

## Mabinogi, Week 16

### 1. Connecting the interlacings so far . . .

#### Eternal Return

J.N. Mohanty: Not only does the religious point of view look upon, or rather experience, sacred time as “perpetually returning,” but it regards the mythical time as providing the foundation for the profane time of nature and history. From this perspective, the profane time, despite its linear character, experiences the eruption of the cyclic, ever-returning sacred time.

#### Magical Speech

Bendigeidfran’s Severed Head / Gwydion calling the Lleu-eagle

#### Bird People

Bendigeidfran + Branwen / Lleu + Blodeuedd / Ceridwen + Gwion Bach

#### Suffering of the Innocents and The Captive Youth

Lleu / Pryderi / Mabon / Gwern

### 2. The Mothers.

	Rhiannon	Branwen	Mouse Queen	Arianrhod
Animal Aspect	x	x	x	
marriage	x	x	x	(x)
Connection to Annwfn	x	x	x	x
Punishment / Judgment	x	x	x	x
children suffer	x	x	x	x

- Animal Mothers:

	Rhiannon	Branwen	Mouse Queen	Ceridwen
Connection to Annwfn	x	x	x	x
Animal Aspect	x	x	x	x
Child suffering as a result of mother's nature / situation	x	x	x	x
Punishment	x	x	x	

- Dumézil's Trifunctional Hypothesis as outlined in Rees & Rees, *Celtic Heritage* (1961), 112:

*I The Sacred.* The relations of [humans] with the sacred and with one another under the surveillance and protection of the gods — on the one hand, cult, magic, and on the other, law, government; also the sovereign power exercised by the king or his deputies in accordance with the will or the favour of the gods ['engaging with the sovereignty'], and again, more generally, knowledge and intelligence, here inseparable from the manipulation of sacred things.

*II Physical force.* The use of main force, primarily though not solely in war. (Also the executive aspects of kingship and government.)

*III Fertility.* This covers a wide range of related qualities in which the unifying principle is less apparent. It includes fruitfulness in human beings, animals and plants, but also food, wealth, health, peace and the fruits of peace, as well as voluptuousness and beauty. There is also the important idea of 'large number', applied not only to goods (abundance) but also to the men who compose the social body (mass).

## 2. *The Blessing of the Mothers.*

- Rees & Rees, *Celtic Heritage* (1961), 40-1:

. . . the supernatural world, whether it be inhabited by the Fomoiré, the Tuatha, or other beings, has an essentially feminine quality. Women are far more prominent than men in medieval accounts of the magic mound/dwellings and of the islands of immortality which lie beyond the sea. In the delectable Other World of 'The Adventure of Conle', 'There is no race there but women and maidens alone.' The fairies are known as 'The Mothers' or 'The Mothers' Blessing', in parts of Wales, and they are sometimes thought of as being exclusively female.

- John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, 255-6:

There was formerly an old woman . . . [who] had the power of bewitching, people used to say: there was a rumour that she spent seven days, seven hours, and seven minutes with the fairies every year in [a] cave . . . It was a pretty general belief that she got such and such a quantity of gold for every child she could steal for them, and that she put one of those old urchins of theirs in its place: the latter never grew at all. The way she used to do it was to enter people's houses with the excuse of asking for alms, having a large dark-grey old cloak on her back, and the cloak concealed one of the children of *Bendith y Mamau*. Whenever she found the little child of the good woman of the house in its cradle, she would take upon herself to rock the cradle, so that if the mother only turned her back for a minute or two, she would throw the sham child into the cradle and hurry away as fast as she could with the baby.

### 3. *Ceridwen, Mother of Memory.*

- Bendigeidfran, Lleu and Taliesin.

1. Death is transcended.

2. Memory is preserved.

3. Memory performs a specific function:

- Bendigeidfran is keeping grief at bay
- Lleu is righting a past wrong
- Taliesin is a repository of magical wisdom

- A Ceridwen archetype?

	Rhiannon	Branwen	Ceridwen
Animal aspect	x	x	x
Mother	x	x	x
Child suffers	x	x	x
Irish sea	x	x	x
Animal communication	x	x	x
Cauldron		x	x
'Speech' survives crossing of the sea		x	x

- What cosmic principles does Ceridwen embody?
- What natural laws are evoked in Ceridwen's story?
- What role does memory play in this mythology?
- What does this tell us about Branwen's story?
- What does this tell us about Rhiannon's story?