

The Mabinogi

The Mabinogion and Other Welsh Tales!

For 2021's epic storytelling event, the Seattle Storytellers Guild is joining forces with the Puget Sound Welsh Association to present the Welsh epic, the Mabinogion and other Welsh Tales.

The Mabinogion contains the earliest stories of all of the literature of Great Britain that continues to inspire us today! The manuscripts in which these tales are found was written in Middle Welsh about seven hundred years ago, (12 -13th century) but the stories existed way before that as the oral tradition and artistry of Welsh and Celtic storytellers who wandered Britain and beyond, swapping these stories for board and lodging. These tales offer drama, philosophy, romance, tragedy, fantasy and humor with classic hero quests and glimpses of a far off age. Some of the stories are pre-Christian, with glimpses of magicians and the old Celtic gods. They're set in a magical landscape which corresponds geographically to Wales, sometimes even with specific place names. The stories are full of giants, talking animals, dastardly and kind rulers, shape shifters, heroic men and intelligent women. Some tales portray a very different King Arthur from the later popular versions but all agree that these first tales of Arthur arose in Wales! Also included is the legend of one of the most famous bards of Wales, Taliesin.

The Tales of the Mabinogion

Strictly speaking, however, the term Mabinogi – Mabinogion was mistakenly taken as the plural of Mabinogi by Lady Charlotte Guest.

The First Branch of the Mabinogi begins with the tale of **Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed**. Pwyll changes places with a King of Annwfn, the Otherworld. He meets Rhiannon for the first time, who appears on a charmed horse which cannot be caught by even the fastest rider, they marry and she is humiliated.

The Second Branch concerns Branwen, her brother Bendigeidfran (a giant) and the terrible fate which follows her marriage to the King of Ireland.

The Third Branch a castle appears where none has ever been seen before, charms are cast and deep revenge is played out.

The fourth branch concerns Math, Son of Mathonwy and Blodeuwedd, the Woman of Flowers

An Epic Storytelling break down of the stories in the Four Branches for individual tellers
Using the translations of Sioned Davies (and of **Patrick Ford**)

The Mabinogion: A New Translation by Sioned Davies Oxford World's Classics 2008 293 pages (Includes a 22 page introduction, 55 pages of notes, a pronunciation guide and an index of personal names)

The Mabinogion and Other Medieval Welsh Tales by Patrick K Ford 224 pages
Includes The four stories that make up the *Mabinogi*, along with three additional tales from the same tradition which compose the core of the ancient Welsh mythological cycle.

The First Branch

p. 3-8 (Ford: p 37-42 (Middle)) *How Pwyll becomes a chieftain of Annwfn* “Pwyll Pen Annwfn”
Begins: “Pwyll, prince of Dyfed was lord over the seven cantrefs ...”
Ends: “... and he was called Pwyll Pen Annwfn from then on”

p. 8-15 (Ford p 42-50 (line#4)) *How Pwyll comes to marry Rhiannon*
Section begins: “Once upon a time Pwyll was at Arberth ...”
Ends: “It is, between me and God,” said Pwyll.

p. 16-21 (Ford p 50-56) *The lost youth*
Begins: “The next day they traveled to Dyfed ...”
End: “And so ends this branch of the Mabinogion.”

The Second Branch

p. 22-27 (Ford p 59-64 Bottom) *The marriage of Branwen and insult to Matholwch*
Begin: “Bendigeidfran son of Llyr was crowned king ...”
End: “They set out from Abermenai in their thirteen ships, and came to Ireland.”

p. 27-31 (Ford 64 Btm-69 1st Para) *The dishonor & punishment of Branwen, mayhem, and her son becomes king*
Begin: “In Ireland they received a great welcome.”
End: “... and the boy was invested with the kingship.”

p. 31-34 (Ford p 69 2nd Para-72) *Death of son, mayhem, Bran's head.*
Begin: “Then, when peace had been made, Bendigeidfran called the boy to him.”
End: “And that is how this branch of the Mabinogi ends ...”

The Third Branch

p. 35-39 (Ford p 75- 79) *Manawydan and Rhiannon marry, the mist, the three crafts.*
Begin: “After the seven men we spoke of above ...”
End: “No,” said Manawydan ... “... We will set off and go and visit Dyfed.”

p. 39-42 (Ford p 79-82 middle) *The disappearance of Pryderi and Rhiannon, Manawydan catches the mouse*
Begin: “Although the road was long, they came at last to Dyfed ...”
End: “... and kept hold of it and made for the court”

p. 42-46 (Ford 82-87) *Manawydan almost hangs the mouse and the “Cleric” reverses the enchantment*
Begin: “Manawydan came to the chamber where Cigfa was.”
End: “... And so ends this branch of the Mabinogi.”

The Fourth Branch

p. 47-50 (**Ford p 91-94 middle**) *Gwydion plots, and deceives Pryderi*

Begin: "Math son of Mathonwy was lord over Gwynedd ..."

End: "Then having made a pen for the pigs, they made their way to Math son of Mathonwy, in Caer Dathyl."

p. 50-54 (**Ford p 94-99 top**) *Rape of Goewin, Gwydion & Gilfaethwy's punishment, birth of Dylan*

Begin: "When they arrived there, the country was being mustered."

End: "And that was one of the Three Unfortunate Blows"

p. 54-59 (**Ford p 99 -103 mid of para 6**) *Naming of Lleu through the making of Blodeuedd*

Begin: "One day as Gwydion was in his bed ..."

End: "And everyone was pleased with his countenance and governance."

p. 59-64 (**Ford p 103 middle-109**) *Blodeuedd. Gronw, and the murder of Lleu*

Begin: "Then one day Lleu went to Caer Dathyl ..."

End: "And so ends this branch of the Mabinogi."

The Other Tales of the Mabinogion

The Welsh Sagas:

Lludd and Lleuelys

Cathwch and Olwen - Arthur

Peredur, Son of Efrog

The Dream of Emperor Maxem

The Arthurian Romances

The Lady of the Well

Geraint, Son of Erbin

Rhonabwy's Dream

TRANSLATIONS IN ENGLISH: (Most are available on Kindle as well)

[**The Mabinogion**](#) by Anonymous and Lady Charlotte Guest Numerous editions of her translation are available . This edition of the ancient stories was translated by Lady Charlotte Guest, an English aristocrat who was most famous for this work between 1838 and 1849. Accomplished with languages from a young age, she gathered from obscure archives the manuscripts, arranged and presented them in modern English.

Two Audio Versions are available: [**The Mabinogion**](#) Audio CD – Audiobook, CD, Unabridged by [Lady Charlotte Guest](#) (Author) Kindle or Audio CD

[**The Mabinogion : The original four branches of the Mabinogi**](#), translated into English by Lady Charlotte Guest . [With a comprehensive introduction by Colin Jones](#), Kindle Audio Book available, read by Colin Jones 3 hours and 37 minutes

[**The Mabinogion: A New Translation**](#) by Sioned Davies Oxford World's Classics 2008 293 pages (Includes a 22 page introduction, 55 pages of notes, a pronunciation guide and an index of personal names) Sioned Davies' 2007 translation of the eleven medieval Welsh tales that make up the Mabinogion is a delight to read. Her guide to pronunciation, extensive explanatory notes and indices of personal names and place names provide the background for readers coming to the tales for the first time to easily understand them.

[**The Mabinogion and Other Medieval Welsh Tales**](#) by Patrick K Ford 224 pages Kindle
The four stories that make up the *Mabinogi*, along with three additional tales from the same tradition, form this collection and compose the core of the ancient Welsh mythological cycle. Included are only those stories that have remained unadulterated by the influence of the French Arthurian romances, providing a rare, authentic selection of the finest works in medieval Celtic literature. This landmark edition translated by Patrick K. Ford is a literary achievement of the highest order.

[**The Mabinogion Tetralogy**](#) by Evangeline Walton 720 pages Kindle
The Mabinogion is to Welsh mythology what the tales of Zeus, Hera, and Apollo are to Greek myth. Evangeline Walton's compelling rendition of these classic, thrilling stories of magic, betrayal, lost love, and bitter retribution include the encounter between Prince Pwyll and Arawn, the God of Death, which Pwyll survives by agreeing to kill the one man that Death cannot fell, and the tale of Bran the Blessed and his family's epic struggle for the throne. Walton's vivid retelling introduces an ancient world of gods and monsters, heroes, kings and quests, making accessible one of the greatest fantasy sagas of all time.

[**The Assembly of the Severed Head**](#) by Hugh Lupton
A masterful telling of the stories in the Mabinogion within the framework of a novel.

There are a number of other wonderful works that incorporate the most well-known stories, including Susan Cooper's "**Dark is Rising**" series, Jenny Nimmo's "**Magician Trilogy**", Lloyd Alexander's "**Chronicles of Prydain**," and stand-alones like Fisher's "**Darkhenge**".

For Younger Readers:

[**Celtic Mythology: Tales of Gods, Goddesses, and Heroes**](#) by Philip Freeman Chapters 8 & 9 are his retelling of the Mabinogi and some of the Welsh Sagas

[**The Mountain of Marvels: A Celtic Tale of Magic, Retold from The Mabinogion**](#) (Skyhook World Classics Book 1) Kindle Edition by [Aaron Shepard](#)

Mr. Shepard has done a commendable job of distilling what are, after all, fragments and pieces of stories, into a reasonably coherent tale. He has also done a nice job of preserving the feel and flow of the tales while modernizing the language and shaping the narrative. And remember, these are basically 800+ year old versions of the same fantasy/quest/magic stories that fill the middle grade shelves now.

[**Tales from the Mabinogion**](#) Hardcover – January 1, 1992 by [Gwyn Thomas](#)

A teens and young adults version needs a warning: the subject matter, which includes rape, gender transformations and incest, is somewhat mature for fifth grade, and the illustrations are graphic and include a nude woman. Parents who are planning to use this book may find it helpful to be warned about this content in advance.

Studies in Welsh Mythology

The Celtic Myths: A Guide to the Ancient Gods and Legends. By Miranda Aldhouse-Green Chapter 4: Enchanted Wales, A Magical Land pp. 77-97

Heroes of the Dawn: Celtic Myth (Myth and Mankind) Time-Life Books 1996

A good introduction to the Celtic World, and presents the Welsh mythology and summarizes the stories. pp 77-102, discussions of the real and legendary Arthur follow..

The Good and the Evil: Women of the Four Branches of the Mabinogion and Le Morte D'Arthur Kindle Edition by [Jan Feldstein](#) **Kindle** 68 Pages

This study tells the story of the most prominent female characters of the Four Branches of the Mabinogion and Le Morte D'Arthur. It points out how surprisingly similar they are to one another. Their significance within the narratives is also discussed in connection with Andrew Breeze's view that the Four Branches were composed by Princess Gwennlian of Gwynedd. Women characters are analyzed and contrasted with their counterparts from the other medieval narrative so as to illustrate the role of women in a male dominated and patriarchal world. What impact can arranged marriages of 'good' subordinate women have on their respective societies? And to what ends may the desire of 'evil' headstrong females lead when they try to realize their inner ambitions?

Celtic Literary Archetypes in The Mabinogion: A Study of the Ancient Tale of Pwyll, Lord of Dyved (Historia Book 1) Kindle Edition by [Adam Haviaras](#) **Kindle**

This book introduces the reader to some of the literary traditions of the ancient Celts through the study of the first branch of The Mabinogion: Pwyll, Lord of Dyved. This ancient text is both a record of British mythology and a teaching text for ancient princes. It also illustrates the values of Celtic, Iron Age society that carried on into the Middle Ages to shape Arthurian Romance and ideals of chivalry and kingship. In this book, the reader will learn about the most prominent archetypes in ancient Celtic literature such as occurrences in threes, the importance of contact with the Otherworld, what it meant to be an effective ruler, and more. Pwyll, Lord of Dyved is a tale of magic and wonder, as well as human trial and experience, and the archetypes it employs are as relevant today as they were over fifteen-hundred years ago. If you are studying The Mabinogion, or have an interest in Celtic and Arthurian studies, the Arthurian legends and British mythology, then you will enjoy this short, engaging study of one of the great literary achievements of the ancient Celts.

Rhiannon: Divine Queen of the Celtic Britons by [Jhenah Telyndru](#)

Jhenah Telyndru's *Rhiannon: Divine Queen of the Celtic Britons* is a real treasure-trove of lore and wisdom regarding this beloved Welsh goddess. The first half of this book gives us a brilliant scholarly introduction to Her, while the second half offers insights into developing an immediate and first-hand relationship with this Sovereign deity. By combining the academic with the experiential this work really stands out in today's modern goddess literature.

Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion - A Lecture Delivered at the National Museum of Wales on 27 October 1950 by [W. J. Gruffydd](#) 32 pages Paperback – April 12, 2013

The History of the Kings of Britain (Penguin Classics) Paperback – January 27, 1977 by [Geoffrey of Monmouth](#) (Author), [Lewis Thorpe](#) (Translator, Introduction)

Completed in 1136, this classic chronicle traces the story of the realm from its supposed foundation by Brutus to the coming of the Saxons some two thousand years later. Vividly portraying legendary and semi-legendary figures such as Lear, Cymbeline, Merlin the magician, and the most famous of all British heroes, King Arthur, it is as much myth as it is history, and its veracity was questioned by other medieval writers. But Geoffrey of Monmouth's powerful evocation of illustrious men and deeds captured the imagination of subsequent generations, and his influence can be traced through the works of Malory, Shakespeare, Dryden, and Tennyson. Lewis Thorpe's translation from the Latin brings us an accurate and enthralling version of Geoffrey's remarkable narrative. His introduction discusses in depth the aims of the author and his possible sources, and describes the impact of this work on British literature.