

## WELSH TRIADS: AN OVERVIEW

**I**N 1957 I went as an affiliated student with a degree in Welsh from the then University College of Wales Aberystwyth to Girton College Cambridge to read Section B of the Anthropology and Archaeology Tripos. It was decided that instead of completing the Welsh paper of that tripos I should write an extended essay on some Welsh triads which Dr Rachel Bromwich, who was currently completing her work on the volume *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, had come across in her research. The resulting essay was an edition of two texts of triads—a text of gnomic or aphoristic triads and a text called *Y Trioedd Arbennig*.<sup>1</sup> With the hubris of youth I struggled through the Welsh manuscripts written between 1250 and 1750 in which triads were catalogued and in the process laid the foundations for a somewhat dilettante interest in triads and a somewhat less dilettante interest in manuscripts. In this paper I shall return to the essay I completed in 1959 and try to give an overall picture of the different types of triad found in Welsh concentrating on the medieval collections. I shall begin by categorising the types of Triads, and refer to the earliest manuscript copies of each genre.

Extensive series of triads can be found in most fields of medieval Welsh learning. Firstly we have triads which are associated with the professional learning of the traditional learned classes. These can be further categorised into triads recording items which are understood to be facts, and triads summarising the learning of the different professions. There are two collections which fall into the first category: the collection entitled *Y Trioedd Arbennig* (see section 1 below), ‘the principal or supreme triads’ which occurs for the first time in NLW ms Peniarth 45 dated by J. Gwenogvryn Evans to the thirteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Daniel Huws would date the manuscript a quarter of a century later and to the fourteenth.<sup>3</sup> This is a text which lists in triad form biblical and apocryphal facts, and facts relating to natural phenomena categorised from one to ten. The second collection is the Welsh triad series *par excellence*, the text known as *Trioedd Ynys Prydain* (see 2 below),<sup>4</sup> records in triad form, persons, events and traditions; most of them are associated with the early history or fiction

<sup>1</sup>The essay was Morfydd E. Owen, ‘Some Gnomic Triads in Medieval Welsh’ (Girton College Cambridge 1959) 1–123; see further M. E. Owen, ‘Trioed heftu y6 yrei hynn,’ *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* 14 (1988) 87–114; M. E. Owen, ‘Y Trioed Arbennig’, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* (henceforth *BBCS*) 24 (1972) 434–50. This article is the fruit of an invitation by Professor Fergus Kelly, who had read the Cambridge essay, to give a paper on Welsh Triads at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies’ Tionól of 2003. Much of the substance of this paper is to be found in Welsh in the 1972 and 1988 articles.

<sup>2</sup>J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *Reports on manuscripts in the Welsh language* (henceforth *RMWL*) i, part 2, Historical mss Commission London, 1898–1910, 380.

<sup>3</sup>D. Huws, *Medieval Welsh manuscripts* (henceforth *MWM*) (Aberystwyth 2000) 59.

<sup>4</sup>R. Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (henceforth *TYP*) (Cardiff 1961; 3rd ed. 2006). The third edition has been newly published in 2006. My quotations come from the earlier edition.

of Britain. The earliest manuscript copy of the series, NLW ms Peniarth 16, belongs to the second half of the thirteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

My second category consists of triads concerned with the rules and ethics of the professional classes: the lawyers, the poets and the doctors. The most important and extensive collections are those of the law-books, the *Trioedd Cyfraith* (see 3 below).<sup>6</sup> Dr Sara Elin Roberts has recently collected and edited them with translations in an Oxford D.Phil. thesis.<sup>7</sup> The earliest of these triads, some eleven of them, are to be found in the thirteenth-century manuscripts of the North Wales redactions of the law texts, known as *Llyfr Iorwerth*.<sup>8</sup> The South-Walian texts, particularly those of the Blegywryd Redaction<sup>9</sup> have long series of triads, which are related to the Welsh triads of the text of Latin Redaction D found in the thirteenth-century Bodleian Rawlinson ms 821.<sup>10</sup> The Blegywryd manuscripts fall into two classes: a class which omits the Laws of Court and where the triad texts are in one major collection at the end of the text; and a class which includes the Laws of Court where the triad texts are scattered throughout the collections. The earliest Blegywryd text, a text which omits the Laws of Court, is found in manuscripts copied about 1300 in Dinefwr.<sup>11</sup> The collections increase in number with the passage of time. The fifteenth-century basically Blegywryd law manuscript Wynnstay ms 36 has literally hundreds of triads.<sup>12</sup>

Appended to the Welsh poetic grammars, *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid*, which contain adaptations in Welsh of the Grammars of Priscianus and Donatus there are collections of *Trioedd Cerdd* (see 4 below), poetic triads (about 50 of them).<sup>13</sup> The earliest witness to these again is thought to be a fourteenth-century manuscript, NLW ms Peniarth 20.<sup>14</sup> Welsh medical texts date from the late fourteenth century onwards; they mainly consist of translations or

<sup>5</sup>*RMWL* i, part 2, p. 337; *MWM*, 58.

<sup>6</sup>Nearly all the extant legal material was published in A. Owen (ed.), *The ancient laws and institutes of Wales* (henceforth *AL*) i–ii (London 1841). There is also a single volume folio edition.

<sup>7</sup>S. E. Roberts, 'The Welsh Legal Triads' (D.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 2002).

<sup>8</sup>A. Rh. Wiliam, *Llyfr Iorwerth* (Cardiff 1961) 22–3. The earliest of the law manuscripts is BL Cotton Caligula A iii, *MWM*, 177–92.

<sup>9</sup>S. J. Williams and J. Enoch Powell (ed.), *Cyfreithiau Hywel Dda yn ôl Llyfr Blegywryd (Dull Dyfed)* (Cardiff 1942; 2nd ed. 1961).

<sup>10</sup>H. D. Emanuel, *The Latin texts of the Welsh laws* (Cardiff 1967) 294–6: *MWM*, 58.

<sup>11</sup>D. Jenkins and M. E. Owen, 'Gwilym Wasta', *National Library of Wales Journal* XXI (1980) 429–30; D. Jenkins and M. E. Owen, 'Welsh Law in Carmarthenshire', *The Carmarthenshire Antiquity* 18 (1982) 17–27.

<sup>12</sup>Dr S. E. Roberts used the collection as one of the base texts in 'Welsh Legal Triads'. See also S. E. Roberts, 'Creu Trefn o Anhrefn', *National Library of Wales Journal* 34 (2002) 207–221.

<sup>13</sup>The texts of the Grammars are to be found in G. J. Williams and E. J. Jones (ed.), *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid* (Cardiff 1960). For discussions, see especially T. Parry, 'The Welsh Metrical Treatise attributed to Einion Offeiriad' *Proceedings of the British Academy* (henceforth *PBA*) 47 (Oxford 1962) 177–95; S. Lewis, *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid* (Darlith Goffa G. J. Williams, Caerdydd 1967); R. Bromwich, 'Gwaith Einion Offeiriad a Barddoniaeth Dafydd ap Gwilym', *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* X (Dinbych 1977) 157–80; A. T. E. Matonis, 'The Welsh Bardic Grammars and the Western Grammatical Tradition' *Modern philology* 79 (1981) 121–45. The work on the poetic triads was summarised by Nesta Lloyd in N. Lloyd and M. E. Owen, *Drych yr Oesoedd Canol* (Cardiff 1986) 215–6.

<sup>14</sup>For the manuscript see *RMWL* i, 342–47; *MWM*, 30, 47, 49, 51 and throughout.

adaptations of tractates and recipes from a general tradition of European Latin literature, but the texts include some five or six triads (see 5 below). The earliest text is probably that of BL Add. ms 14312.<sup>15</sup> Finally I have discovered in NLW ms Penarth 186, p. 14 (a calendar manuscript of the end of the fifteenth century in the hand of the poet Gutun Owain) a calendrical triad:

Tri mevelia caeth sydd ac nid ydynt yn y clander, nid amgen nos  
 Basg a nos Garchavael a Sadwrn y Sulgwynn. ‘There are three  
 strict vigils and they are not in the Calendar, namely Easter night  
 and the Night of Ascension [Day] and Whit Saturday.’<sup>16</sup>

The professional classes of Wales were therefore using the form of the triad to record and memorise the learning of their crafts. The extant collections of triads in their written form do not belong to a date earlier than the thirteenth century; if the triads date from an earlier period they would seem to have occurred previously only in oral form. The fact that legal triads written in Welsh are recorded in the thirteenth-century Latin texts of the laws would seem to support this theory of oral vernacular origins.

My other class of triads belongs to the same field of wisdom literature as proverbs and gnomes, and are best described as gnomic (see 6 below) in that they are an attempt to impose a triad formula on sententious statements concerned with the properties and characteristics of human behaviour.<sup>17</sup> The earliest text occurs immediately before *Trioedd Ynys Prydain* in the fourteenth-century White Book of Rhydderch.<sup>18</sup> This series of triads has a cumulative history and from the sixteenth century the genre is often referred to as the *Trioedd Taliesin*.<sup>19</sup>

These manuscripts contain some of the White Book triads in texts known as the *Triads of Taliesin*, the sixth-century North British poet, who gained the reputation of an omniscient sage in the Welsh literary tradition.<sup>20</sup> Other collections have more specific titles, for instance the *Trioedd Serch*, the ‘Love Triads’, the earliest record of which is ironically written in a contemporary

<sup>15</sup>See M. E. Owen, ‘Llawysgrif Feddygol a anwybyddwyd’, *BBCS* 24 (1974) 48–9. For the medical literature, see M. E. Owen, ‘Meddygon Myddfai, a Preliminary Survey of Some Medical Writings in Welsh’, *Studia Celtica* (henceforth *SC*) 10/11 (1975/6) 210–233; M. E. Owen, ‘The Medical Books of Wales and the Physicians of Myddfai’, *The Carmarthen antiquary* 31 (1995) 34–43.

<sup>16</sup>*RMWL* i, part 2, p. 1013; M. E. Owen, ‘Prolegomena i Astudiaeth Lawn o Lawysgrif NLW 3026, Mostyn 88’ in I. Daniel, D. Johnson, M. E. Haycock and J. Rowland (ed.), *Cyfoeth y Testun* (Cardiff 2004) 372.

<sup>17</sup>See M. E. Owen, ‘Trioed hefut y6 yrei hynn’, *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* 10 (1986) 87–114.

<sup>18</sup>The part of the manuscript in which the text appears was known as Peniarth 12, see *RMWL* i, 325. It has now been bound with NLW Peniarth 4 and 5 to form the White Book of Rhydderch. The contents of Peniarth 12 were published by Egerton Phillimore in *Y Cymmrodor* 7 (1886) 123–154. For the White Book see *MWM*, 227–68, where it is simply called *Trioedd*.

<sup>19</sup>E.g. mss NLW Llanstephan 24, f. 98; 181, p. 2; 117, p. 16; Peniarth 66, p. 88; 136, p. 535; Wrecsam 1, p. 362; Cardiff 6, p. 150.

<sup>20</sup>See for instance, I. Williams, *Chwedl Taliesin* (Caerdydd 1957), and M. E. Haycock, ‘Rhai Agweddau ar Lyfr Taliesin’, (Ph.D. thesis, University of Wales, 1982).

hand in a spare page of the ms known as the Book of the Anchorite of Llanddewi Brefi.<sup>21</sup>

There are many other collections of triads which are cumulative in their contents from the sixteenth century. They may well be older since one of the preoccupations of the Welsh Renaissance humanists was to take an interest in the wisdom literature of the past and attempt to record it.<sup>22</sup> The first gnostic triads were published together with a text of *TYP* by William Salesbury in 1567 in his book known as *Y Diarebion Camberaec*, 'The Welsh Proverbs'.<sup>23</sup> Many of the manuscript collections were gathered with a view to publication by Moses Williams into parts II and III of NLW, ms Llanstephan 65 in 1707/8.<sup>24</sup> Williams was an amanuensis of Edward Lhuyd. Almost a century later the collections were incorporated into *The Myvyrian Archaiology* together with other triads invented by the great Glamorgan scholar and fabricator Iolo Morganwg.<sup>25</sup>

Let us turn now to the syntactical and stylistic structures of all the triads before looking at the collections in greater detail. Like much early Welsh literature most triads are characterised by a conciseness of expression and economy of words. Their basic structure is that of a nominal sentence where the main idea needs no verb to convey the sense which is expressed by the juxtaposition of predicate and subject. The predicative element is introduced by *Tri* or *Tair* and expresses some characteristic or essential of the subject which is three-fold. These head phrases may contain complicated compound words. The nominative element in the simplest triads may consist of single nouns or names, a list of three verbs or even three clauses. The pattern was often extended, as will be seen, especially in some of *Trioedd Ynys Prydain* and of the Legal Triads. The triads are often grouped in sequences dealing with similar topics or containing variations of the same formula or head word, for instance *TYP* 5 and 6: *Tri tharw catuc*; *Tri tharw unben* or in contrasting pairs as in *TYP* 32 and 33: *Tri mat gyflavan*; *Tri anvat gyflavan*. These characteristics Dr Bromwich would consider to reflect the mnemonic purpose of the triad form and to be related to oral tradition. The language of all the triads shows the use of rhetorical figures many of which can be defined in terms of classical rhetoric which reached Wales in encyclopaedic texts such as the *De Nuptiis Philologiae*

<sup>21</sup>R. G. Gruffydd, 'Cywyddau Triawdaidd Dafydd ap Gwilym: Rhai Sylwadau', *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* 13 (1985) 167–77. For the Book of the Anchorite, ms Jesus College, Oxford 119, see *MWM*, 239, and for the anchorite see I. Ll. Foster, 'The Book of the Anchorite of Llanddewibrefi', *PBA* 46 (1950) 197–226.

<sup>22</sup>See for instance William Salesbury's Introduction to *Oll Synnwyr Pen Kembero* (1547), the collection of the proverbs of the poet Gruffudd Hiraethog, which was published in G. H. Hughes (ed.), *Rhagymadroddion 1547–1659* (Cardiff 1951) 9–16. *Y Diarebion Camberaec* is a revised version of the 1547 publication with additions.

<sup>23</sup>See *TYP*, xxxix–xli. The book was published sometime between 1566 and 1568: see A. Mathias, 'Astudiaeth o Weithgarwch Llenyddol Wiliam Salesbury' (MA Thesis, University of Wales, 1949) 192–4.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.* vi–lviii; *RMWL* ii, 556–7.

<sup>25</sup>G. J. Williams, 'Hanes Cyhoeddi'r Myvyrian Archaiology', *Journal of the Welsh Bibliographical Society* 10 (1966) 1–12.

et Mercurii of Martianus Capella.<sup>26</sup> There are examples of *amplificatio* in the use of obscure abstracts and compounds in the key phrases of the triads. There is *paroemion* or alliteration and *homoiooteleuton* in which successive clauses end in like syllables. There is *climax*, otherwise known as *anabasis* or *gradatio* (namely mounting by degrees through linked words or phrases, usually of increasing weight and in parallel construction) and its opposite, *anticlimax* or *catacosmesis*. *Paradox* and *antithesis* are rife and most of the triads contain examples of *isocolon*, namely lists of phrases of approximately corresponding length and structure.<sup>27</sup>

We shall examine the genres one by one.

1. The *Trioedd Arbennig* is a highly schematical, numerical text. At least six redactions of the text survive.<sup>28</sup> *Arbennig* had in Middle Welsh amongst its meanings the meanings, ‘supreme, exceptional and sacred’. The series begins with a reference to the triad par excellence, namely the Trinity:

Teir Person: y Tat, a’r Mab a’r Ysbryt Glan. ‘The three persons:  
the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit’.

The *Trioedd Arbennig* proceed to list phenomena or people derived from the Bible, the Apocrypha, patristic sources or even simple science, namely what the Irish used to refer to as *légend* and no doubt originated from the general church-nourished literacy of medieval Europe. The second triad reads:

Y Teu Tri: y teu dyn yd hiliwyt y byt o nadunt, Ataf ac Eva; a’r  
dwy seren arbenhic, heul a lloer; a’r dwy gywarthei, nef a dayar.  
‘The Two triad: the two persons from whom the world is sprung,  
Adam and Eve; and the two chief stars: the sun and the moon, and  
the two equally balanced ones: heaven and earth’.

Numerology, such as is found in this text, is particularly characteristic of Irish learning.<sup>29</sup> Many of the phenomena listed are paralleled in Hiberno-Latin texts such as the *Liber de Numeris*,<sup>30</sup> and Charles D. Wright’s description of that text as ‘a collection of numerical motifs arranged in numerical order ... each section contains enumerations of the most miscellaneous nature imaginable: biblical, exegetical, pseudo-scientific and didactic’,<sup>31</sup> could equally well be applied to the *Trioedd Arbennig*. Numerical motifs of the same sort are to

<sup>26</sup>See T. A. M. Bishop, ‘The Corpus Martianus Capella’, *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 4 (1864–68) 257–75.

<sup>27</sup>For a convenient list of rhetorical terms see, R. A. Lanham, *A handlist of rhetorical terms* (California 1991). For rhetoric in the Middle Ages, see J. J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (California 1974) and the host of sources listed in his bibliography: J. J. Murphy, *Medieval rhetoric: a select bibliography* (Toronto 1971).

<sup>28</sup>See Owen, ‘Y Trioedd Arbennig’, 434–50. Since I published this article Mr Graham Thomas, who is preparing a catalogue of Welsh prose in manuscripts, has discovered other copies of the text and much work has been done in Hiberno-Latin.

<sup>29</sup>See for instance, C. D. Wright, *The Irish tradition in Old English literature* (Cambridge 1993) 49–52.

<sup>30</sup>R. McNally, *Liber de Numeris, eine Quellenanalyse*, Inaugural-Dissertation (Munich 1927).

<sup>31</sup>Wright, *Irish tradition in Old English literature*, 55–6.

be found in Irish texts such as *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*<sup>32</sup> and Anglo-Saxon sources such as *Byrhtnerth's Enchiridon*.<sup>33</sup> The ecclesiastical nature of the material of the Welsh series seems to have led the copyists to give it precedence over *Trioedd Ynys Prydain* in the manuscript collections. For instance the fifteenth-century manuscript NLW MS Peniarth 47, part iii, which in fact does not include a copy of the *Trioedd Arbennig*, has appended to triad 58 of the *TYP* series a note which reads: *hwt hyn y dywetpwyt y trioed arbennig a thrioed y milwyr a thrioed y gy6 raged, traethy6n bellach trioed y meirch*. 'Hitherto are found the Supreme Triads, and the Triads of the Warriors and the Triads of the Women, now we shall treat of the Triads of the Horses'.<sup>34</sup>

2. *Trioedd Ynys Prydain*, 'The Triads of the Island of Britain', is one of the earliest texts recording the early medieval traditions of Wales and North Britain, listing under the formula: *Tri . . . Ynys Prydein*, the 'Three . . . of the Island of Britain', people, both lay and religious leaders and events which were part of the traditional history of the Island of Britain. Some of the traditions recorded are based on historical fact; others appear to be fictitious. Sometimes the traditions are reliable, at other times they are confused. The phrase *Ynys Prydain* reflects the native belief in the unity of the Island of Britain which survived in Welsh tradition well into the high Middle Ages and is reflected in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth.<sup>35</sup> I have chosen my examples as typical of the *genre*. The most famous of the triads, and the one which Dr Bromwich thought probably stood originally at the head of the collection, is a fairly simple triad which contains a key phrase listing three leaders of North Britain notable for their generosity—one of the most important qualities of a patron. A clause has been added referring to the superiority of King Arthur:

Tri Hael Enys Prydein (*TYP* no. 2). 'The three Generous Men of the Island of Britain'.

Nud Hael mab Senyllt. 'Nudd the Generous, son of Senyllt'.

Mordaf Hael mab Seruan. 'Mordaf the Generous, son of Serwan'.

Ryderch Hael mab Tudwal Tutclyt. 'Rhydderch the Generous, son of Tudwal Tudglyd'.

(Ac Arthur ehun oedd haelach no'r tri.) ('And Arthur himself was more generous than the three'.)

Another feature of the series is the use of contrasting pairs of triads. One of the most famous pairs is one which reflects the importance of the *comitatus* in heroic society and refers to the faithful and unfaithful war bands of

<sup>32</sup>K. H. Jackson (ed.), *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* (Dublin 1990).

<sup>33</sup>P. S. Baker and M. Lapidge (ed.), *Byrhtnerth's Enchiridon*, Early English texts Society Supplementary Series 15 (Oxford 1995). For a comparison of the two see E. Williams 'Aislinge Meic Con Glinne and Byrhtnerth's Enchiridon', *CMCS* 48 (winter 2004) 45–75. Many of the items described had been sourced by McNally.

<sup>34</sup>*TYP*, xxix.

<sup>35</sup>B. F. Roberts, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and Welsh Historical tradition', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 20 (1976) 29–40.

early Britain: *Tri Diweir Deulu Enys Prydein* and *Tri Anyweir Deulu Enys Prydein*. The items listed in these triads have been extended by the addition of descriptive clauses:

(a) *Tri Diweir Deulu Enys Prydein* (*TYP* no. 29):

Teulu Catwallavn mab Catuan, a uuant seith mlyned y gyt ae ef yn Ywerdon; ac yn hynny o yspeit ny ouynassant dim idav, rac goruot arnadunt y adav; Ar eil Teulu Gauran mab Aedan[recte Aedan mac Gabran], a aethant y'r mor dros eu harglvyd; A thrydyd, Teulu Guendolau mab Keidav yn Arderyd, a gynhalyassant y vrwydyr pythewnos a mis wedy llad eu harglvyd. Sef oed riuedi teuluoed pob un o'r gyvr hynny, vn can wr arugeint.

Three Faithful War-Bands of the Island of Britain:

The War Band of Cadwallawn son of Cadfan who were with him seven years in Ireland; and in all that time they did not ask him for anything lest they should be compelled to leave him; and the second the War Band of Gafran son of Aeddan [*recte* Aedán mac Gabrán], who went to sea for their lord; and the third, the War Band of Gwenddolau son of Ceid(i)aw at Ar(f)derydd who continued the battle for a fortnight and a month after their lord was slain. The number of the War Band of each of those men was a hundred and twenty-one men.

(b) *Tri Anyweir Deulu Enys Prydein* (*TYP* no. 30):

Teulu Goronwy Peuyr o (Benllyn) a omedassant eu harglvyd o erbynneit y gwenwynwayw y gan Llew Llaw Gyffes yn Llech Oronwy ymblaen Kynuael. a theulu Gvrgi a Pheredur, a adavssant eu harglwyd yg Caer Greu, ac oet ymlad udunt drannoeth ac Eda Glinvawr. Ac yna y llas ell deu. a Theulu Alan Fyrgan, a ymchuelassant vy vrthav hyt nos a'e ellvng a'e weissyon Gamlan. Ac yno y llas.

Three Faithless War-Bands of the Island of Britain:

The War Band of Goronwy the Radiant of (Penllyn) who refused to receive the poisoned spear from Llew Skilful-Hand on behalf of their lord, at the stone of Goronwy at the head of the Cynfal. and the War Band of Gvrgi and Peredur who abandoned their lord at Caer Greu when they had an appointment to fight the next day with Eda Great-Knee; and there they were both slain. And the War Band of Alan Fyrgan who turned away from him by night and let him go with his servants to Camlan. And there he was slain. (The number of each of the War Bands was twenty-one hundred men).

In the first triad of the pair, the leader, Cadwallon fab Cadfan, was an early king of Gwynedd who fought against Edwin of Northumbria and was exiled to Ireland when Edwin overran Anglesey *c.* 616. Aidan mab Gafran is to be identified with Aedán mac Gabrán, king of Scottish Dalriada who ruled

c. 573–608,<sup>36</sup> and Gwenddolau fab Ceido was the patron of the poet Myrddin<sup>37</sup> and leader of one of the factions at the battle of Arfderydd (Arthuret near Longtown in Cumberland) which *Annales Cambriae* records as occurring in 583.<sup>38</sup>

In the second of the pair *Goronwy Pefr* is the probably fictitious villain of the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogion which refers to this triad.<sup>39</sup> Gwrgi and Peredur were North-British heroes whose death is recorded in the entry of *Annales Cambriae* for 580;<sup>40</sup> Eda Glinvawr, according to the Saxon genealogy preserved in the *Historia Brittonum*, chapter 61, flourished about 700.<sup>41</sup> Alan Fyrgant was a known Breton leader who supported Henry I of England at the Battle of Tinchebrai in 1106 and could not thus have taken part in the Battle of Camlan in 537.<sup>42</sup>

My final example, *Tri Gvrueichiati Enys Brydein*, is the longest triad recorded by Dr Bromwich in her collection which has been expanded to incorporate an entire story into its third item:

Tri Gvrueichiati Enys Brydein (*TYP* no. 26)

Pryderi vab Pvyll Pen Annwn, vrth voch Pendaran Dyuet y tatmeth. Ac y sef moch oedynt; y seithlydyn a duc Pvyll Pen Annwn, ac a'e rodes y Pendaran Dyuet y datmaeth. Ac y sef y lle y katwei, y Glyn Kuch yn Emlyn A sef achavs y gelwir hvnnv yn wrueichiati; kany allei neb na thvyll na threis arnav.

A'r eil Drystan ap Tallvch vrth voch March ap Meirchion, tra aeth y meichiati yn gennat ar Essyllt. Arhut a March a Chei a Betvyr a vuant ell petwar, ac ny chavsant kymint ac un banv nac o dreis, nac o dvyll nac o ledrat y ganthav.

A'r trydyd, Koll vab Kollurevy, wrth voch Dallwyr Dallben y Glyn Dallwyr yg Kerniv. Ac vn o'r moch a oed dorroc, Henwen oed y henv; a darogan oed yd hanuyde waeth ynys Brydein o'r torllwyth. Ac yna y kynullavd Arthur llu Ynys Brydein, ac yd aeth y geeisso y diua. Ac yna yd aeth hitheu yn gordodv, ac ym Penryn Havstin yg Kerniv yd aeth yn y mor, a'r gvrueichiati yn y hol. Ac y Maes Gvenith yg Went y dotwes ar wenithen a gvenynen, ac yr hynny hyt hediv y mae goreu lle gvenith a gvenyn Maes Gvenith yg Went. Ac yn Llonyon ym Phenvro y dotwes ar heiden a gvenithen. Am hynny y y diharhebir o heid Llonyon. Ac yn Riw

<sup>36</sup>*TYP*, 264.

<sup>37</sup>Myrddin is not recognised as a historical poet by all; see, for instance, A. O. Jarman, *The legend of Merlin, an inaugural lecture* (Cardiff 1960); A. O. Jarman, 'The Legend of Merlin and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy', in R. Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman and B. F. Roberts (ed.), *Arthur of the Welsh* (Cardiff 1991) 117–146. For arguments accepting his authenticity see R. Bromwich, 'Y Cynfeirdd a'r Traddodiad Cymraeg', *BBCS* XXII (1966–68) 30–36.

<sup>38</sup>*TYP*, 208.

<sup>39</sup>I. Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* (Caerdydd 1930, 2nd ed. 1951) 92, 3–6; I. Hughes, *Math uab Mathonwy pedwaredd gainc y Mabinogi*, golygiad newydd ynghyd â nodiadau testunol a geirfa lawn (Aberystwyth 2000) xxx.

<sup>40</sup>*TYP*, 491.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.* 337.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.* 270.

Gyuerthwch yn Aruon y dotwes ar geneu cath (= bleid) a chyv eryr. Ac y roet y bleid y Vergaed, ac y roet yr eryr y Vreat tywyssavc o'r Gogled, ac vynt a hanuuant waeth o nadunt. Ac yn Llanueir yn Aruon adan y Maen Du y dotwes ar geneu kath, ac y ar y Maen y bvryoed y gvruiechat yn y mor, a meibion Paluc y Mon ae magassant yr drve vduint.

A honno vu Gath Baluc. Ac a uu vn o Deir Prif Ormes Mon a uagvyt yndi. A'r eil oed Daronwy. A'r dryded Edwin vrenhin Lloegy.

Three Powerful Swineherds of the Island of Britain

Pryderi son of Pwyll, Lord of Annwfn, tending the swine of Pendaran, Dyfed his foster-father. These swine were the seven animals which Pwyll Lord of Annwfn brought, and gave them to Pendaran Dyfed his foster-father. And the place where he used to keep them was in Glyn Cuch in Emlyn. And this is why he was called a Powerful Swineherd; because no one was able either to deceive or to force him.

And the second, Drystan son of Tallwch, tending the swine of March son of Meirchyawn, while the swineherd went with a message to Essyllt. Arthur and March and Cai and Bedwyr were [there] all four, but they did not succeed in getting so much as one pigling—neither by force, nor by deception, nor by stealth.

And the third, Coll son of C(o)llfrewy, tending the swine of Dallwyr Dallben in Glyn Dallwyr in Cornwall. And one of the swine was pregnant; Henwen was her name. And it was prophesied that the Island of Britain would be worse for the womb-burden. Then Arthur assembled the army of the Island of Britain, and set out to seek to destroy her. And then she set off, about to bring forth (?) and at Penrhyn Awstin in Cornwall she entered the sea, and the Powerful Swineherd after her. And in the Wheat Field in Gwent she brought forth a grain of wheat and a bee. And therefore from that day to this the Wheat Field in Gwent is the best place for wheat and for bees. And at Llonion in Pembroke she brought forth a grain of barley and a grain of wheat. Therefore, the barley of Llonion is proverbial. At the Hill of Cyferthwch in Arfon she brought forth a (wolf-cub) and a young eagle. The wolf was given to (M)ergaed and the eagle to Breat, a prince of the North; and they were both the worse for them. And at Llanfair in Arfon under the Black Rock she brought forth a kitten and the Powerful Swineherd threw it from the Rock into the sea. And the sons of Palug fostered it on Môn to their own harm; and that was Palug's Cat and it was one of the Three Great Oppressions of Môn, nurtured therein. The second was Daronwy. And the third was Edwin, king of Lloegr.

*Pryderi vab Pwyll Pen Annwn* is the hero of the story of Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed, the First Branch of the Mabinogi.<sup>43</sup> Drystan ap Tallwch was probably originally a North-British hero who became the prototype of the Tristan of Continental Romance.<sup>44</sup> Dr Bromwich suggested that this triad which testifies

<sup>43</sup>TYP, 496–7; Williams, *Pedeir Keinc*, 157–8.

<sup>44</sup>See R. Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman and B. F. Roberts (ed.), *Arthur of the Welsh* (Cardiff 1991) 214–15.

to the importance of swine in the life and economy of the Celtic nations was untraditional and possibly a burlesque, the third item being a satire of North Wales and its produce in comparison with the produce of South Wales or a farcical response to the story of Arthur's hunt for the boar *Twrch Trwyth*, known in some form from at least the ninth century.<sup>45</sup> This ironic fabrication has drawn to it the name of two prestigious figures known in early story-telling: Pryderi and Tristan. There are other instances of humour and satire in the triads.

Dr Bromwich recognised two main medieval redactions of *Trioedd Ynys Prydain*: the early version found in NLW ms Peniarth 16, and the version of the White Book of Rhydderch and Red Book of Hergest. The Red Book text distinguishes collections of shorter series, such as *Trioedd y Meirch* (the 'Triads of the Horses') in its rubrication of the text.<sup>46</sup> *Trioedd y Meirch* occurs independently in the Black Book of Carmarthen, dated to the mid thirteenth century by Mr Daniel Huws,<sup>47</sup> and is the earliest of the manuscript copies of any series of triads.<sup>48</sup> The collections of the fifteenth century NLW ms Peniarth 47 recognise the series *Trioedd y Gwraedd* in its rubrication.<sup>49</sup> Dr Bromwich in 1961 expressed the opinion that a text of *Trioedd Ynys Prydain* was first put together in the twelfth century but that some of the individual triads were a good deal older.<sup>50</sup> Professor Eric Hamp considered the re-ordered series of the Red Book to reflect the change from a primarily oral milieu to one organised for literacy.<sup>51</sup> The picture is, I think, much more complicated than Hamp suggested. Although there is an element of truth in his theory much more work needs to be done on the evolution of the text and the origins of the triad genre before such a conclusion can be validated. The text is not a fixed one.

The contents of the collections reflect the political and literary climate of the different redactions. The most striking difference between Dr Bromwich's early version and the revised version of the Red Book is the increasingly frequent addition of a fourth clause to the triad emphasising the superiority of Arthur, which reflects the growing influence of the figure of Arthur as popularised in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Dr Bromwich pointed out that the first triad of the Peniarth 16 series reflects the struggle of the bishop of St David's to achieve archepiscopal status for his diocese.<sup>52</sup> Included in triads concerned with sixth-century characters such as Gwrgi and Peredur are allusions to the treacherous warband of the twelfth-century Breton war-leader Alan Fyrgant who, as was seen above, supported Henry I of England at the Battle of Tinchebrai; and to Gilbert Cadgyffro, one of the

<sup>45</sup> *TYP*, 49–53.

<sup>46</sup> *TYP*, 97.

<sup>47</sup> *MWM*, 47 and 58; Mr Huws is following E. D. Jones' note on the manuscript in A. O. H. Jarman (ed.), *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* (Cardiff 1982) xiii–xxiv.

<sup>48</sup> J. Gwenogvryn Evans (ed.), *The Black Book of Carmarthen* (Pwllheli 1906) 27.

<sup>49</sup> *TYP*, lxxviii–lxxix.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* xxxvi.

<sup>51</sup> E. P. Hamp, 'On the justifying of ordering in *TYP*', *SC* 16/17 (1981–2) 104–9.

<sup>52</sup> *TYP*, cxi–cxii.

twelfth-century de Clare, earls of Pembroke, who bore the name Gilbert.<sup>53</sup> The text from the fifteenth-century manuscript NLW ms Peniarth 50 reflects the preoccupation of its copyist, the monk Dafydd from Neath Abbey,<sup>54</sup> with the ecclesiastical traditions of South-East Wales, with the Grail legend and with the claims and traditions of Teilo and the diocese of Llandaff.<sup>55</sup> After the period of the first collections the series had an incremental history and the pattern was imitated centuries later by Iolo Morganwg whose fabrications were incorporated into *The Myvyrrian Archaiology of Wales* ii of 1802.<sup>56</sup>

3. The most prolific tradition of professional triads is that of the legal texts.<sup>57</sup> Triadic formation is discernible in many parts of the law texts. For instance the section of the law which contains the core of what later became criminal law, namely the law concerned with *galanas* 'killing', *lledrad* 'theft' and *tân* 'arson', is called *Tair Colofn Cyfraith* 'The Three Columns of Law'. There are examples of triple triads forming a group of nine. Triad series as such are most copious in two particular redactions of the Welsh legal texts, the Blegywryd Redaction which has traditionally been associated with South-West Wales and the name of a cleric, Blegywryd son of Einion, and the other redaction most closely related to it, a branch of the Cyfnerth redaction associated with South-East Wales found especially in three fourteenth-century manuscripts: the Bodorgan ms, BL ms Cotton Cleopatra A xiv and BL ms Harleian 4353.<sup>58</sup> The core of the texts of the Blegywryd redaction, apart from the triads, seems to derive from a Latin prototype.<sup>59</sup> The triads occur in Welsh, however, in the Latin representative of the Blegywryd tradition, Latin Redaction D, suggesting that the Latinist who composed the text either had a book of triads before him or perhaps had obtained them from a native oral milieu. The triad collections reflect the same stylistic characteristics as are to be found in *TYP*. There are runs of triads which can be linked by the same opening formulae, by similarity of matter and by the use of pairs or antonyms. In many of them there is a build-up to a climax in the third item of the triad. My first examples show a separated pair of triads which comes from the tractate on the king referring to the *sarhaed* of the king and the queen, found at the beginning of the Laws of Court and which occurs in most of the law collections:

<sup>53</sup>Ibid. 270 and 360.

<sup>54</sup>For Peniarth 50, 'Y Cwta Cyvarwyd', see *RMWL* i, 389–99, *TYP*, xxxi–xxxvi and G. J. Williams, *Traddodiad Llenyddol Morgannwg* (Caerdydd 1948) 11, 192, and C. Lloyd-Morgan, 'Darogan yr Olew Bendigaid: Chewdl o'r Bymthegfed Gant', *Llên Cymru* 14 (1981–82) 64–85.

<sup>55</sup>*TYP*, 201–212.

<sup>56</sup>R. Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydain in Welsh literature and scholarship* (Cardiff 1969).

<sup>57</sup>They are now all available in S. E. Roberts' thesis, 'The Welsh Legal Triads' which is due to be published shortly.

<sup>58</sup>For the Cyfnerth texts see 'The Gwentian Code', *AL* i, 619–796; ; A. W. Wade-Evans, *Welsh medieval law* (Oxford 1909); 'The Cyfnerth Text', in T. M. Charles-Edwards, M. E. Owen and P. Russell (ed.), *The Welsh king and his court* (Cardiff 2000) 425–33.

<sup>59</sup>Hywel D. Emanuel, 'Blegywryd and the Welsh Laws', *BBCS* 20 (1962–4) 256–60; Hywel D. Emanuel, 'The Book of Blegywryd and ms. Rawlinson 821', in D. Jenkins (ed.), *Celtic law papers: introductory to Welsh medieval law and government* (Brussels 1973) 161–71.

(a) Tri dyn a wna sarhaet y'r brenhin: y neb a torho yn nawd, a'r neb a lado y wr yn y wyd, a'r neb a rwystro y wreic. 'Three men who bring insult to the king: the one who breaks his protection and the man who kills a man in his presence and the man who hinders his wife'.

(b) O tri mod y serheir brenhines: ban torher y nawd, neu ban trawher trwy lit, neu ban tynher peth gan treis o'e llaw. 'In three ways is the queen insulted: when her protection is broken, or when she is struck in anger or when something is snatched from her hand by force'.<sup>60</sup>

My second example illustrates the rhetorical and figurative nature of some of the legal triads; the example in this case reflects the triadist's analysis of the human emotional response of a kin to the reality of a kinsman's violent death:

Tri chyffro dial yssyt: diaspedein caresseu; a gwelet elor eu car; a gwelet bed eu car heb ymdiffyn. 'There are three incitements to revenge: the screaming of female relatives; and seeing the bier of their relative; and seeing their relative's grave unatoned'.<sup>61</sup>

The third example is part of an alliterative series which comes from one of the great collections of triads found in the Blegywryd text. The sequence defines different types of theft and each triad begins with the key phrase *tri lleidyr* 'three thieves', each time followed by a different epithet:

(a) Tri lleidyr camlyryus yssyd: lleidyr ki; a lleidyr llysseu nny tyfont or dayar; a lleidyr a tyster arnaw yn gwadu lledrat onys llyssa. 'There are three thieves liable to *camlwrw*: a dog thief; a stealer of herbs that grow on the earth; and a thief who is testified against, in denying theft, unless he shall object'.

(b) Tri lleidyr dirwyus yssyd: lleidyr hyd brenhin gwedy as lladho y gwynn: a lleidyr y pallo reith idaw a lleidyr a lladho llwodyn y dyn arall yn y ty neu yn y uarth yn lletrat'. 'There are three thieves liable to a *dirwy*: one who steals the king's hart, after being killed by his dogs; a thief whose *raith* shall fail him in denying theft; and a thief who shall feloniously kill an animal belonging to another person, either in his house, or in his yard'.

(c) Tri lleidyr gwerth yssyd lleidyr y caffer dogyn vannac arnaw trwy eglwys a chytt leidyr lleidyr a groccer am letrat a lleidyr a dalher gwerth pedeir keinnawc kyureith gantaw neu lei o da marwawl yn lletrat. 'There are three thieves liable to be sold: a thief against whom an information has been made through the church; a fellow thief to one who is hanged for theft; and a thief upon whom shall be found, of stolen dead property, what is worth four legal pence, or less'.

(d) Tri lleidyr crogadwy yssyd: lleidyr da bywawl a dalher vn llwdynn ar y liw gantaw; a lleidyr da marwawl a dalher gwerth pedeir keinnawc kyureith y gantaw neu a uo mwy ; a lleidyr da bywawl a dalher croen

<sup>60</sup>Based on *WKC*, 438, §§ 3.1 and 5.

<sup>61</sup>*AL* i, 442–3.

ar y liw gantaw ac ny diheurer am y llwdyn o gwbyl. ‘There are three thieves liable to be hanged: a stealer of live property, in whose possession shall be found one animal, upon accusation; a stealer of dead property, in whose possession shall be found the worth of four legal pence, or more; and a stealer of live property, in whose possession shall be found a skin, upon accusation, and is not exculpated as to the animal altogether.’<sup>62</sup>

The series is notable for its alliterative, tongue-twisting form, again I should think a sign of rhetoric and orality.<sup>63</sup> The gravity of the theft described intensifies as the series progresses. My third example is representative of the later collections in that it deals with the administration of the law and procedure, which are favourite topics in fifteenth-century runs of triads. Many of these later triads are very long, with some of the items in them extending into minor legal treatises. Rhetorical devices such as alliteration and compound words are common. I restrict myself to quoting a short representative of the genre which defines the types of law courts both lay and ecclesiastical available in late medieval Wales:

Teir gorsed gyfreithawl yssyd; gorsedd arglwyd; gorsedd abbat:  
ar teir hynny a dylyant gwrogaeth gwyr, ac ny dyly gwr yn yr  
un o honunt gwneuthur yawn namyn yn y orsedd e hun; ony bei  
damwenaw y wr yr escob neu wr yr abat yn un or dwy ereill, neu  
un or dwy ereill yggorsedd yr abat, pop un or rei hynny gwnaet yn  
y lle y gwnel y cam. ‘There are three lawful sessions: the session  
of a lord; the session of a bishop; and the session of an abbot; and  
to these three homage is due, and the man of no one of them is to  
do right but in his own session; unless a man of the bishop’s, or a  
man of the abbot’s, in either of the other two, or either of the other  
two in the session of the abbot, let every one of those do right in  
the place he does the wrong’.<sup>64</sup>

The productiveness of triads on procedure in the later law texts stems probably from the hybrid nature of the legal state of Wales after the Edwardian Conquest of 1282, where English, Welsh and ecclesiastical law existed side by side and where difference of procedure would be a distinguishing mark between different legal systems. Triads are however not the only numerical devices found in the law texts. There are items such as *y naw cyniweddi deithiog* ‘the nine legal unions’;<sup>65</sup> *saiith esgobdy Dyfed* ‘the seven bishop-houses of

<sup>62</sup>Ibid. 446.

<sup>63</sup>I argued this many years ago in my chapter ‘Y Cyfreithiau: Ansawdd y Rhyddiaith’ in Geraint Bowen (ed.), *Y Traddodiad rhyddiaith yn yr oesau canol* (Llandysul 1974) 220–244.

<sup>64</sup>*AL* ii, 332.

<sup>65</sup>T. M. Charles-Edwards, ‘Naw Kynwedi Teithiauc’, in D. Jenkins and M. E. Owen (ed.), *The Welsh law of women* (Cardiff 1980) 23–39.

Dyfed’;<sup>66</sup> *wyth pynfarch brenin* ‘the eight packhorses of a king’;<sup>67</sup> *naw tafodiog* ‘the nine tongued-ones’;<sup>68</sup> and *pedwar swyddog ar hugain llys y brenin* ‘the twenty-four officers of the king’s court’.<sup>69</sup>

4. The last fairly extensive series of professional triads is that of the triads of the poetic grammars. I quote my examples from the *Trioedd Cerdd*, ‘Poetic Triads’, of the Red Book of Hergest Grammar (c. 1400).<sup>70</sup> These are in part concerned with rules of grammar and prosody:

- (a) Tri bei kyffredin yssyd ar gerd: torr messur, a drycystyr, a cham ymadrawd. ‘There are three common faults in a poem: broken measure, and evil meaning, and false syntax’.
- (b) Tri cham ymadrawd yssyd: vníc a lluosawc, gwryf a benw, gwyd ac absen. ‘There are three examples of false syntax: singular with plural, masculine with feminine, present and absent’.
- (c) Teir sillaf dipton yssyd mew’n kerd: dipton dalgron, a dipton ledyf, a dipton wib. ‘There are three diphthong syllables in a poem: a *talgron* diphthong and a *lleddf* diphthong and a *gwib* diphthong’.

but they are chiefly concerned with what might be called the ethics of the poetic profession, defining different grades of poets: *cerddwr*, *clerwr* and *teuluwr*, and forbidding practices such as begging and satirizing. The series is marked by the same stylistic devices as are the other series: anticlimax, contrasting pairs and runs of triads beginning with the same keywords:

- (d) Tri ryw gerdwr yssyd: clerwr (< *clericus vagans*); teuluwr a phrydyd. ‘There are three kinds of minstrel: a *jongleur*, a household poet and a poetic craftsman’.
- (e) Tri pheth a berthynant ar glerwr: ymbil, a goganu, a gwarthrudaw. ‘Three things pertain to a *jongleur*: begging, and satirizing and shaming’.
- (f) Tri pheth a berthynant ar deuluwr: kyuanhedu a haelyoni ac eruyn da yn deulueid heb rwy ymbil amdanaw. ‘Three things pertain to a household poet: to live in company, and noble generosity, to ask for goods from a household without having to beg overly for them’.
- (g) Tri pheth a berthynant ar brydyd: clotuori a digryfhau, a gwrthneu gogangerd. ‘Three things pertain to a *prydydd*: encomium and entertaining and rejecting satire’.
- (h) Tri pheth a dyly prydyd eu gochel: llynna a gwrageda a chlerwryaeth. ‘Three things that a *prydydd* should avoid: drinking and womanising and the ways of the *jongleurs*’.
- (i) Tri pheth a gadarnhaa kerd: dyfynder ystyr ac amylder Kymraec, ac odidawc dechymic. ‘Three things which strengthen a poem: depth of meaning and abundance of Welsh and a splendid imagination’.

<sup>66</sup>T. M. Charles-Edwards, ‘The seven bishop-houses of Dyfed’, *BBCS* 24 (1971) 247–62.

<sup>67</sup>See for instance *AL* i, 486.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.* 108.

<sup>69</sup>See *WKC*, 15–28.

<sup>70</sup>G. J. Williams and E. J. Jones, *Gramadegau’r Penceirddiaid* (Caerdydd 1934) 16–18.

- (j) Tri pheth a wanhaa kerd: sathredic dechymic, a basder synnwyr, ac eisseu Kymraec. ‘Three things which weaken a poem, hackneyed inventiveness and shallowness/baseness of meaning and lack of Welsh’.
- (k) Tri pheth a hoffa kerd: datkanyat eglur, a chywreint wneuthuryat, ac awdurdawt y prydyd. ‘Three things which embellish a poem: clear recital and careful structure and the authority of the poet’.
- (l) Tri pheth a anhoffa kerd: llesc datkanyat, a sathredic dychymic ac anurdas y prydyd. ‘Three things which detract from a poem: languid recital and hackneyed imagination and lack of dignity in the poet’.
- (m) Tri pheth a anrydeda kerdawr: gwisic ac awdurdawt, ac ehofynder. ‘Three things which honour a minstrel: dress and authority and boldness’.
- (n) Tri pheth a beir karyat a channawl y gerdawr: haelyoni a digrifwch a chlotuori dynyon da. ‘Three things which bring love and praise to a minstrel: generosity and entertainment and praise of good men’.
- (o) Tri pheth a beir kassau kerdawr: kebydyath a dyfyrlllytrwyd a goganu dynyon da. ‘Three things which cause a minstrel to be hated: miserliness and drippiness and the satire of good men’.

The series varies in content from text to text and to a certain extent reflects the interests of the redactors of a particular text. If there is an emphasis on diphthongs in a particular grammar the triads deal with diphthongs. That is, the triadists are summarising the contents of the grammars in an easy mnemonic form. Many of the qualities expected of a poet, or faults condemned in their work, are also paralleled in the *Artes Poeticae* or Grammars of the period.<sup>71</sup>

5. My last examples of the triads used for professional learning reflect the work of one other professional class, namely doctors, who according to a tradition which associates the beginning of Welsh medical literature with the physicians of Rhys Gryg, prince of Dinefwr († 1234), were using Welsh translations of European texts by the thirteenth century.<sup>72</sup> The earliest copy of a medical text is probably that of ms BL 14912, which belongs to the last years of the fourteenth century.<sup>73</sup> Embedded in these medical texts we have some half a dozen triads. They again preserve the same rhetorical patterns such as abstract and compound headwords and they are recorded in contrasting pairs. I quote my examples from the text found in the Red Book of Hergest.<sup>74</sup>

There are myriads of other copies of the triads in the manuscripts from the time of the earliest manuscript; I refer to some of the manuscript copies in my footnotes. Some triads offer simple anatomical observations:

<sup>71</sup>See for instance Ernest Gallo’s discussions of Geoffrey de Vinsauf, and Robert O. Payne’s discussion of Chaucer, in J. J. Murphy (ed.), *Medieval eloquence* (California 1978) 68–84 and 270–287. For a general overview of Welsh poetic ethics, see C. W. Lewis, ‘Poetry and Crisis in the Bardic Tradition’ in A. O. H. Jarman and G. Rh. Hughes (ed.), *The guide to Welsh literature* ii (Swansea 1979) 88–111.

<sup>72</sup>M. E. Owen, ‘Meddygon Myddfai, a Preliminary Survey of Some Medical Writings in Welsh’, 213–21, for the traditions which associate the medical writings with the Physicians of Myddfai of the early thirteenth century.

<sup>73</sup>See M. E. Owen, ‘Llawysgrif Feddygol a anwybyddwyd’, 48–9.

<sup>74</sup>See P. Diverres, *Le Plus ancien Texte des Medygon Mydveu* (Paris 1913) 122, 20, 48.

- (a) Tri thew anesor: auu ac aren a challon: a llyna yr achaws y gelwir wynt uelly. Dilis yw y lle y kerdo clwyf ar un o'r tri, na ellir gwaret udunt namyn marw yn ehegyr. 'The three thick things: liver and kidney and heart: and this is why they are so called. It is indisputable that wherever a hurt affects any one of them, it cannot be got rid of, but they will die straightaway'.
- (b) Tri theneu anescor ynt: pilyonen yr emennyd a glas golud a chwysigen; achaws o'r un achaws y maent anescor a'r rei ereill. 'Three thin indispensables: the membrane of the brain and the small intestine and the urethra: since they are indispensable for the same reason as the others'.<sup>75</sup>

Some refer to remedy and the difficulties of diagnosis:

- (c) Mae teir hirnych gweli: kymal glin, a mwydon assen ac ysgeueint, kanys gwedy macko crown yn vn o'r rei hynny, dilis yw na wyr medic pa bryt y gallo gwaret idaw yny gwelo yn iach. 'There are three longlasting wounds: the joint of the knee and the soft flesh between the rib and the lung. for as soon as pus festers in one of those, it is certain that no doctor knows when he can get rid of it so that he sees it healed'.<sup>76</sup>
- (d) Goreu tri llyn y torri gwres: llynn aualeu, a meid geuyr, a dwfyr ffyn-nawn. 'The best three drinks to reduce a temperature: juice of apples and the whey of goats' milk and spring water'.
- (e) Tri chyualorn medic ynt: Brath ysgyueint, a brath ammwyydon bron, a phen glin. 'Three things which can mislead a doctor are: the stab of a lung, the stab from the soft part of the breast and a knee'.<sup>77</sup>

By the late fifteenth century the scribes seem to have recognised the medical triads as forming a genre and group them in series. The poet Gutun Owain included them in his colourful calendar manuscript *Mostyn* 88.<sup>78</sup>

6. Let us now turn to the aphoristic and gnostic triads. These are of a type far more comparable with the Triads of Ireland.<sup>79</sup> The earliest collection of twenty-nine is to be found in the *White Book of Rhydderch*, a manuscript written probably by a copyist from *Strata Florida* for Rhydderch ap Ieuan Llwyd, who was a patron of the poet Dafydd ap Gwilym.<sup>80</sup> Incorporated in the text is

<sup>75</sup>Copies are to be found in mss BL 14912, f. 64v, Cardiff, Havod 16, 96; NLW, Cwrt Mawr 124, f. 17; Llanstephan 10, 19; NLW 872, 463; 5269, f. 45; 22362, f. 28v; NLW Peniarth 204, 236–7.

<sup>76</sup>See for example the following mss: BL14912, f. 63v, BL14979, f. 42; Cardiff, Havod 16, 96; NLW: Cwrt Mawr 116, f. 82v, Cwrt Mawr 124, f. 17v; Llanstephan 117, 277; Peniarth 47 ii 14, Peniarth 172, 223, Peniarth 216, 76, Peniarth 267, 265.

<sup>77</sup>Cf. for example ms Cardiff 58, 10, and ms NLW *Mostyn* 56, 61 for a variant version, *Tri Chyfeilorn meddyg*.

<sup>78</sup>M. E. Owen, 'Prolegomena i astudiaeth lawn o Lsgr. NLW 3026, *Mostyn* 88 a'i harwyddocâd', in Iestyn Daniel, Marged Haycock, Dafydd Johnston and Jenny Rowland (ed.), *Cyfoeth y Testun* (Caerdydd 2004) 366. See also M. E. Owen, 'Meddygon Myddfai, a Preliminary Survey of some Medical writings in Medieval Welsh'.

<sup>79</sup>For an analysis of the Irish text see now F. Kelly, 'Thinking in threes: the triad in early Irish literature', *PBA* 125 (2003 lectures) 1–18.

<sup>80</sup>For the *White Book of Rhydderch*, see 'Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch', *MWM*, 227–68.

a list of *dewisau* ‘chosen things’ and a list of *casbethau* ‘hated things’.<sup>81</sup> Lists such as these are paralleled in texts attributed to the authorship of well-known poets some of which have been published in a volume called *Yr Areithiau Pros*, ‘The Prose Rhetorics’.<sup>82</sup> The triads of the text often begin with a paradox, such as *Tri rhyfel mewn heddwch* ‘Three wars in peace’, or *Tri charelyn dyn* ‘The three dear enemies of a man’. They are generally ironic or sceptical in tone: *Tri chyffredin byt: gwreic a chlawr tawlbwrdd a thelyn* ‘The three common things of the world: a woman and a taplys board and a harp’.

Runs of triads begin with variations of the same key phrase, such as triads (m)–(o) below. They are recorded in pairs concerned with the same subject, for instance one pair, (i) and (j), deals with things ‘it is right to do’, (e) and (f) form a pair of antonyms: ‘Three easy journeys; three difficult journeys’. There is also a certain amount of repetition within the series; triads occur in which the only difference is in the opening formula such as in triads (g) and (l).

The *trioedd* which deal with classes of people such as poets and priests, and social and economic phenomena, such as legal cases, agriculture and markets and with the concepts of *dedwyddwch* and *direidi*, the predestined states of good fortune and bad fortune into which man is born, throw light on the ethos of medieval Welsh society. I list a sample of them:

- (a) *Teir vnbengerd yw: prydu a chanu telyn a chywarwydyt.* ‘The three chief arts: poetry and harp playing and traditional lore’.
- (b) *Tri pheth a gynneil hir direidi ar dyn: drycyoni a drycannyan a glythineb.* ‘Three things that long bad fortune engenders in a man: wickedness and a wicked nature and gluttony’.
- (c) *Teir bendith ny adant dyn y newyn nac y noethi, os keif: bendith y beriglaur,<sup>83</sup> a bendith y arglwyd priodawr a bendith kerdawr o lin gerd.* ‘Three blessings which do not leave a man hungry or naked if he obtain them: the blessing of his mass priest, the blessing of his rightful lord and the blessing of a minstrel of a poetic line’.
- (d) *Tri fynnyan gwr: eredic tref y dat, ac ardadlu y dadyl yn da. a dwyn y vab ar voned.* ‘Three prosperities of a man: to plough his patrimony and to plead his cause well and to bring up his son in nobility’.

<sup>81</sup> See M. E. Owen, ‘Trioedd heftuf y6 yrei hynn,’ *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* 14 (1988) 87–114.

<sup>82</sup> D. Gwenallt Jones in *Yr Areithiau Pros* (Caerdydd 1934) 49–66.

<sup>83</sup> Various derivations seem to have been suggested for this word *periglaur* which is obsolete in modern Welsh. Its form suggests that it derives from the Latin *periculum* ‘danger’ with a personal suffix equivalent to the Latin suffix *-arius* meaning something like ‘the one who deals with danger’ to be associated with the *periculum* of sin as reflected in the *oratio periculosa* of the mass. Whitely Stokes in *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* ii, 252, suggested the meaning was: ‘the priest who reads the *oratio periculosa* of the mass’. This conclusion differs however from that of Dr Huw Pryce (‘Duw yn lle Mach: Briduw yng Nghyfraith Hywel’ in T. Charles-Edwards et al., *Lawyers and laymen* (Cardiff 1986) 68–9, n. 82 and 3) who, following Huw Williams, *Christianity in early Britain* (Oxford 1912) 433, would derive the word from such as *paroch(l)arius*. The Welsh examples of the word cited by Pryce suggest that the *periglor* served mass and took confession, that is he administered the sacraments which saved the individual soul from the dangers of sin. See further M. E. Owen, ‘Some Welsh Words: the language of Christianity in early Wales’ in M. Richter (ed.), *The language of religion* (in the press).

- (e) Tri rwyd hynt: efferen a chinio a chedymdeith da. ‘Three things which facilitate a journey: mass and dinner and a good companion’.
- (f) Tri afrwyd hynt: diasbat a dryckin ac ymlit. ‘Three impediments of a journey: a shriek and bad weather and pursuit’.
- (g) Tri ryuel yn hedwch: dryctir a drycvreic a drycarglwyd. ‘Three wars in peace: bad land and a bad wife and a bad lord’.
- (h) Tri ymborth gwr: hela a chyfnwit ac eredic. ‘Three sustenances of man: hunting and commerce and ploughing’.
- (i) Tri dyn y mae iawn bot yn da wrthunt: gwedw ac alltut ac ymduat. ‘Three persons to whom it is right to be good: a widower and a foreigner and an orphan’.
- (j) Tri dyn y mae iawn rodi bwyt vdunt: ymdeithic a golochwydwr a llaurwr. ‘Three persons to whom it is right to give food: a traveller and a hermit and a labourer’.
- (k) Tri pheth y ardyrchauel gwr: gwreic duhun diweir ac arglwyd diwyt kadarn a diffeis hedwch. ‘Three things which exalt a man: a chaste vigilant wife and a strong diligent lord and undisturbed peace’.
- (l) Tri pheth a darestwg gwr: dryctir a drycvreic a drycarglwyd. ‘Three things which debase a man: bad land and a bad wife and a bad lord’.
- (m) Tri aghyuartal byt: berthawc a charu ac angheu. ‘The three unequal things of the world: wealth and love and death’.
- (n) Tri glwth byt: mor ac arglwyd a dinas. ‘The three greedy ones of the world: the sea and a lord and a city’.
- (o) Tri chyffredin byt: gwreic a clawr tawlbwrdd a thelyn. ‘The three common things of the world: a woman and a taplys board and a harp’.
- (p) Tri pheth ny ellir bot hebdunt er meint a wnelont o drwc: tan a dwfyr ac arglwyd. ‘Three things which cannot be dispensed with however much evil they wreak: fire and water and a lord’.

These are predominantly cynical in tone. Some of them are almost identical with the Triads found in Kuno Meyer’s collection of Irish Triads.<sup>84</sup> For instance item (l) of the list (*Tri pheth a darestwg gwr: dryctir a drycvreic a drycarglwyd*. ‘Three things which debase a man: bad land and a bad wife and a bad lord’) can be compared with Meyer’s number 72: *Tri dotcaid threbairi: tarcud do drochmnaí, fognam do drochflaith, cóemchlód fri drochferann*. ‘The three unfortunate things for a householder: proposing to an evil woman, serving an evil lord, exchanging for a bad land’.

Proverbial texts which deal with the same topics and concepts are other literary relatives of these triads.<sup>85</sup> Proverbial texts in Welsh can take the form

<sup>84</sup>K. Meyer, *The triads of Ireland*, Royal Irish Academy Todd Lecture Series 13 (Dublin 1910, repr. 1937).

<sup>85</sup>K. H. Jackson, *Early Welsh gnomic poems* (Cardiff 1933), Introduction, and K. H. Jackson, *Early Celtic nature poetry* (Cambridge 1935), chapter 3. An important more recent study is to be found in J. Rowland, *Early Welsh saga poetry* (Cambridge 1990), especially pp. 26–31 and 279–281 and throughout.

of proverb lists<sup>86</sup> or can appear incorporated into poetic texts. Jackson described the gnomes of the poetry as the expression of a desire for classification or a study in crude psychology, and the same can be said of the triads. The most striking thing about the gnomic triads' general tone is their scepticism and cynicism, a worldly wiseness which is much more evident in them than in the gnomes of the poetry. There are some half dozen medieval manuscripts which contain selections of the gnomic triads.<sup>87</sup> Nearly all the series have a cumulative history. The early small nuclear collections found in thirteenth-century manuscripts snowball into very long series by the eighteenth century. In the sixteenth century triads proliferate in the manuscripts and the new collections are often known as *Trioedd Taliesin* 'The Triads of Taliesin', but we have greater specialisation in the genre. There are for instance series of *Trioedd Serch* or 'Love Triads'. The earliest of these are recorded as marginalia in a hand contemporary with the main hand in Oxford ms Jesus 119 which is generally known as the Book of the Anchorite of Llanddewi Brefi. This manuscript was produced in the same area of Wales as the White Book of Rhydderch at about the same time and the same scribe copied part of that manuscript.<sup>88</sup> My example is quoted from a later version of the text.

(a) Gwir a ddoedasai yr henwr mai tri amorth serch sydd: costog tom llafarddrwg, a dôr drom wchiedig, a gwrach glwyfus ymgeingar. 'Truly did the old man say that there are three hindrances to love: a noisy male mastiff and a heavy squeaking door and a complaining painful old woman'.

(b) Tri rhwydd-deb serchog: noswaith dywyll, tylwyth cysgadur a dôr dawedog. 'Three things which facilitate a lover: a dark night, a sleeping family and a silent door'.

(c) Tri afrwydd-deb serchog: noswaith fyr (sic) lawog a gwrach anhunog a chi tom llafarog. 'Three hindrances for a lover: a short rainy night and a wakeful old woman and a noisy male dog'.<sup>89</sup>

Other sceptically humorous and satirical series proliferate from the sixteenth century onward. Many of these series formed the basis of the collections in the *Myvyrian Archaiology*.<sup>90</sup> Amongst the collections there are triads to misers, called variously *Trioedd y Cybydd* and *Trioedd Mab y Crinwas*:<sup>91</sup> *Tri pheth*

<sup>86</sup>For a recent discussion of proverbs, see R. G. Roberts, 'Golygiad o Dri Fersiwn o Fadwaith Hen Gyrys o Iâl', Ph.D. thesis, University of Wales, 2005.

<sup>87</sup>The medieval manuscripts are S XIV, NLW Peniarth 4 and 5 (the White Book of Rhydderch) f. 125v; c. 1400 Oxford Jesus College 111 (the Red Book of Hergest), col. 598; S XV: NLW 5367 (Y Casgliad Brith) f. 46r-v; NLW Peniarth 47, pp. 26-30; Peniarth 50 (Y Cwta Cyvarwyd), p. 209, NLW Llanstephan 27, f. VIv.

<sup>88</sup>*MWM*, 239.

<sup>89</sup>Quoted in R. G. Gruffydd, 'Cywyddau Triawdaidd Dafydd ap Gwilym: Rhai Sylwadau', *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* XIII (1985) 167-77, at 172, from D. Gwenallt Jones, *Yr Areithiau Pros* (Caerdydd 1934) 33. H. Meirion Edwards, 'Y Trioedd Serch', *Dwned I* (Hydref 1995) 25-40.

<sup>90</sup>See for instance Owen Jones, Edward Williams and William Owen Pughe, *The Myvyrian archaiology of Wales* iii (London 1807) 200-280.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.* p. 246.

*ni wyddys ba le y maent; cydwybod anudonwr, diweirdeb merch tavernwr, a gonestrwydd mab y crinwas.* ‘Three things it is not known where they are: the conscience of a perjurer, the chastity of a tavernkeeper’s daughter, and the honesty of a son of a miser’.

There are triads both satirising women and praising them<sup>92</sup> and treating the qualities of different nationalities such as *Trioedd y Sais* ‘The Triads of the Englishman’<sup>93</sup> and a host of *Trioedd Doethineb* ‘Wisdom Triads’. The nuclei of the Myvyrian collections are to be found in sixteenth century manuscripts.<sup>94</sup> This proliferation of the genres is partly due to greater copying and survival but also to the fact that vernacular aphoristic texts, partly perhaps the result of the influence of humanists like Erasmus, were regarded by the Welsh Renaissance scholars as retaining the wisdom of the ages. Humanists such as Wiliam Salesbury copied into manuscripts NLW Peniarth 77 and Cwrt Mawr 3 *Trioedd Serch* and more general triads. He also published a text of our general triads and *Trioedd Ynys Prydain* in his collection *Y Diarebion Camberaec* in 1567. The impetus continued. The late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the great collections of all the triad genres being put together, most notably the collection preserved in NLW Llanstephan 65 written by Moses Williams, an amanuensis of Edward Lhuyd, and which he proposed to publish. Many of these triads were adopted by Iolo Morganwg, and were eventually published with Ioloistic embellishment in the *Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales*.

Here then is a whistle stop drive through the collections. How were the triads used and who devised them? The triads were certainly used by the poets, lawyers and doctors. Some of these poetic and prose usages testify to the existence of triads as part of the stock-in-trade of those classes. Citations of triads are often earlier than any manuscript copy of series of triads and therefore are evidence for the triad’s early existence. There is one in the Gododdin poem whose nucleus, it is argued, derived from the sixth century: *Trydydd engiriawl, Erlyniad gawr.* ‘One of the three Violent Ones, Pursuer in the Onslaught’.<sup>95</sup>

Another famous literary example is the reference to Branwen in the second branch of the Mabinogi as *Trydyd Prif Rieni*, ‘one of the three great progenitors or progeny of the Island of Britain’.<sup>96</sup> More recent references are to be found to *Trioedd Ynys Prydain* in the formal court poetry of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries which is propagandist, political and profound.<sup>97</sup> Llywarch ap Llywelyn, Prydydd y Moch, a poet who sang at the turn of the twelfth and

<sup>92</sup>Jones et al, *Myvyrian archaiology*, 276–78.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid. 253.

<sup>94</sup>For instance ms BL 31055 in the hand of the sixteenth-century lexicographer Sir Thomas Wiliems has a copy of *Trioedd y Cybydd*; ms Cardiff 2.5, pp. 73–4 has a copy of *Trioedd Mab y Crinwas*.

<sup>95</sup>For this version in modern Welsh orthography together with translation see A. O. H. Jarman, *Aneirin: Y Gododdin* (Llandysul 1988) 66–7.

<sup>96</sup>Williams, *Pedeir Keinc*, 31. For a further treatment of triads in the Mabinogion, see I. Hughes, *Math uab Mathonwy* (Aberystwyth 2000) xxx–xxxi. S. M. Davies, *The Mabinogion* (Oxford 2007) 23, translates ‘maidens’, taking *rhieni* as plural of *rhiain*, OIr. *rīgain*; in which case perhaps a better translation would be ‘queens or princesses’.

<sup>97</sup>See R. Bromwich, ‘Cyfeiriadau Traddodiadol a Chwedlonol y Gogynfeirdd’ in M. E. Owen and B. F. Roberts (ed.), *Beirdd a Thywysogion* (Caerdydd 1996) 202–18.

thirteenth centuries, like others uses the *Tri Hael* triad when addressing his patron: *Gwell wyt, un edmyg treisys, no'r Tri—Mordaf, Nud, Rhydderch—yn neddf rodidi*. ‘You, the much praised one, are better than the three generous ones—Mordaf, Nudd, Rhydderch—in the law of giving’.<sup>98</sup>

That the use made by the lawyers of the triad form to convey complex ideas created a corpus of complicated material is obvious. We can see in their work the triadist’s mind at its most sophisticated. Meinir Harris in her splendid thesis dealt with the complexities of the different versions of the triad *Tri dygyngoll cenedl* ‘The three dire losses of a kin’, showing how the triad was consistently reworked by the compilers of the law books.<sup>99</sup> As in the poetry we have implied references to triads within the tractates of the law texts. A triad, ‘The three indispensables of the king’, occurs in the Laws of Court: *Tri anhepgor brenin ynt: y offeirat y ganu y offeren ac y vendigaw y vwyt ae lynn; ae vrawdwr llys y varnu brodyeu ac yrodi kyghoreu; ae teulu vrth wneuthur negesseu y brenhin*. ‘The three indispensables of a king: his priest to sing mass and to bless his food and drink; and his court judge to decide cases and to give counsel; and his household troop to execute his commands’.<sup>100</sup>

In another place in the texts the triad is not cited in full but the court justice is referred to as one of the three indispensables of the king: *Trydyd dyn anhepgor brenhin yw yr ygnat llys*. ‘The court justice is one of the three indispensables of the king’.<sup>101</sup>

We have one piece of external evidence for the use of a legal triad in an actual court case. In a case of 1507 held at the commote court of Is-Cennen at Llanddarog in Carmarthenshire a triad is cited similar to that found in one of the late Blegywryd texts.<sup>102</sup> Many years ago I suggested that triads like proverbs were used as part of the legal rhetoric to make speeches memorable, and the Is-Cennen reference seems to confirm that. In at least one law text we can see the triadist at work. NLW ms Peniarth 164 is an anomaly among Welsh law manuscripts, in that it is the only manuscript written in anglicana. About 65% of its contents consists of triads, about 35% of rules on procedure. In this text the triadist adapts known triads from other law texts and devises new ones on the basis of non-triadic material. Largely illegible because of gall, we know, however, the full nature of its contents from later copies. One series of triads deals with the relative position of the chief rulers of Wales.

[T]ri mechdeyrn dyledoc a ddyly gwladychu Cymru oll dan y therfynau brenin Aberffraw arglwyd Dinefwr a hwnn Mathrafal. ‘The three rightful

<sup>98</sup>E. M. Jones (ed.), *Gwaith Llywarch ap Llywelyn ‘Prydydd y Moch’*. *Cyfres Beirdd y Tywysogion v* (Cardiff 1991) 27, lines 29–30.

<sup>99</sup>M. E. Harris, ‘Galanas a Sarhaed Yng Nghyfraith Hywel’ (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wales, 2003) 323–338; see further S. E. Roberts, ‘Tri Dygyngoll Cenedl; the Development of a Triad’, *SC* 37 (2003) 163–82.

<sup>100</sup>*AL* i, 436–7.

<sup>101</sup>*WKC*, 450 § 12.12.

<sup>102</sup>This case was discovered by Professor Beverley J. Smith many years ago in Public Records Office Just 1.1156, 6. For a discussion of this document see D. Jenkins and M. E. Owen, ‘Welsh Law in Carmarthenshire’, 24–5 and notes 47–9.

overlords who should rule all Wales in its bounds: the king of Aberffraw, the lord of Dinefwr and he of Mathrafal’.

[T]eir prif lys arbennic sydd ir tri theyrn hynn yn essaydynneu breynyawl iddunt un yw Aberffraw yn Gwynedd Dinefwr yn y Deheu Mathrafal Wynfa ym Powys a llyna mal y dosparthwyf eu tehyrnas wynt yn deir rhan un bieu uchafiaeth ar y ddwy nyt amgen noc Aberffraw pieu y pendifigaeth. ‘There are three chief courts for these princes and privileged residences for them: one in Aberffraw in Gwynedd; Dinefwr in the South; Mathrafal in Gwynfa in Powys; and so their kingdom was disposed into three parts: to one belongs the supremacy over the other two, to wit, Aberffraw’.

[T]ri yeirll y sydd danai hi yarll Caerllion a iarll Dinefwr ac iarll Mathrafal. ‘There are three earls under it: the earl of Caerllion, the earl of Dinefwr and the earl of Mathrafal’.

[T]eir rhan ydoedd y Deheu Rhiennwc .i. gwlad Rhein a [Seissyllwg] a Morgannwc. Maeldaf hynaf ab Unwch un archen a beris Uaelgwn Gwynedd y wyr cael y breint cyntaf cyn boed mwyaf o gantrefoedd yn y Ddeheu, uchaf yw breint Gwynedd. Pennaf cynghellawr dref yn Ghymry yw Penardd yn Arfon Maeldaf bioedd honno. ‘The south is in three parts, Rhiennwg, that is the country of Rhein, and Seissyllwg and Morgannwg. Maeldaf Hynaf son of Unwch of one Garment caused his grandson Maelgwn Gwynedd to have the supreme privilege: although there are more *cantrefi* in the south, the privilege of Gwynedd is the highest. The chief *cangellordref* in Wales is Pennardd in Arfon’.<sup>103</sup>

The triads are obviously based on a short prose story text found in four manuscript copies of the North Wales law books, the earliest of which is NLW Peniarth ms 30. The triad is, however, probably based on a version in the lost Llanforda manuscript which was written in the early fourteenth century.<sup>104</sup> The story text is a propaganda text which uses a legend set against a sixth-century background as propaganda to support political activities in 1216 when Llywelyn the Great asserted his position as suzerain over the other princes of Wales.<sup>105</sup> The triadist has taken different elements of the prose story and turned them into triads.

Guedy duyn coron Llundeyn a’r tyirn gyalen y gan genedyl Gemre ac eu dyhol o Lloygyr e gossodassant datleu e edrych puy a uey brenyn penhaf onadunt. A sef e lle e gossodassant eu datleu ar Traeth Maelgwn en aber Deuy, ac ena e doethant guyr Guynet a Powys a Deheuparth a [Rhieinwc] a Morganguc a Sseyssylluc. Ac ena e dodes Maeldaf Henaf uab Vnhwch Vnarchen pendeuyc Penarth en Aruon cadeyr wen o adanet cuyredyc adan Uaelgun, a pan doeth e llanu ny allasant dyodef e datleu namyn Maelgun o achau y cadeyr. Ac urth hynny e cauas ef y uot en urenhyn penhaf,

<sup>103</sup>AL ii, 593–5.

<sup>104</sup>D. Jenkins, ‘Llawysgrif Goll Llanforda’, *BBCS* 14 (1951) 89–104.

<sup>105</sup>For the significance of the text see M. E. Owen, ‘Stories from the Law Tracts: Royal Propaganda’, in *WKC*, 232–8.

ac Aberfrau en pen llysoet, a yarll Mathraul a yarll Dyneueur a yarll Caerlleon adanau enteu, ac en eyr y eyr ef ar pob un onadunt huy, ac en keureyth er eydau; ac nyt reynt ydau ef cadu eu keureyth wynt. A thry ben Maylda Henaf e cauas Pena[r]th e breynt a bot en hynaf kyghellauredref.<sup>106</sup>

‘After the crown of London and the sceptre had been taken from the Welsh people, and they were driven out of England, they arranged meetings to see who of their midst would be the chief king. And the place where they arranged their meetings was Traeth Maelgwn in Aber Dyfi. And then the men of Gwynedd and the men of Powys and the men of Deheubarth and Rhieinwg and Morgannwg and Seissyllwg came. And then Maeldaf Hynaf son of Unhwch Unarchen placed a white chair of waxen wings beneath Maelgwn, and when the tide came in no one could withstand the tide save Maelgwn because of his/the chair. And for that reason Maelgwn became chief king, and Aberffraw the chief of courts, and the Earl of Mathrafal, and the Earl of Dinefwr and the Earl of Caerlleon beneath him, and his word was word over them, and his was the law; and there was no need for him to keep their laws. And it was by the head of Maeldaf Hynaf that Pennard obtained its privilege and became senior *cyngellordref*.’

What of our gnomic triads? I should associate the origins of these triads, or at least their preservation, with the poets, since we have examples of them quoted in the poetry at least from the time of Dafydd ap Gwilym, the earliest of the *Cywyddwyr*, who sang around the years 1340–1350: *Tri pheth a gerir trwy’r byd: Gwraig a hinon ac iechyd* ‘Three things are loved throughout the world: a wife and fair weather and good health’<sup>107</sup> and on into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Professor R. G. Gruffydd has shown how the love triads or *Trioedd Serch* were used by the *cywydd* poets, that is the poets who sang from about 1350 to the end of the Middle Ages. Much of their poetry consisted of love poetry which echoes Continental themes. One of the standard themes of Provençal and Troubadour poetry was the misfortune experienced by lovers. Many of the Welsh *Trioedd Serch* are similarly preoccupied with this theme. The one triad already quoted:

Gwir a ddoedasai yr henwr mai tri amorth serch ysydd: costog tom llafarddrwg, a dôr drom wichiedig, a gwrach glwyfus ymgeingar. ‘Truly did the old man say: that there are three hindrances to love: a noisy male mastiff and a heavy, squeaking door and a complaining, painful old woman’.

is cited in a poem attributed to Dafydd ap Gwilym as well as in other poems of the *cywyddwyr*:

Tri pheth nid ydynt unrhyw,

<sup>106</sup>Text based on *WKC*, 251–2. The text of *WKC* is that of NLW Peniarth ms 30; in square brackets I have substituted the reading from the Llanforda ms which corresponds with the triads.

<sup>107</sup>T. Parry, *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym* (Caerdydd 1952, repr. 1963) 363.

Tri anfoddog serchog syw:  
 Dôr wichiennydd; drymwydd drom,  
 A gwrach wegilgrach gulgrom,  
 A chi tom—o chotymid  
 Ei flew byddai lew o lid.

‘Three things which are not of the same kind,  
 The three things displeasing to a joyful lover:  
 A squeaking door, a heavy [piece] of heavy-wood,  
 And a narrow, bent, scabby-backed old woman  
 And a male dog, if he be tricked,  
 His hairs will be bristling with fur’.<sup>108</sup>

Finally, triads in metrical form became a major component of the folk poetry tradition of Glamorgan:

Tri pheth sy’n gas ac anfad:  
 Cael drwg am dda’n lle taliad,  
 Colli parch heb wybod pam,  
 A goddef cam gyhuddiad.

‘Three things are nasty and bad:  
 To have evil for good instead of payment,  
 To lose respect without knowing why,  
 And to suffer a false accusation’.<sup>109</sup>

Triads thus seem to have been the major mnemonic form used to store fact and aphorism in medieval Wales, a practice which continued into the modern period. Law texts and Grammars suggest that the composition and use of triads played a major part in the repertoire of lawyers and poets, and the medical writers used the form. Gnostic triads also would seem to have had a practical function as part of the literature of entertainment, both in strict poetry and later in the folk tradition.

Finally, where and how did the practice of composing triads originate? Triads are to be found in most cultures. They were popular in Celtic culture and are present in Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Breton and Cornish, as well as Welsh. Triads can also be found in Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Hebrew, Russian, Chinese, Japanese and many other non-Celtic languages.<sup>110</sup> Wales and, to a slightly lesser degree, Ireland are, however, the only countries in Western Europe which have long series of triads. Triads are only one manifestation of the tendency for numerical classification found among the medieval Welsh and Irish. Tetrads, heptads, octads, enneads and groupings of twenty-four are also common. Numerical classification is general in the Latin tradition of early Medieval Europe, and was particularly favoured by the Irish. The most extreme

<sup>108</sup> See R. G. Gruffydd, ‘Cywyddau Triawdaidd Dafydd ap Gwilym’, 173.

<sup>109</sup> Tegwyn Jones, *Tribannau Morgannwg* (Llandysul 1976) 186 (no. 591).

<sup>110</sup> See F. Kelly, ‘Thinking in threes: the triad in early Irish literature’, *PBA* 125 (2003 lectures) 1–18, especially pp. 1–2.

example of the phenomenon from an Irish source is the Hiberno-Latin *Liber de Numeris*, but vernacular Irish learned texts such as the Laws also have long series of heptads.<sup>111</sup>

The Irish were not the only advocates of numerical classification in early Christian Europe: 'enumerative motifs are part of the shared inheritance of Christian literary culture throughout Europe in the early Middle Ages'.<sup>112</sup> Numerical classification had been advocated by St Augustine who based his philosophy on the Book of Wisdom 9.21:

And, therefore, we must not despise the science of numbers, which, in many parts of holy scripture, is found to be of eminent service to the careful interpreter. Neither has it been without reason numbered among God's praises, Thou hast ordained all things in number and measure and weight.<sup>113</sup>

St Augustine (*De Civitate Dei* xi, 24–4) further 'sought to establish the existence of triads at every level of the created order'.<sup>114</sup> Augustine's model was followed by encyclopaedists such as Isidore of Seville. The number three has the added virtue of being associated with the Trinity. The Welsh, according to Giraldus Cambrensis, were fascinated by the number three,<sup>115</sup> and early Welsh religious poetry is much preoccupied with the Trinity.<sup>116</sup> This Welsh preoccupation with the number three may derive from pre-Christian ideas.<sup>117</sup> Lists of triads are, however, comparatively late in Welsh, and the style of the examples which survive I believe reflects the formal Latin learning of the schools. Evidence of the learning available in Wales in the early Middle Ages must be based chiefly on what we know of the texts which were available to educate the Welshman. Many of the glossed texts of the period of Old Welsh, such as Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, Martianus Capella's *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*,<sup>118</sup> Bede's *De Natura Rerum*, the Juvenius poem, the *Colloquy* of Oxonienses Posterior and Priscian's Grammar were known school

<sup>111</sup>See F. Kelly, *A guide to early Irish law* (Dublin 1988), especially pp. 266, 348, and throughout.

<sup>112</sup>Wright, *Irish tradition in Old English literature*, 59.

<sup>113</sup>Quoted by C. B. Kendall in 'Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*' in Murphy, *Medieval eloquence*, 167–8.

<sup>114</sup>C. A. Partrides, 'The Numerical Approach to Cosmic Order during the English Renaissance', *Isis* 49 (1958) 396.

<sup>115</sup>Gerald of Wales, *The journey through Wales/The description of Wales*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmonsworth 1988) 23. See also Oliver Davies, *Celtic Christianity in early medieval Wales* (Cardiff 1996) 52–3, 57–8 and throughout.

<sup>116</sup>For examples see M. Haycock, *Blodeugerdd Barddas o Ganu Crefyddol Cynnar* (Llandybie 1994) 18, 23–9.

<sup>117</sup>For this theme see particularly Oliver Davies, *Celtic Christianity*, 66–8. P. Sims-Williams ('Thought, Word and Deed', *Eriu* 29 (1978) 78) considered that the roots of Celtic preoccupation with numerical composition and triads in general lay in a pagan Celtic past.

<sup>118</sup>For the rhetoric found in Capella's work see W. H. Stahl, R. Johnson and E. L. Burge, *Martianus Capella and the seven liberal arts i* (Columbia 1971) 115–23, J. Murphy, *Medieval eloquence*, throughout, and E. Curtius, trans. W. R. Trask, *European literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, (London 1953) throughout. For the numerology see 'The "enumerative style" in Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England', in Wright, *Irish tradition in Old English literature*, 49–95.

textbooks.<sup>119</sup> By studying these, students would have mastered the rules of grammar and the ornaments of rhetoric as well as numerology. It is impossible to separate the use of Latin from the use of the vernacular in Celtic medieval society where the Church, whose members were native speakers of Irish or Welsh, was the strongest bastion of Latin literacy. I have referred in passing in the course of this essay to the rhetorical devices which characterise all the medieval triad collections. I should suggest that it was the formal Latin learning of early medieval Europe, and particularly Hiberno-Latin, which boosted the Irish and, subsequently, the Welsh use of numerical classifications and contributed to the sophisticated stylistic form of the surviving triads. The tendency to enumerate might always have been present. In cultures which still had a strong oral ambience, numerical lists provided a good mnemonic structure for storing all kinds of facts and fictions. Why the triad *per se* was so popular, however, remains a mystery. How far its origins are native Celtic, or how far a general European, or even human, tendency to group items in threes<sup>120</sup> lies behind the Welsh practice must remain a moot point.

MORFYDD E. OWEN

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<sup>119</sup>For bibliographical references to the glossed texts see A. Falileyev, *Etymological dictionary of Old Welsh* (Tübingen 2000) xiv–xvii.

<sup>120</sup>See Mary Carruthers, *The book of memory: a study of memory in Medieval culture* (Cambridge 1990) 63, 251 throughout, for the importance placed on grouping in threes by Aristotle, John of Garland and others as aids to *Memoria*, and W. Ong., *Orality and literacy: the technologising of the word* (London and New York 1982, 2000).