The Poems
of
Myrddin

Nº. 3

The Apple-Trees

Foreword

I never intended to write this booklet, nor to revisit Myrddin in detail. But at my wife Charlotte's instigation, in July 2016 I held an exhibition of my old paintings in King Street Gallery, Carmarthen, and at the opening gave bit of a talk about them, which necessitated mentioning Myrddin, since he appeared in a number of them. At the end of the talk, on impulse, I said if there was any interest in it, I'd thought of doing a course of talks looking in detail at the actual Myrddin poetry. (Because I feel it's a shame that while Myrddin/Merlin is so well-known by all, hardly anybody knows about the poetry on which the figure is ultimately based. It ought to be better known.) A couple of people subsequently expressed an interest, and I thought, "Help! I'd better do a bit of homework on this. I know! As an initial course aid I'll just quickly dash off a translation of the seven poems traditionally attributed to Myrddin." So I plunged in with the "Apple-Trees".

But then I found people didn't actually want an academic-type course, so I didn't after all have a prospective class happening. Having put my hand to the plough with the "Apple-Trees" though, I thought I might as well see it through. But since I now didn't have a target audience in mind, my approach bit-by-bit deepened from the level of treatment I had initially been aiming at. Nonetheless it was such a treat not feeling I had to cite sources all the time I decided to continue in that mode. So in the end I fear this work falls between two stools: the popular and the academic.

Given the changed focus level though, just doing the "Apple-Trees" was more work and took much longer than I had anticipated, and anyway there wasn't anybody any longer I was doing it for. So when I got to the end of it I didn't feel like doing any more of the poems. Perhaps another day.

I used the Black Book [LLDC] verses as my primary source, supplemented by the Peniarth 3 [Pen3] verses (from Ifor Williams' edition printed in *Bwletin y Bwrdd Gwybodau Celtaidd* iv, p.121) and by the Myvyrian Archaiology [Myv.] and Thomas Stephens' *Literature of the Kymry* [LK]. I didn't get sight of the four verses in Peniarth 50 as I couldn't track down a copy of the manuscript, but I'm hoping they're the additional ones found in Myv. And LK. I haven't cited all the Peniarth 3 variant readings from those of the Black Book, only those I

deemed interesting or significant

The verses don't really have an integral sequence anyhow, but, too whimsically perhaps, I decided totally to rearrange them into my own perception of their date order. Subsequently modifying my ideas on their relative dating I nevertheless didn't change the order I'd initially put them in. Nor have I set myself to read and take on board all contemporary study of, and scholarly thinking about the poem. I further make no apology for what will be anathema to the purist scholar: that I've opted to stage the Middle Welsh in modern dress. So what I proffer here is very much a personal, private citizen's view of what it's about.

Tim

Dan-y-graig, Llandeilo
Tachwedd 2016

Introduction

The golden age of Brittany was probably between 853 and 907 when under its kings Nevenoue, Erezboue, Salaun and Alan, it became in effect an independent kingdom with its own national church. Following Alan's death in 907 however, and especially after Charles the Simple, king of France, had in 911 ceded Normandy to the Viking, Walking Rolf and his associates, Brittany was for thirty years occupied and pillaged length and breadth by the pagan Northmen, with churches and monasteries looted and burnt, with thousands of irreplaceable manuscripts thousands of monks had spent their lives laboriously copying burnt or thrown into lakes. The Breton ruling families fled abroad. (It was the same in Brittany it seems, as in Ireland, Wales, Strathclyde, Scotland and Pictland, that the flowering of dark-age insular christian civilisation was brought to an end by the savage irruptions of the Northmen.) In 937 however Alan Wrybeard son of Mathedoue son of Alan, returning from England, managed to defeat the Northmen and drive them out. But things had changed. Brittany was too devastated to think of getting back on its feet as an independent kingdom. Wrybeard now set it up as a duchy, subject to, and under the protection of, France. (Alan and Louis IV of France had both been pals in exile together in England.) Though part of the point of Brittany giving homage to France was to combat Normandy's continued claim to suzerainty over it.

This shattering of old Brittonic Britanny and its putting-back-together as a duchy of Carolingian France, of course saw the rapid spread of Carolingian norms, in particular the Carolingian language, French, through the ranks of the Breton nobility, a trend only accelerated by their constant intermarriage with the Frankish and Norman ruling families of their neighbouring states. In any case, the next hundred years was to see the crystallizing-out of post-Carolingian France into a mosaic of highly-militarised, mutually-antagonistic and warlike states – Brittany one of their number. By constant practice they developed a distictive and highly proficient military technique centred around the use of armoured cavalry and castles. In the first half of the eleventh century Brittany and its eastern neighbour, Normandy, were increasingly involved with one another, both dynastically and in the constant warfare the endemic power rivalries ngendered.

Oddly, the coming-out of British Brittany into the Carolingian world was accompanied by the rise of a new Breton minstrelsy, hearking back to a

glorious British past, set in a semi-mythological island of Britain of long ago, before France was even thought of, concerning the doings of the Brittonic folk-tale hero Arthur and his war-band. (Arthur and his court in their original conception are actually very analogous to Fionn and his Fenians in Ireland. In the same way that these latter were apparently charged with the defence, in a semi-supernatural capacity, of the realm of Ireland, so Arthur seems to have stood in the same relation to Britain. Was Arthur historical? – Was Fionn historical?) This Arthur, furthermore, when his allotted time-span came to an end, did not die but merely sleeps, awaiting the call, at which time he will return to free Britain, and Brittany, from oppression and to institute a new age of unclouded glory, with Britain/Bretagne true only to itself and its own innate destiny, unconditioned by the over-arching proximity of any inimical French, English or Norman powers.

Was this new Breton voice a protest at being obliged by the movement of the times to assimilate to their neighbours,– regretfully to have to say good-bye to their own distinctive forms, culture and language? Was it by looking for the future return of Arthur, guardian of Britain, to champion the Breton cause that Bretons were able to sustain themselves during the dire national disaster of the Nordic devastation and the continuing humiliations they were subsequently obliged to endure at the hands of the Norman state? Was it a stubborn statement of faith that beyond the exigencies of present-day pragmatism the value of what they once had been could still one day be realised, and that their early promise, now seemingly traduced, would yet one day be fulfilled?

This Breton subject-matter (*matière de Bretagne*) was nonetheless, presented in a Carolingian guise and in the French language, – obviously necessary to make it accessible to the minstrels' paying customers, the now francophone Breton nobility. But it also made it accessible to the rest of France too, and was an immediate hit, especially in Normandy. Perhaps people found it fresh, imaginative, intriguing, magical – a welcome change from the grim chauvenist realism of the old *matière de France*,– you know, Charlemagne, Roland and Oliver, Roncevalles and all that. Anyway, by the beginning of the twelfth century, in french-speaking lands there was bit of an Arthur craze going on which was to last for a century and more. The reach and influence of this genre is evidenced by a carving (dated c. 1120) above the north door of Modena cathedral in Italy, which illustrates an early Arthurian story.

In 1164 William Robertson, duke of Normandy made war on his Breton counterpart, Conan ab Alan, apparently in an attempt to impose Normandy's traditional claim to lordship over Brittany. William was supported by the Breton lord, Rivallon of Dol, vassal to Eozen Penteur of Lambal, which latter was uncle,

enemy and ducal rival of Conan. In 1065 William and his allies pursued Conan as far as Dinan where, according to the Bayeux tapestry, after a siege he surrendered. The following year William invaded England. His army included large contingents drawn from among his Breton supporters in Dol and Lambal. Eozen Penteur provided him with a force of 5,000 men, including his own sons Red Alan (subsequently earl of Richmond) and Brian, plus a hundred ships. The Bretons in William's army must have found it strange to be returning to their legendary ancestral home, and at the prospect of even acquiring lands in Arthur's nebulous otherworld realm.

After his victory William appointed his trusted friend and relation, William Fitzosbern, to be earl of Hereford, who, among other things, immediately proceeded to encroach into Gwent, building the first castle at Monmouth. When in 1071 he was killed in action in Normandy after only five years in the title, he was duly succeeded by his son Ralph. But in 1075 Ralph rebelled against William Robertson and got stripped of his lands. In the subsequent reallocations William gave the lordship of Monmouth to a Breton nobleman from Dol named Gwyddenog Labouseg, who, we may perhaps assume, followed normal practice in apportioning out the lands, offices and benefices of the new lordship liberally among his family and clentelle. (William Robertson seems to have established many of his Breton followers along the Welsh and Cornish march, presumably in the belief that due to their brittonic kinship they would be best able to understand and relate to the insular Britons.) A religious chap, Gwyddenog founded a benedictine priory (of Saumur abbey, in Anjou) at Monmouth, before, in 1082, resigning the seigneural title and becoming himself a monk at Saumur. He was succeeded by his nephew, William Fitzbaderon, who remained lord of Monmouth until 1125 and it was he who oversaw the final consecration of Gwyddenog's priory in 1101.

On general considerations it seems eminently possible that Geoffrey of Monmouth (who calls himself that) was born (not improbably around 1100) and brought up at Monmouth. If we assume that his parents were a french-speaking Breton family associated with the lord, they might have been first generation British Bretons (the conquest was by now thirty five years ago, after all) or else, perhaps more likely, they had arrived from Dol when Gwyddenog, or Fitzbaderon had been installed. Geoffrey, in a number of his later charter signings he calls himself *Galfridus Arturus* 'Geoffrey Arthur'; whether this 'Arthur' was in fact his father's name, or merely a cognomen adopted by himself, or given him by others, in respect of his particular hobby-horse? His grandparents though would almost certainly have been indigenous Bretons. As someone who subsequently proved himself to be imaginative, creative, scholarly, diligent and

an excellent latinist, we can perhaps surmise that he had a good education, and was an able pupil at the new Monmouth Priory, possibly under teachers from Saumur.

We next find him, it could be argued, in the 1120's at LLan-daf, just west of Cardiff. The Cotton Vespasian-A manuscript of the LLyfr LLan-daf (published c. 1125) introduces the *Life of Teilo* with the ascription *Incipit vita Sancti Teliavi Episcopi. A magistro Galfrido Fratre Urbani Landavensis Ecclesie Episcopi dictata.* 'Here begins the life of Saint Teilo, Bishop. Written down by Superintendant Geoffrey, a brother at Bishop Urban's church of LLan-daf'. The life itself is very redolent of Geoffrey's style and method, – his distinctive ability to inflate a few bare scraps of tradition into a rattling good yarn. The life moreover has Teilo being associated with and helped by deer, a strong motif in Breton lore concerning the saint, but unknown in surviving Welsh traditions. Also Geoffrey always uses the hypercorrected (ie. incorrect) spelling, *Galfridus* for what was then pronounced, and is elsewhere spelt, *Gaufridus* (< ?Frankish *Gautfrid*, cf. Germ. *Gottfried*, Eng. G*odfrey*, Norse *Guthfrith*). Presumably he distinguished himself in the scholarly field, for he was, from 1129 on – as charter evidence testifies, at Oxford, most likely a secular canon of St. George's College, still with the rank of Superintendant (*Magister*), where of course he rubbed shoulders with the leading scholars, French, English asnd Welsh, of his age. He remained there apparently for the rest of his life (d. 1155). Although in 1152 – by way of recognition of his achievements, one gathers – he was ordained bishop of St. Asaph (having first been ordained priest ten days earlier), it seems to have been an honorary appointment only, since the diocese was then under Welsh control.

Geoffrey was a true celticist,– his intellectual curiosity continually and obsessively sucked him further up and further in to British studies and the evaluation of the indigenous civilisation of these islands. While at the same time he was possessed of a colourful imagination reluctant to allow facts to stand in the way of a good story. As a young Breton he would have been, in keeping with the vogue of the times, mad about Arthur. He would also have been curious about the Welsh, from among whom he knew his distant ancestors had come. It stood to reason furthermore, if Breton traditions retained a hazy memory of an Arthur, guardian and king of the Island of Britain, who was destined one day to return to save and vindicate his people, that the Welsh, the British who had never left the island, would know much more about him than the Bretons, and so be able to fill in the missing pieces of the picture. Being brought up, and having spent the early part of his career in Wales, Geoffrey was ideally placed to be able to find out more on this subject. If he had worked on LLyfr LLan-daf for Urban, he would have undoubtedly mixed with the Nantcarfan canons, including

the distinguishrd hagiographer, Caradog, and would have spent time researching Welsh historical documents. (Geoffrey's reference to Caradog in "History of the Kings of Britain" has a faintly mocking air about it. One wonders if Geoffrey, the urbane francophone Breton found Caradog too Welsh.)

Imagine Geoffrey's surprise then upon finding out that the Welsh had never heard of King Arthur. Well, I exaggerate of course. Arthur did exist in Welsh tradition, but only as a minor and rather undignified folk-tale figure nobody was much interested in until the new French craze came along to prompt them to bring him out and dust him off a bit. He certainly didn't have the stature of the Breton Arthur, major national colossus, through faith in whose ultimate return the nation was able to maintain morale and a sense of Brittonic destiny in the face of Norman domination and creeping gallicisation. It's not that the Welsh didn't have a once-and-future king. They did, Cadwaladr,– different from Arthur in a number of ways – in being a demonstrably historical figure for one. It was rather that the Welsh kept up their morale in the face of foreign aggression by putting their trust in the veracity of the prophet who prophesied him, – Myrddin. Geoffrey learnt that a number of prophecies by Myrddin were circulating among the Welsh which served to strengthen them in their national struggle.

Although probably disappointed not to find further intelligence about Arthur in Wales, Geoffrey was plainly intrigued by Myrddin. So following his contributions to the LLyfr LLan-daf in the mid 1120's, Geoffrey's next publication in the mid 1130's was a volume entitled the "Prophecies of Merlin". Whether from his colleagues at LLan-daf, or those at Oxford he had gleaned at least that Myrddin foretold the future return of Cadwaladr of Wales and Cynan of Brittany. For, these and the name of the battle at which they are supposed finally to prevail do appear in Geoffrey's work. But ninety five percent of the material bears no relation at all to the actual Myrddin poetry, either in content or in style and is evidently based chiefly upon other prophetic paradigms and Geoffrey's indefatigable imagination.

It is traditionally recounted that Geoffrey came up with the name Merlin because the middle Welsh spelling of Myrddin was *Merdin*, and Latin *Merdinus* would mean 'Shitty'. But I've read, somewhere, that there are early Breton traditions of Merlin in which he much more closely resembles the Welsh Myrddin the Wildman than the arthurian magician. Which might go some way to suggesting that there <u>were</u> ancient pre-Geoffrey memories of Myrddin in Brittany, already under the name Merlin, which Geoffrey might have heard about. Respectable opinion still is though, I believe, that Merlin was a Geoffrey

creation, and that all appearances of the figure post-date, and are attributable to his original conception of him.

Geoffrey's next book, a couple of years later (c. 1136), was his monumental, and most famous, work, "A History of the Kings of Britain" (into which the "Prophecies of Merlin" was also incorporated). Of course the book is primarily angled at giving a historical justification, and prolegomena, for Breton nationhood (and is in some respects quite anti-Welsh). So as you might expect, King Arthur plays a central role, where Geoffrey did the best he could with what he had been able to find out. But in an attempt to be even-handed about the divergent strands of the British tradition he does however feature the Welsh Myrddin, massaged into Merlin, as prophesying and facilitating the advent of the once-and-future king – all be that Arthur now, and not Cadwaladr. Since Geoffrey in 1136 knew virtually nothing about Myrddin he fleshed out his picture of him by identifying him, wrongly, with Emrys in Nennius' account of the youthful Emrys prophesying before Gwrtheyn concerning the red and white dragons (worms).

So the result of Geoffrey's reconstruction of Myrddin,– Merlin, was essentially a totally different character from the Welsh feral madman bard who had inspired him. But as things turned out it was the fictional Merlin, who bore a trace only of his original template, who caught the public's imagination and became a literary celebrity. Whilst the real thing continued to languish (and still does) in obscurity.

So it's with a certain ironic satisfaction that I have to report that over the next ten years or so the patriotic arthur-mad Breton became increasingly sucked into a fascination with, and research into, the British figure of Myrddin, Such that in around 1150 he publishes his last and best work, "A Life of Merlin". By which time he has managed to piece together much more of the actual lore surrounding Myrddin and to present a picture of the bard quite different from, and contradictory to, his 1136 version, and this time one creditably in accord with Welsh tradition. Added to which it's an absolutely excellent Latin poem, polished and refined. The "Life of Merlin" is really the consumation of Geoffrey's life, scholarship and art. (He died a few years later.) So of course it "fell like stone from the press." (Anachronistically to reuse David Hume's remark about his "Treatise of Human Nature.") Never acknowledged or acclaimed, it was almost forgotten. In fact we're lucky to have it, because it only exists in one manuscript.

It could be that the "History of the Kings of Britain" was accessible to its contemporary audience because of the way in which it intersected with the Carolingian romance world-order. It was relevant to the coming-out of Brittany

and to the expansion of Carolingian France into England.. This hard-core British stuff though of the "Life of Merlin" was too far-out. It was not interesting because outside the frame of reference of mainstream european civilisation. It belonged to British civilisation and to the British dispensation only, which romance spectacles were not able to see.

While Geoffrey's "Life of Merlin" does incorporate many of the motifs of the Myrddin legend, it doesn't give us the impression that Geoffrey actually had sight (or sound) of the Myrddin poetry itself. Whether his Welsh wasn't good enough, or he didn't mix in the right circles – he was operating out of Oxford after all, or the poetry was still, at that point, in oral transmission, or else was buried in forgotten manuscripts on the dusty shelves of some Welsh abbey?

Extant in the corpus of Welsh traditional poetry there are today seven poems generally taken as in some capacity representing the authentic pronouncements of Myrddin: "Myrddin and Taliesin's Conversation", "The Birch Trees", "The Apple-Trees", "The Oh!Oh!'s", "The Abiding Together of Myrddin and his Sister Gwenddydd", "Poem Imparted by Myrddin from his Grave" and "Baby Lordling". Of these, as you can see from the titles the first and the fifth are dramatised dialogues in which Myrddin is an actor (ie. they're about him rather than by him), in the sixth Myrddin is regarded as being dead, the second is of manifestly late composition while the seventh is a bit anomalous with problems of its own, – which really leaves "The Apple-Trees" and "The Oh! Oh!'s" as the poems with the best claim actually to be by him. But even these, when you survey them, one of the first things that strikes you is that the verses are all patently from different historical periods: Some verses purport to be about events in the sixth century, some verses are clearly concerned with events during the Viking age, while others again are obviously about the struggle against the Norman and Plantagenet kings, even as late as Henry II and John. The other five poems equally would seem to evidence disparity in the periods at which they were composed.

It was considerations such as these which led nineteeth-century commentators, English and Welsh, quite understandably to be extremely sceptical about claims that the poems represented the work of a historical bard, Myrddin. They were naturally working within the parameters they were used to: the rationalist English, or indeed renaissance-european, modes of thought for dealing with, and categorizing the work of poets. The indigenous British, pre-classical way of coming at things though is other.

Not to beat about the bush, the key to understanding the Myrddin poetry is to grasp that Myrddin is not the name of any flesh and blood bard that ever lived, but the name of a spirit. Even the historical bard who composed the

earliest stratum of the Apple-Trees and the Oh!Oh!'s (and so kicked off the genre) was not called Myrddin, but Llallog. We get an inkling that Myrddin was originally understood to be a spirit by paying attention to the section in the White Book on the names for Britain., where it says, *Cyntaf enw a fu ar yr ynys hon, cyn na'i chael nai'i chyfanheddu,– Clas Myrddin* 'The first name this island bore before it was taken possession of or inhabited was Myrddin's Community.' If it was before it was taken possession of or inhabited, then it was uninhabited (by people). Who then was Myrddin? And who were his community? We could come up with a provisional answer something like: Myrddin was the tutelary spirit of the island (since it was named after him, and is obviously thought of in some sense as being his) with his community being the wild creatures of wood, plain and mountain. (In the post-Vulgate *L'Estoire de Merlin*, Merlin is presented as Lord of the Animals.) Again, "Poem Imparted by Myrddin from his Grave" clearly requires the author of the poem to be a spirit, with his words relayed to us courtesy of some receptive mortal (uncredited). (The objection that this spirit is by implication the shade of one who was once mortal but has died is not intractable and I don't propose to go after it here.) Neither does Myrddin appear in any of the early genealogies, nor in Nennius' list of the distinguished early poets – suggesting he has no historical presence. (Mind you, Taliesin who is in that list is now deemed also not to have been mortal, but mythic. I think Myrddin and Taliesin suffered a similar fate in that through special association with one mortal bard in particular they came to be identified as that bard.) The Welsh bards often allude to what they have to say having been conveyed to them by a spirit (*awen*). When we read that today we tend to think it's just a colourful, metaphorical turn of phrase. But no, they were serious.

So anyway, how does a spirit compose poetry? When the spirit Myrddin comes into a bard's consciousness, either of its own volition because it has intelligence to divulge to the people it loves, – the people of Britain, or else because the bard himself has sought it out, then if that bard allows the spirit to take the steering-wheel, the spirit itself will speak directly to us through the bard's fleshly lips, otherwise it can tell the bard what to say and he will say it. So rightly speaking this means that all true myrddinite poetry is composed under spirit possession, and further, that for the duration of that possession Myrddin briefly re-enters the temporal world and is incarnated as the person through whom he is speaking. (Of course this hasn't, I'm sure, precluded some with a personal point to make, from cynically composing a verse starting, "Perennial apple-tree..." or whatever, and ending with some reference to Caledon Wood in order spuriously to attach the weight of Myrddin's authority to their remarks.)

This means of course that, as an unborn, undying spirit existing in a non-spatio-temporal reality, Myrddin can visit anybody at any point in history, which is why the Myrddin poetry obviously dates from so many different periods, and is therefore plainly the work of sundry mortal bards. It's as if, throughout the succession of the ages Myrddin likes from time to time to reappear to counsel and guide his people. He reappears through someone contacting, or being contacted by, his spirit, and Myrddin himself addressing us once more through them. This has the interesting corollary that Myrddinite poetry is not yet finished. Myrddin's intercession in the life of his people is not over; it's on-going. It could happen again tomorrow. It'ld be hard though, I grant you, to distinguish between the real thing and a deliberate or self-mystified imposter.

The earliest stratum of the Myrddin poetry then, has to do with Gwenddolau ap Ceidio's defeat at the battle of Arfderydd in AD 573, his bard's subsequent madness and flight to Caledon Wood, and his life spent living ferally there for the next fifty years. But while the speaker of this verse does name names, such as Gwenddydd (not said there though to be his sister) he never names himself. Nor does the name Myrddin ever occur in it. However, the Cumbrian twelfth-century life of saint Cyndeyrn, and other Cumbrian documents in the Cotton Titus A manuscript (15th century) record the story of an individual who can plausibly be identified with the speaker of this verse. Except that there he's called (in Latin spelling) Lailoken. Which might explain why, in the much later "Abiding together of Myrddin and his Sister Gwenddydd", while Gwenddydd standardly addresses her brother as Myrddin, she sometimes calls him instead, LLallog and LLallogan.

The Lailoken story and the Cumbrian verse associated with it, dating from the sixth to the ninth centuries, found their way for the first time to Welsh public notice seemingly in the late ninth century, quite possibly as part of the Cumbrian diaspora in the wake of the sack of Allt-glud (Dunbarton) by the Northmen in 870 and the ensuing peculiarly thorough despoliation of the country it controlled (Dunbartonshire, Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire). In the face of the fact that the verse itself avows no name for its author or speaker, Welsh literary opinion very swiftly came to the conclusion that it must be Myrddin – which handle has stuck more or less ever since. Why? (The greatest mystery about Myrddin is his name.)

It's an interesting speculation whether the name of Myrddin was known in pre-ninth century Allt-glud. There's no evidence to that effect (unless you count the Gododdin reference cited below) and although the Cotton Titus A documents mentioned above do explicitly equate Lailoken with Merlyn/Merlin,

that name itself bespeaks the influence of Geoffrey's "Life of Merlin", or could perhaps reflect knowledge of the Welsh poetry. Was Myrddin in the ninth century still a local Dyfed figure or was his repute established throughout Wales? The records tell us that the post-870 Allt-glud refugees settled in Gwynedd. So if the LLallogan story they brought with them, were to have got rebranded in that province, this would suggest Myrddin was already familiar there. Was Myrddin identified with LLallogan solely on the basis that he too was a political prophet? I mean, did he already have matching wildman attributes himself, or was this just a mantle he took over from LLallogan? Seems funny he should have been chosen so unhesitatingly if it was just political vaticination they had in common. There must have been other Welsh prophetic figures who could equally have done.

However it has to be said, we do not have any antecedent traditions of Myrddin as a wildman, while on the other hand we do have early depictions of him as a prophet. Thus in the mid-tenth century "Great Prophecy of Britain" – believed to have been composed in south-west Wales, verse-1 opens with, "The spirit [*awen*] foretells...", verse-2 starts, "Myrddin foretells...", verse-6 starts, "The spirit foretells..." and verse-9, "Druids foretell...", as if Myrddin were functionally equivalent with "the spirit", or "druids". In Aneirin's Gododdin again, we find, *Amug Morien / Gwenwawd Myrddin a chyfrannu pen...*, arguably, 'Morien defended Myrddin's holy vaticination by head splitting...'. (Note the *Mor-* element in *Morien*, see further below.)

But as the reference above again brings out, Myrddin was to the tenth-century audience primarily a spirit who spoke through bards. (Not that their distinction then between mortals and spirits was as clear-cut as ours is today.) So in Geoffrey's twelfth-century "History" we find the following exchange between Myrddin and Emrys: *Excepit illum rex cum gaudio iussitque futura dicere, cupiens miranda audire. Cui Merlinus: "Non sunt revelanda huiusmodi mysteria, nisi cum summa necessitas incubuerit. Nam si ea in derisionem sive vanitatem proferrem, taceret spiritus qui me docet et, cum opus superveniret, recederet."* 'The king received him gladly and ordered him to foretell the future, desirous of hearing some wonders. To which Merlin replied, "Mysteries of that sort can't be revealed except when dire necessity prevails. For if I uttered them for fun or in vain, the spirit which instructs me would fall silent, and when true need arose would desert me." '

Or again in Gerallt Gymro's 1194 "Description of Wales" we read: *Sunt et in hoc Cambriæ populo, quod alibi non reperies, viri nonnulli, quos Awennithion vocant, quasi mente ductos; hi super aliquo consulti ambiguo, statim frementes spiritu quasi extra se rapiuntur, et tanquam arreptitii fiunt... Forsan sicut per fanaticos et energumenos spiritus interdum loquuntur quanquam ignaros... Sicut et olim, stante adhuc Britonum regno, gentis exidium, et tam Saxonum primo, quam Normannorum post adventum, Merlinus uterque tam*

Celidonius quam Ambrosius vaticinando declaravit "There are also among the people of Wales what you won't find anywhere else, certain persons called *awenyddion* ['spirit inspired ones'] who appear to be out of their minds. These, if you consult them about some issue, immediately start to roar in the spirit as if they had been taken out of themselves, and become as if possessed... It could be they speak sometimes as if through frenzied and demonic spirits, albethey unknown... In this way long ago when British rule still prevailed, the two Merlins, the Scottish one and Emrys, both proclaimed in prophecy the destruction of the nation and the coming, firstly of the English, and then of the Normans."

So how could there have been two Merlins? Easy: two mortal men prophesying, but one spirit Myrddin informing them both. (And maybe this goes some way towards explaining too, how it's possible for Myrddin to have three graves: one at Drumelzier in Scotland, one in the forest of Paimpont near Concoret in Brittany, one at Marlborough Mound in England, – not forgetting Myrddin's Quoits, a ruined cromlech at LLan-gain near Carmarthen, Wales.)

But anyway, from this point of view one can imagine the bardic fraternity of ninth-century Gwynedd, when the tale of poor deranged LLallogan first came to their ears, saying, "I don't care what the guy's name was, his personality was obviouly taken over by Myrddin, and it's plainly Myrddin speaking to us through him."

Of the Welsh Myrddin poems the one that has the most archaic look about it, in terms of diction, style and subject matter,– meaning the earliest to have stabilised in its current form (?eleventh century), is "Myrddin and Taliesin's Conversation". The poem purports to have been composed by Myrddin, recording a conversation between himself and Taliesin, whom he seems to acknowledge as his superior. Its first half has apparently to do with a mid-sixth-century war (ie. earlier than Arfderydd) between Maelgwn of Gwynedd and the princes of Dyfed, notably Elgan Lavish-Chops son of Cynan Circle-Form son of Tryffin and Dywel son of Erbin son of Aergol, in which, as may be, Taliesin takes the part of the men of Gwynedd whilst Myrddin supports Dyfed (which lost) lamenting, despite their heroic resistance, the death and defeat of its champions. In the second half of the poem Taliesin shifts the conversation onto the battle of Arfderydd. It's not quite clear if Taliesin's implying that Maelgwn's army was present at that too. (It would have to have been under the command of RHun Maelgwn's son however, since Maelgwn was already dead by that date.) Nor is it entirely clear whether once again Taliesin favours the winning side, the Cymry – Gwynedd and Allt-glud, while Myrddin is sympathetic to the losers of the battle, the Coeling, the anti-Cymric British. But the conversation ends with Myrddin sadly reminding us of the seven score princes from the losing side who

became outlaws and perished in Caledon Wood. (Yet he says nothing about himself having ended up there.)

Here then we seem to find Myrddin as a political prophet, a peer of Taliesin's, in the first instance partisan to the interests of Dyfed, but also secondarily someone involved in the aftermath of the battle of Arfderydd. Now, and this is the central question, was Myrddin in Wales already associated with the battle of Arfderydd before the arrival of the LLallogan material here – which would explain his subsequent identification as author of that material, or does his association with Arfderydd in this poem stem solely from its latter arrival in Wales?

Further apropos Myrddin's Dyfed roots, in Geoffrey 's "Life of Merlin", his protagonist is introduced as *Clarus habebatur Merlinus in orbe Britannus./Rex erat et vates Demetarumque superbis/jura dabat populis ducibusque futura canebat.* 'British Merlin was famous throughout the world. A king and a prophet, he made laws for the proud peoples of Dyfed and foretold the future for their rulers.' While in his "History of the Kings of Britain" the boy Merlin is discovered at the town which would subsequently be called Caerfyrddin/Carmarthen (ie. called after him – despite the fact he's Merlinus in the "History") and his mother is said to be a daughter of the king of Dyfed. (Carmarthen did use, in mediæval times, to be in Dyfed.)

I don't believe Geoffrey made this latter item up ex nihilo and then retained Merlin as king of Dyfed in his "Life" just to keep consistency with his "History". On the contrary nothing seems to me more likely than that the people of Carmarthen should formerly have analyzed their town-name as the city (*caer*) of an eponymous founder and ruler, Myrddin (y've got to be fairly rich and powerful to build a city), and that when asked, they should have informed Geoffrey as much. (As a matter of fact it's what they still believe, I'ld say.) But this Myrddin can't have just been an empty construct deduced from some ignorant folk-etymolgy of the town-name. Why should a mere eponym of Carmarthen town have been chosen unhesitatingly to be identified with the Caledon Wood wildman newly arrived from Cumbria? Carmarthen Myrddin must originally have had, I would have thought, a developed story of his own known throughout Wales in which he was, or had been, a prophet, and possibly a forest-dwelling wildman too. (Though to have founded a city he must surely have had another side to him.)

So to restate our extrapolation so far: people anciently believed that Carmarthen was founded by a prophet and king, who may have had a story as a feral wildman, and whose name, Myrddin, was preserved for us in the name of the town he had founded. This of course is at odds with modern rationalistic

received opinion, namely that the *-fyrddin* of *Caerfyrddin* (and the -marthen of Carmarthen) derive from the Roman name for the town, *Moridunum*, which in turn was based on its old British name, *Moridüno(n)*, a Celtic place-name of a well-known type transparently meaning 'Sea-Fortress'.

But what people don't realise (or don't sufficiently cognize) is that Caerfyrddin and Myrddin (ie. *Moridüno*) are two different places. Carmarthen started life as a military base set up on the bank of a navigable river from whence direct lines of communication to the continent and Rome could be maintained, for the purpose of keeping an eye on the native city located on the artificially-levelled hill-top, Allt Fyrddin ('Hill of [the city of] Myrddin') two miles to the east. (Allt Fyrddin having been, predictably, translated into English as 'Merlin's Hill', it has latterly been slavishly retro-translated into Welsh as Bryn Myrddin. So – and this is possibly significant – the hill-name that formerly commemorated a ruined city now commemorates instead a supernatural personage.)

Caer means a defensive stone wall normally built on the square Roman model, or the settlement enclosed within it, as contrasted with the indigenous British *düno*, which was a circular wooden stockade of tree-trunks and turf. *Caerfyrddin* then is the Roman city of Myrddin, as distinguished from the British *düno* of Myrddin atop Allt Fyrddin. Considering the strategic importance which the presence of the nearby Roman base implies (the only one of its kind in Dyfed) plus the large size of the *Moridüno* site (9 acres) plus the mediæval onomastic legend that it was founded by ten thousand (*myrdd*) men I don't think it'ld be very controversial of me to presume that British *Moridüno*, like its Romano-British successor, Moridunum, was the capital of Dyfed.

Another thing I cannot believe though, is that no-one has ever thought to question the glib rendering of Myrddin/*Moridüno* as 'Sea-Fortress'. How would a city on top of a four hundred foot hill eight miles from the sea and a mile from the river Tywi ever be called 'Sea-Fortress'! Okay, I suspect it's because people keep thinking of Carmarthen itself, only six miles from the sea, on a navigable river and in earlier times an active port, such that a designation of Sea-Fortress might just marginally be applicable to it. (Not really though! Lincoln was an active port; you wouldn't call that a 'Sea-Fortress'.) There was another Roman *Moridunum*, in Devon, identified by Rivett and Smith as Sidbury Castle, also on a hill not near the sea. (Well, three miles.) But if *Moridüno* doesn't mean 'Sea-Fortress', what does it mean?

I'm about to embark on a rather wobbly chain of reasoning here which, while it might represent my provisional, until-proven-wrong, conclusions I well recognize you may not be able to follow me in. But I would exhort you to read it

to end anyhow, on the grounds you might find it imaginative or thought-provoking.

We want to keep the *düno* bit because that obviously does mean 'stronghold, city' (cognate with English 'town', German *zaun* 'fence'), but if the *Mori-* bit doesn't mean 'sea', what else can it mean? G. R. Isaac [*Llên Cymru*, vol.24 (2001), pp.13-23] following Stokes [*Revue Celtique* xii 128] and De Jubainville [*Revue Celtique* xxix 195] finds in the name of the Irish supernatural queen, *Morríon* (OI *Morrígu/Morrígan*) not *Mór-ríon* 'Great-Queen', but an element *mor-* which he relates to English 'mare'='apparition, monster' – as in 'nightmare', German *Mahr/Nachtmahr*, French *-mar* in *cauchemar* 'nightmare', and suggests ultimately to mean 'apparition, elf, fairy, goblin, witch', so making *Morríon* the Elf-Queen. He then goes on, on the basis of correspondences in prophetic voice between the two figures, to propose that this same *Mor-* is also what we're seeing in Myrddin and all his *Mor-* kin. Isaac takes the original form of the word to have been **morā* = (Welsh) 'ellyll' (goblin, spectre). (Not sure if this is supposed to be Proto-Irish, Common Celtic, or Indo-European – or all three.) In which case (blinking for a moment at that the presumptive cognates of *mor-*, 'mare' seem for the most part to designate a female sprite) you would expect a compositional vowel of *o*, so *Myrddin* < **Morodüno*[1] rather than the compositional *i*, attested in all variants of *Moridunum* . But, hey, it's too good a theory to be felled by a mere compositional vowel. It's not impossible to imagine an *i*-stem variant or derivative of **marā*, possibly denoting a male sprite. (Old English *mare* is evidently a feminine *i*-stem.) Alternatively *Moridüno* could be an improper compound with *mori* the genitive of **moros/?morā*. If, anyway, we could in some form make this idea stick, it would give us *Moridüno* = 'Spirit City', or 'City of the Goblin'!

That *Môr* was formerly in use as a personal name too we see from the genealogies: so Môr ap Morydd (RHufoniog, late tenth century?), Môr ap Breichiol (RHufoniog, late ninth century?), Môr ap LLywarch (Buellt, eighth century?) Also in the Black Book's "Grave Epigrams", *Bedd Môr mawrhydig, diesig unben, post cynnen cyntëig, mab Peredur Penweddig* 'The grave of majestic Môr, strident prince, impetuous pillar in the conflict, son of Peredur from Penweddig [in Ceredigion]', who seems to appear again in the last stanza of the Cantre'r Gwaelod epigrams:– *Bedd Seithennin synnwyr fan, rhwng Caergenedr a glan; Môr mawrhydig o gynran* 'The grave of Seithennin, of elevated sensibility, [lies] between Caergenedr and the shore; a

[1] Isaac, as it happens, goes on to argue that the spelling *Myrddyn* is in fact older than *Myrddin*, and that the name is accordingly to be derived from British **Morodonios* 'Elf-Man'. One of the reasons though that impell him in that direction is that it doesn't occur to him to challenge the unthinkingly parroted platitude that the *Mori-* in *Moridunum* means 'sea', and so he can't have the link between *Myrddin* and Carmarthen being old, which link, not evidenced earlier than Geoffrey, he appears to regard this latter as having been author of.

majestic Môr of a prince'. And of course it's perfectly normal for a city to be named after it's founder, in accordance with which *Moridüno* could well be 'Môr's Rampart' (Which would have the corollary perhaps that Carmarthen folk weren't so far wrong after all in supposing their town named after an eminent founder.) But whether the name Môr itself means 'Elf, Fiend'? I do somehow doubt it means 'Sea' (despite the name *Bryn*, 'Hill' = the only actual topographic feature name I can think of[2] – *Craig* being the English spelling of Scottish-Irish *creag* 'rock' ie. 'Peter', not Welsh *craig*) – if only for the reason that I suspect the likewise attested name, Mâr, of being a variant of it (cf. *Moridunum*/*Maridunum*[3]).

Equally though, a city can be named after a deity, whose cultus it promotes and whose protection and blessing is invoked upon it. This is no less true for pre-imperial Britain than anywhere else: so *Lugudunum* (site unknown – thought to be somewhere in northern England) '[the god] LLeu's Stronghold'; *Branodunum* (Brancaster, Norfolk) plausibly '[the god] Brân's Stronghold'; *Camulodunum* (Colchester, Essex) '[the god] Camulos' Stronghold'. It's therefore possible that what we have in Môr then, is the designation of a deity to whose divine patronage *Moridüno* was dedicated, and insofar as Myrddin was the governmental centre for Dyfed, one who was the primary god[4] of all Dyfed.

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[2] *Rhun* also means 'hill' it seems; compare Breton *run* 'colline'.

[3] It is difficult to see the thinking behind the accepted wisdom that Moridunum is the 'correct' British-latin reconstruction for the name. The classical references show: *latine*, Maridunum (Ptolemy, Marídounon – variant Morídounon in one manuscript only) and Muridono (Antonine Itinerary). I suspect the reason is because they want it to mean 'sea'. The *Myr-* of Myrddin implies *Mor-* certainly, Merdin however was the commoner spelling in the middle ages, which, *prima facie*, implies *Mar-*; and indeed a personol name, *Mâr*, does also occur: Mâr ap Cenau ap Coel (Cumbria, late fifth century); Mâr ap Glywys (Glamorgan, late fifth century). Mediaeval south-welsh manuscripts though, no doubt under the influence of French spelling conventions, regularly employ 'e' to represent the phoneme 'y' (as Breton still does). Also, in late British, especially in those areas which had seen heavy Irish influence, short 'a' and 'o' were close in sound; so Welsh Môr and Mâr could conceivably be the same name. Conversely however, the city's namesake, the bard Myrddin is associated in some capacity with a number of figures whose names begin with *Mor-*, notably his father Morfryn (which meaning 'Hill of Môr', would admirably describe Allt Fyrddin), but see also, from *The Abiding Together of Myrddin and his Sister Gwenddydd* [Red Book, col. 583], "[Gwenddydd:] By thy death, mead-reared one, truly we are made destitute. When the grief of thy demise be borne, ah thou who art praiseworthy as Urno, who will declare the truth? From meditation arise and give tongue to the books of the spirit without fear, and thy lady's intimations and sleep dreams. Morgenau is dead, puissant Morial is dead, Morien, stone-wall in combat, is dead. The saddest loss is caused by thy demise, Myrddin. [Myrddin:] The Almighty has compassed my end. With Morgenau dead, Mordaf dead, Morien dead, I wish to die." So all in all, I am happy to stick with the view that it is *Môr*, and not *Mâr*, that lies behind the *Myr-* of Myrddin.

[4] Môr's being taken as a god yields some interesting meanings for the *Mor-* names mentioned above: so *Morgenau* 'Whelp of Môr', *Morial* 'Môr's Anger', *Morien* 'Born of Môr', *Morydd*

But if Isaac (op. cit) is right, *Mor-* < **Marā* is not the name of a Celtic god, but a generic Indo-european term for some non-specific spiritual or superstitious power. I propose therefore that when the Celtic-speaking invaders of Britain conquered the precursor-city to *Moridüno* they found there a stronghold dedicated to a pre-Celtic god which they did not recognize, but whose worship was strongly observed throughout Dyfed. So in dubbing the city *Moridüno*, 'the City of the Evil Spirit', or 'the City of the Goblin', they were in effect naming it 'the City of the Unknown God'.

Were there to have been such a divine sponsor standing behind the city of Myrddin it's perhaps his memory which would be living on in the supernatural figure of Myrddin latterly regarded as standing behind the town of Carmarthen. As to how the name change could have taken place: Môr could have become known as *Môr Myrddin* 'Môr of Moridüno' and then just by surname, *Myrddin* '[the god of] Moridüno', or else his name could have been derived from *Moridüno(s)* 'the Moridunian [god]'. Compare Welsh *Lleuddinion* 'Lothian', traditionally regarded as the fief of an eponymous ruler Lleuddin. Lleuddin implies British **Lugudünos*, and would seem to mean 'inhabitant of Lugudunum'. It's interesting in any event, to see here a man called after a city, and furthermore a *-dunum* city which also embodies the name of a god, in a form parallel to that of Myrddin.

But Myrddin the wildman-prophet was not just a localised Dyfed phenomenon. In mediæval conception he was a pan-British figure, after whom, if you remember, the whole island was regarded as having once been named, and who was concerned with the welfare, success and survival of the British as a whole. He was, and is, in some sense the Spirit of Britain. How are we going to account for that?

Well carbon-dating from under the ramparts of *Moridüno* suggests that the *düno* was first constructed at around 400 BC. But if we go back two and a half thousand years before that to the neolithic period, when quite possibly no town existed there at all (or else possibly did) and the language spoken in Dyfed was not Celtic, or even Indo-European, we arrive at the period when the famous bluestones were carried off from Preseli in Dyfed to be erected at Stonehenge. The effort and expense of so prodigious a feat would only be worth it, I should have

'Môr's Judge', *Morfryn* 'Môr's Hill', *Myrddin* 'Môr's Rampart'.

thought, had the stones had already carried an immense prestige value, such as comprising a Britain-wide revered religious centre. The Wessex people moreover could surely only have had the power to steal Dyfed's equivalent of Westminster Abbey if they had just vanquished them in war. (The story is not dissimilar, perhaps, to England acquiring the Elgin marbles – though those, of course, were obtained without war.)

If the Wessex king so admired and was so impressed with the Dyfed stone-circle as to steal it, it rather suggests he looked up to the cultus and civilisation it stood for. And although it doesn't necessarily follow, it's possible then that the incorporation of the Preseli stone-circle into Stonehenge means that the worship of the god associated with the stone-circle was thenceforth also transferred thither. Certainly the demolition and removal of a nation's central ceremonial centre – tantamount to ripping its cultural heart out, seems to have been intended as an act of cultural obliteration. Like the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem, or like the moslem invaders of Egypt burning the great library at Alexandria. It's surprising perhaps that the burgeoning Wessex culture should have found the Dyfed people such a cultural and military threat.

But actually the the event more probably reflects a classic historical scenario, of aggressively expanding barbarian culture assailing politico-cultural domination by an established, but decadent older civilisation, in which cultural prestige centres, such as religious centres particularly get targeted. Like the Vikings sacking the churches and monasteries of christian Celtia, or the first Greeks sacking the temples of Mycenean Achaia, Crete and Egypt, or renascent islam suicide-bombing western airports. For it could be argued that in the high neolithic the Dyfed nation enjoyed an especial cultural and religious esteem throughout the Island of Britain. This would be based on their putative descent from the megalithic people of the atlantic littoral; which people currently are thought to have been among those who brought the levantine practice of agriculture to this island,– expanding from north Africa northwards by ship, to settle all along the west coast of Europe. Both their megalithic building skills and the cultural respect they commanded may perhaps be

linked to their having emanated from that north-african cultural substrate which egyptian Nile-valley civilisation and the pyramids also grew out of.

So, and this is the crunch question, could the god of the Preseli bluestone circle have in effect been one and the same as, or a lineal ancestor of, two and a half thousand years later, Môr Myrddin? For subsequently, as the historian Diodorus Siculus tells us[5], Stonehenge grew to be the most remarkable, and by implication, most prestigious temple in Britain,– the St. Pauls, or Canterbury cathedral of its day. (Isotope analysis of cremation remains there have revealed individuals originating from Scotland.) If the cult of the bluestone god was celebrated at Stonehenge, and were he to be identifiable with Môr, this might then have given the worship of Môr Myrddin a pan-British range. The divine survivor and representative of ancient Dyfed megalithic civilisation, now extinct, resurging as one of the foremost gods of Britain?

And of course, coincidentally (or not), Geoffrey in his "History" represents Stonehenge as being at Merlin's behest stolen, following a victorious military campaign against its owners, from a country in the far west (Ireland) whence the stones had originally been brought from Africa, and then being transported to Salisbury Plain, there to be re-erected by Merlin.

So would this proto-Môr Myrddin have been, by distant origin a north-african figure associated with agriculture and ships? Well if Myrddin is to be seen as a continuation of his persona, no. If he's like Myrddin he would have been a figure associated in the first instance with the British woodlands and with the wild creatures that live there, – a primitive non-agricultural wild-man of the woods living, if not by hunting, then at least by gathering. Now this picture – revealingly, puts one in mind not of the well-organised north-african agriculturalists, but of the mesolithic people of Britain whom they found here when they arrived. In view of which one wonders whether, to the neolithic settlers, Môr represented the *genius loci* of the Island of Britain itself, a presence here whom they wished to placate for having invaded his space, and whose favour they sought so as to help them thrive in their new homeland. If so, this would mean that as early as the time of these

[5] Writing in the first century BC, he quotes the geographer Hecataeus of Abdera, who had written some three hundred years before his time, as saying, à propos a certain island in the ocean, standardly taken to be Britain:
The men of the island are, as it were, priests of Apollo, daily singing his hymns and praises, and highly honouring him. They say, moreover, that in it there is a great forest, and a goodly temple of Apollo, which is round and beautified with many rich gifts and ornaments
[DIODORUS SICULUS, BK.3, CH.13]

neolithic colonists, Môr already represented the spirit of Britain itself, the spirit who owned and in some sense guarded over the welfare of the island and all those souls who dwell in it.

But jumping ahead now to the closing era of the Italian occupation of Britain, the ancient city of Myrddin has been abandoned, the centre of population and commerce having moved down to the *caer* on the plain. But may we not surmise nonetheless that to the, now-christian, Carmarthenites of that period there remained some residual awareness concerning the ancient city on its hilltop[6] – that it had for thousands of years thrived in the service of a powerful supernatural being after whom it had been named. And if they could not quite remember that being's name, but they knew the city to be named after him, must not his name have been the same as that of the city? In some such way then was Môr, I suggest, reborn as Myrddin.

Or an alternative transmogrification scenario lies in the bard Myrddin's name equally being derivable from british **Moridunos*, with the sense of, 'he of Moridüno'. (Think how many people in Britain today's surname consists of a place-name in the same sense.) If so, well, that spirit responsible for the founding of Moridüno in the first place, – whose in-dwelling presence there had provided the city with its inner dynamic, and whose ghost, forbidden entry to the christian *caer*, must still walk the ruined streets of the once-glorious citadel named after him, surely qualifies in a special way for the sobriquet 'He of Moridüno'; and it is as such that the ensuing christian age, to whom uttering the name of a pagan god would have been anathema, may have chosen to characterise that spiritual power they (albeit superstitiously) still felt to attach to the ancient city of their ancestors.

From mesolithic spirit of the untamed woodland and guardian spirit of autochthonous Britain to the bronze-age pre-eminent god of the island, worshipped at Stonehenge; from eponymous tutelary deity of Carmarthen to muse and spiritual informant of the Caledonian bard LLallogan; from familiar spirit of prophecy, identified by Galffrid ab Arthur with Emrys, to French and Breton Merlin, all-wise druidic counsellor at the court of king Arthur and magical mentor to the destiny of Britain, Myrddin's disguises and rebirths have been every bit as varied and unexpected as his extant legends aver.

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[6] Compare the awe and veneration in which even today the hill-top ruin of medieval Carreg Cennen is held by the denizens of the surrounding commotes. It is, to their minds, still inhabited by the ghosts of the past, - by a numinous presence; in their hearts it still calls and commands.

Afallennau Myrddin

(y rhai a gawsai gan ei arglwydd
Gwenddolau ap Ceidio)

1

A rodded i neb yn un plygaint
A roed i Fyrddin cyn na henaint?
Saith afallen beren a saith ugaint,
Yn gyfoed gyfuwch gyhyd gymaint.
Trwy fron teyrnedd y tyfedaint
Urddoled uched a'i gorthoaint, –
Un forwyn bengrech a'i gorchedwaint,
Olwedd ei henw, oleuwedd ei daint.

2

Afallen beren a dyf yn LLannerch
Ei hangerdd a'i hargel rhag rhiau RHydderch.
Amsathr yn ei bôn, maon yn ei chylch
Oedd aelaw iddudd ddulloedd ddihefeirch.
Nu ni'm câr i Gwenddydd ac ni'm henneirch,
Wyf gas gan Wasog, waesaf RHydderch,
RHy rewinais ei mab a'i merch.
Angau a ddwg bawb, pa rag na'm cyfeirch?
Ac wedi Gwenddolau neb riau ni'm peirch,
Ni'm gogan gwarwy, ni'm gofwy gordderch.
Ac yng ngwaith Arfderydd oedd aur fy ngorthorch,
Cyn ni bwyf heddiw gan eiliw eleirch.

3

Afallen beren, blodau esblydd,
A dyf yn argel yn argoedydd,
CHwedlau a giglau er yn nechrau dydd
Ry sorri Gwasog, gwaesaf meufydd.
Dwywaith a theirgwaith, pedair gwaith yn un dydd:
Och Iesu! Na ddyfu fy nihenydd
Cyn dyfod ar fy llaw i llaith mab Gwenddydd!

Myrddin's Apple-Trees

(which he had received from his lord
Gwenddolau Ceidio's son)

1

Has anyone been given in any dawn
What Myrddin was given before senility set in?
Seven perennial apple-trees and seven score,
Of like age, like stature, like height and like size.
With the heart of monarchs they were grown
Who so exaltedly, so loftily would shelter her, –
A certain curly-headed girl whom they guarded,
Called All-Form, with her pretty white teeth.

2

A perennial apple-tree grows in a glade
Whose special power conceals it from Lord RHydderch.
There was a trampling at its trunk, with troops surrounding it,
Ready for whom were staunch arrays.
Gwenddydd no longer loves me, nor does she speak to me,
I am hated by the Minister, RHydderch's upholder,
I destroyed her son and her daughter.
Death which takes everybody, why doesn't it greet me?
And after Gwenddolau no lord honours me,
No repartee talks of me, no sweetheart visits me.
And in the battle of Arfderydd my neck-ring was of gold
Though today I'm no longer with the hue of swans.

3

Perennial apple-tree with the delicate flowers
Growing in a secret place in the woodlands,
I have heard news that since the start of day
The Minister, wealth-owner's upholder, has got angry.
Twice and thrice, four times a day:
Oh Jesus! That my execution had come about
Before the advent at my hand of Gwenddydd's son's slaying!

4

Afallen beren a dyf ar lan afon,
Yn ei llwrw ni llwydd maer ar ei chlaer aeron.
Tra fûm bwyllwastad a'm bwyad yn ei bôn
Bun wen chwareus, un feinus fanon.
Deng mlynedd a deugain yn yngain anneddfon
Ydd wyf yn ymdaith gan wyllaith a gwyllon.
Gwedi da diogan a diddan gerddorion
Nu neu na'm g[of]wy [namyn] gwall ~~gan wyllaith~~ a gwyllon.
Nu neu na chysgaf fi, ergrynaf fy nragon,
Fy arglwydd Gwenddolau a'm broryw frodorion.
Wedi porthi haint a hoed amgylch Coed Celyddon
Bwyf gwas gwynfydig gan wledig gorchorddion.

5

Afallen beren, burwen ei brig
A dyf ynghymes ym Muesig.
Gnodach im ofwy cyffrwy gwledig
Na gwŷr bro Branllyw, anrhyw ei brig.
Ac wedi gan riain ran barchedig
Neud wyf diaddawn a dieddig.

6

Afallen beren a dyf yng nglan nant
A'i hafalau melyn a'i dail anchwant,
Ac wedi y'm cydfu a'm carasant
Neu'r ethyw fy hoen o hir lifiant.
Neud wyf ddigarad gan fy ngharant,
A minnau gan wyllon ni'm hadwaenant.

4

Perennial apple-tree growing on the bank of a river,
No court-agent looking for it shall thrive on its bright fruit.
While I was of sound mind I used to have at its base
A frolicsome fair lady, an unique slender princess.
For fifty years in unmitigated hardships
I have kept company with outlawry and outlaws.
After irreproachably good living and entertaining musicians
Now rather, only hunger and outlaws visit me.
Now rather I don't sleep: I tremble for my dragon,
My lord Gwenddolau and my native fellow-countrymen.
After bearing affliction and sorrow around Caledon Wood
May I dwell in blissful repose with the lord of hosts.

5

Perennial apple-tree with the pure white boughs
Growing well-proportioned in Buesig.
More usual for me were the blessings of the Lord's abundance
Than for the people of the Raven-Ruler's country, with leaders of excellent pedigree.
But after a respected career with a noble lady,
Yes, I'm undignified and pitiful.

6

Perennial apple-tree growing on a stream's bank,
With its yellow apples and its lovely leaves;
But after the time when those who loved me dwelt with me
Truly has my appearance gone, through protracted downpour.
Yes I am unloved by my loved-ones
And I for my part among outlaws who don't know me.

7

Afallen beren, bren sydd fad,
Nid bychan dylwyth ysydd ffrwyth arnad.
A minnau wyf ofnog amgelog amdanad
RHag dyfod y coedwyr coedgymyniad
I gladdu dy wraidd a llygru dy had
Fel na thyfo byth afal arnad.
A minnau amdanad wyf wyllt wrthrychiad,
I'm cethru cythrudd, ni'm cudd dillad.
Neu'm rhoddes Gwenddolau dlysau yn rhad
Ac yntau heddiw fel na bwyad.

8

Afallen beren a dyf tra RHun,
Cywaethlaswn i yn ei bôn er bodd i fun
A'm hysgwyd ar fy ysgwydd a'm cledd ar fy nghlun.
Ac yng NGhoed Celyddon y cysgais fy hun.
Oian ha barchellan, pyr pwyllut ti hun?
Andaw di adar clywir eu hymeiddun:
Teyrnedd dros môr a ddaw ddy' LLun,
Gwyn eu byd hwy Cymry o'r arofun.

9

Afallen beren, blodau esblydd
A dyf yng ngweryd anghyhyd ei gwŷdd.
Dysgogan CHwimleian chwedl a ddyfydd:
Yd lathennawr gan fryd gwryd erwydd.
RHag dreigiau ardderchaf, rhiau rhybydd.
Gorwydd gradd wehyn, dyn digrefydd.
RHag maban huan, heolydd arfaidd,
Saeson ar ddiwraidd, beirdd ar gynnydd

7

Perennial apple-tree, tree which is beneficial,
Not small the family which consumes the fruit you bear.
But I am fearful and anxious about you
Lest the tree-hewing foresters arrive
To dig up your roots and corrupt your seed
So that no apple shall ever again grow upon you.
And me, I'm a wild warden for you,
Whom vexation goads, whom clothes do not cover.
Yes Gwenddolau gave me valuables freely,
Yet today he's as if he'd never been.

8

Perennial apple-tree which grows beyond RHun,
At whose base I had contended to please a woman
With my shield on my shoulder and my sword on my thigh.
But in Caledon Wood I slept on my own.
Alack, little piglet! Why would you think of sleeping?
Listen to the birds, their wish shall be heard:
Monarchs across the sea shall come on Monday ,
Blessed the Cymry from the expedition.

9

Perennial apple-tree with the delicate flowers
That grows in a land where the trees are of unequal height.
A shaman foretells events that will come about:
Staves shall be plied with courageous resolve.
At the head of splendid dragons a lord shall appear,
A steed of devastating stride, an irreligious man.
From the sun's child, audacious forays,
The Long-Knives uprooted, bards on the increase.

10

Afallen beren, ha bren ffion,
A dyf o dan gêl yng NGhoed Celyddon.
Cyd ceisier ofer fydd, herwydd ei haddon,
Oni ddêl Cadwaladr o'i gynnadl cadfaon
I eryr Tywi a THeifi afon,
A dyfod graendde o ranwynion
A gwneuthur gwâr o wyllt o wallt-hirion.

11

Afallen beren, ha bren ffion,
A dyf o dan gêl yng NGhoed Celyddon.
Cyd ceisier ofer fydd herwydd ei hafon,
Oni ddêl Cadwaladr o'i gynnadl Ryd RHeon,
Cynan yn ei erbyn ef, cychwyn ar Saeson.
Cymry a orfydd, cain fydd eu dragon,
Caffawd pawb ei deithi, llawen fi bri Brython,
Cenitor cyrn elwch, cathl heddwch a hinon.

12

Afallen beren, ha bren melyn
A dyf yn nhalardd heb ardd yn ei chylchyn;
A mi ddysgoganaf fi gad ym Mhrydyn
Yn amwyn eu terfyn â gwŷr Dulyn.
Seithlong a ddeuant dros lydan lyn
A seithgant dros môr i oresgyn.
O'r sawl a ddeuant nid ânt i gennyn
Namyn saith ledwag wedi eu lletgyn'.

10

Perennial apple-tree, O pink-flowered tree,
Growing in concealment in Caledon Wood.
Though it be sought, that'll be in vain, as regards its gifts,
Until Cadwaladr comes for his rendezvous with battle-hosts
To the banks of the Tywi and Teifi rivers,
And the Fair-Beards become full of dread
And the Long-Hairs from being wild are made civilised.

11

Perennial apple-tree, O pink-flowered tree
Growing in concealment in Caledon Wood.
Though it be sought, that'll be in vain, because of its river,
Until Cadwaladr comes for his rendezvous at RHeon Ford,
Cynan meeting him, to march against the English.
The Cymry will prevail, their dragon will be resplendant,
Everyone shall receive their due rights, in honour the British shall be joyful.
Festival horns shall be sounded, a carol of peace and fine weather.

12

Perennial apple-tree, O yellow tree
Growing on the brow of a hill with no garden around it;
And I predict a battle in Pictland
Contesting their border with the Dubliners.
Seven ships shall cross the wide lake
And seven hundred over the sea to conquer.
Of those that come none shall depart from us
Except for seven half-empty ones after their affliction.

13

Afallen beren, burwen o flodau,
Er a'u hŷs melys ei hafalau
A dyfant erioed o'i choed hithau,
A dyf ar wahan ys llydan ei changau.
Dysgogan CHwibleian cyfan chwedlau:
Dyddaw ar Wyndyd frithfyd diau.
Â llynges dros fôr ag angorau;
Seithlong y deuant a seithgant dros donnau;
Disgynnant ar draeth o dan saethau,
Ac o'r sawl y deuant nid ânt yn au
Namyn saith eilwaith yn eu hadnau.

14

Afallen beren, bren addfeinus,
Gwastadfod clodfawr buddfawr brydus;
Yd wnânt penaethau au gyfesgus
A mynaich geuog gwydiog gwydus;
A gweisionain ffraeth bid arfaethus
Yd fyddant gwŷr rhamant rhy drofäus

15

Afallen beren, bren biborig,
Melyn ei haeron, nid maon a'u mestig.
Cynedlais yn ei bôn â dynion dewisig;
Pan alwer Dyfnant difa cerrig
Y talawr i gerddawr ei galennig.

16

Afallen beren, bren ni gryno,
Pedwar can mlynedd yn hedd y bo.
A dyf ar wahan ys llydan ei gortho.
Gnodach yn ei gwraidd blaidd a'i treisio
Na maon mynych a'i mwynhao.
A mi ddysgoganaf faban a fo
O flodau Cadfan pan gynyddo;
Gruffydd ei enw, o hil Iago;
Ni wna anhöeg pan [or]seddo.

13

Perennial apple-tree with the pure white flowers
For those that eat them its apples are sweet
Growing continually from its wood.
The one which grows on its own has wide branches.
A shaman of comprehensive revelation foretells
That certain chaos shall befall the people of Gwynedd.
A fleet shall take anchors over the sea.
Seven ships shall come, and seven hundred, across the waves
And will land on a beach under arrow-fire;
And of those that come none shall falsely go
Except for seven, back to safety.

14

Perennial apple-tree, slender tree,
Residence of a determined and profitable celebrity;
Headmen will make false excuses
And lying monks wicked and vice-ridden;
While smooth-talking underlings shall be ambitious
Men of excellence shall be too devious.

15

Perennial apple-tree, profusely budding tree,
Its fruit which are yellow no hordes chew.
At its trunk I have conferred with eminent men;
When Dyfnant is called a wearer-out of stones,
Poet shall be payed his New-Year's day remuneration.

16

Perennial apple-tree, tree which shall not wither,
For four hundred years it'll dwell in peace.
The one growing on its own has a broad canopy.
It's more common at its roots for a wolf to harm it
Than for frequent throngs to enjoy it.
And I foretell there'll be a baby
Who from Cadfan's flowers shall wax large:
Its name'll be Gruffydd, of Jacob's lineage;
He won't cause any deroofing when he reigns.

17

Afallen beren, bren arhonnaid,
Neus gorwlych dwfr, rhyn pluyn hwyaid;
A mi ddysgoganaf ei bod yn nesaf
Ag y mae arnaf ei harynaig.
Pan fo Duw dewin i'm diffryd i rhag trin
Hyd na bwyf gyfrin ag eisyfflaid.

18

Afallen beren, pren hydwf glas,
Pufawr ei changau hi a'i chain wanas,
A mi ddysgoganaf fi gad amddias,
Pengwern cyfeddgyrn, medd eu haddas,
Ac amgylch Cyminod cymyn, leas – Eingl
Gan bendefig Eryri, eri atgas.

19

Afallen beren, pren hydwf glas,
Purfawr ei changau i'w chain wanas.
Canpid cain arwel ym mhrid gorlas
Cyn berw bryd cymrwyn, ffwyr alanas.
A mi ddysgoganaf gad amddias
Pengwern cyfeddgrudd, medd ei haddas.

20

Afallen beren, burwen o flodau,
Melys ei haeron, carcharorion geiriau,
Yr asen a gyfyd i symud swyddau.
Y finnau a'i gŵyr, ni synnwyr gorau.
Eryr o'r wybr â'i wŷr chwarae.
CHwerw fydd sain Owain arfau.
Aml ei wŷr ni ŵyr ddadlau.
Cenhedloedd dros foroedd a fordwyau.

17

Perennial apple-tree, celebrated tree,
Yes water drenches it, but the duck's feather is stiff.
And I foretell that there is imminent
Such a thing as I dread,
At which time may God the wizard protect me from tribulation
As long as I'm not intimate with evil spirits.

18

Perennial apple-tree, vigorous green tree,
Fruitful its boughs and its fine trunk,
And I foretell of an uproarious battle,
With Pengwern's banqueting horns deserving their mead,
And around Cyminod's hewing, the slaying – of the Engle
At the hands of the ruler of Snowdonia, of hostile bile.

19

Perennial apple-tree, vigorous green tree,
Extremely large from its branches to its fine trunk.
The refined eminent person will perceive in the verdant form
Before anxious agitation of mind, the horror of slaughter.
And I foretell of an uproarious battle
With Pengwern's hillside of convivial companionship deserving its mead.

20

Perennial apple-tree with the pure white flowers
Whose fruit is sweet, – imprisoned words.
The ass shall arise to change administrations,
Me, I know this, he won't savour victory.
An eagle from the sky shall come to play with his men,
Bitter shall be the ringing of Owain's weapons.
He who has many soldiers is not inclined to parley.
Nations over seas will voyage.

21

Afallen beren, pêr ei changau,
Pufawr mawrweirthiog, enwog yn fau.
A mi ddysgoganaf fi rhag perchen Machrau,
Yn Nyffryn Machafwy merchyrddydd crau,
Gorfoledd i Loegr, gorgoch lafnau.
Oian ha barchellan, dyddaw difiau
Gorfoledd i Gymru, gorfawr gadau
Yn amwyn Cyminod, cleddyfod clau.
Aer o Saeson ar on ferau
A gwarwyawr pelrhe ag eu pennau.
A mi ddysgoganaf fi wir heb au:
Dyrchafawd maban yn adfan y Deau.

22

Afallen beren, bren eilwyddfa,
Cŵn coed cylch ei gwraidd yng ngwasgodfa.
A mi ddysgoganaf dyddaw etwa
Medrawd ar Arthur, modur tyrfa.
Camlan darmerthan' Difiau yna;
Namyn saith ni ddyrreith o'r gymanfa.
Edryched Wenhwyfar wedi ei thraha
[Ban at fedd Cadwaladr]
Eglwysig bendefig a'i tywysa.
Gwaeth imi a dderfydd heb esgorfa:
Lleas mab Gwenddydd fy llaw a'i gwna.

23

Afallen beren, llen ar bren briglas.

21

Perennial apple-tree with the luscious branches,
Greatly valuable fruit-tree, famously mine.
And I prophesy to the owner of Machrau
In the vale of Bachawy a bloody Wednesday,
– Rejoicing for England with their blades all red.
But oh! little piglet, there'll come a Thursday
– Rejoicing for Wales, immense armies
Disputing Cyminod with swift sword-stroke.
A host of Englishmen on ashen spits
And football being played with their heads.
For I foretell the truth, no lie:
A boy-child shall arise in the southern quarter.

22

Perennial apple-tree, trysting-place tree,
With wood dogs around its roots in the shade.
And I foretell that in the future
Modred shall attack Arthur, commander of the host.
They'll fix up Camlan for a Thursday at that time.
(From which assembly none but seven returned.)
Let Gwenhwyfar look out following her arrogance.
[From on high to Cadwaladr's grave]
A church primate shall lead her.
Bad news for me what's inescapably going to happen:
The killing of Gwenddydd's son, – it's my hand that'll do it.

23

Perennial apple-tree, a veil over the green-topped tree.
Treacherous monarchs, mead in the fortress
When Burgundy and the men of Arras arrive,
And I foretell a harvest where the unripe corn shall be shorn.
When the eagle and the she-eagle shall arrive – from France
Few shall escape, and they without profit.

Title A late addition, labelling contents. Interestingly the rubric suggests the verses were composed before Arfderydd while Gwenddolau was still alive. Unless it means inspired by him and his memory after his death. Taken in a concrete sense it would seem bit of an unusual gift from lord to bard, – an apple orchard.

Verse 1 Myv. 1; LK 1
Once again a late prologue giving a summing-up of the whole poem.

Dawn *Plygaint* from Latin *pullicantio*, the birds' "dawn-chorus", here just means first light. In Welsh monastic parlance it meant 'matins'. Here poetic for 'day', but with the implications of a new spiritual, or realisational day. (New light shed by the insights of the Apple-Trees.)

Myrddin In none of the old verses does the speaker refer to himself as Myrddin.

Senility It actually just says 'before old-age', but with the implication that in old-age the mental capacity wouldn't be up to it.

Perennial *Afallen beren* is usually translated 'sweet (ie. domestic) apple-tree', as opposed to 'crab-apple', – which would indeed be a singular, though not impossible, thing to find in the middle of a forest. *Pêr* means 'sweet(-tasting)' admittedly, but *peren* as an adjective occurs only in this poem (or pastiches of it). Normally it's a noun,'pear'. (So *afallen beren* could even conceivably mean 'pear tree'.) But given the unusual Latin loan-words in this poem (eg. *pufawr* from *pomarius*) I prefer to see in *peren*, Latin *perennis* 'lasting all year', with reference to its Otherworld-like characteristic, mentioned below, of bearing fruit all year round.

Grown Although *tyfedaint* looks like a plural passive form, I've got a nasty feeling it might be meant to be active, 'they grew'. The line's a bit dark. Whether it means 'they grew vigorously into noble kingly trees', or else that each apple-tree verse foretells and finds the fulfilment of its prophecy in the advent of a monarch successively to guard Britain (=the girl) as stated? The apple-tree becomes a monarch.

So exaltedly Alternatively this line could be translated, 'So exalted, so noble (lofty) the one whom they sheltered.' Couldn't really make my

mind up, but in the end I thought exaltedness and loftiness pertained better to trees than to the girl.

Girl — *Morwyn* 'maid' implies an unmarried girl. I suggest this girl represents the Island of Britain, whom the monarchs 'marry' and protect. 'Curly-headed' perhaps referring to its leafy forests.

All-Form — Taking *-wedd* at face value as being from *gwedd*, 'appearance, form', then Many-Forms, or Form-of-Everything are possible ways of construing it. But it recently appears that female names in *-wedd* are rather to be derived from *-medd* 'possessing, controlling', or possibly 'owner, queen of...', which would have Teilo's sister Anawedd = 'Possessing-Riches', or Blodeuwedd = 'Queen of the Flowers'. In accordance with which we should perhaps see Olwedd as 'Queen of Everything'; on the same lines as Teilo himself, real name Eilydd < *Oliud 'All-Judge, Judge over Everything'. Everything was Britain because Britain was everything, – our forefathers having only a very rudimentary awareness of anything beyond the confines of this island. By marrying the queen of everything a monarch gets to rule everything. I suggest that Olwedd, only ever mentioned here, is to be regarded as one and the same as Gwenddydd, Myrddin's sister, apparently forcibly married by RHydderch and likewise a personification of the Island of Britain.

Teeth — It doesn't say "pretty white teeth", it says "light-appearanced teeth", but *goleuwedd* in Welsh is pretty and poetic where "light-appearanced (or even 'gleaming') teeth" is not. Whiteness of teeth is a standard measure of feminine beauty oft-invoked by the poets. If All-Form is Britain, could her 'light-appearanced teeth' be its beautiful mountains? (The white cliffs of Dover would seem to be outwith the north-westen focus of Welsh tradition.)

Verse 2

LLD 5; Pen3 12; Myv.13; LK 5

The most seminal verse in the whole Myrddin corpus. In it you get a thumbnail of the complete story.

Glade — It's very tempting, given the location and context of this poem, to want to translate *llannerch* ('glade'), as Lanark. (The name of which is presumed to derive from the Cumbric version of Welsh *llannerch*.) Except Lanark is right in the heart of Ystrad-glud, the Vale of Clyde (later Lanarkshire) in fertile lowland on

the bank of the river and not near Caledon Wood. Nor is the putative site of the battle of Arfderydd (Arthuret, ten miles north of Carlisle) in it. Unless Lanark be taken to stand for Allt-glud as a whole and the apple-tree about which armies contend, for the sovereignty of Britain, at that period vested in Allt-glud.

Special power

The apple-tree has this supernatural attribute, that it's invisible to those to whom it's not given to see it, or to enjoy its fruit. Which (together with its perennial fruiting) would again point to its being an Otherworld tree. One could perhaps read it as a metaphor for bardic insight, only available to those who truly know the spirit. Mad Myrddin the bard subsists upon its fruit.

Peniart 3 has *anger a'i hargel*..., – 'Steam/vapour conceals it...'

Lord

Got three options here: Can either translate it as 'Lord RHydderch', or as 'RHydderch's Lord' – which presumably since RHydderch, following his success at Arfderydd was autarch of Britain and hence had no temporal lord but at the same time was a fervent christian, should mean Christ, or else thirdly 'RHydderch's barons'. If it's the first or third of these then the implication is that an otherworld, bardic apple-tree is invisible to christian eyes. If it's the second, then it's not even acknowledged by Christ himself.

RHydderch

Monarch of Allt-glud (roughly Dumbarton, Lanark and Renfrew shires) circa 570-612 AD. After the death of Urien he seems to have become *Gwledig Prydain*,– Count, or Autarch of Britain. Baptised in Ireland by Patrick's disciples, he was an enthusiastic christian, enlisting Cyndeyrn as bishop to help him establish a soundly-based christian order in his country. It's he who seems to have thought up the idea of opposing heathen English incursion in the east by forming an alliance of the three christian peoples living in Britain: the Irish, the British and the Romans, together against the heathen. This alliance involved dropping the British claim to sole rights over the island, and recognizing the inalienable right of those other peoples to live here; on the commendable principle, I suppose, that all christian peoples are one. The alliance was to be called "The Joint-Homelands" (*Cymry*). It was a move however which appears to have been unpopular among a major faction of the British, many of whom were not christian and who were not willing to surrender the principle of Britain for the British. (The

Cymry only included those British lands which lay under the suzerainty of RHydderch and his successors, namely Cumbria and Cambria. It did not include the British countries of Devon, Brittany, or the Breton overseas colony of Cornwall, who went on calling themselves British.)

Trampling — I take it this line and the next depict the battle of Arfderydd, fought over the sovereignty of Britain.

Gwenddydd — Myrddin's sister: Personifying the land of Britain itself, to Myrddin's immanent spirit of the island. The ancient usage of our forefathers was that while men, as ever, ruled, it was the women who owned the land. When a man married a wife he assumed control of her land. Or in the case of a single woman with no children her land would be administered by her brother.
Gwenddydd (literally 'Fair Lady of Day') means Morning-Star (Venus). (You'ld think Britain being in the far west, that Evening-Star would be more appropriate!) So the christian party has won. Britain has gone over to them. RHydderch has married Gwenddydd. She has turned away from her pagan brother. The British no longer pray to the spirit whose island it is and who has looked after them for so long.

Minister — Cyndeyrn is meant, RHydderch's bishop and the patron saint of Cumbria, who was very much the moving spirit behind RHydderch's christianising drive and the setting-up of Cymru. The short pet-form of his name being Cu ('Dear One'), his monastery on the Clyde was called Clas-Cu, 'Cu's Monastery', now pronounced Glasgow. Myrddin is hated by him because he represents the enduring face of unrepentant British paganism. Several sources document the confrontation and conflict between Cyndeyrn and Myrddin. The christian side of the story, of course, avers that ultimately Myrddin confessed the faith, was baptized by Cyndeyrn and received communion from him. There's even a stained-glass window illustrating the event in Cyndeyrn's church at Stobo in

Peebles.
Am I wrong, or does *Gwasog* have a derogatory ring to it. 'Minister' may be too neutral. It'ld probably be better translated, Servant, Servitor, Serving-man, or even Servile.

Her son — This is the most difficult element of the story to comprehend. The Life of Cyndeyrn tells us RHydderch had one son, called, predictably enough, Constantine, who other sources tell us, at his father's death in 612, declined the kingship in favour of the religious life, founding a monastery at Govan, and subsequently achieving reknown as a saint. So plainly he wasn't killed by Myrddin before or at Arfderydd. No, we can only make sense of this line, I suggest if we remind ourselves that Gwenddydd was not, any more than Myrddin was, a flesh and blood being. She is allegorical. RHydderch did not really marry a woman called Gwenddydd. (According to Jocelyn his actual wife's name was Languoreth, ??= Welsh *LLanwared*.) By the same token then, Gwenddydd's son must also be looked for allegorically. The contender for the autarchy whom pre-christian Britain (Gwenddydd) produced before she/it was forcibly abducted by RHydderch and the christian party, was the pro-pagan leader, Myrddin's lord, Gwenddolau. Gwenddolau was, in this sense, the true son of Gwenddydd. From the fact that Myrddin reproaches himself so bitterly for Gwenddydd's son's death we may permit ourselves to imagine that, fiercely partisan to the pagan cause, LLallogan (Myrddin) through his office of bard had been urging on his lord to mount the military challenge to the christian forces which was to end in his death.
Gwenddydd's daughter, never elsewhere mentioned, I suspect of only being added for the rhyme. But we could perhaps see her as the Britain that would have ensued had Gwenddolau been victorious, or at least not been killed.

Peniarth 3 has ...*ei fab a'i ferch* '...<u>his</u> son and his daughter.' Not too sure if this would mean Cyndeyrn's or RHydderch's.

Gwenddolau — LLallogan (Myrddin)'s lord, – who lived at Carwinley (<Caerwenddolau) just south of the Scottish border. (So that's where LLallogan would have lived too.) Gwenddolau's patrimony then would seem to have been centred around the vale of Esk, presumably as far as the Wall. He was a scion of the southern Coeling dynasty, who were rivals to the northern Dyfnwalian dynasty of Allt-glud. The Coelings were of wholly

British stock where the Dyfnwalites proudly proclaimed Roman ancestry and background. Gwenddolau was leader of the anti-Cymru (anti-Dyfnwalite) party. In the triad,"The Three Men who wrought the Three Fortunate Slayings," the first is, "Gall, Dysgyfdod's son, who killed Gwenddolau's two birds which had a golden yoke over them. Two corpses of the Cymry they used to eat for their dinner and two for their supper," while the third is, "Diffyddell, Dysgyfdod's son, who killed Gwrgi Rough-Grey (may well be Gwenddolau's cousin, Gwrgi Eliffer's son – also of the Coeling) and this Gwrgi used to kill one of the Cymry every day, and two on Saturday so as not to kill anyone on Sunday."

Arfderydd

A famous battle which the Welsh Annals date to 573 AD. Welsh tradition tells us that Gwenddolau ap Ceidio was the leader of the losing side, but omits to tell us who was on the winning side. The Myrddin poetry strongly implies that it was RHydderch the Noble of Allt-glud, while Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* explicitly says so. (Though Geoffrey may merely have inferred as much from the Myrddin material.) A late Latin interpolation in the Welsh Annals states it was Gwrgi and Peredur, sons of Eliffer Great-Retinue from York. The Black Book says these fought in the battle but doesn't say on which side. While the Triads say they were there, but as neutral spectators. The triads tell us further Arfderydd was one of the three pointless battles. If the victor was RHydderch it's eminently possible his ally Aeddan ap Gafran, king of the Irish colony in Pictland was there with him, as some authorities have thought, in which case we may take Arfderydd as marking the establishment of Cymru as a the title for the north and west British.

Further note: RHydderch and Aeddan subsequently fell out. Aeddan, having defeated the British and sacked the city of Allt-glud itself, himself assumed leadership of the Cymry. So Cymru was for a number of years headed up by the Irish! The Cymru project finally came to fruition in 603, when Aeddan, mobilising the whole alliance made a concerted attack against the English of Northumberland with the intention of finishing them off once and for all. The upshot was a battle known in Welsh as Y Difancoll 'The Annihilation' in which the great army of the Cymry was totally wiped out by a much smaller English force under their militarily brilliant king, Ethelfrith. The sequel was

that Aeddan and the Pictland Irish quit the Cymru alliance in disgust, to concentrate on getting on with their own destiny in Scotland, leaving the Romans (Dynwalites and the Cuneddaites from Stirling and Gwynedd) and the British (Coeling) to carry it forward. There were still some Irish countries included in the Cymry though, namely Dyfed and Brecknock, who were subject to Gwynedd.

Neck-ring — The twisted celtic torc bent round the neck. A gold one – a significant amount of bullion – worn in battle was a big invitation to people to try to come on and kill you. The Black Book has *gorthtborch* 'neck-ring' (singular) which doesn't really rhyme. Peniarth 3 has the plural, *gortheirch* 'neck-rings', which does rhyme, but probably gives poorer sense.

Hue of swans — Sound like a kenning for a beautiful lady, but who? And on the face of it, bit of a non sequitur after the preceding line. You might think it's Myrddin regretting he hasn't got his girl-friend, mentioned in the previous line but one, with him in the woods. But in fact I suggest it's his sister he's on about, hearking back to, "Gwenddydd no longer loves me". The tone of the kenning is respectful and honorific. In his glory-days ancestral Britain (Gwenddydd) was with him and looking to vindicate herself at Arfderydd. But now that he's lost and Gwenddolau's dead, Britain, the beautiful isle, has rejected him.

Peniarth 3 has ...*gan ail liw eleirch* '..with the likeness of the hue of swans'

Verse 3

LLD 6; Pen3 13; Myv. 14; LK 6

Secret place — Once again, only the initiated can see the mystic apple-tree.

Angry — So what's he angry about? I hope it's not Myrddin having killed Gwenddydd's son, because if so then this latter can't be who I thought he was. None of the other extant fragments of the story suggest in any way that Myrddin ever felt apologetic, or guilty towards Cyndeyrn on account of some wrong he'd done him. I conclude that since the start of day,– the new christian dawn of Britain, the new chapter in Britain's history, Cyndeyrn had maintained an aggressive (angry) campaign of disapproving of, and persecuting pre-christian spirituality.

Jesus — Interesting to see Myrddin calling on, or praying to Jesus. Does

this count as him repenting his sin? British pre-christian spirituality didn't reject christianity when it came along. On the contrary it confessed its truth and endorsed it. It's just they didn't see any reason to abandon their old beliefs, which presumably thesy regarded as expressing the same thing in a different way.. Christianity as they saw it complemented, not contradicted them. Despite the best efforts of Gildas, Cyndeyrn, Dewi, Teilo and the rest, British christianity remained pelagian, that is to say it allowed strands of the native British spiritual tradition to coexist within and side by side with it. The priest was revered, and so was the bard. That's why Augustine of Hippo and Augustine of Canterbury hated it. Furthermore, since Britain had seceded from the empire in 410 the British church naturally didn't recognize the overlordship of Rome.

Peniarth 3's *Och Iesu! Na ddiw fy ymennydd* 'Oh Jesus! That my brain is not present' looks corrupt. If we amended *ymennydd* to *nihenydd* we could perhaps get '...That my execution has not arrived'. Think I prefer the Black Book.

Verse 4

LLD 7; Pen3 14; Myv. 15; LK 18

River

What river? Just any river? The river Aven (formerly Afon) rises in the hills separating Lanark from Ayr and flows north-east through Strathaven to join Clyde by Hamilton. Could those hills anciently have been within the forest of Caledon? Possible I'ld've thought. Perhaps the Clyde itself.

Court-agent

The poor *maer* 'steward, court agent, or official' is roundly despised in the literature,– a by-word for someone ignoble, mercenary, boorish, sordid and stupid, a hireling and a lackey, lacking in any refinement of mind or soul.. Quite unfair really, since it was they who did most of the actual work that enabled the nobility to swan around, especially the collecting of taxes, dues and renders.

Nobody of base, clodlike mentality, simply looking for the magical apple-tree in order to tax it, is either going to be able to find it, nor to enjoy the fruit thereof.

At its base

If the apple-tree represents poetic insight, then when he was a happy and successful court bard perhaps he would use his gift

to compose love poetry to his girl-friend mentioned above, the romantic spell of which she was unable to resist. The fact that she was *meinus* 'slim, graceful' and that she was a great lady (*banon*) serving to emphasise his social standing in his former life.

Outlaws

This line is usually translated, "...with madness and madmen." (Why *gwyllaith* 'outlawry' contains an *ai* dipthong where you'ld expect an *ae*, is an unsolved puzzle I don't propose to bang my head against here.) But *gwyllt* 'wild' in this kind of usage means some man (or creature) living outside of the constraints, conventions and comforts of human society. Christian society had triumphed in Britain, but Myrddin wants no part of it, preferring to live in cold and hunger amongst other outlaws in order to remain true to the previous dispensation. And for why? Because he finds mature spiritual expression through it. *Myrddin Wyllt*, normally rendered 'Myrddin the Wild', should really be 'Myrddin the Outlaw'. (Gerallt the Welshman translates it *Merlinus Silvestris*, literally 'Myrddin of the Woods', though actually Latin *silvestris* does mean 'wild' too, in the sense of 'uncultivated, undomesticated'). The Robin Hood story appeals to the same archetype set, of someone who has chosen the rigours of life in the fastness of the woods out of loyalty to an old order overtaken by the movement of the times.

But in the same way as Robin Hood edges over into being the Green Man – the spirit of the greenwood, so too the Welsh *gwyllon* have traditionally been regarded as possessed of a supernatural dimension – ghosts, or phantoms of the forest. In this we may be getting an echo of a deeper race-memory from the time of the first agricultural colonists of Britain, aware as they must have been that beyond the perimeter of their neat fields in the depth of the untamed forest still dwelt a people inimical to them, living by hunting and gathering, frighteningly other, but nevertheless with claim as the true, autochthonous inhabitants of the land. (Isn't *orangutan* the Malay for 'man of the woods'?)

In which case, perhaps you could translate this line as, 'I have kept company with ghostry and ghosts.' Certainly the next line but two would be good as, 'Now only hunger and ghosts visit me'. But the last two lines of verse 6 would not be good as, 'I'm unloved by my family and instead among ghosts who don't know me.' Something not quite right about ghosts not knowing

one – whereas outlaws would be fine. Could try. '...among ghosts who don't care about me,' I suppose, but it doesn't really say that, and anyway you'ld lose the contrast, because his family doesn't care about him either.

The traditional supernatural view of the *gwyllon* until recently severely proscribed by Jarman, commanding expert in the field, who as a late-twentieth century rational materialist was determined to purge Myrddin of any supernatural merlinesque overtones, needs to be rehabilitated.

Hunger — This whole line is corrupt. It's got too many syllables and too many beats (five instead of four). The last phrase, "...with outlawry and outlaws" looks very much like an accidental re-copy of the end of the previous line but one, while the main verb is an unknown (and unlikely-looking) word. My suggested reconstruction aims at doing a minimum of violence to the original, consistent with delivering some harmonious sense.

Peniarth 3 has *Neud na'm diw gwall gan wyllaith a gwyllon* "Truly has not indigence come upon me with outlawry and outlaws', which scans regularly, and should probably be adopted as the preferred reading.

Native — *Broryw*, a pretty unlikely-looking word. Peniarth 3 has *browy*, which doesn't exist, but amending this to *browys* would give us 'spirited, merry', which sounds much more likely.

Caledon Wood — The references would seem to suggest that the uplands dividing the fertile lowland countries of the vale of Clyde, Ayr and the Galloway coast from one another were covered with primæval forest surrounding the headwaters of Tweed, Clyde, Annan and Nith, and that this was Caledon Wood. Though why it should have a patently Pictish name when it was in the middle of British territory is bit of a puzzle. Here's an idea: For most of Roman rule Caledonia denoted Britain north of Hadrian's Wall. If during this period the Southern Upland forest had been known as *Silva Caledonum*, this could quite credibly have resulted in Welsh *Coed Celyddon*. Then in 369 when Tewdws firmly extended Roman control to a line running from the north of Loch Lomond to Clackmannan, therewith constituting his conquests between that and the Wall into a new province, *Valentia* (*Erechwydd* in Welsh), the *Silva Caledonum* would have ended up inside British territory.

But equally of course Caledon Wood carried a superstitious loading, a bit like the phrase 'ancient woodland' does nowadays. It would, I suggest, have conveyed untamed, primæval Britain, and in that sense have perhaps been regarded as the true soul of Albion itself. But at the same time a dark unaccountable wilderness full of spirits, and where, if one was foolish enough to venture, one might fear to encounter savage men and beasts. This archetypal response might stem from neolithic guilt towards the autochthonous Britain still lying darkly and sullenly where it had been driven back to, beyond the perimeter of their fields, or toward the mesolithic forest people they'd dispossessed and confined there.

Repose — This is *gwas* 'home, dwelling-place, mansion; repose, peace', not *gwas* 'youth, servant'.

Verse 5

Pen3 3; Myv. 4; LK 11

Buesig — More and more I come to the conclusion that these places where the apple-tree is said to be growing are not in the forest of Caledon at all, but are in fact the names of different districts of Allt-glud. Which would be odd, because Myrddin was not from Allt-glud; they were the enemy. But then, perhaps that's the point. *Buesig* 'affluent, abounding in cattle-farms (**buas*)'.

More usual — This line and the next were not easy to cajole into making any sense. *Cyffrwy* '??aboundingness' (ms. *cyfrwy*) being distinctly iffy. But ignoring that: in his former existence as a celebrated bard God gave him abundantly of the good things of life.

Raven-Ruler — This line in Peniarth 3 is *no gwir bro branlliw anriw y bric*. Since *gwir* 'true/truth' really doesn't make much sense after *no,* 'than', it's quite plausible to suppose it to be preserving an older spelling of *gwŷr*, 'people, men, soldiers'. The trouble is it doesn't occur to amend *branlliw* the same way because it seems to make a perfectly good poetic word the way it is: 'rook-coloured', or 'black-coloured' (since *brân* meant black, originally anyway) but then you're stuck with having to keep *-riw* too, which it's difficult to make anything of. (I reject Myvyrian's *ar riw*, 'on a hill', as being a desparate attempt to force the word to mean something recognizable.). Changing *branlliw* in line with *gwŷr* to give *branllyw* though, allows us also to read *anrhyw*, – which could be a miscopying of *auriw*, ie. *afryw* 'base, mean,

degenerate, ignoble', except this gives us rather the wrong sense. Consequently I prefer to see in it a bardic neologism, unattested elsewhere of *an-* 'great(ly)' + *rhyw* 'lineage (among many other things)'

The Raven-Ruler, judging from RHonabwy's Dream, seems likely to be Owain ab Urien, and hence the Raven-Ruler's country to be RHeged. (These ravens still appear today on the coat-of-arms of LLandeilo inasmuch as the Dinefwrs trace their descent from Urien.) The poet therefore seems to be claiming that Gwenddolau's country (whatever it was called) was even more affluent than RHeged (next country along) under the Cynferching (Urien's lot). We never really hear much more about RHeged after Owain's death. The country would seem finally to have been occupied and reduced by Oswydd Aethelfred's son, christian king of the English, in the wake of his rout of the Mercian-pagan and British forces at the battle of Cai, near Leeds, in 655.

Lady — So who is this noble lady again? As she seems in the role of employer, probably not the one he was friendly with under the tree. On the face of it, it might seem like Gwenddolau's queen. But I suggest that again she stands for the Island of Britain, that's who he was employed in the service of, which I suppose would make her his sister Gwenddydd.

Verse 6

Pen3 4; Myv. 5; LK 12

Yellow — Interesting to know the colour of Otherworld apples, golden apples like the sun; Golden Delicious? Russets?

After the time — The major, and constantly reiterated theme of the early Myrddin material is, as so often in Welsh poetry, that of loss and exclusion, specifically the contrasting of the privilege, affluence, comfort and happiness of his erstwhile life with his current wretched state of rejection, privation and loneliness. But in this too Myrddin's dual persona becomes evident: the sixth-century court-bard LLallogan laments the loss of his former honourable position under the pre-christian dispensation at Gwenddolau's court, while Myrddin the eternal spirit of the Island of Britain, who still lurking in the wood has come into LLallogan's mind and taken possession of it, laments through LLallogan's mouth his rejection by his own island; that his people who formerly loved him and sought him out and honoured him now love him no longer, but banishing him from

their society have consigned him to the ancient, unchanging woodland, transmogrifying him into a hideous demon in the process.

Don't know me

The ancestral spirit of Britain still dwells in the ancient forest, also in Llallogan's mind, but the other rough outlaws of the wood, fugitives from battles or from justice, don't recognize and don't know the spirit when they meet it. Much the same is the predicament of spiritualized people living in the secular world. Those who have stumbled across enlightenment and have met the spirit and have come to lead their lives wholly by trusting in it, secular people of immature intellect who do not follow divine law, when they meet them do not recognize them for what they are, nor do they recognize that spirit in them. Spiritual people out in the world are not surrounded by their spiritual family.

Verse 7

Pen3 5; Myv. 6; LK 2

No small

I give you three options for this line: The *lectio facilior* (Peniarth 3) *Nid bychan o ffrwyth ysydd arnad* 'No small amount of fruit you bear', or *Nid bychan dy lwyth ysydd ffrwyth arnad* 'Not small your load which is fruit you bear (Myvyrian – better metre, uncomfortable sense), or thirdly *Nid bychan dylwyth ysydd ffrwyth arnad* 'No small tribe consumes the fruit you bear' (Myvyrian variant, – nice sense – referring to all the forest creatures, and outlaws, that live off the apples – but fanciful grammatically, depending as it does on reading *ysydd* as 3rd singular present indicative, relative of *ysu* 'to eat, or consume'). I've preferred the last of these though, because it's more colourful. The spiritual family that lives by eating the apples of eternal life is indeed not small. That's why the tree's beneficial.

Foresters

These I take to be Cyndeyrn's anti-pagan clerics charged with tracking down and rooting out all pagan survivals, so that no-one should seek salvation or spiritual succour the old way. With reference to the 'tree-hewing', Martin of Tours, the starting point for the monastic revival in the west took, in the 370's and 380's, a special delight in chopping down Gaulish sacred trees .

Warden

Myrddin appoints himself guardian of autochonous spirituality, determined, at the expense of forgoing all human comforts and society, to guard the apple-tree and to maintain the validity of

the bardic vision. Indeed to the extent that he himself subsequently became a celebrated culture-hero, and that the bard, and bardic insight is still acknowledged and respected within the Welsh tradition, he has been successful.

Verse 8

LLD 4; Pen3 2; Myv. 3; LK 10

RHun — Again I presume this designates some territory of the Old North. RHun ab Arthial ruled Ystrad-glud from 872 to 878. (The name Allt-glud had lapsed with the destruction of the city itself and the removal of the government to Govan.) His base would have been at Govan in LLannerch (on the south bank of Clyde, just west of Glasgow), since Allt-glud had been sacked by the Dublin Norse in 870. It's possible this verse could be referring to his kingdom; where "beyond" could mean 'outside its jurisdiction'. If so this could date the composition of this verse to those years.

Contended — Another mini-evocation of the battle of Arfderydd, where once again it's said to have been fought at the base of, as if for possession of, the apple-tree. But now we learn too that it was to please a woman, presumably the woman in the green dress, the Island of Britain.

Peniarth 3 has *cynheddlais* 'conferred, conversed, debated'.

On my own — But the consequence was, he did not please the woman. She rejected him and what he stood for, turning to another, and the battle was lost. So he ends up a fugitive in the wood sleeping on his own.

Piglet — This line gives us a peek-preview of the *Oianau*, the "Alack, little piglet..." verses which form a discrete series in their own right. We may imagine LLallogan here talking to himself, – to his own pink, or not so pink, human body, urging himself on to continued vigilance against RHydderch's men trying to capture him. But we may also imagine Myrddin talking to <u>us</u> – to every human being – warning us against existential drowsiness and complacency. Wake up! Listen to the birds.

Birds — Peniarth 3 has ...*difyr eu hymeiddun* 'Listen to the birds with their merry colloquy', which is actually sweeter sense. But I like the Black Book's ...*clywir eu hymeiddun*, because (given *ymeiddun* = 'wish, desire, entreaty, request') while it could mean '...whose

colloquy can be heard', it could also mean '...whose prayer shall be heard', and I rather like the idea of the birds counteracting the misdeeds of men by praying for an amendment to the destiny of Britain for the better, and that prayer being answered.
The ability to understand the speech of birds which Myrddin is here demonstrating is of course one of Merlin's traditional accomplishments.

Monarchs

Here we start to see the political prophecy creeping in, which is gradually to become the dominant theme of the genre.
One might be tempted to try to tie this couplet up to a historical event, like the invasion of England by the Danes under Ifor and Haldane in 865 and the utter shattering of the English power of Northumbria at whose hands the Cumbrian Welsh had suffered so much. (The only thing is the Welsh didn't have much time to crow about it, because in 870 the Dublin Norwegians turned on Allt-glud and destroyed that too before going on totally to despoil its dependent territories.) But I would really be more inclined to see the couplet as purely mantic, – foretelling of the time when the prophesied child will return to the Island of Britain.

Monday

The poetic invocation of the relative propitiousness of the days of the week, especially in regard to battles and campaigns, is a commonplace of the early poetry. The only problem is, not sure what the relative propitiousness values are. Perhaps Monday, first working day of the week, is a propitious day to start a new project, or to launch an invasion destined to be successful. Compare the rhymes, "Monday's child is full of grace etc.", "Soloman Grundy, born on a Monday etc."

Cymry

The great irony of the Myrddin poetry is that while in the later dark and middle ages it was the paramount rallying call for Cumbric/Cambric patriotism, prophesying the ultimate triumph and vindication of the Cymry, yet in the earliest stratum of the material it's the Cymry who are the enemy. Originally lamenting the demise of the British nationalist cause at the hands of the romish-christian, gael-hugging Joint-Homelanders (*Cymry* < **Combroges*), nonetheless by the time, seventy years later, that all non-cymric British polities had been snuffed out in north and west Britain, the Irish had quit the Cymry and the roman connection had become a distant

memory, it was the Cymry who in turn became the standard-bearers and champions of British civilisation and the British cause.

Verse 9

LLD 8; Pen3 15: Myv. 16; LK 19

Unequal height

I suggest that by 'trees' here we should understand 'men'. (It's not a very far cry from *gwŷdd* 'trees' to *gwŷr* 'men'.) The next line but one carries the figure further. The poet seems to want to make a critical point about the apple-tree's country – wherever that is – to the effect that in it there is reprehensible social inequality, or else that whereas some are courageous and ready to be heroic, many are not. (Makes it sound like the country is divided into two parties, hawks and doves.) Though by implication, since tall trees are presumably superior, the poet would seem to belong to the hawks. (No more than you'd expect of a bard, really.)

The Peniarth 3 version has *A dyf yngwraidd anghyhyd wŷdd* 'Which grows at the roots of trees of differing heights.'

Shaman

Well now. What can I say? The word *chwimleian* (variants *chwibleian, chwimbleian, chwipleian*) has excited much imaginative speculation and extensive debate! For a long time the rendering, 'prophetess; nymph,' held sway, no doubt chiefly because it was analyzed as containing Welsh *lleian* 'nun, ?priestess'. But that a *lleian* could formerly be male too, Breton *lean* 'monk', *leanez* 'nun', Old Cornish *lain* 'fidelis', *laines* 'nonna' goes to testify. The current concensus as to its meaning [GPC] 'wild man of pallid countenance; wanderer' is based on Jarman's discussion of the word, in which he argues that *chwim-* and *chwib-* can only be reconciled if they are regarded as Old Welsh spellings of *chwŷf* 'motion, agitation' unaccountably preserved into middle Welsh (?because the compound could not be construed by the copyist). For Jarman, the great twentieth-century pragmatist, foe to nineteenth-century romantic excess, is resolutely set on debunking and purging any whiff of the supernatural or occult from the Myrddin poetry. It's my belief though, that *chim-, chwib-, chwimb-* and *chwip-* can all be reconciled by regarding them as reflexes of *chwim*, (earlier *chwimp*) 'brisk, nimble; turn; motion', some with loss of the stop, some with loss of the nasal. While at the same time there's no doubt that *lleian* does

denote a spiritual of some sort. Furthermore, Jarman notwithstanding, I think there's no denying that the word *chwimleian*, always used in a vaticinatory context, has attaching to it when invoked a slight but definite aura of superstitious awe.
As to who this *chwimleian* is – very mysterious indeed in the days when it was considered to be a prophetic wood-nymph: consider the "Great Prophecy of Britain", where the author, composing putatively circa 845, appeals to ancient vatic authority thus, "Druids foretell...", "Myrddin fortells...". Likewise here, I contend, LLallogan in the wood is, under the name *chwimleian* appealing to the authority of an ancient vatic power who is in some sense speaking through his lips. It's LLallogan applying the title to himself, whereby to don the mantle, or persona of a known kind of pre-christian shaman figure. (And who better qualified to be that shaman than Myrddin, who, so the White Book implies owned this island in the beginning before it was ever occupied or settled.) The significance of the lines alluding to *chwimleian* then is that in them we see LLallogan becoming Myrddin.

Staves

Might also marginally be possible to translate this line, 'The height of staves will be measured by (their) resolve', depending whether you take *gwryd* to be 'manliness, courage', or '(man-)height, stature, length', where 'staves' like the trees above should be understood as 'men'.

A lord

The central theme of the Myrddin poetry, and indeed of Welsh political prophecy, is that one day a youth is destined to return to whom it will be given to unify, lead, motivate and marshal the Cymry successfully to reclaim what they, and the bard regard as being rightfully theirs. (One is sometimes not too sure what that is though, and here, while it's spelled out, "The English being uprooted", one would rather like to know a bit more about what's envisaged: totally, partially, or just locally?) So this is the first time, in my ordering of the verses, that we meet with the concept. It is of course the Myrddin poetry's central theme of the *mab darogan* 'the prophesied child', characterised as the rebirth of a formerly great British king, that later allowed Welsh Myrddin to be bolted onto the Breton-Norman Arthur myth.
The splendid dragons I presume to be partisan lords true to the British cause mustering behind the sun's son's standard.

By contrast, Peniarth 3 for the aforegoing couplet has *Yd lathennawr gan fyrdd gwyrdd erwydd / RHag rhiain ar ddechrau o rei(?n)giau rhebydd*, apparently 'Green staves will be plied by ten thousand / For the sake of a lady the Governor's front contingents (?ranks) starting out.'

Irreligious — In the sense of 'ruthless'; not letting scruple or compassion stand in the way of doing what needs to be done?

Peniarth 3: *Gorŵydd gran wehyn...* 'Beard-despoiling steed...'. I suppose Black Book's *Gorŵydd gradd wehyn...* could similarly mean 'Nobility-despoiling steed...'

Forays — *heolydd*, literally 'roads'. Peniarth 3 has *hwylydd*, literally 'sails', but also quite capable of meaning 'forays'. Though actually modern South Welsh *heol* 'road' is itself simply a borrowing from Irish *séol* 'sail, course, way, manner', of which Welsh *hwyl* is the Brittonic cognate.

Long-Knives — Okay, this is a bit whimsical. The word being translated is just *Saeson* ie. modern Welsh for 'the English'. But I do hate the word Saxons, which is a learned Latin loan. Why don't we use the English word? The Saxish name for one of their number was a Sax, which is a long heavy knife, a sort of stubby sword really. (The word still exists – its alternative spelling, 'zax' being very good for Scrabble!) But the plural of Sax, the name for the people, is Sex, as in Sussex 'South Sex' and Essex 'East Sex'. But I just thought Long-Knives looks a bit better in this context than Sex! (The original "Night of the Long-Knives" being Geoffrey of Monmouth's story of the massacre of the British nobility at Stonehenge during a peace-conference with the Sex, where, upon Hengystr's shouting out *Nimath eower saxas* 'draw your long-knives', the Sex each drew a concealed sax from their socks to slay their opposite number.)

The ulterior point I'm trying to make I suppose is that the Sex, until Alfred's very successful propaganda wheeze invented the Anglo-Saxons, were a distinct race from the Engle. At the end of the settlement period the Sex occupied all of southern England as far as the south Midlands, whilst the Engle occupied from the north Midlands to the river Forth. The Sex though were subject to the Engle, which is why their dominion was regarded as a part of England.

But the fact that in this line it's the Sex who are the enemy,

rather than the Engle, might suggest that the verse was composed in the south, ie. in Wales, apropos a Welsh scenario, rather than in Cumbria. Although actually, in the tenth century the Saxish dynasty of Alfred did inflict a few major blows on Ystrad-glud.

Bards — Sounds like a bit of wishful thinking on the part of a bard living in times when bards were on the decrease.

Verse 10

LLD 9; Pen3 16; Myv 17; LK 20

Concealment — The apple-tree of British civilisation is banished to the indigenous wilderness because the ruling class of the countries of Britain have turned away to pan-european aspirational models and values. Even though many souls long again to experience the joy of its pink-flowered beauty and taste its restaurative fruit, that cannot be because it is not given to it, nor shall it be until the day when the prophesied child, Britain's saviour, grown to manhood, returns to claim his own, thus enabling the apple-tree to thrive in full glory once again.

Gifts — *addon*, Peniarth 3 has *aeron* 'fruit'.

Cadwaladr — This is the once and future king of Welsh political prophecy, but insofar as the name, which could conceivably be taken as a title or epithet, means 'Battle-Commander', it connects with Nennius' characterisation of Arthur as *dux bellorum* 'Leader in the battles/Battle-Commander'. It's bit of a mystery why Cadwaladr. His rule presumably commences in 655 following his predecessor, Cadafael Battle-Shirker's disgrace at the battle of Gae in that year. Nennius says Cadwaladr died in the great plague of 664, which would give him a reign of nine years and mean he died in his early forties. The Welsh Annals tell us he died in 682, also a plague year., which would give him a reign of twenty-seven years and have him dying at around sixty. (The Triads on the other hand represent him as having died by violence.) Despite the greater authority of Nennius I support the latter date, because the impression I get is that his was a long and peaceful reign, and that he died when past his youth. No battles or heroics, or indeed any events at all are on record from his reign. But perhaps that's the point. His father Cadwallon's reign, so dramatic and glorious, ended in catastrophe. As also did that of his immediate predecessor, his

regent Cadafael Battle-Shirker. Cadwaladr's reign by contrast seems to have been one of longed-for peace, stability and regrowth, with no further disastrous losses of Cymric territory, the main thrust of English encroachment having finally petered out.

The key to Cadwaladr's featuring as the son of prophecy probably lies in his having been the last head-monarch of all Cymru, both Allt-glud and Wales, and in his being the last British monarch with a legitimate claim to the Countship of Britain, that is, to being supreme ruler of the whole island, which title was so briefly attained by his father. The return of Cadwaladr then will signal the reunification of the Cymry and if not the resumption of the countship, then at least the redemption of the honour of the British and their re-establishment as a heavyweight player in the politics of Britain..

On the other hand perhaps Cadwaladr's significance is really, not that he was the last king of the British but that he was the first king (and creator) of Wales. The hundred years 560 to 660 had seen a total implosion and collapse of British sovereignty in the island in the face of germanic aggression. With the last Coeling lands having been overrun following the battle of Maes Gae in 655, the only Cymric territory left by 660 was Cumbria (Dumbarton, Lanark and Renfrew) and Cambria; the border of Wales having by then reached more or less where it is today. That's all the British had known for a century was battles, humiliation, defeat and retreat. But under Cadwaladr that all stopped. They had feared for their race, that it was on the brink of total extinction and that the germanic invader was destined to possess the entire island. But under Cadwaladr a novel concept emerged, of a new mini-Britain in the west.

Just when they thought all was lost, it was a miracle. Cadwaladr in effect relinquished his claim to the countship and now-unrealistic British ambitions about reasserting insular hegemony, in favour of concentrating on defining and consolidating a modest homeland where the beleaguered British could at least re-group, survive and be secure.

Tywi and Teifi

What's going on here, I suggest, is not a battle, but that Cadwaladr, having returned to Gwynedd has proceeded to Ceredigion and Ystratywi (Carmarthenshire) to receive their allegiance and to take command of their armies.You might think this places the action squarely in Wales and hence that the

verse belongs to the post-cumbrian phase of composition. But this need not necessarily be the case: A Cumbrian bard suffering repeated Nordic despoliation at the end of the ninth century, or Saxish invasion and laying waste in the middle of the tenth might well have envisioned the last head-monarch of all Cymru, Cadwaladr, first returning to his patrimonial realm of Gwynedd, before raising a united army from Wales to march north to deliver his northern subjects from their straits. See the next verse, where Cadwaladr is evidently in Cumbria.

Fair-Beards A well-instantiated kenning for the germanic barbarian foe, usually the English, but here possibly the Norse. I did wonder about translating *graendde* as 'apprehensive' (about the military build-up in Wales), but no, I think it does refer to the consternation of men in battle upon realising that their cause is lost and they themselves imminently about to lose their lives.

Peniarth3: *A chydfod graendde o Ranuynion* 'And a lamentable settlement by (?=for) the Fair-beards'

Long-Hairs This seems to rule out the frenchified short-haired Normans as the enemy here. It's key to an understanding of the Welsh attitude towards the English, even today, to remember that at some level we have always regarded ourselves as being products of the Roman Empire and hence of a superior level of civilisation to the English, to the Norse, or even the Normans, whose historical irruptions into and depredations upon the civilized world were held to mark them down as basically of a savage, immoderate, barbaric and uncouth disposition, only thinly veneered over by subsequent christianisation and pretensions to high-culture.

I don't know up till what date the Welsh could realistically have thought that by conquering the English they would be civilizing them. That's what makes me wonder if it's the Norse who are in the cross-hairs here. Though it is, of course, British, pelagian civilisation we're talking about, with its beautiful and pure, pink-flowering Otherworld apple-tree, for so long invisible, finally reappearing to general view. Be that as it may, it's certainly possible that until quite late, Englishmen wore their hair long (a mark of barbarism in Welsh eyes) when Welshmen – under monastic influence perhaps – wore it short.

Verse 11

LLD 10; Pen3 11; Myv. 22; LK 8

I can see why Myv. put this verse out of sequence to be the last one of the poem. It most succinctly captures the whole idea and ends on a beautifully depicted upbeat note dramatically portraying the final advent of the future Welsh utopia.

River

Easy immediately to suspect *afon* here of being merely a scribal transmission error for *addon*, 'attributes, gifts', as seen in the otherwise identical line of the previous verse. But we cannot assume that, and in any case it's a device of frequent employ by the poets to repeat a line in successive verses, varying one element. The river associated with the apple-tree has already been mentioned in verse 4, and there we wondered whether it could be Aven, or Clyde. Though local lore tells us, "Annan, Tweed and Clyde / Rise out of one hillside." Apropos its role in effecting the tree's concealment, rivers often serve as political boundaries, – not to be crossed without special permission. Is this river perhaps to be seen as the boundary between Britain and Otherworld, which latter those with pragmatic eyes cannot see?

Peniarth 3's version of the first three lines of this verse are, *Afallen beren,beraf ei haeron / A dyf yn argel yn argoed Celyddon / Cyd ceisiai ofer fydd herwydd ei hanfon* 'Perennial apple-tree with the most luscious fruit / Which grows in a secret place in Caledon's woodland, / Though he might seek it, that'll be in vain on account of its ??mission.'

RHeon Ford

RHeon is generally considered to have been a country roughly coextensive with modern Wigtownshire in the west of Galloway,– centred on a city of the same name located on the banks of Loch Ryan, somewhere in the vicinity of Stanraer. (Welsh texts also evidence *LLwch RHeon* 'Loch RHeon' and *Caer Reon* 'the city of RHeon'.) This city is thought to be one and the same as Ptolemy's *Rerigonion*. No site has been identified – you'd be looking for a hilltop location with still visible earthworks I'ld've thought. In the British period though, RHeon was an important and powerful country, being the same, apparently, as that made famous by Urien and his sons under the name of RHeged. (Dunragit is at the eastern side of the Stanraer isthmus.) Indeed one gets the impression from the triads that

prior to 369 when Tewdws constituted his new province of Valentia, governed out of Allt-glud, RHeon, or RHionydd Head as the triads term it, was regional capital of the North. Both Welsh *RHionydd* and Irish *Rioghaine* are exactly what you'd expect for the regular development of British *rigonion* in their respective languages. The form *RHeon* I strongly suspect of being borrowed from an early version of English 'Ryan'. Because the thing is, RHeon seems to have been occupied by Oswydd and settled by the English in the wake of the battle of Gae in 655. It remained a piece of England for some two hundred and forty years before in turn being overrun and settled by the Norse Irish. Hence there are very few traces of British toponomy left in the county, the place-names being mostly English, with a good admixture of Irish. So a Cumbrian bard composing this verse in the mid-tenth century (see below) while he might have an awareness of the ancestral importance of the place, his contemporary name for it would most likely have been the English one.

As to the significance and whereabouts of RHeon Ford, I would envisage this to have been the border crossing-point into the country, whether on the Fleet, at Gatehouse of Fleet (Roman remains), or on the Cree at Newton Stewart (present county boundary), or on the Luce at Glenluce. Once again I would here see Cadwaladr knocking at the door of RHeon to invoke their old allegiance and collect their troops. (There are Welsh allusions to RHeon and RHeon Ford however which seem to imply that they were in Wales.)

Cynan

This is bit of a puzzle. Sounds strongly like Cynan's already at RHeon. (The words I translate 'meeting him' could equally well be translated 'welcoming him'.) Cynan, who is frequently depicted as Cadwaladr's partner-in-arms in the second-coming enterprise, is generally taken to be the re-incarnation of Cynan Meiriadog, legendary first founder of Brittany in the 380's, there to represent the non-cymric British, ie. Brittany, Cornwall and Devon. So if he's from Brittany, what's he doing in Scotland? Sounds like we've got something wrong here! Is it even thinkable that all along we've been mistaken and that Cynan of the prophecies is not actually Breton Cynan? I don't off the top of my head remember seeing, in the contexts where he's mentioned, any specific associations linking him with Brittany. But what other Cynan could he be? Cynan White-Shank,

famous and successful ruler of Powys in the late fifth century? Cynan Long-Jaw son of Cynwyd of the Cynwydians, who, if obscure,s is at least roughly in the right place, being one of the Coeling lords of Erechwydd in the late fifth century? Or else the latter's more famous nephew, Cynon son of Clydno of Edinburgh concerning whom the Black Book tells us, *Bedd Cynon yn RHeon RHyd* 'Cynon's grave is at RHeon Ford' (presumably died defending it.)

English — *Saeson* = strictly speaking, the Sex, and not the Engle. But if Cadwaladr and Cynan were engaging the Sex in the Scottish borders, the first time this would have been possible would have been in the mid-tenth century. Because, English England having been effectively destroyed by the Danes between 865 and 878, when the West Sex dynasty of Alfred and his house started, at the battle of Eddington in 878 successfully to roll back the Danish invasion, although they decided for strategic reasons to retain the name England for the country they were rebuilding, nonetheless it was now the Sex and no longer the Engle who were in charge. Then in the next century as Alfred's offspring, gradually extended their new Saxish kingdom northwards, they came increasingly into conflict with the Cumbri. So Elystan Alfredson at the famous battle of Brun in 937, routed and annihilated the Cumbrian forces who had marched south with the Dublin Norwegians against him. While in 945 Edmwnd Alfredson attacked the northern Cymry, defeating them near Grasmere in the Lake District and killing their monarch Dyfnwallon ab Owain before going on wholly to lay waste Ystrad-glud. As the Welsh Annals pithily put it, *946: ...Strat Clut vastata est a Saxonibus* 'Ystrad-clud was laid waste by the Sex'. So you might think this meant this verse was likely to have been composed some time after 945, except that the prophecy contained in this verse, and Myrddin's authorship of it is specifically alluded to in the Great Prophecy of Britain, currently considered to have been composed in the 930's – maybe that date needs rethinking.

Dragon — You might want to regard this as the spirit of the people, and perhaps you'd be right, but dragons in the poetry are generally people,– noted warlords, warriors or national champions. So this is best read, I suggest, as signifying Cadwaladr himself. Indeed the the dragon on the Red Dragon flag represents the returning Cadwaladr, while the flag's motto, *Y DDraig Goch a*

ddyry cychwyn (which can mean lots of things: 'the Red Dragon will stir'; '...will return'; '...will make a move'; '...will have a go'; '...will launch an attack') contains the same word *cychwyn* 'start, starting out, move, leap, initiative, attack' as predicated of Cadwaladr and Cynan in the previous line.

Joyful — These lines give us perhaps the best vignette in the literature of Britain in the new golden age following the dragon's return.

Verse 12

LLD 3; Pen3 7; Myv. 8; LK 13

Yellow — Referring to its load of fruit. See verse 6 above. *Melyn* could equally well, and more poetically be translated by English 'golden'. The word seems originally to have meant 'honey-coloured'. Perhaps some echo of honey's sweetness is being attributed to the apples.

Hill — *Talardd* 'hill-crest' is here probably, like LLannerch or RHun, another place-name, now lost, of the Old North. There's a couple of 'em round here though: Talardd House in FFair-fach and the Talardd Arms at LLanllwni. But if you want to look at it connotatively, then the apple-tree's exalted, in a commanding position, like a strong hilltop city, or Dewi when the hill rose up under him at Brefi.

Garden — But nonetheless it's growing in the wild, unfrequented and neglected, dropping its miraculous crop of golden apples in the middle of the forest unseen.

On the other hand, the Peniarth 3 version of the opening couplet is, *Afallen beren, bren diletgyn', A dyf yn nhalar heb âr yn ei chylchyn* 'Perennial apple-tree, sorrow-free tree, / Growing in the headland without ploughland around it.'

Pictland — Scotland north of the formerly British shires of Dunbarton, Stirling and Clackmannan. The historical heartland of Pictland: Fife, Perth, Angus, Aberdeen, Banff and Moray, is in large part fertile lowland country with a good climate and good agricultural land, capable, then as now, of supporting a large and affluent population.

Dubliners — Founded in 841, from 853 to 1014 Norse Dublin was the de facto capital of the Scandinavian peoples operating in the British Isles.

Wide lake — *Llydan lyn* 'the wide lake' (or possibly, 'the wide drink') is a well-used kenning for the Irish Sea.

From us — Although the battle foreseen is in Pictland, with the Picts defending their border, now it's 'depart from us, the Cymry'. Whether this simply means 'from Britain', or else 'from the northern alliance' (see below) rather than specifically from Cymru. But it does seem to depict the Cumbri as comrades-in-arms with the Picts. The political focus of this verse seeming to be in the Old North, makes it likely it was composed in Cumbria, and indeed, in Cumbrian – as is so much of early Welsh poetry. Which really just goes to show there's no such thing as Cumbrian, only Welsh.

And of course, very significantly, Peniarth 3's version of line 4 is not *Yn amwyn eu terfyn*... 'Contesting their border...', but *I amwyn ein terfyn*... 'To contest our border...'.

Affliction — This would certainly seem to imply that the Dublin army is wiped out with only seven half-empty shiploads getting away.. Which sounds quite like a description of the defeat of Brun in 937, when the king of Dublin, Amhlaibh mac Gofraidh (Auley McCaffrey) sailed to Britain with a fleet of 615 ships (so says Simeon of Durham) to lead a joint force backed by Owain ap Dyfnwal, monarch of the northern Cymry and Caustantín mac Aoidh, Scottish king of Pictland, against Elystan Alfred's-grandson, Saxish king of England, meaning thereby to conquer England and to put a stop to the expansion of Saxish power in the island. Except that when Amhlaibh and Elystan met, at the very bloody battle of Brun, the northern allies were roundly defeated and their huge army comprehensively slaughtered, the remnants of the Norse force limping back to Dublin. (The leaders of the western Cymry, ie. Wales, Hywel the Good and Bald Idwal, who were under-kings of Elystan's, probably fought for him at the battle. Had they on that occasion decided to repudiate their allegiance and throw their lot in with their northern brethren, the course of British history could have been quite different.)

If it is Brun, then the purpose of presenting it here as a (retrospective) prophecy is possibly to make the point that, although people at the time may have thought Amhlaibh mac Gofraidh was the prophesied deliverer ordained by the Head to bring the Cymry final justification, he wasn't. His defeat is a

lesson to us not to put our faith in false messiahs. The *mab darogan*, the Red Dragon, is yet to come.

Verse 13

Pen3 1; Myv 2; LK 9

White — Apple blossom is at the same time both white and pink.

Sweet — For those who can see the tree and eat the apples, eating them brings both bardic insight and eternal life.

Continually — Here a description of the apple-tree's otherworld attribute of flowering and fruiting continually, both at the same time.

Anchors — I imagine the point about them carrying anchors across the sea is that once they've arrived they're not intending to be leaving any time soon.

Seven — The last quatrain of this verse looks very comparable to the last quatrain of the previous verse, such that they almost look like variant versions of each other. Yet there are major differences between them which lead me to conclude that their vatic intent is quite other. Firstly the action here concerns Gwynedd rather than Pictland; Cambria rather than Cumbria. Secondly the fleet will have a contested landing, which the fleet in the previous verse (nor Auley McCaffrey's) doesn't. Thirdly, while the reason the bulk of the force didn't get back could certainly have been because, as in the previous verse, they got killed, there's nothing to say as much. It could equally have been because they had been successful at prosecuting their aim of establishing themselves here. The seven who returned seem cast as cowards. So while this could be no more than a distorted reflexion of the clearer picture we get in the previous verse, equally it could be a depiction of Cadwaladr, the true Count of Britain, returning to claim his own. Nonetheless, the fact that *Gwyndyd,* 'the people of Gwynedd' are mentioned doesn't necessarily rule out this stanza's having been composed in Ystrad-glud, since Cadwaladr, who is in the first instance to be associated with Gwynedd, was acknowledged rightful count of Cymru there too.

As a matter of fact, grammatically speaking it's very tempting to translate this, 'In seven ships they will bring seven hundred men over the waves who will disembark... except for seven men back to their homes' (like the refrain in 'The Treasures of Otherworld', *Namyn saith ni ddyraith o Gaer*... 'Except for seven

men none returned from the city of... '). If seven ships and seven hundred men seem bit of a paltry force (a figure of a hundred men per ship looks about right though), remember it was in only three ships the Long-Knives first came to the Island of Britain. It's in only three shiploads Arthur and his men go raiding the Treasures of Otherworld. While Harri Tudur ab Edmwnd had a force of only around two thousand French and Scottish soldiers, funded by the King of France, when he landed in 1483 near Milford; a fortnight later he was King of England. (The bards hailed him as Cadwaladr.) Okay, in the last verse it's definitely about seven hundred ships. But that doesn't mean it can't be seven hundred men in this one – the meanings of oracles being so protean.

Falsely — This doesn't seem right here. You really want its opposite *yn ddiau* 'truly', – 'Of those that come, truly, none shall go...'. Unfortunately, no grounds for making any such emendation. (In view of Myv. *yn neu*, could we perhaps reconstruct *ynteu* 'then, in that case'?) So anyway, going with 'falsely', I would understand 'return falsely' = 'flee'.

Verse 14

Pen3 6; Myv. 7; LK 3

Slender — This should probably be understood as 'graceful', 'shapely'.

Residence etc. — This seems to imply that Myrddin lived in, or under the apple-tree; or perhaps it means his mind dwelt on it so much. Or else perhaps it means, in a dark and fallen age the spirit Myrddin continues immanently to inhere in the otherworldly beauty and grace of the apple-tree.
I assume the celebrity to be Myrddin,– profitable because his poetry is profitable for us to consider, determined because he alone of the British, in the face of many incentives to abandon his stand, insisted on remaining loyal to the autochthonous dispensation.

Excuses — In the next four lines we get a cameo of the evil society that is to precede the second coming. I presume the excuses are about not paying taxes or not providing military support.

Wicked — I rather like Myvyrian's variant on this, *bwydiog gwydus* 'foody and vice-ridden'.

Men of — *Gwŷr rhamant*: would have thought this phrase betokened a

excellence mediæval date of composition.

Verse 15

Pen3 8; Myv. 9; LK 14

Vigorous Neither I nor GPC've got any idea what *biborig* means. Whether it can be linked to *pybyr* 'staunch, vigorous, valiant', or to *pori* 'to graze'? The traditional translation has been, 'full of shoots, or buds', but on what grounds I don't know; I suspect it's no more than a guess.

Yellow Once again the apples are golden. The fruit of bardic vision is pure and valuable, yet most people despise and disregard it, – too sublime for many to be able to appreciate it

Conferred Myvyrian has *cymathyleis*, which looks a bit like it could be representing *cywaethlais* 'strove, contended'. This would match better with verse 8, *cywaethlaswn yn ei bôn* 'at whose trunk I contended', and also with verse 2, *amsathr yn ei bôn, maon yn ei chylch* 'a trampling back and fore at its trunk with troops surrounding it'. In which case *dynion dewisig* would have to be understood as 'foremost soldiers' rather than 'eminent men' – although *dynion* is not a really a military word (see below). On the other hand it's not impossible *cymathyleis* could be representing *cynnaddyleis*, ie. *cynedlais*. The traditions about Myrddin do represent him as engaging in dialogue with the very eminent Taliesin, as well of course as with his sister Gwenddydd. (*Dynion*, which I have translated 'men' really means 'people', and was formerly often used to refer to wife-men [> women] also. – So where you see toilets labelled *dynion* and *merched*, it really means 'People' and 'Girls'!)

You might wonder what verses like this have got to do with Myrddin. Well it's a later bard making a prophecy he perceives imparted him by Myrddin's spirit, – and of course claiming Myrddin as its source imbues it with authority. The first three lines of the verse then, with their conventional apple-tree invocation and allusions to elements of the Myrddin legend serve to authenticate the utterance as the voice of Myrddin – to let the hearer know who it is that's saying this. While the prophecy itself follows in the fourth and fifth lines.

Dyfnant 'Deep gorge', a fairly common stream-name: there's a suburb of Swansea (*anglice* Dunvant – formerly a colliery) called after one, apparently a tributary of the Clyne. There was of yore one in

Ystradgynlais with a mill on it. There's one near Llanfrynach – a tributary of Taf; one south of Lake Efyrnwy, a tributary of Efyrnwy; one near Cwmpenmachno, tributary to the Machno, and no doubt loads of others. The ones I'v mentioned are all pretty inconsequential water-courses. Or not impossible I suppose, for this to be another of the lost names of Allt-glud.

Wearer-out

Difa cerrig is pretty gnomic too. The modern eye wants to read it as *difa gerrig* 'destroyed stones', but the non-mutation looks deliberate, meaning we should view the internal relation as genitival with *difa* as the verb-noun, 'destroying/consuming stones' – or given the high-mediæval Welsh poetic trope whereby the verb-noun can be used to denote the verbal agent, 'destroyer/consumer of stones'.

(Am I mistaken in thinking that this indicates a late date of composition, in that it would be too rarified a construction to be found in the grammatically simpler Cumbrian poetry of the early Myrddin period?)

I'm at a loss to get what the picture is here. Whether Dyfnant is alluding to some specific stream of that name, or just generically to some or any mountain stream cascading down over the boulders choking its course, whether the stream's envisaged as eroding all its water-worn boulders away to nothing (take a very long time) or periodically tumbling them them aside when in spate, it's presumably a figure for the well-springs of the British cause patiently persevering time after time at wearing down the obstacles in its path, such that when it has finally done so the bard who foretold its ultimate triumph will be vindicated and so receive due reward for truthful prophecy.

It'ld be nicer if we could personalise Dyfnant,– have it refer to a lord or a people of a district called Dyfnant. Then we could perhaps understand 'stones' as castles. (The french-style stone house, or castle was a foreign novelty in a Wales whose vernacular architecture was all of wood.) We could then have the bard doing what bards normally do: punting up his lord as the chosen one divinely ordained to be saviour of Britain (by wearing down/destroying Norman castles), the bard getting remunerated for his vision accordingly. But unfortunately I can adduce no consideration to warrant me in making this last jump.

Payed

One gets the impression that typically the court bard received his salary cheque annually, on New-Year's day. This bard'll get

paid when his prophecy is proved correct. Otherwise perhaps it could mean that as a result of Dyfnant having worn down the stones, the survival of the Welsh *modus vivendi* with its concomitant institution of court bard remains assured for the forseeable future.

Verse 16

Pen3 9; Myv. 10; LK 15

Wither

A hopeful and up-beat look at the future. The pelagian bardic vision and the distinctive British civilisation it supports will never die. Furthermore, for reasons mentioned below a great new age of peace and affluence are on their way. Not sure why four hundred years. If this was composed circa 1100, then in the previous four hundred years, 700--1100, the British had seen nothing but loss of hegemony, failure, continual retrenchment and isolation.

Canopy

By being independent and free-standing a nation can fully develop its own innate potential untrammelled, unconditioned by allegiances and dependencies. Wales' situation was particularly acute in this respect, in that, following Augustine of Canterbury's proscription, it had in effect been expelled from the pan-european community of Roman christendom on account of its christianity being, to Roman eyes, heterodox. Which really was merely a by-product of Britain's not aspiring after the Roman paradigm of civilisation, but rather adhering to its own autochthonous dispensation. That is, it rated the traditions of its own ancient insular civilisation no less highly than those of the Roman johnny-come-lately model. As a result of which it was shunned by, and became invisible to the rest of the christian west, – to Roman catholicism.

So the implication of this line is, perhaps: don't be daunted by a prospect of our being isolated and on our own, it's an opportunity; let's just get on and do our own thing. That's what will be most rewarding for us. It's a plea for separateness; very applicable indeed to the contemporary issue of Brexit.

Roots

I'ld see *yn ei gwraidd* as an adverbial phrase of place, 'at its roots', parallel to the 'at its trunk' (twice) above, rather than as an adjectival phrase qualifying 'it'. ie. not doing it violence <u>in</u> its roots, but <u>at</u> its roots. Not quite clear how a wolf is going to do an apple-tree violence. Pee on it? Eat the apples? – wouldn't be

surprised if wolves did eat apples. I believe there's a South-American fruit-eating species. I know too from personal experience that foxes will eat pears. Perhaps it doesn't mean doing violence to the tree itself, but to Myrddin's happy domicile under the tree, just by appearing there and forcing the prophet to retreat up the tree! If you live on your own in the middle of an iron-age forest, wolves must surely be a known hazard.

But probably the line can only be made sense of by coming at it figuratively. Fierce and rapacious men more interested in rending and slaying their fellow creatures than eating the apples of eternal life work against the influence, or even endanger the continued existence of the tree of bardic afflatus, either because through malevolence towards it they deliberately target it, or else because in their worldliness they simply can't see it (it's invisible to them) and so ride rough-shod over it. We're talking external and internal enemies here. Sadly, the tree of the still vital British dispensation is more often visited by those who are suspicious of it and wish it ill, than by its own people who could profit from its fruits if only they would choose to seek it out, but rarely do.

Baby — But the apple-tree's obloquy is coming to an end. The prophecy of a baby foretells the return of the the Count, the chosen one who is to retore Britain's fortunes.

Cadfan — Monarch of Gwynedd and Count of Britain, c. 613—625. He was the last British ruler unchallengedly to hold the title to the entire island. Edwin, founder and first king of England was fostered at his court. His tomb at LLangadwaladr in Anglesey is inscribed *Catamanus rex sapientissimus opinatissimus omnium regum* 'King Cadfan, wisest and most well-regarded of all kings'. Gruffydd ap Cynan was a lineal descendant (albeit at one point by the distaff) of his.

Wax large — Doesn't just mean 'grow in body to become a man', but more 'shall expand the size of his dominions'. Not quite sure what 'from Cadfan's flowers' means; whether 'descended from Cadfan's progeny', or 'by means of Cadfan's attainments' (ie. wisdom and well-regardedness, – which Gruffydd ap Cynan definitely did share).

Gruffydd — This is a positively identifiable historical person, Gruffydd ap Cynan ab Iago, AKA Gruffydd ŵyr Iago, who after a long,

desperate and eventful struggle starting in 1075, finally managed to establish himself monarch of Gwynedd in c.1099. Following which he reigned successfully until 1137, dramatically extending the boundaries of independent Wales, with the latter half of his reign being considered a golden age of peace and plenty. The dynasty he founded continued to dominate Wales until the English conquest, while the enduring existence of the Welsh tradition today is not without its debt to him. All in all a perfect candidate for the *mab darogan*, returned to foster the growth and esteem of the perennial apple-tree. So it sounds like this verse was put together during the surging optimism in his reign, so let us say somewhere around 1110.

Jacob — Or Iago, Iago ab Idwal ap Meurig, king of Gwynedd 1023–1039, called king of the British by the Annals of Ulster, was Gruffydd's grandfather. The point about his lineage is that he was a scion of the rightful dynasty of Gwynedd, descended from Cadfan, but was killed and succeeded by Gruffydd ap LLywelyn, son of LLywelyn ap Seisyll, Iago's predecessor, men of a rival dynasty. So the accession of Gruffydd ap Cynan represented the restitution of the true Gwynedd lineage, the house of Aberffraw.

Deroofing — A litotes: Gruffydd's reign will see affluence and an increase in population with many new farmsteads, halls and churches being built. The efficacy of his rule will be such that it will not be like in the bad old days: no longer will marauding armies be able constantly to infest the realm, stealing the livestock and burning the settlements, nor will Gruffydd's economic policy tend to poverty and ruin, but rather to prosperity and growth. Okay, so this is a retrospective prophecy, presumably composed to applaud Gruffydd for what he'd achieved.

Verse 17

Pen3 10; Myv. 11; LK 16

Drenches it — I'ld see the 'it' referring proleptically to the feather rather than to the tree, this line being as-it-were a self-contained aphorism, an effect much striven after in Welsh prosody.

Many birds's feathers don't cope well with getting soaked. Not so the duck's feathers, which are constantly in contact with water. Though the struggle for the British cause – for lebensraum for the perennial apple-tree – continues to meet

with setbacks and disappointments, it is not daunted, its resolve kept sharp by the bardic vision, but constantly renews the fight against those forces inimical to it, like the mountain stream patiently wearing away at the stone; finally it will be gone.

Imminent

But now Myrddin foresees some dreadful circumstance so dire it's of no profit to tell us what it is. But if he dreads it, it must be a blow to the soul of the Island of Britain so fatal, so inexorable that our only recourse can be to appeal to God for his aid in our tribulation, but which we shall only receive of course if we've been practising true faith and not consorting with evil spirits. It sounds like death, doesn't it? Whereat the body and the world can no longer avail and all our hope must be on our soul's being able to make that jump from the collapsing tree across to the bosom of the divine.

But if death, is this then the final prophecy, – of the death of Britain and its celebrated apple-tree? I could imagine this verse composed in the despair of the last quarter of the twelfth century when the final conquest and subjugation of Wales by Edward Harrison and the Normans was starting to look inevitable.

But this is where the undrenched duck's feather comes in, to offer us a glimmer of hope after the Flood. A hope for rebirth after death. After winter the apple-tree's vigour will re-awaken and fresh shoots will put forth from the shattered stump. And so it was after the fall of Wales. And this verse speaks to us now, who stand on the threshold of the great cataclysm of the West. After the Tribulation, Britain's perennial apple-tree will awake, and the struggle for it to express its innate genius will continue.

Protect me

'Me' being Myrddin, and Myrddin the guardian spirit of the Island of Britain, it's a plea to God to help Britain get through the apocalypse, provided only that Britain has faith in the one true spirit to succour and provide for it, seeking regularly to come into contact with that transcendant consciousness.

Evil spirits

I have argued at length elsewhere for *eisyfflaid*'s meaning 'evil spirits (ie. those cast out, exorcised ones)' rather that GPC's 'blasphemer, curser; damned, cursed'. (< Latin *exsufflare* 'to exorcise, to cast out evil spirits', cf. *exsufflatio* 'exorcism').

Whether this be regarded as (the spirit of) Myrddin himself speaking, or else the fleshly bard, his mouthpiece, one notes

with interest that communing with Myrddin is not classed as being intimate with evil spirits, and is regarded as perfectly consistent with true faith. But then I believe Myrddin passes John's test for spirits [I Ioan 4:2] *Pob ysbryd a'r sydd yn cyffesu ddyfod Iesu Grist yn y cnawd, o DDuw y mae* 'Every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ to have come in the flesh, is of God'. But more rigourously than John I should like to take as a premise that there is only one divine spirit. Which sort of entails that the spirit Myrddin is an aspect or revelation of the one divine Logos in British clothes.

Verse 18

LLD 2; Myv. 12; LK 4

Green — Not just the colour, but in the sense of 'vital, ever-living'.

Boughs — Note the contrast between the tree's boughs and its trunk. If the fruits of the tree are the teachings of the British dispensation, epistemological and moral, and the branches which bear that fruit are the bards, then the trunk in which they all inhere and find their support, and from which they receive their life-giving sap, must be the spirit Myrddin himself. That is, the picture is analogous to christians who bear the fruits of their faith doing so by being branches of the true vine, which is Christ [Ioan 15:1-8]. Cf. Gal. 5:22, *Eithr ffrwyth yr ysbryd yw, cariad, llawenydd, tangnefedd, hirymaros, cymwynasgarwch, daioni, ffydd, addfwyndwr, dirwest* 'But the fruit of the spirit is, love, joy, peacableness, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faith, mildness, temperance.'

Foretell — Prophecies frequently have an eschatalogcal application and a temporal application. Such that this line could both at the same time be foretelling the Last Battle which is to culminate and conclude the worldly trials of the British, or else a contemporarily imminent poltical realisation. Temporal prophecies moreover, by their transient nature, can be fulfilled more than once, as and when the disposition of events and the configuration of the stars recurs. Regarding prophecies under their temporal aspect then, it's most often a case of, "If the cap fits, wear it." Here, it may not be intended, or there may be other battles that apply, but one battle giving a good fit to this prophecy is the battle of Cymryd Conwy, also known as the Revenging of RHodri, which took place at Conway in 881.

Battle

The consequences of the battle of Cymryd Conwy were momentous: it brought to an end Wales' two hundred and thirty years of tributary subordination to Marchland, which dated back to the reign of Wolfhere Penda's son – or even to that of Penda himself. Partly as a result of the Welsh victory, English Marchland, in around 883, suddenly came to an end as an independent kingdom.

In 874 the Danes had conquered Marchland and set up a local English thegn, Keelwolf, as puppet king. As a result of which, Big RHodri, the powerful and much-loved monarch of Wales felt able to suspend his country's long-standing tributary subordination to it. In 877 the Danes divided Marchland, taking the eastern half for themselves, leaving only the western half to the English. But in 878 Keelwolf invaded Wales with a view to re-asserting his overlordship, and was remarkably successful, defeating and killing Big RHodri together with his son Gwriad. (It was in that same year Alfred won his epoch-making victory over Guthrum and the Danes at Edington.) In 879 Keelwolf died. We may presume that at his death Anarawd RHodri's son once again withheld Welsh homage to Marchland, for in 881 the new English king, Edryd Long-Hair in his turn invaded Wales to enforce his claim there. He was however decisively defeated by Anarawd and the sons of RHodri at Conway.

The major part of Anarawd's troops would have consisted of contingents from Gwynedd together with contingents from Powys, RHodri having united Powys with Gwynedd in 855. (That's why he was called Big RHodri.) With Marchland shorn of its eastern province, and now having lost control over Wales too (and Welsh tribute money), Edryd by 883 had decided to apply for clientship to Alfred. Alfred gave Edryd the hand of his daughter Ethelflaed as part of the deal, such that after Edryd's death in 911 Marchland was ruled by Alfred's daughter. So in this way the former English kingdom of Marchland became henceforth a subordinate lordship of the new Saxish England. Anarawd, with his new-found freedom tried to ally with the Danes against England, but found them too unreliable. So a few years later he too submitted to Alfred on the same terms as Marchland. At least now he was on an equal footing with his old master.

Pengwern

Shrewsbury, anciently the capital of Powys, lost to the English – seemingly under Wolfhere Penda's son, in around 660. The

Powys capital was subsequently re-established at Mathrafal, near Meifod, about twenty three miles west. The original Welsh palace of Pengwern was of course burned (*Llys Bengwern neud tandde* 'The court of Pengwern, yes, is in flames') but tradition has it that the site was re-used for Chad's college at Shrewsbury. (Where St. Chad's church stands today – Chad was bishop of Marchland from 669 to 672.) The origin, though, of the modern name for Shrewsbury, *Amwythig*, remains bit of a puzzle, possibly to be linked somehow to *amwyth* 'anger, fierceness, ?hostility'.

I read this phrase as a metonymy: Pengwern standing for Powys as a whole; and likewise 'Pengwern's banqueting horns' for the Powys armed forces. Nor would I see it as meaning Powys pre-660. At the battle of Cymryd Conwy in 881 the Powys troops – fighting valiantly if we are to believe "deserving their mead" (it was a grudge match) – bested the old enemy who had expelled them from Shrewsbury and district only 220 years previously. The use of the former capital name seems to invoke their ancient right, while suggesting perhaps that at last they are on the brink of re-occupying it. The commander of the Powys troops at that battle is generally deemed to have been Merfyn ap Rhodri, Anarawd's brother.

Banqueting horns

In the first instance referring to the Powys palace-guard. Archetypically Welsh palace guards would be three hundred in number, and reside at court at the monarch's expense, receiving most notably a generous allowance of mead (the drink of the nobility – more expensive than beer) with their evening meal in the hall – and a salary (£1 a year in the Laws). In return for which it was their duty in peace-time to police the monarch's state, in war to spear-head his armies. Most of them would be the sons of major land-owners and hence able each to call-up their own armies of commoners from their estates.

Cyminod

The last couplet here doesn't really belong to the rest of the verse. The rhyme is different for a start. It was added to the Black Book version in a different, later hand, and doesn't appear at all in the Myv. and LK versions of the verse.

The battle of Cyminod: this is the legendary battle of prophecy, at which the British will finally triumph, incontestably to establish once and for all their true entitlement. *Cyminod* would seem to mean 'Edges-togetherness', or possibly, 'edge-to-edgeness'. Apparently connoting a sword-fight the name may

have evolved simply from a poeticism for 'battle'.

Engle

The correct ethonym for the people of Marchland, the English kingdom contiguous with Wales, and whom, at the battle of Cymryd Conwy, Anarawd defeated. Asser tells us that even the southern monarchs of Glamorgan and Gwent sought Alfred's overlordship through fear of military oppression by Edryd, king of Marchland. Alfred invented the Anglo-Saxons in an attempt (largely successful) to smooth away ethnic fault-lines in the new England he was building. But nobody told the Welsh bards.

Ruler of Snowdonia

Anarawd. *Eryri* 'Snowdonia', – base meaning, 'the Borders, the Borderland (of Gwynedd)'. (Strongly suspect derivation from Irish *airer* 'border, coast'.) Insofar as Snowdonia divides Powys from Gwynedd, calling Anarawd 'ruler of the Borderland' may well signify his grip on both countries, or indeed his control over multiple countries (Ceredigion, Ystratywi) outside his own borders. Or else it may be intended to emphasise his unassailability behind Gwynedd's daunting defensive wall of mountains. I believe Jarman ses it as belonging to a later age and suggests LLywelyn ab Iorwerth.

Verse 19

LK 17

This looks like a late, corrupter variant of the preceding verse. It was in LK but in none of my other sources. Don't know where Thomas Stevens got it from.

Extremely large

Purfawr (very prosaic adjective) looks nothing so much as like a rationalisation of the previous verse's *pufawr* (< Lat. *pomārius* 'fruit-bearing') – an uncommon word, quite likely to have been incomprehensible to a late copyist.

The grammar's not right in this line either. Can't make much sense of *i'w* 'to/into/in its' instead of the perfectly clear *a'i* 'and its' of the previous verse.

Refined person

This couplet's added value. It's in none of the other variants. My translation of it's pretty flaky though. I read *canpid* as=*cenfid* (ie. **cant-bid* < *canfod* 'to perceive') rather than as *canpyd* 'a hundred pitfalls'. Nonetheless I take *ym mhrid gorlas* to be for *ym mhryd gorlas* 'in (the) verdant form', rather than really with *prid*, 'in the verdant purchase'. I interpret the 'refined eminent person' as being the insightful bard seeing oracularly in the apple-tree, before it happens, the sorrows and horrors to come,

his foreknowlege empowering him to prophecy a battle. But since the whole verse is so corrupt it's probably not worth taking too seriously any meanings projectable from its words.

Hillside

Cyfeddgrudd or even variant *cyfedd grudd* implies *crudd*, which doesn't exist. Okay, so it could be for-some-reason unmutated *grudd* 'cheek, hillside' (Irish *grua* can mean 'brow of hill' too) – which by rights ought to have given us *cyfeddrudd*. Otherwise following variant *cyfeddgrud*, implying *crud* 'cradle', we could translate, 'Pengwern, cradle of convivial companionship, deserving its mead'. One problem with this though is that *ei* 'its' is feminine, whereas *crud* is masculine. (*Grudd* can be feminine.) But actually the bottom line is that *cyfeddgrudd* has got to be really a faulty transmission of *cyfeddgyrn* 'carousing horns', as seen in the corresponding line of the previous verse.

Verse 20

Myv.18; LK.21

Imprisoned words

If the fruits of the apple-tree are bardic poems, then what these have to tell us is gnomically locked up inside their oracularity. It may further be the case that what people want to say is locked up in ambiguous terminology through theit fear of reprisals from a repressive regime.

The ass

A very unwelsh animal, – more mediterranean really. Its appearance here betrays the influence of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Three or four asses feature in his Prophecies of Merlin, – though not changing administrations. If this be the case, we've got to be looking at at least a mid-twelfth century date of composition. The use of the definite article here in this French way is also indicative of lateness, as is the form *y finnau* (if indeed that's what it be) for *myfinnau*.

If one chose to read the Owain below, as Owain Gwynedd (reigned 1137 - 1170) then you might want to see the ass as Harri ap Mallt, count of Anjou and emperor of the Angevin empire (half of France, Normany, Brittany, England, half each of Wales, Scotland and Ireland) ruled 1154 - 1189, – known anglocentrically as Henry II. As to why he should be characterised as an ass, we should probably study the ass references in Geoffrey's prophecies. Unless it's simply he's being an ass in doing something not very sensible, like trying to dispossess Owain Gwynedd.

Whether his "changing administrations" alludes to the French and English political machinations and territorial horse-trading associated with Harry's rise to power, or for it to have a Welsh dimension, which Myrddin calling it not very sensible suggests it does have, then Harry's invasion and occupation of Gwynedd-below-Conwy in 1157 might equally count as "changing/switching administrations", or "moving administrative districts".

I — Myrddin, – albeit as may be, speaking through the jaws of a twelfth century devotee. Myrddin, seer and otherworld mentor of the British cause, would of course have seen that the French count's Welsh campaigns were not to end happily. Harri's 1157 foray was brought to an end by two defeats at the hands of Owain, while his 1165 invasion had to be called off due to Welsh rain. (Probably arranged by Myrddin.) With the upshot that Owain was ultimately able fully to achieve his territorial ambitions.

Eagle — Owain. An eagle is *eryr*, while Snowdonia is *Eryri*, which by false etymology looks like it means 'Eagles'. (Actually means 'Borderland'.) So Owain Gwynedd, lord of Snowdonia could be presented as an eagle from the Eagles. Why is it from the sky? Well apart from that's where eagles normally appear from, it could be depicting Owain descending from the high mountains of Snowdonia. (*Wybr* actually means 'cloud(s)' – sky/clouds, same thing in Wales.) Or else more probably it's 'sky' in the sense of 'heaven', meaning Owain's successes against Harri ap Mallt and his ensuing supremacy within Wales are divinely ordained, – that he's sent from heaven.

His men — The ass's men. "Play with" in the sense of "engage in combat with" with great gusto and enjoyment, – as if it were a tournament. And possibly "make fools of", – which they did. In the action of 1157 Harri was nearly taken captive.

Owain — Well, is it Owain Gwynedd or not? Up to you to decide. It's a prophecy. It can apply to any set of events that fits it. I don't know that the last line fits the case of Owain Gwynedd very well. In later vatic verse there's an Owain who figures as a legendary returning king in his own right. (Probably a conflation o Owain ab Urien, Owain Gwynedd and Owain Glyn-dŵr.) It's possible this might be him here.
But if it's Owain Gwynedd, the verse is likely to be (as so often)

a retrospective prophecy composed after the event as a paean of triumph to celebrate his successes. The ringing of his weapons is bitter because ringing out not joy and gladness, but defeat, failure and death to his antagonists.

Parley

Whether this means Owain Gwynedd was able to muster such large armies that he didn't need to bother overly with appeasing his enemies at peace conferences or with diplomatic overtures. Or else does it mean Harri, complacent at being able to call on resources and troop numbers vastly superior to those of the British monarchs, without thinking it necessary to discuss any issues he had with Owain beforehand, just arrogantly marched straight into his domain? I suggest the former, if only because the momentum of these lines is celebrating Owain's ascendance.

Voyage

A fordwyau is very peculiar, because while I think there can be no reasonable doubt as to what it's intended to mean, it's an entirely ungrammatical inflexion. You'ld expect *a fordwya*, but the rhyme confirms it has to be *-au*. (Unless, as seems unlikely, this is an early example of the Gwynedd dialect at work, whereby all *-au* is pronounced *-a*. Such that to the poorly-versed in written Welsh it might seem that all final *-a* could be hypercorrected to *-au*.) Otherwise, could be the noun *mordwyau* 'sea-voyages', in which case we might want to reconstruct ...*a[r] fordwyau* 'Nations over seas on voyages', – less felicitous in both idiom and sense.

Okay, this sounds like the classic ending of Welsh prophecy, as epitomized in the Great Prophecy, where following the final victory of the returning Count, the island's alien invaders are obliged to sail away back to where they came from. If this was utterly unrealistic at the date of the Great Prophecy (?930's, under Elystan Alfred's grandson) it would have been even more so in 1157! But if Owain Gwynedd in some degree foreshadows the returning Count, then perhaps his 1157 victory at Talymoelfre will in some degree serve to foreshadow the sea-borne flight of the invader. As part of his 1157 assault, Harri ap Mallt had despatched a fleet (consisting of three naval contingents, according to Gwalchmai: one fom Ireland, one of Norsemen and one from Normandy) to attack Gwynedd from the west. This had landed at Abermenai and put ashore a force which had despoiled eastern Anglesey, including desecrating two churches. Welsh troops assembled during the night and the

next day attacked the landing force with great ferocity, killing very many of them, so that only a small remainder made it, with difficulty, back to their ships, which then abandoned the operation and sailed away for Chester.

Verse 21

LLDC 1; Myv. 21; LK 23.
(This verse is discussed in detail by A. O. H. Jarman in LLên Cymru 3, p.115.)

Luscious — Does the fact that we here get *afallen beren, pêr...* cast doubt on whether twelfth-century bards really did perceive *peren* as being the extended version of *pêr* it is generally regarded as being today. That is, would the poet have put materially the same word twice in a row? I have to say, on the evidence of the habits of Welsh verse in general, it's not impossible.

Mine — You might prefer to translate this line, 'A famous, most-valuable fruit-tree, mine'.

Machrau — Jarman (*op. cit.*) urges that this was at, or near the farmhouse of Maes Machreth (formerly Maes Machre) in the Dyfi valley about six miles east of Machynlleth, and that its owner at that time was Gwenwynwyn ab Owain Cyfeiliog, prince of South Powys. (Maes Machreth is in Cyfeiliog, Powys' most westerly cantref. Tafolwern, Gwenwynwyn's more usual headquarters is four miles away to the east.)

Bachawy — A minor tributary of the Wye in the cantref of Elfael. It runs some seven miles, almost from the English border near Kington, south-west to meet Wye at Erwood, two-thirds of the way from Builth to Aberllyfni, draining RHulen Hill and Red Hill to its north, and Clyro Hill to its south. It therefore runs parallel to Wye (but in the opposite direction) on the latter's Aberllyfni to RHyd-spence stretch, but about four miles further north. (ie. It's the next valley up fom the Wye valley.) I've never been there. I'm sure it's a pretty enough valley, but there's not much in it in the way of settlements, Painscastle and LLandeilo Graban being the most worthy of note.
In July 1198, it seems (*ibid.*), Gwenwynwyn Owen's launched a major campaign of deliverance of the Welsh people from the French agressor. His first step was to march with a huge army drawn from Powys and Gwynedd against the recently-built Painscastle, which was holding Lower Elfael in thrall. After a

three week siege, finally on Wednesday 12th August the besieging Welsh army of liberation was attacked by a relieving Franco-English force under Geoffrey Fitzpeter. The result was a humiliating and signal defeat for Gwenwynwyn, who saw the massacre of his troops (hence the 'bloody Wednesday' and the 'blades covered in red') and the end of his ambitions, whilst the English army boasted they had scarcely lost a man.

Thursday — Thursday is the divinely-ordained sequel to Wednesday. The poet's response to the catastrophe befallen the national cause is to flip back from the consideration of present defeat to comfort himself (and us) by depicting for us the legendary battle of Cyminod that is yet to come, at which the British shall finally prevail, avenging themselves of all the suffering inflicted upon them, and where all their age-old wrongs shall be righted forever. Posibly significantly, the day on which the English are successful, Wednesday, is the day sacred to their chief pre-christian god, Wedne, from whom their kings traced their descent.

Englishmen — Although the ruling elite and the senior knights were French, the rank and file of the army were still the old enemy, the English. (By the thirteenth century the term *Saeson* 'the Sex' had been accepted as the generic term for all the germanic peoples of England, - possibly following Alfred's saxification of old Engle-land.)

Ashen spits — Spears. Ash was the favoured wood for spear-shafts. Normal spits are, I suppose made of iron.

Southern quarter — *Adfan y Deau* is almost a paraphrase of *Deheubarth* 'South Region', the name of the mediæval south-west monarchdom of Dyfed, Ystratywi and Ceredigion, which, following the death of Owain Gwynedd in 1170 and the ensuing domestic infighting, had under the leadership of RHys ap Gruffydd become the dominant power of Wales. At RHys' death in 1197 Gwenwynwyn ab Owen of Powys made his ill-fated bid to take on his mantle but as we saw was utterly discredited at Painscastle in 1198.

If the prophecy in this line was intended to have a contemporary political dimension it (and by implication, Myrddin) was wrong – it <u>was</u> a lie. For the poet seems to be punting up one of RHys ap Gruffydd's sons to carry forward the Countship of Britain and possibly be the one to bring about

the battle of Cyminod. But – it's a familiar Welsh story – the said sons through protracted interfraternal quarrelling only succeeded in destroying their father's legacy.

It's actually highly irregular to be prophesying a saviour of Wales from the South. Normally the returning king is seen as arising from Gwynedd. Presumably because the Aber-ffraw dynasty there had best claim to represent the continuity of Roman legitimacy in Britain. And indeed perhaps our poet should have stuck with this convention, because it was from the north, Gwynedd, that the next supra-national leader, LLywelyn ab Iorwerth, LLywelyn the Great, was to emerge; becoming ruler of all Gwynedd in 1200 and the recognised leader of all Wales in 1212.

On the other hand if you wanted to give this prophecy a longer-term reach, you might try seeing Cyminod as the battle of Bosworth in 1485, and the boy-child from the South as Harri ab Edmwnd (Henry VII), who was born (1457) and brought up at Pembroke. This would make the prophecy not a lie.

Alternatively if you thought Wales was still languishing under a cloud of ignominy and disregard, then you might think the baby who is to fight the (metaphorical) battle of Cyminod to free Wales from subjection to the Anglo-American globalised value system and to lead it on to glory and self-fulfilment in its own terms has not yet been born.

I have to say though, Wales is richer and freer now than it ever has been. Anyone in Wales can be as Welsh as they want to be. If I wanted to, I could live my life entirely, have all my children educated, and conduct all my official business, through the medium of Welsh. Why rock the boat.

Verse 22

Myv.20; LK.7

Trysting-place tree

This sounds most like the tree where lovers arrange to meet for an assignation in the wood. Could perhaps be viewed metaphorically as the place where the bardic votary meets the spirit Myrddin for an infusion of gnosis. As *eilwydd* can also mean 'meeting' in the sense of 'reconcilation', could we translate it 'reconciliation-place tree', or 'tree of reconciliation'? – No, don't like it!

Wood dogs

Wolves, wild dogs, foxes, – here powerful and cruel men of a coarse and insensible disposition. We've already seen the wolf

tyrannizing the apple-tree's roots in verse 16 above.
The manuscripts actually here say, ...*cylch ei gwraidd diwasgodfa* '...round its unshaded roots', – hard to make any half-decent sense of, which means it's probably wrong. And I like GPC's suggested amendment (sv. *Gwasgodfa*) of original *digwasgotwa* to *(d)igwasgotwa*, as if repesenting a false segmentation of *gwreidigwasgotwa*. Whether *(d)igwasgotwa* is to be analyzed as modern *i wasgodfa*, or *yng ngwasgodfa*, makes not a lot of odds since they both can mean 'in the shade'.
Worldly and unenlightened men, though they be over the apple-tree's roots, ie. politically in charge of the land which supports the British dispensation, despite the tree's luscious fruits being close to hand, yet remain in the dark. They don't see it; it's invisible to them. Wolves don't eat such sweet apples, only flesh.

Future

The actual word is *etwa* (=*eto*) 'again', but it's not a 'for a second time' sort of 'again', but a Welsh 'again' = 'at another time, at some point in the future'.
While this verse plainly shows the influence of Geoffrey's and the French romances' focus on the doings of Arthur, Modred, Guinevere and Merlin, at the same time it seems at pains to reconcile the new Franco-Breton narrative with the Welsh tradition. This is manifest not only in the Welsh versions of the names, but also in that nothing is implied about the characters concerned which is inconsistent with pre-Geoffrey Welsh lore.
With one exception: Myrddin seems here to be presented as Geoffrey's Merlin (Myrddin Emrys, of Welsh parlance) prophesying, presumably as part of his vatic delivery to Gwrtheyrn (Vortigern) circa 435, concerning the future battle of Camlan (accorded a date of 537 in the Welsh Annals), and oddly enough, about his true Welsh self, his next avatar as-it-were, Myrddin the Wildman, and the anguish he will at that time feel over events connected with the battle of Arfderydd in 573.

Modred

Welsh *Medrawd/Medrod* implies British **Medrātos*, where Breton *Modred* (the adopted English form) implies **Modrātos*. But they do seem to be the same person.
Medrod does seem to have been known of in pre-Geoffrey Welsh tradition, but the references to him by the poets portray him as simply another model of valour and courtesy. The Welsh Annals (dating from around 980) do state however that

he and Arthur *corruerunt* 'fell' at Camlan.

Arthur — Likewise Arthur was known too, but only as a minor folk-tale hero quite unlike the powerful, chivalrous, gracious and tragic high-king of all Britain, centrally-important to Breton tradition as preserved for us in the French romances. Interestingly the epithet attributed to Arthur here, *modur tyrfa* 'commander of the throng', echoes the one given him in Nennius, *ipse dux erat bellorum* 'it was he that was (the British kings') commander in the battles'.

Thursday — Links back to verse 21. Thursday seems to be the day for conclusive battles. There, of British final vindication., here of the epoch-closing, golden-age-finishing battle of Camlan. *Difiau* < *diw Iau* < Latin *die Iovis*, Jove, or Jupiter's day. Presumably Jove, as king of the Latin gods, has the last word about things.

Seven — This line is the same (even in regard to its tense – which seems a little awkward here) as the refrain to several verses of the poem *Preiddiau Annwfn* 'The Treasures of Otherworld' in the Book of Taliesin, which also has a comparable focus on Arthur. So that one wonders rather strongly whether the author of 'The Treasures of Otherworld' didn't also compose this particular Apple-tree.

Gwenhwyfar — By implication it's Geoffrey's story-line that's at work here, whereby Guinevere, through taking up with Mordred, is complicit in bringing about the battle of Camlan and the concomitant ruination of Britain.

The theme of the abduction of Gwenhwyfar, Arthur's wife, and his subsequent war to win her back is perhaps the central one of the Arthur material. As such it also appears in pre-Geoffrey Welsh sources, albeit that there the abductor is not Modred, but Melwas, king of the Summer Country. (While in the French romances the seductor/abductor is of course Lancelot.)

Gwenhwyfar is a classic sovereignty-of-Britain figure (identifiable in a different register with Gwenddydd, Myrddin's sister) such that the husband who possesses her thereby possesses the island. In that she personifies the land itself, her fall, sorrow and penance embody the decline and punishment of the country for its faithlessness.

Arrogance — *Traha* 'overweeningness, haughtiness, presumption', this is the same sin of which Mererid Seithennin's daughter also stood accused, and for which she was divinely punished by the loss of

her queendom through the drowning of Maesgwyddno in Cardigan Bay. It also has parallels with Branwen's heart breaking upon perceiving herself to have been the cause of the ruin of two prosperous countries. (Not that she suffered from *traha*, quite the reverse.)

But in that it's Gwenhwyfar's arrogance and presumption it's the country's. The rebuke to Gwenhwyfar is a rebuke to the British for their arrogance and complacency, and her penance will be theirs.

Cadwaladr's grave

This line, which only appears in LK (don't know where he got it from) has the wrong number of syllables, the wrong number of beats and doesn't rhyme. So unless there's just a rhyming phrase at the end missing, there's a good case for arguing it doesn't belong here. Especially as it's also of uncertain meaning and relevance.

One may presume perhaps that Cadwaladr's grave lies with that of his grandfather, Cadfan, at Llangadwaladr, not far from Aberffraw in Anglesey. One may reasonably imagine too that Llangadwaladr was by origin an abbey (*llan*) founded by Cadwaladr, – the act of a pious king, which may well have continued until the Norsemem laid them all waste. It may even have had a women's wing.

But the figurative connotations of Cadwaladr's grave are perhaps more important. As the last rightful Count of Britain, at his death the British title to the whole island lapsed. His death has conventionally been taken to mark the end of British hegemony and the start of Wales. (Though there are a couple of other dates that might be regarded as the start of Wales: Gwrtheyn's ceding the western side of the island to Emrys in c.437; Macsen's withdrawing Britain's allegiance to Rome, and declaring himself emperor in 383. For despite Macsen's fall, British Britain was never subsequently recovered by the Western Empire from the control of his family and adherents.)

So Gwenhwyfar's brought from the height of her exalted throne to the ground, to the grave, to Cadwaladr's grave; from her position at the pinnacle of the golden age of British Britain to peruse its final extinction short while after, to reflect on the degree to which its demise might have been a consequence of her own actions. Or in other words, since Gwenhwyfar is Britain, Britain should be led to face how its ultimate failure and humiliation has been result of its sins.

Church primate

Eglwysig bendefig 'ecclesiatical prince'. I take this to mean a bishop. There weren't any archbishops in the British church; they hadn't been invented when Britain seceded from Rome in 410. Arthur's bishop was Bydwini, who in the triads is however given the title *Pen Esgyb* 'Head-Bishop'.

If we ignore the previous line, then Bydwini seems to be escorting Gwenhwyfar to a religious house, one: because it's the only option left to her, her world having fallen apart, and two: as penance for her destructive behaviour which in large part contributed to bringing the cataclysm upon Britain. If we do countenance the previous line, then perhaps we may understand Bydwini to be showing her Cadwaladr's grave in a vision (it wasn't going to be dug for another 145 years after the notional date for Camlan) as the ultimate end of her antics. But clearly she couldn't be entering a nunnery at LLangadwaladr which didn't yet exist either.

Exogesis becomes easier when we read Gwenhwyfar as Britain. Then it might say, following Camlan, Britain was led by clerics and the church. And indeed the two hundred years following Camlan was the great Age of the Saints, which saw a great religious revival and the explosion of monastic christianity thoughout Britain; brought about in part one suspects by the British aristocracy's failure and despair in the political and military fields.

Gwenddydd's son

See verse 2 above. In the last couplet of the verse we are back once again to the familiar ground of the Myrddin legend. The one singular difference here though being that this time the verb tense is in the future.

Is there, one wonders, some parallelism being posited between Gwenhwyfar's having betrayed Britain by her unfaithfulness to Arthur, leading to his mortal wounding at Camlan, and Myrddin's betraying Britain by urging on Gwenddolau, autochonous Britain's last champion, to his death at Arfderydd?

Verse 23

Myv. 19; LK 22

Veil

The apple-tree of bardic insight and British civilisation is occluded by the wickedness of the times. Despite the fact that it is green and still vigorous, a veil has been drawn over it so that it has, once again, become invisible – nobody can see it any longer. The hope being that at some future, happier time the

veil will again be removed.

Mead — Not quite sure of the force of this. I hazard that mead in the hall (after supper) is all right, whereas drunkenness by troops guarding the fortress during the day when on duty is an abuse and a weakness. Or taking *dinas* to be 'city', – 'mead in the city', we could perhaps see an opposition here: treacherous nobility, drunken commons.

Burgundy — *Byrgwyn*, evidently the Welsh spelling of French *Bourgogne*. Burgundy and Flanders, in which the town of Arras was at that time situated, were two of the twelve peerages of France. Thomas Stevens finds in this a reference to Welsh expectations of French aid following Owain Gwynedd's letter to Lewys ap Lewys, king of France (Louis VII), sent in the aftermath of Harri ap Mallt's rained-off expedition to Gwynedd in 1165. Where Burgundy and Arras are envisaged as coming to, or against, I'm not sure. Probably Anjou, or Normandy, the home territories of those French dynasties who also happened to have acquired the kingship of England.

Foretell — Something wrong with this line, it's too long. Even if we regard it as a sort of clumsy *toddaid traeanog* or *rhupynt*, ie. *A mi ddysgoganaf / cynhaeaf / [y] cneifir yr ŷd glas* it's still not satisfactory. (The word 'shear' [*cneifio*] is chosen I presume because it cynghanedds with *cynhaeaf* 'harvest' in *c-n-'-f*.)

Also, if we regard it as commencing a new section of the verse, as lines starting, 'And I foretell...' normally do, it's got no sequel, for the next line again is plainly the first of a separate self-contained couplet. So is this line to be regarded as the second one of a couplet starting 'When...'? (After all, the last couplet of the verse also starts with 'When...'.) But the 'And...' together with the prolegomenary look of the line make this difficult. Better parsing might be gained by making it the last line of a vatic group of three, even though this meant reducing the salutation to the apple-tree from the conventional two lines to one.

Shearing the unripe corn presumably signifies both literally destroying the crops of enemy territory, and metaphorically cutting down the young men of their opponents' armies.

If we went for the three-line option I would read it as saying that the reaction to the arrival of Burgundy and Arras will be betrayal and drunkenness(??) of which the final end will be

ravaging and war. Otherwise, if we wanted to retain the verse's second line as part of the apple-tree's salutation, and have our current line the second half of a couplet, then the meaning might be: The apple-tree is veiled because the prevailing state of Britain is one of treachery and drunkenness, as a punishment for which Burgundy and Arras will soon arrive to bring ravaging and war.

Eagle

Unlike the traditional metaphorical use of the word by the poets of the princes, this is much more of a Geoffreyan fabulous beast, such as populate *passim* his fake Prophecies of Merlin. (Though neither of the two prophecies there about eagles obviously matches this one.)

One possibility would be to try to see the she-eagle here as ex-Holy-Roman Empress Mallt (the double-headed eagle being the emblem of the Holy Roman Empire), countess of Anjou and officially endorsed heir of Henry Williamson, king of England, who between 1139 and 1148 fought her cousin Stephen count of Blois, son of Adela William's daughter, for the kingship of England. Mallt's campaign was strongly supported by her ever-loyal half-brother, Robert Harrison, earl of Gloucester. His holdings included Gwent and Glamorgan, so he would have been well-known in Wales, and by exercise of his feudal authority large Welsh contingents marched in the armies he raised to fight for Mallt. But eventually in 1148 Mallt gave up the struggle and went home to Normandy, handing the fight over to her young son Harri, who after Stephen's death in 1154 did finally get to be king.

Within the Mallt scenario the best fit for this line would probably be for the period between 1148 and 1154, when the return of prince Harri and his mother was imminently expected for the resumption of their campaign to conquer England.

But this sort of line at this position in the verse would normally be associated with the triumphal return of the prophesied saviour to the British people. And indeed that might well be what it is after all, and the Mallt interpretation a total chimæra. In this case however, somewhat irregularly, the *mab darogan* is returning from overseas in the company of a lady *merch ddarogan!* If it is a standard native scenario though, I've no idea who, or when or where.

On the other hand if it is foretelling the ascent to British hegemony of Harri ap Mallt (English-speak, Henry II), he's a

sort of anti-*mab darogan* isn't he? Whose return augurs nothing but harm and loss for the Welsh monarchs. (They'd been doing rather well out of the divided state of England under Stephen and Mallt.) France seems an unlikely location for a British once-and-future king to be returning from. (Even Harri ab Edmwnd [Henry VII] came from Britanny.)

Mallt's home was in Rouen in Normandy. To save patriotic blushes, the English call the people who conquered England under Gwilym ap Robert (William I) the Normans. Welsh contemporary records are not so coy. They standardly call the invaders *FFrainc* 'the French/France'. So there's nothing to forbid *FFrainc* here from meaning Normandy, which at this period was a part of the Angevin empire, a rival to the France proper which contained Burgundy and Flanders.

Hard to believe though, that our bard should be concerning himself about the resolution of an English civil war when the Chronicle of The Princes seems hardly even to be aware there <u>was</u> a civil war going on in England.

Escape

If 'the eagle' refers to Harri ap Mallt then this is presumably foretelling the discomfiture of his enemies, including among their number the Welsh kings; whereas if it's referring to the returning Count of indigenous tradition, then it once again foretells the triumph of the British and the utter defeat of their enemies.