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## Deathsongs for Cynddylan: An annotated translation of the Heledd poems from the Red Book of Hergest.

Anne McConney

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Deathsongs for Cynddylan  
an annotated translation of the Heledd poems  
from the Red Book of Hergest

A Thesis  
presented to the  
Department of English  
and the  
Faculty of the Graduate College  
University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
Anne McConney

May, 1979

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Thesis Acceptance

Accepted for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman  
*July 26, 1979*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

To Richard L. Lane

Ban gúir pan disgleir  
Bannach pan lefeir

(Canu Taliesin XV, 33-34)

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## I. Deathsongs for Cynddylan

1. Stand in the open, maidens, see the land  
Of Cynddylan, the court of Pengwern all afire,  
The grieving of the young who mourn their home.
2. A blight will come upon a single tree;  
It is the chance of fate,  
And only God can end the pain.
3. Cynddylan with heart like the ice  
Of winter, thrust across the Twrch at its mouth  
And loosed the riders of Trenn.
4. Cynddylan with heart like the fires  
Of spring, gave himself for his fighting men  
While holding Trenn, that wasted town.
5. Cynddylan, bright pride of the border,  
Chainwearing, stubborn support in war,  
Fought for Trenn, his father's town.
6. Cynddylan, bright steadiness on the heights,  
Chainwearing, stubborn support of hosts,  
Fought for Trenn while he had life.
7. Cynddylan with heart of a greyhound,  
When he came down upon the rivermouth,  
Battle-slaughter he kindled.
8. Cynddylan with heart of a peregrine,  
Who was once the fierce and furious  
Cub of the stubborn Cyndrwyn.

9. Cynddylan with heart of a mad boar,  
When he came down in main attack  
Battle-slaughter broke the silence.
10. Cynddylan, Culhwch of warriors,  
Where light was brightest he attacked,  
And returns not from Twrch to his father's town.
11. Cynddylan, then toward thee  
Went out the heart from me, so weeping  
As [if I were] a virgin to warfare.
12. Cynddylan, Powys bright lord,  
Splendid to find danger; the life of [our] lord  
We mourn, the cub of Cyndrwyn.
13. Cynddylan, fair son of Cyndrwyn,  
It was not lucky to go round the cape,  
Though no man better were than our white lord.
14. Cynddylan, tormentor of your land,  
Success now thou shalt never have;  
In Trebwill broken was thy shield.
15. Cynddylan, thy field has no lord  
And the English come today;  
Fear is around it in this time.
16. Cynddylan, thy field has no chief,  
And the English come through Trenn;  
A forest is not made of one tree.
17. With my heart how I would long  
To mend the broken side, the fair flesh,  
Of Cynddylan, prince of the white host.
18. The hall of Cynddylan is dark;  
Tonight, without fire, without family,  
I shall weep awhile and then be still.
19. The hall of Cynddylan is dark;  
Tonight, without fire, without candle,  
Who but God will give me strength?
20. The hall of Cynddylan is dark;  
Tonight, without fire, without light,  
Its feast is turned to nettles.



21. The hall of Cynddylan is dark,  
The rooftree gone and the fair company;  
Bitter the good that shall not be.
22. Hall of Cynddylan, disfigured  
Thou art, thy shield is in the grave;  
While he lived, thy gate stood unbroken.
23. The hall of Cynddylan is abandoned;  
Tonight, with none to claim it,  
Dishonor and death are lords of it.
24. The hall of Cynddylan has no welcoming  
Tonight, its rooftree fallen over stones,  
Without lord, without warband, without passion.
25. The hall of Cynddylan is dark;  
Tonight, without fire, without song,  
My cheeks are shrunk with tears.
26. The hall of Cynddylan is dark;  
Tonight [it is] without household,  
That was a teeming place a time ago.
27. Hall of Cynddylan, it is death  
To see it without wisdom, without fire;  
My chief is dead and still I live.
28. The hall of Cynddylan is deserted;  
Tonight are gone those skillful warriors,  
Elphan and Cynddylan who wore the crown.
29. The hall of Cynddylan is lifeless;  
Tonight is gone the honor it had,  
With no grandson nor granddam to keep it.
30. The hall of Cynddylan is still  
Tonight, after the loss of its prince;  
Great, redeeming God, what shall I do?
31. The hall of Cynddylan is dark,  
Its rooftree gone; the English have slain  
Cynddylan and Elphan of Powys.
32. The hall of Cynddylan is dark;  
Tonight [are gone] the sons of Cyndrwyn,  
Cynan and Gwiawn and Gwyn.
33. The hall of Cynddylan it pierces me  
Each hour; gone the great assembly  
That I saw about its hearth.

34. The eagle of Eli cries on high,  
Fullfed is he with a terrible drink;  
The heart's blood of Cynddylan the fair.
35. The eagle of Eli dances tonight,  
Stained with the blood of stainless men;  
The forest [is] strange and fearful upon me.
36. The eagle of Eli is bloody tonight  
With my lord's blood—I cannot stop him;  
The forest [is] strange and sounding upon me.
37. Eagle of Eli, the guardian of battle—  
Tonight, keeper of honor in Meisyr's valley,  
Brochfael's land too long thou dost offend.
38. Eagle of Eli, once keeper of the seas,  
Who no more fishes in the estuary,  
Thou hast called, strong from the blood of men.
39. The eagle of Eli, he walks the wood,  
And with him an overflowing of anguish;  
Beneath his kiss all pride decays.
40. Eagle of Pengwern whose crest  
Is grey, on high he screams,  
Eager for flesh. . . .
41. Eagle of Pengwern whose crest  
Is grey, upraised is his claw,  
Eager for flesh of Cynddylan.
42. Eagle of Pengwern whose crest  
Is grey, upraised is his talon,  
Eager for flesh of my kin.
43. Eagle of Pengwern, from far he calls,  
Tonight above men's blood he keeps his watch;  
Trenn has been called a luckless town.
44. Eagle of Pengwern, far didst thou call,  
Tonight above men's blood thou hast been seen;  
Trenn has been called a shining town.
45. The chapels of Bassa are his resting place—  
Tonight ends the men of my clan,  
The staff of battle, the heart of Argoed.
46. The chapels of Bassa are [my] riches—  
Tonight my lord has made them so;  
His blood is in them and my pain.

47. The chapels of Bassa are [my] anguish;  
Tonight the inheritance of Cyndrwyn  
Is the earth above Cynddylan the pure.
48. The chapels of Bassa are [my] country—  
Tonight has made their clover so;  
His blood is in them, and my heart.
49. The chapels of Bassa, failed  
Is their honor; the English have slain  
Cynddylan and Elphan of Powys.
50. The chapels of Bassa are [my] fortress—  
Tonight the warriors who did not endure,  
They have no sky but in this place.
51. The chapels of Bassa they endure  
Tonight, as I endure my weeping;  
His blood is in them, and my grief.
52. White town beside the forest edge,  
Thy sign shall be forever this:  
The blood that lies upon the grass.
53. White town that stands within our land,  
Thy sign is on the green: the blood  
That lies beneath the feet of men.
54. White town within the valley, once  
Was merry all that was near you,  
But now in battle all thy host is gone.
55. White town between Trenn and Trodwyd,  
Common were the broken shields, coming  
From battle one by one to your river.
56. White town between Trenn and Trafal,  
There was more blood upon the grass  
Than fair snow on a fallow field.
57. Blessed is she tonight, Ffreuer, not sickened  
After the loss of our valley;  
From my misfortune is made her benefit.
58. Blessed is she now, Ffreuer, not stricken  
Tonight by the death of Elphan  
And Cynddylan, eagle of Cyndrwyn.
59. Not for thy death, Ffreuer, do I burn  
Tonight, but for the failing of my helpless land  
I lie unsleeping and I weep.

60. Not for thy death, Ffreuer, do I sicken  
From nightfall until midnight,  
Nor waken and weep till the dawn.
61. Not for thy death, Ffreuer, do I walk  
Tonight sallow with fevers,  
Red-eyed with weeping over our protector.
62. Not for thy death, Ffreuer, to I grieve,  
But for myself not slain by sword;  
My brothers sleep a holier place.
63. Fair Ffreuer, our brothers were gentle  
And sprung of no mean blood;  
They were not refusers, my clan.
64. Ffreuer, fair was the land for thee,  
When the lords they were a ready host,  
Nor rested from the battle's rage.
65. Myself and Ffreuer and Medlan,  
Though battle raged in every place,  
Feel no passion; to kill is not our share.
66. The mountain joining me to him above,  
No harm will come if I should bring my wish:  
That we shall have protection from the saints.
67. In summer gently the Aerwy  
Flows down through Trenn to the Trydonwy,  
And it goes with the Twrch to the Marchnwy.
68. Because the sun is on the land,  
The Trydonwy now flows in Trenn,  
And white the rapids as it goes.
69. Once my cover was made of skins,  
Skins of the hillgoat fed on holly;  
Cold in the birchgrove is the grave of the strong.
70. Once my cover was made of skins,  
Skins of young hillgoat fed on holly;  
Cold in the birchgrove is the grave of Trenn.
71. Gone my brothers from the lands of Hafren  
And from the waters of the Dwyrw;  
My God, why am I living now?
72. Gone the trained horses and blood-stained  
The garments and plumes of gold;  
Nothing is here but stone and weed, and dark is come.

73. They were not shamed before burial,  
Though they went to their deaths without song,  
Who were the brightness of the men of Uchant.
- 74A. They were not shamed before burial,  
Though they went to their deaths unwilling,  
Who were the brightness of man.
- 74B. Fierce shame upon the cattleherd  
Who refuses a worthy vigil  
And shamefully breaks the purpose  
Once held so strong—it is well  
He bleed, this companion of my lord.
75. If our prince had a woman, she would be raging  
Today; great would be the outcry  
She would make to destroy the men.
76. The turf of Ercall lies above the brave,  
The grandson of the line of Moryal,  
And gone the host that once he led.
77. Saltpit of desolation I am called;  
O God, to whom shall now be given  
The horses of my valley and their fields?
78. Saltpit of desolation I am pointed out;  
O God, to whom shall now be given  
The dark arms of Cynddylan and his forty steeds?
79. I looked before the darkness on a gentle land,  
Out from the gravemound of brightness;  
Long the sun's journey, longer my thought.
80. Then did I pause near Dinlle  
Uricon, in Ffreuer's land,  
And wept the failing of my helpless land.
81. Horseman from out the fortress down below,  
It was not evening when the sorrowing  
Of man would be seen. . . .
82. My brothers were killed all in one war,  
Cynan, Cynddylan and Cynwreith,  
While holding Trenn, that wasted town.
83. The bloodline of Cynddylan would not oppress,  
Nor flee from battle by one foot,  
Nor yet strike down the mother of a babe.

84. Brothers I had not mean of heart,  
Ardent they were as the hazel spear,  
But one by one gone are they all.
85. Brothers I had, brought to God  
Before me—it was my misfortune;  
Their fame they won without deceit.
86. Thin the breeze, great my sadness,  
Sweet the furrows that do not remain,  
Where earth heals seemly over him.
87. Sickened with God and with man,  
Sickened with young and with old,  
Disgrace I will endure to leave seed.
88. Living, he left no seed before he failed,  
And yet immortal the remaining blood  
If on the greensward [comes] a chief in strength.
89. I will wonder at brightness that is not of day  
On the track of the skillful pursuer, hearing  
Suddenly the boar break the bones of a young foal.
90. No longer with pride nor with honor,  
Nor with his warriors fighting;  
The meadow's heir is broken.
91. Thou hast gone, heir of the meadow,  
Shield without weakness of the city,  
Whose keeper is now Caranmael.
92. Caranmael, grief is upon thee,  
Sorrowful thy pledge of battle  
Customary upon a warrior's cheek.
93. Always laughing and liberal of hand,  
Son of Cynddylan of unfailing fame—  
Caranmael, last grandson of Cyndrwyn.
94. He was obstinate and for a time  
He was gone from his father's town,  
But men sought Caranmael as chief.
95. Caranmael, persistent tormentor,  
Son of Cynddylan whom we praise;  
No leader, though thou declare thy claim.
96. When Caranmael donned the warcloak of Cynddylan,  
Would that the lords had loosed the spear;  
A mercenary had not brought death on his head.

97. Once I was strong as thou art  
[Who was] not raised up by my help—  
The man who groans, sick of plague.
98. Brothers I had who once were with me,  
And I too would not complain in sickness,  
No more than Elphan or the great Cynddylan.
99. It is not well if the crown is not won  
By a man in mighty battle. . .  
They made no sound, my brothers.
100. Until from death and mighty suffering  
And raw pain I shall be cold,  
I too shall make no sound.
101. The field of Maodyn lies under frost  
That wastes away the cattle;  
Grief lies upon my lord as deep as snow.
102. The earth of Elwyddan is wet with rain  
And the field of Maodyn lies below,  
That was the due of Cynon, fairest one.
103. Would that my four brothers were with me  
And every one the leader of a warband—  
But there is no grandson of Trenn's lord.
104. Would that my four brothers were here  
And every one in the pride of his strength—  
But there is no grandson of Trenn's true lord.
105. Would that my four fierce and gentle  
Brothers were here, all sons of Cyndrwyn—  
But there is no grandson of Trenn's dear lord.
106. [Thy] warband brought thy death on thee,  
Thou art not to wake at the dawning;  
My song is broken for a man who will not rise.
107. [Thy] warband could not make thee flee,  
Thou shalt not bespeak them sinless;  
Unworthy the clay thy body enters.

## II. Deathsongs for Cynddylan: a commentary

In the Red Book of Hergest, one of the so-called "Four Ancient Books of Wales," there are one hundred and seven short stanzas that tell the story of an early prince of Powys named Cynddylan, of his last battle and death, and of the grief of those who survived the burning of his fortress, Pengwern. It is a terse poem, telling in fine-honed imagery of a firelit world, brutal and bright and childlike, detailing the movements of pain and the ragged perimeters of survival in verse as lucid as water.

This long passage in the Red Book, a shorter elegy, and a few scattered "grave stanzas"<sup>1</sup> are all that is known of Cynddylan. He appears in neither the genealogies of the time<sup>2</sup> nor in any of its scant historical records. "Powys on

<sup>1</sup>See Appendices.

<sup>2</sup>H.M. Chadwick, "Vortigern," with "A Note on the Name Vortigern" by Nora Chadwick, Studies in British History (Cambridge at the University Press, 1959), p. 30.



the Welsh March," writes Lloyd Laing, "was focussed on the old territory of the Cornovii. Its dynastic records, however, are confused."<sup>3</sup> In spite of this deficiency of cold historical record, there is little doubt among scholars about Cynddylan's actual existence. The bards who sang him sang no shadowy legend but of a man of flesh and bone and blood, and of a world where plunder was reason enough for warfare and where the wages of defeat were burning and dispossession, death and the movement of predators toward the battlefields.

Now his ancient, ruthless and heraldic world is gone. The Severn still flows but the hills are thirteen centuries older and what can we, townsmen of other towns, care about the death of an upcountry Welsh chieftain, fallen during a minor incident in a war that was, even then, doomed to fail? If the Cynddylan poet still speaks to the modern world, it is because he speaks to a core of human experience that lies deeper than external realities, because he confronts a question that still concerns all humankind.

He has travelled the journey of loss, in all its delicate psychological balancings and adjustments, through to the end. He has shown us what it is to quarrel with life and yet live, to weep in the hiraeth that is less a cry of pain than of outrage, and he has, at the last, defined the final step that brings a relentless sanity out of madness and imposes a harsh but true shape on a world that had seemed only a mockery.

The Cynddylan stanzas, broken, corrupted by other hands, suffering heavily from losses in transmission over the centuries, still form a whole that is incredibly intact. This unity is not the result of a clear and straightforward storyline, for there is none; the story is mutilated, perhaps

<sup>3</sup>The Archaeology of Late Celtic Britain and Ireland c. 400-1200 AD (London: Methuen, 1975), p. 102.

beyond repair. Nor is it the result of clear poetic diction, for this too has been corrupted over the centuries, until some of the stanzas have become, in their present state, almost meaningless. It is, rather, the product of a poetic skill which imposes a still-discernable pattern of imagery upon the poem as a whole, of a vivid verisimilitude of detail, and, perhaps most importantly, of a clear and inward understanding of the emotions at work throughout the poem. Few poets have examined so minutely the psychological ferocity of grief and its ultimate effect on the human spirit; few works of any nature display more clearly than the Cynddylan verses that double vision whereby the true artist both experiences and assesses his own passions. In order to understand the scope of this achievement, however, we must examine the historical and cultural backgrounds of the poem, the poet and his methods, and, finally, the poem itself.

### The Historic and Cultural Background

In speaking of the "historical background" of dark-age Britain, the scholar is speaking of something that, in the modern sense, is almost nonexistent. The historical records of the time are scant and often uncertain, and even such writers—Gildas, Nennius, Geoffrey of Monmouth—who supposed themselves to be writing sober history usually relied heavily on hearsay and myth. There was little or no apparatus for testing the line between fable and fact.

Complete historical accuracy is, of course, unattainable in any era; in the dark ages of Britain the very concept is impossible. The histories of the dark ages bear little resemblance to either the Classical convention or to our own. Shadowy figures appear and disappear in a landscape populated with half-seen heroes and prophesying birds, with wonders and monsters, magical pigs and rather prosaic princes and chiefs. In dark-age Britain legend and history merge, and

the colors have run together to make not a patchwork but a new color. The Celtic world may have been a center for scholarship, but it was a scholarship based on a worldview entirely different from our own.

Even so, modern historians and archaeologists have pieced together much of the past. The Celtic peoples are now known to have come from central Europe, or perhaps even further to the east, and to have spread northward through Spain and Gaul. When they entered the British Isles, they divided, and the language they spoke was broken into two branches. One of these branches became the Gaelic tongues spoken in Ireland and Scotland; the other became Brythonic, the root language from which developed Breton, Cornish and Welsh. The people themselves evolved a tribal economy based on herding and a small amount of farming which, according to Alcock, was "supplemented with cottage industries and a little trade, but lacking currency."<sup>4</sup>

To the "cottage industries" and the mixed farming should probably be added cattle raiding, which was apparently a favorite evening pastime among the Celts. Each local prince or chief had his teulu or warband; the most successful of these, of course, took and held most of the spoils, thus adding not only to the wealth of the chief but to his power of recruiting more and better members for the teulu. The Roman occupation of Britain apparently did little to change this durable tradition.

Though the Romans held Britain for some five hundred years, their empire eventually collapsed. Faced with trouble on their other frontiers and devastating internal intrigue and faction, the Romans abandoned Britain in the fifth

<sup>4</sup>Leslie Alcock, Arthur's Britain: History and Archaeology AD 367-634 (London: Allan Lane-Penguin, 1971) p. 314.

century. The Emperor Honorius sent official letters to the civitates of Britain in 410 AD, informing them that they must henceforward provide for their own defenses;<sup>5</sup> the withdrawal of the legions had already begun some years before.

The Germanic tribes of Europe had long been a threat to Britain; with the departure of the Roman military power, the invasions had little to stop them except whatever forces the local prince or chief could put into the field.<sup>6</sup> Little by little the Britons were pushed to the west. In the middle of the seventh century, the time of Cynddylan, the court of Pengwern, thought to be the site of modern-day Shrewsbury,<sup>7</sup> stood almost on the border between Saxon and Briton, and may have been one of the key fortresses in its defense.

The Celtic society left behind by the Romans was far from primitive. Each tribe or clan was headed by its prince or chief, and each was centered on a caer or fortress which was often surrounded by lesser settlements,<sup>8</sup> a pattern that emerges clearly in the course of the Cynddylan verses, where the battle apparently raged not only through the town of Trenn but through villages named Trebwill and Trodwyd as well, and where the "chapels of Bassa" are close enough to be a

<sup>5</sup>Peter Hunter Blair, Roman Britain and Early England: 55 B.C.-A.D. 871 (New York; Norton, 1963), p. 159.

<sup>6</sup>Many scholars believe that in the fifth or sixth century the Britons did indeed find a leader who was able to unite the often uncooperative clans and keep the invaders at bay; he became the figure known as King Arthur.

<sup>7</sup>According to John E. Lloyd, the name Scrobbesbyrig, which became Shrewsbury in modern English, may be an almost exact translation of the Welsh word Pengwern. (A History of Wales from the Earliest Time to the Edwardian Conquest [London: Longmans Green, 1911], p. 196. See also stanza 1nn.

<sup>8</sup>Ceri W. Lewis, "The Historical Background of Early Welsh Verse," A Guide to Welsh Literature I (Swansea; Christopher Davies, 1976), p. 12.

place of refuge. Such beginnings of urbanization were probably well established in the second and first centuries B.C. and continued to develop under the Roman occupation, bringing with them such associated concomitants as trade, a greater stratification of society, and the development of writing.<sup>9</sup> Christianity had originally been brought to Britain by Roman citizens and, in A.D. 314, three British bishops attended a council at Arles, evidence that the British church was a fairly well organized entity by that time;<sup>10</sup> in the sixth and seventh centuries it had become the one accepted religion. Beneath the Christian surface, however, lay the weight of the untracked pagan centuries. The old Druidic memories remained, subtle colorations of thought rather than thought itself. The great spring and autumn bonfires were still lit, the oak and mistletoe still carried an aura of mysterious sanctity though fewer and fewer remembered why. The king or prince (or, sometimes, the queen) was still invested with the semi-divine power of the royal priest, and still understood that his primary obligation was to lead his people into battle and perhaps to sacrifice himself for them there;<sup>11</sup> the duty and the mystique remained

<sup>9</sup>Lewis, "Historical Background," p. 13.

<sup>10</sup>By 429 A.D. it had managed to produce its first heresy, Pelagianism, which brought St. Germanus from Auxerre in order to combat it: see Ralph Merrifield, "Paganism and Christianity," Roman Britain 55 B.C.-A.D. 409. British History Illustrated: special issue, VI No.1 (April-May 1979) p. 58. Rome sent no official mission to England until that of St. Augustine of Canterbury in 597 A.D., and, according to Peter Blair in Roman Britain and Early England (pp. 222-3), this mission was aimed at the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons rather than the Britons.

<sup>11</sup>Alcock, p. 319. See also stanza 99, which seems to embody remnants of just such a belief.

even after the gods who conferred them were forgotten, even after the king, as often as not, had adopted the old Roman name of "consul"<sup>12</sup> or perhaps—as in stanzas 94 and 95—that of ynad or magistrate.

Dark-age Britain was thus a society built on contrast, perhaps even on paradox—the Roman culture set against a ruder tribal background, the small fires of learning lit against the darkness of an ancient paganism. Belief in magic and belief in science existed side by side, nor was it easy to tell them apart. A few centuries later, this culture would flower, with the rest of Europe, into the high medieval civilization, a time that would be, according to Morfydd Owen, "not purely [one] of Celtic romance and magic, of archaic legalism, heroic praise poetry and love lyrics, but a complex mixture of philosophy, religion, science [and] music."<sup>13</sup> The seeds of this culture lay, still dormant, in the dark ages.

They were already beginning to come to life in the caers of the kings. These fortresses, invariably placed on hill-tops, were far from being the mighty castles of a later day. They were comparatively rude structures made mostly of timbers, with perhaps hearths and defensive walls of the native stone. The building arts had not progressed to the point where each room could have its own fireplace, so the center of the household was inevitably the hall where all gathered around the great fire. A smaller area, perhaps with its own heat source, was provided where the women could withdraw if

<sup>12</sup>Geoffrey of Monmouth refers to Brochmael, an early king of Powys, as "consul of the city." See Six Old English Chronicles, John Giles, ed. and trans. (London: H.G. Bohn, 1848), p. 276.

<sup>13</sup>"Functional Prose," A Guide to Welsh Literature I (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1976), pp. 248-9.

they chose. Private rooms, though not unknown, would have been cold and cheerless and, in a day when privacy was neither available nor much missed, lonely.

Primitive as they may have been, even by medieval standards, the caers were also rich with luxuries and creature comforts. Warm fur coverlets, jewelery and goblets and fine weapons crafted by master metalsmiths, and, of course, colorful and intricately ornamented clothing, were among the amenities enjoyed by the Britons of Cynddylan's era. Roman influence was particularly strong in regard to clothing. The Britons readily adopted the tunic of soft cloth, the warm cloak pinned on the shoulder with a jewelled brooch, and, for warriors, the lorica or breastplate—which had become llurig in the softer Brythonic tongue—in short, the garments of a Roman general. "There is no doubt," writes Alcock, "that both Germanic and Celtic warriors aped Roman parade dress in this way."<sup>14</sup>

And there was also song, which was more important to the way of life of the Celts than ornament or armor or valued warhorse; they were evidently a people who understood and honored man's insistant need to define himself, his capacity for experiencing reality more clearly at one remove. The tool they used was poetry and nowhere, not even in ancient Greece, have poets been more significant to their culture. Perhaps the Celtic languages, with their softened consonants and open vowel sounds, were conducive to the forming of poetic patterns, or perhaps some less easily explained sensitivity to language, bred into the restless Celtic blood, gave them their love for the art of word weaving; whatever the causes, it is certain that no people have loved poetry better, practised it more diligently, nor raised it to a higher art.

<sup>14</sup>Alcock, p. 360.

There were no love lyrics—the human race had not yet become romantic about sex—but there were songs for almost every other occasion. Bards composed poems about battles and raids, and praised the valor and generosity of princes and heroes and God; they described nature and horses and feasting, arms and armor and bloody but heroic death, in loving detail. They were poets trained in a craft that had been honored long before the Romans came, in an art that may have had its origins in ancient druidic lore; when the Roman empire gave up its British frontier, they became one of the few remaining bonds of unity in a fragmenting society.

The invasions from the east and south began in earnest as the Roman military forces were progressively weakened by reassignment to other areas, and finally departed altogether. According to time-honored legend, the British King Vortigern, engaged in fighting the Picts on his northern border, invited the two barbarian brothers Hengest and Horsa to serve him as mercenaries. The brothers, having seen the good land available in the island, soon sent for their fellow tribesmen and it was not long—or so the story goes—before Vortigern and his men were fighting for survival. "Hengest and Horsa fought against King Vortigern at a place called Agælesþrep [Aylesford]," wrote the scribe of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. In his entry for the year 457, a scant two years later, he recorded: "Hengest and Æsc [his son] fought against the Britons at a place called Creeganford [Crayford] and there slew four thousand men and the British forsook Kent and fled to London in great terror."<sup>15</sup>

The events in this tale are clearly exaggerated and, in any case, the culprit was probably not Vortigern but the

<sup>15</sup>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS A, G.N. Garmonsway, trans. (London and New York: J.M. Dent and E.P. Dutton, 1953), p. 12.



Roman army itself. Malcolm Todd writes:

The time-honored Roman tradition of employing barbarians in their army meant that Franks, Alamanni, Saxons, Frisians had already seen service in Britain and numbers of them had settled there before 400 A.D. . . .Some of these may have been mercenaries settled on strategic sites as part of [those] towns' defenses. Their numbers were not large but their presence was to influence the course of later Germanic settlement.<sup>16</sup>

Whatever the original causes may have been, the invasions were historically inevitable and their progress slow but inexorable. In A.D. 491, Aelle and his son beseiged Andered-ecester [Pevensy] and in A.D. 500 Wessex fell to Cerdic. In A.D. 552, "Cynric fought against the Britons at the place called Searoburh [Old Sarum]," and in 577 "Cuthwine and Ceawlin fought against the Britons and slew three kings, Coinmail, Condidan and Farinmail at the place that is called Dyrham, and they captured the cities Gloucester, Cirencester and Bath."<sup>17</sup>

As the Britons were pushed to the west, the tides of the Germanic invasion began to slow. The Britons, relying on cavalry as the invaders did not, and having, moreover, the advantage of military tactics learned from the Romans, were able to slow, if not stop, the invasions. The kings of Powys held Pengwern until about A.D. 750, when the royal court and its retinues moved to Mathrafal; Cyngen, that sad and broken king who was the last of the old British line, died as an exile in Rome in 852.

If scholars are correct in placing the death of Cyn-dylan in 642, we may infer that the burning and destruction

<sup>16</sup>"The Ebbing Tide," Roman Britain 55 B.C.-A.D. 409. British History Illustrated, VI No. 1 (April-May 1979), p. 64.

<sup>17</sup>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS.A, pp. 2, 15-19.

of Pengwern as told in the "Deathsongs" was the result of an isolated raid rather than an invasion in force, and that the princes of Powys later rebuilt and resumed it as their capital. The situation presented in the Cynddylan poems is, in fact, very much what we should expect it to be: a state not of open and continual warfare, but rather of gradual encroachment, accompanied by raid and counter-raid, and of a border constantly in flux but moving gradually westward.

This four-hundred-year war, marked in every generation by desperate and bloody battles, had inevitable effects on the societies that supported it; among the Britons, these effects included a great growth in national and racial awareness. Rachel Bromwich writes:

It is significant that in Wales and Ireland the earliest literature reflects a genuine national and nation-wide consciousness on a cultural level, in spite of the fact that in neither country was this reflected in the political sphere; this outlook was undoubtedly facilitated by the freedom accorded to both Welsh and Irish bards to travel unimpeded over the whole area in which their language was spoken.<sup>18</sup>

Not only were the bards instrumental in the fostering of this national consciousness, but their own art was unavoidably changed by it. They still sang the great heroic praises and elegies, but they were now, often enough, dirges to heroes fallen in a war that was coming to seem both endless and hopeless. A theme new to heroic poetry—the theme of final and stark defeat—was being added to the ancient tradition. The heroes were still sung, but their victories were now achieved in a moral or spiritual place and in spite of physical defeat or death. A new depth and dimension had been added to the once-simple heroic verse of the Britons.

<sup>18</sup>Trioedd Ynys Prydein, pp. lxviii-lxix.

The popular but provincial themes were thus transmuted into what Brynley Roberts has called "the loss of Britain" theme, which he believes "first appears in Gildas' De Excidio Britanniae and shortly afterward in Nennius' Historia Britonum. . . central [also] to Geoffrey [of Monmouth's] view of history is the concept of the single kingdom."<sup>20</sup> These new themes—defeat, despair, the loss of the beloved country—were to change the direction of Welsh poetry in the dark ages and perhaps in all the times to come.

### The Bards and Their Poetry

A number of scholars have asserted, or apologized for, the fact that Celtic literature produced no great verse epic in the tradition of the Iliad or the Odyssey or even Beowulf. This assertion may be true, yet in the "loss of Britain" theme we must certainly recognize the typos of at least one of what Northrup Frye has called the great epic themes: the destruction and captivity of the city, the nostos or return home, and the building of the new city.<sup>21</sup> Nor can we doubt the skill of the Celtic bards or the power they had with their audiences. If the Welsh poets failed to achieve an epic, then we must search for reasons beyond those which seem most apparent, and, in order to do so, we must examine their way of life, their techniques, the very nature of their art, and the ways in which these were all affected by that bleak segment of history in which the British cynfeirdd—the early bards—lived and worked.

<sup>20</sup> "Historical Writing," A Guide to Welsh Literature, pp. 244-45.

<sup>21</sup> Anatomy of Criticism: four essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 319. Frye calls these the "themes of the three great epics"—the Iliad, the Odyssey and the Aeneid. While within Frye's definitions the Iliad is certainly the major example of the first theme, the historic situation in dark-age Britain added a dimension of loss not present in the more ancient poem.

According to Kenneth Jackson, Celtic literature produced no great epic because the function of the bard was to praise "the aristocratic class in general and his own patron in particular."<sup>22</sup> In this, however, the Welsh poet was no different from any other poet of his time or before it; the society of the dark ages, as of the classical period, was one of rigid stratification, a time in which the function of the "aristocratic class" was quite unlike the feeble role it plays in a more egalitarian day.

In this society success was not measured by progress up the social or financial ladder but by the performance with honor of one's allotted function within the scheme of things. Loyalty and generosity and courage were the primary virtues, and these virtues of necessity centered upon the king or prince, for, if he failed, so must the entire matrix of society.

Within this complex of interrelated functions, that of the bard or poet was of supreme importance, for it was he who sang the exploits of his prince and his prince's ancestors, and who kept the genealogies of the royal line, though Giraldus Cambriensis was doubtless romancing when he wrote:

It is worthy of remark that the Welsh bards and singers, or reciters, have the genealogies of the aforesaid princes, written in the Welsh language, in their ancient and authentic books; and also retain them in their memory from Roderic the Great to B.M.; and from thence to Sylvius, Ascanius and Aeneas, and from the latter produce the genealogical series in a lineal descent, even to Adam.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup>The Gododdin: the Oldest Scottish Poem (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969), pp. 38-39.

<sup>23</sup>The Itinerary Through Wales and Description of Wales, Richard Colt Hoare, trans. (London and New York: J.M. Dent and E.P. Dutton, 1908), pp. 157-58. Giraldus goes on to add: "But as an account of such long and remote geneologies may appear to many persons trifling or other than historical, we have purposely omitted them. . . ."

The bards were also the keepers of historical records, though such records, for the most part, took the form of poems. "Earlier scholars held our historical records, especially heroic epics such as the Iliad, for fiction," writes Nora Chadwick. It is only in our own time, she adds, that scholars have come to realize "that in these heroic poems. . . we have oral records which reflect genuine history."<sup>24</sup> In ancient days, when the Celtic kings were semi-divine figures, the bard may have been very like a priest, his duty set and circumscribed by customs older than memory, his craft regulated by ancient druidic law. Even when this lore began to be forgotten, the poet remained an important part of Celtic society, the forger of unity between the king and his people.<sup>25</sup>

In Christian times, these traditions continued, and the bard enjoyed a close, often loving, always interdependent relationship with his prince. "Thou without me," sang the bard Cynddelw to the Lord Rhys, "thou hadst no voice; I without thee, no voice have I."<sup>26</sup> The poet's awen<sup>27</sup>—his power of inspiration—was now, with the coming of Christianity, thought to be the gift of the Holy Spirit rather than the direct voice of a darker god, but it was no less potent for

<sup>24</sup>The British Heroic Age: the Welsh and the Men of the North (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), p. 72.

<sup>25</sup>Ceri W. Lewis, "The Historical Background of Early Welsh Verse," A Guide to Welsh Literature, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup>Cited by Thomas Parry in The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1962), p. xix.

<sup>27</sup>The word awen is often translated "muse," but this is exceptionally misleading as it introduces a classical concept alien to Celtic thought. The word denotes an irresistible spirit of inspiration which was thought to descend upon the singer.

that. The poet was entirely aware of his own power. "The bards of the world judge the men of valor," sang the bard Aneirin.<sup>28</sup> They were often men of valor themselves, as it was the custom for them to ride into battle with their princes. One seventeenth-century Welshman, looking back upon this old tradition, wrote: "Our Histories were not written by Schoolmasters that trafayled noe further for his knowledge that a Child's iourney from his Brekfast to his lesson. . .for noe man did treat of any battel but such was an eyewitness thereof. . . ."29

Not only was the bard expected to be an historian and a fighting man, but his training in his craft was long and severe. "We do not have as complete information about the training of the Welsh cyfarwydd," writes John J. Parry, "as we do about the Irish fili—who to secure the degree of ollam had to spend twelve years in training and know by heart three hundred and fifty stories—but it was probably very similar."<sup>30</sup> In this long and difficult apprenticeship, it may be possible to see the final remnants of druidical influence, for it was probably the priests of this ancient religion who first fostered bardic training and traditions.

Little is known about this obscure religion; its detractors point to Caesar's records of human sacrifice while its apologists speculate that, had it been allowed to flourish without interference, it might have developed

<sup>28</sup>The Gododdin, cited by Maxwell Frazer in Wales, I (London: Robert Hale, 1952), p. 146.

<sup>29</sup>Llanstephen MS 144, cited in A Book of Wales, David M. Lloyd, ed. (London: Collins, 1953), p. 107.

<sup>30</sup>John J. Parry, "The Welsh Texts of Geoffrey of Monmouth," Speculum V, No. 4 (October 1930), p. 430.

into an extremely ethical and benevolent religion. Maxwell Frazer writes:

[The British Druids] had a well-defined code enforcing the sanctity of human life, and there is little reason to believe they practiced the wholesale slaughter common to their continental counterparts. Celtic imagination had [even then] conceived the immortality of the soul. Diogenes Laertius in his Vitae summed up druidic teaching: "To worship the gods, to do nothing base, and to practice manhood."<sup>31</sup>

Druidic lore was extensive and may well have provided a science remarkable in its day.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps most important to a study of early Welsh poetry, however, was the insistence of the Druid priests that their learning was never to be written but was, according to Ceri W. Lewis, "ingeniously incorporated in poetical compositions and transmitted orally from one generation to another."<sup>33</sup> It was this insistence on an unbroken tradition that give substance to the claim that, except for the Greek and Latin classics, Welsh literature is the oldest in Europe.<sup>34</sup>

Oral tradition has, after all, always been a commonplace in early and largely unlettered societies. Ancient Sparta forbade the writing down of its laws, and Norsemen in the Isle of Man developed no written code until 1417 A.D.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup>Wales, pp. 18-19.

<sup>32</sup>It is fascinating to speculate that scraps of this mysterious learning may survive in some of the poems included in the Book of Taliesin (Canu Taliesin). Though some of the verses in this book deal with historic personages, others, such as the poem known as Cat Goddeu, are almost certainly of great antiquity.

<sup>33</sup>Ceri W. Lewis, "Historical Background," p. 17.

<sup>34</sup>Ceri W. Lewis, "Historical Background," p. 11.

<sup>35</sup>Wales, p. 19.

In following this custom, perhaps they were most wise. Books and scrolls were all, of course, hand copied and consequently expensive; it may be that the ancient sages recognized that a written law was, in effect, under the control of those wealthy enough to afford copies.

Nor is the transmission of vast literatures by word of mouth surprising. The trained memory is capable of astounding feats. Greek singers easily recited the Iliad, and Norse skalds kept in their memories enormous epic sagas. Much of the Old Testament was a part of Hebrew lore centuries before it was written down. John Parry writes:

There is no reason why a text as extensive as that of the Historia [of Geoffrey of Monmouth] could not have been transmitted orally, although at first sight the idea may seem extravagant to us. The Celtic story-tellers were trained to do exactly this sort of thing and seem to have taken pride in being able to do it.<sup>36</sup>

Some early poetry—including the Cynddylan verses—may have undergone as many as three or four hundred years of oral transmission; its vigor and clarity are not only a tribute to those generations of bards, but a demonstration of their skills.

Eventually, of course, the poems began to be written down. Perhaps, as Sir Ifor Williams suggests, an old bard might make a copy to help his failing memory, and "this again might be copied and re-copied from generation to generation."<sup>37</sup> Though some texts may have been written as early as the sixth century, extensive copying probably did not take place until at least two centuries later.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup>"The Welsh Texts of Geoffrey of Monmouth," p. 430.

<sup>37</sup>Ifor Williams, The Beginnings of Welsh Poetry (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1972), p. 151.

<sup>38</sup>Kenneth Jackson, The Gododdin: the Oldest Scottish Poem (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969), p. 60.



Even after it was written, a given text might be subject to accident. Errors by copyists—sometimes careless, often barely literate—were always possible. "And of course," writes Sir Ifor, "a living language is always changing. Old words become obsolete. . .and must be replaced if the song is to be intelligible to its hearers."<sup>39</sup> Scribes, he noted, often simply modernized the manuscripts as they went along "where they understood them or thought they did—changing the orthography, and substituting modern terms for old. Sometimes they forgot to modernize, or frankly gave it up in despair and copied what was before their eyes."<sup>40</sup> Sometimes the copying must have been almost totally mechanical, as in the case of the famous scribal error which incorporated a small and very ancient nursery rhyme into the middle of the long battle-poem The Gododdin.

Inaccurate as they often were, the scribes performed a service that was becoming more and more necessary as the society of the time became more complex. Poetry, like all the other arts and sciences of the era, was taking the first steps toward a major transition from the oral to the written forms, and was accumulating the additional subtleties and sophistications of which these forms were capable. The skills of the British bards had always been geared to the formal and the intricate and their purposes centered on other aims than the vast and sweeping epic. With the advent of a written rather than an oral art, these tendencies became even more marked.

The poetic consciousness of the time was, moreover, progressing in new directions, and was beginning to examine

<sup>39</sup>Ifor Williams, The Beginnings of Welsh Poetry, pp. 151-52.

<sup>40</sup>Williams, Beginnings, p. 152.

questions that might never have occurred to the bards of a simpler age. The pressures of invasion, warfare and defeat had turned British poetry in a more humanistic, and perhaps more profound, direction.

The Cynddylan poems are central to any consideration of this movement toward complexity, for in them we see clearly the changes British poetry was making in its progress toward an understanding of both the reaches of the human spirit and its own purposes and methods.

#### The Deathsongs for Cynddylan: a brief evaluation

In any consideration we may make of the Cynddylan poems, we must first understand that they are historical and not legendary documents. They stand too near the borderline between the heroic age and a more modern worldview to have gathered the accretions of legend. The verses purport to be the record of an historic event, but they do not pretend to be more. They contain, as do other verse cycles in the "Four Ancient Books," an epic theme—in this case, the "loss of the city" in one of its clearest forms—but they do not achieve epic scope, nor were they intended to do so. The purposes of the poet (or poets) who crafted them were more subtle.

Failure to understand the intent of these Welsh bards, and mistaken attempts to equate them and their methods with the poets of other heroic-age cultures, has led some scholars to make critical evaluations which fail to take into account the masterful skills of these poets, and which attribute to them purposes they may not have had in mind.

One of the most popular of these critical theories in recent years has come to be called the "lost-prose-saga" theory. This concept was first postulated by Sir Ifor Williams in a lecture delivered before the British Academy

in 1933.<sup>41</sup> In this lecture, Williams presented his theory that both the Llywarch Hen and Cynddylan cycles are the verse portions of long prose-and-verse sagas, the prose portions of which have been lost. Williams writes:

In the early stages of the tradition the minstrel knew the story by heart, at any rate the main lines of it. There was no necessity for him to be able to repeat it word for word, provided that he followed the original faithfully enough to bring in the englynion [verses] at the right moment. These, however, had to be committed carefully to memory. . . . If he distrusted his memory he could write them on vellum and by so doing would make it still more certain that these verse elements of the story would be preserved intact for centuries, practically in their earliest, and most primitive form. The prose, on the other hand, remained fluid: it could be modernized freely from generation to generation, in construction, in vocabulary, even in substance. At last the oral tradition comes to an end, the story is forgotten. The vellum remains. . . .<sup>42</sup>

Unfortunately, we have little knowledge of the exact forms used by the bards of the seventh century, and there is little reason to suppose that they used more than the briefest of prose interpolations. The extant manuscripts of such prose-and-verse tales—and there are relatively few in Welsh literature—are all of a considerably later date; some exist only in manuscripts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While the early bards may well have added prose explanations, these may have been quite casual. Today, of course, we have no way of determining

<sup>41</sup>Bromwich, Introduction to The Beginnings of Welsh Poetry, P. xiv.

<sup>42</sup>Williams, Beginnings of Welsh Poetry, p. 131.

the extent of these prose interpolations, and the assumption that they were in any way essential to the unity of the original must be considered very tenuous indeed.

Therefore, while it is evident that portions of the Cynddylan cycle are missing, we have no reason to suppose that these missing parts were prose rather than verse. The fact that the final sections of the poem are more corrupt than the earlier parts must militate against the theory.

As anyone who has committed a long work to memory is aware, the final part is the last learned and the soonest forgotten. The losses in the Cynddylan cycle fall exactly where they might be expected to fall; the lyric segments, depending heavily on incremental repetition and recurring ideas and images, are largely intact, while the transitional passages and those nearest the end have suffered the greatest losses. If the prose passages had had an important function, therefore, it would seem that their loss should be felt equally throughout the poem, whereas the first sixty verses, though lacking in transitions, display no lack of unity or even of too-abrupt mood shifts.

The attempt to discover a "Celtic saga" must therefore fail, at least insofar as the Cynddylan cycle is concerned; perhaps it must fail in all cases, as the techniques of the Welsh bards were evidently at odds with the long epic form. Their purposes were, rather, praise or eulogy, and to these ends the British poets brought their finest techniques and their most skilled craftsmanship, a craftsmanship we may be in danger of missing if we attempt to force these poems into a form never intended by their creators.

The Cynddylan poems, upon close examination, may be seen as a major example of this delicately balanced and intricate craftsmanship. In these verses we see clearly a poet who is concerned not only with detail but with the finest points of understanding. Over and over again, the poet establishes his situation and then examines it in

detail which, though it may at first seem random, proves upon examination to display a subtle progression of thought and feeling.

For examples of these subtleties, we need look no further than the opening stanzas describing the battle, where the action progresses from the time when Cynddylan "thrust across the Twrch at its mouth" (st. 3), attacked downward from the heights (st. 6), and finally met his death in Trebwill (st. 14). The action is vivid and accurately presented by a narrator<sup>43</sup> who at the same time records his own emotions, from the open admiration of "Cynddylan, bright pride of the border" (st. 5) to the numb grief of

Cynddylan, then toward thee  
Went out the heart from me, so weeping,  
As [if I were] a virgin to warfare.  
(st. 11)

When we turn to the "Hall of Cynddylan" stanzas that follow, we find an even more intricate weaving of images. In these stanzas the poet examines fire in all its symbolic and evokative meanings, linking it with family, light, companionship, song, and, finally, wisdom. The controlling image in this sequence, of course, is that of the burned and broken hall; fire has destroyed fire and left only darkness.

And so, throughout the poem—or at least in those parts that are complete—we find, over and over, an image first evoked and then examined in all its ramifications. The eagles, gathering from their fishing at the rivermouth, join in a bloody orgy and become, in an apotheosis of bitter

<sup>43</sup>However many bards and scribes may have added to the cycle over the centuries, it is difficult not to believe that these early stanzas must represent at least the remnants of an original, eyewitness tradition, probably having its origin with a bard attached to Cynddylan's retinue.

irony, "keeper[s] of honor" (st. 37), bestowing the "kiss" beneath which "all pride decays" (st. 39). The chapels of Bassa become successively the narrator's riches, his<sup>44</sup> anguish, his country, and, at the last, his fortress or city (sts. 46-50), but for the "warriors who did not endure" they are only an ironic and useless sky (st.50).

Over and above this accuracy of feeling and image, however, loom larger patterns; the entire poem is a complex of interrelated imagery. The most important of these patterns is the interplay of light and darkness; "light" and "fire" are set against what is probably the most often repeated word in the poem: heno—"tonight." The movement of the poem is thus from darkness to light and back again, from Cynddylan's attack "where light was brightest" (st. 10) to the gathering dusk and the quenched fires of the "Hall of Cynddylan" stanzas and the darkness that surrounds the shrieking eagles and the weeping mourners in the chapels of Bassa. These images are followed by the stanzas to the "white town" where, by implication, sunlight has come again to show the blood upon the grass (sts. 52-53).

These sequences are again followed by night, but this time by a night shot through with light. Ffreuer has died and the poet evokes the holiness of her state: "blessed is she" (sts. 57-58); the word for "holy" or "blessed" is gwyn, which may also mean "white;" the juxtaposition of this word with heno creates an unforgettable image: a night burning with the white and holy fire of a dead girl's purity.

After the sequence of stanzas devoted to Ffreuer, we return to daylight. The "sun is on the land" (st. 68). At this point in the poem, the image of recurring day and night begins to gradually give way to that of the changing

<sup>44</sup>or "her"; the speaker at this point cannot be identified with any certainty.

seasons. The flickering fire of the early stanzas becomes first the steady light of the Ffreuer sequence and, at last, the shining of the sun. The contrast is now not between light and darkness but between heat and cold, and the cold is that of death and loss: "Grief lies upon my lord as deep as snow" (st. 101). The narrator has become resigned; death and loss are accepted and transformed:

Until from death and suffering  
And raw pain I shall be cold,  
I too shall make no sound.  
(st. 100)

While an exhaustive study of the imagery of the "Death-songs" is outside the scope of this project, the above examples should demonstrate amply that these verses are no mere elegy turned out on set, traditional lines, but rather the high art of an acute poetic intelligence. The old formulations still form the solid bases of the poem, but they are now the bearers of new insights.

The Cynddylan verses may thus be seen as occupying a point of transition in literature. They are based firmly upon the ancient tradition of praise for the dead prince who, had he lived, would have protected his people and held together the very fabric of society. The tale presented here is, indeed, the old epic theme of the lost city with all its overtones of a shattered people, a broken way of life and a loss, ultimate and irrevocable, of all that has been held dear. The loss of this city, however, is only a part of a larger loss which, in its turn, has tempered poetry from a master craft into an art worthy to stand with the best of world literature.

In these verses, we may see a new concept beginning to shape itself: the half-understood and perhaps yet unformed recognition that there is a place beyond loss and a redemption that is not found in spite of defeat but within it. In his minute and careful examination of a grief instructed,

fueled and set burning by an alert and relentless mind, a rage purged and made translucent by acceptance, the Cyn-dylan poet has achieved a work which is neither ancient nor modern but timeless. He has touched that final reality wherein man is seen as the guardian of the pain of the universe, and poetry as the thing he forges from it.



### III. A Note on Translations

The noted philologist J.R.R. Tolkien once said of Welsh, "It is the native language to which in unexplored desire we would still go home."<sup>1</sup> We have not, however, yet done so. The great riches of Celtic literature are still, for the most part, unexplored. When she published her anthology Lyra Celtica in 1896, Elizabeth Sharp claimed that if all the unedited manuscripts in the National Libraries of Great Britain were to be printed, "they would fill at least twelve hundred or fourteen hundred octavo volumes."<sup>2</sup> Eighty years have passed and the study of Welsh and Irish literature has made enormous progress, and still the treasurehouse is largely untouched.

A number of books have been published, many of them excellent attempts to reproduce the orthography of the original manuscripts, yet we may fairly say that Celtic literature is still in its infancy and that, with a few notable exceptions, it has centered almost entirely on linguistic problems. Critical evaluation of the literature as a whole has scarcely begun.

<sup>1</sup>J.R.R. Tolkien, "English and Welsh," Angles and Britons 2 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1963), p. 41.

<sup>2</sup>Elizabeth A. Sharp, Lyra Celtica (Edinburgh: P. Geddes and Colleagues, 1896), pp. xxii-xxiii.

Interest in these manuscripts, after all, began only in the middle of the eighteenth century. Before that time only a few Welsh antiquarians had attempted, with greater or less success and often with small idea of the methods of scholarship, to preserve these historic documents. Latin was considered to be the language of scholarship, and classical literature was the major influence upon both poets and scholars. The so-called "Celtic Revival" of the eighteenth century was notable mostly for the "Ossianic Controversy" with its notorious forgeries.

The poet-historian Thomas Gray, better known for his "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," tried his hand at a few translations from the Welsh. These translations, probably as accurate as they could be in their time, are today chiefly noteworthy for their energy and vigor. Celtic studies were still vague; it was not uncommon for scholars to confuse Norse and Celtic myths.

The next upsurge in Celtic studies came approximately one hundred years later. Such poets as Tennyson may well have been influenced by this renewed interest and, at the turn of the century, the poet-critic Matthew Arnold published four lectures on the subject, first delivered at Oxford University.<sup>3</sup> In 1868 William Skene had published his two volumes entitled The Four Ancient Books of Wales, containing the Cymric Poems attributed to the Bards of the Sixth Century.<sup>4</sup> One of these "Four Ancient Books" is the Red Book of Hergest (Jesus College [Oxford] MS cxi), a fourteenth-century manuscript which contains the verses known as the Cynddylan (or Heledd) cycle. Though the notes and translations of the Skene edition are today considered obsolete, the transcriptions, which attempt to retain the

<sup>3</sup>The Study of Celtic Literature, publ. 1905 (rpt Port Washington and London: Kennikat, 1970).

<sup>4</sup>Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1868.

original orthography, are still a valuable tool for the scholar.

Modern translations of the "Deathsongs" have suffered from the ease with which the poem can be broken into relatively self-contained sections for inclusion in anthologies. Few modern volumes of Welsh poetry appear without "The Eagle of Pengwern" or "The Hall of Cynddylan," neatly titled and set apart with perhaps a brief note to inform the reader that they are only a part of a larger whole. "The Chapels of Bassa," with their twisting idioms, are commonly omitted, as are the stanzas on Freuer's death and the obscure final stanzas. The most extensive modern translation is probably that of Joseph Clancy in Earliest Welsh Poetry.<sup>5</sup> Clancy translates 68 of the 107 stanzas, breaking them into sections under such titles as "Heledd Remembers," "Cynddylan," "The White Town" and other groupings; he does not retain the sequence found in the Red Book of Hergest.

Undoubtedly these anthologies serve their intended purpose of providing an overview of the literature, but as far as the Cynddylan verses are concerned, it is impossible not to feel that something vital is being lost. The present project was begun with the object of examining this premise, and it has held true. Seen as a whole, the "Deathsongs for Cynddylan" reveals a closeknit psychological progression, a storyline that—at least until the difficult and probably corrupt final portions—is clear and straightforward, and a delicate system of internal contrasts and balances that shows it to be the work of a master craftsman.

In attempting this translation, I have preferred to work with the Skene edition because, despite its age, it attempts to reproduce the original orthography, and I have thought it best to get as close to this original as possible, thus avoiding preconceived ideas.

<sup>5</sup>New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970.

My approach has been to treat the poem as I would treat any other literary work. I have expected its imagery to be reasonable and its language to make sense, and I have refused to make excuses on the grounds that we do not entirely understand its conventions, that the text is corrupt, or that bardic poetry was often obscure even to its original hearers.<sup>6</sup> I have preferred, in other words, the explanation that where I have failed to understand, the failure is my own and not that of the poet. I have attempted to provide a reasonable reading of the poem; this is all that I, or any other honest translator, can claim. I know my errors must be many; some are due to sheer ignorance and some to experimentation with possible alternate meanings. For this reason, I have tried to give alternate readings, especially where the meaning is obscure or where I have departed from a commonly accepted interpretation.

The poem has amply repaid such treatment. Like all fine poetry, it has a toughness and a resilience, even a resistance, to heavy-handedness. It is always relentlessly itself; even in those portions where it is broken and incomplete, it still sings with its own voice. X

<sup>6</sup>An explanation too often heard among Celtic scholars is that the poems were meant to be obscure and that few persons understood them even at the time of their original composition. Granting that there must have been those (even as today) to whom poetry was a closed book, it seems unlikely that bard after bard composed and publicly performed lengthy works that only a few could understand.

#### IV. Deathsongs for Cynddylan: an annotated translation

1. Sefuch allann vorynnyon a syllúch werydre  
Gyndylan llys benn gúern neut tande  
Gúae ieueinc a eidun brotre

Stand in the open, maidens, see the land  
Of Cynddylan, the court of Pengwern all  
afire,  
The grieving of the young who mourn their  
home.

- 1b. benn gúern (Pengwern): the name means "the head (or upper part) of the swamp," though Graham Webster in The Cornovii (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1975, p. 123) notes Giraldus Cambrensis' definition of it as "head of the alder grove" or "alder hill," and points out that the alder is a tree usually found growing in marshy conditions or in swamps. Since the Britons of this period commonly built their fortresses on high ground, the name probably implies "above the swamp." Ifor Williams in his Canu Llywarch Hen (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1960, p. 192) cites the ancient traditions that Pengwern, once the court of the famed king Brochfael, was situated in what is today Shrewsbury, and quotes an early manuscript which places the fortress on the site occupied in historical times by the college of St. Chad (...ibi steterat ubi collegium divi Ceddae episcopi nunc situm est). In later times the seat of the princes of Powys was at Mathrafal where, as the bard Cynddelw sang, "In Mathrafal field sods are broken/By the feet

- 1b. of magnificent horses. . ." (trans. D.M. Lloyd in A Book of Wales, London: Collins, 1953, p. 119). Today this settlement, as Rees notes, has also disappeared (Life in a Welsh Countryside, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1971, p. 108).

neut: often used as an intensive particle, hence Ifor Williams' translation of neut tande: "it is a flaming fire."

- 1c. eidun: the third person singular form of the modern Welsh eidduno (to long for, wish, or pray). "Mourn" seems indicated by the context.

brotre: the closest approximation in modern Welsh is brodre, a "robe" or "cloak." It is possible, however, to read either brodir (country, homeland) or broder (brothers). In Earliest Welsh Poetry (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970, p. 79) Joseph Clancy translates line C: "Ah the young yearn for a mantle," while Kenneth Jackson (A Celtic Miscellany, Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1951, p. 251) gives "Alas for the young who long for their brothers." The poet may have intended to evoke all three meanings; such wordplay is common in early Welsh poetry.

2. Vn prenn a gouit  
 Arnaú arno odienc ys odit  
 Ac auynno duú derffit

A blight will come upon a single tree;  
 It is the chance of fate  
 And only God can end the pain.

- 2a. Ifor Williams (CLLH, p.33) cites a later source which gives the first line as Vn prenn ygwydvit a gouit, thus identifying the "single tree" as a honeysuckle (MW: gwyddfid) but the Red Book of Hergest omits this word. The stanza is sometimes cited as an example of Welsh "gnomic" poetry, in which an observation—usually a truism—about nature or humanity is used with little purpose other than to complete the meter or rhyme scheme. In the case of the Cynddylan verses the gnomic classification does not seem valid; the poem as a whole is remarkably terse and its imagery, while complex, is never purposeless. Cf. stanza 16.
- 2b. The text in this line may be corrupt. If odienc may be read as o dien then the poet is making a pun, as dien may mean either "fate" or "sprouts."





4. Kynndylan callon godeith  
Wannwyn o gyflwyn amgyuyeith  
Yn amwyn tren tref diffeith

Cynddylan with heart like the fires .  
Of spring, gave himself for his fighting  
men  
While holding Trenn, that wasted town.

- 4a. godeith: this word implies an outdoor fire such as the enormous bonfires that marked the great Celtic pagan festivals. The lighting of these fires continues as an annual custom in some places even today, long after their original purpose has been forgotten. The most important of these festivals was that called Beltane in Ireland and Galen-mai (the Calends of May) in Wales; at this festival fires were lit and rituals performed to insure the fruitfulness of the earth as the sun entered the sign of Cwy, the Speckled Ox, in the Celtic zodiac (Elizabeth Bolton, "The Prisoner Gwair," Anglo-Welsh Review XV.36, p. 13). A lesser festival was that called Imbolg or Imbolc, approximately February 1, at which the sacred flame was kindled to celebrate the return of the sun. Lughnasadh (Lammas), falling on August 1, was the major summer festival, and there was, of course, Samhain, the Celtic New Year, on November 1. All of these festivals were marked by the lighting of fires and by appropriate rites. In Celtic Mysteries (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975, p. 18) Sharkey records that in some places it was the custom for young men to mark their names on white stones and put them in the Imbolg fire; when the fire died, each searched for his stone and ran away when he found it; in pagan times not to find one's stone would have been a sign that the gods had chosen one as a sacrifice. In his Celtic Myth and Legend (Hollywood: Newcastle, 1975, p. 410) Charles Squire notes a Scottish custom in which a cake was divided and he who got the "burnt piece" was required to leap through the flames of the Beltane fire. In some places in Wales the entire village jumped through the flames, men first, women and children when the fire was lower; last of all the livestock were driven through the ashes. Even though seventh-century Wales was a Christian country, these annual celebrations undoubtedly played an enormous part in the lives and thought of the people.

- 4b. gyflwyn (MW: cyflwyn): "gift, consecration, dedication." The concept of self-sacrifice is heightened by the use of o (from, out of). The connection of this idea to the image of the spring fires would have been immediately apparent to seventh-century listeners. According to Leslie Alcock (Arthur's Britain, p. 319), "Classical writers. . . make it clear that one function of British kings and queens was to lead their people on the battlefield." There is evidence that a sacrificial kingship was practiced in Britain, its memory remaining—like that of the great spring bonfires—well into the Christian era.
- 4c. tref: here translated "town," the word, in fact, denotes a township, i.e., both the settlement and its surrounding environs.

5. Kyndylan befyr bost kwylat  
 Kadúynaúc kildynnaúc cat  
 Amuscei tren tref y dat

Cynddylan, bright pride of the border,  
 Chainwearing, stubborn support in war,  
 Fought for Trenn, his father's town.

- 5a. befyr (MW pefr): "bright, radiant, beautiful."
- 5b. kadúynaúc: "chain," plus the -aúc (MW -og) ending denoting a carrier or wearer. This may refer to the chainmail of the period or to some ornamental chain or torque. Even before the time of the Roman occupation, Celtic craftsmanship had attained to beautifully wrought gold and bronze ornaments; the torque, or collar, worn to designate rank was often especially striking. In his Itinerary Through Wales (translated by R.C. Hoare, New York: Dutton, 1908, p. 24) Giraldus Cambriensis describes one such torque: "it is in four pieces wrought round, joined together artificially and clefted as it were in the middle with a dog's head, the teeth standing outward. . . ." See also stanza 15 and note.
- kildynnaúc cat: again the poet uses the -aúc ending denoting a carrier or agent of the action: Cynddylan's stubborn courage carried, or was the mainstay, of the battle.

6. Kyndylan beuyr búyll o vri  
 Kadúynaúc kynndynnaúc llu  
 A muscei tren hyt tra vu.

Cynddylan, bright steadiness on the heights,  
 Chainwearing, stubborn support of hosts,  
 Fought for Trenn while he had life.

- 6a. beuyr: another form of pefr; see stanza 5n.

búyll o vri: the difficulty in this line is o vri, for which Ifor Williams (Canu Llywarch Hen, pp. 33, 195) suggests gofri (wise, noble, excellent). Other possible readings might be gofron (slope), o fry (from above) or o ffry (by the stream); it is notable how many of these readings indicate a place or direction. I have used o fry and have translated it as specifically as possible as "from the heights," i.e., Cynddylan attacked the enemy from the high ground. In A Celtic Miscellany (p. 251), Jackson uses a quite different interpretation and translates: "Cynddylan of the bright heart, the stately."

If scholars are correct in identifying modern Shrewsbury with Cynddylan's fortress of Pengwern, then the heights are easily identified. Shrewsbury lies on the northern side of the Severn, which surrounds it on the west, south and east. According to William Page (The Victoria History of Shropshire, London: Archibald Constable, 1908, pp. 398-99), the area "occupies a peninsula of rising ground surrounded by the river Severn except on the north, where the windings of the river so nearly approach each other that the isthmus is only 900 ft. in width. Upon this isthmus the ground rises precipitously above the eastern bend of the river to a height of 67 ft."

7. Kyndylan callon milgi  
Pan disgynnei yg kymelri  
Cat calaned a ladei

Cynddylan with heart of a greyhound,  
When he came down upon the rivermouth,  
Battle-slaughter he kindled.

- 7b. kymelri: cymell in modern Welsh means "to induce" or "to compel." Ifor Williams (Canu Llywarch Hen, p. 196) gives an alternate reading of kymerli (MW cymer: confluence or rivermouth) which seems more reasonable.

According to Alcock (Arthur's Britain, pp. 344-45), seventh-century military tactics were fairly simple and were based almost totally on two concepts—the dawn attack and the defense of river lines, "with the consequence that battles frequently take place at fords. It has been claimed that at fords even a small force of British horsemen would enjoy a great advantage over Anglo-Saxon infantry. This is to ignore the fact that many of the earliest English [Saxon] victories. . .were also won at river crossings."

- 7c. ladei: either the modern Welsh lladd (to strike or to kindle) or lledu (to spread).

8. Kymndylan callon hebaúc  
 Buteir ennwir gynndeiraúc  
 Keneu kyndrúyn kynndynnaúc.

Cynddylan with heart of a peregrine,  
 Who was once the fierce and furious  
 Cub of the stubborn Cyndrwyn.

- 8a. hebaúc (MW hebog): the peregrine falcon. The comparison of a hero to a hawk or eagle was common in early Welsh poetry. Cf. stanza 58n.
- 8b. buteir: probably byddai'r: "used to be, would be." Some translators opt for buddair: "bittern," giving a reading of "A bittern fierce and furious" in line B.
- 8c. keneu (cub) was often used as a synonym for mab (son) in the poetry of this period, probably because the rigid alliterative patterns required such substitutions.

kyndrúyn (Cyndrwyn): In the old Welsh tale "Culhwch and Olwen," there occurs a long catalog which purports to be a listing of Arthur's warriors. Included in this list is Cyndrwyn son of Ermid son of Erbin. This genealogy would make Cyndrwyn the nephew of the Gereint of Arthurian legend and of the poem "Gereint ab Erbin." Since the list seems to include nearly every possible legendary figure that could be gotten into it, obviously little or no weight can be given to it as history. On the other hand, the genealogies of princes are thought by many scholars to have been a part of traditional bardic lore; though Cyndrwyn the father of Cynddylan can scarcely have been among Arthur's warriors, the "Culhwch and Olwen" passage may well embody a real, though misplaced, scrap of historical information.

9. Kyndylan callon gúythhuch  
Pan disgynnei ympriffúch  
Cat kalaned yn deudrúch

Cynddylan with heart of a mad boar,  
When he came down in main attack,  
Battle slaughter broke the silence.

- 9a. The comparison of a hero to a bird or beast was quite common in early Welsh poetry; cf. The Gododdin: "Bleiddig son of Eli was a wild boar for fierceness. . . . (The Gododdin, Kenneth Jackson, trans. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1969, p. 102).
- 9b. ym priffúch: Ifor Williams (Canu Llywarch Hen, p.197) suggests that this phrase may mean "first attack" rather than "main attack."
- 9c. deudrúch: probably daw (silence) and trwch (broken);  
kalaned (MW celanedd): "slaughter."

Battles in ancient times were noisy affairs, not only because of the battering of weapons upon armor and shields, but also because it was universally believed that the screaming and shouting of warriors struck fear into the hearts of the enemy. Aneirin describes one hero as "in the front rank, armed in the battle-shout. . . ." (The Gododdin, p. 117).

10. Kyndylan gulhúch gymnifiat  
Lleú blei dilin disgynnyat  
Nyt atuer túrch tref y dat

Cynddylan, Culhwch of warriors,  
Where the light was bright he attacked,  
But returns not from Twrch to his father's  
town.

- 10a. gulhúch (Culhwch): a famous warrior of King Arthur's table, hero of "Culhwch and Olwen" in the tales known as the Mabinogi. Glyn Jones, in his "Early Prose: the Mabinogi" (A Guide to Welsh Literature, Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1976, p. 191), notes that recent scholarship has placed the composition of the Mabinogi in the late eleventh century, considerably earlier than was once thought. This dating, however, would refer to the written texts; the traditional material embodied in the tales is, of course, much older.
- 10b. Lleu blei dilin: literally, "light where bright." Blei is probably ble (where) rather than blei (wolf), although it is possible that the animal image is the one intended. The line is quite ambiguous as to place or direction, but probably means that Cynddylan's warriors galloped either toward the sun or out of it: see note 7b. The dawn attack was an established part of seventh-century military tactics; even some centuries later, Giraldus Cambriensis could write: "neither deterred by cold or hunger, they [the Welsh] employ the dark and stormy nights in watching the hostile motions of their enemies" (Itinerary through Wales and Description of Wales, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1908, p. 168). This would seem to imply that scouting parties were a regular adjunct of British warfare, the battle itself taking place as soon as there was sufficient light.
- 10c. Túrch: if the Twrch is not a river (see stanza 3 and note), then this merely means "boar." Joseph Clancy (Earliest Welsh Poetry, p. 80) translates: "The town's boar shall not return."



11. Kyndylan hyt tra attat  
 Yd adei y gallon mor wylat  
 Gantaú mal y gúrúf y gat

Cynddylan, then toward thee  
 Went out the heart from me, so weeping  
 As [if I were] a virgin to warfare.

- 11b. Yd adei: "it had gone [out]." The yd may indicate a construction in which the subject follows the verb, thus making y gallon (the heart) the subject rather than Cynddylan. The above rendering is very free; a literal translation of the entire stanza would be:  
 Cynddylan when toward thee  
 It had gone the heart so to weep  
 From me as the virgin to the battle.
- 11c. guruf y gat: guruf is probably gwryyf, which may mean "pure" or "virgin," and which also carries the connotation of "fresh" or "unfledged." The y may here be a relative particle meaning "to" or "in that."

The passage would seem to indicate what has, in truth, been evident all along: the speaker or narrator in this portion of the poem is not Heledd the sister of Cynddylan, but rather a fighting man, presumably a bard of Cynddylan's household. The precision of the battle descriptions, as well as the numb grief of the emotionally charged stanzas (11-14) that follow, argue strongly for the view that the original source of the Cynddylan material was an eyewitness and a participant.



13. Kyndylan wynn uab kyndrŷyn  
 Ny mat wisc baraf am y drŷyn  
 Gur ny bo guell no morwyn

Cynddylan, fair son of Cyndrwyn,  
 It was not lucky to go round the cape,  
 Though no man better were than our white  
 lord.

- 13b. baraf (para): "to go on, to continue;" drŷyn (trwyn): "cape" or "point." Trwyn may also mean "nose," and it is actually possible to read this line: "It was not seemly to dress the beard (barf) around the nose," and then to read line C: "Such a man were no better than a maiden." Clancy translates: "Unfit for a beard the man/No better than a maiden," (Earliest Welsh Poetry, p. 80).
- 13c. morwyn: "girl, maiden." It seems more reasonable—as it is Cynddylan who is being described—to read por (lord) and wyn (white).

There may have been many reasons why it was unlucky to go around the cape; perhaps the enemy had set up an ambush there, or perhaps the stony ground found near rivers hampered the horses. According to Lloyd Laing (The Archaeology of Late Celtic Britain and Ireland, London: Methuen, 1975, pp 291-92), horseshoes were introduced into Britain by the Romans but were not widely used. Dark age cavalry tactics were far from disciplined; according to Alcock (Arthur's Britain, p. 334), "It has even been doubted whether a horseman of the time, lacking stirrups, could withstand the shock of riding down a footsoldier with a lance." The early Britons may have followed the Greek practice of throwing a short spear or javelin from horseback rather than charging with a fixed lance, though The Gododdin seems to imply that both methods were used. It has been suggested that Greek funerary monuments show riders with couched lances, but since they also sometimes show warriors entering battle unclad except for helmets, allowance must be made for what were probably common artistic conventions. The date at which stirrups began to be commonly used may be inferred from the Bayeaux tapestry, which shows about half of the horsemen using stirrups; those who do not are invariably shown carrying their lances in the overhand, throwing position.

14. Kyndylan kymúyat úyt  
 Ar meithyd nabydy lúyt  
 Am drebúll túll dy ysgúyt

Cynddylan, tormentor of your land,  
 Success now thou shalt never have;  
 In Trebwill broken was thy shield.

- 14a. kymúyat (MW:cymwyad): "tormentor." Since the purpose of the poem is to praise Cynddylan, this must be interpreted to mean that the prince caused the torment by his death.
- 14b. Literally, "possessor thou shalt not be of success [llwydd]." Another reading might be llwyd: "grey," or, by extrapolation, "grey hairs," i.e., "thou shalt not grow old." In stanza 32 the poet mentions Gwiawn, the brother of Cynddylan, who, according to Troiedd Ynys Prydein (see 32n), took part in the Battle of Bangor Orchard (the Battle of Chester) in 616 AD. If Gwiawn was old enough to bear arms—at least sixteen or seventeen—and if Cynddylan was in fact his elder, then Cynddylan could have been no younger than 42 or 43 in 642 AD, the date postulated by most scholars for the destruction of Pengwern. The inference, based on a line in the "Lament for Cynddylan," that the prince was unmarried and therefore very young, may possibly result from a misreading of Welsh idiom. See Appendix C.

15. Kyndylan kae di y riú  
 Yn y daú lleogyrwys hediw  
 Amgeled am vu nydiú

Cynddylan, thy field has no lord  
 And the English come today;  
 Fear is around it in this time.

- 15a. kae (cae): "field," an image for the realm or kingdom. Cae may also mean a "crown" or "chaplet," and if this is the accepted interpretation the translation would be: "Thy crown has no lord (to wear it)." According to Rachel Bromwich (Trioedd Ynys Prydein, p. 38), cae may also mean a torque or other neckpiece. Cf. stanza 28.
- 15c. Amgeled means, generally, "care" or "anxiety," but in the present context "fear" seems a more accurate rendering. In Canu Llywarch Hen (p. 201), Ifor Williams suggests a reading of nid gwiw rather than nidiu, in which case the translation would be: "Fear around it was not fitting."

16. Cynddylan kae di y nenn  
 Yn y daú lloegyrwys drúy dren  
 Ny elwir coet o vu prenn

Cynddylan, thy field has no chief  
 And the English come through Trenn;  
 A forest is not made of one tree.

- 16c. elwir (gelwir): "is called." The literal meaning, therefore, would be "not is called a forest it was a tree." Presumably the reference is to Cynddylan and constitutes the first of several statements which hint, rather obliquely, that the prince's warriors did not support him well, perhaps even weakened and fled. Cf. stanza 2.

17. Gan vygallon i mor dru  
 Kyssylltu ystyllot du  
 Guynngnaút kyndylan kyngran canllu

With my heart how I would long  
 To mend the broken side, the fair flesh  
 Of Cynddylan, prince of the white host.

- 17b. kyssylltu: literally, the poet longs to "join together" (cysylltu) the flesh of Cynddylan which apparently has been pierced with many weapons, as "it is" (ys) "full of holes" (tyllu). Du means "black" or "gloomy," and tu (side) seems more reasonable in this context. Clancy (p. 81) apparently equates ystyllot with astyll (board) and translates: "coupled with boards of black. . ." i.e., placed in a coffin.
- 17c. canllu: this word might be amended to canllaw (protector) or it may be read, as above, as can plus llu—"white host." Jackson (A Celtic Miscellany, p. 251) opts for cant (hundred) and translates: "Cynddylan, the leader of a hundred hosts." Clancy (p. 81) omits the word altogether and reads merely "Cynddylan the commander."

18. Stauell gyndylan ystywyll  
 Heno heb dan heb wely  
 Wylaf wers tawaf wedy

The hall of Cynddylan is dark;  
 Tonight, without fire, without family,  
 I shall weep awhile and then be still.

- 18b. wely (gwely) is often translated "bed," i.e., "without fire, without bed." Gwely, however, may also mean "family." In dark-age Britain a great many of a chief's people would have been related to him in one way or another, and the concept of family would have been much broader than it is today.
- 18c. This has been called one of the most beautiful lines in Welsh poetry, not only for its music but for its restraint. The ritual wailing of friends and relatives over the dead is usual in almost all early societies and has almost nothing in common with the restrained and continuing grief shown here. Even so, when the Welsh laws came to be codified—and codified, as one might expect, in the traditional triadic form—the lawgivers recognized that the "three things that arouse revenge are the wailing of relatives, the sight of the kinsman's bier and the sight of his grave unavenged." See Morfydd Owen, "Functional Prose," A Guide to Welsh Literature I (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1976), p. 272.



19. Stauell gyndylan ystywyll  
 Heno heb dan heb gannwyll  
 Namyn duu púy am dyry púyll

The hall of Cynddylan is dark;  
 Tonight, without fire, without candle,  
 Who but God will give me strength?

- 19c. púyll (MW pyyll) means "strength, discretion" or "steadiness;" the narrator of the poem prays not only for strength but, by implication, for the discretion, perhaps even the cunning, which will permit survival in a land filled with enemies. The word is sometimes also taken to mean "sanity," as in Kenneth Jackson's translation (A Celtic Miscellany, p. 251): "but for God, who will give me sanity." Cf. búyll in stanza 6.

20. Stauell gyndylan ystywyll  
 Heno heb dan heb oleuat  
 Elit amdaú am danat

The hall of Cynddylan is dark;  
 Tonight, without fire, without light,  
 Its feast is turned to nettles.

- 20b. The emphasis on fire in these stanzas is understandable; the great fire in the hall of a prince or chief was the center of life in his fortress, the place where plans were laid, guests greeted, and fellowship enjoyed. Aneirin writes of one hero: "He was not weak of counsel, or base, before the well-fed fire, the pine logs blazing up from dusk to dusk, the lit-up doorway [open] for the purple-clad traveller" (Jackson, The Gododdin, p. 138). It is also likely, according to T.M. Charles-Edwards ("The Heir-Apparent in Irish and Welsh Law," Celtica IX [1971] p. 187), that the Celts followed the Roman custom wherein the fire burning on the hearth was seen not only as the center of life but as a symbol of family continuity. "It is not difficult," he notes, citing the ancient Welsh laws, "to see what was meant by the rule that the heir apparent sat on the other side of the fire to the king. The fire symbolized the kingship."
- 20c. I suggest that elit is e- (a prefix meaning "without" or "before") and llid (feast) rather than the second person singular imperfect of "to go," as elit amdaw—"thou wouldst go it will come"—is unlikely. In this context danat is probably danad (nettles). A literal reading would thus be: "A feast before, it will come about nettles."

21. Stauell gyndylan ystywyll  
 Y nenn guedy guen gyweithyd  
 Gúae ny wna da ae dyuyd

The hall of Cynddylan is dark,  
 The rooftree gone and the fair company;  
 Bitter the good that shall not be.

- 21c. Conran translates line C: "Woe who neglects the good that offers" (Penguin Book of Welsh Verse, p. 90) and Clancy gives "One should do good when able" (Earliest Welsh Poetry, p. 83). Jackson translates: "Alas for him who does not do the good that falls to him." (A Celtic Miscellany, p. 252). It seems to me, however, that there is a possibility of another interpretation, in which Guae (woe, sorrow), ny (not), wna (the third person singular of gwn: it makes), da (good), ae (which) dyuod ([it] comes) might be read literally as "Sorrow it unmakes the good which comes."

22. Stauell gyndylan neut athwyt  
 Heb wed mae yn bed dy yscúyt  
 Hyt tra un ny bu doll glúyt

Hall of Cynddylan, disfigured  
 Thou art, thy shield is in the grave;  
 While he lived thy gate stood unbroken.

- 22a. athwyt: a form of "to go." Heb wed in line B means "without appearance" or "without form," so the literal meaning is "thou hast gone without form." Conran translates "...you've gone uncomely" (Penguin Book of Welsh Verse, p.90).
- 22c. ny bu doll glúyt: literally, "not it was not having holes [the] gate;" the double negative sometimes appears in Welsh literature as an intensifier and this is apparently its function here. In A Celtic Miscellany, Jackson translates line C: "while he lived you were not mended with hurdles" (p.252). In his article "Incremental Repetition in the Early Welsh Englyn" (Speculum XVI.3, p. 308n) he adds that a literal translation would be "there was no hurdle." In The Penguin Book of Welsh Verse (p. 90), Conran translates line C: "While he lived, doors needed no bar."

23. Stauell gyndylan ys digaryat  
 Heno guedy yr neb pieuat  
 Owi a anghen byrr ym gat

The hall of Cynddylan is abandoned;  
 Tonight, with none to claim it,  
 Dishonor and death are lords of it.

- 23c. The translation of line C is a departure from the more commonly accepted translations such as that given by Clancy (Earliest Welsh Poetry, p. 83): "Ah death, why let me linger?" or Conran (The Penguin Book of Welsh Poetry, p. 90): "O for death why did it leave me?" Jackson has two versions: "Alas, death, why does it leave me alone?" in "Incremental Repetition" (p. 308) and "Ah Death, why does it spare me?" in A Celtic Miscellany (p. 252). The key word is byrr (pyr) which means "why" but which may also mean "lords." Ym gat is a form of gadu: "to leave, to desert" and also "to allow." I would suggest that owi may be gowyn: "shame, dishonor, insult." If so, then a literal meaning might be "Dishonor and death lords in it allows" or "[which] in it leaves."

24. Stauell gyndylan nyt esmúyth  
 Heno ar benn carrec hytwith  
 Heb ner heb niuer heb amúyth

The hall of Cynddylan has no welcoming  
 Tonight, its roof-tree fallen over stones,  
 Without lord, without warband, without  
 passion.

- 24b. hytwyth (MW:hydwyth) means "elastic"—not, of course, the fabric but rather the general concept of shape-changing or mutability; the word thus serves as a complement to heb wed (disfigured or changed) in stanza 22.
- 24c. amúyth: "anger," but compare amúyn: "to hold" or "to defend."

25. Stauell gyndylan ystywyll  
Heno heb dan heb gerdeu  
Dygystud deurud dagreu

The hall of Cynddylan is dark;  
Tonight, without fire, without song,  
My cheeks are shrunk with tears.

26. Stauell gyndylan ystywyll  
 Heno heb deulu  
 Hidyl meu yt gynnu

The hall of Cynddylan is dark;  
 Tonight [it is] without household  
 That was a teeming place a time ago.

- 26b. deulu (teulu): "household." In a dark age or medieval context, the word refers to a king or chief's retinue or warband. As a sidelight, Rachel Bromwich (Trioedd Ynys Prydein, p. 481) equates the teulu of Owein with the famous flight of ravens which, according to legend, followed him. "Bran [Raven]," she notes, "appears frequently in poetry as a euphemism for a warrior." She goes on to cite the final words of Iaelles y Flynnawn: "Those were the three hundred swords of the tribe of Cynfarch and the Flight of the Ravens. And wherever Owein went, and they with him, he would be victorious." See also stanza 103n.
- 26c. hidyl meu: literally, a "profuse property."



27. Stauell gyndylan amgúau  
Y gúelet heb doet heb dan  
Marú vy glyú buú mu hunan

Hall of Cynddylan, it is death  
To see it without wisdom, without fire;  
My chief is dead and still I live.

27a. amgúau (MW angau): "death."

27b. doet: probably doeth: "wise;" literally, "without the wise."



28c. in the seventeenth century but probably embodying much earlier material, states that "noe man dyd treat of any Battel but such was an eye-witness thereof for some of the cheefest of the Bards were the Marshalls of all Battels." See A Book of Wales, David M. Lloyd, ed. (London: Collins, 1953), p. 107.

29. Stauell gyndylan ysoergrei  
 Heno gŷedy y parch am buei  
 Heb wyr heb wraged ae katwei

The hall of Cynddylan is lifeless;  
 Tonight is gone the honor it had  
 With no grandson nor granddam to keep it.

- 29a. oergrei: "depressing, lifeless," but also note oergreth: "terrible."
- 29b. Kenneth Jackson ("Incremental Repetition," p. 307), translates this line: "After the honor I used to receive." While it is true that the narrator of the poem might well have remembered personal honors while looking on the ruin of Pengwern, I have assumed that it is the honor of the hall itself that is being referred to. Since the hall is continually personified throughout all of this long passage, this interpretation seems to me to be more in keeping with the mood of the poem.
- 29c. wyr: this word may mean "grandson," or it may be translated simply as "men," as in Clancy's translation: "No men, no women to guard it" (Earliest Welsh Poetry, p. 83). Wraged, however, carries the connotation of an old woman—bent, feeble, even a crone or hag. It seems likely that the poet used this highly economical means to convey the idea that both men and women, both young and old, were swept away in the destruction of Pengwern.

30. Stauell gyndylan ys araf  
Heno gúedy colli y hanaf  
Y maúr drugaúc duú pawnsaf

The hall of Cynddylan is still;  
Tonight, after the loss of its prince,  
Great, redeeming God, what shall I do?

- 30c. drugaúc: drwg (evil, harm) plus the ending -aúc  
denoting a carrier or bearer; i.e., "redeemer."

31. Stauell gyndylan ystywyll  
Y nenn gŵedy dyua o loegyrwys  
Kyndylan ac eluan powys

The hall of Cynddylan is dark,  
Its rooftree gone; the English have slain  
Cynddylan and Elphan of Powys.

- 31b. loegyrwys: "the men of Loegyr." Usually translated "the English," the word would, in this period, refer to the Saxons. Cf. stanza 49.

32. Stauell gyndylan ystywyll  
 Heno o blant kyndruyn  
 Kynon a guiaun a guyn

The hall of Cynddylan is dark;  
 Tonight [are gone] the sons of Cyndrwyn,  
 Cynan and Gwiawn and Gwyn.

- 32b. Heno o blant kyndruyn: literally, "Tonight of children of Cyndrwyn." It would seem that there has been a word or two lost from this line, as it lacks a foot; I have supplied "are gone."
- 32c. According to Triad 60 (Tríoedd Ynys Prydein, p. 163), Gwiawn, the son of Cyndrwyn and the brother of Cynddylan, fought at the battle of Bangor Orchard, usually equated by scholars with the Battle of Chester in 616 A.D. The triad runs:

Three gatekeepers at the action of  
 Bangor Orchard:  
 Gwygon Red-sword  
 And Madog son of Rhun  
 And Gwiawn son of Cyndrwyn.

We are not told if Gwiawn survived the battle. Later on, in stanza 82, Heledd will tell us "All my brothers were killed in one war," i.e., in defending Pengwern, but this might well mean "my remaining brothers" and cannot be given much weight as evidence.

33. Stauell kyndylan am erwan  
Pob awr gúedy maúr ymgynyrdan  
A welais ar dy benntan

The hall of Cynddylan, it pierces me  
Each hour; gone the great assembly  
That I saw about its hearth.

- 33c. dy benntan: literally, "thy hearth;" such shifts in person occur with regularity in the poem, especially, it seems, in the "stauell kyndylan" stanzas.



34. Eryr eli ban y lef  
Llewssei guyr llynn  
Creu callon kyndylan wynn

The eagle of Eli cries on high,  
Fullfed is he with a terrible drink,  
The heart's blood of Cynddylan the fair.

- 34a. According to Conran (p. 92), "The birds in question are white-tailed or sea eagles, not the larger golden eagles. Sea eagles are now extremely rare birds of passage in Britain, but they were once common. They have a steel-grey head, which looks almost like a wig, and their legs are much barer of feathers than those of the golden eagle, which emphasizes their great claws. Their call is a loud, shrill yelping, not the characteristic scream and bark of the bigger bird." The arrival of birds of prey—eagles, crows and other predators—to feed on those slain in battle was one of the horrible commonplaces of seventh-century warfare and one vividly described by most of the early poets. In the Gododdin, attributed to the sixth-century bard Aneirin, we hear that "his hand made a banquet for birds," and "he furnished food for birds of prey." According to Anne Ross in "Birds of Life, Birds of Death" (Scottish Studies VII, p. 217), birds were often thought to be the bearers of evil omens and the harbingers of death in all parts of the Celtic world.

Eli is probably a river name. Conran (p. 92) states that Ifor Williams "compares it with the river Meheli in Montgomeryshire, which I would guess is a later name for the same river."

ban: "lofty." Literally, "lofty the cry," implying that the eagle, on the wing, shrieks over the forest. Ban may also, however, mean "branch;" perhaps the eagle, too gorged to fly, merely calls from his tree.

35. Eryr eli gorelwi  
 Heno y gúæet gúyr gwynn novi  
 Ef y goet trúm hoet ymi

The eagle of Eli dances tonight,  
 Stained with the blood of stainless men;  
 The forest [is] strange and fearful  
 upon me.

- 35a. gorelwi (corelwi): "to dance, to whirl;" doubtless this is a description of the characteristic turning, foot-shifting motion of the predatory bird as he tears at flesh. The image of the blood-spattered and sated—one might almost say drunken—eagle is surely one of the most unforgettable in any literature.

36. Eryr eli a glywaf  
 Heno creulyt yú nys beidyaf  
 Ef y goet túrúm hoet arnaf

The eagle of Eli is bloody tonight.  
 With my lord's blood—I cannot stop him;  
 The forest [is] strange and sounding upon me.

- 36a. glywaf: "lord, leader, warriors, battle." The eagle may be bloody with warriors' blood or even perhaps the blood of battle.
- 36b. beidyaf: possibly a form of "to dare," but, in my opinion, probably a form of peidio: "to stop" or "to cease."
- 36c. túrúm: "tumult, thunder, sounds." Cf stanza 3n. Also note the similarity to stanza 35c; it is possible that the poet intended to repeat the same word (trum) and that a letter has been added or deleted through a copyist's error.



38. Eryr eli echeidú myr  
 Ny threid pscaut yn ebyr  
 Gelúit gúelit owaet gwyr

Eagle of Eli, once keeper of the seas,  
 Who no more fishes in the estuary,  
 Thou hast called, strong from the blood  
 of men.

- 38a. echeidú: e- (before) and ceidwad (keeper).
- 38b. threid: the third person singular of treiddio: "to pierce, to cross, to frequent." The eagle may indeed "frequent" the fishes of the estuaries, but it is more likely that the poet intended to evoke the actual act of piercing, or catching the fish. According to Conran in the Penguin Book of Welsh Poetry (p. 92) the sea eagle of the British Isles soars high, then stoops directly into the water to capture fish in his huge talons. There is no question but that the birds described are sea eagles; H.E. Forest notes in his chapter on birds in The Victoria History of Shropshire (p. 173) that there "is no authentic record" of golden eagles in Shropshire.
- 38c. gúelit: either gwelid (thou hadst been seen) or gwe-lydd (strong). A double verb is possible here, but the second choice (gwelydd) seems less awkward.

39. Eryr eli gorymda  
 Coet kyuore kinyaua  
 Ae llaúch llúydit y draha

The eagle of Eli, he walks the wood,  
 And with him an overflowing of anguish;  
 Beneath his kiss all pride decays.

39c. llaúch (llawch): "protection, kiss, caress."  
llúydit (llwydit): "thou wouldst molder."

40. Eryr penngúern penngarn  
 Llúyt aruchel y atleis  
 Eidic amgic....

Eagle of Pengwern whose crest  
 Is grey, on high he screams,  
 Eager for flesh....

40a. penngarn: probably a reversal of carnben: "big-headed," hence "crested."

40c. A part of line C has apparently been lost. Ifor Williams notes that some other sources add a gerais: "that I love." (CL1H, p.38).

41. Eryr penngŷern penngarn  
Llŷyt aruchel y euan  
Eidic amgic kyndylan

Eagle of Pengwern whose crest  
Is grey, upraised is his claw,  
Eager for flesh of Cynddylan.

41b. euan (MW:ewin): "nail" or "claw." Cf. stanza 42.



42. Eryr penngŷern penngarn  
 Llŷyt aruchel y adaf  
 Eidic amgic a garaf

Eagle of Pengwern whose crest  
 Is grey, upraised is his talon,  
 Eager for flesh of my kin.

42b. adaf: "talon" or claw"—literally, "hand."

42c. garaf: possibly ger (near) and -af (me), but caraf  
 (I love) is equally likely.



44. Eryr pennguern pell gelwit  
 Heno ar waet gúyr gúelit  
 Rygelwir trenn tref lethrit

Eagle of Pengwern, far didst thou call,  
 Tonight above men's blood thou hast been seen;  
 Trenn has been called a shining town.

- 44c. In his "Incremental Repetition in the Early Welsh Englyn" (p. 306), Kenneth Jackson translates this line: "Trenn can be called a famous town." Stanzas 43 and 44 are interesting because they are essentially identical except for the end words, which evoke a subtle change in mood—especially the shift to the irony of lethrit (shining) in line C. Worth noting, however, is the interpretation of Dr. Guest (no first name given) whose translation was used by Skene (Vol. I, p. 453): "Truly will Trenn be called the town of flame."

45. Eglŷysseu bassa y orffowys  
 Heno diwed ymgynnŷys  
 Cledyr kat callon argoetwys

The chapels of Bassa are his resting place;  
 Tonight ends the men of my clan,  
 The staff of battle, the heart of Argoed.

- 45a. Jarman identifies the "chapels of Bassa" as Baschurch, "where Cynddylan lies buried." ("The Cycle of Llywarch Hen," A Guide to Welsh Literature I, p. 94), but in King Arthur's Avalon Geoffrey Ashe cites Nennius: "The first battle [of Arthur] was at the mouth of the river which is called Glein. The next four were on the banks of another river which is called Dubglas and is in the region Linnius. The sixth was upon the river which is called Bassas. . ." (p. 88). If the identification with Baschurch is correct, then Cynddylan's body was carried to "a place of considerable importance in Saxon times," since Baschurch had maintained a collegiate church from an uncertain, but apparently extremely early, date. (Edmund Vale, Shropshire, London: Robert Hale, 1949, p. 27). The meaning of the stanza seems to be straightforward; the survivors have rescued the body of Cynddylan (and perhaps those of others) from the eagles and have fled to the chapels bearing their dead with them.
- 45b. Line B is interesting for its wordplays. Diwedd means "end" or "termination," but the verb form (diweddu) may also mean "to lay out a corpse." Cynnwys means "welcome" and, in A Celtic Miscellany, Jackson translates the phrase ". . .his last welcome" (p. 252). In "Once Again Arthur's Battles," however, he points out that the suffix -wys always refers "to regions and their inhabitants." I would suggest, therefore, that ymgynnwys may be a compound of ym (my), gynt (clan) and -wys (men of). The clan, that wide complex of blood relationships which was the basis of early Celtic society, was, of course, firmly identified with the region in which it lived. See also stanza 59n.
- 45c. Cledyr: "staff, pillar, pale." The word is often used in early Welsh poetry as a description of a hero.

46. Eglŷysseu bassa ynt ffaeth  
 Heno vynauaút ae gúnaeth  
 Rud ynt úy rwy vy hiraeth

The chapels of Bassa are [my] riches;  
 Tonight my lord has made them so;  
 His blood is in them and my pain.

46a. ynt: "they are." The use of this form often indicates that the subject is following the verb. I have arbitrarily added "my," as some such indicator is needed in English.

ffaeth: this word may mean "gentle" or it may mean "luxurious" or "rich." It seemed, in this case, more appropriate to use the nounform, "riches," as the use of a noun form in the other stanzas in this sequence would seem to indicate that the subject and predicate are indeed being reversed throughout most of the passage.

46b. There are a number of possible translations of vynauaút, but it seems likely that it is simply vy (my), naf (lord) and a noun ending indicating the doer of the action. Another possibility might be nawd (kin).

46c. rud ynt úy rwy: literally, "red they are of my lord."

hiraeth: most dictionaries give "longing" or "regret" as definitions for this word, but the actual implications are much greater. Perhaps it might be best translated as a kind of passionate nostalgia or, as Idris Bell puts it in The Development of Welsh Poetry (Oxford at the University Press, 1936, p. 27), an "angry revolt against the tyranny of fact."

47. Eglŷysseu bassa ynt yng  
 Heno y etiued kyndrŷyn  
 Tir mablan kyndylan wynn

The chapels of Bassa are my anguish;  
 Tonight the inheritance of Cyndrwyn  
 Is the earth above Cynddylan the pure.

47a. yng may mean a "strait" or "narrows" and, in the context of the poem, ing (pain, anguish, agony) seems a more likely reading.

47b. etiued (MW etifedd): "inheritance."

47c. Tir mablan: literally, "earth burial place."

48. Eglúysseu bassa ynt tirion  
Heno y gúnaeth eu meillyon  
Rud ynt úy rúy vyngallon

The chapels of Bassa are [my] country—  
Tonight has made their clover so;  
His blood is in them, and my heart.

48c. Cf. stanzas 46 and 51.

49. Eglŷysseu bassa collasant  
 Eu breint gŷedy y dina o loegyrwys  
 Kyndylan ac eluan powys

The chapels of Bassa, failed  
 Is their honor; the English have slain  
 Cynddylan and Elphan of Powys.

- 49b. dina: Ifor Williams (CLLH, p.39) reads diua  
 (MW:difa), "to ravage, to destroy." I have  
 translated "slain," as this is obviously the  
 meaning of the word in this context.



50. Eglŷysseu bassa ynt dina  
 Heno y chetwyr ny phara  
 Gŷyr awyr amy yma

The chapels of Bassa are [my] fortress;  
 Tonight the warriors who did not endure,  
 They have no sky but in this place.

- 50a. dina: the modern Welsh word dyna means "there is," and dinas (fortress, city, refuge) seems more reasonable. In Canu Llywarch Hen (p. 39), Ifor Williams suggests diua (MW difa): "to ravage, to waste, to destroy." This interpretation is made even more compelling by the use of the same word in stanza 49, where its meaning is almost certainly "to destroy" or "destroyed." Since a noun form is necessary, the translation in that case would have to be: "The chapels of Bassa are [my] destruction."
- 50b. chetwyr (cedwyr): "warriors."  
phara (para): "to endure."
- 50c. "They have no sky but in this place:" literally, "Men (whose) sky only here." I understand this to mean the men who are buried in the recently-dug graves, i.e., the earth which covers them has become their sky. On the other hand, the warriors "who did not endure" may not be the dead, but merely the survivors of the battle; their earth—their "sky"—is now narrowed to the confines of the chapels at Bassa.

51. Eglúysseu bassa baruar  
 Heno a minneu úyf dyar  
 Rud ynt úy rúy vygalar

The chapels of Bassa they endure  
 Tonight, as I endure my weeping;  
 His blood is in them and my grief.

51a. baruar: probably a form of para: "to endure," a contrast to chetwyr ny phara in stanza 50.

51b. a minneu: "and I also," i.e., "I too endure."

51c. Cf. stanzas 46 and 48.

52. Y dref wenn ymbronn y coet  
 Ys ef yŷ hefras eiroet  
 Ar wyneb y gŷellt y gŷaet

White town beside the forest edge,  
 Thy sign shall be forever this—  
 The blood that lies upon the grass.

- 52a. ymbronn may mean either "almost in" or "in the breast," i.e., "within the forest." I have chosen "almost in" (or "at the side") since it would have been a more likely site for a town. Forests in Dark Age Britain were more frightening to the people—and, in actual fact, a good deal more dangerous—than they would be today, and a permanent settlement in the midst of one of them would have been highly improbable.

53. Y dref wern yn yt hymyr  
Y hefras y glas vyuyr  
Y gwaet a dan draet y gúyr

White town that stands within our land  
Thy sign is on the green—the blood  
That lies beneath the feet of men.

- 53b. glas vyuyr: probably MW glasbawr—"greensward."

54. Y dref wenn yn y dyffrynt  
 Llawen y bydeir úrth gyuanrud  
 Kat y gúerin neurderynt

White town within the valley, once  
 Was merry all that was near you,  
 But now in battle all thy host is gone.

- 54b. bydeir: this word may be byddai'r: "was" or "used to be," but some scholars have opted for buddair or "bittern." See stanza 8 and n.

úrth gyuanrud (wrth cyfanrwydd): "near" and "wholeness" or "entirety," i.e., "all that was nearby."

- 54c. neurderynt: literally, "they have ceased." The meaning may be either that the host of the white town has been slain or that it has fled away from the enemy.



56, Y dref wenn rúng tren athraual  
 Oed gnodach y gauet ar  
 Wyneb guellt noc eredic brynar

White town between Trenn and Trafal,  
 There was more blood upon the grass  
 Than fair snow on a fallow land.

56c. Stanza 56 is seldom translated, and those few translations I have seen all treat eredic in line C as a form of aredig: "to plow." Joseph Clancy, for example, presents "Than plowing of fallow" in his Earliest Welsh Poetry (p. 82). This seems to me, however, to be an inept image in a poem where such lapses are few. I would, therefore, suggest the possibility of eira teg: "fair snow."

57. Gúynn y byt freuer mor yú diheint  
 Heno gúedy colli keuneint  
 O anffáuť vyntauáuť yt lesseint

Blessed she is tonight, Ffreuer, not sickened  
 After the loss of our valley;  
 From my misfortune is made her benefit.

- 57a. Gúynn y byt (MW gwyn y byd): "holy her state" or "life"; Ffreuer has died and the poet evokes both the holiness and peace of her present state and perhaps the purity of her life on earth. There is also the connotation of "fortunate"; Ffreuer, dead, cannot be sickened by loss as are those who survive her.

diheint: probably haint (pestilence, sickness) with the negative prefix di-; "not sickened" seems a reasonable translation, but the hint that Ffreuer has died of plague or pestilence is extremely strong.

- 57b. keuneint: this is probably a form of the modern Welsh word ceunant—a gorge—which in this case would refer to the wide valley of the Severn. "Gorge" is not a very apt word for such an expanse, but the use of such almost-synonyms is common in early bardic poetry, where the exigencies of the extremely rigid alliterative patterns made such usages necessary.

- 57c. This is a difficult line. Vyntauáuť has sometimes been translated "my tongue" (MW tafod), which apparently caused the misfortune, as the -áuť ending indicates an agent or doer of the action. This opens entire vistas of untold story in which some speech or remark of the narrator caused the sacking of Pengwern. Such events are, of course, popular themes in many early tales, but there is little in the Cynddylan poems to support such an interpretation. I would suggest that the word in question is simply tau: "that it is," i.e., "From my misfortune that it is [the cause of] benefit." It is possible that lesseint may be a verb (they benefit) rather than a noun (MW lessiant: benefit, welfare). If so, the "they" ending is confusing and may be an error for -it: "thou wouldst benefit." In either case the meaning is plain: Ffreuer's death is a misfortune to Heledd but a benefit to herself, as now she does not suffer.





59. Nyt anghau freuer am de  
Heno am damorth brodyrde  
Duhunaf wylaf uore

Not for thy death, Ffreuer, do I burn  
Tonight, but for the failing of my helpless  
land  
I lie unsleeping and I weep.

- 59b. brodyrde: probably bro diardwy—"helpless land."  
According to T.M. Charles-Edwards' article "Some Celtic  
Kinship Terms" (Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies,  
24 [1971] p. 116), bro means a "small kingdom in which  
the lands of kindred [lie]." If this is so, then  
dyrde is certainly an adjective describing bro. Another  
possible reading might be bro dewrdyr—"brave land."

60. Nyt angheu freuer am gŷna heint  
O dechreu nos hy deweint  
Duhunaf wylaf bylgeint

Not for thy death, Ffreuer, do I sicken  
From nightfall until midnight,  
Nor waken and weep till the dawn.

60a. heint: modern Welsh haint; see stanza 57n.

61. Nyt angheu freuer am tremyn  
 Heno am gúna grydyeu melyn  
 A chocheu da reu dros erchúyn.

Not for thy death, Ffreuer, do I walk  
 Tonight, sallow with fevers,  
 Red-eyed with weeping over our protector.

- 61b. melyn: literally, "yellow." The narrator of the poem begins at this point to be very concerned with sickness; the idea of plague and pestilence recurs throughout the rest of the poem: see especially stanzas 97, 98 and 100. It was one of the realities of seventh-century battles that they were almost invariably followed by devastating illnesses, perhaps brought about by the impossibility of dealing adequately with the dead. Since the stanzas on Ffreuer's death follow those telling of Cynddylan's burial in the chapels of Bassa, and even those to the "White Town," the implication is that Ffreuer did not die in the sack of Pengwern but afterward, presumably of some illness.

- 61c. A chocheu dagreu: "with red weeping."

erchúyn (MW erchwyn) may mean "protector," but it may also mean "bedside" or "bedfellow." Clancy (p. 84) translates this line: "My tears red at my bedside."

62. Nyt angheu ffreuer aerniwaf  
 Heno namyn myhun ny wanglaf  
 Vymbroder am eymyr agúynaf

Not for thy death, Ffreuer, do I grieve,  
 But for myself not slain by sword;  
 My brothers sleep a holier place.

62b. wanglaf: probably gwan (thrust, stab) and glaiif (a sword or spear).

62c. A literal translation of line C would be: "My brothers [are] about a place which [is] holiest," but as the meaning is clear, "sleep" or "lie" seem to be justifiable synonyms. If a gúynaf is read not as a gwynaf but as anghynnaf, then the meaning becomes "my brothers sleep a colder place," probably another case of a word being used to evoke a double meaning.

63. Freuer wenn brodyr athuaeth  
 Ny hannoedynt ordiffaeth  
 Wyr ny negynt vyngylyaeth

Fair Ffreuer, our brothers were gentle,  
 And sprung of no mean blood;  
 They were not refusers, my clan.

- 63b. hannoedynt: from hannoed (descended, came from) and -ynt (they).

- 63c. negynt (MW negyd): "refuser." A telling word, used several times in the course of the poem, which may have had a specialized meaning in the seventh century.

vyngylyaeth: probably MW llwyth (tribe or clan), with the prefix "my," but also possibly the same prefix plus cyllaeth (grief, sorrow), i.e., "They were not refusers, to my grief."

64. Freuer wenn brodyr athuu  
 Penn glywynt gyúrenin llu  
 Ny echyuydei ffyd ganthu

Ffreuer, fair was the land for thee,  
 When the lords they were a ready host,  
 Nor rested from the battle's rage.

64c. echyuydei: a form of echwydd, the first meaning of which is "to flow," but which also has an older meaning of "a resting place at midday." When used in this sense, the word implies a shady place for cattle: cf. stanza 55. The word is here being used as a verb; the ending is singular because it refers to the "ready host" as a whole.

65. Mi affreuer a medlan  
 Kyt yt uo cat ympob mann  
 Nyn taúr ny ladaúr an rann

Myself and Ffreuer and Medlan,  
 Though battle raged in every place,  
 Feel no passion; to kill is not our share.

- 65a. Medlan: identified in another manuscript as one of the sisters of Heledd and Ffreuer; see Appendix A. Meddlan may also mean "a drink of mead," so an alternate translation might be: "Myself and Ffreuer who drank of mead. . . ."
- 65c. ladaur: probably a form of the modern Welsh lladwr: "killer," i.e., "not to kill" or "not to be killers." Another possibility, however, is that the verb form in question is the passive lladdir: "not to be killed," i.e., "to survive is our share."



66. Y mynad kyt at uo vch  
 Nyt eidigafaf ydŷyn vymbuch  
 Ys ysgaŷn gan rei vy ruch

The mountain joining me to him above,  
 No harm will come if I should bring my wish:  
 That we shall have protection of the saints.

- 66b. ydŷyn (y dwyn): "to take, to bring."

vymbuch: buch means "cow" and Clancy translates "as I lead my cow." (Earliest Welsh Poetry, p. 85). It seems, however, that puch (wish) is a more logical reading.

- 66c. ysgaŷn (ys cawn): "we shall get" or "have."

gan rei: possibly canrhed—"protection."

ruch: this word may be a form of rhuchen (cloak), giving a reading of "we shall have protection of my cloak," but this seems strained and I think gwyr uch (men above) is more reasonable. "Saints" is a free translation, suggested by "him above" in line A; the meaning may well be merely "the men over us."

67. Amhaua! ar auaerúy  
 Yda atren yny trydonúy  
 Ac yd a atúrch ym marchnúy

In summer gently the Aerwy  
 Flows down through Trenn to the Trydonwy  
 And it goes with the Twrch to the Marchnwy.

- 67a. ar auaerwy: an aerwy is an ornamental chain or torque or other neckpiece, but in this case it appears to be the name of a tributary of the Trydonwy. Line A should probably be read Amhaua! arau aerúy, with arau: araf (slowly, gently).

68. Amhaúl ar eluyden  
 Ydaa trydonúy yn tren  
 Ac ydaa geirú yn alwen

Because the sun is on the land  
 The Trydonwy now flows in Trenn,  
 And white the rapids as it goes.

68a. eluyden: (MW elfyddan): "country, region, the world."

68b. ydaa: probably yd a: "it is going."

68c. geirú: (MW geirw): "foam, rapids, waves."

alwen: probably oll wyn: "completely white." T.H. Parry, however, notes the use of the word olwen to mean "wheel" ("English-Welsh Loan Words," Angles and Britons [2], Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1963, p. 58). In this case, the image would describe the turning movement of the foaming rapids.

69. Kynn bu vygkylchet croen  
 Gauyr galet chùannauc y gelein  
 Rym goruc yn uedu ued bryum

Once my cover was made of skins,  
 Skins of the hill-goat fed on holly;  
 Cold in the birch grove is the grave of  
 the strong.

- 69a. kylchet (MW cylched): this word denotes a bedcover rather than a robe or cloak; such warm coverlets would have been among the great luxuries of the dark ages. Clyched may also mean "circuit" or "zone." In medieval times the cylch was a custom whereby those persons attached to a noble's court were permitted to billet themselves upon the local bondmen. See William Rees, "Survivals of Ancient Celtic Custom in Medieval England," Angles and Britons 2, pp. 154-55. In later times there was also apparently a bardic custom called the cylch clera; according to the seventeenth-century author of Llanstephen MS 144 (collected in A Book of Wales, p. 105), the "Bards had also a Perambulacion or a Visitacione once every three yeares to the houses of all the Gentlmen in the Countrey. . .at which Perambulacione they dyd collect all the memorable things that were donne and fell out in every Countrey."
- 69b. gelein (MW celyn): "holly." According to an old Welsh tradition (cited by Frazer, p. 227), the crown of thorns was made of holly and, to this day, holly is left to grow undisturbed in Wales. Robert Graves (The White Goddess, New York: Vintage rpt., 1948, pp. 185-87) discusses the identification of holly with the figure of Christ, but if there is any such meaning here it is obscure; the poet is probably referring only to the predilection of goats for eating holly leaves.
- 69c. It seems possible that in uedw ued the u should be a y or, in modern Welsh, f: fedw fed, the radical form of which would be bedw bed—"birches grave." A literal translation of line C, therefore, would be "Cold it made in the birches the grave of the strong." Clancy (p. 85) apparently reads the two words in question as meddw (drunk) and medd (mead), and translates: "It made me drunk, the mead of Bryn."

70. Kynn bu vygkylchet croen  
 Neu gauyr galet kelyngar y llillen  
 Rymgoruc y uedú ued trenn

Once my cover was made of skins,  
 Skins of young hill-goat fed on holly;  
 Cold in the birch grove is the grave  
 of Trenn.

70. With minor changes, this stanza is the same as stanza 69. The goat is now a young goat and the grave is the grave of Trenn; this implies that it is the grave of Cynddylan, who was buried in the chapels of Bassa (stanza 45). These statements are not necessarily contradictory. Edmund Vale writes (Shropshire, p. 27) that the Berth is a hill that may once have been an island and "about a mile farther along the road is Baschurch." If the "chapels of Bassa" can indeed be identified with this foundation, then they may well have stood in a grove of water-loving birch trees.



72. Gúedy meirch hywed a chochwed  
 Dillat a phlúaúr melyn  
 Mein uygcoes nymoes du dedyn

Gone the trained horses and bloodstained  
 The garments and plumes of gold;  
 Nothing is here but stone and weed, and dark  
 is come.

- 72a. hywed: "docile;" in this context, the word probably refers to a gentle palfrey or riding horse rather than to a warhorse.
- 72b. Taliesin, in his panygyric to Cynan Garwyn, king of Powys (fl. 580), records that his gifts from the king included horses, mantles, bracelets, brooches and a yellow- [gold?] hilted sword. See Jarman's "Taliesin" in A Guide to Welsh Literature, I, p. 56.
- 72c mein: probably maen (stone). Uygcoes has been translated fy (my) coes (leg); cf. Clancy, Earliest Welsh Poetry, p. 85. I would, however, like to suggest gwyg (tares) and oes (is). In the same way, nymoes may be read dym (nothing) and oes (is).

73. Gwarthec edeirnyaún ny buant  
Gerdeunin a cherd neb nyt aethant  
Ym buú gorwynnyon gúyr o uchuant

They were not shamed before burial  
Though they went to their deaths without song,  
Who were the brightness of the men of Uchuant.

- 73a. Gwarthec means "cows" or "cattle," but it may also mean "shame" or "disgrace." The text is extremely corrupt at this point, however, and I believe it may be possible that the word might be read as deierin (buried) with the prefix e- (before), giving a literal reading of "Shamed before burial not they were." I have, however, adopted this reading only experimentally. Edeyrnion was a region which, according to John E. Lloyd (A History of Wales from the Earliest Time to the Edwardian Conquest, London: Longmans, Green, 1911, p. 245), had taken its name from Ederne ap Cunedda and which was "at an early date brought under the sway of the rulers of Powys." Edeirnyaún in this passage is, therefore, quite likely to be a proper noun, i.e., "Shamed in Edeyrnion not they were."
- 73b. Gerdeunin: again, this has been treated as a proper noun, but might also be read as ger (at) and dinin (slaughter or slaying), i.e., "at their deaths."
- 73c. Gorwynnyon: it is surely an indication of the extreme difficulty of this stanza that this word has also been treated as a proper noun, the translator's final resort for a word that otherwise seems meaningless. I think it is possible, however, that the meaning may be gorwyn (bright or beautiful) with the -yon (-ion) ending indicating an adjective being used as a noun—"brightness."

Uchuant: according to the notes in the Skene edition (Vol. II, p. 446), this is "a district in the upper part of Montgomeryshire."



74-A. Gwarthec edeirnyaún ny buant  
 Gerdunin a chant neb cherdynt  
 Ym byú gorúynnyon gúr

They were not shamed before burial  
 Though they went to their deaths unwilling,  
 Who were the brightness of man.

74-A. As noted, the text in these stanzas seems to be extremely corrupt. Skene presents this and the next stanza as one, noting that the resulting eight-line stanza "seems to have been made up by the huddling together of three or more imperfect stanzas" (Vol. II, p. 447). I have followed Ifor Williams (Canu Llywarch Hen, p. 42) in treating the first three lines separately, as they seem to be a variant of stanza 73.

74-B. Eduyn warth gúarthe gyd  
 Gúerth gúyla negyd  
 Ar a dyuo dragúarth ae deubyd  
 Mi awydún a oed da  
 Gúaet am y gilid gwrda

Fierce shame upon the cattlcherd  
 Who refuses a worthy vigil  
 And shamefully breaks the purpose  
 Once held so strong—it is well  
 He bleed, this companion of my lord.

74-Ba. gúarthe gyd: this may mean either a cattleherd or a cattle raider, and recalls a day and culture where the two were often one and the same.

As noted in stanza 74-A, this stanza is quite corrupt and, if it represents two or more stanzas, then at least one line is missing from the second triad. It would appear that the stanza is either an exhortation to revenge or a cry of triumph after it.



76. Tywarchen ercal ar erdywal  
 Wyr o etined moryal  
 A gúedy rhys macrysinal

The turf of Erccall lies above the brave,  
 The grandson of the line of Moryal,  
 And gone the host that once he led.

- 76a. ercal: probably Erccall which, according to B.G Charles ("The Welsh, their Language and Placenames in Archenfield and Oswestry," Angles-and Britons [2], Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1963, p. 86). is "a Celtic [place] name of uncertain origin" lying northeast of modern Shrewsbury. Another possible meaning might be erchyll: "horrible, frightful, terrible."
- 76b. etined: probably a form of the verb etifeddu: "to inherit."
- 76c. macrysinal: this is an extremely baffling word; it may be either a proper noun or a formation from a Latin root. If it is neither of these, then it is probably two or three shorter words, perhaps mistakenly melded by some copyist. I suggest mai (that) crys (he hastened [led]) and ynol, a word suggesting in this context a past time; this is not a very satisfactory solution; there does not seem to be a satisfactory solution.

77. Heled húyedic ym gelwir  
 O duú padiú yth rodir  
 Meirch vym bro ac eu tir

Saltpit of desolation I am called;  
 O God, to whom shall now be given  
 The horses of my valley and their fields?

- 77a. Heled: this is the first reference to Cynddylan's sister by name, and there is no real evidence that it is a name at all—it may be merely the girl's epithet for herself. Heledd means "saltpit"—scarcely a likely name—and this, rather than any connection with the Cynddylan cycle, is undoubtedly the origin of the place-names Yn Heledd Wen and Yn Heledd Ddu, which are the old Welsh names for Nantwich and Northwich respectively. According to B.G. Charles ("The Welsh, Their Language and Placenames," p. 87), both of these sites are located in Cheshire in a district once called tir yr helet. There is also an otherwise unidentified Llanhelet (Heledd's church or Heledd's enclosure) which is referred to in the "Stanzas of the Graves" (see Appendix B).

húyedic: I have read this word as gwyddwig—"desolation"—although Skene points out in his notes (Vol. I, p. 447) that in the ancient Welsh laws hwyedec is a word used to designate a male hawk; Clancy has apparently followed this suggestion and has translated "Heledd the hawk I am called." (In modern Welsh hwyad means "duck," so I suppose a case could also be made for "Heledd the ducklike I am called. . ."). Another possibility is hinted at by the word bonheddig which means "noble" and which almost certainly has the same stem as hwyedic. Unfortunately, some such specialized meaning for húyedic—if, indeed, it ever existed—has now been lost.

78. Heledd húyedic am kyueirch  
 O duú padiú rodir gorumseirch  
 Kyndylan ae bedwar deg meirch

Saltpit of desolation I am pointed out;  
 O God, to whom shall now be given  
 The dark arms of Cynddylan and his forty steeds?

- 78a. kyueirch (MW cyfeirio): "to point out, guide, refer to."
- 78b. seirch: "arms, armor, battle-harness." In Arthur's Britain (p. 333), Leslie Alcock speculates that the word may have been derived from the Latin sarcia—the rigging of a ship—and that, if so, the word would refer specifically to the leather strappings of the harness.
- 78c. Bedwar deg meirch: "forty horses." Another possibility might be bedwar teg meirch: "four fair horses." Cf. Kenneth Jackson's translation of the Gododdin (p. 135): "In his hall there were wont to be swift horses, bloody spears and dark-blue armor."



80. Neur llysseis o dinlle  
 Ureconn ffreuer werydre  
 Hiraeth amdamorth vrodyrde

Then did I pause near Dinlle  
 Uricon, in Ffreuer's land,  
 And wept the failing of my helpless land.

- 80b. Ureconn: probably Uricon, the ancient Roman name for the city of Wroxeter, but, possibly, a form of Wrekin, one of the mountainous landmarks in the vicinity of Shrewsbury.

ffreuer werydre (Ffreuer's land): this may refer to those lands which were to have been Ffreuer's inheritance, as Welsh daughters in this period could inherit property on much the same terms as sons; see stanza 37n. Werydre may, however, also mean "grave," in which case the reading would be "near Ffreuer's grave." Such a reading would heighten the sense of the passage of time and enhance the pattern of contrasts which emerges strongly at this point in the poem.

- 80c. vrodyrde: Cf. stanza 59 and n.



81. Marchaúc o gaer o danaú  
 Nyt oed húyr a gúynnyon  
 Gúr o sanneir

Horseman from out the fortress down below,  
 It was not evening when the sorrowing  
 Of man would be seen....

- 81a. danaú: danaf (under me) implies that the narrator looks down upon the fortress from a high place. The marchaúc (MW: marchog) or horseman is unidentified; the word may be an epithet for Cynddylan himself.
- 81c. sanneir: the future subjunctive of synna (he would be beheld or seen) or possibly the future subjunctive of sannu (he would be surprised), in which case it would probably refer to the enemy attack on Pengwern. Line C is lacking a foot in meter and a part of it has evidently been lost.

82. Llas vymbroder ar unweith  
Kynan Kyndylan Kynnwreith  
Yn amúyn tren tref diffeith

My brothers were killed all in one war,  
Cynan, Cynddylan and Cynwreith,  
While holding Trenn, that wasted town.

83. Ny sangei weheleth ar nyth  
 Kyndylan nythechei droetued vyth  
 Ny nagas y uam uab llyth

The bloodline of Cynddylan would not  
 oppress,  
 Nor flee from battle by one foot,  
 Nor yet strike down the mother of a  
 babe.

- 83a. weheleth (gweheleth): "lineage, stock, bloodline."  
 83b. droetued (MW troedfedd): a one-foot measurement.  
 83c. nagas (MW neges): the word usually means "message"  
 or "errand," but in earlier times it was also used  
 to mean "to assault" or "to attack."

84. Broder ambúyat ny vall  
 A dyuynt ual gúyal coll  
 A vun yun edynt oll.

Brothers I had not mean of heart,  
 Ardent they were as the hazel spear,  
 But one by one gone are they all.

- 84b. dyfynt may mean "ardent" or "zealous," or it may be a form of dyfod: "to come." Jackson (A Celtic Miscellany, p. 251) translates the phrase as "they grew up."

coll: this word is apparently collen (hazel). Coll may also mean "lost," and might be placed with line C: "Lost one by one, gone are they all." The fact that the rhyme scheme requires coll in line B, however, makes "hazel" more likely.

85. Broder ambúyat aduc  
 Duu ragaf vy an ffaút ae goruc  
 Ny obrynynt ffaú yr ffuc

Brothers I had, brought to God  
 Before me—it was my misfortune;  
 Their fame they won without deceit.

- 85b. ffaút (MW ffawd): "fate, fortune, prosperity." The an- prefix makes this negative: "misfortune."
- 85c. obrynynt: probably the third person plural of gobrwyo: "to reward, to merit, to earn."

86. Teneu awel tew lletkynt  
 Pereid y rycheu ny phara  
 Ae goreu ar auu uat ydynt

Thin the breeze, great my sadness,  
 Sweet the furrows that do not remain,  
 Where earth heals seemly over him.

86b. rycheu: rhychau means "furrows" or "grooves" and is not uncommonly used in the poetry of this period to indicate a grave. The use of the plural form in this stanza indicates that it is not only the grave of Cynddylan but the graves of all of Heledd's dead which are being evoked.

86c. auu: probably gwau: "to weave, to join, to knit together." I have translated it "heal."

87. As clywo a duú a dyn  
 As clywo y ieueine a hyn  
 Meuyl barueu madeu hedyn

Sickened with God and with man,  
 Sickened with young and with old,  
 Disgrace I will endure to leave seed.

- 87a. clywo: even though clywed means "to hear," I would like to suggest the possibility that the verb intended here is clwyfo: "to wound" or "to sicken."
- 87c. Meuyl barueu madeu: meuyl is probably the modern Welsh word mefl (disgrace, blot or blemish). Skene, in his now rather obsolete notes to this verse (Vol.II, p. 448) cites "the disgrace of the beard" (meuyl baryw) as an obscure but heinous crime. Frankly I have my doubts whether the "disgrace of the beard" ever existed at all except in the minds of nineteenth-century antiquarians. A reading of barueu as a form of para (to endure) seems much more reasonable.

88. Ym byú ehedyn ehedyei  
 Dillat yn aros gúaed bei  
 Ar glas vereu naf núyfei

Living, he left no seed before he failed,  
 And yet immortal the remaining blood  
 If on the greensward [comes] a chief in  
 strength.

88a. ehedyn: hedyn (seed) and the prefix e-; "he" apparently refers to Cynddylan.

88b. dillat (MW diladd): "immortal."

yn aros: "waiting, staying," i.e., "remaining."





90. Ny úy nyúl ae múc  
 Ae ketwyr yn kyuamúc  
 Y gúeirglaúd aer yssyd drúc

No longer with pride nor with honor  
 Nor with his warriors fighting;  
 The meadow's heir is broken.

- 90a. muc: mwg means "smoke," and a more likely reading is myg: "holy, honored." An interesting possibility, however, is that mwg may be read as buoch or boch: "if you were." This reading would permit translating line A: "No longer be proud if you were beside him...."

91. Edeweis y weirgláud aer ysgúyt  
Digyuyng dinas y gedyrn  
Goreu gúr garanmael

Thou hast gone, heir of the meadow,  
Shield without weakness of the city  
Whose keeper is now Caranmael.

91c. Goreu gúr garanmael: literally, "it made the man Caranmael," i.e., the death of Cynddylan ("the shield...of the city") has allowed Caranmael to become the keeper of Pengwern.

92. Karanmael kumŷy arnat  
 Alwen dy ystle o gat  
 Gnaút man ar gran kyniuiat

Caranmael, grief is upon thee,  
 Sorrowful thy pledge of battle  
 Customary upon a warrior's cheek.

- 92a. kymŷy: "grief," with the added connotations of "burden" or "affliction."  
 92b. ystle: probably gwystl: "a pledge." The reference is apparently to a custom whereby a chief or leader was kissed or otherwise saluted by his men before entering battle.  
 92c. kyniuiat (MW cynifiad): "warrior, battle." Note also that gat in line B may mean either "army" or "battle."

The Caranmael stanzas are obscure and perhaps misplaced within the poem. The meaning of stanza 92 appears to be that a warband—perhaps those few warriors remaining after the destruction of Pengwern—has refused to offer a pledge of loyalty to Caranmael.

93. Kymued ognáu llaú haul  
 Mab kynndylan clot auael  
 Dywedúr kynndrúynin caranmael

Always laughing and liberal of hand,  
 Son of Cynddylan of unfailing fame—  
 Caranmael, last grandson of Cyndrwyn.

- 93b. auael: probably af- (a negative prefix) and ffael:  
 "failing," hence, "unfailing."  
 93c. Dywedúr: Ifor Williams reads diwet (MW diwedd): "end,  
 termination" and wyr: "man" or "grandson." The meaning,  
 therefore, would be "the end of the grandsons" or "the  
 final grandson."

94. Oed diheid ac oed  
 Oed diholedic tref tat  
 A geissywys caranmael yn ynat

He was obstinate and for a time  
 He was gone from his father's town,  
 But men sought Caranmael for chief.

- 94a. Oed: this word may mean either "time" or "age," or it may be a form of oedd: "he was, it was"; the passage makes little sense unless both readings are accepted. In the Brut Y Tywysogyon (Peniarth MS 20 with English translation, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1952, pp. 2-3) Thomas Jones translates oed oet as "was the year."
- 94b. diholedic: the word is sometimes used to mean "banished" or "exiled," but may also mean merely "separated."
- 94c. ynat: this may be yna: "there" or "then," or possibly "in thee," in which case the town is being personified and addressed. Ynat may also mean "magistrate," and, in view of the tendency of the time to use such forms, I have translated it "chief." The meaning of the stanza seems to be that, after the fall of Pengwern, the survivors sought out the departed Caranmael and prevailed upon him to return as their chief or war-leader.

95. Karanmael kymwyd ognau  
Mab kyndylan clot arllau  
Nyt ynat kyt mynnat o honau

Caranmael, persistent tormentor,  
Son of Cynddylan whom we praise,  
No leader, though thou declare thy claim.

95b. clot arllau: literally, "praise to give."

95c. ynat: see stanza 94.





97. Amser y bum bras vŷyt  
 Nyderchafun vy mordŷyt  
 Yr gŷr a gŷynei claf gornŷyt

Once I was strong as thou art,  
 [Who was] not raised up by my help,  
 The man who groans, sick of plague.

- 97b. Nyderchafun: probably ny (not) and dyrchaf (to raise, to ascend).

mordŷyt: possibly a form of porthwy: "help" or "assistance."

- 97c. Again, as in the Ffreuer stanzas, the poet is much concerned with the idea of plague. The "man who groans" in the last line is of uncertain identification; he may be Caranmael or the poet himself, or perhaps an abstract metaphor. Though in stanza 98 it would appear that the victim may be Heledd, here he is male. It is worth noting that little was known of the causes of disease at that time, and such visitations as a plague were invariably thought to be the result of fate or divine intervention. Alcock cites many references to both a "Great Plague" and a "Yellow Plague," and notes that the Welsh seem to have believed that these came in "the form either of a yellow beast or a column of vapor." See Arthur's Britain, p. 54.

98. Brodyr ambúyat inneu  
Nyscúynei gleuyt cornnúydeu  
Un eluan kyndylan deu

Brothers I had who once were with me,  
And I too would not complain in sickness,  
No more than Elphan or the great Cynddylan.

- 98b. Nyscúynei gleuyt: literally, "not it would complain courage," i.e., the speaker claims her courage is such that it will not complain—hence the third person singular verb ending.

99. Ny mat wisc briger nyw dirpir  
 O ūr yn dieuaŭr gywryssed  
 Nyt oed leuaŭr vymbroder

It is not well if the crown is not won  
 By a man in mighty battle. . .  
 They made no sound, my brothers.

- 99a. wisc briger: "headdress." I understand this to be an euphemism for "crown," chosen rather than coron or cae because of its alliterative values; as noted previously, this is common in Welsh bardic poetry.
- 99b. dieuaur: In his Canu Llywarch Hen (p. 46), Sir Ifor Williams reads this word as dirfawr (immense, great, huge). This makes much better sense than difawr (small).
- gywryssed (MW cyfryssed): "war, battle."
- 99c. Nyt oed leuaŭr (MW lefawr): literally, "[they] were not noisy," i.e., being dead, they could make no objections. The meaning is apparently that the kingship has passed to one the speaker considers unworthy, for he has not earned the crown in battle; there may be a hint here of the ancient British kingship in which the king offered his life for his people, perhaps by leading them to war. The implication would seem to be that Cynddylan and his brothers would not have allowed this to happen had they been alive.

100. Onyt rac agheu ae aeleu  
Maúr a gloes glas uereu  
Ny bydaf leuaúr inneu

Until from death and mighty suffering  
And raw pain I shall be cold,  
I too shall make no sound.

100b. uereu: probably ferru (to freeze, to perish), but possibly chwerw (bitter, sharp, severe), in which case it would serve as a second adjective modifying "pain." Cf. stanza 99.

101. Maes maodyn neus cud reú  
 O diua da y odeú  
 Ar ued eirinued eiry tew

The field of Maodyn lies under frost  
 That wastes away the cattle;  
 Grief lies upon my lord deep as the snow.

101a. cudd: "hiding, hidden, concealed."

reú (rhew): "frost" or ice."

101c. Ar ued: probably ar udd: "upon my lord," but possibly  
arwydd: "sign, portent, omen," i.e., "omens of grief  
 are thick as snow."

eirinued: I believe there has been an accidental  
 transposition of letters and that this word should be  
 read ernywed: "grief, lamentation, sadness."

102. Tom elwithan neus gúlych glaú  
 Maes maodyn y danaú  
 Dyliei gynon y gúynaú

The earth of Elwyddan is wet with rain,  
 And the field of Maodyn lies below,  
 That was the due of Cynon, fairest one.

102a. Tom: In his Canu Llywarch Hen (p. 240), Ifor Williams gives "mound" for this word, which would thus refer to the gravemound of Elwyddan. This is a fairly typical "grave stanza," even to the traditional image of the rain. In his translation and commentary on the "Stanzas of the Graves" (Proceedings of the British Academy, 1967, pp. 126, 133) Thomas Jones gives stanza 45 from the Black Book of Carmarthen:

Bet Elchwith ys gulich [y] glav  
 Maes Meuetauc y danav  
 Dyliei Kynon y kuinav

The grave of Elchwith, the rain wets it,  
 The plain of Meueddawg is beneath it,  
 Cynon had a right to bewail him.

Jones notes that in his translation he has added [y] in the first line to supply a lacking syllable, but adds that an "alternative emendation would be to read Elchwith[an]. . . . The Red Book of Hergest version, as Jones translates it, reads"

The tomb of Elwyddan, rain wets it,  
 Maes Maodyn is below it,  
 Cynon had a right to bewail him.

The identical translation of the final lines depends, of course, on the identification of kuinav with guynau.

102c. Dyliei: probably "due" or "privilege." It is possible, however, that it may be a form of the third person singular imperfect of either dal (to hold) or dyle (to destroy). In the first case, the field of Maodyn would be the burial place of Cynon, and, in the second, the place of his death.

103. Pedwar púnn broder am bu  
 Ac y bob un pennteulu  
 Ny wyr tren perchen ydu

Would that my four brothers were with me  
 And every one the leader of a warband—  
 But there is no grandson of Trenn's lord.

- 103a. Pedwar púnn broder: the first person subjunctive of bod (to be) is bawn, but in some of the irregular verbs the form is pwn, as in gwybod, which may be either gwybyddwn or gwypwn in the subjunctive; evidently this verb is in the process of change. I therefore speculate that bod, too, may once have taken the form pwn in the subjunctive, and that this is its meaning here.
- 103b. pennteulu: literally, "head of the household," which, in early Wales, meant the head of the prince's personal retinue—the equivalent of the Captain of a King's Guard today. In the time of the Court Poets, some four or five hundred years after the time of Cynddylan, the pennteulu was considered to be the first of the "Twenty-four Court Officials." He was usually a close relative of his prince; a son, a nephew, or (as in this case) a brother. According to Rachel Bromwich (Troiedd Ynys Prydein, p. 32), his perquisites included a gift of the equivalent of three pounds, given him yearly by the king, and a "horn of liquor at every feast from the queen." See also stanza 26.

104. Pedwar púnn broder am' buant  
 Ac y bop un gorúyf núyvant  
 Ny wyr tren perchen kugant

Would that my four brothers were here  
 And every one in the pride of his strength—  
 But there is no grandson of Trenn's true  
 lord.

104b. gorúyf: "pride."

núyvant (MW nwyfiant): "Strength, energy, vigor."

104c. kugant (MW ceugant): "sure, true."



105. Pedwar pŷn terwyn o adwyn  
 Vrodyr am buant o gyndrŷyn  
 Nyt oes y drenn berchen mŷyn

Would that my four fierce and gentle  
 Brothers were here, all sons of Cyndrwyn—  
 But there is no grandson of Trenn's dear  
 lord.

105a. terwyn: "fierce, brilliant, ardent."

105b. o gyndrŷyn: literally, "out of Cyndrwyn" or "from  
 Cyndrwyn."

106. Gosgo yghot adot arnat  
 Nyt úyt bylgeint gyuot  
 Neum gúant ysgúr of gúrr dy got

[Thy] warband brought thy death on thee,  
 Thou art not to wake at the dawning;  
 My song is broken for a man who will not  
 rise.

- 106a. gosgo: probably gosgor (retinue, host), but possibly osgo (attitude, bearing, having the look of) i.e., "having the look of death on thee."

yghot: possibly a form of codi (to intend or to rise)  
 Cf. line C.

adot: probably either addod (grave) or addoed (death); since it is the rhyme word, arnat (on thee) may be a later addition, or the two words may have been transposed by a scribe.

- 106c. gúant (MW gwant): a "break" or "caesura," a reference to poetic technique which increases the possibility that ysgúr (ysgwr) may mean "song" rather than its other possibilities of "stick" or "branch." It is, however, possible to translate line C: "They break by means of a stick thy garment," as dy got may be translated "thy coat" rather than cod (he rises) with the negative prefix dy- (di-).

Both stanza 106 and stanza 107 are extremely difficult and any translation at the present must rely heavily on conjecture. Both stanzas are omitted in Ifor Williams' edition of the poem in Canu Llywarch Hen. The person referred to is probably either Cynddylan or Caranmael.

107. Gosgo di yghot atech  
 Nyt úyt ymadraúd díbech  
 Nyt gúíú clein yth grein y grech

[Thy] warband could not make thee flee,  
 Thou shalt not bespeak them sinless;  
 Unworthy the clay thy body enters.

- 107a. atech: Kenneth Jackson notes a passage in The Gododdin (p. 124) in which he believes pechat (sin) has been used to replace thechat (flee), and theorizes that this substitution may mark the transition between the time when a man's greatest shame was to flee the enemy and a more standardized Christian concept of sin.

- 107b. yadraú: probably a form of yadroddi (to speak, to tell), but possibly also yma trawd (here journeying) or yad rhawd (to depart company). The last mentioned would give a translation of "Thou shalt not leave a sinless company."

- 107c. clein (cleien): "clay soil."

yth grein: the preverbal particle yth (yd) would seem to indicate that this is the third person singular of either creinio (to fall) or creiddio (to enter, to penetrate).

grech: this word is extremely obscure, but the propensity of the Red Book of Hergest scribe for confusing ch with th allows the possibility that the word may be creth (shape, form), chosen by the poet instead of corff (body) for rhyming or alliterative purposes.

## Appendix A: Additional Stanzas

In his edition of Canu Llywarch Hen, Sir Ifor Williams includes seven stanzas from sources other than the Red Book of Hergest. Though some of these stanzas are beautiful, they add little to the story other than the names of additional sisters and the mysterious figure of Llemenig, whose connection to the cycle is unclear and must, I think, be considered tenuous. The Welsh text used here is from Williams' Canu Llywarch Hen (pp. 47-48) and has been modernized. The stanza numbers are continued from the present text and do not correspond to Williams' numbering.

108. Amser i buant addfwyn  
I cerid merched Cyndrwyn  
Heledd Gwladus a Gwenndwyn

The times they were gentle  
To chasten Cyndrwyn's daughters;  
Heledd and Gwladus and Gwenndwyn.

109. Chwiorydd a'm bu diddan  
 Mi a'u colleis oll achlan  
 Freuer Medwyl a Medlan

Sisters I had who with me sang,  
 And with their loss I lost all entirely;  
 Ffreuer and Medwyl and Medlan.

110. Chwiorydd a'm bu hefyd  
 Mi a'u collais oll i gyd  
 Gwledyr Meisyr a Cheinfryd

And other sisters I had with me,  
 And with their loss I lost all in all;  
 Gwledyr and Meisyr and Cheinfryd.

111. Llas Cynddylan, llas Cynwraith  
 Yn amwyn Trenn tref diffaith  
 Gwae fi fawr aros eu llaith

Dead is Cynddylan, dead Cynwraith,  
 In holding Trenn, that wasted town;  
 What could I give to stay their deaths?

112. Gwelais ar lawr Maes Cogwy  
 Byddinawr a gawr gymwy  
 Cynddylan oedd kynnorthwy

I saw on earth the plain of Cogwy  
 And I was all one cry of pain—  
 'Cynddylan, he was mighty.'

109b. achlan; "entirely," but note also achlin: "lineage,"  
 i.e., "I lost all of my line."

110b. olli gyd: both oll and gyd mean "all" and I have  
 taken the phrase to be an idiom.

111b. Cf. stanza 82 and note.

113. Celyn a sych o du tan  
 Pan glywyf godwrf godaran  
 Llu Llemenig man [Mawan].

Holly dries black beside the fire  
 Where warriors make a merry noise—  
 the host of Llemenig son of Mawan.

114. Arbennig lleithig llurig ynghyhoedd  
 Aergi gwyth gwaithfuddig  
 Fflam daffar llachar Llemenig

Marked with blood his armor before the people  
 Battle-warrior in his triumphant fury—  
 Steadfast flame, shining Llemenig

The overall impression given by these additional stanzas is that, while they fall into several of the patterns already established within the poem, they remain subtly at variance with its general mood. The three stanzas lamenting the sisters, for example, may seem to complement those on the brothers, and surely "Sisters I had who with me sang" (109) is as finely wrought as "Brothers I had not mean of heart/Ardent they were as

- 113c. Llemenig appears in a number of early Welsh manuscripts as the name of a hero. A grave stanza in the Black Book of Carmarthen records his grave as located at Llanelwy, known in modern times as St. Asaph (Stanzas of the Graves [50], p. 127), and Geoffrey of Monmouth names a Cadur Limenic as one of the heroes who fell with Arthur in his last battle. Tatlock notes that the Liman (var. Lyfann or Lifan) is a stream in Montgomeryshire, a tributary of the Trothy which in its turn enters the Wye a little below Monmouth; he speculates that the name may be a place designation, i.e., Cadur of Liman, (The Legendary History of Britain, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950, p. 76). The name may also mean "leaping" or "eager."

- 114a. Lleithig means "seat" or "throne," and I suggest an emendation to lleddig: "bloody." Ynghyhoedd may be misplaced, as either lleithig or llurig should be the rhyme word.

the hazel spear" (84). Even so, the passage, with its standardized format and its insistence upon the naming of all names, strikes a slightly alien note, as if the poet were responding not to grief but to the demands of an audience.

In the same way, the stanzas on Cynddylan and Maes Cogwy add little, and those on Llcmenig are so completely extraneous to the poem as we have it that they may well be merely a misplaced scrap from an altogether different cycle.

The additional stanzas are well-crafted—all but the last have a perfect rhyme scheme—and all have their beauties, but ultimately they are disappointing. Where we could have hoped for verses that would clarify the poem or add even more light to its exploration of the dark corners of the spirit, we have instead no more light and some additional obscurity. The poems may be a part of the original cycle, or they may be additions by a much later hand, but in the final analysis it makes little difference. We may add them to the poem if we choose, but we will gain no new insights. We may take them away if we choose, but we will not feel their loss.

## Appendix B: The Stanzas of the Graves

In the Black Book of Carmarthen there occurs a series of seventy-three stanzas known as the Beddau Milwyr Ynys Prydain (The Graves of the Warriors of the Island of Britain) or, more simply, "The Stanzas of the Graves." These short poems record the burial places of heroes both historic and legendary. The "grave stanza" was apparently a common form in early Wales, for a number of such stanzas occur in other manuscripts as well, and the verses in the Black Book of Carmarthen may represent a collection made from various sources as a catalog and memory refresher.

Whatever their original purpose, only a few of the verses deal with personages found in the Cynddylan cycle, and of these some are peripheral. The text and translation used here is that given by Thomas Jones in his "Stanzas of the Graves," from the Proceedings of the British Academy, 1967.<sup>1</sup> The numbering is from Jones' text.

<sup>1</sup>London: Oxford University Press for the Academy, 1969. pp. 97-116.



14. Gwydi guru a choch a chein  
 A goruytaur maur minrein  
 In Llan Helet bet Owein

After things blue and red and fair,  
 And great steeds with taut necks,  
 At Llanheledd is the grave of Owein.

15. Gwydi gweli a gwaedlan  
 A gviscav seirch a meirch kann  
 Neud ew hun bet Kintilan

After wounds and field[s] of blood,  
 And wearing harness, and white steeds,  
 This is the grave of Cynddylan.

45. Bet Elchwith ys gulich glav  
 Maes meuetauc y danav  
 Dyliei Kynan yno i kiniav

The grave of Elchwith, the rain wets it,  
 The plain of Meueddawg is beneath it,  
 Cynon had a right to bewail him.

Among additional stanzas quoted by Jones from the Red Book of Hergest, two appear as stanza 101 and 102 of the Cynddylan cycle. One of these (st. 102) is obviously a variant of stanza 45, above.

## Appendix C: The Elegy for Cynddylan

The poem known as the Marwnadd Cynddylan—"Elegy for Cynddylan"—is found in the British Museum (Additional MS 14867) and in the Panton MS 14, both written at some time in the eighteenth century. Though both of these manuscripts are of late date, the poem itself is thought to have been composed in the seventh century, perhaps very shortly after Cynddylan's death.<sup>1</sup> It is sometimes attributed to a bard named Meigant<sup>2</sup> about whom little is known, though the internal evidence of the poem would seem to suggest that he was a cousin or other relative of his prince and that, as was common for bards of his time, he fought beside him in battle.

It was traditional for elegaic poetry of that time to praise the dead hero by recalling his past exploits. The bard who first composed the "Elegy for Cynddylan" chose to do so by detailing what appear to be a number of different battles and skirmishes. The first of these battles was apparently fought at the Menai, the strait

<sup>1</sup>Clancy, Earliest Welsh Poetry, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup>Jarman, "The Later Cynfeird," A Guide to Welsh Literature, p. 100.

between the island of Mon (Anglesey) and mainland Wales; another was that of Caer Llwytgoed (Fortress of the Grey Wood), which may have been the local name for Maserfield. Ceri Lewis writes: "According to a Welsh tradition of a slightly later period [than the seventh century], Cyn-ddylan fought at the Battle of Maserfield (Oswestry) in 642, in which Oswald, king of Northumbria, was killed by Penda."<sup>3</sup> If the dating of both events is correct, then this battle would have predated the destruction of Pengwern by very little time, and may even have precipitated it.

The poem also, according to Lewis, "seems to contain references to a successful raid on a district somewhere in Lichfield in Mercia."<sup>4</sup> It also includes a number of clear references to the fighting at Pengwern itself. All of these names and events are scattered throughout the poem, and the logical connections between them—if, in fact, they ever existed at all—have now been lost.

Confusing as its placenames may be, however, the "Elegy for Cynddylan" is remarkable for its vigor and spirit, for its sure-handed changes of mood and, not least, for its exact psychological detailing of the fighting man's almost mystical exaltation at the height of battle, where "each fish and beast becomes most fair/in violence " (ll. 34-35), and where his passionate love for his fellow warriors makes them all "brothers with me forever, better than pure faith " (l. 46). Though the text as we have it is obviously imperfect, the "Elegy for Cynddylan" remains a notable example of the skills the early bards brought to their art.

<sup>3</sup>Lewis, "Historical Background," p. 43.

<sup>4</sup>Lewis, p. 43.

The Welsh text used is that given by Sir Ifor Williams in his Canu Llywarch Hen (pp. 50-52), in which the original orthography has been modernized. Williams has also added some interpolations, which are indicated by brackets in both the Welsh and English texts.

. . .Dyhedd deon diechyr by. . .  
 Rhiau a Rhirid a Rhiossedd,  
 A Rhygyfarch lary lyw eirassedd,  
 Ef cwynif oni fwyf i'm derwin fedd,  
 O leas Cynddylan yn ei fawredd. 5

. . .war, fearless nobles, were it that. . .  
 Rhiau and Rhirid and Rhiosed,  
 And great-hearted Rhygyfarch, that ardent  
 chief—  
 I shall grieve till I lie in my oaken grave  
 Cynddylan dead in the pride of strength.

Mawredd gyminedd a feddyliais  
 Myned i Fenai cyn ni'm bai fais  
 Carafi a'm enneirch o dir Cemais  
 Gwerling Dogfeiling Cadelling trais 10  
 Ef cwynif oni fwyf i'm derw llednais  
 O leas Cynddylan, colled anofais.

In the height of swordbattle I thought the  
 Menai  
 Would fall to us, if skilled our warcraft;  
 My kinsman beside me, a prince of Cemais,  
 Prince of Dogfeiling, the passion of Cadell  
 in him;  
 I shall grieve till I lie in my gentle oak  
 Cynddylan dead and mighty my loss.

- line 1. The poem begins with this broken line, and the stanza is obviously incomplete.
- line 7. Myned i Fenai cy ni'm: literally, "to go into Menai before us."
- line 9. Cadell: an early ancestor of the princes of Powys.

Mawredd gyminedd i feddyliaw  
 Myned i Fenai cyn ni'm bai naw  
 Carafi a'm enneirch o Aberffraw,  
 Gwerling Dogfeiling Cadelling ffaw 15  
 Ef cwynif oni fwyf i'm derwin taw  
 O leas Cynddylan, a'i luyddaw.

In the height of swordbattle I thought the  
 Menai  
 Would fall to us as if by nature;  
 My kinsman beside me, a prince of Aberffraw,  
 Prince of Dogfeiling with the honor of  
 Cadell in him;  
 I shall grieve till I lie in my oaken  
 silence  
 Cynddylan dead, who once led our host.

Mawredd gyminedd, gwin waredog  
 Wyf colledig wen, hen hiraethawg;  
 Collais pan amwyth alaf Pennawg 20  
 Gwr dewr diachar diarbedawg  
 Cyrchai drais tra Thren, tir trahawg;  
 Ef cwynif oni fwyf yn ddaear fodawg  
 O leas Cynddylan, clod Caradawg.

In the height of swordbattle was wine of  
 healing,  
 But now I am doomed, white old griefbearer;  
 I lost in the fury the fortune of Pennawg,  
 A man bold and unyielding—dark earth is  
 on him  
 Who made mighty attack over Trenn's proud  
 land;  
 I shall grieve till I lie in abiding earth  
 Cynddylan dead, as honored as Caradawg.

line 19. hiraethawg: hiraeth (grief, regret) plus the  
 -awg ending denoting a carrier or bearer.

line 21. diarbedawg: literally, "the bearer of a dark  
 grave."

line 24. Caradawg (Caradog): this is a common name in both  
 early and medieval Welsh history; our dating of  
 the "Elegy for Cynddylan" would be much aided if  
 we knew which of the heroes of this name the poet  
 was referring to.

Mawredd gyminedd mor fu daffawd 25  
 A gafas Cynddylan cynran cyffrawd  
 Saith gant rhiallu'n ei ysbyddawd,  
 Pan fynnwys mab pyd, mor fu barawd  
 Ni ddarfu yn neithiawr, ni bu priawd;  
 Gan Dduw py amgen plwyf, py du daerawd; 30  
 Ef cwynif oni fwyf yn erwydd rawd,  
 O leas Cynddylan, clod addwyndawd.

In the height of swordbattle, great was the  
 sight—  
 Cynddylan there, the chief in attack;  
 Seven hundred champions were his host  
 In power—a reckless son he was, would he  
 had lived  
 Nor found end in the grave. . .but he was  
 not his own;  
 God made another choice; dark was his  
 burying;  
 I shall grieve till I lie in the place of  
 staves  
 Cynddylan dead, honored for gentleness.

Mawredd gyminedd, mor wyf gnotaf,  
 Pob pysg a milyn yd fydd tecaf  
 I drais a gollais, gwyr achassaf, 35  
 Rhiau a Rhirid a Rhiadaf,  
 A Rhygyfarch lary [ior] pob eithaf  
 Dyrrynt eu [p]reiddiau o ddolau Taf,  
 Caith cwynant, brefynt, grydynt alaf;  
 Ef cwynif oni fwyf yn erw penylaf 40  
 O leas Cynddylan, clod pob eithaf.

In the height of swordbattle I entered in  
 Where each fish and beast becomes most fair  
 In violence. . .but loss I had  
 Rhiau and Rhirid and Rhiadaf  
 And Rhygyfarch, all generous [lords];  
 They thrust their way out from the meadows  
 of Taff,  
 And captives lament and wail, the herd lows;  
 I shall grieve till I lie in my last span  
 of earth  
 Cynddylan dead, honored to the land's end.

line 29. neithiawr (MW neithior): "a wedding feast," hence Clancy's translation in Earliest Welsh Poetry (p. 88): "no bridal took place." In Welsh idiom, however, neithior daear means a grave or burial place.



Mawredd gyminedd mor oedd eiddun  
 Gan fy mryd pan athreiddwn Pwll ac Alun. 65  
 Irfrwyn y dan fy nhraed hyd bryd cyntun;  
 Pludde y danaf hyd ymhen fy nghlun;  
 A chyn ethwyf i yno i'm bro fy hun,  
 Nid oes un car neud adar i'w digfryn, 70  
 Ni ddigones neb o bechawd cyhafal fy hun.

In the height of swordbattle I vowed  
 In my thought, that when we have come to  
   Pwyll and Alun  
 The generous down below, then I shall think  
   to sleep  
 Feather pillows under me, within my meadow,  
 For though he has gone there to my valley  
 Was not one kinsman would refuse his return,  
 And though it falls not from God at once,  
 No one has caused more evil than I have done. .

line 70. adar means "bird," and atre (return) seems more likely here.

line 71. the poem as we have it ends with this line. The final stanza is obscure in meaning and, as it lacks the final formulation of the other stanzas, it is obviously incomplete.



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