

Owein

A Survey of Texts and Scholarship

Because of its similarities to Chretien de Troyes's *Yvain*, *Owein* is one of the more controversial of the Middle Welsh texts. Only recently have scholars begun to set aside the proverbial chicken and egg question of *Yvain* and *Owein* to look at *Owein* as a work of art in its own right. In an attempt to understand *Owein* in context of the literary history and society that produced it, I have compared *Owein* to its French and English counterparts: *Yvain* and *Ywain and Gawain*. In addition I have studied a variety of scholarly works that analyze *Owein*'s mythological backgrounds, politics, and relations to both other Welsh tales and to *Yvain*. By these studies I have gained a better understanding of not only the story itself, but also of the general character of Middle Welsh prose.

Primary Sources¹

Crestien de Troyes. *Yvain (Le Chevalier au Lion)*. Edited by T. B. W. Reid. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967.)

Chrétien begins his tale with a digression on the lack of courtly love and chivalry in the modern world. He then says that he will write of King Arthur for "Qu'ancor vaut miauz, ce m'est avis, / Uns corois morz qu'uns villains vis" (ll. 31-2).

During a celebration at Pentecost, Arthur retreats to his bedroom. To fill time, Calogrenant tells how seven years before he was in search of adventures in a far off land when he traveled down a difficult path and found a castle. In front of the castle is a man with a falcon on his arm. The man greets him and takes him inside, where a vavassor rings a copper gong, calling the people of the castle to gather in the courtyard. Among

¹ Please see also draft of parallel text attached.

them was a beautiful woman who disarms Calogrenant and gives him fine cloths; she then entertains him in a garden until dinner.

The next day Calogrenant leaves early and stumbles upon a valley where he sees bulls fighting and a giant guarding the cattle. Calogrenant tells the man that he is in search of adventure. The giant points down a path and tells Calogrenant that he will see a boiling spring next to a pine tree, a slab, and a chapel. He tells Calogrenant that he must pour water on the stone to see a storm. Calogrenant does and after the storm a knight in black comes. The knight who tells Calogrenant that he has caused him shame and harm. They fight and Calogrenant loses. The black knight takes Calogrenant's horse and leaves.

Yvain chastises Calogrenant for keeping this secret for so long and promises to avenge him. Kay says that Yvain is boasting and an argument ensues. When Arthur wakes, the Queen tells him Calogrenant's story and Arthur promises to leave in a fortnight to avenge him. In order to beat Arthur there, and gain the glory for himself, Yvain sneaks out that night and goes to the fountain.

Yvain fights the black knight and fatally wounds him. However, when he follows the knight through a gate of a castle, the gates come down and Yvain is trapped. A maiden comes and hides him in an adjoining room, giving him a ring that will make him invisible when the town's people come searching for him. The body of the black knight is brought into the room by the people and mysteriously bleeds because Yvain, his killer, is near. Among the group surrounding the body, is a lady. Yvain immediately falls in love with her and Chrétien begins the first of many digressions on love.

Lunette woos the lady, Laudine, for Yvain. Her argument is that Laudien should marry a defender for the fountain before King Arthur arrives to invade them. However, during this debate Laudine begins to love this knight she has never seen. Laudine and Yvain marry and celebrate until Arthur arrives. At the fountain, Arthur pours water on the stone and when the knight arrives Kai fights him and is defeated.

Once Arthur realizes that the knight is Yvain, they all celebrate together and Arthur is greeted in the town with pomp. Gawain and Lunette fall in love during the feast while the rest of Arthur's men flirt with the women of the town. When Arthur is ready to leave, Gawain questions Yvain's manhood and convinces him to come back to Arthur's court. Laudine reluctantly gives permission for Yvain to go for one year. For that year Yvain and Gawain joust at many tournaments and gain so much respect that they begin to stay in their own camp away from Arthur's.

One day a maiden comes and chastises Yvain for overstaying his term at court. Yvain, in sorrow at the loss of his lady's love, goes mad and roams the forest, where a hermit helps him. A year later, Yvain is found asleep in the woods by ladies who recognize him and give him an ointment to heal his madness. The servant uses the entire contents of the vile planning to lie to her mistress. When she returns to the lady she says that the ointment was lost in the river. Yvain fights Count Alier's army, that has invaded the countess's land, defeats several of the knights, corners the Count, and forces him to surrender to the countess. Later while traveling through the woods, he saves a lion from a dragon, forced to cut off the tip of the lion's tale to free it from the dragon's dead jaws. The lion then bows before Yvain and follows him from then on. Yvain then returns to the fountain and hears Lunette crying from the chapel. Yvain criticizes her for daring to

say she is more miserable than he is but promises to return the next day to fight for Lunette's honor.

That evening he stays at a castle that is being harassed by a giant, Harpin, who has killed two of the lord's sons and will kill the other four unless the lord agrees to give him his daughter as a concubine. Yvain hesitantly agrees to help but the next day is about to leave when the giant arrives and insults the lord. To protect the family (relatives of Gawain) from the slander, Yvain and the lion fight and kill the giant. Likewise, later that day, they fight the three knights that accused Lunette of treason and throw them in the fire that was intended for Lunette.

Meanwhile two sisters are arguing over their inheritance. The older sister convinces Gawain to fight for her, and the younger sister goes in search of the Knight with the Lion to help her. She falls ill and a friend takes her place. The friend follows Yvain's trail and Chrétien gives a lengthy repetition of all of Yvain's accomplishments. When the lady finds him, Yvain agrees to help and they head back. On the way, they stay at a castle where three hundred maidens are imprisoned and forced to work. In order to leave, Yvain must fight two sons of the devil. Yvain and the lion fight, win, and Yvain frees the three hundred maidens who return home.

Yvain arrives to Arthur's court in disguise to fight for the younger sister's inheritance. There he unknowingly fights Gawain (also disguised). During this fight Chrétien, goes into yet another long digression of how if they would have recognized each other, the two friends would have never fought. Surprised by the difficulty of the battle, the two men eventually exchange names and refuse to fight out of love for each

other. When Arthur realizes who has been fighting, he forces the older sister to give up a share of her land to the younger. The younger sister then swears fidelity to her sister.

When Yvain is healed of his wounds, he returns to the fountain deciding that he would torment Laudine with storms until she takes him back. After the first storm, Lunette tricks Laudine into accepting The Knight with the Lion as a protector of the fountain then rides to find Yvain. When Yvain returns and Laudine realizes she has been tricked, she is angry but will not break her word. Yvain and Laudine live together from that day forward.

***Owein or Chwedyl Iarllles y Ffynnawn.* Edited by R. L. Thomson. (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1986.)**

The story opens with King Arthur sitting in his chamber with Owein, Kynon, Kai, Gwenhwyvar and her ladies, and we are told that there was not porter but Glewlwyd Gavaelvawr was acting as one. The king informs all that he will sleep until it was time to eat and suggests that the others entertain themselves with tales. In exchange for food and mead from Kai, Kynon tells a tale first.

Kynon describes how he was a daring young man and one day, after achieving all the adventures available in his own land, set out for others. He eventually comes to a castle where two lads shoot arrows near to a man wearing a yellow cape meet him. He greets the man and is taken into the castle where he was then greeted by twenty-four beautiful women and brought to dine. Kynon tells the lord that he is looking for adventure and the man reluctantly agrees to describe one. The next day, Kynon leaves, takes the path that the man had described and finds a valley filled with wild animals that are guarded by a large black man. The guardian points Kynon to the fountain. When he

reaches it, Kynon throws water from the fountain on a slab and a storm erupts. A knight in all black comes, overthrows Kynon, and takes his horse. Kynon's tale here ends.

The next day Owein leaves to find the black knight. He has the same encounters as Kynon did; however, instead of being defeated, Owein is able to mortally wound the black knight. He follows the black knight's horse carrying his dead body to a castle. However, while going through the gate, it falls on him and cuts his horse in half; Owein is trapped. A maiden, Luned, comes and gives Owein a ring that will make him invisible. When the people of the castle opened the gate to kill him, Owein slips through and finds the maiden in a room.

That night, hearing an outcry, Owein looks out Luned's window and sees the beautiful Countess of the Fountain in torn yellow clothes walking next to the bier of the owner of the castle. Hearing who she is, Owein declares his love for her. Luned goes to the countess and tries to make peace between her and Owein, telling her that she should have Owein protect the fountain. Under the pretence of going to Arthur's court, Luned goes back to Owein and stays with him until the necessary time has passed.

When Owein and Luned appear before the countess, she takes counsel with the town's people, and marries Owein. For three years, Owein defends the fountain. Then Arthur and three thousand men go to look for Owein at the fountain. During the trip, they have the same encounters as Kynon and Owein. After throwing the water on the stone, Kai fights Owein twice, followed by all of the other men in Arthur's household; all are defeated. When Gwalchmai fights Owein, however, his helmet falls off. Owein recognizes him and surrenders, Gwalchmai surrenders to Owein in return, and Arthur must declare them both with winner to end the politeness.

After spending three months in feasting at the Castle of the Countess of the Fountain, Owein goes back with Arthur to his court for three months. The three months become three years and one day, a lady shames arrives at Arthur's court and shames Owein for his negligence. Owein goes to the forest and lives with wild beasts.

One day a widowed countess finds Owein half dead and restores him to life with a magic ointment. Owein finds out that the countess is harassed by a young Earl, who she has refused to marry. Owein hears the tumult caused by the Earl and requests a horse from the countess. The Countess replies, “Y rof a Duw,” heb hi, “mi a rodaf idaw varch ac arueu vyth, ac ny bu ar helw ef eiryoet varch ac arueu well noc wynt. A da yw genhyf I eu kymryt ohonaw rac eu caffel o'm gelynnynon avory o'm hanford” (23). In return for her gifts, Owein captures the Earl. The Earl, in ransom for his life, returns the Countess's lands and gives her treasure.

Later, while riding through the woods, Owein saves a lion from a serpent. In return the lion befriends Owein and brings him firewood and food. One night, while eating, Owein hears a sigh from a cave. He discovers it is Luned who is imprisoned by two pages who called Owein a deceiver for leaving. Not knowing who she is talking to, she tells him that only Owein can rescue her then directs him to a castle to stay.

At the castle Owein is told that the Earl has two sons who have been captured by a man-eating monster. If the lord's daughter is not handed over the next day, the monster will kill the sons. The next day Owein and the lion go out fight the monster. The lion kills him, and Owein leaves to rescue Luned. When he returns to the woods, he sees two youths about to throw Luned in a fire. Breaking loose of its cage, the lion kills the two youths and Luned is saved. Owein gathers his wife and returns to Arthur's court.

He then enters his castle of the savage black man where he finds twenty-four widow prisoners who tell him of their woes. He encounters the owner of the castle outside, fights, wins, and then spares the man's life. Owein takes the twenty-four widows to Arthur's court. After he remains there for a while, he travels again with his followers of three hundred ravens.

“Ywain and Gawain.” In *Middle English Romances*. Edited by Stephen H. A. Shepherd. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995): 75-173.

This tale begins with a lament that honesty is no longer present in society. The author writes of the knights in King Arthur's court

Thai tald of more trewth tham bitwene
Than now omang men here es sene,
For trowth and luf es al bylaft;
Men uses now another craft (ll. 33-36).

During a celebration on Whitsunday, the king goes to sleep and Calogrevance tells how six years before he was in search of adventures when he travels down a difficult path and finds a castle. A man with a falcon on his arm greets him and took him inside where the people of the castle gather in the courtyard. Among the people was a beautiful woman who disarms him and gives him fine clothes.

The next day Calogrevance leaves early and stumbles upon a valley where he sees wild animals guarded by a giant. Calogrevance tells the man that he is in search of adventure. The giant points down a path and tells him he will see a boiling spring next to a tree, a slab, and a chapel. He informs Calogrevance that he must pour water on the stone to see a storm. Calogrevance does and after the storm a knight in black comes. When Calogrevance loses, the black knight takes his horse and leaves.

After the tale is completed, Ywain chastises Calogrevance for keeping this secret for so long and promises to avenge him. Kay says that Ywain is boasting, but Ywain, out of courtesy, refuses to argue. When Arthur wakes and the Queen tells him Calogrevance's story. Arthur promises to leave in a fortnight to avenge Calogrevance. In order to beat him there and gain glory for himself, Ywain sneaks out that night and goes to the fountain alone.

Ywain fights the black knight and wins. He follows the knight through a gate of a castle; however, when the gates come down, Ywain is trapped. Lunet comes and hides him in an adjoining room, and gives him a ring that will make him invisible to the town's people. Invisible, Ywain witnesses the people of the town come into the room with a bear. Among the group is a lady, and Ywain immediately falls in love with her. Lunet woos the lady, Alundyne, for Ywain, arguing that Alundyne marry a defender for the fountain before King Arthur arrives to invade them. Soon after the wedding, Arthur arrives at the fountain and pours water on the stone. Ywain, disguised defeats Kay fights the unknown knight.

Once Arthur realizes that the black knight is Ywain, they all celebrate together. When Arthur is ready to leave, Gawain convinces Ywain to come back to Arthur's court in order to maintain his martial honor. Alundyne reluctantly gives permission for Ywain to go for one year. For that year, Ywain and Gawain joust at tournaments and Ywain is always victorious.

One day a maiden comes and denounces Ywain for overstaying his term at court. Ywain, in shame, goes mad. He sneaks away from the court and roams the forest, nude and unable to speak. A year later, he is found asleep in the woods by ladies who

recognize him and give him an ointment to heal his madness. In return for the Countess's aid, Ywain fights Count Alers' army, that has invaded the countess's land, defeats several of the knights, and forces the Count to surrender to the countess.

While traveling through the woods, Ywain saves a lion from a dragon, which gratefully follows and protects him from then on. Ywain and the lion are traveling near the fountain when he hears a woman crying from the chapel. They exchange names and Lunet tells him that she is falsely accused of treason. Ywain promises to return the next day to fight for Lunet's honor. That evening he stays at a castle that is being harassed by a giant who has killed two of the lord's sons and will kill the other four unless the lord agrees to give him his daughter as a concubine. Ywain hesitantly agrees to help, and the next day, when the giant arrives, Ywain fights and kills him. Likewise, later that day, Ywain fights the three knights that accused Lunet of treason and throws them in the fire.

Meanwhile, two sisters are arguing over their inheritance. The older sister enlists Gawain to fight for her, and the younger sister goes in search of the Knight with the Lion. Ywain agrees to help the maid and on the return trip, they stay at the Castle of the Hevy Sorow where three hundred maidens are imprisoned and forced to work. In order to leave, Ywain must fight two warriors who seem like sons of the devil. Ywain and the lion fight and when one of the warriors begs mercy, Ywain spares his life. Ywain frees the three hundred maidens to return home.

At Arthur's court, Ywain and Gawain, both disguised, champion the two sisters arguing over inheritance. Surprised by the difficulty of the battle, the two men eventually exchange names. Out of love and mutual respect, Ywain and Gawain each concede the battle to the other. To settle the dispute, Arthur tricks the usurping older sister into giving

up a share of her land to the younger. The younger sister then swears fidelity to her sister. The author notes that this was the first time that land was divided among female inheritors.

When Ywain is healed of his wounds from Gawain, he returns to the fountain and throws water on the stone. After the storm, Lunet tricks Alundyne into accepting The Knight with the Lion as a protector of the fountain. When Alundyne realizes she has been tricked, she is angry but will not break her word. However, the couple reconciles and Ywain and Alundyne live together happily.

Owein and the Welsh Tradition

Breeze, Andrew. *Medieval Welsh Literature*. (Portland: Four Courts Press, 1997).

Andrew Breeze discusses the general development of Welsh literature from the earliest poems to the court poets. In this book, he gives valuable information on the story of *Owein*, the manuscripts in which it is found, and the historical figure Owein uab Urien.

We know of the historical Owein from the poems of Taliesin who was a court poet for Urien of Rheged in the third quarter of the sixth century. These poems are a window into Welsh culture of the time. For example, they reflect intense fighting between the Celts and the English during this century. Moreover Taliesin's language suggests English influence, and an elegy for Owein shows an early Celtic belief in purgatory.

On the manuscripts, Breeze writes that the *The Red Book of Hergest*, one of the manuscripts in which *Owein* appears, was copied about 1400 by Hywel Fychan ap Hywel Goch from Builth for Hopeyn ap Tomas of Ynystawe. Breeze lists the other texts in the manuscript, which are mostly educational and religious in nature. A portion of *Owein* is contained in *The White Book of Rhydderch*, which also includes mainly religious texts.

Of *Owein*, Breeze briefly discusses the story's relation to Chrétien's work. He comments that the work contains the many French loan words. Breeze concludes from these and from the location of Arthur's capital at Caerlon (a tradition from Geoffrey of Monmouth) that the romance was written in the later twelfth or early thirteenth century. He also addresses the mention of Owein's spurs in the scene in the portcullis, the presence of which would limit the text to being written between 1150 and 1250.

Loomis, Roger Sherman. *The Development of Arthurian Romance*. (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1963).

Loomis discusses the progress of Arthurian romance concentrating on the tales from England, French, and Wales. He believes that after the Saxon invasion *Conteurs*, professional Breton storytellers who spoke French, were probably how the Welsh tales came to the continent. The tales gradually grew more to French tastes to include chivalry and the newest fashion. After the Norman Conquest, Loomis believes that the tales returned to England through the Normans and their texts where the stories changed again to reflect English tastes and styles. As Loomis writes, "It was thus by way of Brittany that Arthur returned, as it were, to reconquer the land of his historic exploits and became a hero for the Anglo-Normans" (33). Although Loomis notes the possibility that the stories were transferred directly from Wales, he concludes that there is not enough evidence to support this theory.

About the tales themselves, Loomis notes a distinction between *Erec* and *Ivain* in Chrétien's versions, which would also be reflected in the Welsh versions. As Loomis explains, "The parallel is enforced by the neat contrast between Erec, who allowed his

wife to distract him from tournaments, and Ivain, who allowed tournaments to distract him from his duties as a husband” (58).

Loomis also discusses some backgrounds and sources for the story. The lion, for example, can be traced to an Androcles story. Also a primitive legend made Owein the son of Urien and the river-goddess Modron. Loomis believes that over time a fay of a spring replaced the river goddess, and Owein eventually took the place of his father. At a late date the spring was connected with a spring in the Forest of Broceliande, “where even in the nineteenth century the peasants, in the time of drought, used to pour water on a stone in order to induce rain” (59).

Roberts, Brynley F. “From Traditional Tale to Literary Story: Middle Welsh Prose Narratives.” In *The Craft of Fiction: Essays in Medieval Poetics*. Edited by Leigh Arrathoon. (Rochester: Solaris, 1984): 211-230.

In this article, Roberts describes how tales such as Owein are indicative of the development of Welsh literature in general and describes them as a step in the development of Welsh literature from oral to written. Oral literature can be characterized by a performer using a variable text. However, that text is based on formulae, conventional phrases, and will be structurally linear. The written text is fixed and “its style will be less bound by convention” (215). The written tales in Welsh developed common features, which Roberts calls “‘*cyfarwydd* style writing’ a consciously literary style which never became wholly divorced from the oral tradition which continued to flourish throughout the Middle Ages” (215). In ‘*cyfarwydd* style’, there are more conjunctions between ideas than in oral style and syntax is more varied. Formulae are fewer used in more specific circumstances (greetings, forms of dress, etc.), so they do not draw the reader’s attention. The later works such as *Owein*, “never include an address to

the audience and the narrator does not interrupt his tale nor does he point to the significance of his story” (220). Although there are some examples of authorial comment, such as the comment about the porter at the beginning of *Owein*, these comments are short and do not disrupt the tale.

Another interesting fact that Roberts points out is the complexity of the narrative structure and point of view in the latter stories. For example, in *Owein* the audience knows that it is Owein who is described fighting with the members of Arthur’s court at the fountain; yet, he is not named in the story until Gwalchmai recognizes him. Also unlike most oral tales, the story is not chronological; it consists of a triple repetition of events and includes flashback.

Overall, the lack of psychological development in the Welsh tales, especially when compared to similar tales in the French, does not indicate a less mature author or audience. As Roberts writes, “They are implicit and naturalistic rather than specific and chivalric in motion, suggestive rather than rhetorical in their exploration of character, still revealing the objectivity of narrative rather than the personal voice of the author, but they represent in Welsh writing a major development which may be properly called ‘Welsh Romance’” (225).

General Owein Scholarship

Foster, Idris Llewel. “*Gereint, Owein, and Peredur.*” In *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History*. Edited by Roger Sherman Loomis. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959): 192-205.

In this article, Foster writes a expansive summary of scholarly trends dealing with the stories of *Gereint*, *Owein*, and *Peredur*. For *Owein*, Foster remarks on several discrepancies between *Owein* and *Yvain* which indicates for him that *Owein* was

composed separately from or is the source for *Yvain*. For example, the gateway in which Owein become trapped is more realistic in *Owein*: there is no lavish adjoining room, which is inconsistent with castles built at the time. Also the mention of the yellow man who awaits upon Cynon at the castle would indicate originality since the color is not mentioned in *Yvain*, and therefore it could not be the source for it.

Another difference between the two tales is the placement of the duel between Yvain/Owein and Gauvain/Gwalchmai. Foster writes, “Now if this duel between Yvain and Gauvain had been placed at the end in his source, it is not easy to understand why the Welsh redactor moved it back. But, if it was placed early in the story, [such as it is in *Owein*] it is easy to perceive why Chrétien deliberately reserved it as an appropriate climax to the career of his hero” (199). Therefore, it would be unreasonable to assume that *Owein* was created from *Yvain*.

He also notes that T. F. O’Rahilly suggests that the black man tending animals (*y gwr du*) and the black oppressor (*y du traws*) who appears later in the story could have originally been the same person and of mythological origin. He could be the counterpart to Buchet, the herdsman in the Irish saga *Esnada Tige Buchet* who reopened his house on Leinster for hospitality.

Roberts, Brynley F. “The Welsh Romance of the *Lady of the Fountain (Owein)*.” In *The Legend of Arthur in the Middle Ages: Studies presented to A. H. Diverres by Colleagues, Pupils and Friends*. Edited by P. B. Grout, R. A. Lodge, C. E. Pickford and E. K. C. Varty. (New Jersey: D. S. Brewer, 1983): 170-182.

Roberts writes a general analysis of the narrative structure of *Owein* and how that structure is representative of the structures of other Welsh narratives. Robert explains that because of good editions, the focus of scholarship has shifted from the origin of the tale to reading *Owein* for itself. What we have learned is that the variant readings are

most frequently “the result of a copyist unconsciously altering the syntax of a phrase or sentence or exchanging one word for another as he mouthed the text” (171). Overall, the text shows that like the other prose authors, the author of *Owein* has very little interest in psychological motivations or elaborate descriptions. As Roberts writes: “Our author, like those responsible for the other tales and ‘romances’, has the same respect for direct untrammelled expression of a kind which has no waste words but which never becomes curt, and for him as for his fellow writers the essence of narrative lay in an account of a series of sequence of events and actions rather than in an analysis of motives and emotions or descriptions of character” (172).

However, the author does deviate from traditional methods at times. For example, in the Four Branches, the author would pass time by saying “and they spent that night” while in *Owein* the author writes “That night seemed long to me” (173). This change indicates, according to Roberts, that the author is beginning to pay attention to internal motivations. Also The author also uses the favorite technique of describing the adventure before the event occurs. The reader then knows what is going to happen, and the suspense comes from how the current event will change from the previous description.

Roberts remarks that *Owein* consistently downplays any chivalric episode that appears in *Yvain*. Cynon is motivated to go to the fountain by arrogance, not by a sense of adventure. Owein is motivated by Ceï’s taunts and the desire to see a marvel, not by a desire for vengeance. And the episodes that deal with trial by arms and courtly love are missing in the Welsh text.

The various adventures are connected both thematically and structurally. As Roberts writes, “The theme of the romance is Owain’s coming to know himself, and to recognize the immaturity in his character which led him to spend three years at the fountain unmindful of Arthur and the court, and three further years at court forgetful of his wife” (179). The structure of the story reflects, therefore, Owain’s rise and fall and rise again. The only episode that doesn’t fit the pattern is the Du Traws episode after Owain’s reconciliation with his wife.

Thomson, R. L. “Owain: Chwedl Iarllles Y Ffynnon.” In *The Arthur of the Welsh*. Edited by Rachel Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman, Brynley F. Roberts. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991): 159-69.

Thomson gives an overall reading of *Owain* in this article. Beside the early version, which appears in full in the *Red Book*, there are several later versions of the story. What is interesting is that, of the four independent tales, three omit the sections that include the lion.

Thomson dates the story in its early form from the early twelfth century, but states that the raw material of the story was of unknown age, the first part probably being mythological in origin. He objects to the stories being called *rhamantau* (romances) as being misleading. As he explains “*Owain* is explicitly called *chwedl* (‘tale’) in the colophon (though the later manuscripts all term it *ystori*), perhaps implying something rather less factual than *ystoria* (‘history’), which is the term applied to *Peredur*” (160). However, *Owain* does revolve around a real historical character; Owain son of Urein lived about the end of the sixth century in the northern British kingdom of Rheged. *Owain* also reflects Welsh history in that even though Arthur is referred to as *annherawdyr*, like his is in *Historia Regum Britanniae*, he is seated on rushes instead of a

throne; “the description in fact accords better with the realities of Welsh life in the twelfth century” (161).

After relating a summary of the text, Thomson gives the proportions of various sections of *Owain* and *Yvain*. For example, the sections dealing with the fountain consists of 68.5% of *Owain* and 39% of *Yvain*. He then explains several arguments against the reliance of *Owain* on *Yvain*, namely the lack of time pressure in *Owain* and the treatment of the mysterious and irrational. *Yvain* cuts out or explains all mysterious elements except for the ring of invisibility and the storm at the spring, which are both essential to the development of the story. However, he concludes that *Owain* should be enjoyed no matter what its relationship to *Yvain* is.

Society and Politics

Aronstein, Susan. "When Arthur Held Court in Caer Llion: Love, Marriage, and the Politics of Centralization in *Gereint* and *Owein*." *Viator* 25 (1994): 215-228.

In this article, Susan Aronstein places the Welsh stories of *Gereint uab Erbin* and *Owein* into their socio-political contexts in order to better understand the differences between them and their French counterparts. As Aronstein writes, “*Owein* displaces its French counterpart’s exploration of *fin amor* and the balance between public and private duty to explore instead the politics of centralization. It argues that the threat of an external invasion necessitates submission to a centralized government, an argument that both supports Llewelyn’s centralizing agenda and vindicates his own political decisions with respect to Norman England” (224).

To lay the groundwork for her argument, she briefly describes the cultural and political shifts that which occurred in Wales in the late twelfth and early thirteenth

centuries as a result of the slow but steady Norman infiltration. In an attempt to both befriend and ward off the Norman outsiders, the House of Aberffraw, most particularly Llewelyn ap Iowerth, instituted two changes to Welsh practices: a move to a centralized government and the practice of political marriages to Norman nobility. This ideology is reflected in the stories of *Owein* and *Gerient*.

For example, the major difference between *Owein* and *Yvain* is the prominence of *fin amor* in the French version. In *Owein*, however, love is downplayed. When the Lady of the Fountain marries Owein, it is a political decision, based on the advice of Luned and her counselors. The marriage is necessary to provide a protector for the kingdom of the Fountain. Because the kingdom lies within Arthur's own, the kingdom considers it better to be protected by one of Arthur's men than to be ravished by an outsider. This sentiment is echoed later in the story when Owein rescues a widowed countess. She tells him that she would rather give him a horse and armor willingly than for them to be taken forcibly by others.

Aronstein argues, therefore, that *Owein* maintains not only Llewelyn's practices of arranging marriages with Norman lords but also his push to unify Wales under his own rule. After all, as Aronstein writes, "Better the Welshman with the legitimate claim than the marauding Norman" (223). By placing the story in Arthur's court, Llewelyn could claim antiquity for his own new practices; they were simply a reversion to a previous order misplaced by modern Welsh traditions.

Fulton, Helen. "Individual and Society in Owein/Yvain and Gereint/Erec." In *The Individual in Celtic Literatures: CSANA Yearbook 1*. Edited by Joseph Falaky Nagy. (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2001): 15-50.

After elaborately criticizing current theories of the individual in the Middle Ages, Fulton goes through both the Welsh and the French romances to show that the characterizations in them are based on the society in which they are written not on a modern psychological western version of autonomy. As Fulton writes: “From this point of view, the characters in the French and Welsh can be read, not as more or less successful versions of the psychologized liberal-humanist individual, but rather as social subjects produced by different discourses. What the characters are allowed to say or experience is determined by the discursive formations available to them” (23).

During the time that the French romances were written, the French social structure was in flux. Primogeniture dictated that the younger sons needed to gain land by other means than inheritance, such as military force, marriage, or a gift from a lord. Knights, therefore, sought ways to seamlessly merge with the upper aristocracy. Thus for the French romances to attract an audience, they reflected the means to shift social strata namely through courtly love and individual chivalry. For example, Yvain’s choice of wife is a personal decision not a political one. These tales then concentrated on the interior thoughts of the knight, his individual prowess, and far more often have the narrator appearing as “I” such as in Chrétien’s works.

Conversely, the Welsh social structure during the time the romances were written was less hierarchical. Instead the Welsh nobility considered themselves a single status group calling themselves *uchelwyr*. In these tales, loyalty to kin and lord is emphasized, individualism, in the western sense of the word, is not discussed, and marriage is a political act. For example, The Lady of the Fountain’s decision to marry Owein is based on the protection of her lands and is reached only after it is discussed with her counselors.

As Fulton summarizes: “To audiences of knights and noblemen engaged in competitive relationships with each other and with the king, the French romances endorse a model of lordship in which well-born knights can earn the right to rule more or less autonomously. To audiences of *uchelwyr*, competing to maintain their traditional privileges in the face of Norman colonization, the Welsh romances endorse a model of lordship in which tribal loyalties outweigh individual ambition” (28). Therefore, Owein’s return to Arthur at the end of the story is a message to the Welsh lords to remain loyal to a single Welsh overlord.

Owein’s counterparts

Bromwich, Rachel. “First Transmission to England and France.” In *The Arthur of the Welsh*. Edited by Rachel Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman, Brynley F. Roberts. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991): 273-98.

In her article, Bromwich traces the transmission of Celtic tales from Wales to England and France. She states that the transmissions could have begun as early as 1002 when King Ethelred married Emma of Normandy. However, the largest amount of material would have transmitted through the Britons during the Norman invasion when they comprised a large amount of William’s followers. Throughout that century, Norman lords frequently owned lands on both sides of the channel.

Since the first settlement in Brittany, the Normans and the Britons were closely linked; however there is evidence that the Britons “still remembered their ancestral origins in Wales and Cornwall. Evidently a strong urge was felt by Normans and Bretons alike to nurture a sense of ‘belonging’ to their new country, by investing its traditions, imaginatively re-creating its legendary history, and collecting its ancient stories and the Lives of its early church-founders, or saints” (275). Through Geoffrey of Monmouth,

Wace, and other such writer's, we can get a picture of what the first transmissions were like and the breadth of their differences. However, according to Bromwich, it was the uncharted literature, that which was oral or is lost, which would have actually been transferred to the Normans and these at a very early date.

In order to investigate these lost tales, Bromwich traces a large number of personal and place names of Brythonic derivation, which appear in both the French and Latin works. For example, Chrétien's alludes to place names, such as *Orcanie* and *Cotoatre*, which appear neither in Geoffrey or Wace and therefore, according to Bromwich, indicate other sources. Bromwich writes of some of the names, "The French poems suggest that very much more may once have been known and told about these heroes in Wales, and that both are figures who have declined in status in the existing Welsh records" (280).

In part II of her article, Bromwich discusses the tales of Chrétien de Troyes and his Welsh counterparts. Bromwich writes that although the style and structure of the Welsh tales indicate that they were written by different authors, they all show an awareness of the French versions. The sequence of events do resemble the French tales; however, they deviate enough that it could be that they were in part written from memory of a story heard. Bromwich believes that the 'common source' discussed so much of late was not necessarily a written source, but an oral one. This would mean that the theme of Sovereignty in *Peredur* and possibly in *Owein* is plausible. Nevertheless, as Bromwich writes: "But however this may be, it is inconceivable that Chrétien or the authors of the Welsh tales had any comprehension of the significance of this theme. The myth was so

old and so deeply submerged that its meaning had been lost and forgotten long before the composition of the extant tales and poems” (284).

She finds that place names are a more accurate method of portraying the transmission because the stories are too variable. She also trusts that the transmission was not a formal occurrence, but first came through informal contacts and intermarriages and possibly through written texts of storytellers like Bleddri and Geoffrey of Monmouth.

Hunt, Tony. “Some Observations on the Textual Relationship of *Li chevaliers au lion* and *Iarllles y Ffynnawn*.” *Zeitschrift fur Celtische Philologie* 33 (1974): 93-113.

Hunt says that to judge the aesthetics of a work as a means of finding out whether *Yvain* or *Owein* was written earlier is a fallacy. Instead he looks at specific aspects of the texts to see which text would have influenced the other. His conclusion is that, instead of being based on a similar source in Anglo-Norman, *Owein*, in its present form, is in fact most likely influenced by *Yvain* itself.

To prove his thesis he describes discrepancies throughout the text. For example, he cites the beginning of the story when Arthur goes to sleep before the meal and tells his knights to entertain each other with stories. In *Yvain*, the sleep motif is necessary in order to avoid confrontation between Arthur and Yvain about avenging Calogrenant. In *Owein*, there is no need for Arthur to leave. Hunt concludes that these details, “in the Welsh text appear singular and yet purposeless. In the French they are natural and *functionally indispensable*, being intimately linked to later narrative requirements. In other words, their occurrence in the *mabinogi* cannot readily be accounted for without reference to putative sources. In Chrestien their presence seems to require no explanation other than internal necessity” (98).

Hunt lists several more examples, equally mundane and ignorant of the Welsh text and tradition. For example, he concludes that because Arthur requests of the Lady of the Fountain that Owein attends him back to “Ynys Prydein” that they must be in France. Because it had not been previously mentioned that the knights had traveled over sea, this detail must come from Chrestien. Although he lists in opposition numerous examples of instances where they mention travel abroad previously, he concludes that these are all formulaic. Hunt writes, “In these cases the reference to *Ynys Prydein* belongs to conventional hyperbole and at no stage implies geographical removal from the Island of Britain itself” (103). He neglects, however, to explain why.²

Mythological Background

Goetinck, Glenys W. “Chretien's Welsh Inheritance.” In *Gallica: Essays Presented to J. Heywood Thomas by Colleagues, Pupils, and Friends*. Edited by Philip F. Butler. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1969): 13-29.

Goetinck believes that Chrétien’s stories *Perceval*, *Yvain*, *Erec et Enide*, and the corresponding Welsh stories all had common sources probably written in French. However, she believes that the tales are Welsh Celtic in origin and were transferred and later adapted by Chrétien to fit into the French courtly culture. Goetinck enumerates: “The material on which the Welsh romances were based derived mainly from the dynastic traditions of the Old North; legends attached to the names of various local chieftains and dealing mostly with the theme of sovereignty, the quest for it, and the means by which it might be acquired” (13).

² In general, if Hunt has any valid point to make, untainted with an obvious preference to the priority of Yvain over true scholarship, it would need to be exhumed out of the article after double checking all “facts” contained therein.

As an example of the transmission, Goetinck examines *Peredur* and *Perceval* to find examples of the Sovereignty myth.³ Chrétien's Guenievre, for example, may have a link to the Irish Queen Medb, a personification of sovereignty, most especially in the fact that both queens had many lovers. Goetinck continues, "When the goddess became a queen and was later made a consort to Arthur, those qualities which were formerly a natural part of her character became difficulties to be surmounted and rationalized by the *conteurs*" (15). There are several types of sovereignty themes running throughout Welsh literature and also transferred into the French; the Abduction, the Insult, the Transformation, and the Acquisition by combat are only a few.

Goetinck goes on to describe the theme in *Peredur* and *Perceval*, which uses the version of Acquisition by Combat. In this case, the maiden or sovereignty can only be attained after the hero has defeated a god of the Otherworld and proven his worth. The knight goes to a castle, finds it defenseless and attacked by an outsider who has some connection with the ruler and usually wishes to marry by force the dominant female of the domain. This female in return for protection of her land offers herself to the hero, and thus the hero is morally tested; he must refuse the offer of intercourse to be worthy. The hero then fights several battles, regains the realm, and then often times leaves the realm back in the hands of the original rulers, though he will sometimes marry the dominant female.

Goetinck states that over time the original single female had become two separate characters, such as the Countess and Luned are separate in *Iarllles y Ffynnawn*. In the French versions of the stories, however, the connection has been lost "for Blancheflor has

³ Although this article does not deal directly with Owein, many of the same patterns can be found in both stories.

taken the place of the Empress; the ultimate identity of all the characters who encounter the hero to help him and test him, and the reason linking their appearances, has also vanished” (25). Thus, though the story is well treated and exciting, Chrétien’s tales have lost their more global meaning of sovereignty and the influence of the Otherworld.

Lovecy, Ian. “Exploding the Myth of the Celtic Myth: A New Appraisal of the Celtic Background of Arthurian Romance.” *Reading Medieval Studies* 7 (1981): 3-18.

In this work, Lovecy analyses the tendency in Welsh scholarship to look for an original myth underscoring both medieval Welsh texts and their French counterparts. For stories like *Yvain*, for example, the implication is that “Chrétien de Troyes got it wrong; that he was trying to write the original Celtic myth, but alas lacked the knowledge of mythology” (4).

Lovecy goes on to warn against looking for a corrupted myth at all. He argues that the reason scholars have trouble finding the myth, even in the Welsh sources, is because, “the Celtic myths themselves have long ceased to be in any real sense mythology” (5). To support his claim, Lovecy analyses *Cath Maige Tured*’s references to gods and concludes that the work contains both names for the gods and descriptions because the gods are no longer identifiable by simply one or the other.

Instead of one lump category of mythology, Lovecy breaks the unearthly elements of the stories into two subsections: the supernatural and science fiction. The supernatural is expressed in two ways: both by a passive acceptance of otherworldly events, such as Pwyll and Annwin’s abilities to shape shift, and by unexplained events that draw attention to the supernatural, such as “when the actors themselves find events strange and marvelous we, the audience, must be expected to do likewise” (9). Science

fiction on the other hand is described as a supernatural event that is explained in the story. Lovecy's conclusion is that simply because a story has supernatural elements it is not necessarily mythological in origin. Therefore, Chrétien's *Le Chevalier au Lion* cannot be seen as a botched attempt at Celtic myth writing.

At the same time, we cannot write off the Celtic influences on Chrétien's story. Lovecy writes, "If Chrétien were using an international tale-type from a Continental source, he has taken great pains to make it seem Celtic, and to choose those images – the fountain, the rings, the monstrous herdsman – which can most easily be paralleled in other Celtic tales" (13). However, as Lovecy points out what is important is not the possible mythological background but the story itself, the creativity and originality expressed in each tale.