

# The Relevance of Changing Attitudes to Translation for Students of Celtic Literatures:

## The *Mabinogi* from Lady Guest to Sioned Davies

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# Outline

- Classroom context, target audience
- Translations
- Criteria
- Theories and Approaches
- Translational Intentions
- Comparisons
- Results and conclusions
- Bibliography

# Classroom situation

- tightened curricula
    - not enough time to learn languages fully
    - not enough time for intensive analysis of texts
  - heterogenous groups of participants
    - students from various diciplines
    - not all participants know even one celtic language
- not always possible to read texts in the original language
- translations have to be used in class

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# Target audience

- university classroom
- not usable: retellings or paraphrases
- desirable: full text, represented *accurately*
- possibly different courses of study
- different levels of existing knowledge
- expected to be able to deal with 'difficult' texts

# Translations – 1

- Pughe, William Owen: 1795-1829
  - 1795: *“The Mabinogion, or Juvenile Amusements, being Ancient Welsh Romances”*
  - 1796: *“The Romantic Tales called Mabinogion or Juvenile Amusements”*
  - 1818: *“The Romantic Tales of the Mabinogion”*
  - 1829: *“The Mabinogi: Or, the Romance of Math ab Mathonwy”*
- Guest, Lady Charlotte: 1838-1849
  - *“The Mabinogion from the Llyfr Coch o Hergest, and other ancient Welsh manuscripts, with an English Translation and Notes”*

# Translations – 2

- Lanier, Sidney: 1881
  - *“The Boy's Mabinogion being The Earliest Welsh Tales of King Arthur in the famous Red Book of Hergest – edited for boys with an introduction by Sidney Lanier, Editor of ‘The Boy's Froissart’ and ‘The Boy's King Arthur’”*
- Ellis, T.P. and Lloyd, J. 1929:
  - *“The Mabinogion: A new Translation”*
- Jones, Gwyn; Jones, Thomas: 1949
  - *“The Mabinogion”*

# Translations – 3

- Gantz, Jeffrey: 1976
  - *“The Mabinogion”*
- Ford, P.K.: 1977
  - *“The Mabinogi and other Welsh Tales”*
- Thomas, Gwyn; Crossley-Holland, Kevin: 1985
  - *“Tales from the Mabinogion”*



# Translations – 4

- Parker, Will: 2005
  - *“The Four Branches of the Mabinogi”*
- Bollard, John K.: 2006-2010
  - 2006: *“The Mabinogi”*
  - 2007: *“Companion tales to the Mabinogi”*
  - 2010: *“Tales of Arthur”*
- Davies, Sioned: 2007
  - *“The Mabinogion”*

# Criteria for selecting translations

Which translation is *the best* for classroom use?

→ need to establish criteria to select translation(s)

- what are applicable theories and approaches ?
- what happens when we apply these tools to our texts?

# Theories & Approaches

established theories and approaches applicable:

- translation studies
- postcolonial studies
- postcolonial translation studies
- &c.

# Translation Studies

- *"Either the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him."* Friedrich Schleiermacher, 1813. (trans.: Bernofsky 2004:49)
- modern terminology:
  - **domesticating** method:  
ethnocentric reduction of foreign text to target language cultural values
  - **foreignizing** method:  
representing linguistic and cultural differences of foreign text, sending reader abroad

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# Postcolonial Studies

- set of theories from various disciplines
- reaction to colonialism & colonialist ideology
- aim: to understand and/or overcome colonialist legacy

basically:

- high status vs. low status
- self vs. other
- dominant vs. dominated

# Postcolonial Translation Studies

M. Tymoczko (1999):

- *“In translations the greater the prestige of the source culture and the source text, the easier it is to require that the audience come to the text.”* (Tymoczko 1999: 30)
- differences not only in language but also cultural factors (signature concepts)
- ‘faithful translations’ might cause difficulties to target audience sensibilities
- in obscuring/muting cultural disjunctions translator ceases to be ‘faithful’
- preferred solution often: embedding translated texts in an explanatory shell

# Translational intentions – foreignising

- “Recognizing that any translation is to some degree an interpretation of the original, I have tried to render *The Mabinogi* into standard modern English while staying as close as possible to the meaning, phrasing, and construction of the medieval text. [...] I have chosen to retain some linguistic and stylistic elements that are not usually found in present-day written English.” (Bollard 2006:13)
- “The overriding aim of this translation has been to convey the performability of the surviving manuscript versions. [...], the *Mabinogion* were tales to be read aloud to a listening audience – the parchment was ‘interactive’ and vocality was of its essence. [...], every effort has been made to transfer the rhythm, tempo, and alliteration of the original to the target language.” (Davies 2007:xxxi)



# Translational intentions – domesticating

- “The surviving texts of The Mabinogion are often tedious, repetitive and unclear, and I have therefore varied sentence structure, eliminated a few duplications and occasionally replaced personal pronouns with proper names (or vice versa); the result will sound as natural to the modern reader as the original did to its medieval audiences.” (Gantz 1976:34)
- “The present work contains nearly all the Mabinogion originally given; [...], the original text is scrupulously preserved, except occasionally to hasten the long-lagging action of a story, – in which case the interpolation is always in brackets, – and except where the demands of modern reserve require excision.” (Lanier 1881: xix)

# Differences – Overview

areas of notable differences:

- additional materials
- completeness, selection of texts
- the titles
- punctuation, paragraph separation, speaker marking
- names (place-names, personal names)
- lexical items
- verbal syntax
- stock-phrases, narrative formulae
- representation of style
- &c.

# Titles

## **Guest, 1849:** “*The Mabinogion*”

- Pwyll Prince of Dyfed
- Branwen the Daughter of Llyr
- Manawydan the Son of Llyr
- Math the Son of Mathonwy

## **Lanier, 1881:** “The Boy’s Mabinogion”

- Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed
- Branwen the Daughter of Llyr
- Manawydan and the Mice
- The Origin of the Owl

## **Bollard, 2006:** “The Four Branches of the Mabinogi”

- The First Branch
- The Second Branch
- The Third Branch
- The Fourth Branch

## **Davies, 2007:** “The Mabinogion”

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# Goewin

- *Ac yguely Math uab Mathonwy dodi Giluathwy a Goewyn uerch Pebin y gyscu y gyt, a chymell y morynyon allan yn amharchus, **a chyscu genti o'y hanuod** y nos honno.* (PKM)
- Gilvathwy and Goewin were put together to sleep; and the other damsels were disrespectfully forced out; **so she was slept with, against her consent**, on that night. (Pughe 1829)
- and Gilvaethwy took Math the son of Mathonwy's couch. And while he turned out the other damsels from the room discourteously, **he made Goewin unwillingly remain.** (Guest 1849)
- [ONCE upon a time Gwydion found a yellow-haired child in his chamber, which had been placed there by magic art. And Gwydion straightaway flung a velvet scarf over the child and hid it.] Now the place he hid it was the bottom of a chest at the foot of his bed. (Lanier 1881)

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# Bran 1/2

- ***Bendigeiduran*** *uab Llŷr, a oed urenhin coronawc ar yr ynys hon, ac ardyrchawc o goron Lundein.* (PKM: 29)
- **Brân the Blessed** son of Llŷr was the crowned King of this island, having been raised to the throne of London. (Gantz 1976: 67)
- **Bendigeidfran**, son of Llŷr, was chosen King of the Island of Britain, which was called 'the Island of the Mighty'; and he was crowned in London. (Thomas 1985:30)
- **Bendigeidfran** son of Llŷr was crowned king over this island and invested with the crown of London. (Davies 2007:22)

## Bran 2/2

- *Bendigeiduran uab Llyr, a oed **urehin coronawc** ar yr ynys hon, ac **ardyrchawc o goron Lundein**.* (PKM: 29)
- Brân the Blessed son of Llŷr was the **crowned King** of this island, **having been raised to the throne of London**. (Gantz 1976: 67)
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# Pwyll 1/2

- A ***thrannoeth yn ieuengtít y dyd*** *kyuodi a oruc, a dyuot y Lynn Cuch i ellwng e gwn dan y coet. A chanu y gorn a dechreu dygyuor yr hela, a cherdet yn ol y cwn, ac ymgolli a'y gydymdeithon.* (PKM: 1)
- ... and the next morning, **in the infancy of the day**, he arose and came to the **vale of Cuch**, to turn out his dogs under the wood. He blew his horn, and began to enter fully upon the chace, following after the dogs, and separating from his companions. (Pughe 1799: 327)
- And the next day, **when the day was still young**, he arose and came to **Glyn Cuch** to loose his dogs into the wood. And he sounded his horn and began to muster the hunt and he became separated from his companions. (Bollard 2006: 20)
- And **early the next day** he got up, and came to **Glyn Cuch** to unleash his dogs in the forest. And he blew his horn, and began to muster the hunt, and went off after the dogs, and became separated from his companions. (Davies 2007: 3)

# Pwyll 2/2

- *A thrannoeth yn ieuengtít y dyd kyuodi a oruc, a dyuot y Lynn Cuch i ellwng e gwn dan y coet. **A chanu y gorn a dechreu dygyuor yr hela, a cherdet yn ol y cwn, ac ymgolli a'y gydymdeithon.*** (PKM: 1)
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# Efnissyen

- *A chyuodi y uynyd, a chymryt y mab erwyd y traet, a heb ohir, na chael o dyn yn y ty gauael arnaw, yny want y mab yn wysc y benn yn y gynneu.* (PKM)
- He rises up and takes the boy by his feet and without delay, before any man in the house catches him, he thrusts the boy headlong into the blaze. (Parker 2005)
- And rising up, he took the boy by the feet, without delay, and no man in the house got hold of him until he thrust the boy headlong into the blazing fire. (Bollard 2006)
- And he gets up, and takes the boy by the feet, and immediately, before anyone in the house can lay hand on him, he hurls the boy head-first into the fire. (Davies 2007)

# Lleu

- *Sef a wnaeth ynteu, medyl yaw y mae Lleu oed yr eryr, a chanu englyn:* (PKM)
- Gwydyon thought that the eagle was Lleu, so he sang this englyn: (Gantz 1976)
- This is what he did – he thought that the eagle was Lleu, and he sang an *englyn*: (Bollard 2006:105)
- He thinks that the eagle is Lleu, and sings an *englyn*: (Davies 2007: 62)

# *Llinon, gwyrda*

- "Arglwyd," heb y **wyrda** wrth Uatholwch, "nyt oes gynghor namyn kilyaw drwy **Llinon** (auon oed yn Iwerdon) (PKM)
- 'Lord,' said the **gwyrda** unto Matholwch, 'there is no counsel save to retreat through the **Llinon** (a river which is in Ireland) (Ellis/Lloyd 1929)
- 'Lord,' said his **chief men** to Matholwch, 'there is no counsel save to retreat across the **Llinon**, a river which was in Ireland (Jones/Jones 1949)
- 'My Lord,' said his **noblemen**, 'there is only one wise thing we can do – retreat over the River **Shannon**,' (Thomas 1985)
- 'Lord,' said his **men** to Matholwch, 'the only advice is to retreat across the **Liffey**, (a river in Ireland) (Davies 2007:29)

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# Lexical items

## PKM

- *marchog*
- *unben*
- *eneit*
- *prif lys*
- *cylch*
- *gwyrda*

## Guest (1849)

- horseman, knight
- chieftain
- my soul
- chief palace
- circuit
- lords

## Ellis/Lloyd (1929)

- man on horseback
- Sir
- my soul
- chief court
- *cylch*
- *gwyrda*

## Bollard (2006)

- rider
- chieftain
- friend
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# Style(s)

- stylistic features in general
- register
- “apparent age”
  - translation in archaic style to show age of text
  - translation in fluent modern style to match original perceptions
- representation of different registers within Middle Welsh Prose
- repetition of terms or employing synonyms
- &c.



# Results

- no translation is perfect representation of source text
- every translation is a different interpretation of source text, makes different choices and decisions
- even translations which aim at accuracy differ in treatment of alterity:
  - representing (foreignising)
  - glossing over (domesticating)
- every translation is just that:  
one possible translation  
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# Conclusions:

Which one to choose?

- different translations suited for different purposes
- dependant on target audience and desired learning goals
- target audiences and desired learning goals can vary within one class
- **necessary:** creating awareness for translation as process
- **suggestion:** reading same piece of text in different translations

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# My personal conclusions

# Thank you for your attention!

# Bibliography

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