

The Unnamed Queen

Session 1

1. J.K. Bollard 'The Structure of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion (1971)

<https://journals.library.wales/view/1386666/1419353/251#?xywh=-2687%2C-194%2C7652%2C3875>

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which help to create form within the interlace. The four tales are juxtaposed in order that the reader might compare the events of one with those of another, while each forms a complete tale in itself. The author expects his readers to keep in mind various themes, and when an episode arises, a slight reference to similar previous occurrences interlaces them together and we get a broader view of the entire pattern of the tales. There is no incident or detail which remains isolated or superfluous in the *Four Branches*.

The three major themes which the author develops in the *Four Branches* are three of the functions of society which bind together, or separate, various groups and elements of that society. These themes I have rather loosely termed Friendships, Marriages and Feuds. Each of these themes is presented in several episodes, and each occurrence of any one of them has some variation or different point of view from which it may be compared with other examples. If the reader can trace these themes throughout the *Four Branches* and keep in mind the pattern of the whole, he should then come to a greater understanding of the *Mabinogi*.

2. Hunting the supernatural.

PWYLL, prince of Dyfed, was lord over the seven cantrefs of Dyfed. Once upon a time he was at Arberth, one of his chief courts, and it came into his head and his heart to go hunting. . . . And he blew his horn, and began to muster the hunt, and went off after the dogs, and became separated from his companions. And as he was listening for the cry of his pack, he heard the cry of another pack, but these had a different cry, and they were coming towards his own pack. And he could see a clearing in the forest, a level field; and as his own pack was reaching the edge of the clearing, he saw a stag in front of the other pack. And towards the middle of the clearing, the pack that was chasing caught up with the stag and brought it to the ground.

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As [Manawydan and Pryderi] approached [the thicket], a gleaming-white wild boar rose from it. Encouraged by the men, the dogs charged at him. The boar then left the thicket and retreated a little way from the men. And until the men closed in on him, he would keep the dogs at bay without retreating; but when the men closed in he would retreat again and break away. They followed the boar until they saw a huge, towering fort, newly built, in a place where they had never before seen either stone or building. The boar was heading quickly for the fort, with the dogs after him. When the boar and the dogs had gone into the fort, the men marvelled at seeing the fort in a place where they had never before seen any building.

	Pwyll	Pryderi
Nobleman goes hunting	Dyfed	Dyfed
Engages with special animal	Arawn's stag	Glwaming White Boar
Enters Annwfn	Annwfn	Enchanted Castle
Has an edifying experience	Lerns self-control	Punished for greed and impulsiveness

3. Haircuts and swine in Culhwch and Olwen.

Arthur took a golden comb, and shears with loops of silver, and combed [Culhwch's] hair, and asked who he was. Arthur said, 'My heart warms towards you. I know you are of my blood. Tell me who you are.' 'I will. Culhwch son of Cilydd son of Celyddon Wledig by Goleuddydd daughter of Anlawdd Wledig, my mother.' Arthur said, 'That is true. You are my cousin then. Name what you will, and you shall have it, whatever your mouth and tongue may name.'

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Culhwch set out with Gorau son of Custennin, and those who wished harm to Ysbaddaden Bencawr, and took the wonders with them to his court. And Caw of Prydyn came to shave off Ysbaddaden's beard, flesh and skin to the bone, and both ears completely. And Culhwch said, 'Have you been shaved, man?' 'I have,' he replied. 'And is your daughter now mine?' 'Yours,' he replied. 'And you need not thank me for that, but thank Arthur, the man who arranged it for you. If I'd had my way you never would have got her. And it is high time to take away my life.' And then Gorau son of Custennin grabbed him by the hair and dragged him to the mound and cut off his head and stuck it on the bailey post. And he took possession of his fort and his territory.

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When [the queen's] time came, her senses returned to her. This happened in a place where a swineherd was tending a herd of pigs. And out of fear of the pigs the queen gave birth. And the swineherd took the boy until he came to court. And the boy was baptized, and was named Culhwch because he was found in a pig-run.

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‘There is no comb and shears in the world which can dress my beard, because of its stiffness, except the comb and shears that lie between the ears of Twrch Trwyth son of Taredd Wledig. He will not give them willingly, nor can you force him.’

	Culhwch	Twrch Trwyth	Ysbaddaden
Pig-identity	Born with and named after pigs	Transformed into a boar	
Special status of adversary		Chief of Boars	Chief of Giants
Initiation through hair cutting	Cut by Arthur with special comb and shears	Hunted by Arthur for the special comb and shears	Killed by Arthur’s men as his beard is cut
Sociological function	Civility	Wildness	Incivility
Mythological function	Sacred Masculine	Destructive Transformation	Death of the old

4. The Story Animal.

- Michelle Scalise Sugiyama, ‘Literary Prehistory: The Origins and Psychology of Storytelling’, in B. Evans (ed.) *Critical Approaches to Literature: Psychological* (Salem Press):

3 - Our species, Homo sapiens, emerged around 200,000 years ago, at which point language was firmly in place. The recent finding that 85% of nighttime conversation among San foragers is dedicated to the recounting of stories and myths attests to the prominence of this activity in modern and—by implication—ancestral hunter-gatherer life.

4 - For humans, then, information is a vital resource: it is the resource that is used to acquire all other resources (Tooby & Cosmides 1990). Even though humans no longer live by hunting and gathering, their ecological niche remains the same: modern agriculture, industry, and technology depend on a body of knowledge that has

accumulated over scores of centuries and is so vast it can't possibly be stored in a single human mind. . . .

5-6 - This information-dependent niche is the context in which storytelling emerged . . . The emergence of storytelling was a milestone in human evolution . . . it marked the point at which humans acquired the ability to recreate situations for others and to convey to them what has been found to be of interest and of value.

- Glen McBride, 'Storytelling, behavior planning, and language evolution in context', *Frontiers in Psychology* (October 2014):

Searching in memories has always been a demand for animal minds. The environmental maps of familiar paths in arboreal primates were three dimensional. Deciding to go to drink from any part of the range or a sudden need to flee meant choosing a path, mentally moving a self-image freely through alternative memory maps to decide on a plan . . .

. . . While the evolution of conscious thinking has many threads, the demands of storytelling have certainly contributed. Every child needed to remember each story, often moving through its images repeatedly in extended consciousness to make sense and reality of it; . . . Consciousness was emerging as ready access to those memories improved. In this way, the stories could be turned into second-hand image experiences in memory, to be worked through repeatedly, available when needed. . . .

. . . Merely remembering some episode does not create an experienced adult. Always many parts of the experience are irrelevant while some features need examination if learning from experience is to be meaningful.