifs in literature provides a setting in which the reader may judge the morality of the characters' actions. These actions, Bolland states, are always human, despite taking place in a world of enchantment.<sup>2</sup> This statement is problematic on two counts, particularly when applied to Arianrhod. First, it implies that 'fantasy motifs', or the fantasy genre, create a narrative in which the reader is directed towards a moral judgement of a character's actions. Second, it asserts that these are the actions of an inherently human character. Neither application embraces the complexity of the female characters of the *Mabinogi*. Nor does it acknowledge, in the cases of Rhiannon, Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd, these characters' non-human origins. The curses that Arianrhod places upon her son, Llew, are hardly human actions. Neither do they originate from a strictly human source, as shall be demonstrated in this chapter. This is not to say that Arianrhod is above human law in either text, rather that she is entangled in a contest of wills that is outside human law.

Her outsider status is reinforced repeatedly in the novel. It is initially forced upon her by her brother, as discussed in Chapter III, but Arianrhod continuously makes choices which isolate her further. The novel's treatment of her character avoids the trap later twentieth-century feminist rewritings of myth or fairy tale occasionally fall into, that of turning 'bad' female characters into 'good' ones. This is particularly evident in Barbara Donley's 1987 novella *Arianrhod: A Welsh Myth Retold*, as well as Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*.<sup>3</sup> Both rewritings of medieval

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<sup>2</sup> J. K. Bolland, 'The Structure of the Four Branches of the *Mabinogion*', in '*The Mabinogion*: A Book of Essays', ed. by C. W. Sullivan III (London: Garland Publisher, 1996), pp. 165–96 (p. 175).

<sup>3</sup> In Barbara Donley's *Arianrhod: A Welsh Myth Retold*, Arianrhod never knew she gave birth to Llew; when introduced to him by Gwydion she embraces her lost son and develops a close maternal relationship with Blodeuwedd, who amicably divorces Llew, marries Goronwy and creates an idyllic pastoral community with her mother-in-law. Moreover, I believe there is textual evidence that Donley

literature approach the female antagonists in these texts as misunderstood victims of a misogynist patriarchal power structure. While I do not question the value of critiquing the villainization of female characters in medieval literature, this chapter will argue that Walton's more nuanced characterization of her medieval female antagonist (despite the fact that it was written over fifty years prior to Donley's and Bradley's) anticipates the work of twentieth and twenty-first century fantasy writers such as Angela Carter and Gregory Maguire because its depiction of a morally ambiguous anti-heroine refuses to consign Arianrhod to a reductive 'good' or 'bad' categorization, causing the reader to question his or her assumptions of what attributes make a female character a heroine or a villain.

Walton's *Island of the Mighty* is therefore more aligned with the work of writers such as Margaret Atwood, Carter and Maguire, whose feminist reinterpretations of myth and fairy tale embrace the moral complexities in apparently straightforward narratives.<sup>4</sup> Diane Purkiss argues that the sub-genre of feminist fantasy re-writes can be problematic because inverting the good/bad dichotomy merely reinforces it. In this model, male heroes become villains and female villains

had read *The Island of the Mighty* and her own novella was at least partially inspired by it, as demonstrated in the Introduction above. Her description of Blodeuwedd is remarkably similar to Walton's in two passages compared in the Introduction to this thesis. Morgaine is the main protagonist in Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*. The incest with Arthur is orchestrated by Merlin; Morgaine is reinterpreted by Bradley as an innocent victim, rather than the vindictive sorceress portrayed in *Le Morte Darthur*. Barbara Donley, *Arianrhod: A Welsh Myth Retold* (Oakland: Stone Circle Press, 1987); Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon* (London: Penguin, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Specifically Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, in which the ever-faithful Penelope is given her own narrative to voice a few complaints; Angela Carter's female protagonist in her short story 'The Company of Wolves' who chooses to embrace the Big Bad; and Gregory Maguire's Elphaba, a Wicked Witch of the West whose story takes place prior to the events in L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Maguire's Elphaba is perhaps most closely aligned with Walton's Arianrhod in that Maguire does not create an alternate narrative but, rather, turns the villain into the protagonist, providing motivations for her actions that may give the reader sympathy for her character. Although not a re-telling of a medieval tale or so-called classic fairy tale of the Grimm and Perrault traditions, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, first published in 1900, has long been a part of the American literary mythos. The famous 1939 film adaptation premiered just three years after the first printing of *The Island of the Mighty*. Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2005); Angela Carter, 'The Company of Wolves', in *The Bloody Chamber* (London: Vintage, 1995), pp. 129-39; Gregory Maguire, *Wicked* (London: Headline Review, 2006); L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1987).

become heroines or, as in Donley's *Arianrhod*, no one is a villain and everyone lives happily ever after. According to Purkiss, this technique ignores the literary integrity of the source material, as well as the fact that it originated in a vastly different socio-cultural environment from that of the modern writer and reader. The depiction of women in such texts, Purkiss argues, cannot be judged as 'good' or 'bad' by modern standards because they were not written from a modern perspective.<sup>5</sup> While Purkiss' critique of this sub-genre does not take into account the more dynamic relationship between past and present at work in these texts, a simple inversion of the 'good' and 'bad' characters is indeed problematic. Here is ample support for Sellers's suggestion of a 'balancing act' between following and altering the original narrative.<sup>6</sup>

This balancing act is nowhere more precarious than in the writer's use of language. Irigaray maintains that a subject can only enter language by choosing a side, placing oneself on either end of one of many dichotomies:

Yes/no, within/without, *good/bad*, true/false, being/non-being, along with all the subsequent resulting dichotomies, are still the oppositions ensuring the entry of the subject into language, and they are still subjugated by language to the principle of non-contradiction: yes or no, and not yes and no at the same time, at least on the surface. They are henceforth alternatives measured, tempered, temporalized and determined hierarchically: the contradiction being supposedly always capable of resolution in the good term, the right term, according to the right finality.<sup>7</sup>

The 'good/bad' dichotomy in language does not allow for these terms to coexist. A choice must be made if the subject wishes to enter 'into language', a process which is essential if one is to participate in society. For 'good' to exist, it must be 'determined hierarchically' as 'the right term', relegating 'bad' to the dark corner of language and literature. 'Good' and 'bad' become binary opposites. Gwydion can only be 'good' if

<sup>5</sup> Diane Purkiss, 'Women's Rewriting of Myths', in *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*, ed. by Carolyne Larrington (London: Pandora Press, 1992), pp. 441-57 (pp. 441-2).

<sup>6</sup> Susan Sellers, *Myth and Fairy Tale in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 27-30.

<sup>7</sup> Luce Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 230 ('good/bad' emphasis added).

Arianrhod is ‘bad’. Arguably, inverting that binary—Arianrhod becomes ‘good’ and Gwydion ‘bad’—merely reinforces the hierarchical value system inherent in language. Contradictions are still not allowed to coexist; there is still a ‘right term’ and a ‘right finality’, only now that dominant status belongs to the woman, who adopts the task of ‘measuring’, ‘tempering’ and ‘temporalizing’ a language which does not allow for an indeterminate subject.

Yet in *The Island of the Mighty* Arianrhod is just such a subject. Neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad’, Arianrhod refuses categorization. Such a choice is not typical of many feminist re-writes.<sup>8</sup> Yet it results in a narrative that is simultaneously more innovative and more faithful to its source. A ‘good’ Arianrhod would, firstly, imply that the Arianrhod of the *Mabinogi* is a villain—an insufficient, superficial reading of the text—and secondly would ignore the ‘literariness’ of the text’s source material by treating the original Arianrhod as an incorrectly portrayed victim misunderstood by the redactor, rather than a literary creation of that redactor. According to Thelma J. Shinn, in Walton’s revisioning of the *Mabinogi* ‘[t]he myths of the Mothers [...] did not assert absolutes of good and evil so much as they presented dynamics of human interaction’.<sup>9</sup> Although Arianrhod is portrayed as the antagonist in the battle of wills between herself and Gwydion, Walton’s extradiegetic narrator allows the reader to view her thoughts and feelings, while the heterodiegetic narrator comments on the complex nature of her motivations. The double narrator technique allows the novel to

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<sup>8</sup> Gregory Maguire’s *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister* transforms the conniving siblings of the original tale into shy, impoverished teenagers who attempt to rescue the spoilt Cinderella from the Prince’s life of bourgeois marital bondage. In Owen Sheers’s reinterpretation of the Second Branch, *White Ravens*, Rhiain is told to ‘[g]o back to your brothers now. Help them’ and ‘[b]e more of a man than either your grandfather or your father ever were’. The gendered language in the final lines of Sheers’ novella undermines the ostensibly feminist content because the ‘good/bad’ dichotomy is defined as ‘men/not-men’. Despite the fact that a female character occupies the top place in the hierarchy, that hierarchy still exists and is still patriarchal. Gregory Maguire, *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister* (New York: ReganBooks, 1999); Owen Sheers, *White Ravens* (Bridgend: Seren, 2009), p. 178.

<sup>9</sup> Thelma J. Shinn, *Worlds Within Women: Myth and Mythmaking in Fantastic Literature by Women* (Westport: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1986), p. 27.

adhere to the plot of the *Mabinogi*—the curse contest between Arianrhod and Gwydion plays out in *Island* as it does in the Fourth Branch—while simultaneously using the novel form in order to reveal Arianrhod’s complex motivations. The same technique was applied to the character of Evnissyen in *The Children of Llyr*. Rather than using fantasy fiction motifs to enable the reader to cast a moral judgement upon Arianrhod’s actions, as Bolland would have it, the text uses those same motifs to make such a judgement irrelevant.

### **The Silver Wheel: Merging the Medieval Arianrhod with Her Celtic Original**

The negative treatment of Arianrhod in the *Mabinogi* may have been the result of deliberate interference on the part of a Christian redactor. Green offers such a hypothesis about the ‘inherently harmful’ depiction of the enchantress or witch figure in Welsh mythology in *Celtic Goddesses*.<sup>10</sup> She cites archaeological evidence for the existence of female priests or priestesses in Celtic society, particularly the discovery of female bodies that were found interred at ceremonial sites with objects that indicate they were of high social standing.<sup>11</sup> Ross stresses that although there is a ‘comparable paucity of recognisable mythology in the literature of early Wales some striking instances are preserved which demonstrate the community of cult ideas’, which she argues must have existed at one time among the peoples of Celtic Britain.<sup>12</sup> Both Ross and Green note that the meaning of Arianrhod’s name—Silver Wheel—may indicate her status as a Moon goddess.<sup>13</sup> *The Island of the Mighty* uses this connection when

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<sup>10</sup> Miranda Green, *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), pp. 152-3.

<sup>11</sup> Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, pp. 141-7.

<sup>12</sup> Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (London: Sphere Books, 1974), p. 290.

<sup>13</sup> See Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, p. 290 and Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, pp. 58-60.

referring to her home on Caer Arianrhod as ‘The Castle of the Silver Wheel’.<sup>14</sup> The novel provides a hypothetical account of Arianrhod’s mythological origins:

Arianrhod, whose name meant Silver Wheel, perhaps was worshipped by the common folk as incarnation as well as priestess of the moon, the benevolent sky-lady herself, come down from her pale bright chariot in the heavens to watch more closely over the tides she ruled, and make them gentle to the coasts of men. Such mystic, mighty song and incantation to control or invoke the elements may have been the rites practices [sic] by all the dwellers on those sacred isles around Britain of which Plutarch tells us (Walton, p. 526).

This passage’s use of ‘perhaps’ and ‘may have’ indicates that this is an instance of heterodiegetic narration. This narrative technique enables the novel to establish the divinity of the Arianrhod of the *Mabinogi* while simultaneously distinguishing her from the Arianrhod of the *Tetralogy*.

Although the *Mabinogi* is not explicitly mentioned here, the language is a cue to the reader that this is the anterior narrator speaking; this is a commentary on the pagan religious significance of Arianrhod’s character, not a reported scene. Nowhere in the novel is there any other reference, direct or indirect, to the island dwellers worshipping Arianrhod. The passage serves the purpose of providing a mythological background for Arianrhod, one which establishes her as a powerful individual with a significant role in the fictional pantheon and a magical connection with nature, specifically water. Valente points out that, in the *Mabinogi*, Arianrhod is ‘never named in relation to a man [...] who might be her protector, suggesting her independence from conventional rules of female behaviour’.<sup>15</sup> Such a unique omission distinguishes Arianrhod from the other primary female characters in the Four Branches; even Rhiannon is identified as the daughter of Heveydd Hen. Valente suggests that Caer Aranrhod, being named after its mistress, ‘reminds us of the

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<sup>14</sup> The title of Book II, Chapter 6 is ‘At the Castle of the Silver Wheel’ (Walton, p. 569).

<sup>15</sup> Roberta L. Valente, ‘Gwydion and Aranrhod: Crossing the Borders of Gender in *Math*’ in ‘*The Mabinogion*: A Book of Essays’, ed. by C. W. Sullivan III (London: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 331-45 (p. 336).

powerful goddesses who give their names to the lands with which they are connected'.<sup>16</sup>

Rhŷs went so far as to suggest possible real-life locations for Caer Arianrhod.<sup>17</sup> Walton inserts a footnote, referencing his *Celtic Folklore*, after she locates the Caer in Anglesey. The footnote is in reference to Tyddyn Elen, the Moor of Maelan and Gwennen's Grave, which Walton uses as the 'place of [...] refuge' for Arianrhod's three sisters after the Caer is submerged (Walton, p. 526). This footnote is an instance of foreshadowing, combined with references to Welsh geography and folklore outside of the *Mabinogi*. The sinking of Caer Arianrhod is the climax of Arianrhod's story in *The Island of the Mighty*, but it is not in the Fourth Branch.<sup>18</sup> Walton could have derived this episode from a chapter in *Celtic Folklore* called 'Folklore of the Wells', in which Rhŷs cites a tale of an entire town submerged because a woman uncovers a magical well.<sup>19</sup> This narrative of a woman punished for seeking knowledge is re-enacted by Arianrhod in *The Island of the Mighty*. The novel is again integrating elements from the wider body of Celtic folklore with the *Mabinogi* for the purposes of expanding the story with material that could be considered contemporaneous and thus analogous. The well in both narratives is a site of knowledge; its cover indicates that such knowledge is beyond the purview of the mortal mind, much as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil functions in Christian theology. In the original tale the moral is apparent; women should not seek to know that which is beyond their range of understanding. In the novel, however,

<sup>16</sup> Valente, 'Gwydion and Aranrhod', p. 336. This is Valente's spelling. I will continue to use Walton's spelling, 'Arianrhod', for textual consistency.

<sup>17</sup> Sir John Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx*, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), p. 207.

<sup>18</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 45-61.

<sup>19</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, pp. 207-8, p. 218 and Sir John Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx*, Vol. II (London: Wildwood House Ltd, 1980), p. 401. Ross notes that Celtic mother-goddesses 'have a widespread association with water' because of its association with fertility and fecundity. She cites several examples of cauldrons and goddess iconography found at springs and wells in Buxton, Derbyshire, Yorkshire and multiple locations in Scotland, among other sites across Britain. See Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, p. 57.

Arianrhod is the guardian of the well; she functions as the protector of a magical knowledge which is explicitly female.

Arianrhod's function as the well's guardian was a matrilineal inheritance; she is identified in both texts as a child of Dôn, or 'bi Donn', a designation which Rhŷs identifies with the 'faded ancestral divinity' found in Ireland as 'Danu' or 'Donu'. Dôn is 'the great "she"' of Welsh language, according to Rhŷs.<sup>20</sup> Ross and Green also agree that Dôn was originally a 'divine Mother' or founder goddess in British Celtic society.<sup>21</sup> Ross asserts that '[a]lthough we must resist the temptation to read cult origins into every fantasy of the folktale tellers', there are 'several [examples] from the *Mabinogion* which seem to point convincingly to earlier mythology', of which the Mother goddess Don is one.<sup>22</sup> The Children of Dôn, like the Children of Llyr, are one of the three 'houses' (the third being that of Pwyll) whose stories comprise the events of the *Mabinogi*.<sup>23</sup> The similarity between the Irish Danu or Donu and the Welsh Dôn is one of many indications that, for Rhŷs, the characters in the *Mabinogi* 'are remarkable for their wizardry'.<sup>24</sup> This skill was 'handed down [...] according to a fixed rule of maternal succession', and Rhŷs finds it 'significant' that 'our traditions should connect the potency of ancient wizardry with descent in the female line of succession'.<sup>25</sup> Walton applies Rhŷs' suggestion that wizardry is inherited matrilineally to her characterization of Arianrhod as 'a mistress of magic'. According to Gwydion, 'Don our mother instructed her well in all manner of women's sorceries' (Walton, p. 523). Gwydion does not specify what 'women's sorceries' are, nor how they differ from the sorcery which he practices. Arianrhod's true role as a daughter of Dôn is not

<sup>20</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, pp. 644-5.

<sup>21</sup> See Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, p. 290, p. 293 and p. 453, and Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 64.

<sup>22</sup> Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, p. 453. Ross does not use the *to bach* over the 'o'.

<sup>23</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, pp. 548-9.

<sup>24</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, pp. 636.

<sup>25</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, p. 637.

revealed until the climax of the novel, when she opens the cover of the well she has been charged to guard. It is her misuse of the power entrusted to her by Dôn, the Mother goddess, which results in her death. This incorporation of the folktale recorded in Rhŷs' *Celtic Folklore* reinterprets the unambiguous moral of the original. In the folktale, the woman who uncovers the well in order to seek knowledge not only suffers, she causes the suffering of others. The folkloric motif of the magical well is a symbol of the forbidden, used as a scare tactic to remind women that learning lies outside the boundaries of their circumscribed gender role. In Walton's novel, the plot of the original tale is retained but the meaning ascribed to it is entirely new. Arianrhod's uncovering of the well in the novel demonstrates the consequences of the misuse of power; the gender of the character is irrelevant.

Abuse of magic and its consequences is the theme of *Island*. It is not just women's magic, however, that is abused. Book I tells how Gwydion's misuse of his sorcery leads to Pryderi's death and Goewin's rape. Mâth declares that his actions are a violation of 'love and loyalty and symbol of that which gave you birth'. After pronouncing the brothers' supernatural punishment, he states: 'The flawed blade must back to the forge' (Walton, pp. 508-9). In both texts Gwydion spends three years in the form of, successively, a deer, a pig and a wolf, in order to humble his pride.<sup>26</sup> The punishment is retributive; Gwydion's actions are un-human because they ignored 'right or wrong or the rights of others', yet he is not 'sinless', as an animal is, because he possesses a human consciousness (Walton, p. 511). Even prior to discovery Gwydion acknowledges that the rape of Goewin 'violated' 'the Ancient Harmonies', but he refuses to accept responsibility for enabling Gilvaethwy's violation of Goewin (Walton, p. 477). His three years' punishment humbles him but does not repair the

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<sup>26</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 50-51.

‘flawed blade’ of his ego. This blade is a weapon of manipulation, and Gwydion wields it against Arianrhod until she is backed into a defensive corner.

Walton reincorporates Celtic mythology and folktales into her depiction of Arianrhod in order to challenge the male logic embodied by Gwydion in the original text. In the Fourth Branch men’s magic is misused by Gwydion, but Mâth’s character acts as a positive counterpoint, demonstrating that magic can be used to instruct, and Gwydion eventually learns from his earlier mistakes—his last magical act in the Branch is to restore the dying Llew to his human form. In the curse battle between himself and Arianrhod, Gwydion is the protagonist, seeking to advance his son through the socio-cultural stages of manhood. Conversely, Arianrhod’s magic is antagonistic and self-interested. Gwydion has the final word before her character disappears from the Branch: ‘thou wast ever a malicious woman, and no one ought to support thee’.<sup>27</sup> Arianrhod’s refusal to accept her son makes her unquestionably villainous in the original text; moreover, it isolates her from society. She is without ‘support’ because she has used magic in an attempt to escape her culturally-defined maternal gender role. Such actions cannot be condoned by the medieval redactor of the *Mabinogi*, but Walton utilizes Arianrhod’s pre-Christian Celtic identity in order to critique the ‘good/bad’ dichotomy inherent in the gender economy of the original text.

### **Divine Motherhood: Subverting the Maternal Female**

Arianrhod is never portrayed as a victim. Nor is she an entirely sympathetic character. She is, however, forced into the battle of wits with Gwydion, just as he forced her into giving birth. Bolland points out that Arianrhod’s curses against Llew are all designed to deny his existence, and thereby alleviate the shame she suffers as the result of being

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<sup>27</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 55.

found a ‘false virgin’.<sup>28</sup> In the novel Arianrhod’s reaction upon first seeing her son is one of shock; the description of her emotional response indicates that she was unaware of his existence, reminding the reader that Gwydion used magic and manipulation to force a child upon her. She ‘stared at [Llew] amazedly, as the moon might stare at some outrageous, strayed little star that had somehow left its right, distant place in the heavens and intruded into her own orbit’ (Walton, p. 572). The simile alludes to her moon goddess origins, while the use of the verb ‘intrude’ indicates that Llew’s entrance into her ‘orbit’ is perceived by her as a forceful penetration; in other words, being manipulated into giving birth to Llew is interpreted in the novel as a violation, and the intrusion of him into Arianrhod’s ‘orbit’ reminds her of that violation. Llew’s ‘right’ ‘place’ is ‘distant’ from her: ‘He was the wrong her brother had done her, personified in living flesh and blood’ (Walton, p. 583). This section will demonstrate that Walton departs from the Fourth Branch’s depiction of Arianrhod as a *twyllforwyn* in order to explore the issue of forced childbirth. Rather than interpreting the curse contest as magical proof of Arianrhod’s shame, the novel uses this fantasy motif in the original text to illustrate the conflict between Arianrhod and Gwydion’s contradictory interpretations of female identity.

Arianrhod does not resent her son’s existence as much as she resents Gwydion forcing her to acknowledge it and consequently perform an undesired maternal function. This is confirmed by the extradiegetic narrator’s description of her emotional reaction: ‘Pain marred its anger [...] the pain of a woman who has been tricked where she most trusted’ (Walton, p. 573). The intermediate shift into the present perfect tense in this fragment—‘a woman who *has been* tricked’—places the linguistic emphasis of this statement onto Gwydion’s trickery as the source of

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<sup>28</sup> Bolland, ‘The Structure of the Four Branches of *The Mabinogion*’, pp. 184-5. See Chapter III above for a thorough discussion of the role of the *twyllforwyn* in the Fourth Branch and Walton’s application of it in *The Island of the Mighty*.

Arianrhod's pain and anger, and thus any actions she takes as a result of those emotions. Her first words of recorded speech in this scene are in response to Gwydion, not Llew: 'My sorrow! What has come on you to shame me, and to cherish my shame and keep it by you so long as this? You to betray me, my brother, you of all men on earth!' (Walton, p. 573) This scene provides subtle indications to the reader that Gwydion's actions are the instigation for the events which follow. While not absolving Arianrhod of responsibility for her own actions, the novel provides justification for her emotional reaction.

Although Gwydion is Llew's 'socially acknowledged father', his fosterage of the child is not equivalent to an acknowledgment of paternity.<sup>29</sup> Despite the high probability that Llew is his and Arianrhod's biological son, as discussed in Chapter III, Gwydion never officially claims Llew as his in the original text. The child 'has no pedigree that either parent has seen fit to acknowledge in public'; consequently, he is unable to claim his status as a member of the nobility, or indeed any status. Llew has no legal right to inheritance. He has no legal name.<sup>30</sup> The novel makes this clear prior to Arianrhod and Llew's first meeting:

[A]ccording to the custom of the times, the child's position as Gwydion's heir and son of the royal house of Gwynedd could never be secure unless Arianrhod herself named and thereby acknowledged him. [...] Gwydion's boy may have had one, though we have no record on this point. But the permanent name must be conferred by the mother [...] (Walton, p. 569).

This passage is followed by a footnote referring the reader to Rhŷs and Brynmor-Jones' *The Welsh People*.<sup>31</sup> Aside from Walton's evident understanding of early Welsh inheritance law, by addressing the reader directly and using phrases such as 'thereby acknowledged' and 'no record on this point', the heterodiegetic narrator is

<sup>29</sup> T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 177.

<sup>30</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 178.

<sup>31</sup> John Rhŷs and David Brynmor-Jones, *The Welsh People: Chapters on their Origin, History, and Laws, Language, Literature, and Characteristics* (London : T. F. Unwin, 1913).

adopting pseudo-legal language for the purposes of establishing the factual significance of the issue at play. Llew's naming is assumed, beyond the fictional world of the text, to be an historical fact. Thus Arianrhod's refusal to confer a name upon her son stands in opposition to her legal obligations as his biological mother. 'Naming entails the public recognition of the sex of the child', Charles-Edwards states: 'Since the name will normally include at least a patronymic, if not full bilateral descent, naming typically implies public recognition of the child's kinship'.<sup>32</sup> Kinship, which defines identity, is identified through bilateral descent: that is to say, through the mother as well as the father. According to *The Law of Hywel Dda*:

Whatsoever woman wants to lay a son legally, thus it is for her to lay him: she and the son come to the church where his burial-place is, and she comes as far as the altar and puts her right hand on the altar and the relics, and her left hand on the son's head, and so swears, to God first, and to that altar and to the good relics which are on it, and to the son's baptism, 'that no father created this son in a mother's heart save' (such-and-such man, naming him) 'in my heart'. And so it is right to lay a son to a Welshman.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the obvious Christian trappings of this ritual, the fundamental process and its repercussions are the same as that described in the above passage from *The Island of the Mighty*. The mother must publicly name the child as the son of his father in order for him to have any legal rights. As this process also determines the sex of the child (being clearly identified as the legal 'laying' of a son), Arianrhod is effectively denying Llew gender as well as social status.

That denial might, however, have a more positive mythological significance. As Arianrhod has been identified as a divinity by Celtic scholars, her offspring must also have a divine nature. The very act of denying Llew's rites of passage may indicate that nature. As a god or demi-god, Llew would have to undergo trials in order

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<sup>32</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 175-6.

<sup>33</sup> Dafydd Jenkins, ed. and trans., *The Law of Hywel Dda: Law Texts from Medieval Wales Translated and Edited* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986), p. 132.

to achieve divine manhood.<sup>34</sup> Llew accomplishes this partially through Gwydion's trickery, but primarily through his own skill. In both the *Mabinogi* and the novel he kills a wren with a slingshot and Arianrhod refers to him as Lleu 'Llaw Gyffes', meaning, according to the novel, 'Sure Hand' (Walton, pp. 585-6).<sup>35</sup> According to Green, wren-killing in Ireland was a symbolic folk-custom that signified the transition from winter to spring. If a similar custom was practiced in Wales, this act could be the remnant of a myth of re-creation and fertility.<sup>36</sup> The mythological Arianrhod might have been denying her son a name until he earned it. Although that is not the motivation of the Arianrhod of the novel, she does function as a necessary antagonist for Llew and the plot. Each curse he and Gwydion successfully overcome takes him further along the path of divine manhood. Arianrhod could be seen as either helping or hindering this process, depending on whether one ascribes to Green's or Charles-Edwards' interpretations. The latter believes Arianrhod is trying to 'fix his fate' by preventing him from transitioning from one phase to another in the social-life cycle. This act is called *tynghaf tyngched* and it can only be accomplished by a woman if she is the child's biological mother.<sup>37</sup> This is the perspective adopted by the novel, for Arianrhod reacts to the revelation that her first curse has been overturned with combative anger. Her eyes 'flashed hard and bright as the sapphires in a sword hilt', her 'whole figured sparkled as with fire' and 'her eyes pierced them both like triumphant spears' when she pronounces her second curse (Walton, p. 586).

<sup>34</sup> Dillon and Chadwick identify his name as the Welsh version of Lug or Lugus, a probable Celtic god. See Myles Dillon and Nora Chadwick, *The Celtic Realms* (London: Cardinal, 1973), p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> Davies states that Llew's name means 'the fair-haired one with the skilful hand'. Walton was unsure of the meaning of 'Lleu' and recognizes that the spelling 'Llew' is a rewrite by later scribes. She hypothesizes the connection between 'Lleu' and the Irish *lu*, meaning 'little' (*The Island of the Mighty*, p. 586). Her conjectures are fully supported by Markale in *Women of the Celts*. Despite her linguistic insecurity, she does describe Llew as fair-haired: his 'crisp curls' 'shone like gold' (*The Island of the Mighty*, p. 570). See Sioned Davies, trans., *The Mabinogion* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 243; Jean Markale, *Women of the Celts*, trans. by A. Mygind, C. Hauch and P. Henry (Salisbury: The Anchor Press Ltd, 1975), pp. 293-4.

<sup>36</sup> Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, pp. 58-60.

<sup>37</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 177.

The use of vision as a magical agent is also employed in Walton's characterization of Rhiannon, when she uses her eyes to forcibly control the language of an unnamed male character. The three similes describing Arianrhod's eyes are reminiscent of the violent imagery used to describe Rhiannon's in *Song*. As in that passage, Arianrhod's eyes are personified as weapons. In both instances, however, vision is the weapon used to control language, which is the ultimate source of magical agency. Just as Rhiannon uses her supernatural power to force speech from a male antagonist, Arianrhod commands the power of her sorcery to inflict another curse on Llew. As the novel has already made clear, however, the ultimate target of the curses is Gwydion:

She loved him, and therefore it was a torment to her to hate him. But the child she could hate happily [...] He was not the bond, but the barrier, between herself and her loved one: that which Gwydion had prized more than herself, and therefore the object of her raging jealousy (Walton, p. 583).

In the novel Llew becomes the object upon which Arianrhod displaces her anger towards Gwydion. The curse battle is a magical enactment of their conflict over Arianrhod's female role; by rejecting maternity she rejects Gwydion, who subsequently transfers his love to their child. The child then becomes a 'barrier' between the willing and unwilling parents. By explaining Arianrhod's motives and the feelings behind them, as with Evnissyen, Walton creates a more complex character than the narrative framework and Christian cultural context of the medieval *Mabinogi* allowed for.

Gwydion and Arianrhod embody the conflict between the waning 'gynaecocratic order', in the words of Markale, and the emerging patriarchal state.<sup>38</sup> Their former sexual relationship hinted at in the *Mabinogi* may be reflective of the divine couple which appears in the epigraphy and iconography of Roman Britain.

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<sup>38</sup> Markale, *Women of the Celts*, pp. 138-9.

Bromwich argues that the Four Branches are ‘fundamentally’ stories of ‘old Brittonic gods’.<sup>39</sup> Ross notes that these paired male and female deities, most often located in the south-west, appear to be insular.<sup>40</sup> Green hypothesizes that the similar size of the female and male figures may indicate their equivalent power status.<sup>41</sup> She also points out that the iconography of the female and male paired deities expresses in its symbolism ‘well-being, prosperity and plenty’, which is implicitly the result of their union.<sup>42</sup> Arianrhod and Gwydion’s conflict leads to the inversion of those positives: namely war. It also leads to the symbolic death of the hero, as Llew makes the transition from his human life into an Otherworldly space. If we accept, as Walton does, that Llew was the product of an incestuous sexual relationship, the Fourth Branch may be considered a moralizing incest story. According to Elizabeth Archibald, ‘[f]rom ancient times [these stories] were traditionally used as building blocks for “birth of the hero” legends’.<sup>43</sup>

Walton interweaves medieval Welsh paternity laws and the Celtic paired deity figures in order to depict a character with a complex relationship to her maternal role. There are two obvious choices to make when re-visioning Arianrhod; one can either maintain the ‘bad’ mother portrayal as a marker of fidelity to the original text or invert the dichotomy in an effort to reinterpret the narrative from her perspective. Walton chooses the more difficult third option. The novel retains the actions of the

<sup>39</sup> Rachel Bromwich, ed. and trans., *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961), p. lxxxvii.

<sup>40</sup> A Mercury figure, for example, is accompanied by a native goddess in the south-west. See Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, pp. 271-2.

<sup>41</sup> Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 117.

<sup>42</sup> Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 136.

<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 218. The most well-known product of an incestuous union in mythology is Zeus, whose parents, Cronus and Rhea, were brother and sister. Archibald finds it ‘puzzling’ that ‘sibling incest is not a major motif in medieval literature’, despite its frequent occurrence in early modern ballads and folktales. She hypothesizes that ‘such transgressions [...] were more openly discussed than parent-child incest, and were not regarded as serious moral lapses’. Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, p. 229.

'bad' mother but expands the characterization of Arianrhod in order to provide a reinterpretation of the villain of the Fourth Branch as a more nuanced character. The next section will explore how the novel uses fantasy motifs to revision Arianrhod as a complex anti-heroine who challenges the misogynist stereotyping of her medieval original.

### **Madness, Monstrosity and Mystic Language: Expanding Definitions of Female Identity**

Just as the contest for Excalibur represents a contest for sovereign power over Britain, the second curse Arianrhod places on Llew is one which would deny him the physical representations of his kingly inheritance. The denial of arms, armour and indeed amour is a denial of Llew's transition into manhood.<sup>44</sup> 'For the Celtic warrior, the taking of arms was one of the great "rites of passage" from one stage to another in a life cycle', according to Charles-Edwards.<sup>45</sup> Without them Llew is akin to Arthur without Excalibur. He will not be recognized by society nor have the ability to gain or hold any land he inherits. In mythological terms, the divine hero must earn his weapons. By overcoming the obstacle(s) in his path, Llew demonstrates his 'sanctity and prowess'.<sup>46</sup> Arianrhod has placed herself as one of these obstacles, for the wording of her curse necessitates that she herself physically arm him (Walton, p. 586). In both texts Gwydion engineers this by disguising himself and Llew as bards, which allows them to enter Arianrhod's home, then creating a magical fleet of warships that invade the Caer. Although he succeeds in his object, the construction of his plot is evidence of his myopic focus on himself and his son. It is Arianrhod who points this out: 'You are an evil man Gwydion my brother. Many youths might have

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<sup>44</sup> Bolland, 'The Structure of the Four Branches of *The Mabinogion*', pp. 184-5.

<sup>45</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 178.

<sup>46</sup> Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, pp. 58-60.

got their deaths in the commotion and the uproar that you have made in this Cantrev today' (Walton, p. 608).

Although Gwydion has adopted a maternal role he is not portrayed in the novel as the 'good' mother to Arianrhod's 'bad'. Neither is innocent, neither is entirely without cause for anger. Only Llew is a victim, of both his mother and his father's machinations. Gwydion calls Arianrhod 'the worst of women' in the novel, a similar statement to the one his character makes in the Fourth Branch, but the speech does not carry the same condemning weight in *Island* as it does in the *Mabinogi* due to the altered depiction of both characters (Walton, p. 574). While Mâth agrees that 'an unloving mother violates the Ancient Harmonies' he reminds Gwydion that 'you have made her a mother against her will' (Walton, p. 587). Mâth's statement places equal weight upon the transgressive nature of both Arianrhod and Gwydion's actions, but his character's condemnation of Arianrhod's lack of maternal devotion is undermined by the word '[y]et' and the subsequent reminder of Gwydion's own culpability. The speech's description of the consequence of his actions, which will 'lower the rank and degrade the ancient dignity of woman' (Walton, p. 587), shifts the primary burden of guilt from Arianrhod to Gwydion. This is a radical challenge of the Fourth Branch's unequivocal condemnation of Arianrhod. In the original text her rejection of motherhood makes her 'wicked' and undeserving of social 'support'. While the novel may continue to reinforce the aberrant nature of Arianrhod's lack of maternal love, it states that her 'aversion to maternity was sincere and unalterable' (Walton, p. 575). The use of the word 'sincere' implies that Arianrhod's rejection of Llew is not a self-interested desire to avoid shame, but an 'unalterable' characteristic that she has no control over. To then condemn Arianrhod as 'the worst of women' for

not accepting the unwanted child that Gwydion has forced upon her is, according to Mâth, hypocritical.

The novel asserts that Gwydion is inappropriately conflating ‘mother’ and ‘woman’ and confusing ‘feminine’ with ‘female’. His character acts on the presumption that because Arianrhod is physically capable of giving birth she would therefore want to do so. Although she runs from the infant, he then assumes that, because she is biologically female, her maternal instinct will awaken as soon as she sees the child. It is clear to the reader, however, due to the omniscient third person narration, that Arianrhod does not possess these ‘feminine’ characteristics. Arianrhod is perceived by Gwydion—and even Mâth—as being an unnatural woman because she does not conform to their preconceived notions of natural female behaviour. She is the ‘monster-woman’ of Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*:

Threatening to replace her angelic sister, [the monster-woman] embodies intransigent female autonomy and thus represents both the author’s power to allay ‘his’ anxieties by calling their source bad names (witch, bitch, fiend, monster) and, simultaneously, the mysterious power of the character who refuses to stay in her textually ordained ‘place’ and thus generates a story that ‘gets away’ from its author.<sup>47</sup>

The ‘author’ of the *Mabinogi*—that anonymous, male clerical redactor—attempts to keep Arianrhod in her ‘place’ by assigning her the role of ‘monster-woman’. However, she still has a stronger narrative voice than Branwen, despite the fact that the *Mabinogi* demonizes (or ‘monsterizes’) her in a way that it does not demonize the equally vocal Rhiannon. The women in Rhiannon’s court attempt to demonize her by accusing her of eating her son, but once she undergoes punishment for this offence she is rewarded for her maternal nature with vindication, restoration to her queenly role, and the return of her son.<sup>48</sup> Branwen, who attempts to throw herself into the fire

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<sup>47</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 28.

<sup>48</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 13-18.

after her own son, naturally dies of a broken heart in an act of maternal sacrifice implicitly sanctioned by the medieval text.<sup>49</sup>

But Arianrhod—the mother who would rather not be—is referred to in the *Mabinogi* as a ‘malicious woman’ who deserves to be socially isolated.<sup>50</sup> Try as the redactor might to villainize her character, Arianrhod’s is a story that must be at least partially told in order for the events of the Fourth Branch to make narrative sense. Thus, she is placed in the role of ‘monster-woman’ by a redactor who does not know what to do with her. If her voice must be heard, than at least it can speak as a warning to woman that motherhood is her natural role, and the consequence of deviating from one’s culturally-defined identity is expulsion from that culture. In the twentieth century, in the hands of a female author, Walton gives Arianrhod an identity beyond either ‘malicious woman’ or ‘monster-woman’ and, more importantly, permission to tell her side of the story: a co-existing alternative version of events that is not present in the *Mabinogi*.

It is Arianrhod’s supernatural abilities which allow her to tell that story. Her curses can be seen as a reactive exercise of her only remaining power, rather than simple vengeance. According to Briffault, ‘[t]he curse of a mother was regarded by our barbaric ancestors as the only curse of which the effects could never be avoided’.<sup>51</sup> This is evident in both the original text and the novel, as Gwydion cannot name or arm his son himself. Nor can he force Arianrhod to repeal her curses. He can only use his magic to trick her into the loophole she left open in both cases, that she must name and arm Llew herself. Gwydion uses Arianrhod’s language against her. It is this language, which Irigaray would term ‘mystic’, which gives Arianrhod agency

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<sup>49</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 29.

<sup>50</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 55.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Briffault, *The Mothers: The Matriarchal Theory of Social Origins* (New York: Macmillan, 1931, reprinted Kessinger: No Date), p. 95. All further references are to the Kessinger edition.

in both the *Mabinogi* and the novel. ‘Mystic language’, states Irigaray, ‘is the only place in the history of the West in which woman speaks and acts so publicly’.<sup>52</sup> ‘Mystic language’ comes, according to Irigaray, from an unconscious space behind that which has been ‘logically repressed’, where the ‘Same’ and the ‘other’ are able to merge because ‘either/or’ dichotomies are erased. In order to access this space, however, the woman is ‘torn apart in pain, fear, cries, tears, and blood’ because she must ‘shed’ all ties to her former, male-defined identity. Irigaray’s concept of ‘mystic language’ provides us with a template for analyzing the re-visioned Arianrhod’s use of magic in *The Island of the Mighty*.

Arianrhod’s use of the verbal curse allows her to escape the ‘*one* perspective, *one* point of view, and *one* economy’ in which Gwydion has trapped her.<sup>53</sup> However, Gwydion himself never uses that phallocentric discourse to counter the effects of her curses. The reading implicit in the text is that he cannot. Gwydion needs to get through a verbal loophole, but he uses deception in order to do it. He disguises his and Llew’s appearances, creates supernatural, ephemeral images; he uses visual magic to create elaborate scenarios in which Arianrhod is tricked into acting against her will. Conversely, all Arianrhod has to do is *pronounce* Llew’s *tynghaf tyngched*. Mâth tells Gwydion that he has ‘set aside the ancient laws and used guile and trickery’ to achieve his ends (Walton, p. 558). This is the charge laid at his door by Mâth’s character throughout the novel. Gwydion does not use his magic honestly. Irigaray argues that man only enters into ‘mystic language’ ‘for/by woman’ in order to ‘attend to woman’s madnesses’.<sup>54</sup> This is evident, in both texts, in Gwydion’s emotional reaction to Arianrhod’s curses. He denounces her as ‘malicious’ and ‘wicked’. Her

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<sup>52</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 191-202.

<sup>53</sup> Irigaray, p. 227 (original emphasis).

<sup>54</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, pp. 191-2.

curses are symptomatic of a very specific form of ‘woman’s madness’, the rejection of motherhood. Arianrhod accesses ‘mystic language’ through magic in the novel, and it is in this space that she is able to ‘shed’ this circumscribed female identity, which the original text defines by maternity. In the process of doing this, however, she experiences the ‘pain, fear, cries, tears, and blood’ that Irigaray argues are the necessary consequences of redefining the self.

Although Arianrhod has already begun the pursuit of magical study, Gwydion inadvertently instigates a more violent redefinition than Arianrhod initially intended. Her character argues that ‘[t]his game was of his choosing and beginning, not mine; and am I to blame if I would not let myself be utterly worsted?’ (Walton, p. 659) Gwydion offers Arianrhod the position of Mâth’s footholder while knowing that she will fail the virginity test and be forced to give birth to Llew (Walton, p. 530). Arianrhod’s desire for the position stems from the access she would have to Math’s magic. ‘I would do new things,’ she tells Gwydion:

I would have magic and power and splendour. Why should I suffer to bring forth a child when there are so many new spells to be learned and so much in the world to be enjoyed? In my own mind I will marry the knowledge of the women of Dyved to the knowledge of the women of Gwynedd; and who knows what may be born of that? (Walton, p. 531)

Arianrhod seeks to use her position as Math’s footholder to unite the magic of the Old and New Tribes, as discussed in Chapter III. What she speaks of openly to her brother he refers to as a subversive act; Arianrhod intends ‘to worm out of Math some of the secrets of his power’ (Walton, p. 532). Arianrhod is the daughter of a Mother goddess—is a goddess herself, originally—and the novel evokes her divinity in her character’s expression of a desire for ‘magic and power’. These desires are contrary to those expected of her as a woman in both texts. They are unnatural because they are unfeminine, and thus Gwydion cannot accept them. Moreover, he cannot allow her to

pursue them. He uses ‘guile and trickery’ in an attempt to force Arianrhod into the motherhood that he considers her ‘duty’ as a daughter of Dôn (Walton, p. 523). The novel reveals, however, that Arianrhod was in fact doing her ‘duty’ by Dôn by protecting the well. Her violation of duty was not a rejection of her culturally-circumscribed female role but a gender-neutral abuse of magical power.

According to Briffault, those notions of ‘natural’ male and female difference are ‘the effect, rather than the cause, of that divergence in the avocations of men and women which has taken place in the course of cultural and social development’.<sup>55</sup> Despite the fact that the *Tetralogy* is set in a pre-Christian pagan time, and Arianrhod is described as descending from a goddess, it would be a mistake to assume that she has complete autonomy. Green argues that modern feminist claims to a correlation between female divinity in pagan societies and a strong socio-political position for women in those societies is ‘unsound’ for two reasons.<sup>56</sup> The first is that there is ‘little evidence that divine and human worlds are reflections one of the other in terms of gender’. The second is that ‘evidence for a few powerful female leaders within a particular culture [...] need not correlate with the position of women in general’.<sup>57</sup> Green cites Athens as a prime example; the city named after the goddess Athena did not treat its female citizens with equal reverence.<sup>58</sup> She concludes that men most likely held the position of real power, while noting that ‘Celtic societies were dynamic’ and must have changed over the years.<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, Green acknowledges that the presence of powerful female deities in Celtic society may indicate that their women enjoyed a higher socio-political standing than their Mediterranean sisters.<sup>60</sup> In

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<sup>55</sup> Briffault, *The Mothers*, p. 159.

<sup>56</sup> Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 15.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 15.

<sup>59</sup> Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 24.

<sup>60</sup> Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 27.

*Conquest, Coexistence and Change: Wales 1063-1415*, R. R. Davies makes the intriguing observation that ‘[i]t is in the literature [of the time] [...] that we see that the judicial inferiority of women could easily be lost sight of in the shadow of their personal masterfulness’. He cites as evidence Rhiannon’s relationship with Pwyll in the *Mabinogi*.<sup>61</sup>

Arianrhod is also an example of a woman of ‘personal masterfulness’ who is still judicially inferior. Armitt observes that fantastic contemporary women’s fiction juxtaposes historic sources and a contemporary standpoint; this confluence of past, present and future challenges the view that feminism’s goals have been achieved.<sup>62</sup> Walton’s depiction of Arianrhod offers such a challenge. The extradiegetic narrator interprets the Arianrhod of the *Mabinogi* as a self-centred individual and makes that clear in the narration: ‘any deed [she would do] weighed light as thistledown so long as it did not threaten her with consequences’ (Walton, p. 536). The Arianrhod of the novel retains her selfish characterization from the *Mabinogi*, but Gwydion is revealed as equally flawed:

The truth is that the weakness of both of them was to think cleverness supreme above all laws, which were only made for it to outwit. And that tameless mental activity was the secret of their endless attraction for each other, and also of their endless skirmishing; for they could rest nowhere and in nothing, but must forever be trying to outwit even each other (Walton, p. 536).

This is where the novel juxtaposes a modern standpoint with its historic source. A twentieth-century perspective recognizes that Arianrhod is a victim first without using that victimhood to excuse her later actions. Arianrhod takes her own vengeance. Her battle with Gwydion may symbolize a power struggle between a god and goddess such as the paired deities analyzed by Ross and Green. The novel uses that

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<sup>61</sup> R. R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence and Change: Wales 1063-1415* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 129.

<sup>62</sup> Lucie Armitt, *Contemporary Women’s Fiction and the Fantastic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), p. 12.

mythological contest as a metaphor for a battle between conflicting ideas of female identity: ‘There is no suspicion and no feud so old as that between the sexes, so ancient in its beginning or more remote in the time of its end’, comments the heterodiegetic narrator (Walton, p. 551). This narrator describes an ‘eternal war between these two opposites [men and women]’, and meditates on that war:

[I]t is a strange thing that the most intimate relations of our lives, those which hold our holiest and deepest loves, should also always be innate antagonisms, individual combats in the universal war that is as old as sex and consciousness and the reproduction of life. Yet so it shall be until the day when the world is healed and the sundered halves are welded, and consciousness is more clearly and truly conscious than ever, yet has fused and melted into One (Walton, pp. 560-1).

This passage has no narrative or exegetical relevance. It is pure commentary, yet it is not commenting directly on either the characters or the even the *Mabinogi*. Walton is using the battle of wits of Arianrhod and Gwydion in the medieval text to illustrate the conflict between male and female definitions of gender identity and gender roles, and to argue that such a conflict will be ‘eternally’ relevant as long as two distinct genders exist. The novel’s conclusion, that this gender ‘war’ will only end when men and women become metaphorically and physically ‘One’, is reminiscent of Irigaray’s assertion that the pursuit of ‘mystic language’ will ultimately result in a ‘lose of self-identity except for a hint of an imprint that each keeps in order the better to intertwine in a union already, finally, at hand’.<sup>63</sup> Both authors even use the same word, ‘melt’, to describe this process, indicating that they view gender union as the result of an alteration and merging of male and female identities that will permanently eradicate dichotomies. Irigaray refers to this as a ‘dissolution of difference’.<sup>64</sup> The novel refuses to engage with the reductive dichotomies of the original text. Rather than interpreting the relationship between Arianrhod and Gwydion as a supernatural battle between the

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<sup>63</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, p. 196.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

'good' father and the 'bad' mother, Walton re-visioned it as an example of the consequences of defining gender as 'either/or'. The narrative arc of Arianrhod and Gwydion enacts one of the primary themes of the *Tetralogy*, which is that these dichotomies are at the foundation of the patriarchal gender economy.

### **'What the Folk Call Wickedness': Deviating from the Normative Function**

*The Island of the Mighty* combines myth, folklore and a modern feminist perspective in order to re-vision the narrative of the Fourth Branch as a critique of the villainization of women who act outside of their circumscribed gender role. In 'The Laugh of the Medusa' Cixous warns that:

writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine—economy; that is the locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that's frightening since it's often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction.<sup>65</sup>

She argues that 'writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures'.<sup>66</sup> Walton employs the techniques of the fantasy novel in order to provide a springboard for a dialogue about the possibility of transforming the 'social and cultural structures' that delimit gender identity. By relocating the narrative to a pre-Christian past, the novel is able to incorporate elements of what it interprets as a more gender-equal Celtic pantheon. Reintegrating the 'Goddess of the Silver Wheel' into its depiction of Arianrhod enables Walton to critique Arianrhod's characterization in the original text while respecting the integrity of the narrative. In its re-writing of the Fourth Branch, the novel uses magic to reveal

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<sup>65</sup> Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, revised edn, ed. by Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), pp. 347-62 (p. 350).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid* (original emphasis).

what the original text concealed: the repression of a deviant female voice. ‘Tradition and consensus go together’ in the fairy tale, Bacchilega states, ‘and it is their dynamic interaction with an “innovative” or subversive impulse that constitutes folk narratives. [...] the tale of magic produces wonder precisely through its seductively concealed exploitation of the conflict between its *normative* function [...] and its *subversive* wonder’.<sup>67</sup> As exemplified by its handling of Arianrhod and Gwydion’s battle of wits, the *Tetralogy* exploits the supernatural conflicts in the *Mabinogi* in order to subvert the ‘normative’ patriarchal ‘function’ of the original text.

This is nowhere more apparent than in its depiction of Arianrhod’s death, a scene which is not in the *Mabinogi*. The novel provides narrative closure for her character, which the Fourth Branch does not, by incorporating the legend of the sunken castle of Arianrhod from Rhŷs’ *Celtic Folklore*. This has the added effect of reinforcing her mythological origins and primary motivations. In the novel, Arianrhod orchestrates the murder of her other unwanted son, Dylan, upon receiving news of Llew’s presumed death. After Dylan’s death, she questions her motivations: ‘was it herself that she had wished to justify [to] herself? Or Llew that she had wished, in some thwart way, to avenge?’ (Walton, p. 671) Neither narrator answers these questions:

Change had laid its grip on both her and Gwydion. They could never be still and follow old established ways. They must forever move and explore and discover, and somehow in that moving she had become confused and lost direction and firm footing—had stranded herself upon this rock of nothingness. How had it happened? Why had it happened? She did not know. She refused to know (Walton, p. 670).

Arianrhod is motivated by an anger that, while initially justified, has been ‘perverted’ by her quest for revenge: ‘Her breasts that had never given suck burned as though

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<sup>67</sup> Cristina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), p. 7 (original emphasis).

filled with bitter fire. All the love that she had never let herself feel curdled within her, soured and perverted: a demon that she must fly from' (Walton, pp. 671-2). The 'bitter fire' that 'curdles' and 'sours' like milk within Arianrhod's breasts is a metaphor for her unwanted, enforced maternity, and the emotional journey her character undergoes as a result. Although 'Gwydion was the spider that had woven the web' of her destruction, Arianrhod has too much power to be a victim, and her valid grievance against Gwydion prevents her from being a villain (Walton, p. 671). Her mental confusion, illustrated by the use of repetitious phrasing and questions in the above passage of free indirect discourse, reinforces her character's ambiguity. The 'malicious' woman of the Fourth Branch has been transformed into a 'confused' and 'lost' individual driven by the desire to 'move and explore and discover'.

Her final grasp at power is what leads to her death. Her sisters warn her that 'now you have broken all the laws that were ever laid on women, and you will break the greatest that were ever laid on magicians also. [...] You have lit a fire in yourself that it will take all the waters of the sea to put out' (Walton, p. 675). Arianrhod is still a transgressive character in the novel, just as Gwydion is. Both grasp after power to the detriment of themselves and others. Yet the negative aspects of Gwydion's character are mitigated by his role as mother and father to Llew in the Fourth Branch, while its depiction of Arianrhod lacks any sympathetic nuance. In the novel, however, Arianrhod's antagonistic actions towards her children are interpreted as equally *self-destructive*. Unlike the redactor of the *Mabinogi*, neither of the novel's narrators cast judgement on her wish to remain childless. Arianrhod is fully aware that she has 'failed' as a mother, and of how her actions will be socially perceived: 'I have cast my lot with what the folk call wickedness, so I must be successful in wickedness: not a

failure in all' (Walton, p. 677). This statement subtly comments on her depiction in the original text as the 'malicious' witch, undeserving of social 'support'.

Opening the well she has been charged with guarding is another transgressive act Arianrhod undertakes, and one that is common in Celtic folklore. A woman 'intruding on sacred ground in quest of wisdom and inspiration [that] was not permitted their sex: certain sources of knowledge [...] were reserved for men alone'.<sup>68</sup> The novel does not take this gender-specific view of Arianrhod's act. It makes her the keeper of the well, a position of power that contrasts with that held by the other women in this folkloric trope. Arianrhod's actions are in violation of the trust Don placed in her and a transgression of the boundary between this and the Otherworld. Water in the Celtic universe was a 'liminal' space: a doorway between worlds.<sup>69</sup> Islands were also considered 'liminal' spaces.<sup>70</sup> Caer Arianrhod, an island with a well in the centre of it, combines two liminal spaces in order to increase its supernatural importance. The well is clearly a gateway between the human and Otherworlds. When Arianrhod violates this boundary by opening it, a 'great jet of water in the pit shrieked and writhed as it forced its way up, like some monstrous birth, through the rock walls of the island's breaking heart' (Walton, p. 678). This simile personifies the island as Arianrhod and the water—over which, as a moon goddess, she ostensibly has control—is the child who destroys her. Although she initially attempts to escape, the flood consumes her: 'She knew her doom and the cause of her doom. She had broken the first of laws, that ancient law upon which the being of the race depends: that a woman shall guard, not take, the lives of the children she has borne' (Walton, p. 679). Although the novel never condemns Arianrhod for her 'natural' 'aversion' to

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<sup>68</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, pp. 392-3.

<sup>69</sup> Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 90. This is evident in the 'early vernacular mythic tradition', Green states.

<sup>70</sup> Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 142.

maternity, it gives her a death that is both a form of justice and a bodily enactment of her psychological destruction. In a metaphoric sense, Arianrhod dies in childbirth.

*The Island of the Mighty* uses a confluence of fantasy motifs, Celtic myth and folklore in order to critique the reductive patriarchal gender economy of the Fourth Branch. Walton's re-visioned Arianrhod challenges both the medieval text and the rehabilitated villains of other feminist fantasy fiction re-visionings by offering an alternative that refuses to engage in the 'good/bad' dichotomy. Arianrhod retains the transgressive identity defined by the original redactor, but in the novel that transgression evolves beyond the limited patriarchal socio-cultural context in which that redactor worked. Walton uses the magical elements of the *Mabinogi*, in combination with the pre-Christian Celtic goddess figure, to critique the medieval 'monster' Arianrhod. Gilbert and Gubar write that 'assertiveness, aggressiveness—all characteristics of a male life of "significant action"—are "monstrous" in women precisely because "unfeminine"'.<sup>71</sup> Arianrhod's aggressive assertion of her right *not* to be a mother is interpreted by the medieval redactor as 'unfeminine' and therefore 'monstrous'. In the novel, however, those qualities are seen as markers of her divine magical inheritance: her connection with the Mother goddess. It is her abuse of that inheritance which leads to her death, not an 'unfeminine' 'monstrosity' which is, in the novel, merely the self-interested misperception of Gwydion. In the final chapter of this thesis I will examine the novel's evaluation of Gwydion's paternal/maternal obsession and its re-evaluation of another 'unfeminine' 'monster-woman': Blodeuwedd.

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<sup>71</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 28.



## Chapter VII From Flowers to Feathers: Bloduewedd's Human Journey

### The Final *Tynghaf Tynged*: Medieval and Mythological Explanations

Before her death, Arianrhod swears a final destiny on her son. After Gwydion has tricked her into arming Llew, she glances at him with ‘no mother’s look’ and pronounces his *tynghaf tynged*: ‘Never shall his side touch a woman’s of the race that now dwells upon this earth’ (Walton, p. 608). The wording in the *Mabinogi* differs slightly yet significantly: ‘he shall never have a wife of the race that now inhabits this earth’.<sup>1</sup> The novel retains the latter half of the curse, which emphasizes that Arianrhod has learned from Gwydion’s ability to slither through her verbal loopholes. The alteration of the first is consistent with the pre-Christian world of the novel, in which, as discussed in Chapter I, a marriage is formed when a man and woman have sex, and such a marriage does not require the monogamy that Western religious and/or civil ceremonies do at present. The word ‘wife’ in this context is therefore inappropriate. Rather, by preventing Llew’s side from ever touching another woman’s, Arianrhod is condemning him to a life of celibacy and, consequentially, a life without offspring.

Arianrhod failed in denying him a name and arms; Llew now has a legal identity, the right to inherit and the right to win honour and fortune for himself, but without the ability to procreate, he cannot pass on his inheritance or his name. The *Mabinogi* and *The Island of the Mighty* effectively record the same curse despite the difference in phrasing. In the Christian world of the *Mabinogi*, Llew would need a wife who could give birth to legitimate heirs. In the pagan world of *The Island of the Mighty* any sons Llew acknowledges, either by rearing or fostering them, will inherit.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lady Charlotte Guest, trans., *The Mabinogion* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 177.

Bolland opines that this final curse in the *Mabinogi* is, like the previous two, designed to deny Llew's existence and thus alleviate Arianrhod's shame. Any children of Llew's would perpetuate that shame across future generations.<sup>3</sup> While Bolland's argument is culturally and psychologically apt, Green and Markale offer an additional perspective which takes the Celtic pagan origins of these characters into account. Green integrates the third curse into her theory of Llew as a divine being who needs to undergo classic heroic trials. As a god, she argues, he would need an equally supernatural wife. A mortal woman would be an unequal partner.<sup>4</sup> Markale is in agreement. As the son of a Mother goddess, Llew 'cannot have a wife from the race of man because he is their integral representative'.<sup>5</sup> When viewed from this perspective, Arianrhod's refusal to allow Llew a mortal partner could be seen as an implicit confirmation of his identity as her son, rather than, as Bolland argues, an attempt to deny it. Although approached from slightly different angles, Green and Markale are making essentially the same point. Arianrhod's curse is a tautology. The curse merely reiterates what his birth necessitates.

Despite this neat mythological logic, both the *Mabinogi* and *The Island of the Mighty* treat the curse as an insuperable obstacle. It is important to remember that Arianrhod's supernatural identity is not explicit in the original text, and the novel treats it as an ancient lineage. Arianrhod and Llew are mortal beings living in a human world. Single goddesses are not readily available. Arianrhod's curse prevents Llew from union with any woman in this world. In order to circumvent this, Gwydion must

<sup>3</sup> J. K. Bolland, 'The Structure of the Four Branches of *The Mabinogion*', in '*The Mabinogion*: A Book of Essays', ed. by C. W. Sullivan III (London: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 165-96 (pp. 184-5).

<sup>4</sup> Miranda Green, *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> Jean Markale, *Women of the Celts*, trans. by A. Mygind, C. Hauch and P. Henry (Salisbury: The Anchor Press Ltd, 1995), p. 151. An obvious comparison is with Zeus, king of the Greek pantheon. Despite his many affairs with mortal women he never marries them. His wife is the goddess Hera. Markale makes analogies with Aphrodite and Adonis as well as Mary and Jesus, although the latter comparison is questionable.

take recourse in the only loophole Arianrhod has left him. He must create a woman not of this world.

The Fourth Branch reads both Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd as villains because neither will submit to a patriarchally-defined gender role. This chapter will demonstrate that, as with her depiction of Arianrhod, Walton uses fantasy motifs, Celtic mythology and contemporaneous historic texts to challenge the villainization of Blodeuwedd, expanding her characterization beyond the good/bad dichotomy of the original text. Blodeuwedd's human creation at the hands of men prevents her from developing an identity independent of that which has been assigned to her by her male creators, Mâth and Gwydion. In the following section I will examine the technique Walton uses to create a narrative voice for Blodeuwedd that disrupts the '*one [male] perspective*' of the Fourth Branch.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Creature Speaks: Gender Reassignment of the *phoné***

*Not of mother and father,  
When I was made  
Did my creator create me.  
Of nine-formed faculties,  
Of the fruit of fruits,  
Of the fruit of the primordial God,  
Of primroses and blossoms of the hill,  
Of the flowers of trees and shrubs.  
Of earth, of an earthly course,  
When I was formed.  
Of the flower of nettles,  
Of the water of the ninth wave.  
I was enchanted by Math,  
Before I became immortal;  
I was enchanted by Gwydion  
The great Purifier of the Brython...  
I was enchanted by the sage  
Of sages, in the primitive world.*

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<sup>6</sup> Luce Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 228.

Walton quotes the above as a preface to Book Three of *The Island of the Mighty*, citing it as ‘*Book of Taliessin VIII, Skene’s Four Ancient Books of Wales*’ (Walton, p. 609).<sup>7</sup> The first volume of Skene’s two-volume work is an amalgamation of history, criticism and English translations of an extensive selection from these major works of Welsh medieval literature, as the title implies. Chapters range in topic from early Welsh history to Celtic dialects, topography, and criticism of the texts.<sup>8</sup> While the extent to which Walton relied on Skene as an historical or critical source is unclear, the way in which she uses the poetry in the novel is significant. As with her inclusion of material from the *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, Walton has identified connective threads between these important works of Welsh medieval literature and drawn them together in a unique way. By taking this selection from ‘The Battle of Godeu’ out of context and placing it as the preface to Book Three of *The Island of the Mighty*, entitled ‘The Loves of Blodeuwedd’, the ‘I’ of the poem is no longer associated with Taliessin. The reader may now infer that it is Blodeuwedd herself telling the story of her creation.

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<sup>7</sup> The selection is a verbatim reproduction of ll. 150-65 (prior to the ellipsis) of a poem entitled ‘The Battle of Godeu’, which can be found in its entirety in Walton’s source: Skene’s *The Four Ancient Books of Wales: Containing the Cymric Poems Attributed to the Bards of the Sixth Century*, Vol. I (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1868), pp. 276-84. Marged Haycock’s 2007 translation, in her edited volume, *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliessin*, is entitled ‘Kat Godeu’, and is at slight variance with Skene’s: ‘It was not from a mother and a father/that I was made,/and my creation was created for me/from nine forms of consistency:/from fruit, from fruits,/from God’s fruit in the beginning;/from primroses and flowers,/from the blossom of trees and shrubs,/from earth, from the sod/was I made,/from nettle blossom,/from the ninth wave’s water./Math created me/before I was completed./Gwydion fashioned me--/great enchantment wrought by a magic staff;/[...]The wisdom of sages fashioned me/before the world [was made],/when I had being,/when the extent of the world was [still] small’. Marged Haycock, trans., *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliessin* (Aberystwyth: CMCS Publications), pp. 181-3 (ll. 151-77). Haycock describes this passage as ‘Microcosmic Taliessin’s creation by Math, Gwydion and others’ (p. 167). However, the narrative and descriptive similarities between this passage and Blodeuwedd’s creation, as described in the *Mabinogi*, are clear. The same men whom Taliessin credits with his creation also formed Blodeuwedd. See Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 55 and Haycock, p. 168. An interesting difference between the Skene and Haycock translations is found in a comparison of lines 152 (Skene) and 153 (Haycock). Skene’s reads: ‘Did my creator create me’, while Haycock’s reads: ‘and my creation was created for me’. Skene’s line is narratively straightforward, while Haycock’s carries implications of Taliessin’s powerlessness to determine his own creation. This possible interpretation echoes *The Island of the Mighty*’s re-visioning of the Fourth Branch.

<sup>8</sup> Volume Two consists entirely of selections from the ‘Four Ancient Books’ in Welsh with translator’s notes.

The novel gives her voice primacy. It has also taken a male ‘I’ and reassigned it to a female. In this instance, Walton is doing precisely what Purkiss argues against: ‘changing the narrative, changing the position of the speaker, changing the spaces available for identification’.<sup>9</sup> In light of Purkiss’s argument, by giving Taliesin’s words to Blodeuwedd the novel is not uncovering the silent feminine. It is merely taking part in the repetitive cycle of the text’s patriarchal discourse.

In *To Speak is Never Neutral*, Irigaray declares that language is not gender neutral and neither, therefore, is writing.<sup>10</sup> Based on this determination, we are reminded of Irigaray’s previously quoted series of questions:

What if that other speaking nature acceded to (her own) language? What if that ‘subjectum’ heretofore non-subjectifiable unveiled herself as the source of another logic? In what ways would the status of the subject and of discourse be disrupted?<sup>11</sup>

By changing the gender identification of the speaker of the poem, the novel is not strictly unveiling Blodeuwedd as ‘the source of *another* logic’. The language she accedes to is not ‘her own’; it is man’s. Yet, bearing in mind that utterance and enunciation are determined by the *phoné*, if the gender of that voice is reassigned, one can logically expect that some degree of disruption of ‘the status of the subject and of discourse’ will result.

The question then becomes: to what extent are the status of the subject and discourse disrupted, and what is the effect of that disruption on the narrative? Irigaray wonders: ‘would a crisis in truth—or in being—result, if a being, who had always submitted to the laws of predication determined by man alone, actually spoke up?’<sup>12</sup> The inversion of gender roles caused by reassigning Taliesin’s words to

<sup>9</sup> Diane Purkiss, ‘Women’s Rewriting of Myths’, in *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*, ed. by Carolyne Larrington (London: Pandora Press, 1992), pp. 441–57 (p. 444).

<sup>10</sup> Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral*, p. 140.

<sup>11</sup> Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral*, pp. 232–3.

<sup>12</sup> Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral*, p. 232.

Blodeuwedd—allowing her to be the first to speak—instigates a disruption in the discourse of the narrative which results in a crisis both of truth and being, the moral ‘truth’ expressed in the medieval text and the character of Blodeuwedd.<sup>13</sup> Blodeuwedd is an unnatural creature who turns, in her loneliness, against those who created her. The climax of both texts centres on her affair and subsequent attempt to aid her lover in murdering her husband. As in the rest of the *Tetralogy*, the plot of the novel adheres to that of the Fourth Branch. Because of this fidelity to the source material, the shift in narrative focus from Llew and Gwydion to Blodeuwedd radically alters the reader’s perceptions of all three characters. All of the women in the *Tetralogy* dance between the roles of victim and villain. Their power is intrinsically connected to their punishments. In no other female character are these conflicting identities more boldly drawn, and more resonant of the protean identity of the modern Western woman, than in Blodeuwedd.

### **Plants and Puppets: Unhuman Nature<sup>14</sup>**

Although the female characters in Celtic myth often appear to be ‘passive’, as Green states:

their power lies in their role as facilitators or enablers; they are catalysts [...] whose very existence causes momentous occurrences which are crucial to the development of the myths.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, they may be regarded as ‘archetypes, whose specific characters may not be as important as their symbolic roles’.<sup>16</sup> This is certainly true for every woman in the

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<sup>13</sup> The theme of the story is similar to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*: a warning against taking the power of creation into man’s incapable hands. Thelma J. Shinn also briefly points out this similarity in *Worlds Within Women*, making an analogous comparison between the male mothers Dr. Frankenstein and Gwydion, but she does not make the same comparison between the characters of Frankenstein’s Monster and Blodeuwedd. See Thelma J. Shinn, *Worlds Within Women: Myth and Mythmaking in Fantastic Literature by Women* (Westport: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1986), p. 24.

<sup>14</sup> Thanks to Alun Thomas, B. A., M. A., for the second half of this title.

<sup>15</sup> Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 46.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Four Branches; Rhiannon and Arianrhod in particular are archetypes of varying forms of Mother goddesses whose supernatural (i.e., unhuman) origins are intimately connected with their abilities to act as a catalyst, facilitator or enabler. Blodeuwedd's lack of a specific identification with the Mother goddess will be shown to be directly related to her lack of human identity. She does, however, have her own unnatural origin, and it is that origin which initially gives her power and ultimately results in her human destruction. Blodeuwedd is a catalyst because she is the epitome of this unhuman, unnatural woman. This woman's irruption into the human world creates a disruption which results in violence, destruction and her necessary return to the natural world.<sup>17</sup>

Blodeuwedd is created from flowers; she is not discovered, fully-formed, inhabiting a local body of water. However, her story does share some unique characteristics with that of the Lady of Llyn y Fan Fach.<sup>18</sup> Both women's identities are directly connected to an element of the natural world. Both leave that world, willingly or unwillingly, to become wives. Both of their human lives are marked by violence and that violence is the direct cause of their return to nature. Blodeuwedd and the Lady of Llyn y Fan Fach are aberrant; their existence in the human world is a disruption of the balance between human and supernatural existence. While the

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<sup>17</sup> See Sir John Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx*, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), pp. 1-74, and Hilda Vaughan, *Iron and Gold*, new edn, ed by Jane Aaron (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2002). *Iron and Gold* is a novel which re-tells the tale of the Lady of Llyn y Fan Fach (roughly translated: the lady of the lake of the small beacon hill) and contains a version of the original in the appendix ('The Lady of Llyn y Fan Fach', from John Williams, ed., *The Physicians of Myddfai*, pp. 206-14). Chapter One of *Celtic Folklore* discusses various legends of women who inhabit lakes. These are the origins of the Arthurian Viviane/Nimue/Niniane: the supernatural woman who emerges from the lake to grant Excalibur to Arthur, and to whom he must return the sword when his reign is over.

<sup>18</sup> The plot is as follows: A farmer discovers the lady while herding his cattle near her lake. After three unsuccessful attempts to woo her, she finally consents to be his bride and moves with him to his farmhouse, bringing with her a magnificent herd of cattle, thus greatly increasing the farmer's wealth. She tells him that she will forsake immortality for a life with him so long as he does not strike her with iron three times without cause. Unfortunately, over the course of their years together, he does. When the third strike occurs, she returns to the lake, leaving behind their children but taking her cattle with her. The farmer, who has now lost the wealth which came from the cattle, searches for her to no avail. See John Williams, ed., 'The Lady of Llyn y Fan Fach', in *The Physicians of Myddfai*, pp. 206-14.

unnatural woman initially brings with her great beauty and/or great wealth, attempting to possess her has violent consequences. According to the medieval Welsh literature she cannot be possessed in the way a human woman can. There are echoes of this characteristic in Rhiannon and Arianrhod, whose connection to the Mother goddess makes them incapable of being controlled or victimized by their male counterparts. Blodeuwedd's natural origins resonate with the sovereignty goddess, and C. W. Sullivan opines that 'the sundering of Lleu and Blodeuedd's marriage is a negation or rejection' of the ritual union between the lord and the land.<sup>19</sup> The fact that their union is infertile emphasizes this 'negation or rejection'. Yet Sullivan's argument begs the question: why does Llew and Blodeuwedd's union fail when the other sovereignty marriage in the *Mabinogi*—that of Pwyll and Rhiannon—yields a bountiful kingdom and a male heir?

Rhiannon and Blodeuwedd are both supernatural, but, unlike the latter, Rhiannon's identity as a woman is never in doubt in the *Mabinogi*. Her identification with a Mother goddess makes her essentially female. Conversely, Blodeuwedd is neither woman nor human. Despite the stereotypically symbolic female fertility which her floral make-up implies, flowers are monoecious: they have both female and male sexual organs.<sup>20</sup> The substance used to give her physical form is biologically both male and female. Her human femaleness is a creation of Gwydion's: a mirage, just like his other solutions to Arianrhod's curses. In the novel Llew recognizes this. When Gwydion tells him they have made him a wife, he exclaims: 'But she is an illusion!' Gwydion responds by saying that 'She is a reality. Whatever she was when first we shaped her semblance, she has her own life now. She is no longer an illusion; she is a maid for you to woo' (Walton, p. 618). This is not entirely true, however.

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<sup>19</sup> C. W. Sullivan III, 'Inheritance and Lordship in Math', in '*The Mabinogi*: A Book of Essays', ed. by C. W. Sullivan III (London: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 347-66 (p. 360).

<sup>20</sup> Thanks to Rebecca Verina Kaye, BSc, for providing botanical terminology.

Blodeuwedd may be a physical reality, but she does not have an autonomous life, nor is she a maid for Llew to woo. He has no need to court her because she was created for no other purpose than to be his wife. Having ‘a life of one’s own’ implies autonomy; Blodeuwedd has none. She is, to a greater extent than Penardim or even Branwen, ‘a commodity’.<sup>21</sup> She was manufactured by men, for a man, to produce more men, and she initially appears to accept her assigned role willingly.

It is Goewin, Mâth’s wife, who recognizes that Blodeuwedd lacks identity, and anticipates that this will have negative consequences:

[I]t seemed to the Queen that this very passive acceptance of all that came to her proved her still but a puppet to do Gwydion’s will and Mâth’s, animated only by instincts they had planted within her; that there were blanks in her mind and feelings as though she had never been completely ensouled and was no individual, only one of those fair images that poets weave, whose hearts and minds move only at their creator’s will. [...] she wondered what would happen if ever a will should waken within that fair, half-human thing that enchantments had evoked from the unknown void (Walton, p. 625).

That Blodeuwedd might have an incomplete soul, and might not, therefore, be entirely human, is supported by Green, who believes that Gwydion is unable to ‘ensoul’ her.<sup>22</sup> As a magical creation, Blodeuwedd is ‘unstable’, ‘rootless, treacherous and without moral values’, according to Green. She is still from the Otherworld and does not belong on earth.<sup>23</sup> However, in her book, *Animals in Celtic Life and Myth*, Green asserts that ‘[e]very tree, mountain, rock and spring possessed its own spirit or numen’.<sup>24</sup> The redactor of the Fourth Branch writes that Blodeuwedd was created from ‘the blossoms of the oak [...] broom [...] and [...] meadowsweet’,<sup>25</sup> flowers which Green observes bloom at different times of year in different habitats in

<sup>21</sup> Luce Irigaray, ‘This Sex Which is not One’, in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, revised edn, ed. by Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), pp. 363-9 (p. 368).

<sup>22</sup> Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 60.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Miranda Green, *Animals in Celtic Life and Myth* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 58.

Britain.<sup>26</sup> If all living things—even rocks—had spirits in Celtic mythology, then surely flowers possessed their own spirit. The heterodiegetic narrator in the novel hypothesizes that ‘they may have needed those flowers to form the link of substance wherewith to anchor the immaterial to the fleshly world we know’ (Walton, p. 616). The inference, then, in the novel’s Celtic-inspired mythology is that Blodeuwedd does have a soul. Goewin’s reference to her as a ‘half-human thing’ indicates her recognition of Blodeuwedd’s uncanny nature. Yet that uncanniness is not caused by an incomplete soul, but by the uneasy coexistence of an unhuman soul in a human body. Llew senses this as well. He asks how she can have a life of her own ‘when she is not human?’ Gwydion’s response indicates his lack of control over his own creation: ‘Once she may have been of the race of men [...] Who knows?’ His son’s questions cause him to wonder ‘whence it had come and what manner of being it might be, the soul that he and Mâth had drawn from the upper winds to inhabit the form they had fashioned’ (Walton, p. 618).

Blodeuwedd’s soul is equated with her identity, and its ambiguity is the uncanny mystery at the heart of the text. If her soul is derived from her floral origin, then Irigaray’s analogy between woman’s identity and plant identification in *Speculum of the Other Woman* is strikingly apt here. She compares man’s need to categorize woman as akin to the assigning of genus and species to plants:

The plant may indeed conform to her own purpose, but an other has to certify this. She may be fully herself and in herself, but an other has to declare that this is the case. Thus, her development is subject to definitions coming from an other. [...] *She* would have no say in her own promotion into being.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, despite the fact that Blodeuwedd had an identity prior to her human incarnation, now that she has been forcibly ‘promoted into being’ human, she must look to those

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<sup>26</sup> Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 60.

<sup>27</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1984) pp. 162-3 (original emphasis).

who fashioned her in order to assume a new identity. This identity will be chosen for her, without her ‘say’ being taken into account, by the male god figures of Gwydion and Mâth. Goewin and Gwydion will never know who she was before, because her original ‘purpose’ has been denied. She has been re-‘certified’, re-classified as human and must perform her new role of woman, despite the fact that she has no image of woman to model herself after.

As Goewin observes, she is a ‘puppet’ of men, not an individual. Her thoughts and emotions move to the machinations of Gwydion and Mâth. These men are her creators, her gods. Although technically crafted from the Mother earth, her human consciousness has not inherited her society’s tradition of Mother-worship. If we view Mâth and Gwydion as a Father/Son dual deity, Blodeuwedd, as their first human-like creation, is the first worshipper of a patriarchal god. The Christian analogies are obvious. It may be helpful, therefore, to examine this in light of some analyses of the effect of the Christian’s male image of god on female identity. Irigaray points out that ‘[i]f God is always imagined as a Father, how can women find a model of identity in him, an accomplished image or representation of themselves?’<sup>28</sup> Marie-Louise von Franz also questions the ability of a phallocentric religious hierarchy to provide a complete representation for female worshippers:

[W]omen have no metaphysical representant in the Christian God-image. [...] This feminine archetypal image [of the Virgin Mary] is incomplete because it encompasses only the sublime and light aspects of the divine feminine principle and therefore does not express the *whole* feminine principle.<sup>29</sup>

In both texts Blodeuwedd does not even have this fragmented feminine archetypal image to model herself after. Her sole object of identification is male. Markale

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<sup>28</sup> Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral*, p. 243.

<sup>29</sup> Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Feminine in Fairy Tales*, revised edn (London: Shambhala, 1993), p. 1 (original emphasis).

theorizes that Blodeuwedd is Llew's 'narcissistic double',<sup>30</sup> and Llew is as much Gwydion's creation as she is, but his humanity is not in doubt. He may look to Gwydion as both father and mother, but he was raised in the Mother-worshipping, matrilineal traditions of his people. Blodeuwedd has, as Llew recognizes, 'known no childhood' (Walton, p. 623). She only has her male deities to model herself after. Because she has no female deity to provide her with an 'accomplished image' or 'representant' of the female self, her identity becomes an incomplete, reflexive image of masculinity.

### **Milk-Water or Fire? Sexual Self-Determination**

The Fourth Branch describes Blodeuwedd's creation: 'So they took the blossoms of the oak, and the blossoms of the broom, and the blossoms of the meadowsweet, and produced from them a maiden, the fairest and most graceful that man ever saw'.<sup>31</sup> The novel, however, keeps the creation behind closed doors. The reader is left with the servants, who carry armfuls of 'the blossoms of oak and broom and meadow-sweet' to the locked door. What Mâth and Gwydion did with them 'is one of the mysteries that lie dead with the druids', according to the heterodiegetic narrator (Walton, p. 616). The obvious similarities of plot and detail are not as revealing as Walton's choice to conceal the act of creation. The narrator admits they are as ignorant of the 'mysteries' of Blodeuwedd's creation as the reader. Although technically omniscient, they know only what is in the medieval manuscript. And while in many instances the heterodiegetic narrator offers a hypothesis to fill in the gaps, it is always explicitly stated as such. However, no such hypothesis is offered in this instance.

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<sup>30</sup> Markale, *Women of the Celts*, p. 152.

<sup>31</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 55.

The significance of this choice lies beyond an exceptional fidelity to the source material. By leaving even the heterodiegetic narrator in the dark as well as the reader, the creation of a human being by other human beings becomes a mystery of this fictional pagan past that is impossible to recover and that ought not, by implication, to have ever been known:

[The servants'] curious eyes clung to [the door] as though to spy out the mystery beyond. But that door was shut as tightly as the doors between earth and the worlds beyond, those hazy portals of twilight that most of us can open with but one key: death.

But during those three days not even death could have unlocked Mâth's door (Walton, p. 616).

By comparing the door to Mâth's room to a portal between this world and the Other, which not even death can enter, the novel reinforces Mâth and Gwydion's identities as sorcerers who were originally deities, and who still possess the ultimate power of a deity: the ability to create life. Walton uses the ellipsis to signify that unknowable mystery. It allows the reader to maintain their suspension of disbelief because it allows the unexplained in the Fourth Branch to remain so.

In Davies' translation of the *Mabinogi* she notes that the choice of flowers used by Mâth and Gwydion 'may well be significant'. The yellow broom was often used as a metaphor to describe a maiden's hair, and the white oak and meadowsweet flowers could easily be symbols of ideal beauty and female purity.<sup>32</sup> The original text itself does not offer a reason for these choices and neither does the novel. Rather, the heterodiegetic narrator considers the flowers to be reflective of man's conception of female identity:

[W]hat stuff could be tenderer than flowers, more fragile and akin to fancy, and yet more full of all the promise and powers of life—the strength of the oak

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<sup>32</sup> Sioned Davies, trans., *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 243.

and the sweet springing vigor of plants, and the soft beauty of the little flowers that grow in the meadows? (Walton, p. 616)<sup>33</sup>

This passage is offering, as Davies also does, a hypothetical explanation for what remains unexplained in the *Mabinogi*. Yet the important distinction is that, in this instance, the narrator is asking questions, not providing answers. According to the novel, a substantive link is needed to connect Blodeuwedd's soul to a man-made human form because the soul itself can not be crafted.

On their wedding night, Llew contrasts her 'light' body with the 'solid and warm and human' girl he met on a beach years earlier. That girl 'might have been a comrade', but Blodeuwedd 'was beautiful enough for a god [and] too beautiful for a man'. He is afraid to have sex with her because he fears her flesh lacks 'solidity': 'He felt afraid that it would crumble into petals again if he should touch it' (Walton, p. 623). Although he eventually achieves coital success, Llew's fear that physical contact will destroy his insubstantial wife foreshadows her destruction. Blodeuwedd's infidelity is the catalytic action which results in the attempted murder of her husband and her own human death. This treachery can be interpreted in the original text as the result of her unhuman origins. Blodeuwedd's punishment for her treachery is to be turned into an owl, which Ross notes is called *aderyn y corf* in Welsh, meaning 'corpse-bird'.<sup>34</sup> The novel retains the fear associated with Blodeuwedd's unhuman nature in the form of Goewin's uncanny sensations of 'blanks' in Blodeuwedd's 'mind' and 'feelings', Llew's questions and Gwydion's inability to identify where her soul came from. As that soul 'grows in her', as the novel describes it, so does 'malice', and this 'malice' is explained as the direct result of Blodeuwedd's growing

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<sup>33</sup> American spelling of 'vigor' retained.

<sup>34</sup> Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (London: Sphere Books Ltd, 1974), p. 346. Ross observes that the owl 'was more popular in the older mythology and was apparently associated with a goddess, perhaps the Indo-European prototype of the classical Minerva [...] but its role in the written tradition is slight, and the only insular character who is connected with it in any significant way is Blodeuwedd' (p. 369). This is the most direct identification of Blodeuwedd with a goddess that I have been able to locate.

understanding of the purpose of her human existence: ‘I am the toy they made for his pleasure’, she realizes. ‘I am bound to him like a slave, and my life is not my own, but his chattel. [...] I was created for his sake, and not for mine’ (Walton, p. 636).

According to the novel, it is the spontaneous emotion of love she feels for another, and her ability to act on that love, which makes Blodeuwedd finally feel ‘awake’ and ‘alive’.

Blodeuwedd’s recognition of her status as a commodity in the gender economy of both texts is instigated by the arrival of Goronwy Pevr. In the *Mabinogi* and the novel he passes through Llew’s land on the hunt, while Llew is visiting Mâth in Caer Dathyl. The arrival of an outsider seems to ‘open a door in the far horizon’ for Blodeuwedd (Walton, p. 629). Her invitation of hospitality is socially appropriate, but the two immediately become lovers. In the novel Goronwy first appears in the ‘red flare’ of torches: ‘He was a tall, dark man with eyes bright as flames, brighter than the eyes of most men. His hands were still red from the hunt and the kill’ (Walton, p. 630). The adjectives and similes of fire and blood are used repetitively to describe their relationship, and are contrasted against the ‘thin milk-and-water love’ once shared between Blodeuwedd and Llew. The reason for this difference is stated early on by the extradiegetic narrator: ‘For the first time since she had lived, events were stirring *within her*, not coming upon her from without’ (Walton, p. 630. Emphasis added). Blodeuwedd has ‘made her first step upon the ladder of evolution’, according to the novel, because she has begun to experience emotions and act in ways which have not been dictated to her by her creators.

However, it is the very nature of that creation which prevents Blodeuwedd from evolving further. Simply put, Mâth and Gwydion’s insufficient understanding of female identity did not allow for emotions beyond that which they needed her to feel:

love for Llew. Her role as Llew's human female wife is the only 'ontological status' she has been given, and according to Irigaray, '[t]he substance of the plant, like that of any (female) being, cannot move, or move beyond' that status.<sup>35</sup> When Blodeuwedd attempts to 'move beyond' the status given to her by her creators, she can do nothing beyond acquiesce to her (male) lover's plot to murder Llew. The childish eagerness with which she embraces the violence of this solution is explained in the novel as the result of her incomplete identity: '[W]ithin her narrow, self-focused, puppet's mind there was no room for consideration of anything save her own desires' (Walton, p. 637). Blodeuwedd's 'puppet mind' mimics that of the male she has chosen to identify with, thus her desires shift from Llew's 'milk-and-water' to Goronwy's 'flames' and blood. This suggests a transition from passivity to activity, but that activity is still a reflection of her male god.

Irigaray points out that female sexuality has been circumscribed by the male with whom she is forced to identify, and this circumscription results in woman's loss of control over her own sexual behaviour:

How could she [woman] be anything but suggestible and hysterical when her sexual instincts have been castrated, her sexual feelings, representatives, and representations forbidden? When the father forces her to accept that, while he alone can satisfy her and give her access to pleasure, he prefers the added sexual enjoyment to be derived from laying down the law, and therefore penalizes her for her (or his own?) 'seduction fantasies'?<sup>36</sup>

The phrase, 'seduction fantasies', is a direct reference to Freud's revision of his own seduction theory of neurosis.<sup>37</sup> Irigaray's theory may be applied to Blodeuwedd's

<sup>35</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, p. 163.

<sup>36</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>37</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Aetiology of Hysteria', in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), pp. 96-111. Freud initially believed that hysteria and neurosis arose from suppressed memories of childhood sexual abuse. These suppressed memories were uncovered in the course of his analysis of twelve female and six male patients, all suffering from hysterical or neurotic symptoms, and in 'The Aetiology of Hysteria' Freud asserts his belief in their veracity. However, later in his career Freud came to believe that those experiences were what he referred to as 'wishful phantasies' of the female, who was fixated on her father. When the 'phantasy' became 'reality' the patient became a 'hysteric'. Although the patients which led Freud to his early, and later disavowed, theory, were men as

character, as re-visioned in Walton's novel, in the following way. Blodeuwedd is unable to assimilate her love and attraction for another man into her identity because her sexual instincts have been castrated by the law of the father(s): Mâth/Gwydion. Any 'feelings, representatives, and representations', outside of those expressed for the benefit of Llew, have been 'forbidden'. Only Llew can 'satisfy her and give her access to pleasure'. Yet he no longer does. It is questionable that he ever did. The novel never describes Blodeuwedd's physical or emotional reaction to her first sexual encounter with Llew, while the fire imagery aptly describes the incendiary 'nature' of the passion she shares with Goronwy. Only Llew's feelings and thoughts are expressed on their wedding night. Blodeuwedd is the object of the narrative, not its subject, until Llew leaves and Goronwy arrives. Blodeuwedd's sexual awakening occurs when she and Goronwy exchange the hostess' kiss of greeting: 'it seemed to her in that moment that a lightning flash had cleft the world in twain and welded it together again in another shape' (Walton, p. 63). With this first spontaneous emotion, Blodeuwedd is no longer the 'pet animal' who 'let herself be tended and cherished' (Walton, p. 637). Yet this is not an awakening which instigates true independent thought and agency. She is still, to use Irigaray's phrase, 'suggestible and hysterical', as evidenced by her eagerness to enter into Goronwy's plot, which hinges on her successful manipulation of her husband (a scene which takes place in the marriage bed in both texts) and which will end in the murder of the man she, until recently, was led to believe she loved (Walton, p. 641-3). Blodeuwedd's eyes and hair are described as 'gleam[ing] with *reflected* fires' (Walton, p. 641. Emphasis added). She is still a reflexive image of man. The only difference—and it is an important one—is that this time she has chosen the man.

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well as women, Freud argued that '[t]he natural sexual passivity of women explains their being more inclined to hysteria'. Freud, 'The Aetiology of Hysteria', p. 96.

The reason for her attraction to this particular man is implicit in his first appearance in the novel, as a hunter with blood on his hands. Goronwy is likened to a fire which Blodeuwedd warms herself at:

[One] that made her consciousness glow more intensely, anchored her flimsy being more firmly to the earth, dispelling the cold of those unknown spaces whence she had come. And her spirit, that was almost too light to be held to our element by its own weight, clung desperately to this grosser heat (Walton, p. 644).

The adjectives ‘flimsy’ and ‘light’, used to describe her spirit, are repetitions of Llew’s initial impressions of her body. This repetition subtly reinforces Blodeuwedd’s dependence on her sexuality as her source of identity. The ‘grosser heat’ of the physical chemistry between herself and Goronwy offers a more potent anchor for her tenuous identity than the ‘milk-and-water’ emotions offered to her by Llew. Yet the novel still identifies that ‘grosser’ emotion as love, just as the *Mabinogi* does: ‘[F]rom the moment that she looked on him she became filled with his love. And he gazed on her, and the same thought came unto him as unto her’, states the medieval text.<sup>38</sup> The novel replaces this phrasing with the metaphoric lightning flash, foreshadowing the destructive consequences of that love. Neither text questions the legitimacy of the pair’s affections for one another. In the *Mabinogi* the relationship is nothing more than a plot device that instigates the climactic actions of the Fourth Branch, while Walton chooses to explore the psychological motivations behind the attraction and examine its repercussions on Blodeuwedd’s psyche. The affair is used in the novel to demonstrate the inability of patriarchally-determined gender roles and a singular male god-figure to fully encompass the complexities of female identity.

When the attempt on Llew’s life fails, the affair falls apart and Goronwy is murdered by Llew, an act which is positioned in both texts as in keeping with talion

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<sup>38</sup> Guest, *The Mabinogion*, p. 56.

law.<sup>39</sup> Llew does not, however, retaliate against the wife who betrayed him.

Gwydion's pursuit of Blodeuwedd precedes Goronwy's death in the concluding chapters of the novel, and the omniscient narrator gives the reader insight into both hunter and hunted. The chase scene is viewed from Blodeuwedd's point of view:

He was not a man, who pursued her up the mountain. He was the God who had made her, and Whose design in shaping her she had thwarted: her angry Maker, who could perhaps un-make her (Walton, p. 710).

The capitalization of 'Whose' emphasizes this explicit statement of what had been implicit earlier in the novel. Gwydion, as Blodeuwedd's patriarchal God, had shaped her for a specific purpose, one which she had rejected, and because of this act of adolescent rebellion she is expelled from the human world, just as Eve is expelled from the utopian Garden. As the *Tetralogy* has made clear, however, earth is no Eden, and even the utopias of the Bright World have hidden dystopian cracks.

Ultimately, Gwydion allows her to live because, as his creation, he cannot kill her. When the narrative perspective shifts, we see Blodeuwedd's mind through his eyes:

Clear as glass her mind lay before him, the light, empty thing void of thought or meaning, all regret without repentance, the lust extinguished by the chill of fear. Even that one tie that bound her to the race of women had not endured. Even Goronwy was forgotten, lost in her fear for herself (Walton, p. 711).

Gwydion's description of the 'light', 'empty' 'void' of Blodeuwedd's mind recalls for the reader Goewin's earlier perceptions; the consequence foreshadowed when she worried about the repercussions of those 'blanks' has arrived. Yet even in his anger Gwydion recognizes that Blodeuwedd is, in effect, another of his children with Arianrhod: 'the offspring of Arianrhod's curse as surely as Llew was the offspring of

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<sup>39</sup> 'Talion law' is a term used by Karen Horney in a psychoanalytic context, and defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'the principle of exacting compensation'. Its common knowledge equivalent is 'an eye for an eye'. See *Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://dictionary.oed.com>> [accessed 25 July 2011].

her body' (Walton, p. 712). Gwydion acknowledges that Arianrhod has 'defeated' him by necessitating Blodeuwedd's creation. Even in death her influence impacts upon the most significant events in the narrative. Gwydion's choice of punishment for Blodeuwedd is, he warns her, worse than death (Walton, p. 712). He transforms her into an owl, condemning her to a solitary existence in the dark. The novel includes a footnote in this passage which once again makes the reader aware of the story's connection with Welsh mythology: '*The Mabinogi* states that the owl has ever since been called Blodeuwedd, or the Flower-Like, in Wales' (Walton, p. 712).

Shape-shifting, according to Rhŷs, was considered a form of death in Celtic folklore.<sup>40</sup> Although Gwydion allows Blodeuwedd's soul to live on, he ends her human life as recompense for Llew's suffering. Mâth is given the final word on her brief human existence:

Never before have the women of Gwynedd been bound [in marriage]. They have given their love when and where they pleased, as their right was [...] for they had granted him their favour, not rendered him his due. [...] You, who lay bonds on them that you do not lay on yourselves, will never get from them the honesty that we of the old time knew. Nor have we been altogether fair to her to whom we gave life for Llew's pleasure, not her own (Walton, pp. 703-4).

This is the only answer the novel provides to the ethical question asked in its re-visioning of the Fourth Branch. It was not only Gwydion and Mâth's creation of Blodeuwedd that irreparably damaged the previously equal gender economy of the Old Tribes, but their assumption that, because they had created her, she was 'bound' to 'render' them their 'due'. Walton's re-visioning of the Fourth Branch reveals the problematic patriarchal presumption that determines the original text's villainization of Blodeuwedd; woman is created, literally, to be a man's subservient wife. Exploring the psychological motivations behind Blodeuwedd's creation and her deviant actions

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<sup>40</sup> Sir John Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx*, vol. II (London: Wildwood House Ltd, 1980), p. 610. Rhŷs later cites Llew's story as evidence of the pagan belief in the immortality of the spirit, despite the form that spirit is housed in. See *Celtic Folklore*, pp. 621-2.

allows the novel to critique that presumption. More significantly, Mâth's final words imply that the consequence of man's usurpation of the power of human creation extends beyond the medieval text, that the Gwydions of this world are still creating woman in man's image.

## Conclusion

The re-visioning of Blodeuwedd's creation in *The Island of the Mighty* functions as a synecdoche for the *Tetralogy*. Just as Blodeuwedd is re-created in this final novel, the series as a whole is an act of textual re-creation. And while the final paragraph of the novel ends with Llew pulling the bloody spear from the stone 'that for ages after was to be called Llech Goronwy' and his return to 'Gwydion and the *men* of Gwynedd', his victory is as hollow as the stone (Walton, p. 716. Emphasis added). The women whose actions led him to this moment have been punished for their deviant behaviour with human deaths. Llew returns to rule, but, tellingly, the 'men', not the people. Blodeuwedd's death ensures that he will have no offspring; his name will die with him. And Arianrhod, whose other children would have inherited according to the laws of the time, has only Llew left to survive her. With the deaths of Mâth, Gwydion and Llew, the race of the children of Dôn will end. The *Tetralogy* concludes with the death of the Mother and the advent of the patriarchal rule of Men.

The *Tetralogy*'s re-visioning of the female characters in the *Mabinogi*, particularly the supernatural Rhiannon, Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd, introduces into the original text a more complex definition of female identity. The evil 'other', as epitomised by the characterization of these women in the medieval text, become more ambiguous and less reductive in the *Tetralogy*. Jackson traces the development of the 'other' in fantasy literature as an evolutionary process. According to Jackson, in medieval literature 'otherness' was synonymous with evil.<sup>1</sup> The 'other' was often characterized as supernatural, and the evil it caused often took on a magical form, as can be seen in Gwydion's designation of Arianrhod as a 'wicked' woman because of

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson does not specify which period in the Middle Ages she is referring to. See Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 52-57.

her use of magic language. As recognition of an internal other self began to grow in the Romantic period, the evil ‘other’ became an externalized aspect of the self, and the binary opposition of good and evil began to dissolve. The ‘other’ became characterized by its un-reality and thus became a threat to the reality of the world in Romantic and modern fantasy.<sup>2</sup> Walton modernizes the medieval *Mabinogi*, which designates the unfeminine, supernatural Arianrhod and unnatural/natural Blodeuwedd as ‘evil’, from an other/bad v human/good battle to a complex exploration of character motivation and gender interaction. Rather than being designated as ‘evil’, the ‘other’ characters in the *Tetralogy* use magic to achieve agentive autonomy, with varying degrees of success.

Walton’s disruption of these binary oppositions in the medieval text has been misunderstood by even her most thorough critics. Zahorski and Boyer divide the themes of the *Tetralogy* along precisely binary lines: Old v New Tribes, Order v Chaos and Good v Evil.<sup>3</sup> Le Guin identifies such an approach to fantasy literature as a limited and ‘rationalized’ understanding of the genre:

[T]he tension between good and evil, light and dark, is drawn absolutely clearly, as a battle, the good guys on one side and the bad guys on the other [...] In such fantasies I believe the author has tried to force reason to lead where reason cannot go, and has abandoned the faithful and frightening guide, the shadow. These are [...] rationalized fantasies. They are not the real thing.<sup>4</sup>

The novels reject this rationalization by making the conflict internal as well as interpersonal. Jackson identifies two sources of threat in fantasy fiction. The first is

<sup>2</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy*, pp. 52-57. We can see this definition of the ‘other’ in, for example, E. T. A. Hoffman’s gothic short story *The Sandman* (1816), in which the protagonist’s increasing inability to distinguish the separate identities of the salesman Guiseppe Coppola, the lawyer Coppelius and the eponymous fairy tale monster of his nurse’s tales, leads to his madness and eventual suicide. See E. T. A. Hoffman, ‘The Sandman’, in *Tales of Hoffman* (London: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 85-126.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth J. Zahorski and Robert H. Boyer, *Lloyd Alexander, Evangeline Walton Ensley and Kenneth Morris: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1981), pp. 130-3.

<sup>4</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*, revised edn (London: The Women’s Press, Ltd., 1989), p. 57. The ‘shadow’ to which Le Guin refers is her interpretation of the Jungian ‘other’ self.

the self: an overuse or misapplication of will that creates a destructive situation. The self generates the threat internally.<sup>5</sup> This interpretation can be applied to both Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd in the *Tetralogy*; they are incapable of integrating the other and the self, whereas Rhiannon's ability to do so mitigates the threat posed by her supernatural status and leads to her restoration in the eyes of her people. It is this internal conflict which elevates these female characters, not only beyond their medieval textual identity, but beyond a reductive reversal of identity: from villain to heroine. As Cranny-Francis argues:

[A]ttempts to construct a female hero based on simple substitution fail [...]. A female hero who is as blood-thirsty (i.e. brave) and manipulative (i.e. clever) as her male counterpart does nothing to redefine that characterization and the ideology it naturalizes; she may even reinforce it by lending it a new legitimacy.<sup>6</sup>

What all the female figures discussed in Chapters V-VII have in common is their ambiguous nature. They cannot be classified as 'good' or 'bad', 'villain' or 'victim'. This embrace of the indeterminate, unclassifiable female identity effectively avoids reinforcing the patriarchal ideology of the *Mabinogi* by disrupting the discourse of the original text. The 'heretofore non-subjectifiable' women of the *Mabinogi* are revealed as the source of 'another logic': their own logic.<sup>7</sup> By negotiating with the narrative structure and socio-cultural milieu of the medieval text, Walton is able to subvert the oppositional patriarchal power structure that significantly impacted upon the construction of its female characters. The result is a disruption of the discourse of the original material that is akin to the lightning flash which strikes Blodeuwedd. As her world is re-shaped, so these characters, re-visioned, act as a lightning flash which splits and re-creates the textual world of the *Mabinogi*.

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<sup>5</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy*, pp. 52-57.

<sup>6</sup> Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Luce Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral* (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 232-3.

The resultant creation reflects the modern society in which Walton was writing, but her refusal to re-inscribe binary oppositions leaves the novels open to multiple interpretations. The *Tetralogy* is not ‘frozen’ in a definition of feminism specific to any decade, a quality in part made possible by the fact that the novels are a combination of the original 1930s manuscripts and Walton’s 1960s alterations. Thelma J. Shinn opines that Western society divides everything into good and bad binary opposites, and that, ‘[i]n its rejection of patriarchal cultural myths and its return to ancient myth, fantastic literature by women [...] rejects such duality’.<sup>8</sup> While Walton does use the fantasy genre to re-integrate ancient myth with the *Mabinogi*, this decision is not synonymous with a wholesale rejection of the medieval text. Walton engages with the ‘patriarchal cultural myth’ that governs the Four Branches in order to challenge it, demonstrating that it is possible to re-appropriate these myths for a feminist purpose.

The novels hypothesise sources of gender conflict. They do not create fixed gender identities. Horney, in her critique of the Freudian assumption of universal female characteristics, argues that, in certain culture-complexes:

there may appear certain fixed ideologies concerning the “nature” of woman; such as doctrines that woman is innately weak, emotional, enjoys dependence, is limited in capacities for independent work and autonomous thinking. [...] these ideologies function not only to reconcile women to their subordinate role by presenting it as an unalterable one, but also to plant the belief that it represents a fulfilment they crave, or an ideal for which it is commendable and desirable to strive.<sup>9</sup>

By the final novel, Walton’s fictional Island of the Mighty has become increasingly similar to the modern world described by Horney. The *Mabinogi*—written in a patriarchal, Western European medieval society—draws this depiction even more

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<sup>8</sup> Thelma J. Shinn, *Worlds Within Women: Myth and Mythmaking in Fantastic Literature by Women* (Westport: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1986), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Karen Horney, M.D., *Feminine Psychology*, ed. by Harold Kelman, M.D. (London: Routledge, 1967), p. 231.

strongly. As women who actively reject this male-defined, culturally-designated identity of ‘woman’, Rhiannon, Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd are placing themselves outside of their society as well as their gender. Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd act upon culturally aberrant emotions, and the contemporary reader, while perhaps sympathetic, would understand that such actions demand punishment. Jackson notes the connection between ‘evil’ and ‘social deviancy’:

An apprehension of something *without* signification is re-written as “evil” and into that evil category are exiled forms of social deviancy and subversion. Here, again, it is woman, under the sign of Lilith: woman as threat, as a demanding, desiring, angry and violent presence.<sup>10</sup>

Like Lilith, Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd are designated as ‘evil’ in the medieval text because they practice a similar form of ‘social deviancy’. Rhiannon does not escape punishment, but because she bears it, rather than rebelling against it, as Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd do, she is redeemed and reintegrated into her chosen society. Although originally a culturally-designated ‘other’, Rhiannon becomes assimilated by choosing to adhere to the conventions of that culture. Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd take their ‘other’-status to the extreme by making choices which place them further outside their gender role, until they finally reach the cliff-edge of acceptable behaviour and fall forward into oblivion. In the narrative of *The Island of the Mighty*, however, Walton demonstrates that such a fall is precipitated by the pushing and shoving of a culture that increasingly has no room for women who wish to retain possession of their sexual and procreative rights. And while these women are not white-washed into shining examples of twentieth-century feminists,<sup>11</sup> they are also not the villains of the *Mabinogi*. Walton’s characterizations of Arianrhod and Blodeuwedd defy stereotypes by uniting action and expanded dialogue with interior monologue and free indirect

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<sup>10</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy*, p. 150, writing about George MacDonald’s *Lilith* (1895). See George MacDonald, *Phantastes and Lilith* (London: Gollancz, 1962).

<sup>11</sup> As seen in Barbara Donley’s *Arianrhod: A Welsh Myth Retold* (Oakland: Stone Circle Press, 1987).

discourse. The *Tetralogy* allows the characters to speak for themselves and leaves any evaluation of the morals in the hands of the reader.

The *Tetralogy*'s commitment to refrain from imposing moral judgments on its characters is most evident in its re-visioning of Evnissyen. As Sullivan points out, in the *Mabinogi* 'Gwydion has power, both magical and political, and he uses it to achieve recognizably male, patriarchal ends'.<sup>12</sup> Evnissyen has neither magical nor political power, nor any recognizable goals, patriarchal or otherwise. He is characterized in the original text by violence; violence without motivation that is used solely as a plot device by the medieval redactor. In order to create a more nuanced character, the novel manages to retain Evnissyen's violence—both internal and external—without consigning his character to the one-dimensional role of villain. This tenuous balance is achieved by employing his character as an extreme representative of the cultural rejection of the mother. Evnissyen's anger is explained, through the use of free indirect discourse and exegesis, as motivated by his inability to identify with his biological mother, Penardim (and, through her, the divine Mother). The expanded story of Penardim exemplifies Walton's technique of incorporating tangential material from medieval Welsh literature; the origins story she creates for Evnissyen is one of procreative usurpation that simultaneously expands the most marginalized female character in the Four Branches and acts as a microcosm for the feminist theme that unifies the *Tetralogy*. Evnissyen's destruction of the Cauldron of Rebirth—interpreted by Walton as a perverted, and patriarchally-controlled, womb symbol—is a magical return to the Mother, but one that simultaneously represents her Death.

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<sup>12</sup> C. W. Sullivan III, 'Inheritance and Lordship in *Math*', in '*The Mabinogi*: A Book of Essays', ed. by C. W. Sullivan III (London: Garland Publishing, 1986), pp. 347-66 (p. 355).

This theme of the death of the Mother can best be understood by interpreting it as an Irigarayan mythic matricide. Both writers posit the same consequences of this act; the exclusion of the divine female results in the need for a singular, male god.<sup>13</sup> The shift from female to male creator is reflected in the commodification of the procreative female: ‘being deprived of a womb’, Irigaray writes, can be interpreted as ‘the most intolerable deprivation of man, since his contribution to gestation [...] is hence asserted as [...] open to doubt’.<sup>14</sup> This is attenuated by his ‘mark[ing] of the product of copulation with *his own name*’, rendering woman ‘the anonymous worker, the machine in the service of the master-proprietor who will put his trademark on the finished product’.<sup>15</sup> The consequences of the discovery of paternity for the gender relationships of the Old Tribes is illustrated by Eurosswydd’s sexual coercion of Penardim, Gwydion’s magical manipulation of Arianrhod and his creation of Blodeuwedd, and Bran and Matholuch’s orchestration of Branwen’s arranged marriage. All of these actions are motivated, in the novels, by the male characters’ preoccupation with creating and claiming paternally-identified biological children. This unifying theme aligns the *Tetralogy* with Bachofen’s assertion that ‘the *Mabinogion* shows father-right beginning to triumph over mother-right in the same island’.<sup>16</sup> In Walton’s fictional Island of the Mighty, motherhood is marked by suffering and sufferance. Arianrhod, the ‘monster mother’, is forced to bear unwanted children, Rhiannon, the ‘devouring mother’, is scape-goated as a Calumniated Wife, and Penardim’s rape is the catalytic act that instigates the commodification of women in the Old Tribes.

<sup>13</sup> Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral*, p. 232.

<sup>14</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid (original emphasis).

<sup>16</sup> J. J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion and Mother Right* (London: Routledge, 1967), p. 123. This assertion is supported by C. W. Sullivan. See Sullivan, ‘Inheritance and Lordship in *Math*’, in ‘*The Mabinogi*: A Book of Essays’, pp. 347-66 (pp. 348-9).

Branwen is the character most closely associated with victimhood in the *Tetralogy*. Lesley Jacobs argues that, in the *Mabinogi*:

Branwen's urge to destroy herself shows that she has accepted and internalized the ideological blame for the Irish expedition [...] Branwen ultimately accepts the doubled responsibility placed on her [...] both for her family of origin and her connections by marriage, as the woman "marrying out".<sup>17</sup>

Branwen's exogamous marriage would not have been unusual in the original text, but Walton reinterprets it as a revolutionary act instigated by two men intent on controlling her procreative power in a matrilineal society. Jacobs' interpretation of Branwen's dying declaration is heightened in Walton's reinterpretation by the uniqueness of her situation. Acting without a guiding precedent, Branwen must negotiate between the two men who control her and yet are utterly dependent upon her. Irigaray writes that 'the female function' is that of '[a] hinge bending according to their exchanges [between men]. [She is] [a] reserve supply of *negativity* sustaining the articulation of their moves [...] in a partly fictional progress toward the mastery of power'.<sup>18</sup> Branwen can be interpreted as the 'hinge' between Bran and Matholuch, her presence acting to 'sustain' 'their moves' during the marital and combative negotiations, as they 'progress toward the mastery of power' over both each other's domains and her body. In the original text, Branwen's silence isolates her from the other female characters in the Branches and within her own tale. Irigaray observes that the female 'will have no part' in the male pursuit of power. Rather, she will be 'off-stage', 'beyond representation, beyond selfhood'.<sup>19</sup> Branwen's lack of character delineation in the original text is deceptive, however. Walton demonstrates this by using free indirect discourse and interior monologue to give Branwen voice without

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<sup>17</sup> Lesley Jacobs, 'Trouble in the Island of the Mighty: Kinship and Violence in *Branwen Ferch Llyr*', *Viator*, 40:2 (2009), 113-33 (130-1).

<sup>18</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, p. 22 (original emphasis).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

deviating from the plot of the original text, reading into the gaps created by her silence in the Second Branch. Moreover, that silence becomes synonymous with her death—in Irigaray’s terms a ‘deadly silence’—in the *Tetralogy*’s most potent exemplar of the connection between speech and agency in the *Mabinogi*.<sup>20</sup>

Each novel of the *Tetralogy* and, within it, each of these characters, contributes to a larger thematic narrative. Walton’s direct engagement with the medieval text and the fragments of the Celtic past within it make *The Mabinogion Tetralogy* a unique work of fantasy fiction but, more importantly, they ground the text in a literary and historical reality that gives it broader relevance beyond the limits of genre. The Four Branches are re-visioned as a tale of mythic matricide which instigates, in Walton’s own words, ‘the waning power of women’.<sup>21</sup> Walton asserts that, in the *Mabinogi*, this loss ‘seems to be identical with the waning of magic’.<sup>22</sup> By using magic to symbolize female agency, Walton created the first work of modern feminist fantasy fiction, a sub-genre that has grown since one of her admirers, Marion Zimmer Bradley, published *The Mists of Avalon* in 1983.

Yet Walton, and the genre which she helped create, remains largely ignored by academics. While fantasy is no longer ‘dismissed by critics as being an embrace of madness, irrationality, or barbarism’, in Jackson’s words, it is still dismissed.<sup>23</sup> Writers of popular fantasy are largely unexamined, with the exceptions of, predominantly, J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis. A line in the sand has been drawn, demarcating the division of ‘serious’ literature from fantasy. While it may be acceptable to profess enjoyment in the works of such fantasy writers as Bradley, Neil Gaiman and J. K. Rowling, the genre is largely dismissed as escapist popular fiction

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<sup>20</sup> Luce Irigaray, ‘The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1991), pp. 34–46 (p. 38).

<sup>21</sup> Paul Spencer, ‘An Interview with Evangeline Walton’, *Fantasy Review* 8:3 (March 1984), 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy*, pp. 172–3.

and therefore not literary enough to be subjected to the rigours of scholarly analysis.

Magic is something our ancestors believed in, in a period we laughingly refer to as

‘The Dark Ages’. Yet Jackson’s words, written in 1981, hold true today:

Precisely because it is situated in this crucial area [‘the interplay of imaginary, symbolic and real’], the fantastic demands much more theoretical attention [...] and much more analysis of its linguistic and psychoanalytic features.<sup>24</sup>

Fantasy, like the Gothic, expands and explores the boundaries of the ‘real’ within our world and within ourselves. Walton’s *Mabinogion Trilogy* offers a powerful example of the ability of fantasy literature to re-vision older narratives, keeping them alive in the cultural consciousness by giving them modern relevance. The feminist themes of the novels are not inscribed onto the Four Branches, they are brought forth from the subtext, the symbolism and the history of the tales themselves.

There are a multitude of unexplored aspects of the *Tetralogy*. In choosing to focus this thesis on the process of feminist re-visioning, I have endeavoured to demonstrate both the importance of Walton’s work as a foundational piece of fantasy fiction and the fact that it has continued relevance for feminist literary studies as an examination of female identity and gender roles in transition from a matrilineal past to a patriarchal present. In 1971, the year *The Children of Llyr* was published, Adrienne Rich delivered a paper called ‘When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision’ for a forum on ‘The Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century’. In that essay Rich states that ‘[r]e-vision’ is ‘the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction’ and that it ‘is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival’.<sup>25</sup> Although Rich was not referring to that novel, Evangeline Walton was undertaking an act of re-visioning. Her *Tetralogy* ‘enters’ the medieval text of the *Mabinogi* from the ‘new critical direction’ of a

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Adrienne Rich, ‘When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision’, in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), pp. 33–49 (p. 35).

feminist writer of the twentieth century. By ‘looking back’ at the Four Branches ‘with fresh eyes’, the novels (and the multiple translations of them) ensure the survival of the tales of the Four Branches by making them widely available to a modern readership. Zahorski and Boyer believed in 1981 that Walton’s legacy would be vastly different:

It is through the diligent pursuit of the ancient and honored craft of the bard that she has assured for herself a prominent and respected position as an American myth fantasist. Her legacy promises to be rich and substantive [...] above all else, she will be remembered for taking a great, but little known, work and making its abundant riches more accessible. [Walton] will be remembered for having provided a model for future treatments of mythic materials.<sup>26</sup>

*The Mabinogion Tetralogy* has provided ‘a model’ for re-visioning ‘mythic materials’ for Barbara Donley and Marion Zimmer Bradley. Owing to the popularity of Bradley’s *The Mists of Avalon*, and the subsequent multitude of feminist fantasy novels, Walton’s work has had a profound effect upon the genre. Yet it exists now largely as a forgotten pebble at the bottom of a lake, an analogy which I think she would find appropriate. Evangeline Walton has now become marginalized like the female characters in the *Mabinogi*, her work is hidden in the ‘gaps’ of literary discourse. Yet Walton’s *Tetralogy* ably demonstrates that the fantasy genre enables writers to re-vision folklore, fairy tale and myth as feminist narratives while retaining the literary integrity of the original material. These narratives critique the patriarchal power structures and delimited gender roles in the source narrative by creating an alternate, parallel discourse that engages with the original text.

*The Mabinogion Tetralogy*, through its reintegration of Celtic mythology, medieval history and contemporaneous literature, is a significant contribution to our understanding of the *Mabinogi* as part of a rich Welsh literary tradition. The unique

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<sup>26</sup> Zahorski and Boyer, *Lloyd Alexander, Evangeline Walton Ensley, Kenneth Morris*, p. 159.

confluence of literature, history and mythology in the *Tetralogy* evinces that the fantasy genre, rather than limiting the writer, offers a multitude of narrative and thematic possibilities. Walton's re-visioning of the *Mabinogi* transforms the medieval text into an important work of feminist fiction whose place in the field of twentieth-century women's writing is long overdue for reassessment.

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