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The Mabinogi And Other Medieval Welsh Tales



Synopsis

The four stories which make up the Mabinogi along with three additional tales from the same tradition form this collection and comprise 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. In this first thoroughly revised edition and translation since Lady Charlotte Guest's famous Mabinogion in 1849, Patrick Ford has presented a scholarly document in readable, modern English, a literary achievement of the highest order.

Book Information

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: University of California Press; Second Edition, 30th Anniversary Edition edition (February 12, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0520253965

ISBN-13: 978-0520253964

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.5 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

Although at least one new translation of the collection of medieval Welsh narratives known as "The Mabinogion" has been announced (and parts are available on-line), Patrick K. Ford's "The Mabinogi, and Other Medieval Welsh Tales" is the most recent version to be published in book form, and, despite being a variant selection of material, is in some ways the most satisfactory. Patrick Ford gives a clear and vigorous rendering, with an excellent introduction and notes. He does not try to make the medieval texts sound up-to-date, but he doesn't strive for quaintness, either (the stories are quite strange enough!). Typically, he restores the correct "Mabinogi," instead of the enshrined scribal error in the nineteenth-century title of 'The Mabinogion.' (According to Eric P. Hamp's "Mabinogi and Archaism," in "Celtica" Volume 23 [1999], even the manuscript form "mabinogi" is

problematic for other reasons!) I have reviewed the nineteenth-century translation by Lady Charlotte Guest, whose failure to recognize a scribal slip created the collective title of "Mabinogion" for a diverse group of tales, and the standard modern translation by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, which, following a little-known predecessor from 1929, created the standard modern "canon" of these stories by dropping one of Charlotte Guest's selections, and evaluated these older translations there. The Jones and Jones list was followed in Jeffrey Gantz's translation for the Penguin Classics, which appeared about a year before Ford's translation of "The Mabinogi, and Other Medieval Welsh Tales," and I have discussed it briefly in comparison with the Jones and Jones version.

How does the handsomely bound new rendering by Sioned Davies, Chair in Welsh at Cardiff, compare with the standard version often used and widely praised, Harvard professor Ford's? I consulted my 1977 copy as Ford's new printing has not yet been published. Will his "30th Anniversary" U of California paperback reissued edition find itself in a dead heat with Davies? The race may prove a photo finish! I compared their translations of a favorite passage of mine early on in the First Branch, Pwyll's tale. Arawn's just been reunited with his queen after the year's test by unwitting yet steadfast doppelganger Pwyll. She wonders, post-coitally after a long year's lapse, why it's been so long since her husband made love with her. Here's Ford (1977 ed., p. 41) first at the starting line. "Shame on me," she said, "if from the time we went between the sheets there was even pleasure or talk between us or even your facing me-- much less anything more than that-- for the past year!" And he thought, "Dear Lord God, it was a unique man, with strong and unwavering friendship that I got for a companion." And then he said to his wife, "Lady," he said, "don't blame me. I swear to God," he said, "I haven't slept with you since a year from last night nor have I lain with you." And he told her the entire adventure. "I confess to God," she said, "as far as fighting temptations of the flesh and keeping true to you goes, you had a solid hold on a fellow." "Lady," he said, "that's just what I was thinking while I was silent with you." "That was only natural," she answered.--You can feel the hesitant insertion of the teller's dramatic pauses implied with the "said's." These intensify rhythms of the poet's strong, confident prose.

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