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Retribution and Freedom in The Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi

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Retribution and Freedom in The Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi

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Wild Boar, Koninklijke Bibliotheek - Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts

Introduction:

What is The Four Branches of the Mabinogi?

- A classic Welsh literature book that takes place in the Middle Welsh.
- Written anonymously in the late 11th and 12th centuries.
- A narrative following the family of Carey, known as Pyderi in the original Welsh language.

Objectives:

- Explain the use of animal transformation magic as:
- punishment for crimes
- symbolism for freedom
- significance of animals chosen
- evidence of strong family ties and complicated moral code

Methodology:

- Close reading of the primary text
- Research into medieval animals and symbolism



Stag, Bodleian Library LUNA Search: MS. Ashmole 1462

Abstract:

- Examines the idea of magic and animal transformation in *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*
- Specification of the Fourth Branch, where animal transformation is used as punishment for heinous crimes, as well as symbolism for grief, trauma and escape
- Emphasizes the importance and need for magic in these medieval Welsh stories



Owl, Bibliothèque Municipale de Reims ms. 993 (BNF)

What are others saying about this?

- Forsten, editor of *Animals and the Symbolic in Mediaeval Art and Literature (2017)*: “Animals in discourse for the most part show the shaping if human subjectivity, and the lost monsters of the mediaeval text demonstrate what we do not want to be, but perhaps, as in Marie’s fable, we realise we are not so far removed from them after all.” (37).

References:

- Boyd, Matthieu. *The Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi*
- Forsten, *Animals and the Symbolic in Mediaeval Art and Literature*
- Walker, Caroline. *Metamorphosis and Identity*, (79,168).