

The Villainous Wife in the Middle Welsh *Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein*.

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Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein is a Middle Welsh prose reworking of the hugely successful, if misogynistic, story of the *Seven Sages of Rome*, versions of which were found across Medieval Europe from the late twelfth century onwards.¹ It is found in three Middle Welsh manuscripts dating from the fifteenth century, two held at the Bodleian Library, Oxford and the third at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.² The Welsh text was probably written in the late fourteenth century, by a redactor named in one of the witness manuscripts, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Jesus College 20, [J20], as ‘Llywelyn Offeiriad’ (Llywelyn the Priest).³ It features a collection of tales set within a frame story reminiscent of the Biblical tale of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife (Genesis 39:7/20) where a married woman lusts after a young man; when she is rebuffed she accuses the youth of rape and seeks vengeance. In the frame tale of *The Seven Sages of Rome* the young man is a Roman Emperor’s son and the wicked woman is the hero’s stepmother who, when her improper advances are spurned, accuses the boy of attempted rape and demands that he be put to death. The Emperor believes his wife’s malign accusation and orders the execution of his only son. The young prince must remain silent for seven days to avoid this fate and so cannot speak to defend himself, however, his tutors, the eponymous Seven Sages of Rome, obtain a stay of execution by relating a series of misogynistic tales, which are countered by the Empress with tales aimed at discrediting the Sages as well as their charge. Eventually the prince, released from his silence, relates a tale that convinces his father that he is innocent and the wicked stepmother is then put to death.

The parent version of the Welsh work is the Old French prose romance *Les Sept Sages de Rome*, which dates from the thirteenth century.⁴ However, in many parts the Welsh version is only loosely based on the Old French tale. Where the Old French generally gives a fuller description of the action, the Middle Welsh version is characterised by the narrative economy of the redactor.⁵ However, the Welsh redactor, Llywelyn Offeiriad, occasionally breaks from his general principle of *abreviatio*; as Lewis has noted, these particular passages are echoes of earlier Welsh tales, which have in common with *Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein* the theme of marriage.⁶

The first such passage occurs at the very beginning of the frame narrative, when the *Amherodres* [the Empress], the hero's stepmother, discovers that the Emperor already has a son, a fact that had been hidden from her.⁷ Like her counterpart in the French tradition, she questions those in the court about the possible existence of living heirs to her husband 'amofyn a wnaeth hi ac un ac arall a oed etifed yr amherawdyr.' 'She went around one and sundry and asked whether the emperor had an heir.'⁸

The Welsh version diverges quite significantly from its French source in this scene. On the one hand, in the French *Sept Sages de Rome*, the information apparently comes to the Empress unbidden:

*L'en avoit bien dit a l'emperiz que li emperieres avoit un hoir malle et se il estoit morz li hoir qui istroient de li seroient hoir de l'empereur de Rome.*⁹

The Empress had been told that the Emperor already had a male heir, and that if this were to die the heirs issued from her would be heirs to the emperor of Rome.

The issue here is political. The Empress' motive in this version is straightforward: destroy the rival to her own unborn children, disregarding the potential undermining of the existing social stability within the empire in the process. She is therefore condemned by the narrator as an 'evil plotter full of evil ways and evil tricks' '*mal engigneuse et plainne de mal art et mal engin*': the stereotypical wicked stepmother.¹⁰

In the Welsh text, however, the *Amherodres* appears to be suffering from real anxiety on this point, exclaiming: '*Gwae finneu y vot ef yn anvab*' 'Woe is me that he is childless'. Even though, as in the French source, she begins by asking whether the Emperor has any heirs, the chief cause of her distress is that he appears to have none at all. By contrast, the Empress in the *Sept Sages de Rome* would have been gratified that there were no pre-existing heirs. Inheritance in Roman law is through primogeniture: inheritance according to Welsh law is by 'gavelkind', which includes all heirs, legitimate or otherwise. However, if no child exists from a man's long-term marriage, there may well be a problem. At stake in *Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein* is the issue of sterility. The issue for the new wife is not so much whether there are rivals to the future offspring of her recent marriage, as fear that the Emperor might be unable to sire any heirs at all. The relief of the *Amherodres* is palpable thus when an old crone, after denying, like all the courtiers that her husband

had sired any children, eventually admits to his having a son: '*ac na uyd drist, vn mab yssyd idaw ar vaeth gan Doethon Rufein*' 'Don't be sad, he does have a son being fostered by the Sages of Rome'.¹¹ This revelation is clearly made to comfort the young woman, who at this point in the narrative comes over as a sympathetic character.

However, the nature of the Empress's informant suggests cause for alarm. The old woman, in the Welsh text, is described as a '*wrach*', a hag '*heb un dant yn y phenn*' 'without a tooth in her head'.¹² Not only is the old woman ugly, the term twice used of her, '*wrach*', is laden with negative connotations and is frequently translated as 'witch'. In the J20 redaction, this pejorative depiction of the crone implicitly extends to the Empress herself, with the narrator introducing the old woman's revelation with the words: '*Yna y truanhanawd y wrach wrth yr ysgymmun arall*' 'And then the witch pitied the other loathsome one'.¹³ The Empress is thus explicitly aligned with the witch, preparing the reader for her wicked behaviour later in the narrative.

The full significance of Llywelyn's reworking becomes apparent when one considers his skilful use of verbal echoes in this passage, evoking for his Welsh audience comparable situations appearing in traditional Welsh tales. Most recognisable of these is a clear borrowing from the well-known Middle Welsh tale of *Culhwch ac Olwen*.¹⁴ There, a newly-married stepmother expresses a similar anxiety at her new husband's apparent childlessness. She happens upon an old hag and enquires whether the husband has produced any heirs.¹⁵ The verbal echo between the Welsh *Seith Doethon Rufein* and *Culhwch* is unmistakable, as is the overall similarity in structure of the episode, with the old woman initially denying the existence of an heir, then revealing the truth because of the lady's distress: '*Na vyd tristit heuyd, un mab yssyd idaw*' 'Don't be sad, he does have one son'.¹⁶ Whereas in the French text, the Empress, on discovering the existence of an heir, sets about plotting his demise The Welsh wife in both *Culhwch* and the *Seith Doethon* is happy at this news; indeed, she is exceedingly happy: '*yn llawen orawenus*'.¹⁷

The markedly different reaction of the lady to the discovery of the existence of a stepson in the French and Welsh texts may be seen as reflecting the very different social and legal backdrop to the Emperor's remarriage in these texts. In the French *Sept Sages de Rome*, the imperial marriage is described as the result of a conventional process of aristocratic matchmaking; the lady is suitable because of her beauty and rank, and she is given to her suitor by her kin group: '*ele estoit de grande*

lignage. Li parent de la dame la donerent a l'emperèur 'She was of great lineage, her parents gave her to the emperor'.¹⁸ One may note that no mention is made of the bride having consented to the marriage, though this could be seen as implicit; certainly, the French narrator stresses the fact that the couple were greatly enamoured of each other: '*l'ama moult [...] et la dame lui ausint*', 'he loved her greatly [...] and the lady loved him also.' By contrast, there is no suggestion of mutual love in either the Welsh *Seith Doethon Rufein* or *Culhwch*. In the *Seith Doethon* we are simply told that: '*Yr amherawdyr a briodes gwraig*' 'The emperor married a wife'; while in *Culhwch*, the wedding is actually made under duress. Culhwch's father, Kilydd, invades the territory of the man married to the woman he covets and kills him; she is a spoil of war and she presents herself as such, referring to her husband as, '*y gwr a'm rydyllas yg gordwy*' 'the man who seized me by violence'.¹⁹ The verbal echo of *Culhwch* in the *Seith Doethon* thus evokes a narrative of forced marriage, male violence and female disempowerment. The issue of sterility becomes correspondingly more pressing, as the production of an heir is the woman's only hope for stability and influence.

The reaction of the stepmother in *Culhwch* to the discovery of an heir is political. She herself had been seized by Kilydd but already had a daughter by her previous husband, Doget. Her motive in offering the young hero, Culhwch, the hand of the girl in marriage is not only to secure her own position but also that of her daughter, thus putting an end to a potential feud situation through the union of the two bloodlines.²⁰ This emphasises once again the importance of offspring, for political stability as well as for the personal security of the wife.²¹ We find a further parallel to this situation in another Welsh tale, the *Mabinogi* tale of *Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed* (Pwyll Lord of Dyfed).²² Here the hero, Pwyll, is pressured by his nobles to divorce Rhiannon, his wife of three years, because she has not yet given him an heir.²³

Na byd it etued o'r wreic yssyd genyt. Ac wrth hynny kymmer wreic arall o bo ettiued yt ohonei

You haven't had an heir from the wife that you have now. Then take another so that she will give you an heir.

Rhiannon does have a baby boy, but he is kidnapped and she is wrongly blamed for killing him. However, the simple fact of having given birth has changed Rhiannon's status, so that when Pwyll's nobles again attempt to persuade him to divorce Rhiannon, he is able to counter that the only grounds for divorce would be that she was childless, which clearly was not the case:

Nyt oed achaws ganthunt wy y erchi y mi yscar a'm gwreic namyn na bydei plant idi.

They have no grounds to order me to divorce my wife unless she were childless.²⁴

The marriage depicted in *Culhwch* is supposed to be taking place in a distant past where canonical law and the requirement of consent for a marriage to be valid did not apply. The *Seven Sages* story, equally, is set in a distant past. The verbal echoes woven by Llywelyn Offeiriad into his text could be read as a hint that the remarriage of the Emperor might also have contravened fourteenth-century laws of marriage; that the Empress of the *Seith Doethon* may well have been an unwilling bride. This suggestion is all the more likely as the mention in the French texts that the lady was given in marriage by her parents is omitted by Llywelyn, thus suggesting that it might not have conformed to the most common type of legal marriage according to canon law, as well to the Welsh Laws of Hywel Dda (King Hywel the Good, late C9).²⁵ Intertextual allusion thus mitigates somewhat the deviousness of the Empress; the story is indeed misogynistic, but it applies to a specific situation where the balance of power within the bond of the married couple is entirely skewed in the direction of the husband. Female duplicity is indirectly linked with powerlessness within a potentially abusive, non-sacramental union.

The theme of female choice in marriage – or, more precisely, remarriage – is at the heart of the retelling of the infamous tale known as ‘The Widow of Ephesus’, one of Petronius’ tales from the *Satyricon* within the *Seven Sages* corpus.²⁶ As a fabliau its content is predictable. A young woman is widowed and swears not to leave the body of her dead husband in his grave in the cemetery until she too is dead. However, when a handsome knight appears, not only does she abandon her vigil but she desecrates her dead husband’s body in the hope of re-marriage to the newcomer. The Welsh follows the established story-line, but introduces an element of farce which turns it into parody; moreover, Llywelyn creates a web of internal references that align the unwomanly widow of his ‘Vidua’ tale not only with the *Amherodres*, but also with the courtly figure of the Lady of the Fountain in the romance of *Owein*, the thirteenth century Welsh adaptation of Chrétien de Troyes’ *Yvain* (c.1170/5).

In all three of these tales, the heroine is shown displaying intense grief, depicted in a very similar way, though under markedly different circumstances. The Empress of the *Seven Sages* tradition successfully attempts to give her accusations of attempted rape more verisimilitude, letting

out what the French text describes as ‘*un grant cri et hideus*’ ‘a great and hideous cry’,²⁷ and in the Welsh text a ‘*diaspat uchelgroch oruchel*’, usually translated as ‘an enormously loud scream’. However, the word ‘*diaspad*’ carries much stronger connotations than ‘scream’, the unmarked word for which, in Welsh is ‘*gwaedd*’.²⁸ It is the word used by Culhwch when King Arthur’s gatekeeper, Glewlwyd Gouaelluawr, refuses him entry to Arthur’s hall. He threatens to create a ‘*diaspad*’ to be heard from ‘Penn Pengwaedd’ in Cornwall to ‘*gwaelawt Dinsol*’ (the depths of Dinsol) in the North and to ‘*Eskeir Oeruel*’ (the ridge of Coldness) in Ireland, threatening the stability of the kingdom by inducing miscarriage in all the pregnant women of Arthur’s realm and ensuring that none will ever become pregnant again.²⁹ In the *Seith Doethon* this already marked word is further intensified by the redactor’s use of the two compound adjectives ‘*uchel*’ + ‘*croch*’: ‘high’ + ‘loud’, and ‘*or*’ + ‘*uchel*’: ‘above’ + ‘high’, an intensification typical of the native Welsh narrative tradition.³⁰

His marked word ‘*diaspad*’ is also prominent in the pivotal scene of *Owain* where the newly-widowed Lady of the Fountain laments the death of her husband, the Black Knight, who has just been killed in combat by the hero. Owain hears ‘*diaspedain a gweidi anueitrawl eu meint*’ ‘a shrieking and dreadfully loud wailing’, and amidst this noise, louder than any man or horn in the cortège, are the screams of the Lady herself: ‘*Ac uch oed diaspad noc a oed o dyn a chorn y llu*’ ‘and her shrieking was louder than the horn of battle.’³¹

This wording is almost identical to that of the scene describing the distress of the young widow in the *Seith Doethon*’s tale ‘*Vidua*’. This particular tale had become a popular French fabliau known as ‘*La Dolente qui fu fotue sur la tonbe*’ ‘The Mourner/ Widow who was fucked on the grave’, a title well in line with the ‘amusing’ crude misogyny of the fabliaux.³² In this tale, following the death of her beloved husband, the ‘*Dolente*’ screams, tears her hair and wrings her hands:³³

*Dont oïssiez fame crier
Et veïssiez molt grant duel fere,
Et poins detordre et cheveus trere.*

You could have heard the woman scream/ and seen her display her despair/ and wring
her hands and tear her hair.

This is a conventional depiction of a grieving widow. In the *Seith Doethon*, the Welsh redactor further accentuates the element of comic exaggeration in the description of the young widow’s

grief: ‘*Ac uch oed bop llef a diaspedai noc o gorn a chloch dros wyneb yr holl dinas*’ ‘And each cry she shrieked was louder than any horn or bell throughout the whole of the city’.³⁴ This trumps even the wicked *Amherodres* of whom we are simply told: ‘*a dodes diaspad uchelgroch oruchel*’, ‘she gave an enormously loud scream’.³⁵ However, both passages share the marked word ‘diaspad’, implicitly inviting the audience to take note and question the sincerity the female character.

Another verbal echo may be found in the description of the play-acting of the *Amherodres*: ‘*A ryfed nat oed yssic penneu ei byssed rac ffestet y maedai y dwylaw y gyt*, ‘and it was a miracle that the ends of her fingers were not bruised from the ferocity of the way she struck her hands together’. The distress of the widow in ‘*Vidua*’ is presented in an identical manner;³⁶ but more surprisingly perhaps, so is the courtly Lady of the Fountain in the Middle Welsh romance *Owein*, of whom we are told that at her husband’s funeral ‘it was a miracle that her fingers were not bruised because of how harshly she struck her hands together mourning her husband’: ‘*a ryfed oed na bei yssic penneu ei byssed rac dycnet y maedai ei dwylaw y gyt y gwynnaw y gŵr*’.³⁷ The significant difference between these passages is that the widows in both ‘*Vidua*’ and *Owein* are said to be lamenting the death of their husband, whereas the Empress merely laments the supposed gross insult to her person and goes on to demand revenge.

It would be tempting to see these conventional signs of grief as being indications of the lack of depth and sincerity of these ladies’ feelings. The Empress is clearly play-acting, and the widow in ‘*Vidua*’ will not hesitate to disinter and mutilate her dead husband’s body. In the case of the Lady of the Fountain, the narrator gives no indication of insincerity on her part, indeed she is the epitome of medieval correctness. Yet the passage where she mourns her slain husband is clearly echoed in the two passages of the *Seith Doethon* quoted above (‘*A ryfedd oed na bei yssic penneu y byssed...*’ ‘And it was a miracle that her fingers were not bruised...’) suggesting parallels as well the more obvious contrasts.

All three female characters considered have one thing in common: they are seeking a new sexual partner. This is obvious in the case of the Empress, who desires her young stepson as her lover, and of the Widow, who is equally inflamed by lust for the handsome knight at her husband’s graveside. It is less clear in the case of the Lady of the Fountain, but the following events unambiguously show that she is on the marriage market again, despite her protests that she has no wish to remarry. The loss of the protector of her wealth and fountain means, as her companion

Luned points out to her, that she has to find a replacement for him: *‘Ti a wdost na ellir kynnal dy gyfoeth di namyn o vilwriaeth ac arueu’* ‘You know that you cannot safeguard your kingdom except by force of arms’.³⁸ The argument put forward by Luned to convince her lady to accept the hero, *‘Gallut,’ heb Lunet, ‘gwrha gŵr vei gystal ac ef neu well’* ‘‘You could,’ said Luned, ‘marry a man who might be as good as he was or even better’’,³⁹ is repeated in strikingly similar terms by the knight in the *Seith Doethon* when flirting with the widow, *‘A unbennes,’ heb y marchawc, ‘ti a gymerut gwr a uei gystal a’th ŵr dy hun, neu a vei well’* ‘‘Ah, my Lady,’ said the knight, ‘you should take a husband who would be as good, or better, than this one was’’.⁴⁰ The Lady of the Fountain reluctantly accepts Owein, ostensibly on the advice of her barons, even though he was her first husband’s killer, while the widow of ‘Vidua’, despite her increasingly grisly efforts to mutilate her dead husband’s body to make it appear similar to that of a hanged outlaw, fails to secure a new spouse; but both the words used to describe their predicament are identical. The three female characters are also linked by the fact that the outcome of their efforts is not positive for them. The Empress’s bid for sexual fulfilment leads to her death; the widow is left, a lonesome rejected figure degraded both physically and morally for having attempted to choose her own spouse; while the Lady of the Fountain soon discovers at her own expense that her new husband was not as loyal to her as he should have been, he abandons her for three years, to return to knightly pursuits. Women who play by the rules are thus at the mercy of their selfish husbands, but women who attempt to choose their own partner and pursue their desire are unfeminine and deserve to be punished.

However, the redactor of Welsh *Seith Doethon* may be said to be unobtrusively subverting this unrelenting condemnation of female assertiveness. Though the plight of the Widow of ‘Vidua’ is effectively dismissed as farce due to her increasingly implausible exertions to win a new partner, Llywelyn does not suggest that she should be punished or lose the opportunity to re-marry, unlike the imagined audience of Petronius’ tale who would have hanged her.⁴¹ The implicit parallel with the Lady of the Fountain, a courtly lady who comes over as a political pawn with little right to emotional fulfilment, and with the stepmother in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, a queen forcibly abducted and ‘married’, introduces an undercurrent of complexity to the apparently two-dimensional villainess of the *Seith Doethon*.

Llywelyn indirectly raises the question of whether women placed in what, in effect, were forced marriages had any hope of a positive resolution to their predicament. Transgression at its worst results in loss of life, but submission to duty is no guarantee of security. The Lady of the Fountain

makes a point of following the ‘advice’ of her barons, and remarries out of duty; she is abandoned by her husband and left alone to face the dangers of political unrest, a situation only marginally less humiliating than that experienced by the widow of ‘Vidua’, who is told in no uncertain terms that her unfeminine behaviour in taking charge of the situation (albeit in a rather gruesome way) results in the knight dismissing her with the words: *‘dos di y ffordd y mynnych, wrth na mynnaf I dydi byth*’ ‘Go wherever pleases you, since I would never want you’.⁴² The selfish misogyny of the knight in the French text is equally apparent in his condemnation of the widow he seduced: *‘Voire’, dist le chevaliers, ‘orde, desloiaus, l’en vous devoit ardoir comme orde lecherresse et larrenesse’’* ‘‘Truly,’ said the knight, ‘you filthy, disloyal woman, you should be burned as a dirty lecher and thief’.⁴³ His self-righteous stance seems more pompous than the Welsh knight’s, whose rejection seems to arise from a concern for his own safety:⁴⁴

‘Kany’s pan vydut ti mor agkywir a hynny wrth y gwr a’th priodes yr yn verch [...] ys agkywir a beth vydut ti ymi, heb welet golwc arnaf eiryoet hyt heno?’

‘So, since you have behaved so badly towards the man who married you as a virgin, [...] how much more so might you treat me, whom you’d never set eyes on before tonight?’

The further distancing of the Welsh narrative from the ideological stance of the Medieval French source is effected through its enhanced use of farcical and comedic devices. It is hard to take the widow of ‘Vidua’ or the *Amherodres* at face value. The verbal echoes and borrowings from well-known Medieval Welsh texts become as many invitations to the audience to question the assumptions present in the *Seven Sages* tradition, hinting at a wider narrative context where women going off the rails are linked with coercive matrimonial practices. Might Llywelyn the Priest have been manipulating misogynistic discourse to promote the necessity of mutual consent in marriage? By the late fourteenth century, this was a principle that had been imposed with some success by the Church; but at a time when arranged marriages were the norm among the great and wealthy, the consent of the bride was not necessarily freely given.⁴⁵ The fictional world of the Welsh *Seith Doethon Rufein* appears to give a stern warning: forced marriages make women turn to the bad!

¹ K. Cambell’s Introduction to *The Seven Sages of Rome, edited from the Manuscripts* (Boston USA, Ginn and Co. 1907, reprint 1997) pp. xi-cxiv remains the most comprehensive account of the Seven Sages tradition, with an account of the early history of the tales and their possible route of transmission, together with information on versions of the story other than in English, and analogues of individual tales. A table of the tales and the order of their appearance in each group

can be found in Campbell, p.xxxv. Further information on the tradition may be found in Whitelock's critical edition of the English verse version of the tale: *Seven Sages, Midland Version*, Early English Text Society (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005).

The web site of the Seven Sages Society: http://myweb.dal.ca/hrunte/sss_1.html is an essential scholarly resource. The site, created and administered by Hans Runte, was founded in 1975 to further the study of the tales. It includes a constantly-updated analytical bibliography, lists ongoing research and offers an exhaustive account of each vernacular redaction. My quotations from the Old French *Les Sept Sages de Rome* are taken from Runte's transcription and translation of the thirteenth century MS. Paris, BNF fr.2137 fol. 1-46, which can be accessed from this site. (Last accessed, 20/Jan/2014.)

² The Middle Welsh redaction of the tale is found in three fifteenth century manuscripts: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Jesus College 20, fol.42r.- fol.70r.; Oxford, Bodleian Library; MS Jesus College 111 (also known as *Llyfr Coch Hergest, The Red Book of Hergest*), fol.128r., col. 528 - fol. 134v., col.555; and Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Llanstephan 2, fol. 278- fol. 318. The oldest witness, belonging to the early fourteenth century, was always considered to be J20, (D. Huws, 'Table of Medieval Welsh Vernacular Manuscripts', *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Aberystwyth, University of Wales Press and the National Library of Wales, 2000), p.60.) with the redaction found in the *Red Book*, J111 slightly later, c. 1382. However, recent research has established that a scribal error in J20's *Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein* points to J20 having been copied from *the Red Book*, which then becomes the oldest witness. Llanstephan 2 is securely dated to the mid- fifteenth century. (Carys Gadsden, 'A New Date for the Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Jesus College MS20?' *Reading Medieval Studies*, XXXIX (2013): 97-101.

³ The only manuscript to name Llywelyn in a contemporary hand is J20. In fact, J. Gwenogvryn Evans, in his list of manuscripts held at Jesus College Oxford, calls J20 'Llyfr Llywelyn Offeiriad'. J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language*, 2 vols. (London, HMSO, 1902), vol. 2 part 1, 31-4.

The tale begins at the top of folio 42r with a rubricated introduction stating: '*Yn y mod hun y treythir o chwedleu seith doethon rufein o weith llywelyn offeir*' 'Here is the tale of the Seven Sages of Rome from the work of Llywelyn the priest'. In *The Red Book of Hergest* a later hand has added: '*o weith Llywelyn offeiriad*', 'from the work of Llywelyn the priest' above the final line of the tale (fol. 134 v. col. 555). In the third Middle Welsh witness, Llanstephan 2, a much later hand has placed '*Ai Chuedlae'r seithwyr Doethyon o Ryein*' 'Is this the tale of the Seven Sages of Rome' at the very top of fol. 278, where the tale begins. The text ends abruptly: '*Ac velly y teruynaud*' 'And so it ends' at the foot of fol. 318. The following folio, 319, is blank except for a few lines of a later, faint cursive script; we cannot therefore know if Llywelyn was about to be mentioned or not.

⁴ The French source of the tale is identified by Gaston Paris in his *Deux Rédactions du Roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, (Paris, Société des anciens textes français, 1876), p. xxvii, with the Middle Welsh version shown to derive from the same manuscript tradition as the Middle English version, the earliest surviving manuscript witness of which dates from the thirteenth century. For a survey of the manuscripts belonging to this specific textual tradition, see K. Brunner, ed., *The Seven Sages of Rome, Southern Version*, Early English Text Society (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1933, reprint, 2002), p. xvi, note 1.

⁵ This narrative economy of the Welsh redaction compared to the fullness of the Old French is demonstrated at the very beginning of the tale when the Seven Sages are introduced one by one. Whereas the French redactor describes each one and gives him a speech justifying his claim to tutor the child Llywelyn merely names four of the Sages and allows them to say that he will teach him to the best of his ability. (Lewis, pp.43-4)

⁶ Lewis states that J. Loth: ‘La version galloise des Sept Sages de Rome’, *Revue Celtique*, XXIII (1902): 349-352, had already noted similarities between passages in the *Seith Doethon* and *Culhwch ac Olwen* (also found in the *Red Book*) as well as echoes of *Breuddwyd Maxen*/ The Dream of Maxen and *Owain neu Iarlles y Ffynnawn*/ Owain or The Lady of the Fountain. Lewis, pp.23-4.

⁷ Lewis, p.44, l.46.

⁸ Lewis, p.44, l.41-2. The translation of this and other Welsh texts are my own, unless otherwise stated.

⁹ Runte, <http://myweb.dal.ca/hrunte/FrenchA.html> p.7, fol.3a.

¹⁰ Runte, <http://FrenchA>. p.9, fol.5c

¹¹ Lewis, p. 44, l. 51-3.

¹² Lewis, p.44, l.43-4.

¹³ J20, fol.43.r

¹⁴ R. Bromwich and D.Simon Evans eds., *Culhwch ac Olwen*, (Caerdydd, Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1997.) All quotations from *Culhwch ac Olwen* are from this edition. Any translations are my own.

¹⁵ Bromwich and Evans, p.2, l.36.

¹⁶ Bromwich and Evans, p.2, l.42.

¹⁷ Lewis, p.44, l.54.

¹⁸ Runte, <http://FrenchA>, p.7, fol.3a.

¹⁹ Bromwich and Evans, p.2.

²⁰ According to Gerald of Wales, this practice of marriage within prohibited degrees and even incest was common in Wales: ‘Incest is extremely common among the Welsh, both in the lower classes and the better educated people. There is no fear of God before their eyes and they have no hesitation in marrying women related to them in the fourth or fifth degree, and sometimes even third cousins. Their usual excuse for abusing the ordinances of the Church in this way is their wish to put an end to some family quarrel or other.’ Gerald of Wales, *The Journey Through Wales/ The Description of Wales*, trans. L. Thorpe (London, Penguin Classics, 1978) chap. 6, pp. 262-3.

²¹ The stepmother’s plan fails. Culhwch’s refusal sets off the action of the tale since he must now set off on a quest to find and marry Olwen, the daughter of Ysbaddaden Bencawr (Ysbaddaden Chief of the Giants) whose fate is to die the day his daughter marries. However, Culhwch will obviously succeed in his quest since he is King Arthur’s cousin.

²² *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi, allan o Lyfr Gwyn Rhydderch*, ed. I. Williams (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1978.) All quotations from *Pwyll, Pendefig Dyfed* are from this volume.

²³ Williams, p.19.

²⁴ Williams, p.21.

²⁵ *Cyfraith Hywel Dda*, The Laws of Hywel the Good, is the code of early Welsh laws traditionally considered to have been established by Hywel Dda, king of Deheubarth (d.950 AD). Daniel Huws (‘Leges Hywelda at Canterbury’ *National Library of Wales Journal*, XIX (1976): 340-4.) dates the earliest manuscript (Peniarth MS 28; formerly Hengwrt MS7) to the mid-thirteenth century. The Laws have a specific section dealing with the rights of women, marriage, divorce and inheritance. A marriage was deemed to be lawful if the woman’s kin gave her to her husband, as the ‘French’ Empress had been. See D. Jenkins and M. E. Owen, *The Welsh Law of Women* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1980.) for the Welsh legal position. These Welsh laws were only finally superseded by English law by the Acts of Union, 1535/1542.

²⁶ *Petronius Arbiter: The Satyricon*, ed. and trans. P.G. Walsh, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997. reissued 2009), 110.6-113.4.

²⁷ Runte, <http://FrenchA>, p.9 (MS Paris BN f. fr.2137, fol.5c.)

²⁸ Lewis, vocabulary section, p.106.

²⁹ Bromwich and Evans, p.4, l.104-110. For a detailed explanation of the geographical significance, see *The Mabinogion*, trans. S. Davies (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 260-1. ‘Diaspad’

is also one of the three terrible plagues that befall the Island of Britain in *Kyvranc Llud a Llevelis*, The Meeting/ Adventure of Lludd and Llefelys, another Medieval Welsh tale which is found in both The Red Book of Hergest and the earlier *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch*, the White Book of Rhydderch (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS4).

Yr eil ormes oed diaspat adodit pob nos kalan mei, uch bob aelwyt yn ynys A honno a aei trwy galloneu y dynyon [...] ac y collei y gwyr eulliw ac nerth ar gwraged eu beichogyeu [...] ar holl anieileit ar gwyd ar daear ar dyfer a edewit yn diffrwyth.

The second plague was a scream which was heard every May Day Eve above every hearth on the Island and this pierced the heart of every man ...so that they lost their colour and their strength and the pregnant women miscarried...and all the animals and the trees on the land and the waters were left barren.

Evans J. Gwenogvryn ed., *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch, Y Chwedlau a'r Rhamantau*, Bulletin of the Board for Celtic Studies (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1973), p. 97, text from The Red Book, col.706 due to a lacuna in The White Book.

³⁰ The Welsh oral tradition and the craft of the storyteller (or 'cyfarwydd') in medieval Wales, is discussed in detail in S. Davies's Welsh language book: *Crefft y Cyfarwydd*, (Cardiff, Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru/ University of Wales Press, 1995.) She gives a thorough analysis of the narrative techniques used by the medieval Welsh storyteller, such as the repetition of formulaic phrases (especially at the beginning of a tale) and the use of compound adjectives to describe a noun, see Davies, p. 142. Brynley Roberts notes that these adjectives are more often than not a creation of the medieval Welsh storyteller's, possibly a technique learnt at a school for bards. B. Roberts, 'From Traditional Tale to literary Story: Middle Welsh Prose Narratives', in *The Craft of Fiction*, ed. L. A. Arrathoon, (Rochester, Solaris Press, 1984), pp. 211-230.

³¹ Thomson, p. 14, l.359-60.

³² An English translation of this fabliau, called '*La Dolente qui fu fotue sur la tonbe*', 'The mourner who was fucked on the tomb', may be found in N. Dubin trans., R. Howard Bloch intr., *The Fabliaux, A New Verse Translation* (New York and London, Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013), pp. 324-5. Though the story is very similar to the version in the *Satyricon*, the *Satyricon* version bears more of a resemblance to the *Seith Doethon* version than it does to the fabliau. As a genre, the fabliaux had been neglected for many centuries from their heyday in the early middle ages (late twelfth- fourteenth centuries) being thought too crude for a later audience and certainly too vulgar to have originated in France. Gaston Paris considered that they, like *The Seven Sages of Rome*, had their origins in the East, in the *Panchatantra*. (Dubin, Introduction, p.xvi).

³³ Dubin, pp. 324-327.

³⁴ Lewis p. 63, l.581-2.

³⁵ Lewis, p. 45, l.81-2.

³⁶ Lewis, p. 63, l.579-80.

³⁷ Thomson, p. 14, l.356-7.

³⁸ Thomson, p. 16, l.411-12.

³⁹ Thomson, p. 15, l.395-6.

⁴⁰ Lewis, p. 64, l.626-8.

⁴¹ Petronius, Chap.113.2.

⁴² Lewis, p. 66, l. 690-1.

⁴³ H. Runte, *Les Sept Sages de Rome* <http://myweb.dal.ca/hrunte/FrenchA.html>. (Runte, *http/FrenchA* Transl.) fol.35b, p.31.

⁴⁴ Lewis, p.66, l.686-90.

⁴⁵ An example of such a forced marriage in the highest of places is that of Maud Clifford, forcibly abducted in 1270 by John Giffard of Brimpsfield. Maud was Llywelyn the Great's grand-daughter and thus related, albeit on the 'wrong side of the blanket', to the king, Henry III since Llywelyn had

been married to Joan, the illegitimate daughter of King John. She complained to King Henry that she had been abducted and was being held against her will by Giffard. Despite the king's threats of confiscating Giffard's lands if he did not release Maud, Henry was eventually prepared to recognize the 'marriage' following a fine of 300 marks, even though it contravened both civil and Canon law, the latter of which required mutual consent: obviously not the case here.

For the full account, see G. Richards, 'Abduction and Rape of the King's Baroness: Maud Clifford', in *Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century, An Historical Study of Medieval Welsh Law and Gender Roles*, (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter, The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), pp. 99-124.