

SIR JOHN RHÛS MEMORIAL LECTURE

*LLYFR DU CAERFYRDDIN*  
THE BLACK BOOK OF CARMARTHEN

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*Read 6 November 1985*

THE Black Book of Carmarthen, *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*, is a vellum manuscript of 108 pages, 6¾ by 5 in., now housed at the National Library of Wales. Its title appears to be at least as old as the sixteenth century. Written entirely in Welsh, it contains some forty items, of very varying length, all with one brief exception in verse. Leaves are missing in at least three places, with the result that the text of some of the poems is incomplete. That the loss did not occur in recent times is, however, shown by the fact that a copy (Peniarth MS 107) made by Robert Vaughan of Hengwrt (1592?-1667) corresponds to the original in every particular. Before its arrival at the National Library in 1909 the manuscript had belonged to the great collections at the private libraries of Hengwrt and Peniarth, but its history up to the unknown date when Robert Vaughan acquired it is obscure. There is some evidence that it had been in the possession of the poet Siôn Tudur, who died in 1602, and of Jasper Gryffyth, a collector of manuscripts who died in 1614. The credit for discovering and preserving it, however, belongs to Sir John Prys (1502?-55), a prominent public figure who acted as one of King Henry VIII's commissioners for the dissolution of the monasteries, but who was no less zealous in his devotion to Welsh history and antiquities. In a memorandum which Sir John left behind him (now apparently lost but used as the basis of a note in an eighteenth-century catalogue) he stated that he was given the Black Book of Carmarthen by a treasurer of the church of St David's, but that it came originally from the priory of Carmarthen. This is the only firm evidence for associating the manuscript with Carmarthen. Of its earlier history nothing is known.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For further details of the history of the manuscript see my edition *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* (Caerdydd, 1982) (henceforth LIDC), pp. xiii-xxiv (section by E. D. Jones) and pp. lxvii-lxx; *The Cambrian Register* (London), iii (1818),

[footnote cont. on p. 334]

In 1940 Mr Gildas Tibbott described the Black Book as 'the oldest extant manuscript volume written in Welsh',<sup>1</sup> and for many years this had been and continued to be the general view. The publication therefore by Dr Gwenogvryn Evans of a facsimile edition in 1888, and in 1906/7 of a diplomatic edition which included 130 copies on Japanese vellum paper, were regarded in Wales as occasions of some national significance. In the National Library the Black Book still enjoys the prestige of being numbered Peniarth MS 1. In his description of the manuscript published in 1899 in his *Reports on Welsh Manuscripts*, i, 297, Dr Evans avoided too great a precision in suggesting a date for it, preferring to say that it was 'in several hands of the XIIth and early XIIIth centuries'. Previously, in the introduction to the *Facsimile*, he had expressed the opinion that the opening folios, written in a large hand, belonged to the reign of Stephen (1135-54), and the remainder to the reigns of Henry II and his son Richard (1154-99). He modified this view in the diplomatic edition by omitting the reference to Stephen and stating that the Black Book 'was written during the reigns of Henry II, and his sons'. This would bring the latest date down to 1216, when John's reign ended. Earlier scholars such as Lhuyd and Skene, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively, had opted for a mid-twelfth-century date. Most of these views were based on other than palaeographical considerations. During the second half of the nineteenth century, however, a consensus view developed among palaeographical scholars, such as Madden, Macray, and Maunde Thompson, that the Black Book was written *c.*1200. There the matter rested for some time and this generally accepted dating for 'our oldest Welsh manuscript' became a fixed point of reference in Welsh textual scholarship.

The whole of the Black Book (with the exception of a few lines) is written in an orthography which, though not invariable, shows a remarkable degree of consistency. Its most striking features are the use of *t* for *dd*, *d* for *d* in final as well as other positions, *w* for *f*, *e* and *i* for *y*, and *u* for *w*. As a system it can be differentiated from the orthographies used in both Old (*c.*1100) and Medieval Welsh (*c.* 1300 and later). It has been customary to regard it, not as the idiosyncrasy of a particular scribe, but as the fashion prevailing at the time the Black Book was written, with the result that if a

288; *Handlist of Manuscripts in the National Library of Wales, Part I* (1940), pp. v, xx; Daniel Huws in *The National Library of Wales Journal*, xvii, no. 3 (Summer 1972), 319.

<sup>1</sup> *Handlist of Manuscripts, I*, p. viii.

Welsh text in which these orthographical features occur is found in a comparatively late manuscript it is confidently declared to be derived from a lost original dating from *c.* 1200. The question has now, however, been thrown into some confusion by the conclusions of a number of mid-twentieth-century palaeographers who have expressed the view that the Black Book was written at a later date than was previously thought. In 1954 Dr Denholm-Young suggested the 'second quarter of [the] thirteenth century' or the 'mid-thirteenth century'.<sup>1</sup> In the Sir John Rhŷs Memorial Lecture for 1967 Professor Thomas Jones quoted the similar opinion of Dr Hywel D. Emanuel that the first sixty-nine stanzas of the *Englynion y Beddau* on pp. 63–9 of the manuscript 'were copied by a hand of the second quarter of the thirteenth century'. And now, in a detailed study published in 1982, Dr E. D. Jones has concluded that 'no part of [the Black Book] was written much before 1250, and the writing of it continued for a considerable time after that date'.<sup>2</sup>

The palaeographical considerations on which these opinions are based lie beyond the scope of this lecture. It should be noted, however, that both Denholm-Young and E. D. Jones think that the entire manuscript of the Black Book, apart from a few very minor additions, is the work of one scribe. Observing that it is written in liturgical script, Denholm-Young describes it as a 'palaeographical freak' and stresses the 'highly unusual use of liturgical script for a vernacular manuscript'. One of its characteristics is a progressive increase in the number of lines to the page, and a corresponding diminution in the size of the letter-forms. Thus, each of pages 1–5 has nine lines, pages 9–11 have twelve, pages 41–4 have sixteen, and some later pages have twenty or more. The increase in the number of lines, however, is variable rather than regular and E. D. Jones explains it with the conjecture that the manuscript was written over a number of years, and indeed at different periods in the lifetime of the scribe.

If we accept these conclusions of the palaeographers all claims that the Black Book of Carmarthen is the oldest surviving Welsh manuscript must be abandoned, although it may still be regarded

<sup>1</sup> N. Denholm-Young, *Handwriting in England and Wales* (Cardiff, 1954), p. 78, and note on pl. 16.

<sup>2</sup> LIDC, p. xxiv. For Dr Emanuel's views see Thomas Jones, 'The Black Book of Carmarthen "Stanzas of the Graves"', *Proceedings of British Academy*, liii (1967), 98. In *Llên Cymru*, xiv (1983–4), 211–12, Professor Simon Evan expresses some modest reservations about the dating suggested.

as the oldest written collection of Welsh verse.<sup>1</sup> Scholars in the past made much use of internal evidence for purposes of dating, in particular the historical references found in some of the poems. In 1934 Sir J. E. Lloyd claimed to have identified a reference in the *Oianau* poem to a battle fought as late as 1257. This was a challenge to accepted opinions at the time but it would not accord ill with the view expressed by E. D. Jones. In 1951, however, I attempted to show that Lloyd's argument was based on a verbal misunderstanding of the text he was discussing and that the reference was not to the battle fought in 1257 but to events of a century earlier, c.1151-5, and this is still my view.<sup>2</sup> The Black Book contains a number of references to clearly identifiable historical occurrences, and in my opinion the latest of these is found in another stanza of the *Oianau* poem, in which the ancient prophet Myrddin is made to foretell the invasion of Gwynedd by King John in 1211 and the subsequent uprising of the Welsh led by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth and the expulsion of the invaders in 1212.<sup>3</sup> Other events, to which references are clearly made in the prophetic poems ascribed to Myrddin, were earlier and can be dated respectively c.1198-1201, 1173-5, and (as already indicated) 1151-5. These poems were vaticinations designed for political and propagandist ends and it can be assumed, though perhaps not proved, that each was composed shortly after the event described. If we accept the view that the scribe of the Black Book was working during the period 1250-65, he was probably using sources which at that time were at least thirty or forty years old. Whether this consideration can be built up into an argument for pushing him backwards a little in time is, however, doubtful.

There is no actual evidence, apart from the statement by Sir John Prys, for associating the Black Book with Carmarthen Priory. Furthermore, while there is no need to doubt that it had come thence into the hands of the treasurer of St David's, this is not proof that it was compiled or copied at Carmarthen, and Professor Geraint Gruffydd has made a case for the view that it was the product of a more Welsh-orientated house than the priory at Carmarthen, such as Hendy-gwyn (Whitland), Talylychau (Talley) or Ystrad Fflur (Strata Florida).<sup>4</sup> For the priory of St

<sup>1</sup> For Denholm-Young's views on the dating of the Book of Aneirin ('second half of thirteenth century') and the Book of Taliesin ('fourteenth century (?second quarter)') see his *Handwriting in England and Wales*, pl. 18, and p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> *Bulletin of Board of Celtic Studies*, xiv (1951), 179-85; LIDC, p. xxix.

<sup>3</sup> LIDC, pp. xxix-xxx.

<sup>4</sup> J. E. Caerwyn Williams (ed.), *Ysgrifau Beirniadol IV* (Dinbych, 1969), p. 16.

John the Evangelist at Carmarthen, although originally a Welsh foundation, had been taken over by the Normans in the twelfth century and converted by them into an Augustinian institution. Throughout the thirteenth century the town of Carmarthen was under Norman control, except for the eight years 1215–23, when it was in the possession of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth. In 1208, however, a certain Cadifor, presumably a Welshman, was prior, and attempts to oust him by a group of canons from Llanthony by Gloucester were resisted by King John. The priory no doubt contained a Welsh element during the first quarter of the century, but after 1223 a process of re-Normanization was inevitable, if gradual. There exists a mid-thirteenth-century Norman French religious poem of considerable length ascribed to 'Simun de Kermerthin', but unfortunately no copy of it has survived in a manuscript written at Carmarthen. Some have thought that the Black Book was written during the period when there may have been a strong Welsh presence at the priory, but we have seen that palaeographical scholars do not at present support this view. It is, however, possible to envisage a Welshman who had joined the priory at an early age and was allowed to continue to live there after 1223, who had literary interests and had learnt liturgical script, and for whom during a period of progressive Normanization the task of compiling a varied and representative anthology of Welsh verse provided solace in his increasing isolation. At best, however, this mental picture must remain speculative.<sup>1</sup>

I come now to the contents of the Black Book. From the point of view of subject-matter they fall into four categories: (1) poems on religious themes; (2) panegyric poems for princes of the eleventh and twelfth centuries; (3) prophetic poems associated with the Myrddin legend; and (4) poems on mythological or legendary subjects. All the poems may be dated in the period extending from possibly the ninth, but more certainly the tenth, century to the thirteenth. The Black Book does not contain any examples of the earliest stratum of Welsh verse, the war poetry and panegyrics attributed to Taliesin and Aneirin and others in the sixth and seventh centuries, though it does record many echoes and memories from that period. It differs also from the Books of Aneirin and Taliesin in that it is not a collection of poems ascribed to one poet, but a miscellany of very varied and mostly

<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. F. Cowley, *The Monastic Order in South Wales, 1066–1349* (Cardiff, 1977), pp. 44 and 156. The text of the poem ascribed to Simun de Kermerthin is printed in the *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur*, xiv (1892), 147–51.

anonymous verse. Only four of the poems contained in it can be associated with any known poet, and these are attributed to Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr (Cynddelw Great Poet), who flourished during the period 1155–1200. One poem lies outside the four categories I have mentioned. This is a brief collection of versified proverbs and moral aphorisms which, however, commences rather oddly with a description of a mildly erotic dream, perhaps a passing record of the fantasies of an unguarded moment in a monkish or clerical routine of duties.<sup>1</sup>

There are fourteen poems on religious themes and twelve of these appear in three groups at various places in the manuscript. Thus, there are six on pages 29–45, two on pages 70–1, and four on pages 82–8. This suggests that they derived from collections of religious verse which had come into the hands of the scribe at different times. It has been surmised that they represent the remnants of a large body of fairly early religious poetry which has not been preserved, and that they were composed by members of the regular and secular clergy for the purposes of popular religious instruction. Professor Glanmor Williams, who has made these suggestions, stresses the fact that the religious verse in the Black Book is less ornate, less obscure and more intimate than the poems on religious subjects produced by the class of ‘official’ court poets known as the *Gogynfeirdd*.<sup>2</sup> He adds that the poems designed for popular instruction show an awareness ‘of the value of rhyme and rhythm as aids to memory as well as devotion’. A different view, however, is taken by Professor Geraint Gruffydd, who sees in the first grouping of religious verse in the Black Book the work of a poet in religious orders, who was ‘a product of the great monastic revival of the twelfth century’ and merits recognition among the important poets of a notable period in the history of Welsh poetry.<sup>3</sup> Professor Gruffydd rejects a pre-twelfth-century date for these poems but it seems to me, as I have indicated elsewhere, that several of them exhibit certain linguistic and metrical features which, according to the established canons of Welsh textual criticism, did not persist after c.1100.<sup>4</sup> Some of their literary

<sup>1</sup> LIDC, no. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Glanmor Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation* (Cardiff, 1962), p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> *Ysgrifau Beirniadol IV*, pp. 16–17. Professor Gruffydd includes the ‘Debate of the Body and the Soul’ in the grouping, despite the fact that it is separated from the six following religious poems by the prose fragment of the ‘Triads of the Horses’. On this see LIDC, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> LIDC, pp. xlvi–li.

characteristics, too, invite comparison with the verse of an earlier period.

One of these poems is a brief hymn which calls on various pairs of objects, such as church and chancel, plain and hill, night and day, birds and bees, the seven days and the stars, air and ether, books and letters, thought and deed, to bless the Lord.<sup>1</sup> Another well-structured poem is devoted to praise of the Trinity and ponders the triune nature of what it describes as 'one unit of power'.<sup>2</sup> It ends with another list of objects created and events caused by God. These include the sun and the moon, letters in wax, the flame in a lamp, love in the mind, a gentle amiable maiden, and the burning of five cities guilty of 'perverted wedlock'. (These were Sodom and Gomorra and the three other 'cities of the plain', Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar, named in Genesis 14: 2).<sup>3</sup> Other themes which are given prominence in the religious poems are the majesty as well as the mercy of God, the sufferings of Christ, the sinfulness of man, the transitoriness of life and of the world's affairs, and the inevitable Judgement to come.

A few of the poems possess an individuality which sets them apart from the more conventional run of much medieval religious verse. One commences with a stanza in the style and manner of the 'Celtic' nature poetry which is well exemplified in early Irish literature. In four lines it enumerates the salient features of the rural scene in May: the singing birds, the green groves, the ploughs in furrow, the yoked oxen, the green sea, the many-coloured landscape. However, the mention of the song of the cuckoo in the second stanza brings thoughts of sadness, as is usual in medieval Welsh, and the poet remembers his kinsmen who have passed away. The religious theme then becomes dominant and early traditions of the Celtic Church, with its 'saints' and settlements dispersed in remote places, are reflected in a stanza which declares that 'on hill, in hollow, in isles of the sea, wherever one may go, from Holy Christ there is no escaping' (literally, 'no wilderness').<sup>4</sup> A contrast to this poem is provided by a series of thirteen *englynion* of a penitential character in which the poet declares his intention of undertaking a pilgrimage overseas in expiation of his sins. He refers, in the *lorica* tradition, to the Cross

<sup>1</sup> LlDC, no. 9.

<sup>2</sup> LlDC, no. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. also Gen. 19: 29; Henry Lewis, *Hen Gerddi Crefyddol* (Caerdydd, 1931), p. 111; T. Jones, *Y Bibyl Ynghymraec* (Caerdydd, 1940), p. 80, *sodi y pum dinas*.

<sup>4</sup> The poem, known from its opening line as *Cyntefin ceinaf amser* ('Maytime, fairest season'), has been studied in detail by R. Geraint Gruffydd in *Ysgrifau Beirniadol IV*, pp. 12-26. For the text see LlDC, no. 8.

of Christ as a protective shield surrounding him and refuses, thus fortified, to give credence as an ill omen to a sneeze which he hears. He mentions Rome, presumably his destination, and invokes the protection of Saint Peter and Saint Brigid during his journey.<sup>1</sup>

The 'Debate of the Body and the Soul' was the subject of numerous compositions, in both prose and verse and in many languages, in the Middle Ages. It is thought that the theme had its origin in the early Christian churches of Egypt. The Black Book of Carmarthen contains a poem of 163 lines on this subject, and many other examples in Welsh of the 'Debate', largely in prose, are found in later manuscripts. The Black Book poem has linguistic features which suggest a pre-twelfth-century date, and in places the text appears defective. It may be divided into four sections, an introduction, two speeches by the Soul, and one by the Body. In a long first speech the Soul launches into a vigorous attack on the Body, charging it with a multitude of sins of commission and omission. At one point it regrets the day when it joined the Body 'as a companion', thus implying a claim to a prior independent existence which is Platonic or Origenist rather than orthodox. 'I have been defiled', it tells the Body, 'by thy base company'. The Body is only allowed some twenty-two lines to defend itself, and this it does rather lamely with a plea of its earthly origin and the statement that it was formed of seven elements, fire, earth, wind, mist, flowers (two are omitted, but a text in the Book of Taliesin suggests that they were water and air). In its second speech the Soul ignores the Body's pleas in its own defence and urges a reconciliation preparatory to their journey together to Paradise after the final Judgement, which will be held on the Mount of Olives. This may seem a trifle optimistic in view of the Soul's severe strictures on the Body, but the poem proceeds to refer to Paradise in terms not unreminiscent of the Celtic Otherworld as a 'place where there is clover in dew-laden fields, where there are minstrels in constant harmony', presided over by the generous Creator seated on a splendid throne.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> LIDC, no. 26. See P. L. Henry, *The Early English and Celtic Lyric* (Allen & Unwin, 1966), p. 86; Brynley F. Roberts in *Bulletin of Board of Celtic Studies*, xxi (1965), 203; H. M. and N. K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature* (Cambridge, 1932, 1968), i, 426.

<sup>2</sup> LIDC, no. 5 (cf. also no. 24); Henry Lewis (ed.), *Hen Gerddi Crefyddol*, p. 5. For discussions and bibliographical references see Bobi Jones, 'Ymryson ac Ymddiddan Corff ac Enaid', *Ysgrifau Beirniadol V* (1970), pp. 44-61; LIDC, p. xlvii, and for verse texts *Bulletin of Board of Celtic Studies*, ii (1924), 128; iii (1926), 120; prose texts in *Transactions of Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1913-14), p. 185; *National Library of Wales Journal*, iv (Summer, 1946),



Another poem of over eighty lines commences with passages of conventional praise for the Lord and then, after brief references to the temptations of Job and Eve, gives us in its final thirty-one lines a version of the tale of the apocryphal miracle of the Instantaneous Harvest. This legend is found in the medieval and modern folklore of a number of countries and it has been suggested that it had its origin in a lost apocryphal Gospel. According to Professor Kenneth Jackson the Black Book version is the oldest known. It describes Jesus and Mary (there is no reference to Joseph) in flight, presumably to Egypt, before an evil host said to be of the race of Cain. Seeing a ploughman at work in a field they instruct him to reply truthfully when the pursuers arrive and ask him whether he has seen a woman and her son going past. On being questioned he replies: 'I saw them when I was harrowing the fair meadow which you now see being reaped'. Not understanding that the harvest has been instantaneous, the evil host turn back. A striking characteristic of this poem is the large amount of straight narrative it contains in the strict metre of *byr a thoddaid*. In the Welsh medieval tradition the medium of narration was almost invariably prose. Verse was used for declamation, celebration, eulogy, elegy, and prophetic or gnomic affirmation. Exceptions, such as the *awdl* on 'The Battle of Argoed Llwyfain' attributed to Taliesin, are rare. Like that poem, however, the account of the Instantaneous Harvest given in the Black Book not only tells a story simply and directly, but achieves a dramatic effect by recording conversation in direct speech; each of these two poems contains three such speeches. This suggests that sustained narrative was well within the potential of the medieval poetic tradition, had it been exploited.<sup>1</sup>

Among the remaining religious poems in the Black Book there

187. Early belief in the Soul's pre-existence is discussed in J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (Oxford, 1977), p. 344. Cf. *ibid.*, 180-1, however, for Origen's view that souls were sinful in their pre-existent state.

<sup>1</sup> LIDC, no. 12. For discussions see K. Jackson, 'A Note on the Miracle of the Instantaneous Harvest', *Bulletin of Board of Celtic Studies*, x (1940), 203-7; *id.*, 'Some Fresh Light on the Miracle of the Instantaneous Harvest', *Folk-lore*, li (1940), 203-10; *id.*, *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff, 1961), pp. 120-2; J. Vendryes, 'Le Miracle de la Moisson en Galles', *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions* (1948), pp. 64-76; F. P. Pickering (ed.), *The Anglo-Norman Text of the Holkham Bible Picture Book* (Oxford, 1971), p. 24, and note on p. 87 (French version). An English translation of the text in the Black Book is given by Ifor Williams in *Bulletin of Board of Celtic Studies*, x (1939), 34. For verse as a vehicle for narrative in Welsh cf. Saunders Lewis, *Braslun o Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg* (Caerdydd, 1932), pp. 8-10.

are three series of pious *englynion*, of which two are attributed to a poet named Elaeth, and the third (in a text of the poem in another manuscript) to Addaon. No medieval poets bearing these names are known but traditions exist of a sixth-century king called Elaeth and also of an Addaon son of Taliesin. Elaeth and Addaon may have been medieval poets of whom we are now totally ignorant, but it is equally possible that we have examples here of the ascription of medieval poems to early authors, just as scores of late poems on prophetic and other subjects were ascribed to Taliesin and Myrddin.<sup>1</sup> One other religious poem calls for mention. It is an incomplete text of the *Marwysgafn*, or 'Death-bed Confession', of Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr, the most eminent of the medieval court poets. About forty-six of his poems are extant, most of which are eulogies or elegies for members of the ruling princely families of the period. But he also composed on religious subjects and in the *Marwysgafn* he used the literary convention of the death-bed confession to express repentance for his sins and seek reconciliation with God. Its more formalized diction, in the style of the *Gogynfeirdd*, sets it somewhat apart from most of the other religious verse in the manuscript.<sup>2</sup>

This brings me to the second category, the panegyric poems, of which there are five examples in the Black Book. They do not appear together at one point in the manuscript and therefore probably do not represent a single collection. Three, however, are by Cynddelw, whose *Marwysgafn* I have just mentioned, and the presence of poems by him in what Sir Ifor Williams thought were three separate parts of the manuscript led that scholar to ask whether the scribe was a native of Powys.<sup>3</sup> He describes Cynddelw as 'the great poet of Powys', but it must be remembered that as a court poet Cynddelw also functioned in both Gwynedd and Deheubarth. Two of the three poems are undoubted examples of his early work. One is a series of *englynion* to the personal war-band of Madog ap Maredudd, prince of Powys, who died in 1160. Cynddelw praises the men of Madog's retinue by comparing them

<sup>1</sup> LIDC, nos. 19, 20 and 27. The ascription of the poem to Addaon is found in Llansteffan MS 27, see LIDC, p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> LIDC, no. 28. For the full text of the *Marwysgafn* see *Hen Gerddi Crefyddol*, pp. 40-3.

<sup>3</sup> I. Williams, 'The Poems of Llywarch Hen', *Proceedings of British Academy*, xviii (1932), 12; reprinted by Rachel Bromwich (ed.) in *The Beginnings of Welsh Poetry, Studies by Sir Ifor Williams* (Cardiff, 1972), p. 131. For Cynddelw see D. Myrddin Lloyd in *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, i (ed. by A. O. H. Jarman and Gwilym Rees Hughes, Swansea, 1976), 166-72.

to the Three Faithful War-bands of early Welsh story, and also to the war-bands of Arthur and of Cynon, a celebrated sixth-century warrior who by this time had become a legendary Arthurian character. The other poem is an elegy for Madog, presumably composed in, or shortly after, 1160. In it Cynddelw shows that, at the commencement of his career, he was already a master of the established modes of the centuries-old tradition of Welsh panegyric. It is a paean of posthumous praise in forty-two lines in which a heap of well-proven metaphors derived from the early poetry, or *hengerdd*, is piled up before the listener (for these poems were heard rather than read). Madog was the defensive door of a fortress, a golden shield in the attack, an ensnarer of the enemy, a sword-blade in the tumult, the lion of Powys, a powerful anchor, an iron-enclosed fist, but nevertheless a lover of poets and poetry. Various metrical devices such as alliteration, internal rhyme, a single end-rhyme (in *-eith*) sustained throughout the poem and the employment of *cymeriad llythrennol* (an embellishment involving the use of the same consonant at the beginning of each line in a series of consecutive lines) contribute jointly to creating an effect of cumulative laudation.<sup>1</sup>

The third panegyric by Cynddelw is undoubtedly later. It is a reconciliation-poem addressed to Rhys ap Gruffydd, the Lord Rhys of Deheubarth, who ruled in south-west Wales from 1155 until 1197. For some unknown reason the poet's relationship with Rhys had been under a cloud, but in ten skilfully constructed stanzas he seeks to re-establish himself in the prince's favour. With the aim of assuaging his anger he entreats God's blessing on Rhys, his warriors and his land, and declares him to be a pillar in battle, a lion of war, and a true sustainer of minstrels. Suddenly, however, in the middle of the poem, he remembers that he is still Cynddelw the 'Great Poet'. Even if we grant that the epithet *Mawr* in Cynddelw's title, as Mr Myrddin Lloyd has told us, initially referred to his physical size, he was not lacking in self-esteem and did not find it easy to tolerate rivals. He concluded the fifth stanza with the couplet:

You court silentaries, call for silence:  
Be silent, poets; now you hear a poet.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> LIDC, no. 38.

<sup>2</sup> LIDC, no. 23. The couplet reads: *gostecwir llis gosteguch. | gostec beirt bart a glywuch*. For the epithet *Mawr* see D. Myrddin Lloyd in *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig hyd 1940* (Llundain, 1953), p. 82. The three panegyric poems by Cynddelw are edited and discussed by J. Vendryes in *Études Celtiques*, iv (1948), 1-47.

For Cynddelw, reconciliation with the prince also involved the assertion of his own authority as *pencerdd* or chief poet.

The two other panegyric poems are anonymous. They belong to the beginning of the twelfth century and are therefore earlier than those by Cynddelw. One is in praise of Cuhelyn, a lord of the cantref of Cemais in Dyfed, an ancestor of Dafydd ap Gwilym, who flourished c. 1100–30 and was himself reputed to be a poet, a seer, and a story-teller. The area of Cemais was occupied by the Normans c. 1110–15 and Cuhelyn apparently made his peace with them. This meant that he was allowed to wield some authority, by favour of an overlord, but whether the poem was composed before the Norman occupation is not known. It praises Cuhelyn for his cultivated Welsh and patronage of poetry, and appears to refer to him as a 'ship-fancier' and his ship as the 'treasure of the port'. It is composed in an archaic diction, is very concise and compressed in style, and is metrically intricate.<sup>1</sup>

The claims made for Cuhelyn in the poem are reasonably restrained and are probably a realistic reflection of the extent of his power. This, however, is not the case with the fifth of the panegyrics, which is addressed to another Dyfed princeling, Hywel ap Goronwy, who took part in the Welsh resistance to the Normans in 1096 but was later granted certain lands in Gower and the Tywi valley by Henry I. In 1106 he was done to death by a combination of Welsh and Norman treachery, vividly described in *Brut y Tywysogion*,<sup>2</sup> and at no time was he a major figure. The two poems in praise of him and of Cuhelyn are roughly contemporary, but it is uncertain which is the earlier. They are both in the same metre (*rhupynt*) and have been described as the 'earliest extant examples' of the work of the *Gogynfeirdd*.<sup>3</sup> But the poem to Hywel, probably composed when fortune appeared to be favouring him, claims that his power extended throughout Wales and beyond, and even overseas. Numerous distant places, such as the Severn valley, Powys, Merioneth, Llŷn, Aberffraw, Degannwy, as well as Brecon, Gwent and Glamorgan in southern Wales, are named as subject to his rule, and he is described as 'the best king from the West as far as London'. The poet who, with considerable metrical skill, constructed this eulogy must have known that the

<sup>1</sup> LlDC, nos. 3–4. The poem has been edited and discussed by R. Geraint Gruffydd in *Studia Celtica*, x/xi (1975–6), 198–209.

<sup>2</sup> See T. Jones, *Brut y Tywysogion, Peniarth Ms. 20* (Caerdydd, 1941), pp. 38–9; id., *Brut y Tywysogion or The Chronicle of the Princes, Peniarth Ms. 20 Version* (Cardiff, 1952), pp. 26–7.

<sup>3</sup> See R. Geraint Gruffydd, *Studia Celtica*, x/xi (1975–6), 198.

claims he was making had no validity outside his own imagination, and those who heard the poem declaimed in Hywel's court could not fail to be aware that, whatever aspirations of conquest their prince might entertain, the hope that such a minor figure would ever achieve a position of dominance throughout Wales was even less than minimal. The poem is therefore instructive as an example of the extent to which extreme factual exaggeration was acceptable in panegyric, not only as a rhetorical exercise, but also as a contribution to the elevation of spirit which a prince received from a praise-poem.<sup>1</sup> In this connection it is difficult not to be reminded of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, which is in effect a prose panegyric for the Brittonic peoples in past ages, and in which the 'factual' element again leans heavily on the author's imagination.

The third category consists of four poems, mostly vaticinary in character, but also associated with the legend of Myrddin, or Merlin. The first, known as 'The Dialogue of Myrddin and Taliesin', occupies the opening folios of the Black Book (pp. 1-7.2), but is separated from the other Myrddin poems by forty pages. In content it is hybrid or composite, for its first twenty-two lines describe a sixth-century battle, apparently believed to have been fought in Dyfed and in which local heroes such as Elgan and Dywel ab Erbin perished, while the remaining sixteen lines refer to the battle of Arfderydd or Arthuret in northern Britain, dated c.573, which provided the starting-point or initial focus for the development of the Myrddin legend.<sup>2</sup>

The three other poems are the *Bedwenni* ('Birchtrees'), the *Afallennau* ('Appletrees') and the *Oianau* ('Greetings').<sup>3</sup> They are found together as a group in the centre of the manuscript, where they occupy sixteen pages (47-63) and, as the *Afallennau* and *Oianau* contain much of the oldest material of the Myrddin legend in Welsh, it is conceivable that, in a sense, the Black Book of Carmarthen was regarded as the Book of Myrddin. This should be borne in mind in considering the possible association of the manuscript with the priory of Carmarthen. Myrddin himself, despite the northern roots of his legend, was associated with the town of Carmarthen, of which he was probably considered to be the founder. The ramifications of the legend, and the manner of its migration from northern Britain to south-western Wales, are

<sup>1</sup> LlDC, no. 22. The poem has been edited and discussed by J. Vendryes in *Études Celtiques*, iv (1948), 275-300.

<sup>2</sup> LlDC, no. 1. See my edition of the poem, *Ymddiddan Myrddin a Thaliesin* (Caerdydd, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> LlDC, nos. 15-17.

involved and complex, and I do not propose to pursue the subject here. It will suffice to say that in the Black Book texts Myrddin is portrayed as a golden-torqued warrior who, when his liege lord Gwenddolau was slain at the battle of Arfderydd, lost his reason and fled to live the life of a solitary wild man of the woods in the forest of Caledonia, *Coed Celyddon*. In the poems he speaks in the first person, complaining of the hardships of his life in the wilds, and confesses to having been guilty of the death of the son of his sister Gwenddydd. Three consecutive stanzas of the *Afallennau* contain a large part of the original nucleus of the legend, and embody some of the oldest traditional matter preserved in the Black Book.<sup>1</sup>

A feature of the legend of the wild man was that with his lapse into madness the gift of prophecy was granted to him. This no doubt accorded well with the tradition of prophecy which already existed in Welsh and Celtic society,<sup>2</sup> and in due course Myrddin came to be regarded as such an outstanding prophet that his original legendary history tended to be obscured by the preponderance of the vaticinations attributed to him. In the Black Book text of the *Afallennau* the lines dealing with legend and with prophecy are roughly equal in number, but in the *Oianau* the prophetic element greatly predominates, while in the *Bedwenni* there is no legendary content. The tradition of prophecy in early and medieval Wales begins with the tale of the fight of the red and white dragons in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*, in which the wonder-child Ambrosius is made to prophesy the ultimate victory of the red dragon over the white. The tale was used by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Prophetiae Merlini*, which he incorporated in his *Historia Regum Britanniae* in 1136, and behind it lay obscure traditions of the struggle of the Britons or Welsh and the English from the fifth century onwards.<sup>3</sup> The *Prophetiae* were regarded

<sup>1</sup> For discussions of the legend see R. Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (Cardiff, 1978), pp. 469–74; Basil Clarke, *Life of Merlin* (Cardiff, 1973); A. O. H. Jarman, *The Legend of Merlin* (Cardiff, 1976); id., 'The Welsh Myrddin Poems', ch. 3 in R. S. Loomis (ed.), *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History* (Oxford, 1954); id., 'Early Stages in the Development of the Myrddin Legend', ch. 13 in R. Bromwich and R. Brinley Jones (eds.), *Astudiaethau ar yr Hengerdd* / *Studies in Old Welsh Poetry* (Cardiff, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> See M. E. Griffiths, *Early Vaticination in Welsh with English Parallels* (Cardiff, 1937); Glanmor Williams, *Religion, Language and Nationality in Wales* (Cardiff, 1979), ch. 3 on 'Prophecy, Poetry, and Politics in Tudor Wales'.

<sup>3</sup> For the *Historia Brittonum* see J. Morris, *Nennius: British History and The Welsh Annals* (London and Chichester, 1980), pp. 31 and 71; David N. Dumville, *The Historia Brittonum: 3. The 'Vatican' Recension* (Cambridge, 1985),

as Latin versions of prophecies believed to have been made in Welsh by Myrddin, but it would be difficult to point to any one of them which translates a known Welsh text. Geoffrey, however, both in his *Historia* and in his poem *Vita Merlini*, gives prominence to the names of the national deliverers Cadualadrus and Conanus, or Cadwaladr and Cynan, whose return was expected, and these are names which the authors of the poems in the Black Book use to conjure up hope of ultimate victory for the Cymry over their enemies.

The belief in the prophesied return of a messianic leader to liberate a conquered people is a widespread phenomenon. Historically, however, Cadwaladr is a shadowy figure, the obscure son of a renowned father, Cadwallon king of Gwynedd, who in 633 allied himself with Penda of Mercia to devastate Northumbria, thus attempting to re-establish Welsh rule in northern Britain. His hopes were short-lived, for the following year he fell in battle at Hexham. No military achievements are attributable to his son and heir Cadwaladr who apparently died during the great plague of 664, possibly as a monk of the monastic settlement at Llangadwaladr in Anglesey.<sup>1</sup> King Henry VII was said to have claimed descent from him in the twenty-second degree,<sup>2</sup> but it is one of the mysteries of early Welsh literary history why the seemingly innocuous son rather than the bellicose father should have assumed the role of prophesied national deliverer. Cynan, who was expected to join Cadwaladr, was historically an even more insubstantial figure, namely Cynan Meiriadog, the legendary founder of the British or Welsh colony in Brittany.<sup>3</sup> These two leaders make their first appearance in prophetic literature in the political poem *Armes Prydain* ('The Prophecy of Britain'), preserved in the Book of Taliesin, which foretold the successful outcome of a confederacy of British and Norse peoples to drive the Saxons from Britain. The campaign, led by Cadwaladr and Cynan, so the 'Prophecy' promised, would conclude with the delivery of the entire land into the possession

p. 94. For Geoffrey's *Historia* see Neil Wright (ed.), *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth, I*, Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS. 568 (Cambridge, 1985), p. 74; Lewis Thorpe, *Geoffrey of Monmouth: The History of the Kings of Britain* (Penguin Classics, 1966), p. 171.

<sup>1</sup> See J. E. Lloyd in *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig*, p. 56; R. Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, p. 292.

<sup>2</sup> W. Wynne, *The History of Wales . . . from Cadwalader the last King, to Lhwelyn the last Prince, of British Blood* (London, 1697), p. 336.

<sup>3</sup> R. Bromwich, *op. cit.*, pp. 316-18.

of the Welsh.<sup>1</sup> This impressive poem of some 200 lines, purporting to be by the sixth-century poet Taliesin, has been dated c.930 and is thought to have been composed in order to bring pressure on King Hywel Dda of Deheubarth to support an alliance against Athelstan, king of the West Saxons. Its spirit, however, persists in the several references to Cadwaladr and Cynan in the Black Book poems. Thus, in the *Afallennau* Myrddin is made to foretell the coming of Cadwaladr to his trysting-place at Rhyd Rheon. He then adds that

Cynan will meet him, they will move forward against the  
Saxons,  
The Welsh will be victorious, their prince resplendent,  
All will obtain their rights, the renown of the Britons will  
be joyful,  
The trumpets of jubilation will be sounded, the song of peace  
and serenity.<sup>2</sup>

And in a passage in the *Oianau* Myrddin declares:

And I prophesy two rulers  
Who will fashion a peace from heaven to earth:  
Cynan and Cadwaladr, throughout all Wales  
Their coming together will be praised.<sup>3</sup>

The passage concludes with the statement that ordered government will be established and plundering hosts destroyed. There will be relief after adversity and no one will be excluded from the liberality of the deliverers.

The poem *Armes Prydain* opens with a promise of peace and increased wealth after the coming battle, but it is nevertheless principally concerned with the prospect of victory and retribution. The Black Book prophecies, on the other hand, place more emphasis on the achievement of peace with justice and a better world as the consequences of victory. This possibly reflects war-weariness, resulting from the long period of conflict during which the Normans strove to impose their rule on Wales. Many of the stanzas in the poems, however, are utterly pessimistic in tone and full of references to treachery and perjury, the ravaging of the land and the sufferings of the poor, rapacious stewards and bishops who protected thieves, women without modesty and men without valour, and the decline of patronage for minstrels. Then hope briefly returns and we hear of 'joy after long misery' with the

<sup>1</sup> See *Armes Prydein . . . From the Book of Taliesin, edited and annotated by Sir Ifor Williams* (English version by Rachel Bromwich, Dublin, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> LlDC, no. 16.84-8.

<sup>3</sup> LlDC, no. 17.120-3.



coming of the promised deliverer. Most of the prophecies are composed in fairly simple language, which contrasts sharply with the archaic and learned diction of the contemporaneous panegyrics of the *Gogynfeirdd*, and we may surmise that some of them, at least, were recited to sustain the morale of the fighting men, so that intelligibility was a prime requisite. We may wonder too about the literal credibility of the prophecies. Was the re-establishment of Welsh rule over the whole of Britain under Cynan and Cadwaladr envisaged as really feasible in terms of the politics of the principalities of the twelfth century? The answer must be negative. Professor Glanmor Williams has asserted that what medieval Welshmen received from the prophecy was not an expectation of its literal fulfilment but, first, an assurance that their separate identity as a people was both honourable and historical and, secondly, a vindication of their right to be governed by their own native rulers rather than treated as 'a race of conquered and untrustworthy barbarians'.<sup>1</sup> It is certainly true that the sense of nationality found in the prophecies is very real, however much it may differ in both form and content from modern concepts of nationality. The entire body of Welsh medieval prophecy, including the Black Book poems, is a basic source for the study of the development of the concept of Welsh nationhood, and still awaits close analysis by a competent historian of ideas who is also a Welsh scholar.

Some of the stanzas in the Black Book poems are not content merely to prophesy victory for the Welsh in general terms at some unknown future date, but refer specifically and in detail to known historical events. I have already mentioned the stanza of the *Oianau* which foretells the clash of Llywelyn and John in 1211–12. It refers to the English encampment at Degannwy, the adoption by the Welsh of a kind of 'scorched earth' policy, and the anger of Deiniol, patron saint of Bangor, at the outrage committed when John's soldiers burnt the episcopal city and carried the bishop away as a prisoner. Another stanza prophesies that there will be five kings from Normandy, the fifth of whom will invade Ireland, do honour to St David on his return, and later be involved in the 'conflict of a son and a father'.<sup>2</sup> Here we cannot fail to recognize King Henry II, who campaigned in Ireland in 1171 and returned in 1172 via St David's, where he heard mass at the cathedral. The following year he faced the rebellion of his eldest son Henry, and

<sup>1</sup> G. Williams, *Religion, Language and Nationality in Wales*, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> LIDC, no. 17.32–43.

his relations with his sons were troubled afterwards for many years until he died in 1189 fighting against Richard, who then succeeded him as Richard I.

Yet another stanza, the first in the Black Book text of the *Afallennau*, is very circumstantial in its detail. It prophesies that there will be

In the valley of the Machafwy a Wednesday of blood,  
Joy for the English with gory blades,

and then adds that later a 'Thursday will come' when there will be 'joy for the Welsh', led by 'a youth from the region of the South'.<sup>1</sup> There can be little doubt that the stanza refers to a battle fought on Wednesday, 12 August 1198, in the valley of the Machafwy near Painscastle, when the forces of Geoffrey fitz Peter utterly routed a considerable Welsh army which Gwenwynwyn, prince of Powys, had dispatched against him. Gwenwynwyn had only ruled Powys for some three years and now, in the words of Sir J. E. Lloyd, he 'saw the prize for which he had fought, the leadership of the Welsh people, pass beyond redemption from his grasp'.<sup>2</sup> Before long the leadership would be vested in Gwynedd, with the rise of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, but when the Lord Rhys of Deheubarth died in 1197 many hopes centred for a brief period on his son and successor Gruffudd ap Rhys. He, however, died in 1201, but not before enduring shabby treatment at the hands of Gwenwynwyn of Powys. It seems to me highly probable that the stanza in question was composed between 1198 and 1201 and that in it we hear the voice of a southern poet taunting Gwenwynwyn with the failure of an ill-conceived enterprise and offering the Welsh a new leader.<sup>3</sup>

I am of course assuming that, unless we are prepared to credit Myrddin in the sixth century with the authorship of these specific prophecies, we must conclude that they were composed shortly after the events to which they refer. Their purpose was propagandist, and in attempting to envisage the circumstances of their composition and dissemination we must presuppose a measure of both guile and credulity on the part, respectively, of their authors and of those to whom they were addressed. The argument must have been this: if Myrddin so many centuries ago could

<sup>1</sup> LIDC, no. 16.1-12.

<sup>2</sup> J. E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*, ii (London, 1948), 586-7.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed analysis of this stanza see my article, 'Perchen Machreu', *Llên Cymru*, iii (1954), 115-18.

predict with such accuracy the English victory at Machafwy on a Wednesday, or the invasion of Gwynedd by King John and the subsequent Welsh uprising, why should he not be believed when he prophesies ultimate deliverance for the Welsh under the leadership of Cadwaladr and Cynan? We do not know whether any among the Welsh disbelieved the prophecies. Giraldus Cambrensis, however, tells us of one eminent doubter. He records that when King Henry II returned from Ireland in 1172 via St David's he came to a marble slab known as Llech Lafar which lay across the river Alun near the cathedral. According to a prophecy of Merlin (unfortunately not preserved in Welsh) a king of England was destined to die when crossing this stone. Henry eyed it closely, walked boldly across it, and was unharmed. He then asked: 'Who will ever again believe the lying Merlin?' However, a bystander immediately responded: 'You are not the king who is to conquer Ireland. Merlin was not talking about you'.<sup>1</sup> It will be observed that the king chose to impugn the veracity of Merlin but did not suggest that the prophecy was a late forgery, while for the bystander the only matter in question was its correct interpretation.

The legend of Merlin was one of the outstanding creations of the Welsh imagination in the Middle Ages. The Black Book poems, which contain its essential core in the early stages of its development, embedded in a much larger amount of prophetic material, thus dovetail with the fourth category of poems on legendary or mythological themes. There are fourteen of these, of which several are brief, one or two scrappy, while some are of a fair length. A number occur together towards the end of the manuscript and Sir Ifor Williams suggested very reasonably that they are 'a collection of songs from our earliest sagas'.<sup>2</sup> They are on the whole probably of earlier date than most of the poems in the other three categories and their more primitive subject-matter leads us back not only to the Brythonic heroic age but to traditions deriving from the pagan Celtic pantheon. Immediately after the Myrddin poems in the Black Book there follows a series of seventy-three *englynion*, entitled 'The Stanzas of the Graves', in which the burial-places of ancient heroes, both historical and legendary, are noted, and brief but pregnant comments made about their occupants. These were the subject of the Sir John Rhÿs Memorial Lecture by the late Professor Thomas Jones in 1967. The prevailing tone

<sup>1</sup> See Lewis Thorpe, *Gerald of Wales: The Journey through Wales and The Description of Wales* (Penguin Books, 1978), pp. 166-8.

<sup>2</sup> Ifor Williams, *Lectures on Early Welsh Poetry* (Dublin, 1970), p. 22.

of the stanzas is that of the heroic age. We are told that Môr Mawrhydîg was a 'pillar in the swift-moving battle', that Llwch Llawengin 'would not be three months without conflict', and that wherever Brwyno Hir went 'there would be no retreat'. Of three heroes named together it is stated that 'they were not slain un-avenged'. The exception is the reference to 'the grave which everyone doubts', that of Gortheyrn or Vortigern. There is also a note of sadness, as in the *Gododdin* of Aneirin, at the fall of the heroes before their youth was spent. Among the most intriguing, however, is the *englyn* which notes the graves of three heroes, March, Gwythur, and Gwgawn Glededyfrudd ('of the red sword'), and then states that a grave for Arthur is not to be found.<sup>1</sup> There is evidence that at the time the Black Book was written there was widespread belief in the expected return of Arthur but, as we have seen, in the earlier prophetic poems, including those in the Black Book, the promised deliverers named are, not Arthur, but Cadwaladr and Cynan. However, as early as 1125, William of Malmesbury had declared that 'the tomb of Arthur is nowhere beheld, whence ancient ditties fable that he is yet to come'.<sup>2</sup> The *englyn* does not specifically promise his return, but it is the only Welsh text which can be related to William's statement.

One poem of ninety lines, incomplete in the manuscript owing to the loss of a leaf, known as 'The Dialogue of Arthur and Glewlwyd Gafaelfawr', is an invaluable document for students of the origins and early history of the Arthurian legend.<sup>3</sup> It opens with the arrival of Arthur, accompanied by a troop of warriors, at the gate of a fortress, to which he seeks admission. The gate-keeper, Glewlwyd, requires him to identify himself and his men. This he does, giving us the earliest known descriptive enumeration of his 'knights'. These, however, are not the knights of the Round Table and medieval chivalry, but rather their progenitors as they were conceived of at a much earlier period. The poem introduces us to a weird and fantastic world of primitive saga. A large part of it is devoted to the praise of Cai (later Kay, Keu and Keie in English, French and German respectively), who, we are told,

<sup>1</sup> LlDC, no. 18.133-5.

<sup>2</sup> In his *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, see E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain* (London, 1966), pp. 17, 250. William's statement reads: 'Sed Arturis sepulcrum nusquam visitur, unde antiquitas naeniarum adhuc eum venturum fabulatur'.

<sup>3</sup> LlDC, no. 31. The poem has been edited by Brynley F. Roberts in *Astudiaethau ar yr Hengerdd*, pp. 296-309, and translated by R. Bromwich in P. B. Grout, R. A. Lodge, C. E. Pickford and E. K. C. Varty (eds.), *The Legend of Arthur in the Middle Ages, Studies Presented to A. H. Diverres* (D. S. Brewer, 1983), pp. 45-6; see also the discussion in *ibid.*, pp. 107-11.

struck down his enemies by the hundred, destroyed witches and monsters, and could not be slain unless God himself willed it. The text of the poem unfortunately breaks off as Cai is setting forth to fight the man-eating monster cat Cath Palug, which later appears in French romance as *Capalu* and whose memory is still perpetuated by place-names such as *Col du Chat* and *Mont du Chat* in the French Alps. The portrayal of Cai in the poem is similar to that found in the tale of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, which depicts him as a Celtic hero comparable to the Irish Cú Chulainn. In the continental romances he has been transformed into a morose and cowardly bully, but Wolfram von Eschenbach in his *Parzival* specifically rejects the common description of Keie as 'a rogue' and asserts that he was 'a brave and loyal man'. It has been claimed that the only way to explain this is to postulate an unknown link between the tradition represented by the Black Book poem and the German poet.<sup>1</sup>

Another poem of thirty-seven *englynion*, entitled 'Mechydd ap Llywarch', belongs to the cycle of Llywarch Hen, and the Black Book text (the only one of this poem) is the oldest of any part of that cycle.<sup>2</sup> It is obscure in parts and may represent a conflation of two different poems. The opening *englynion* provide another example of 'Celtic' nature poetry, referring to the biting wind, the bare hillside, the frozen lake, the withered reeds and the broken stalks, but the poet then turns, not to religious considerations, but to citing these harsh features of the wintry scene as reasons for not going to war. The stanzas appear to take the form of a dialogue between Cynddilig, son of Llywarch Hen, and his father, and the exchanges between the two are concerned with one of the prevailing themes in the Llywarch Hen poetry, the criticism or rejection, in part at least, of the heroic ideal. Llywarch charges Cynddilig with cowardice but it seems probable that, in the event, the latter yielded to his father's promptings, went forth to battle like all his brothers, and fell.<sup>3</sup> Other characters mentioned in

<sup>1</sup> G. Goetinck, *Peredur: A Study of Welsh Tradition in the Grail Legends* (Cardiff, 1975), pp. 96, 102.

<sup>2</sup> LlDC, no. 30. For editions see Ifor Williams, *Canu Llywarch Hen* (Cardiff, 1953), p. 27; K. Jackson, *Early Welsh Gnostic Poems* (Cardiff, 1935), p. 18. A Welsh text with English translation is given by Patrick Ford in *The Poetry of Llywarch Hen* (University of California, 1974), pp. 120-31.

<sup>3</sup> The theme is discussed in my article, 'The Heroic Ideal in Early Welsh Verse' in W. Meid (ed.), *Beiträge zur Indogermanistik und Keltologie* (Innsbruck, 1967), pp. 193-212; for a Welsh version see 'Y Delfryd Arwrol yn yr Hen Ganu', *Llên Cymru*, viii (1965), 125-49. See also my volume, *The Cynfeirdd* (Cardiff, 1981).

the poem include a certain Pelis, who declares that he has been 'reared', or possibly 'trained', by Owain Rheged and describes himself as 'following Owain' (*canlyn Owain*) on a white charger. A similar phrase, 'following Arthur' (*canlyn Arthur*), is used in the tale of *The Dream of Rhonabwy*.<sup>1</sup> Owain, a warrior prince of northern Britain whose elegy was sung by Taliesin, was a son of Urien, the sixth-century king of Rheged. In the twelfth century he appears as the Arthurian character Yvain, the hero of Chrétien de Troyes's romance *Le Chevalier au Lion*, to which the Welsh *Owain* or *Iarllles y Ffynnon* corresponds. The Black Book poem not only applies the conventional description 'red-speared' to him, but also includes the cryptic phrase 'whom God deliver from close captivity'.<sup>2</sup> If a ninth- or tenth-century dating is acceptable for the poem, we are here given a glimpse of Owain ab Urien midway in his progress from a historical warrior leader of the Britons of the North to a major character in medieval chivalric romance.<sup>3</sup>

Other poems on legendary themes include a series of eighteen *englynion* embodying traditions concerning Geraint, a late sixth-century prince of Devon; a short humorous or mock-heroic poem on 'Gwallog and the Goose'; and two dialogue-poems, in one of which Gwyddneu Garanhir, originally one of the Men of the North, and Gwyn ap Nudd, the Welsh King of Faery, are the speakers, and in the other Taliesin and an unknown Ugnach ap Mydno.<sup>4</sup> There are also a series of nine *englynion* on the legend of the inundation of Maes Gwyddneu, or Cantre'r Gwaelod,<sup>5</sup> and two difficult fragments of a poem embodying an early form of the Tristan legend.<sup>6</sup> Another brief poem describes the harsh penance imposed upon a certain Ysgolan, who had been guilty of setting fire to a church, killing a cow, and casting a book, presumably a psalter, into the water. His penance was enforced immersion for a full twelvemonth in the waters of a weir, where his flesh was

<sup>1</sup> See Melville Richards, *Breudwyt Ronabwy* (Caerdydd, 1948), p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> LIDC, no. 30.87. Cf. I. Williams, *Canu Llywarch Hen*, p. 183.

<sup>3</sup> For the dating of the poem see LIDC, p. lxi; *Canu Llywarch Hen*, p. lxxiv.

<sup>4</sup> These four poems, nos. 21, 33, 34, and 36 in LIDC, have been edited by Brynley F. Roberts in *Astudiaethau ar yr Hengerdd*, pp. 286-96, 309-25.

<sup>5</sup> LIDC, no. 39. The poem has been edited by R. Bromwich in 'Cantre'r Gwaelod and Ker-is', *The Early Cultures of North-West Europe* (*H. M. Chadwick Memorial Studies*), ed. by Cyril Fox and Bruce Dickins (Cambridge, 1950), 213-41.

<sup>6</sup> LIDC, no. 35. The poem has been discussed twice by R. Bromwich in 'Some Remarks on the Celtic Sources of "Tristan"', *Trans. Hon. Soc. Cymmrodorion* (1953), pp. 32-60, and in 'The "Tristan" Poem in the Black Book of Carmarthen', *Studia Celtica*, xiv/xv (1979/80), 54-65.

gnawed by the sea-creatures.<sup>1</sup> A large number of versions of the theme of this poem have been recorded in the present century from oral tradition in Brittany, the result probably of borrowing through a cultural link with Wales in the Middle Ages. The only prose item in the manuscript must be mentioned here. It is a fragment of the *Triads of the Horses*, which record the names of the horses of early heroes.<sup>2</sup> The last poem in the Black Book is a rather mixed collection of twelve *englynion* entitled, not with complete accuracy, *Enwev Meibon Llywarch Hen* ('The Names of the Sons of Llywarch Hen').<sup>3</sup> It has been shown that three of the names in one *englyn* derive from a Welsh version of Geoffrey's *Historia*.<sup>4</sup> This now poses no problem for the dating of the Black Book, as our earliest copies of Geoffrey's work in its Welsh dress (*Brut y Brenhinedd*) are believed to have been written during the first half of the thirteenth century.<sup>5</sup> But it is noteworthy that, although the Black Book was written, as is now believed, well over a century after the composition of the *Historia*, it shows no trace elsewhere of having been influenced, either directly or indirectly, by Geoffrey's work. In particular, the sections which contain legendary and prophetic material represent pure native tradition. Geoffrey himself had been able to draw upon some of the contents of this tradition, but through which channels is not known.

This lecture is, I think, the first attempt at a general survey in English of the contents of the Black Book of Carmarthen since Dr Gwenogvryn Evans published the 'Introductory Remarks' to his diplomatic edition in 1907. The treatment of both the form and subject-matter of the poems has of necessity been very selective and condensed. Contained in the 1,927 lines of the Black Book there are literally hundreds of points or matters of interest which would repay extended investigation by the linguist, folklorist, historian or literary critic. Dr Evans, in his introduction, divided the poems from the standpoint of subject-matter into four main divisions: Mythology, Theology, History, and Literature. This corresponds in part to the categories which I have used, but it

<sup>1</sup> LIDC, no. 25. For discussions see D. Laurent, 'La gwerz de Skolan et la légende de Merlin', *Ethnologie française*, i, 3-4 (1971), 19-54, and my article, 'Cerdd Ysgolan', in J. E. Caerwyn Williams (ed.), *Ysgrifau Beirniadol X* (Dinbych, 1977), pp. 51-78.

<sup>2</sup> LIDC, no. 6. See R. Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, pp. 97-118.

<sup>3</sup> LIDC, no. 40. For an edited text see I. Williams, *Canu Llywarch Hen*, p. 30. A Welsh text with English translation is given by P. Ford in *The Poetry of Llywarch Hen*, pp. 132-5.

<sup>4</sup> By R. Bromwich in *Bulletin of Board of Celtic Studies*, xvii (1957), 180.

<sup>5</sup> See Brynley F. Roberts in *ibid.*, xxv (1973), 274.

may be doubted whether the scribe of the manuscript would have understood the concept of a category devoted to 'Literature' as such. He would have thought much more functionally of his various collections of verse which embodied and expressed current concepts appertaining to religion, panegyric, prophecy and legend or legendary 'history'. Dr Evans's section on 'Literature' merits attention, however, because in it he stresses the literary excellence of many passages in the poems, the musicality of the diction, the measured cadences of the prophecies, the aphorisms, the convincing realism of the descriptions of the natural scene, the eloquence of many a line recording joy or unhappiness. And he rightly emphasizes that these qualities and many others can only be fully appreciated by reading the poems in the original Welsh.