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The purpose of this paper is to explore through latent content analysis the process by which traditional literature, such as folktales and legends, are transformed into children's literature and the benefits of such a transformation. I have chosen as my sample several works of children's and young adult fantasy based on the four branches of the *Mabinogi*, a collection of medieval Welsh tales which, despite their comparative obscurity, have provided the raw material for a number of critically acclaimed and perennially popular young adult books. I argue that in order for such books to be successful, they should fulfill two important criteria: they must be entertaining (enough to read) and they must meet the developmental needs of their readers. I begin by briefly establishing the historical and literary context of the *Mabinogi*, providing synopses of the four branches. I then proceed to introduce several examples of juvenile fiction based on the *Mabinogi*, chosen for their positive critical reception as well as their enduring popularity with young readers. Finally, I attempt to demonstrate how these books both entertain their readers and provide them with a model for growth and development.

Headings:

Children's Literature – Evaluation

Fantasy fiction, English – History and criticism – juvenile literature

Fantasy fiction, American – History and Criticism – juvenile literature

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THE MABINOGI AS CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Introduction:

The medieval Welsh prose tales collected under the umbrella title of *Mabinogion* or *Mabinogi* represent, according to translators Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, “the finest flowerings of Celtic genius and, taken together, a masterpiece of our medieval European literature.” Jones and Jones go on to note that “their excellence has been long, if intermittently, celebrated, and their influence deeply felt and widely recognized” (Jones and Jones, 1948, preface).

Nowhere is this influence more evident than in the area of children’s literature, where these otherwise neglected tales have long inspired talented authors of children’s and young adult books to tell and retell these stories, as well as to create original works incorporating characters, settings, and incidents from the *Mabinogi* into their own work.

That so many authors should look to such obscure material attests to the enduring power and resonance of these stories, yet the fact that these same tales contain themes and subject matter that would make many adults uncomfortable (including murder, rape, incest, adultery, and in one notable instance, mass genocide) raises some provocative questions about the nature and purpose of children’s literature. Bruno Bettelheim, in *The Uses of Enchantment*, maintains that

[f]or a story truly to hold the child’s attention, it must entertain him and arouse his curiosity. But to enrich his life, it must stimulate his imagination; help him to develop his intellect and to clarify his emotions; be attuned to his anxieties and

aspirations; give full recognition to his difficulties, while at the same time suggesting solutions to the problems which perturb him. In short, it must at one and the same time relate to all aspects of his personality—and this without ever belittling but, on the contrary, giving full credence to the seriousness of the child's predicaments, while simultaneously promoting confidence in himself and in his future (Bettelheim, 1976, p.15)

According to Bettelheim, it is not the content of the stories that is of value to children. Or rather, it is not the content alone that determines a story's worth. Instead, Bettelheim is advocating that stories for children, regardless of their individual characters and plots, equip young people for the difficult work of growing up. Like the magical helpers and enchanted objects of fairy tales, literature for children should prepare children to be the heroes of their own lives, facing and hopefully overcoming the trials and challenges that life will present to them.

Following Bettelheim's lead, I argue that children's literature has a dual purpose: to entertain and instruct, and that successful children's literature thus fulfills two main criteria: it is well-written and entertaining, and it fulfills the developmental needs of its readers. The first criterion is difficult to objectively assess, and it thus falls outside the scope of this paper. The second criterion I shall attempt to demonstrate through latent content analysis of the following representative works: Gwyn Jones and Kevin-Crossley Holland's *Tales from the Mabinogion*, Lloyd Alexander's *Prydain Chronicles*, Jenny Nimmo's *Magician Trilogy*, and Alan Garner's young adult novel, *The Owl Service*.

The books that I am examining in this paper are both beloved by readers and critically acclaimed, suggesting that the use of traditional materials is most successful

when authors combine good storytelling with sensitivity to the developmental needs of their audience. My purpose in pursuing this research is to explore some of the ways in which this underlying commitment to child and adolescent development is strengthened and reinforced by the incorporation of traditional tales whose universal themes provide a path for young readers to follow.

Background: *The Mabinogi*

The term *Mabinogi* refers to four interconnected medieval prose narratives that, along with a handful of other, unrelated stories, comprise virtually all that is known about pre-Christian Welsh mythology. Roughly speaking, the tales recount the birth, life, and death of Pryderi, a legendary Welsh prince. While he is the only character to appear in all four stories, or branches, Pryderi's role varies considerably throughout the tales. In more than one branch, he is either out of commission (such as in two separate instances when, as the victim of malicious enchantment, he simply disappears) or merely a supporting character. However, because some of the incidents in the life of Pryderi mirror the stages in the life of a mythic hero, summarized by Patrick Ford as the "hero's conception, birth, youthful exploits, training in arms, wooing a bride, marriage, mature deeds, and death," some scholars have theorized that the *Mabinogi* represents a corruption of an ancient Brythonic myth cycle that has parallels in many other Indo-European cultures (Ford, 1976, p.199). Whatever the actual purpose or cultural function of the *Mabinogi*, this theory has been highly influential, and may account for the tendency for tellers and translators to treat them as stories specifically for children.

In any event, the Mabinogi's origins are obscure, as is most of its history; as must be the case with any traditional literature, what we know is far less than what we do not know. Even the details of its transmission are hazy. For example, while scholars agree that the tales were written down long after they were orally composed, no one can say when precisely this event occurred or who was responsible for committing the tales to parchment. No one has yet been able to provide a definitive date of composition, although general scholarly consensus places the Mabinogi at a date no earlier than 1060 CE and no later than around 1190 CE. There may have been one author or scribe, or several. It is possible that the author or authors were affiliated with the church, which suggests that however adult the stories may be, the versions in which they currently exist have undergone an intensive process of being "toned down," so as not to offend the sensibilities of their readers. That is to say, it is likely that the Four Branches once contained even more sex and violence than they currently do.

Even the origin of the word *Mabinogion/Mabinogi* is unknown, and has long been a subject of heated debate. C.W. Sullivan remarks that "because of its similarity to the Welsh word *mab*, meaning 'son' or 'boy,' ...[scholars] have felt that these stories were intended for young people...or stories about the youth, *enfance*, of a medieval hero—in this case, Pryderi" (Sullivan, 1995, p. xvi). Regardless of whether or not the stories were actually intended to entertain or instruct young people, the fact that people believed that they were was enough to ensure that these stories reached a youthful audience—that is, when they reached an audience at all.

Indeed, Rachel Bromwich explains that "up until the end of the eighteenth century, these tales were little known," in part because there exist only two complete

manuscripts, the White Book of Rhydderch and the Red Book of Hergest along with a handful of fragments (Bromwich, p.3). It was from the latter manuscript that, in 1838, twenty-six-year-old Lady Charlotte Guest, wife of wealthy industrialist Sir John Guest, mother of four and a remarkably accomplished independent scholar, published the first part of her translation of the Welsh tales. Over the next decade, she continued with her ambitious project, producing a further six parts (along with six more children). The enterprise culminated in 1849 with the publication of three volumes containing the translations along with notes and commentary, which she titled *The Mabinogion*.

The title is largely a misreading, for as C.W. Sullivan explains, “technically the term *mabinogi* applies only to the first four tales in the Red Book and White Book manuscripts, those stories called the Four Branches. The form *mabinogion* appears only once in the text (probably a scribal error),” (Sullivan, 1995, p.xvi). Lady Guest’s edition included not only the first four branches, but a number of Arthurian tales as well, due to her interest in Arthurian romance.

Lady Guest’s translation became the standard version, and even Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, who produced the influential 1948 Golden Cockerel edition (later the Everyman edition), acknowledged the felicity of her style, if not the strict accuracy of her text. Some of these inaccuracies were purely matters of translation, such as might befall any self-taught non-native Welsh speaker, however bright or accomplished. Others were due to a deliberate process of censorship, in which the content of the stories was weighed against Victorian sensibilities. There is evidence that Lady Guest intended her translation to be, first and foremost, a source of entertainment for her young children. Indeed, Lady Guest dedicated her *Mabinogion* to her two eldest sons, suggesting that the tales had

much wisdom to impart to young people. “My dear Children, Infants as you are, I feel that I cannot dedicate more fitly than to you these venerable relics of ancient lore,” she wrote in 1838, expressing her hope that they would “learn to emulate the noble qualities” of such figures as Ifor Bach, a twelfth century Welsh leader who, among other notable exploits, kidnapped the Earl of Gloucester in 1158. While she was presumably referring more to Ifor’s courage and patriotism than his relentless harrying of the Normans, the fact remains that Ifor’s deeds were far more acceptable than those perpetrated by the legendary figures of the Mabinogi, which I shall relate in the next section.

The Four Branches of the Mabinogi (Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi):

Pwyll Penduic Dyued (Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed)

In the first branch of the Mabinogi, *Pwyll Penduic Dyued*, Arawn, king of Annwn, makes a bargain with Pwyll, a young prince of Dyfed: they will switch places (and forms) for a year and a day, and Pwyll will fight and kill Arawn’s sworn enemy, Hafgan. During this time, Pwyll must pretend that he is the Otherworldly King, a role that includes sharing a bed (albeit chastely) with Arawn’s wife. He succeeds in his task, cleaving Hafgan neatly in two and maintaining friendly but platonic relations with his best friend’s unsuspecting wife. Not long after this adventure, Pwyll spies a beautiful maiden riding on a white horse and instantly falls in love with her. He attempts to catch up to her, but no matter how much he spurs on his horse, he is unable to outpace the maiden’s calmly ambling mount. Calling out to her, he begs her for the sake of he whom she loves best to stop and speak to him. She does so, revealing that her name is Rhiannon and that she has come to offer her hand in marriage to Pwyll, preferring him to her

betrotted, a man named Gwawl. On the day of their wedding, Pwyll impulsively grants a boon to a ragged stranger who is really Gwawl in disguise. Gwawl requests that Pwyll return his fiancée, which forces Pwyll and Rhiannon to devise a clever plan in order to free Rhiannon. A year and a day later, Pwyll disguises himself as a beggar and attends the wedding feast of Gwawl and Rhiannon. Equipped with a magical sack that can never be filled, Pwyll asks a boon of Gwawl: enough food to fill the sack he is carrying. As Pwyll steadily exhausts the food supply, Gwawl grows flustered and demands to know when the sack will be full. Pwyll replies that it can never be full until a wealthy man of noble birth places both feet in the sack and declares that enough food has been placed in it. Gwawl does this, at which point Pwyll encloses his rival in the sack and begins beating him violently with a stick. Pwyll and Rhiannon marry, and soon after Rhiannon gives birth to a son, who is abducted from his cradle in the middle of the night. Rhiannon's maids, terrified of reprisal, slaughter a litter of puppies and slather their mistress with the blood in order to convince the court that Rhiannon has committed infanticide. Rhiannon's son turns up in the household of Teyrnon, whose mare always foals and whose foal always disappears as soon as it is born. Teyrnon, keeping watch over his stables one night, chases away a strange creature and finds an infant in the stall. He gives it to his wife, who raises it as her own until the child grows old enough to bear a marked resemblance to Pwyll, at which point the boy (called Gwri) is restored to his true parents, who name him Pryderi, meaning "worry" or "care."

Branwen uerch Llyr (Branwen, daughter of Llyr)

In the second branch, *Branwen uerch Llyr*, war begins after Bran or Bendigeidfran, king of Britain gives his sister Branwen to the Irish king Matholwch as a bride. During the wedding celebration, Branwen's half-brother Efnisien shows up and demands to know what is happening. Upon learning that Branwen has been given away without his consent, Efnisien flies into a rage and mutilates the horses of the Irish visitors. To appease the Irish king, Bran gives Matholwch a magic cauldron that will restore the dead to life, albeit without speech or independent thought. The gift is accepted, but the injury is not forgiven. In Ireland, Branwen receives cruel treatment at the hands of her adopted countrymen. She trains a starling to carry a message to her brother, who immediately embarks on a rescue mission. The Irish build a great house for Bendigeidfran, ostensibly as a peace offering, and within its walls they hang one hundred sacks of what they claim contains flour but which in fact conceals one hundred armed warriors. Efnisien, suspicious of the gift, reaches into the flour sacks and, upon touching the heads of the warriors hidden inside, proceeds to crush their skulls with his bare hand, "until his fingers feel the brain through the bone." Despite inauspicious beginnings, a temporary settlement is reached when Matholwch agrees to confer sovereignty upon the boy Gwern, Matholwch's and Branwen's young son and heir. Efnisien, however, lures the trusting child to him and then holds him over the fire, roasting him alive. This ignites hostilities on both sides, and soon a full-scale battle is being waged, with the Irish side holding their ground by casting the bodies of their slain comrades into the cauldron of rebirth as soon as they die. The Welsh suffer grievous losses at the hands of this *de facto* zombie army, and the episode ends with a genocidal war that wipes out most of the

population of both islands. Only seven of the Welsh (including a tearful Branwen) return home, while five pregnant Irish women remain to repopulate Ireland.

Manawydan vab Llyr (Manawydan, son of Llyr)

Following the genocide in the second branch, *Manawydan* begins when Pryderi invites his comrade Manawydan to marry his mother, Rhiannon. Soon after, a magical spell causes nearly all living creatures in the region of Dyfed, human and domestic animal, to mysteriously vanish, save for Pryderi, his wife Kigva, Manawydan, and his new bride Rhiannon. Pryderi and Manawydan go out hunting and spy a white boar, which they follow into the forest. The boar disappears inside a mysterious tower. Pryderi follows the creature into the tower, but does not come out. Rhiannon, upon hearing the tale from Manawydan, goes after her son and finds him inside the tower, unable to move or speak and with his hands upon a golden bowl. Rhiannon touches the bowl, and ends up in a similar predicament. Meanwhile, Manawydan and Kigva attempt to grow food by sowing three fields of wheat. Just prior to harvest, Manawydan finds two of the fields ravaged, seemingly overnight. He decides to stay up and guard the third field, and late that night, discovers a plague of mice which are furiously stripping the fields bare. Manawydan catches one of the mice, which is slower and fatter than the others. He decides to put it on trial and hang it for stealing. This he attempts to do three times, and each time he is stopped by a stranger who prevails upon Manawydan to release the mouse and, upon Manawydan's refusal, offers to buy the mouse from him. The first is a scholar, the second is a priest, and the third is a bishop. Each time Manawydan refuses, until at last the bishop confesses that he and the other two strangers are one and

the same man: Llwyd vab Cil Coed, a friend of Gwawl, the old rival of Pryderi's father Pwyll. Llwyd vab Cil Coed informs Manawydan that he has placed a spell on the land to avenge Gwawl's insult all those years ago, and that the mouse Manawydan has captured is Llwyd's heavily pregnant wife. Manawydan ransoms the pregnant mouse to Llwyd vab Cil Coed, who agrees to take the spell off the land. Pryderi and Rhiannon are released from their enchantment, and all parties live happily thereafter.

Math vab Mathonwy (Math, son of Mathonwy)

The third branch, Manawydan, is tame by comparison, including only the threat of capital punishment (which in the circumstances might also amount to an abortion). However, the fourth branch more than makes up for this. Math begins when the enchanter Gwydion helps his brother Gilfaethwy rape Goewin, virgin footholder to Math, son of Mathonwy, ruler over the kingdom of Gwynedd. As punishment for their crime, Math transforms the brothers into a breeding pair of various animals for three successive years. As deer, pigs, and wolves, Gwydion and Gilfaethwy mate with each other and bear offspring before Math permits them to return to their original human forms. Gwydion, however, is not finished yet: he nominates his sister Aranrhod as Math's new footholder, despite having impregnated her with twins—a fact that Math quickly discovers when he puts Aranrhod's maidenhood to the test. The main product of this incestuous union is the hero Lleu Llaw Gyffes, upon whom Aranrhod places a curse: he shall never have a name, arms to bear, or a woman to bed. Gwydion, in an attempt to subvert Aranrhod's curse, creates a maiden from flowers, whom he calls Blodeuwedd and whom he gives to Lleu as a bride. Shortly after their marriage, Blodeuwedd begins an

affair with a man named Gronw Pebr; the two conspire to kill Lleu and very nearly succeed. Lleu, however, survives the attack by transforming into an eagle and later returns to seek vengeance on his wife and her lover, slaying the latter with a well-hurled spear. Gwydion turns Blodeuwedd into an owl, and she flies away.

Literature Review:

In conducting my literature review, I began by looking at works that examined the places where ancient myth and contemporary literature intersect: the genre of fantasy. The children's fantasy books I discuss in this paper are not merely children's fantasy books; they are examples of fantasy fiction that can stand proudly alongside their "adult" counterparts without suffering from the comparison. Moreover, because the qualities that define these children's books are their imaginative use of myth and legend as well as their concern with the quest (read: developmental task) of the hero to achieve greater self-knowledge, independence, and integration into society, qualities that also define fantasy fiction as a genre, I felt that studies of fantasy fiction—regardless of intended audience—addressed to some extent the same questions that I was pursuing in my own work.

C.W. Sullivan, in his *Welsh Celtic Myth in Modern Fantasy*, looks specifically at the presence of Welsh myth and legend in fantasy fiction, specifically High Fantasy, which he perceives to be the direct descendent of Arthurian romance, which is in turn inspired by Celtic legend. He argues that "although the pattern of the High Fantasy novel may be traced to the märchen, High Fantasy owes much of its refinement and complexity to the medieval Arthurian romances and, back through them, to Welsh Celtic Literature" (Sullivan, 1989, p.9). Interested primarily in the "Welsh Celtic influence on modern

High Fantasy,” Sullivan uses as the basis of his discussion the four branches of *Mabinogi* and examines the work of six authors who have made use of the tales in their own work (Sullivan, 1989, p.9). In chapters entitled “Expanding,” “Interweaving” and “Inventing,” Sullivan establishes three intricate author pairings: Evangeline Walton and Alan Garner; Kenneth Morris and Nancy Bond; and Lloyd Alexander and Susan Cooper. These pairings provide the jumping off point for a discussion of authorial strategies for incorporating traditional materials into contemporary fantasy fiction. The “Expanding” pairing, that of Walton and Garner, is characterized by a process of fleshing out and filling in, taking the basic framework and adding to it. Keeping in mind that each of the Four Branches is only 600-800 lines in length, and that both Walton’s and Garner’s works are several hundred pages long, it becomes obvious that Walton and Garner are doing considerably more than simply appropriating the tales. Thus, the approach of Walton and Garner is to “use whole stories from the Four Branches for their novels, adding characterization and descriptive detail to make their several-hundred-page novels out of twenty-page mythic and legendary stories” (Sullivan, 1989, p.x). The “Interweaving” pairing, that of Morris and Bond, represents a different approach: taking characters or incidents from the *Mabinogi* and integrating them into their own work. Because my paper does not concern these authors—in fact, only two of the authors whose work Sullivan discusses, Lloyd Alexander and Alan Garner, appear in my paper—I have chosen not to comment on this strategy.

The strategy of the “Inventing” authors, Alexander and Cooper, is to develop original characters, settings, and plots and to use the Welsh materials to lend their works greater authenticity, and “to give their novels mythic and legendary depth and texture”

(Sullivan, 1989, p.x). While these authors invent characters, they ground them firmly in myth and legend, providing these characters with additional substance and lending their journeys an archetypal importance that enables the young reader to more easily identify with otherwise alien people and situations.

Moreover, Sullivan points out, one writer in each pair prefers to set his or her work in the mythic past, while the other prefers a present-day setting. A chapter on the aesthetic uses of the material enables Sullivan to explore the role of the Mabinogi in Secondary World creation, a staple of the fantasy genre, while his discussion of the thematic uses of the *Mabinogi* allows him to examine some of the psychological underpinnings of fantasy novels, many of which “present a main character becoming more mature, more aware of himself as a self and of his place in society” (Sullivan, 1989, p. xi). Sullivan’s approach is primarily mythological, as opposed to psychological or developmental, and thus he centers his discussion of children’s fantasy on how successfully the authors graft the myth onto the bare bones of the story, as opposed to how successfully they use the mythic elements to strengthen and feed the original stories they create. He is interested in the myths and legends themselves, and the ways in which their individual components survive in fantasy fiction (albeit often in drastically altered form), as opposed to how audiences respond to the integration of myth and fiction or how audiences might benefit from such an approach.

In her book-length study, *A Century of Welsh Myth in Children’s Literature*, Donna R. White notes that “in most cases, when writers incorporate elements of ancient tales in their work, the resulting fiction is labeled fantasy,” despite the fact that as traditional literature, these myths, legends, folktales and other stories serve as cultural

documents and thus represent a kind of symbolic truth. Citing Sullivan, she agrees that “fantasy is a direct descendent of traditional literature via medieval romance” and claims that the *Mabinogi*, as the medieval flower of ancient Celtic roots, lends itself particularly well to adaptation (White, 1998, p.2). While White is by no means the first person to examine the influence of Welsh traditional literature on the fantasy genre (see Sullivan), nor the first to study it specifically with respect to children’s literature (see Filmer-Davies), White is the first scholar to study Welsh-themed children’s literature in its historical and cultural context. Her approach is primarily chronological, using as her starting point two influential works: Lady Charlotte Guest’s *Mabinogion*, which first brought the tales to the attention of a wider audience; and Robert Graves’ *The White Goddess*, which cast these same tales in a new light and inspired authors such as Lloyd Alexander and Alan Garner to explore the rich possibilities of Welsh literature and to make the stories their own. White does not shy away from pointing out the problematic nature of such influences: Lady Guest’s translation is neither the most accurate nor the most faithful to the general sensibility of the tales, while Graves’ work, subtitled “a historic grammar of poetic myth” is at best a fanciful but mostly unfounded interpretation of Celtic myth and legend, and at worst a spurious piece of pseudo-scholarship. Nevertheless, both works have had a profound influence on the authors discussed in this paper and thus cannot be ignored.

White categorizes the literature based on the *Mabinogi* as either “retellings as myth or legend, or...fantasy inspired partially or wholly by the Welsh tales,” designations which I have found useful in conducting my own research (White, 1998, p.5). While I limit my discussion to the latter category, specifically children’s and young adult fantasy

novels from the mid- to late-twentieth century, I do make use of the former category as a means of comparing the two. Moreover, White does touch upon the challenges faced by authors who write for children, noting that “because of our attitudes towards children and childhood...writers approach this special readership much differently than they would an adult audience. Some concepts, situations, and events, we believe, are inappropriate for children, who lack certain kinds of knowledge and experience and who are (we hope) innocent and pure” (White, 1998, p.2). She also briefly comments upon how our expectations of children alter over time.

Meanwhile, Kath Filmer-Davies, in her *Fantasy Fiction and Welsh Myth: Tales of Belonging*, takes a thematic approach to much of the same material. Like that of Sullivan and White, Filmer-Davies’ approach is mythocentric. She praises the “potency of myth: [how] it confronts readers with a sense of Otherness, often with intimations of the numinous and the holy,” and argues that myths and other forms of traditional literature are instrumental in holding society together (Filmer-Davies, 1996, p.xi). Filmer-Davies holds that myth plays an important role in the education of children. Curiously, however, she also maintains that myths are not for children, at least not primarily. While acknowledging that “children might enjoy the narratives of these stories,” she nevertheless argues that “the process of responding to their truth is more difficult,” with the result that “mythopoeic literature appeals more to older children and to adults” (Filmer-Davies, 1996, p.xii). For this reason, it is surprising that she devotes so much space in her book to discussing mythopoeic children’s literature.

In fact, Filmer-Davies discusses both juvenile and adult fiction in her book-length examination of the interplay between myth and modern fiction. However, while her

sample is comprised of numerous distinguished and beloved children's books, including Lloyd Alexander's *Prydain* books, Susan Cooper's *The Grey King* and *Silver on the Tree*, Nancy Bond's *A String in the Harp*, Alan Garner's *The Owl Service*, Louise Lawrence's *The Earth Witch*, and Madeleine L'Engle's *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, it addresses only a handful of relatively obscure adult novels, such as Liane Jones' *The Dreamstone*, and Barbara Erksine's *Lady of Hay*. Of the children's novels she examines, at least half of them are intended for a middle-grade audience (although they may be enjoyed by readers of all ages). For this reason, it is easy to question her assumption that children are less capable of finding meaning in fiction whose source material is traditional or folkloric in nature.

It is possible that Filmer-Davies, in her attempt to cover the sprawling influence of Welsh myth and legend takes on too much: she insightfully discusses legendary influences ranging from the Mabinogi to the legend of Madoc; she also discusses Welsh mythic influences in everything from modern British poetry to Hollywood movies. As a result, her argument is difficult to follow in places and the reader soon becomes overwhelmed by the sheer volume of connections that she has unearthed. While readers who are less familiar with the nuts and bolts of Celtic folklore will learn a great deal, there remains the danger that these same readers may come to overestimate the contribution of Welsh myth to popular culture.

However, her work is useful in that, by touching upon universal themes such as the quest for identity and the need to belong, it affords a great deal of discussion room to children's literature based on the Mabinogi.

Concerning quests and growth, Norma Bagnall's article "An American Hero in Welsh Fantasy: The *Mabinogion*, Alan Garner and Lloyd Alexander," discusses the issue of identity as it relates to class and social status in the *Prydain* Chronicles and to a lesser extent in *The Owl Service*. In responding to this article, I chose to focus on Bagnall's discussion of the *Prydain* books, primarily because it bears on my exploration of the developmental tasks of young readers. Bagnall begins with the assertion that although Alexander "incorporates the ancient legends and sets them in a Celtic background, his story is primarily *bildungsroman*, each novel independently, and the series as a whole...about the search for self-identity and about maturation" (Bagnall, 1993, p. 26).

Moreover, Bagnall argues that Taran represents the "classic American hero," who embodies the idea that "we, as Americans, can become anything we are willing to work hard to be, that humble beginnings do not prevent us from attaining success and prestige, and that we alone shape our destiny" (Bagnall, 1993, p. 26). Taran's quest, therefore, is mythic on two levels: it is based on literal Welsh myth, while at the same time championing a modern "myth," that of self-directed destiny—something which is pointedly at odds with the values of the culture that produced the legends upon which Alexander builds his fantasy epic. Medieval Welsh society, as depicted in the *Mabinogi*, is very concerned with issues of rank and nobility: one's birth is one's destiny, and rigid social stratification means that the level at which one is born is the level at which one stays for the remainder of his life. Therefore, it is clear that Alexander's *Prydain* series, while it ends with Taran's ascent to the throne as High King over Prydain, is not a story in and of itself about actual nobility—unless we read kingship as a metaphor for maturity, and the final stage in the process of learning to master oneself. Rather, the *Prydain*

Chronicles, succeeding where the Mabinogi itself fails as a “hero biography,” concerns the developmental tasks that Taran must complete if he is to attain true maturity and become a good citizen and a full member of society.

While Jenny Nimmo’s work has received less critical attention than that of the other authors examined in this paper, Marcus Crouch’s article, “Welsh Magic and Jenny Nimmo,” adds balance to the proceedings as he looks at three of Nimmo’s books: *The Snow Spider*, *Emlyn’s Moon*, and *The Chestnut Soldier*. Consisting of three interrelated, if not strictly sequential novels, Nimmo’s *Magician Trilogy* is not, strictly speaking, a trilogy. Each book is self-contained, and its thematic link is provided by the budding magical abilities of a boy named Gwyn rather than a complex, multi-episodic story arc. However, as Crouch points out, the books do share “a common scene, a central character, Gwyn, an interdependent society of town and country, and an atmosphere of wonder and brooding menace” (Crouch, 1993, p. 22). As such, he claims, they deserve to be viewed as a thematic unit and I am in agreement with him.

Crouch applauds Nimmo’s quest for “perfection on a small scale,” citing her ability to evoke the triumphs and disappointments of young children without sensationalizing them, and without resorting to either condescension or melodrama. He also praises her skill in depicting the everyday realities of family life, whether it is the guilt-ridden silence of Gwyn’s parents, who have lost their only daughter, or the cacophonous chaos of the sprawling Lloyd family. Crouch also compares Nimmo’s work to that of E. Nesbit, noting that both authors share a sense of restraint in “tempering the demands of a situation to the capabilities of [their] young characters” (Crouch, 1993, p. 23). While Nimmo’s characters face challenges both big and small, their responses are

never inappropriate to their stage of development. Gwyn, notes Crouch, “in rising to the demands of his destiny...grows, morally and through the sequence physically, but he remains a young Welsh country boy with all the limitations imposed by his years and inexperience” (Crouch, 1993, p. 23). For this reason, the *Magician Trilogy*, if in many respects a lesser series than the *Prydain Chronicles*, deserves serious consideration for its psychological authenticity and realistic portrayal of child and adolescent experience.

There exists a great deal of scholarship on Alan Garner’s young adult fantasy novel *The Owl Service*. Peter J. Foss, in his discussion of Garner’s work, “The Undefined Boundary: Converging Worlds in the Early Novels of Alan Garner,” notes that Garner’s treatment of the loves and hatreds, and the rivalries, jealousies, and betrayals—one of the things that makes *The Owl Service* such a compelling novel—are the result of his sensitivity to the essentially “dynamic” nature of “that limbo between childhood and adulthood, when ideas and feelings, though raw, have the potential to be pure” (Foss, 1993, p.33). He skillfully describes the ways in which the various elements—characterization, setting, social milieu, and plot—emphasize this transitional state. As the only young adult novel in my sample, *The Owl Service* addresses the same set of developmental goals as the other books, but approaches them from a different angle.

However, much of the critical discussion deals with the ending, which is ambiguous and in the opinion of many critics, unsatisfying—albeit for different reasons. Sarah Beach (“Breaking the Pattern: Alan Garner’s *The Owl Service* and the *Mabinogion*”) believes that the novel is about “the breaking of a pattern...a cycle of emotional abuse and anger” and concludes that Garner’s ending “may verge a little on the simplistic” (Beach, 1994, p.14). However, C.W. Sullivan (“One More Time: The

Conclusion of Alan Garner's *The Owl Service*") views the ending as the winning of a battle, not a war. Roger's swift actions to ensure Alison's recovery constitute a victory over the powerful forces that is only "incidental" and Sullivan theorizes that "when conditions are right again—perhaps, but not necessarily, in the next generation—the cycle will continue (Sullivan, 1997, p.52). The ending of *The Owl Service*, while unsettling and in many ways problematic, is not the focus of my paper, although it has some bearing on my discussion of the book.

Ultimately, my approach to these works is to examine the ways in which they address the work of making the transition from a state of immaturity to one of maturity, and provide guidance for young readers who—perhaps contrary to their own inclinations—are engaged in the process of growing up.

Methods:

The primary method employed in this paper is that of content analysis, which involves the systematic analysis of recorded forms of human communications, including but not limited to "books, magazines, Web pages, poems, newspapers, songs, paintings, speeches, letters, e-mail messages, bulletin board postings on the Internet, laws and constitutions, as well as any components or collections thereof" (Babbie, p. 314). I am analyzing books, which makes my method one of textual analysis. Because I am analyzing these texts thematically, my content analysis focuses on the latent content, which refers to the "underlying meaning" of a given text, as opposed to the manifest content, which concerns its surface elements, such as words or sentences (Babbie, p.314).

In this paper, the unit of analysis is the individual book, which in this case includes works that use the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* as their source material. Note that I have restricted my definition of “Mabinogi” to the scholarly one: the four branches alone, without the other tales that accompany them in the original manuscripts and which translators and editors frequently include in modern English language editions. However, my reasons for separating out the Four Branches for special emphasis are not purely scholarly: on the one hand, my decision eliminates the independent native Welsh tales, such as *Breuddwyd Macsen Wledig* (“The Dream of Macsen Wledig”) or *Hanes Taliesin* (“The Story of Taliesin”) which have not been appropriated or adapted to any significant extent as children’s literature; on the other hand, it cuts out the Arthurian romances, which—on account of the popularity of Arthurian themes in children’s literature—would have caused my sample size to swell beyond what is reasonable or realistic for a paper of this length and scope. Unfortunately, this choice meant that I had to exclude such worthy titles as Susan Cooper’s *The Dark is Rising* sequence, which has less to do with the *Mabinogi* proper, concerning itself primarily with the Arthurian cycle.

I decided that the use of these tales might take the form of wholesale borrowing, or might simply serve as a jumping off point for an author to create an original work incorporating elements of the stories but relying primarily on his or her own imagination to develop characters, setting, and plot. In my preliminary research, I located a total of 15 novels that fulfilled the basic criteria of deriving their characters, settings, plots, and/or themes from the *Mabinogi*. These could be the tales themselves translated, retold, or adapted; or the borrowings could be wholesale or integrated into a new narrative. I then proceeded to pare down my initial sample to 6-9 representative novels (1 stand-

alone work of fiction and 2 series consisting of 5 and 3 individual entries, respectively) and 1 translation intended for younger readers, primarily by using selection tools such as *Children's Catalog*, and the *Best Books...* series. By taking note of which books appeared in more than one selection guide and which received positive reviews from these sources, I was able to develop a shortlist of titles. Using this list, I sought out book reviews of the texts in question and took note of the number of reviews available, the variety of publications in which they appeared, and, of course, the content of those reviews. I did not necessarily rule out a book on the basis of it receiving mixed reviews, or reviews in which problems or flaws were addressed, depending on the nature of the criticism. For example, while one reviewer for *The Snow Spider* felt that the plot was, at times, “vague,” numerous others felt that this was more than balanced out by the realistic depiction of the main character, Gwyn—something which “makes the story believable” (HB, 1986, p.641).

I also took into account in making my decision any awards these books may have won, for example, the Newbery Medal, or the Carnegie Medal. However, while awards are one potential indicator of a book's value to readers and its staying power, they are not the only criterion by which a book may be judged.

Equally important, in my view, is the content. One conscious decision I made was to select books whose protagonists were children or young adults. There exist books and series which make use of the Mabinogi as source material, but some of these do not incorporate young protagonists. For example, while Evangeline Walton's acclaimed adaptations of the tales have long been popular among young adults, she did not write them explicitly with a youthful audience in mind. Nor are the characters Walton portrays

(or rather, fleshes out) adults. Because I am examining how these books fulfill the developmental needs of their readers, I decided to focus my inquiry on books intended for adolescent readers.

In conducting my analysis, I grouped the books by series, i.e. treating each series as a single story or thematic unit. This left me with essentially 3 “novels,” as well as one translation, primarily for purposes of comparison.

The Books:

***Tales from the Mabinogion*, by Thomas Gwyn and Kevin Crossley-Holland.**

Thomas Gwyn’s and Kevin Crossley-Holland’s 1984 collection, *Tales from the Mabinogion*, is a direct translation rather than an adaptation, with Welsh scholar Gwyn collaborating with award-winning children’s author Crossley-Holland to produce a faithful version of the tales. As such, and the bulk of critical attention focuses on the “ambitious translation” of the tales themselves rather than the “primly decorous” illustrations by Margaret Jones, which one reviewer describes as “rather stiffly composed and manneristic, but attentive to the story’s imagery and details.” The reviewer for *CCBB* praises the book’s literary quality, noting that “the translation is fluent, [and] the dialogue nicely balanced between language easily comprehensible to today’s readers,” while citing as a particular strength “the mood of ancient magic that pervades the tales (*CCBB*, p.190)” Meanwhile, the reviewer for *Booklist* agrees that “the tales are set forth in resonant, fluid language, [while] dialogue framed in colloquial patterns enhances their readability.” However, the reviewer also observes that “these tales espouse a moral code rather different from our own, which may prompt discussion among readers (*BL*,

p.1123).” This is a subtle way of saying that this work leaves in what many other translations, adaptations, or derivative works leave out, and states what others only imply. For this reason, it occupies a different area of children’s literature: myths, legends, and folktales. I shall discuss the significance of this later on.

***The Prydain Chronicles*, by Lloyd Alexander**

Lloyd Alexander’s *Prydain Chronicles* consists of five novels: *The Book of Three*, *The Black Cauldron*, *The Castle of Llyr*, *Taran Wanderer*, and *The High King*. One of the most beloved and critically acclaimed high fantasy series for children, the Prydain books focus on the adventures (and misadventures) of an unlikely hero: a young Assistant Pig-Keeper named Taran who finds himself caught up in a war between good and evil. With a band of steadfast companions, Taran must do his part to defend his country while engaged in the equally difficult struggle to become a man—something which is reflected in the series itself. In a starred review for *Kirkus Reviews*, an especially perceptive reviewer notes that “Prydain is an imagined territory, somewhat like Wales and peopled with characters whose genealogy stretches back to Welsh legend, at a time when “mankind was still in the process of ‘becoming’” (*KR*, 1964, P.818). Citing non-human characters such as Doli of the Fair Folk, as well as the inimitable and describable Gurgi, the reviewer seems to suggest that their presence is a metaphor for Taran’s developing personality and as-yet-unformed adult nature. Similarly significant is the battle between good and evil that unfolds throughout the series. Indeed, the series concerns itself very much with the task of balancing strengths and weaknesses, selfish impulses and noble gestures, and with the struggle to reconcile the divide between head and heart that defines

immaturity. As such, Alexander “draws his figures with the same touches of irritability, doltishness and contrariness that leavens with high good humor the high fantasy,” observes the reviewer, noting that “the major theme is good against evil—black magic against white—but (give thanks for creative restraint) only to a draw” (*KR*, 1964, p.818).

I decided not to treat the books individually, since the setting is consistent throughout the series and since it follows the same group of characters through a set of events and adventures which, while they can be enjoyed as stand-alone episodes, clearly comprise a complex, five-book story arc that culminates in Taran’s maturity and acceptance of his role in life. Thus, my discussion of the series treats the five books as one continuous, multi-part narrative. The *Prydain* books are unique in my sample in that they span the whole of adolescence, beginning when Taran is a boy of about 10 or 11 and ending when he is grown and ready to begin his adult (married) life.

The Magician Trilogy, by Jenny Nimmo

Similarly, Jenny Nimmo’s *Magician* trilogy (consisting of *The Snow Spider*, *Emlyn’s Moon*, and *The Chestnut Soldier*), while it frequently takes advantage of multiple viewpoints, nevertheless revolves around the same core group of characters (Gwyn, Nia, and Emlyn and their families) living in the same rural and self-contained village in North Wales. For this reason, I discuss the books as a thematic unit.

The first volume of the trilogy, *The Snow Spider*, won both the Smarties Prizeⁱ in 1986, and the Tir na n-Og Award in 1987, awarded annually to the best English-language book with a Welsh setting. The series’ popularity with young readers mitigates the decidedly mixed reviews it received upon publication. *Kirkus Review* states somewhat

dismissively that “with its imaginative overlay and exploration of family dynamics, [the series] would make a satisfying TV drama...[but] lacks subtlety and logical links.” Still, the reviewer concedes that the books are “smoothly written and entertaining” (KR, p.861) Furthermore, while some reviewers express confusion at the “arcane and bizarre wonders” that characterize the book, leading them to describe some elements of the plot as “perplexingly vague,” at least part of this is directly attributable to a lack of familiarity with the source material. Indeed, only one reviewer perceives and remarks upon the connection to “the magicians of old Welsh legends.” Nearly all, however, comment favorably on the authenticity of Gwyn, the young protagonist, as well as on the complex family dynamics of the story. “Gwyn is a very real ten-year-old, bewildered by the sorrows that have divided his family, conscious that he is different from his classmates, touchingly anxious to belong and to be loved,” states the reviewer for *Horn Book Magazine*, concluding that “the combination of [Gwyn’s] personality and the author’s power of description make the story believable” (HB, p.641). The reviewer for *School Library Journal* finds that “the reality of Gwyn, his parents, and the Welsh setting give this fantasy equilibrium and an appealing warmth” (SLJ, p.87). Overall, the series’ major strength is Nimmo’s psychologically accurate depiction of the development of the young protagonists as each grows “into a more self-assured child who is beginning to know...considerable strengths” (BL, p.1980). These books deal with late childhood and early adolescence, and thus occupy the opposite end of the spectrum to Alan Garner’s *Owl Service*, which I shall discuss next.

***The Owl Service*, by Alan Garner**

Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* is not part of a series, but rather a stand-alone young adult novel that "uses a tragic Celtic legend about an unfaithful flower goddess as the framework for an eerie, bittersweet tale in which three young people become the unwitting victims of fateful misfortune" (*BL*, 1968, p.310). Since its publication in 1967, *The Owl Service* has received a great deal of critical acclaim, winning both the Carnegie Medal and the Guardian Award. In a starred review for *Kirkus Reviews*, one reviewer praised the book as Garner's "finest, if most elliptical [work]," calling it "an uncommon book for uncommon readers of some maturity" and citing in particular "scenes which approach the intensity of Strindberg" (*KR*, 1968, p.1058). Indeed, one of the most notable aspects of *The Owl Service* is its emotional intensity, which reflects its subject matter. The reviewer for *Horn Book Magazine* cites the nuanced depiction of interpersonal relationships unfolding against a complex social milieu, summarizing it thus: "in a skillful working out of a succession of discovers and through superb characterization, subtle patterns of class structure emerge" (*HB*, p. 563). This reviewer goes on to state that "the ominous atmosphere contributes to the richness of the ingenious and complex story" (*HB*, p.563). The *Times Literary Supplement's* review does concede that "those familiar with Celtic mythology will find numerous allusions throughout the book that will add richness to the texture," but nevertheless maintains that "it is not essential to know them, pursue them, or regard the story as a kind of *mythologie a clef*" (*TLS*, 1967, p.1134). Indeed, the reviewer praises the book for its tacit refusal to be "a story which 'uses' supernatural aids" to shore up weaknesses in writing or plotting, but rather its insistence on being "a complex of attractions and hostilities between persons, classes, myth and modern day reality" (*TLS*, 1967, p.1134). Garner's novel deals with

middle to late adolescence, providing a useful counterpoint to Nimmo's work and providing an opportunity for an in-depth examination of the developmental work of this stage—something which Alexander's work can only broadly hint at.

I began by reading the books and noting the similarities and differences between an individual book and its source material. I did both a general read-through, rather in the way one compares a film adaptation of a book to the original source. Then, noting the kinds of similarities between the differences, as it were, I proceeded to examine the connection between the kinds of changes the authors made and the intended audience of the books. For this, I made extensive use of NoveList K-8 in order to establish reading and grade level, as well as to gain an overview of such factors as critical reception and popularity among readers. I also read contemporary reviews of the books, to assess their initial reception. In the case of books that were published decades ago and have endured longstanding popularity, I also looked for more contemporary reviews, to determine the effect over time.

Following the selection of my sample and my initial read-through, I turned my attention to the stages of childhood and adolescence, in an attempt to generate a basis for coding the texts.

Adolescence and Development

Adolescence is typically divided into three stages. Early adolescence, spanning ages 11-14, is characterized by egocentrism through which all problems and issues are filtered, which frequently manifests in an increased concern about appearance. The

growing importance of friends and peer groups is offset by the simultaneous need for independence from family, factors which can lead to rebellious or defiant behavior (Fenwick, 1994, p. 35).

Middle adolescence, which covers ages 14-17, focuses primarily on identity, self-image, and self-discovery. This process of identity formation may involve risk-taking, but can just as easily involve developing new skills and interests, or seeking out new interests and experiences. During this period, adolescents typically become less self-absorbed and begin to form lasting relationships with both members of the same and opposite sex, something which coincides with growing sexual awareness, if not sexual activity. Middle adolescence also sees the beginning of the development of personal moral standards or an ethical code of behavior that defines the adolescent's worldview.

Late adolescence, which includes ages 17-19, is a time of idealism and independence. Adolescents typically become more involved with their community, i.e., the world outside of home, school, or other immediate contexts. Viewing adults as equals, they consider themselves fully independent from parents and family, yet they will often form relationships with those whom they view as potential mates. Adolescents in this stage make a priority of self-sufficient living, which may include a focus on career or on starting a family.

Plotting out these stages in a table, I situated each of the "books" in my sample in the context of the stage of childhood/adolescence that they address. I have reproduced this table below:

Fig. 1

	Prydain	Magician	Owl Service
Late Childhood (ages 8-11)	<i>The Book of Three</i>	<i>The Snow Spider</i> <i>Emlyn's Moon</i>	
Early Adolescence (ages 11-14)	<i>The Book of Three</i> <i>The Black Cauldron</i>	<i>The Chestnut Soldier</i>	
Middle Adolescence (ages 14-17)	<i>The Castle of Llyr</i> <i>Taran Wanderer</i>		<i>The Owl Service</i>
Late Adolescence (ages 17-19)	<i>The High King</i>		<i>The Owl Service</i>

Using these stages as a starting point for defining childhood and adolescence, I set to work compiling a list of developmental goals or tasks that would typically occur during this period. Robert Havighurst's ten developmental tasks served as a useful model on which to base my own criteria. The tasks are as follows:

1. Achieving new and more mature relations with age-mates of both sexes
2. Achieving a masculine or feminine social role
3. Accepting one's physique and using the body effectively
4. Achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults
5. Achieving assurance of economic independence

6. Selecting and preparing for an occupation
7. Preparing for marriage and family life
8. Developing intellectual skills and concepts necessary for civic competence
9. Desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior
10. Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behavior

(Havighurst, 1953, p.111-158)

For the most part, and broadly considered, Havighurst's list has withstood the test of time. However, I did decide to make a few adjustments, altering and streamlining in places where I felt that the tasks reflected the adolescent experience of the 1950s as opposed to the adolescent experience of the twenty-first century. For example, while forming mature and lasting bonds with one's peers remains an important part of young adult development, "achieving a masculine or feminine social role" may inadvertently stigmatize adolescents who do not fit neatly—and who may not wish to fit neatly—into ready-made gender categories. Instead, I propose "achieving a sense of comfort with one's identity that will enable one to participate fully as a citizen or member of society," in order to emphasize the process of identity formation and self-discovery undertaken by the individual as he or she grows and changes. Similarly, for "accepting one's physique and using the body effectively," I would substitute "accepting one's strengths and limitations, and utilizing these appropriately," a definition which encompasses not only physical characteristics such as appearance, but also personality traits as well as innate talents and acquired skills.

Keeping in mind that not everyone aspires to marry or start a family, and that the term "economic career" may limit what constitutes, for the adolescent, a broad spectrum

of life goals which may include anything from financial independence to higher education to a general sense of wellbeing and personal fulfillment, I would merge these goals into “preparing for an independent and self-directed adulthood, and setting realistic life goals” in order to emphasize the adolescent’s personal choices regarding his or her path in life and place in society as opposed to his or her conformity to societal norms or other outside expectations.

Thus, I came up with a modified list of eight developmental tasks:

1. Achieving new and more mature relations with age-mates of both sexes
2. Achieving a sense of comfort with one’s identity that will enable one to participate fully as a citizen or member of society
3. Accepting one’s strengths and limitations, and utilizing these appropriately
4. Achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults
5. Preparing for an independent and self-directed adulthood, and setting realistic life goals
6. Developing intellectual skills and concepts necessary for civic competence
7. Desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior
8. Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behavior

Creating a code book of these tasks, I then went through the books in my sample and documented instances in which the protagonists either strived to attain or successfully achieved these goals. The results of this process I shall address in detail in my Discussion section.

Fig. 2

	Prydain	Magician	Owl Service
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<p><i>Achieving new and more mature relations with age-mates of both sexes</i></p>	<p>Taran falls in love with Eilonwy, whom he has previously dismissed as a little girl (BC, CL, TW, HK); Taran's negative attitude towards the amiable but clumsy Prince Rhun changes: his opinion transforms from one of exasperation and envy to one of respect and affection (CL, HK);</p>	<p>After growing apart from childhood friend Alun Lloyd (on account of Alun's discomfort regarding Gwyn's magical abilities), Gwyn befriends Alun's sister Nia (EM, CS); Gwyn also, following an initial period of antagonism, befriends his estranged cousin Emlyn (EM)</p>	<p>Alison and Gwyn realize that the initially platonic nature of their relationship is changing into mutual attraction; Gwyn and Roger's antipathy takes on a new dimension as they become romantic rivals for Alison's attention.</p>
<p><i>Achieving a sense of comfort with one's identity that will enable one to participate fully as a citizen or member of society</i></p>	<p>Taran abandons his quest for his parents, realizing that he was not searching for evidence of his roots, but rather evidence of noble birth; Taran accepts that he is an orphan of no standing and focuses instead on learning a useful trade (TW).</p>	<p>Gwyn comes to terms with his identity as a magician (SS, EM, CS)</p>	<p>N/A Gwyn is ashamed of his working-class background, and buys a set of records to "improve" his accent; Alison is caught uncomfortably between girlhood and womanhood</p>
<p><i>Accepting one's strengths and limitations, and utilizing these appropriately</i></p>	<p>Headstrong Taran must learn restraint (B3); Taran realizes that, despite his love for the craft of shaping clay, he does not have the talent to be a master potter, and that his abilities are best put to some other use (TW).</p>	<p>Gwyn becomes more attuned to his powers, and is able to instinctively sense what he must do in a given situation; he also learns when not to make use of his magic.</p>	<p>N/A None of the characters appear to be aware of their strengths or limitations, or at least, the problem is not addressed in the novel</p>
<p><i>Achieving emotional</i></p>	<p>Taran, a foundling,</p>	<p>Gwyn, while always</p>	<p>N/A</p>

<p><i>independence of parents and other adults</i></p>	<p>is loyal to his guardians, Dallben and Coll, but resents their authority (B3); later, he comes to see that their judgment is sound—more sound than his -- Taran’s hero worship of Lord Gwydion, while never entirely extinguished, gives way to Taran’s own sense of self-reliance</p>	<p>distant from his father, begins to confide less in the other adults in his family—even Nain, his beloved grandmother; meanwhile, he forges closer bonds with several of his peers.</p>	<p>All three adolescents seem unable to escape the holds their families have on them;</p>
<p><i>Preparing for an independent and self-directed adulthood, and setting realistic life goals</i></p>	<p>Taran apprentices himself to three craftspeople: a blacksmith, a weaver, and a potter (TW); Taran desires to rebuild his country’s infrastructure following the end of the war, and is appointed High King of Prydain; he accepts this role as a necessary burden (HK)</p>		<p>Gwyn plans to continue his schooling, aspiring to a career as a politician; Roger longs to be a photographer, but may instead accept a position in his father’s company; Alison is unsure of what the future holds, but expects that she will do whatever her mother decides is best for her.</p>
<p><i>Developing intellectual skills and concepts necessary for civic competence</i></p>	<p>During his short apprenticeships, he learns qualities such as patience, diligence, attention to detail, as well as the value of physical labor; in his travels, Taran learns to objectively weigh</p>		<p>N/A</p>

	all sides of an issue and balance pros and cons; he mediates more than one dispute and comes up with workable solutions to crofters' difficulties (TW)		
<i>Desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior</i>	Taran gives up the place allotted to him in the Summer Country, opting to fulfill his responsibilities to his fellow citizens, whose homeland has been devastated by war; he becomes High King, and begins the process of rebuilding (HK)		N/A
<i>Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behavior</i>	Taran is a highly ethical character, due in part to his own innate internal moral compass as well as his admiration and emulation of various adult role models: Dallben, Lord Gwydion, and others.	Progression from immaturity → maturity: early on, Gwyn uses magic selfishly: to bring his dead sister back and in a schoolyard fight against another boy; later, he uses it to help his community, to right an ancient wrong.	N/A

Scope:

Because the questions I am exploring involve traditional literature, which is a vast corpus of myths, legends, folktales, fairy tales, and other stories in poetry and prose from every culture and region in the world, my task necessarily involved being selective and taking a

“snapshot” approach to what would otherwise be an overwhelming topic. I chose Celtic folklore because it is a longstanding interest of mine, as well as occupying the interesting position of being both obscure (in terms of general familiarity) and popular (it is a mainstay of the fantasy genre, whether or not readers of fantasy are aware of it). I chose Welsh folklore in particular because my familiarity with the Welsh language would enable me to assess the extent to which the stories are adapted and changed to suit the needs of their audience. I selected the four branches of the *Mabinogi* because it has received less attention than other aspects of Welsh and Celtic folklore, for example, the Arthurian legends. Furthermore, I noticed that a great deal of high-quality children’s literature had sprung from the stories of the *Mabinogi*, despite its essentially adult tone and subject matter and despite being the product of a long-ago era and of a culture whose mores and values were markedly different from those of twentieth and twenty-first century American (and British) society. Thus, this paper will provide only a glimpse of some of the ways traditional literature becomes children’s literature, serving as the jumping off point for further research and discussion.

Discussion

In this section, I shall discuss the books with respect to the extent to which their respective protagonists address or complete the various developmental tasks I have outlined in the methods section of this paper.

The Magician Trilogy

Nimmo's series, featuring one main character and several supporting characters who range in age from 9 to 13, deals with the period of early adolescence. In fact, it might be more accurate to say that the first two books in the series center on the challenges inherent in leaving behind childhood and entering adolescence, while the third explores the transition from early to middle adolescence. Gwyn Griffiths, the protagonist, is a magician and worried about the implications of this. True to the demands of early adolescence, his primary concern is how he appears to other people and thus, he attempts to hide his magical powers from his friends, family, and classmates, fearing their censure. More tellingly, he wishes that these powers would disappear altogether. Gwyn hopes that, "Perhaps...when I am thirteen, the wizard in me will fade away and I will grow and be like an average boy" (Nimmo, 1989, p.5). Indeed, his goal throughout the series is to be not only normal but average. Not only does he want to be free of magic, he also wants to be free of any quality that would make him stand out in the slightest. He notes how "once, he'd been tall for his age. But in four years, he'd hardly grown." He is short, but he does not necessarily want to be tall. When he eventually does grow, "two inches to be precise," he is thrilled, even though this merely reduces the size of the gap between Gwyn and his friend Alun. "Average will do for

me!” he proclaims, even though his friend Nia perceives that “Average he will never be” (Nimmo, 1989, p.195).

Gwyn’s journey, then, is one of discovering who he really is and what his place in the world will be as he grows to young adulthood. Along the way he comes up against a series of challenges in the form of the developmental tasks he must complete in order to gain a sense of his true identity and of his role in society.

Task 1: Achieving new and mature relations with age mates

Gwyn initially struggles with this, on account of his magical powers, which alienate his classmates. “Little whispering groups [form] in the playground,” and there are “murmurings in the cafeteria,” as he sits silently and by himself, eating his food. When his classmates are not giggling at and gossiping about him, they are actively tormenting him with taunts of “Hullo, Mr. Magic. Seen any spaceships lately?” (Nimmo, 1986, p.65). In response to this, Gwyn’s strategy is not to find a niche for himself but simply to withdraw. He “[goes] to school, [does] his work, [sits] alone on the playground, and [speaks] to no one” (Nimmo, 1986, p.61). He disengages from everything and interacts with no one.

Apart from Arianwen, the magical spider who, in the absence of supportive friends, becomes considerably more than a pet to him, Gwyn soon grows “tired of magic, of intuition and the unnatural power that ripple[s] through him sometimes” (Nimmo, 1989, p.5). He longs to be like his classmates, but despairs of either getting rid of his gifts or finding anyone who will accept him for what he really is. Gwyn and his former best friend Alun begin to grow apart, largely because Alun is uncomfortable with Gwyn’s powers and “[draws] away from magic and all talk of it” (Nimmo, 1989, p.7). Their

interactions are awkward and stilted, with Alun avoiding Gwyn and then, instead of experiencing guilt, feeling instead “relieved at having rid himself of Gwyn’s disturbing presence” (Nimmo, 1986, p.59) When Alun and his family move a few miles away to the nearby town, Gwyn comes to see them off. As he waves from the distance, Alun’s sister Nia notices him and attempts to get Alun to acknowledge Gwyn. He does not. “I wish you had waved to Gwyn!” says Nia to her brother (Nimmo, 1987, p.9). Nia, who is more accepting of Gwyn’s powers, cannot understand the rift that opened between them. In turn, Gwyn begins to pay more attention to Nia. Gradually, he comes to realize that “it [is] not Alun he want[s] to see, but [Alun’s sister] Nia.

“Gwyn,” she asks. “You told us once that you were a magician. Are you one?” Gwyn replies in the affirmative and “[waits] for a scornful response.” None is forthcoming, for Nia is “amazed.” However, unlike Alun, she is not frightened or upset by the revelation, for “instinct [tells] her that Gwyn’s power would never hurt [them]” (Nimmo, 1987, p.62). Their budding friendship, based on trust and acceptance, signals a crucial development in Gwyn’s progress. For the first time, he is able to interact with one of his peers without having to conceal anything.

Nia, in fact, plays an important role in Gwyn’s developing social life. She is the catalyst in the series of events that leads to Gwyn establishing a friendship with his estranged cousin Emlyn. Torn apart by a family rivalry, Gwyn and Emlyn have inherited a set of prejudices and refuse to have anything to do with one another. Gwyn remarks that he has “gone to the same school [as Emlyn]...and [has] sat in the same room” and yet has “never spoken to him” (Nimmo, 1987, p.61). Nia, who considers both boys to be her friends, refuses to choose sides: “Emlyn isn’t wicked,” she tells Gwyn, who is

inclined to think otherwise, and defends Gwyn's behavior to Emlyn, explaining that "he's not like other boys" (Nimmo, 1987, p.112). When Emlyn demands to know "Why Gwyn Griffiths? Why not me?" she cannot respond, caught between her conflicting loyalties.

Eventually, Gwyn and Nia combine forces to heal the rift between Gwyn's family and Emlyn's. "Everyone needs family," decides Gwyn, demonstrating that he is beginning to understand that his grudge against his cousin is harmful to everyone and that he'd rather have a better relationship with Emlyn. The result of his efforts is that Emlyn becomes yet another trusted friend. A year or so later, when Gwyn needs a carved wooden effigy to perform magic, he asks Emlyn, explaining that it is for "some witchcraft...of the healing kind." Emlyn "accept[s] this as a perfectly normal request," asking only, "Do you want me to paint it?" (Nimmo, 1989, p.143). Gwyn and Emlyn's shared bond is as strong and trusting as Gwyn's friendship with Nia, and these bonds prove to be crucial to all three adolescents.

Tasks 2 and 3: Achieving a sense of comfort with one's identity that will enable one to participate fully as a citizen or member of society and Accepting one's strengths and limitations, and utilizing these appropriately

As I have demonstrated, Gwyn's insecurity with regard to his magical powers is a major stumbling block on the way to greater maturity. However, Gwyn's brief journey back in time and his ensuing encounter with the magician Gwydion represents a turning point in Gwyn's journey to self-acceptance. Upon first seeing Gwydion, Gwyn realizes that "might have been looking at a matured and weathered version of himself. The white-haired man was not old; he had every one of Gwyn's features: the dark eyes and heavy eyebrows, even the Griffiths dent in his chin" (Nimmo, 1989, p.171). Gwydion serves as

a mirror in which Gwyn can see himself more clearly, and his appearance symbolizes Gwyn's coming to terms with his own nature. Furthermore, in Gwydion, Gwyn sees a possible future for himself—provided that he is able to accept his magical gifts and, along with this acceptance, acknowledge that they are no more or less an impediment to a normal life than he makes them.

It is during this meeting that Gwyn realizes that he wants to be a magician, and that it is only his fears that prevent him from embracing this path. Gwyn “looks up at his ancestor, hoping for a word to set him once and for all on the right road for a magician” (Nimmo, 1989, p.172). Gwydion responds by putting to rest Gwyn's fears that he has made “too many mistakes” and that his “decisions are hopeless” by reassuring him that he, too, has made mistakes—worse ones than Gwyn's. He tells his descendant that his uncle “turned [him] into a stag once for misbehaving, and on another occasion a wild sow” (p.172). However, even this did not ruin his life: Gwydion accepted the punishment that followed from his actions and eventually regained human form. Gwydion's story demonstrates to Gwyn that mistakes are inevitable and as long as one accepts the consequences of one's actions, there is no reason that one mistake should derail one's entire life.

Gwydion also gives him his wand, a “slim uncomplicated stick” which nevertheless “release[s] a cloud of magic” when Gwyn touches it. Such powerful magic, contained in such an ordinary seeming piece of wood symbolizes the power that is in Gwyn—as well as the challenge inherent in being a multi-dimensional human being. If he is to wield this powerful object successfully, he must reconcile the two sides of himself: the extraordinary and the ordinary, giving each its place and knowing when to let one or

the other come to the fore. Indeed, he tells Nain: “I know that sometimes I shall have to leap into the dark, but...I’ll never turn from [the magic] again. It’s not a burden, you see (Nimmo, 1989, p.180)

The magic is part of Gwyn, and ultimately he comes to accept this. However, he has also come to the realization that magic will not solve all problems. He explains that the magical artifacts given to him by Nain “have taken [him] on a strange journey,” but that he feels he’s “finished with them” and “[doesn’t] believe [he’ll] need magic for a while” (Nimmo, 1989, p.200). The “for a while” implies that he has not forsaken magic, nor has it forsaken him. Rather, Gwyn is trying to explain that while some problems can be solved with the aid of magic, many cannot, and he has developed the ability to tell the difference.

Task 4: Achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults.

Early on, Gwyn chooses to conceal his troubles at school from his mother, feeling obligated “to protect her” (Nimmo, 1986, p.61). Mrs. Griffiths, for her part, “sense[s] that something [is] wrong and [is] hurt and offended that her son [does] not confide in her,” noting that “he had never shut her out before” (Nimmo, 1986, p. 62). Yet, while Gwyn’s desire to keep his mother from worrying is well-intentioned, it is not healthy. Gwyn cuts himself off from his parents, but he does not immediately form equivalent bonds with any of his peers. Instead, he retreats ever deeper into the magical world shown to him by Arianwen, who weaves webs that serve as a window to another world—possibly the Otherworld. Gwyn finds himself drawn to the “pale children with wonderfully serene faces, not shouting as earthbound children would have done, but calling in soft, musical voices,” and is overcome with a “longing to be with them, to be

touched and soothed by them.” Gwyn also realizes that he has “never seen an adult in the cobwebs, never heard an adult voice” (Nimmo, 1986, p.63) This yearning to join the children he sees in the web reflects Gwyn’s simultaneous desire to be independent of the adults in his life and to form stronger relationships with his real-life peers—something which to him, seems as unlikely as magic.

However, Gwyn does achieve this independence, and moreover, does so with the help of the children of the web. When he inadvertently summons one of them, a girl called Eirlys (meaning “snowdrop”), he find that he has also summoned his “heart’s desire:” namely, his missing older sister. Eirlys is familiar to Gwyn, and he “realize[s] with a shock that he [knows] her...[has] seen her somewhere, but [can]not remember where” (Nimmo, 1986, p.67). Gwyn’s parents, on the other hand, recognize her immediately: aside from her hair which is “so soft it [is] like touching water” and her complexion, which is “almost as pale as the snow,” she is a dead ringer for Gwyn’s sister Bethan, long lost and presumed dead. In fact, it soon becomes apparent that Eirlys *is* Bethan, or at least, whatever remains of Bethan. Bethan/Eirlys’ residence in the Otherworld has transformed her into someone at once achingly familiar and unthinkably remote. Gwyn is struck by the girl’s “greeny-blue” eyes, which look “as though they had once been another color, but that other color had been washed away” (Nimmo, 1986, p.67). Other aspects of Bethan/Eirlys have been similarly washed away, as the girl explains. “I’m not Bethan...I might have been Bethan once, but now I’m Eirlys. I’ll never be Bethan again. I’ve been out there!” (Nimmo, 1986, p.103). In fact, she tells Gwyn, the only reason she has returned is, “You called me, didn’t you?” and remarks that

“at first, [Gwyn’s] calls were very faint, and then when Nain gave [him] the gifts, [his] voice became so loud [the children] couldn’t ignore it” (Nimmo, 1986, p.105).

Gwyn has summoned Bethan/Eirlys because he needs her. Gwyn needs Bethan/Eirlys’ help to deal if he is to overcome his problems at home and school. First, Bethan/Eirlys keeps him company, and allows him to build up his social skills. Although it is “against his principles to have girls at Ty Bryn,” Gwyn makes an exception for this strange girl, for he had never expected “to enjoy the company of girls” (Nimmo, 1986, p.80). Gwyn’s friendship with a girl who is almost, but not quite his sister demonstrates that he is beginning to form connections outside of his immediate family circle, and that he is able to achieve some measure of independence from his parents and his grandmother. Indeed, his decision not to explain Eirlys’ situation to them shows his understanding that “they don’t want to know” and that this event—Eirlys’ mysterious visit—is his problem and his alone (p.126). Once he has begun to establish his independence, Bethan/Eirlys leaves, explaining that she must return to her new home and reassuring Gwyn that “it will be all right between [him] and Dad” (Nimmo, 1986, p.126). Proof that Gwyn is ready to pursue his own, independent life comes when Bethan/Eirlys attempts to take Gwyn with her to the Otherworld. He resists her “grip...like steel, her strength irresistible,” screaming “I want to stay! Gwydion lives HERE!” (Nimmo, 1986, p.127). Gwyn rejects the fantasy kingdom “out there” that his reincarnated sister offers him, a “good place,” where “the children...have never grown” and where she is “very happy,” because Gwyn knows that he belongs in the real world and must live there, however difficult things may be for him (p.125). Gwyn knows that he is “not ever going” to where Bethan has gone, because he does not need to. He is ready to live.

Tasks 7 and 8: Desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior and Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behavior

Initially, Gwyn struggles with this. In *The Snow Spider*, he uses his magic against Dewi, the class bully, in a schoolyard fight; while he does so mainly in self-defense, he misjudges his strength and ends up breaking the other boy's nose. Gwyn's reaction to the boy's taunts, however, is childish: he wants nothing more than "to hurt [Dewi]," and "[brings] up his clenched right fist and thrust[s] it out toward Dewi, opening his fingers wide as he [does] so...[then,] a low hiss [comes] from within him, hardly belonging to him, and not his voice at all, but more like a wild animal" (Nimmo, 1986, p. 65). Gwyn allows his anger to overwhelm him and lashes out where a more mature person would refuse to be provoked.

In *Emlyn's Moon*, however, he refuses to use magic in his brawl with his cousin Emlyn, because doing so would give Gwyn an unfair advantage. This demonstrates that his ethical sense, while far from mature, is nevertheless in the process of being formed. His natural instincts of self-preservation nearly cause him to retaliate:

Gwyn stood up, his arms raised, fingers stretched wide, like a cat spreading its claws. A boy who was not a boy, but a part of the magic in the sacred trees and of the ageless shadows beneath them. All the dark power that still dwelled in the graveyard seemed to have gathered into his hands. And then he let it go. (Nimmo, 1987, p.59)

His choice to refrain from using his power reflects his sense of right and wrong. "I never hurt him," he explains to Nain. "I had to stop him for a while...but I let him win...I knew I had to let him win" (Nimmo, 1987, p.96). Gwyn couldn't avoid the fight with

Emlyn, who would have pursued him anyway. Nor did Gwyn wish to harm his cousin. Thus, he allowed his cousin to win, feeling that once Emlyn's anger is spent, he will be willing to talk to Gwyn. In Gwyn's view, it will be impossible to deal with Emlys and to help him unless Emlys can claim this small victory.

Gwyn's progression from abuse to proper use of power is accompanied by a broader sense of responsibility to his community. In *The Chestnut Soldier*, Gwyn must stop the calamitous series of events set in motion by the soldier Evan Llyr's possession by the spirit of Efnisien. While he could use his powers to destroy Efnisien outright (most likely destroying Evan as well), Gwyn knows that the responsible thing to do is to try and save Evan. He casts a spell by casting a wooden effigy of the man into an ice-cold pool, "begg[ing] the spirit of the pool to forgive and heal Evan Llyr" (Nimmo, 1989, p. 162). Gwyn must face his battle, although he does not do so willingly. He does not wish to harm anyone, as is evident in his final words to his enemy, "I don't hate you...Forgive me, Evan Llyr" (Nimmo, 1989, p.188).

While Gwyn's primary responsibility is to the people of his town, who are suffering from "shaking walls, the rain of hailstones, and the inexplicable smell of burning" that pervades the houses on account of Efnisien's rage, he also will not give up on a single individual who needs his help. Gwyn's approach to the problem demonstrates that he is cognizant of the necessity of balancing the needs of the many with the needs of the individual. His successful resolution of the matter, in which he manages to "quiet Efnisien forever" while preserving Evan Llyr's life, proves that he has reached a stage of his development in which he is able to behave ethically and according to a self-generated moral code.

The Prydain Chronicles

The *Prydain Chronicles* documents every step of Taran's journey from boy to man. Taking the raw material of Welsh myth and legend, Lloyd Alexander transforms it into high fantasy, a process which involves simplifying some aspects and fleshing out others. For example, the character of Gwydion is a very different character than he is in the *Mabinogi*: the trickster magician whose loyalty to the crown depends on the benefits he believes he will reap becomes a noble and wise hero, whom Taran justly idolizes. Arawn of Annwyn undergoes a similar process of simplification. Whereas in the *Mabinogi* he is technically neutral, for his concerns do not really extend beyond his domain, in Alexander's hands he is transformed into an evil, power-hungry figure, bent upon ruin and destruction.

The results of this process are very much in alignment with the development of the series' adolescent readers, and the story resonates because it fulfills these needs in addition to providing entertainment.

While it draws heavily on Celtic folklore, particularly the storehouse of Welsh myth found in such works as the *Mabinogi* and the *Welsh Triads*, the series is recognizably an example of high fantasy, with Taran's quest to defeat the great evil that besieges the country unfolding parallel to his secondary quest to discover his identity—both in terms of his origins and his destiny.

The books are prime examples of high fantasy, although this term, while universally understood, is not unanimously accepted. Gates et al. make a case for distinguishing between “heroic” fantasy and “ethical” fantasy, arguing that

If one stresses plot, characterization, and style, then “heroic” or “high”—the two terms are interchangeable—may be a more accurate designation; on the other hand, if one wishes to emphasize the author’s intention, subject matter, or possible effects upon the readers, then “ethical” may be preferable. Further, in view of the fact that many titles appear under both subtypes, “heroic-ethical” after all may be as accurate a designation as one can hope for (Gates et al., 1998, p.112)

In any event, there is little need to make a case for one or the other, for Alexander’s series contains equal parts “heroism” and “ethics.” His plot is tidy and well-structured, his characters and setting vivid, and his style fast-paced and lively. At the same time, the Prydain chronicles are essentially a coming-of-age story, in which a youthful hero (and to a lesser extent, a youthful heroine as well) progresses from childhood to adulthood. The grave and battle-weary Taran who organizes and leads his ragged but loyal war-band to victory against Arawn in *The High King* is a far cry from the headstrong and impetuous boy who pleads with Coll to teach him sword fighting in *The Book of Three*. Yet, the former could not exist without the latter, because much of the adult Taran’s wisdom and restraint springs largely from the mistakes made and the lessons learned by the adolescent Taran.

Throughout the series, Taran progresses from a state of not knowing who he is to forging an identity of his own, founded solely upon his actions and personal qualities such as courage, loyalty, and integrity. His social standing may be inferior, but his willingness to risk his life for others and to keep his promises marks him as a leader of

men, and eventually leads to his becoming High King of Prydain. In this way, his experience reflects that of a child reader's, who perhaps perceives himself or herself to be small and insignificant, but who longs to become someone better: bigger or stronger or braver or cleverer or even just better able to cope with whatever comes his or her way. Significantly, Taran is a foundling, but—like many heroes of folklore and unlike many literary orphans—not a foundling of noble birth. As an infant, he is taken in by Dallben, who finds him after his village has been destroyed. His parents, who are unknown to Dallben and never identified for either Taran or the reader, are presumably ordinary people—farmers or craftspeople not unlike the ones Taran encounters in the course of his adventures. Adolescent readers identify instinctively with Taran, because they are likely to be from similarly un-aristocratic backgrounds. Furthermore, Taran's successful maturation hinges on two things: first, his willingness to cooperate with others in order to achieve a common goal, and secondly, his ability to confront his strengths and weaknesses and to use what he has to achieve what he must.

Task 1: Achieving new and mature relations with age mates of both sexes

The most sustained example of Taran's progress with respect to this developmental task is in his relationship with Eilonwy. Initially, he is inclined to dismiss her as a hindrance to the cause. She is "always getting into one scrape or another," Taran points out, and she "never stop[s] talking" (Alexander, 1966, p.5). Defeating Arawn's armies is "work for warriors," he declares to an outraged Eilonwy, concluding, "We can't be burdened with a girl" (Alexander, 1965, p. 25). Yet Eilonwy is a young woman of extraordinary courage and resourcefulness. She "don[s] men's garments and braid[s] her hair about her head...[and] at her belt [hangs] a sword and short dagger" (Alexander,

1969, p. 94). Thus attired, she rides into battle alongside her companions, unwilling to sit idly by while everyone else fights. Despite his attempts to prevent her, Eilonwy will not be swayed from her purpose. “I understand you’re upset,” she responds to his angry insistence that she leave the fighting to other, more seasoned warriors. “But there’s no cause to be rude” (Alexander, 1969, p.125). Eilonwy will not be bullied or browbeaten, and as such, she forces Taran to accept her as an equal.

In large part because of this, he falls in love with her and, in the final book of the series, they marry. Here, too, Taran’s relationship with Eilonwy progresses from childish to mature. Early on, he struggles to express his feelings. When she first leaves for the Island of Mona, to receive her education as a princess, Taran confesses to Dallben, “I shall miss her” (Alexander, 1966, p.5). He says this “half-angrily,” demonstrating his inability to articulate his feelings for her—one of the prerequisites for pursuing a more adult relationship with her. When asked if he has admitted his feelings to Eilonwy, Taran stammers, “Not—not exactly,” and explains, “[E]very time I begin talking about it I—I [feel] very odd” (Alexander, 1969, p.5). It is not until the very end of the series that Taran is able to confess to Eilonwy, “I have long loved you, and loved you before I knew that I did” (Alexander, 1969, p.236).

Some of the impetus to declare his feelings comes from a sense that Prince—later King—Rhun is his rival for Eilonwy’s affections. The young heir to the throne of Mona is “of Taran’s age, with a moon-round face, pale blue eyes, and straw-colored hair” and, on account of his clumsiness (upon first disembarking from the ship that brings him to the harbor, he immediately “[loses] his footing, stumble[s], and with a loud splash pitche[s] headlong into the shallows”) and general “scatterbrained behavior, fuels Taran’s

resentment (Alexander, 1966, p.6). Taran is angry that Rhun was “born to his rank,” despite being, in Taran’s opinion, “a clumsy, muddleheaded baby” (Alexander, 1966, p.10). Taran questions whether “[Rhun’s] birth makes him worthy of his rank,” adding that at least he, Taran, “has earned the right to wear [his sword]” (Alexander, 1966, p.10). He also envies the fact that “King Rhuddlum and Queen Teleria mean to betroth [Eilonwy] to Prince Rhun,” and despairs that his common origins prevent him from proposing to Eilonwy (Alexander, 1966, p.170).

Taran, however, gradually changes his mind about Prince Rhun. Some of this is due to change on Rhun’s part. Rhun changes physically, growing both “taller and leaner, though his grin [is] as broad as it had ever been” as well as mentally. Upon assuming the throne following his father’s death, he becomes King Rhun and begins to think seriously about his responsibilities as a ruler, focusing on how to “improve things here and there” (Alexander, 1969, p.19). He decides to “put up a new seawall at Mona Haven,” which his untimely death prevents him from completing (p.19-20).

Mostly, however, if Taran comes to see Rhun as a kind and dutiful young man, it is because Rhun is just that. It is only Taran’s prejudice that blinds him to Rhun’s true nature: while Rhun is born to his station in life, he is not unworthy of it. He sacrifices his life for his companions, creating a diversion so that Taran and the other warriors can mount an attack on Arawn’s army. “The day is ours,” Taran tells Rhun as he is dying. “Without you, it would have gone differently” (Alexander, 1969, p.79). That Taran can admit this and give credit where credit is due shows that he has overcome both his childish resentment and his equally immature desire to be a hero. Instead, he announces the death of his companion with “a grief-stricken face” and vows that “[Rhun’s] work

shall not be left undone” (Alexander, 1969, p.79). In tribute to his dead friend, Taran undertakes to complete the seawall of which Rhun dreamed.

Task 2: Achieving a sense of comfort with one’s identity that will enable one to participate fully as a citizen or member of society

As an orphan, Taran lacks a sense of his own identity. Part of his development, therefore, involves discovering his origins and coming to terms with who he is. In *Taran Wanderer*, he goes on a quest to find out who his parents were, and what happened to them. After a series of false leads and misadventures, Taran happens upon a herdsman named Craddock who claims that Taran is his long lost son. Feeling that he is “bound to him by ties of blood,” Taran stays with the old man despite his own wishes to flee to Caer Dallben. Feeling “free as the caged eagle,” Taran submits to long seasons of hard labor, determined to do his duty by his “father.” Craddock, in fact, is not Taran’s father. However, Taran does not discover this until Craddock is on the verge of death, as a result of overexposure suffered from being caught on a rocky ledge during a snowstorm. Taran later confesses his urge to leave Craddock on the rock to die, saying “I was ashamed to be base-born, so ashamed that it sickened me” (Alexander, 1968, p.159). To his friends he admits that he “longed to be of noble birth, longed for it so much [he] believed it was true,” and that “a proud birthright was all that counted for [him],” so much so that “those who had none...[he] deemed them the lesser for it” (Alexander, 1968, p.160).

This recognition marks a turning point for Taran. He sees that in searching for his origins, he has been, ironically, avoiding self-knowledge. He states, “I am not proud of myself...I may never be again. If I do find pride, I’ll find it not in what I was or what I am, but what I may become. Not in my birth, but in myself” (Alexander, 1968, p. 160).

Thus, Taran learns to accept not only that he may not have the parentage he once dreamed of but also that he may never find out where he comes from. What matters, he has learned, is what he makes of himself—his words, his deeds, and his choices. He can become a good man, or a bad one, but only he has the power to become either.

Tasks 3 and 6: Accepting one's strengths and limitations, and utilizing these appropriately and Developing the intellectual skills and concepts necessary for civic competence

Taran is constantly engaged in a process of accepting his flaws and limitations, while also learning to appreciate the skills and talents he does possess. In the course of his travels, he briefly apprentices himself to three craftspeople: a swordsmith, a weaver, and a potter. While he learns to forge a sword and weave a cloak, he ultimately concludes that neither path is for him. Blacksmithing teaches him the importance of hard, steady labor, which will serve him well. As Heyvedd the smith tells him “Life’s a forge...Face the pounding; don’t fear the proving; and you’ll stand well against any hammer and anvil” (Alexander, 1968, p.181). Weaving, on the other hand, demonstrates to him the importance of patience. Life, Dwyvach the weaver tells him, is not a forge but rather “a loom...where lives and days intertwine; and wise he is who can see the pattern” (Alexander, 1968, p.185). In order to be successful, Taran must learn to complete tasks step by step, as diligently as possible. However, despite his hard-won skill at weaving, Taran realizes that his path is not that of a weaver. It is at the wheel of Annlaw Clay Shaper that Taran hopes he will discover his path in life. He loves to work with clay, but soon—to his sorrow—comes to understand that he lacks the gift to become a potter and that his life must take a different course than the one he would choose for himself. “Is

the gift [of clay shaping] forbidden me?” he cries in despair, because he knows “within himself, he [has] touched the truth” (Alexander, 1968, p.198). He is better at blacksmithing and weaving than he is at creating pottery, and yet even in these crafts, he does not feel adept enough to pursue them as his livelihood. Nevertheless, these experiences teach him a great deal about himself, and help him to see his strengths and weaknesses more objectively. Moreover, in acquiring these skills, he is in a position to make a positive contribution to his society—utilizing such painstakingly cultivated qualities as hard work and patience to achieve civic competence.

Task 5: Preparing for an independent and self-directed adulthood and setting realistic life goals

Taran longs to be a man, and continually desires to prove himself. “I am old enough to sit in a council of men,” he declares at the beginning of *The Black Cauldron*, when he is little more than a headstrong adolescent. “I have learned much, I have fought at [Gwydion’s] side (Alexander, 1965, p.9).” The adults in his life, including Dallben, Coll, and Gwydion, do not refuse his requests to participate in the activities of man, although they try to advise him. “Manhood...may not be all that you believe,” Lord Gwydion cautions Taran.

Taran also believes in the external trappings of manhood: for example, a sword. Upon receiving a sword of his own, he crows “Yes...this is a weapon for a man and a warrior! (Alexander, 1965, p.25). Dallben expresses his hope that Taran “will not have cause to use it,” and explains that, “like all weapons [its powers are] only those held by him who wields it” (Alexander, 1965, p.23). In other words, it is not a weapon or a position of power or authority that proves the worth of a man, for these things are subject

to abuse. Arawn, for example, has both weapons and command over large armies. Yet because he uses them for evil purposes, one can hardly consider him a man, although once he was no different than anyone else, before the enchantress (and his former consort) Achren “showed him the secret ways to power” (Alexander, 1966, p.149).

Taran comes to realize that his boyhood fantasies of being a noble warrior like his hero, Lord Gwydion, were misguided. He laments, “I had longed to enter the world of men. Now I see it filled with sorrow, with cruelty and treachery, with those who would destroy all around them” (Alexander, 1965, p.177).

Yet it is precisely this knowledge that later enables him to assume the duties of High King of Prydain. Offered a place in the Summer Country, Taran regretfully turns it down, even though he knows that he may never again see some of his best friends. He has come to understand that his first duty is to Prydain, to the land he loves and its people. He says, “There are those more deserving of [the gift of eternal youth] than I, yet never may it be offered them. My life is bound to theirs” (Alexander, 1969, p.237). He knows that he cannot “restore life to...those valiant folk who followed [him]. Nor...mend the hearts of widows and orphaned children. Yet,” Taran decides. “If it is in [his] power to rebuild even a little of what has been broken,” he must do it. His decision reflects his mature acceptance of the responsibilities of adulthood.

Taran admits that while “long ago [he] yearned to be a hero without knowing, in truth, what a hero was...[but] a grower of turnips or a shaper of clay, a Commot farmer or a king—every man is a hero, if he strives more for others than for himself alone” (Alexander, 1969, p.238). It is this recognition—that manhood is not about power and

privilege but about service and responsibility—that demonstrates Taran’s readiness to assume his place in society as a man and as a king.

Tasks 7 and 8: Desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior and Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behavior

Taran in *The Book of Three* and *The Black Cauldron* is both too young and too immature to have a sense of what is or is not socially acceptable behavior, although by the end of *Taran Wanderer*, he is well on his way. Early on, he desires only to be a hero and begs Coll to teach him swordfighting. Taran’s view of the world is essentially egocentric, and his primary motivation is to preserve his honor at all costs. When the haughty Prince Ellidyr insults Taran, calling him “pig-boy,” Taran gives free rein to his temper and starts a fight with the young nobleman. The Good-natured Coll tells him he “should know better than...to quarrel with strangers,” while Dallben chastises him somewhat more severely, reminding Taran that he should “conduct [himself] with as much restraint and dignity as possible—which” he adds, “may not be very great, but [which Taran] shall have to make do with” (Alexander, 1965, p.8). Indeed, even Lord Gwydion reprimands him for boasting of his warrior prowess while behaving like a child, chiding him for having “repaid anger with a childish insult” (Alexander, 1965, p.21). Taran is a good person, but prone to a young adolescent’s self-centeredness and thoughtlessness.

Taran is always a highly moral character, but his concept of morality—particularly in the early books—is limited to a largely black-and-white perception of good and evil. However, Taran’s growth and maturity follows a developmentally authentic course. Whereas in the series’ early entries, Taran is likely to attribute evil

deeds to an evil nature (as in his dealings with Achren), he is later able, as his character develops, to link bad behavior to bad choices. For example, Craddock lies to Taran about his parentage, something which goes against Taran's own moral code. Yet Taran recognizes that Craddock is a good man. Whenever, for example, "a sheep sicken[s], Craddock care[s] for it with an unexpected tenderness that [goes] to Taran's heart" and "when danger threaten[s] the flock, Craddock turn[s] fierce as a wolf, heedless of his own safety with a courage Taran could only admire" (Alexander, 1968, p.146-7). Craddock is selfless and honorable, but Taran "scorn[s] the generosity he would have honored in any other man," simply because Craddock has dashed Taran's dreams of noble lineage. Indeed, Craddock has "never...been false to any man. Save once. To [Taran]." He confesses to Taran,

I needed your strength to keep what remained to me. I saw no other way. Even as I spoke the lie, I was ashamed, then more ashamed to speak the truth...At first I leaned upon you as on my crutch, because you served my need, but no father came to love a son so dearly" (Alexander, 1968, p.155).

Craddock would not have lied unless it was absolutely necessary. He is lonely as well as desperate for both aid and companionship, things which Taran realizes he would have been reluctant to provide if Craddock had been honest with him. When he first decides to aid Craddock, he declares, "As long as Craddock lives, I am bound to him by ties of blood—if truly his blood runs through my veins" (Alexander, 1968, p.141). Taran's "if truly" implies that if he had believed that Craddock was not his father, he would have fled. He chooses to aid the old herdsman reluctantly, and ungraciously. As a result, when Taran realizes how badly he has behaved towards the old man, on account of his pride

and his being “ashamed to be the son of a herdsman,” he cries, “My shame is for myself” (Alexander, 1968, p.159). However, although it is a painful lesson for Taran to learn, it is not one that falls on barren ground. Taran learns from his mistake, and abandons his quest for his parentage, choosing instead to “make [his] own way, earn [his] own keep,” for, as he points out, “the robin must scratch for his own worms” (Alexander, 1968, p.161). Despite his failure to behave well in this instance, he has reached a crucial milestone in his development.

As the series progresses, so too does Taran’s ability to make choices from both a practical and a moral standpoint. Despite being outnumbered, Taran refuses to let King Rhun join them in battle because he is aware that Rhun’s people on the Isle of Mona need him more than Taran’s ragtag army does. Rhun “owes another kind of debt to the fisher folk of Mona...[and] theirs is the greater claim” (Alexander, 1969, p.70) It would be selfish to put Rhun’s life on the line and deprive his subjects of their ruler. Similarly, when Eilonwy is held captive by the enchantress Achren, Taran refuses to submit to Achren’s will—despite the promises with which she tempts him. “With me,” says Achren. “Princess Eilonwy shall be a queen. But who shall be her king?...What then shall be the lot of an Assistant Pig-Keeper?” (Alexander, 1966, p.152). Achren promises Taran everything he would (at that point) choose for himself: a throne and the hand of the woman he loves. Yet he knows that by selfishly accepting Achren’s offer, he is effectively dooming the land of Prydain. Not quite trusting himself to do what is right, he “half-sobbing...[tries] in vain to stop his ears against the whispered words and [buries] his face in his hands” (Alexander, 1966, p.153). Yet he does not consent, does not give in to the wicked enchantress. His ability to consider the needs of others before his own

desires shows Taran's progress towards maturity. Indeed, he becomes High King solely because he is the one who puts aside his wants—in this case, happiness and eternal youth in the Summer Country—in order to begin the process of rebuilding Prydain. Only after his admission that he is “well-content as an Assistant Pig-Keeper” does Dallben offer him the crown. “Your worth was proved when you drew Dyrnwyn from its sheath,” says the old enchanter. “And your kingliness when you chose to remain here. It is not a gift I offer you now, but a burden far heavier than any you have borne” (Alexander, 1969, p.239). Taran cannot take up this burden until he has matured enough to live by a strict moral code and to practice it every day, in everything he does. Once he has come to terms with the fact that his life is not his own, and that it belongs just as much to his fellow citizens as it does to him, only then can Taran fulfill his true destiny.

The Owl Service

The novel in its depiction of the heightened emotional turmoil of adolescent love and jealousy, reflects adolescence itself. More specifically, the events of the story symbolize the transition from childhood to adulthood, with all that this change entails. This theme is supported not only by the recurring nature of the mythic story, which must play out each generation with a different cast performing the ancient roles, but also by the skillful arrangement of character triads which show the progression from one generation to the next. That the power unleashed by the reenactment of the myth can be either positive or negative—or, in the parlance of the novel, flowers or owls—demonstrates that adolescence is neither good nor bad, neither innocence nor experience. Rather, Garner attempts to show that adolescence is an inevitable, essentially neutral process whose

outcome is highly susceptible to outside influence and highly dependent upon the situation in which it unfolds.

Taking as its source material the story of Blodeuwedd from the fourth branch of the Mabinogi, *Math vab Mathonwy*, the novel presents the story of two upper-class English teenagers, Alison and her stepbrother Roger, who during their summer holiday in Wales meet a Welsh boy named Gwyn, who is the housekeeper's son. The trio discovers, hidden in an attic, a dinner service decorated with an elaborate pattern that can be viewed as either a floral motif or a series of owls. Soon after, they uncover a portrait of a woman painted on the wall of the billiard room that has been concealed under a layer of pebble dash. Huw Halfbacon, the handyman, seems to know what is going on, but when pressed for information will only provide the cryptic answer, "She's coming." Gwyn's mother Nancy also appears to have knowledge of the situation, but her reaction is one of fear and anger. Meanwhile, as Alison's friendship with Gwyn deepens, Roger and Gwyn's mutual antipathy intensifies. Alison has become obsessed with tracing the owl patterns on the plates, an act which unleashes a powerful supernatural force with the potential to wipe out the sleepy Welsh valley in which they live.

The energy has its source in Welsh myth. Long ago, the enchanter Gwydion created a woman from wildflowers as a bride for his son, Llew Llaw Gyffes, because Llew's mother Aranrot had put a curse on him saying that he should never take a human bride. This woman, Blodeuwedd, fell in love with a man named Gronw Pebr and together they plotted to kill Llew. Llew survived the attempt on his life by changing into an eagle. Once restored to human form, he sought revenge on Gronw. He hurled a spear

at his wife's lover, who hid himself behind a stone; the spear penetrated the rock and killed Gronw. Gwydion then changed Blodeuwedd into an owl as punishment.

This drama must be reenacted once every generation, although the outcome can be either “owls” or “flowers,” that is, it often ends tragically (owls), but does not have to. The kernel of the myth is the love triangle that connects Lleu, Blodeuwedd, and Gronw, and the motif of two rival men fighting over a woman is a theme that finds expression in the traditional tales of many cultures. How the principal actors resolve—or fail to resolve—the situation can vary, however, although the outcome is more likely to be tragic than happy.

Garner has voiced his conviction that “the myth chooses the form for its clearest expression at any given moment” (Garner, 1997, p.110). In other words, in order for a story to survive, it must tell itself again and again, recruiting for its cast of characters whatever people happen to be at hand. In *The Owl Service*, the actors are British teenagers, whose already intense emotional lives provide the energy necessary to make the story plausible in its modern context. Indeed, Neil Philip states that “all myths, being the expression of primitive kernels of emotion rather than its sophisticated development, are adolescent dramas.” In his view, it is entirely appropriate that the myth is acted out by teenagers, because Lleu, Blodeuwedd, and Gronw are not mature in either their passions or their behavior. “The love of the story must be first love or none at all, the hate first hate” in order to resonate with readers” (Philip, 1981, p.68).

Task 1: Achieving new and mature relations with age mates of both sexes

Gwyn and Alison's friendship is the only example of "achieving new and mature relations with age mates of both sexes" in *The Owl Service*, and even so, it is only a partial success. Initially, it appears as if Gwyn and Alison will form a romantic attachment. Alison shyly gives Gwyn a gift, explaining "I want to give you a present...for today" and presents him with a painted souvenir stone. When Gwyn protests that he has nothing to give her in return, she dismisses it. "You're the only one I can talk to," Alison tells Gwyn. "You're the only one who's ever called me Alison" (Garner, 1969, p.103, 140). She explains that she is "always called Ali...Ali Alleycat," and that she considers this pet name "horrid" (Garner, 1969, p.103). Gwyn's insistence on calling her by her given name reflects his acknowledgment of her womanhood, hinting at the possibility that their connection will take on new depth, and that they will change from friends to lovers.

After all, the book, notes C.W. Sullivan, begins with "an onset of [Alison's] menstrual cycle, the sign of her fertility" (Sullivan, 1993, p. 52). Her compulsion to trace the owls suggests her tentative explorations of her emerging sexuality. Of the owls derived from the pattern on the plates, Alison explains, "I have to make them...I get all worked up and edgy, and it's the only thing that makes me feel better." She goes on to reveal that she feels she is "going to burst," and describes it as "losing your temper and being frightened, only more. My body gets tighter and tighter and—and then it's as if my skin's suddenly full of holes, like that chicken wire, and it all shoots out (Garner, 1969, p.88). Tracing the owls, then, appears to be to some extent a release of sexual tension. That she can only sleep once she has finished her task suggests that there is a masturbatory aspect to her obsession with the plates. Indeed, once she has finished

making her patterns, she is “trembling and her teeth [begin] to chatter,” reflecting the aftermath of orgasm (Garner, 1969, p.89). Gwyn is the only one who is sympathetic, and when he goes to the shed where she has sequestered herself, he does so out of concern. “I want to help you,” he tells Alison. When she attacks him, he attempts to restrain her without harming her:

He hit Alison with his shoulder and pinned her arms to her sides. She fought, thrashing, kicking, but Gwyn held her. His head was tucked in close to her anorak, out of her reach. The dinner service splintered under them. Gwyn held her until her strength was gone, and he let her cry herself to silence (Garner, 1969, p.87).

Afterwards, they “[sit] on the floor of the hut, and Alison hid[es] her head in Gwyn’s shoulder, and he talk[s] to her until the sun clear[s] the mountain” (Garner, 1969, p.87). They spend the night together, holding one another, which seems a clear precursor to more intimate involvement. Indeed, the next morning, they “step...from the hut into rainbow dew and walk[] together up to the house through the midsummer dawn” (Garner, 1969, p.87). Significantly, their encounter takes place at Midsummer, traditionally a time of fertility.

Yet, Gwyn and Alison never arrive at this point. First, Gwyn comes to resent Alison’s constant insistence they cannot spend time together because of “Mummy...I can’t bear to see her hurt or upset” (Garner, 1969, p.161). He assumes that she has “not come these past five days” because she is ashamed to be seen with him, her social inferior. He reminds her that, regardless of how hard she pretends otherwise, “it did happen...we were up there on the mountain. It did all happen,” to which she says,

soothingly, “Of course...it was lovely,” but insists that they cannot be seen together because “Mummy’s threatened what she’ll do, and she means it” (Garner, 1969, p.160). The scene is that one of star-crossed, forbidden love, and emotions run high. Alison pleads with Gwyn to “Stop it! Stop tearing me between you!” The death blow to their relationship, however, comes when a misunderstanding causes Gwyn to believe that Alison has betrayed him, and his already turbulent emotions erupt into fury. Gwyn had previously confessed to Alison his plan to “get out of this place” where “there’s nothing but sheep” (Garner, 1969, p.125). He has revealed to her that even if his mother forces him to leave school, there is still the option of “night school” as well as “a set of records...[which] teach you to speak properly.” He views her as a trusted confidant. “I can tell you, Alison,” says Gwyn. “I can’t tell anyone else” (Garner, 1969, p.139). Thus, when Alison accidentally lets this information slip in conversation with Roger, who in turn uses the knowledge to taunt the other boy, Gwyn’s reaction is at first incredulous: “You told him?” he asks in disbelief. Then, he scornfully asks “Was it a good laugh?” before fleeing, hurt and enraged.

Alison is unable to detain Gwyn long enough to explain the real situation, and shouts to Roger to “Stop him! Make him stop!” Gwyn, for his part, will not have anything further to do with Alison. When the spirit of Blodeuwedd takes over Alison, he refuses to offer his help, even though all he has to do is “Look to her. Comfort her” (Garner, 1969, p.216). Despite promising beginnings, Gwyn is unable—or, as Huw remarks, “not wanting” to make things right with Alison, and to repair the rift in their relationship. He has “only hate in [him]” and where once there was affection, there is now only rage and anguish.

This is the closest any of the characters come to achieving any of the developmental tasks. Yet, as teenagers, Gwyn and Alison—and to a lesser extent, Roger—confront many of them, even if they do not complete them. Therefore, my discussion of the rest of *The Owl Service* will necessarily focus not on the ways in which the characters are successful in achieving developmental milestones, but rather the ways in which they fall short.

Tasks 2 and 3: Achieving a sense of comfort with one's identity that will enable one to participate fully as a citizen or member of society and Accepting one's strengths and limitations, and utilizing these appropriately

As a working-class Welsh boy surrounded by upper-class English people, Gwyn feels the need to prove—and improve—himself. He purchases a “set of records [that] teach you to speak properly,” or as Alison describes it, “a ghastly...elocution course on gramophone records” (Garner, 1969, p.157). She insists to Gwyn that “There’s nothing wrong with the way you speak...I like it. It’s you and not ten thousand other people.” But Gwyn disagrees. Having the right accent “doesn’t matter—as long as you haven’t got it” (Garner, 1969, p.139). While Huw encourages him to embrace his heritage and his birthright, claiming that Gwyn is “the lord in blood to this valley after me,” Gwyn

If Gwyn is dissatisfied with who he is, he nevertheless may be in a stronger position than Alison, who lacks a sense of identity altogether, whether positive or negative. Alison complains, “I’m as useless as one of those girls in fashion photographs—just stuck in a field of wheat, or a puddle, or on a mountain, and they look gorgeous but they don’t know where they are” (Garner, 1968, p.101). This lack of identity on Alison’s part stems from not having a purpose in life. When Gwyn

mockingly asks if Alison will “sit at home and arrange flowers for Mummy,” once she is finished with her schooling, Alison replies, “Probably” (Garner, 1969, p.124). She can propose no alternative because, as she explains to Roger “I’ve never felt anything that strongly” with regard to her future. She has no real ambition in life, nor does she have any hobbies, such as Roger’s passion for photography (Garner, 1969, p.156). With no sense of who she is, she cannot know what she wants; and without dreams and goals, she cannot know what sort of person she aspires to be.

Yet Alison is full of potential, even if that potential has no concrete form. The fact that she is the one to release the energy from the plates suggests that she possesses unique powers. “It’s the power,” observes Huw. “It’s in her” (Garner, 1969, p.215). Gwyn, however, is the one who works out that the power is “neutral like a battery...you can use it to explode a bomb or to fry an egg: It depends on you” (Garner, 1969, p.87). He tells Alison of seeing a nettle which, despite being “a pale little thing...had split the concrete floor.” Alison is like that nettle: her energy can be used positively or negatively, creatively or destructively. The fact that she does not know whether she is “owls” or “flowers” creates the ambiguity of the situation, which is reflected in the ending of the novel. Alison lies atop the table, while “feathers [cling] to her and drift...around her” (Garner, 1969, p.214). She is in the process of turning into an owl, until Roger convinces her that she is “flowers.” After this, “the room is full of petals from skylight and rafters, and all about them, a fragrance, and petals, flowers falling, broom, meadowsweet, falling, flowers of the oak” (Garner, 1969, p.219). Yet, it is unclear what this symbolizes. The maiden Blodeuwedd was made of flowers, but in becoming the bride of Lleu she became a flesh-and-blood woman. If Alison becomes flowers, then is she expected to be maiden

rather than a woman? Given the ending, it is possible that it is not that evil has been defeated or catastrophe averted, but that natural adolescent sexuality has been suppressed in favor of a reversion to a false, idealized image of childhood. Alison, whose emerging young womanhood is awakened by her obsession with the owls she perceives on the dinner plates, is drawn out by her relationship with Gwyn, and finds expression through her assumption of the role of Blodeuwedd-as-owl, is ultimately repressed. Her freedom is curtailed by the well-meaning Roger's "You're not birds. You're flowers." He strokes her forehead, soothing her with "Quietly, now. Flowers." His affectionate chiding of her, as when he calls her "silly girl" and "silly gubbins" and insists upon using her nickname, Ali, which she despises, is full of good intentions but is also highly patronizing. He questions her actions, asking "What made you think those plates could be anything else? Why didn't you cut the patterns into flowers right at the start...?" Alison, perhaps because she has no clear sense of self and has never expressed any hopes or dreams of her own, that are not generated by parents or peers, is unable to resist or assert her identity one way or the other.

Task 4: Achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults

All of the characters struggle with this, but of the three protagonists, Alison and Gwyn have the most trouble establishing their independence. Alison lives in fear of her mother's anger, and "hate[s] upsetting her" (Garner, 1969, p.124). Gwyn remarks insightfully to Alison that "that's the all-year-round cultural pursuit in [her] family...not upsetting Mummy," something which Alison cannot deny, since her fear threatens to ruin her relationship with Gwyn, of whom her mother does not approve (Garner, 1969, p.124). "Mummy says I mustn't talk to you," Alison protests, when Gwyn seeks her out. She

claims her mother's temper as her reason for avoiding him, to which Gwyn responds bitterly, "Mummy was upset yesterday, and Mummy was upset the day before, and I bet you anything Mummy will be upset today" (Garner, 1969, p.124). Despite her connection to Gwyn, she is unable to break free of her mother's control. This is evident when Gwyn asks Alison what she wishes to do once she leaves school and she replies, "Mummy wants me to go abroad for a year." When Gwyn presses her, asking "But what do you want to do?" Alison responds, "I've not thought. I expect I'll go abroad" (Garner, 1969, p.124). Not only does Alison refuse to defy her mother's wishes, she seems incapable of formulating her own.

Yet, for all that Gwyn questions Alison's meek compliance in the face of parental pressure he is similarly incapable of achieving emotional independence. However, Gwyn's lack of independence takes a different form. Rather than submit to his mother's will, he delights in defiance. When his mother orders him to nail up the opening to the loft where Alison first discovered the plates, Gwyn purposely drags his feet, bragging about how he "can spin that out till tomorrow...[leaving] plenty of time to bring the plates down" (Garner, 1969, p.28). His defiance goes beyond simple rebellion, frequently containing unadulterated malice. When Nancy refuses to give him money, he plants an owl pellet in her handbag, "open[ing] the purse and dropp[ing] the ball of mouse inside" (Garner, 1969, p.46). In short, the energy that Gwyn might put into breaking free and establishing a new life for himself he squanders on his own obsessive love-hate relationship with his mother. "She hates my guts," claims Gwyn (Garner, 1969, p.125). In fact, it is more complicated than that. Gwyn and Nancy's relationship reflects that of Lleu and Aranrot. Katherine Millersdaughter points out that throughout

the four branches of the Mabinogi, “women depend on male kin for their social identity: they are daughters, sisters, and wives to certain men.” The one exception, she maintains, is the figure of Aranrot, who “lives a life of independent, propertied power usually reserved for elite men” (Millersdaughter, 1996, p.308).

The character of Nancy has a similar independence, if not actual property. As housekeeper to an affluent English family, Nancy lacks the social status of Aranrot. However, her power over those around her is undeniable. She gets her way by threatening to quit whenever something upsets her, in one instance “[giving] her notice three times” (Garner, 1969, p.18). Roger’s father acquiesces to her demands, reasoning that “it was hard enough to get someone to live-in all summer. If Nance left now, we’d never get a replacement” (Garner, 1969, p.24). Clive’s reaction suggests that Nancy’s role as housekeeper has less of the sense of “servant” and more of the sense of “guardian of the house.” Her influence on her son is no less profound.

Gwyn, for example, has no last name, reflecting both his lack of an acknowledged father and his mother’s refusal to give him an independent identity. When he goes to the local shop, he is greeted by Mrs. Richards, the shopkeeper, “And you [sic] Nancy’s Gwyn, are you?” While Gwyn subtly corrects her by affirming “I’m Gwyn,” it is only a symbolic protest. His sole identity is that of Nancy’s son.

Just as Aranrot denies Lleu what he needs to become a man, that is, a name, a weapon, and a bride, so does Nancy prevent Gwyn from asserting his independence. Like Aranrot, Nancy will not bestow a name upon her son. She is unmarried and has never revealed to Gwyn the identity of his father. Indeed, even her maiden name is never mentioned and Gwyn’s actual surname is unclear. She also will not permit him to go to

university, despite his high marks and obvious intelligence. She prefers him to work “behind a shop counter” because, as Gwyn remarks, “as long as [I leave] the house in a suit every morning, that’s Mam happy. The other lads in our street wear overalls” (Garner, 1969, p.126-7). Thus does Nancy refuse to arm her son for success in the world, even though she claims that she has “struggled in Aber [all those years]” for Gwyn’s sake. Nancy also disapproves of Gwyn’s relationship with Alison, whom she views as “a twicer, that one” implying that she is duplicitous and not to be trusted (Garner, 1969, p.117).

Gwyn, resentful of Nancy’s influence, is nevertheless stunned when she abandons him, just as Aranrot had abandoned Llew. Unwilling to accompany her, Gwyn chooses to stay with Huw, telling her, “I’m not coming...You can look after your own cases. I’m staying with my dad” (Garner, 1969, p.201). At this point, the power that suffuses the valley claims her:

She turned but did not stop. She walked backward up the road, shouting, and the rain washed the air clean of her words and dissolved her haunted face, broke the dark of her into webs that left no stain (Garner, 1969, p.201).

Even when she is gone, it is not clear that Gwyn is free of her. Afterwards, Gwyn “watche[s] for a while the unmarked place where she had been, then climb[s] over the gate” (Garner, 1969, p.207). For the rest of the book, he is curiously detached, and goes “without speaking” until he encounters Huw (Garner, 1969, p.218). It is telling that he calls Roger “Mummy’s boy” and taunts him about his mother, “the Birmingham Belle.” Gwyn and Roger now have something in common: each has been abandoned by his mother physically and emotionally, yet neither has abandoned his absent mother. This, in

fact, may well be a factor in his refusal to help Alison. When Roger explains that it was his fault, not Alison's, Roger sees "the question form[ing] in [Gwyn's] eyes, and [sees] that he knew" (Garner, 1969, p.217). Gwyn, having been "betrayed" by two women, two Blodeuwedds of different generations, wants nothing to do with either—but is unable to break free.

Task 7 and 8: Desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior and Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behavior

Gwyn is reluctant to assume his rightful role as "lord of the valley." He grudgingly agrees to "stay and help the valley, but not this lot," he says, referring to Roger and Alison. Gwyn grasps only part of his obligation to his domain, which is to guard not only the land but its inhabitants—Welsh or English or something else entirely. This is because he is unable to let go of his wounded pride. Gwyn's reaction, while understandable, is not mature or responsible. Indicating Alison and Roger, Gwyn states flatly that he is "not doing anything for them," because he is "finished" with them (Garner, 1969, p.215). Despite Huw's insistence that "you are the three. You have made this together," Gwyn will not accept his share of the responsibility for bringing the myth to life. Instead, he hangs back, saying "I can't, man...you don't know what these two have done. I can't touch [Alison]" (Garner, 1969, p.216). Gwyn's decision demonstrates that he has not yet reached a stage of higher moral reasoning that will enable him to do the right thing. Unable to put the needs of others first, he remains a child.

Conclusion:

Each of the three books or series presents or addresses in some way the challenges that adolescents face as they grow. The successful completion by the protagonists of the developmental tasks which I have previously outlined varies considerably from book to book, and from series to series. In some cases (e.g. the *Prydain Chronicles* and the *Magician Trilogy*), the characters successfully complete many or most of these tasks, whereas in others (*The Owl Service*), they do not.

In the *Prydain* series, Taran matures from boyhood to manhood, and in the process completes virtually all of the developmental tasks. In *The Owl Service*, Gwyn, Alison, and Roger complete virtually none of them. Only in their approach to the first task, “achieving new and more mature relations with age-mates of both sexes,” do any of them experience even a qualified success. However, success does not equal happiness or fulfillment, since the basis of these “new and more mature relations” is the romantic attraction between formerly platonic friends Gwyn and Alison, which has the potential to be a positive force in their lives, but which in actuality creates more problems than it solves. The character of Gwyn in the *Magician Trilogy* completes approximately half the tasks, which may result from the series spanning a shorter interval of time than the *Prydain Chronicles* and featuring a protagonist that is considerably younger than the main characters of *The Owl Service*. This is largely because Nimmo’s series presents a snapshot of one stage of adolescence blurring into another, as its protagonist progresses from childhood to adolescence. The series begins on Gwyn’s tenth birthday and ends when he is thirteen. This is different than Taran’s developmental progress, which unfolds over the course of five books and (in the story, at least) the better part of a decade. If I were to consider each book as an individual unit and stand-alone story, Taran would

comprehensively fail to complete any the developmental tasks in all but the very last entry in the series. He succeeds because the story unfolds over time, and because the series tracks him through multiple stages of adolescence.

For this reason, one factor I took into consideration was the age or stage of adolescence of the characters in question. Initially, I surmised that a failure to sufficiently address or complete a developmental task was due to the latter tasks being more appropriate to late adolescence, and thus not easily fulfilled by preteens or young teenagers. My assumption was that, roughly speaking, the first four tasks centered on identity formation and peer-group bonding (developmental concerns typical of early adolescence), whereas the last four tasks were centered on independent and self-sufficient living as well as community involvement (developmental concerns typical of middle-to-late adolescence).

Thus, younger protagonists would be less concerned with preparing for their adult lives and becoming responsible citizens and more concerned with self-discovery and forming interpersonal relationships with their peers. For older protagonists, the reverse would be true.

On the other hand, the protagonists in *The Owl Service*, possess no such abilities. Gwyn, Alison and Roger, who are all about 16 or 17 years old and who should thus be thinking very hard about their life goals and their personal values, are nowhere near where they ought to be, developmentally speaking. Furthermore, none of the three main characters is particularly comfortable with his or her identity. Despite his obvious intelligence and his many talents, Gwyn is ashamed of his working-class background and attempts to get rid of his Welsh accent by purchasing “elocution lessons” in the form of a

learn-at-home record set. Alison uncomfortably inhabits the liminal space between being a girl and being a woman: she resents being referred to by her childhood nickname “Ali,” but also refuses to behave in a way that will prompt others to treat her as a young woman. Both she and her stepbrother Roger define themselves primarily by the roles their parents have designated for them, and far from achieving any sort of emotional independence, they remain bound to their families. Neither has any realistic idea of what he or she might do as an adult, unless it involves meekly following the paths laid out for them by parents and guardians. Even Gwyn, who aspires to a career in politics, remains emotionally shackled to his mother, whom he simultaneously loves and despises.

Nor do any of them have a sufficiently developed moral or ethical sense of how to behave and how to interact with others. They behave—or don’t behave—in a certain way not because it is the right thing to do, but because they fear the repercussions of their actions or feel that things will go badly for them if they behave in way that is contrary to what is expected of them.

One major difference between Taran in the *Prydain Chronicles* and the characters of Gwyn, Alison, and Roger in *The Owl Service* is that Taran has a number of role models and sympathetic adults in his life: Dallben and Coll of Caer Dallben, who raise him from infancy; Lord Gwydion, whom Taran hero worships and whose conduct he strives to emulate; and the would-be bard, Fflewddur Flam, who despite his tendency to embellish the truth, is nevertheless a kind man and a loyal friend to Taran. He also has a clearly defined role: to do whatever he can to prevent Arawn, the king of Annwyn, from conquering Prydain and laying it to waste.

The teenagers of *The Owl Service*, on the other hand, lack both direction in life and suitable role models to emulate. Gwyn is practically an orphan. Huw and Nancy, it is suggested, are related by blood; Gwyn, the illegitimate offspring of their possibly incestuous union, is not really raised by either parent. He is separated from Huw for most of his life, and resented by Nancy, who ultimately abandons him. Alison and Roger are similarly neglected. Roger's mother, referred to as "the Birmingham Belle," has walked out on him, while Roger's father, who has recently remarried, does not appear to understand or take much of an interest in his son. Meanwhile, Alison's father is dead. Margaret, her mother, lives but is never seen. Throughout the novel, she remains offstage, as her family scrambles to keep from upsetting her.

Margaret's absence is particularly difficult on Alison, who is undergoing a process of maturation and becoming a woman. Without anyone to guide her, she feels confused and frightened about the changes that are taking place in both her body and in her life. In the beginning, when Alison is menstruating and later, when she is attempting to make sense of her own feelings and budding sexual urges, she has no one to turn to.

Nevertheless, a support system, while helpful, is not essential to completion of the developmental tasks. The Magician Trilogy demonstrates this by depicting the situation of its protagonist, Gwyn Griffiths. Gwyn's parents are too distraught over the loss of their daughter to pay attention to Gwyn's needs. His father is openly hostile, displaying considerable aggression towards Gwyn. Ivor Griffiths is both emotionally and verbally abusive: he refuses to acknowledge his son except to blame or criticize him; he also holds Gwyn responsible for Bethan's death ("It was that one...[s]he is gone because of him"), despite the fact that Gwyn was only four years old when his sister vanished (Nimmo,

1986, p.12). He even threatens to squash Gwyn's pet spider, Arianwen. Gwyn's mother, while sympathetic to her child's plight, is preoccupied with both her own grief and with managing her husband's explosive temper, which has both mother and son living in constant fear. Glenys Griffiths is afraid to make demonstrations of love or kindness to her son, in case she should anger her husband and make things worse for Gwyn.

Both Mrs. Griffiths and Gwyn tiptoe around Mr. Griffiths, waiting until he is out of the house to interact normally as mother and son, conversing or laughing or showing affection. Because her husband refuses to celebrate his son's birthday, Mrs. Griffiths plans a birthday party for Gwyn behind Mr. Griffiths back, which causes trouble for both her and her son when Mr. Griffiths comes home unexpectedly. Gwyn is rarely permitted to have friends over, a situation which he prefers, given his circumstances. The atmosphere in the Griffiths household is tense, and this barely suppressed anger and resentment frequently erupts into loud shouting matches or bitter recriminations followed by equally bitter tears.

It is Gwyn's grandmother, therefore, who provides love and stability for him. Nain visits often, and invites him to come and see her whenever he needs a respite from his home life. The inside of her cottage is warm and full of light, reminding Gwyn of "a bright bowl" and she always makes him feel at home by feeding him and telling him stories. She takes Gwyn seriously, and listens to what he has to say. She also tells him of his magical ancestry, thus providing Gwyn with a possible means of "preparing for an independent and self-directed adulthood." Yet, while she provides her grandson with a firm foundation of affection and emotional support characteristic of many fond

grandparents, Nain's greatest contribution to Gwyn's growth is perhaps her encouragement of his magical abilities.

Gwyn's magic may, in fact, be the key to his achieving the final four developmental tasks. If Gwyn can learn to control and utilize his powers, and direct them into positive outlets, he will have the basis of a "realistic life goal." For, in this strange and remote corner of Wales which seethes with ancient magic, being a magician appears to be as realistic a life goal as any other. Indeed, since Gwyn averts a major magical catastrophe in each volume of the series, he arguably has more work as a magician than some of the neighboring farmers and shopkeepers do in their seemingly "normal" careers. (Nia Lloyd's father, for example, gives up his failing farm in order to take over the management of a struggling butcher shop).

Moreover, by mastering the demands of magic, Gwyn will have also developed the some of the "intellectual skills and concepts necessary for civic competence." Gwyn is a farmer's son, from a small Welsh village in a remote and isolated rural community in North Wales where few people, it seems, go on to pursue a university degree or even move away from the community to begin a new life or career. (Nia Lloyd's soldier cousin is regarded as a success—as well as an oddity—simply for joining the army and going to Ireland.) Advanced schooling or specialized professional training is more the exception than the rule, with the majority of people following in the footsteps of the preceding generation. And Gwyn, while intelligent, is not particularly academically inclined. He spends his days at school daydreaming or writing poetry in his notebook and wishes "he'd never have to see or hear a foreign verb again" (Nimmo, 1989, p.73). Yet, proper use of his magic requires that he develop skills that he will use for the rest of

his life. Proper use of magic is also necessary if he is to “achieve socially responsible behavior” and “acquire a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behavior.”

It would appear, therefore, that—just as in real life—although the presence of adult role models can contribute positively to a young person’s life, it is not the only factor that determines success or failure in terms of attaining significant developmental milestones. Moreover, while the successful completion of developmental tasks by a book’s protagonist(s) can provide an adolescent reader with a fictional role model of his or her own, it is not necessary for a book’s protagonist to reach greater maturity in order for that book to be compelling and useful to a reader.

For example, despite the fact that *The Owl Service*’s young protagonists are not role models, they are characters with which an adolescent reader can easily identify. Garner’s characterization of Gwyn, Alison, and Roger is skillful and authentic: their confusion, their dysfunction makes them all the more believable. The story, despite its fantastic elements, is uniquely truthful.

Indeed, this may be the strength of the novel: that it does not preach. It is possible that while older children and younger adolescents need, on some level, to have good and bad clearly identified for them—and, moreover, to see good rewarded and evil thwarted or punished, older adolescents may want a more realistic examination of moral ambiguity. Paradoxically, this “realism” may be more in line with the stark contours of myth than so-called “realistic” fiction.

“Myth is not entertainment, but rather the crystallization of experience, and far from being escapist, fantasy is an intensification of reality,” explains Garner, in his discussion of his novel. He goes on to describe how, upon first reading *Math vab*

Mathonwy, he was struck by how “modern” it seemed in its treatment of “the damage people do to each other, not through evil, but through the unhappy combination of circumstances that throws otherwise harmless personalities together” (“Practice” 62).

There are no evil characters in *The Owl Service*. At certain moments certain characters behave in ways that cause pain to others, but it is rarely with the conscious motivation of inflicting harm. Rather, when the characters feel threatened, or simply have no appropriate outlet for their emotions, they lash out in self-defense. For example, when aspiring photographer Roger, frustrated with his own lack of independence and jealous of Gwyn and Alison’s special connection, taunts Gwyn about his ambitions to improve his social status, Gwyn responds angrily and later refuses to help Alison, believing that she has betrayed him.

Throughout the novel, the damage results not from the motives of individual characters but from combinations or configurations of multiple characters. In *The Owl Service*, the dominant configuration is that of the love triangle between Llew, Blodeuwedd, and Gronw.

Complicating the situation is the endless repetition of the myth, of which the novel represents only the most recent incarnation. There is the Gwyn-Alison-Roger triad in the younger generation, representing Llew, Blodeuwedd, and Gronw, respectively. This is both the latest incarnation as well as the legacy of the triad that exists in the preceding generation, comprised of Huw (Llew), Nancy (Blodeuwedd), and Bertram (Gronw). Huw and Nancy’s union produces Gwyn, who takes over his father’s old role. Bertram, Nancy’s former lover, is Alison’s cousin and it is his bequest of the house to Alison that brings Gwyn, Alison, and Roger into close and dangerous proximity.

The concept of generations is a vital aspect of *The Owl Service*, and the overarching theme of the novel might well be *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. One generation is succeeded by the next. Like adolescence itself, such cycles are not a freak phenomenon to be feared but an inevitable process of growth and change that should be embraced because, like life, it contains both positive and negative elements—elements that can be combined and which, once combined, complement one another. Each of the novels in this paper reflects this to some extent: that growing up is inevitable and that it is the adolescent's duty to equip him or herself for adult life. At the same time, these novels provide some reassurance that, even in the most challenging situations and against considerable odds, it is possible to overcome the obstacles of adolescence and emerge from them a better, stronger, and more compassionate human being.

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ⁱ Also known as the Nestle's Children's Book Prize, the Nestle Smarties Book Prize was one of the top prizes for children's literature in the UK until it was discontinued in 2008. It is also notable because schoolchildren across the United Kingdom vote for the first-, second-, and third-place winners from the annual shortlist determined by a panel of adult judges.