

12. Rhys Nanmor

Rhys Nanmor, thought by some to be a disciple of Dafydd Nanmor but related only by place of origin rather than family,¹⁰⁵ sang two poems for Rhydderch ap Rhys of the great Tywyn household in south Ceredigion. This was the family that supported Dafydd Nanmor and for which poems were written by Deio ap Ieuan Du and Lewys Glyn Cothi. Little is known about Rhys Nanmor, apart from what can be gleaned from his poetry. The most complete collection of his work is gathered in an M.A thesis by Mary.G.Headley for the University of Wales, Bangor, 1938 (BLIRhN).

Rhys' main patron appears to have been Rhys ap Thomas. He is famous for being the landowner who raised armies to support Henry Tudor on his return to Wales from Brittany. Rhys ap Thomas after fighting alongside Henry at the Battle of Bosworth, was knighted and grew to be an even more powerful figure after the accession of Henry VIII. Rhys Nanmor's connection with Rhys ap Thomas probably influenced his writing of a *marwnad* for prince Arthur, the eldest son of Henry VII, in 1502 and an *awdl* to welcome Henry VIII to the throne in 1509 (DNB, Rhys Nanmor, and Rhys ap Thomas).

Moliant to Rhydderch ap Rhys

The *moliant* in *cywydd* metre to Rhydderch ap Rhys of Tywyn is a robust tribute to a military man. Rhys Nanmor put a fifteenth century gloss on the classical style of Taliesin and Aneurin speaking to the warrior princes of old. One can imagine this poem going down well at the end of a long loud night of feasting and drinking... Rhydderch is a lion (BLIRhN 59.1), with a shout louder than Urien. (59.3) His forces are six thousand (59.5), he gives gold freely (59.7), yet passionate, compared to the wild sea (59.12), he is like the four elements (59.18-20) and has qualities drawn from north, south, east and west (59.21-

24). Lion in body, lion in nature (59.32-33), generous keeper of Rhys' land¹⁰⁶ (59.38), Rhydderch has put on Rhys' hood (59.40):

Y Llew ar ffraint Llŷr a'i frig

A'r llaw fawr, iarll y Ferwig

Mwy'n gawr yma, nag Urien,

Nid oedd fwy hyd Addaf hen.

Wrth eich maint mae nerth chwe mil,

Rhydderch, nid o rai eiddil.

Mawr yw Rhys am roi'r aur rhudd,

Bid ar y byd bedwar ban,

Bid i'r un bedwar anian;

Daear, tân a dŵr tyner,

Dy waed di sydd hyd at sêr

O'r Dwyrain yr wyd eryr,

A Deau oll yw dy wŷr;

Gogledd eich mawredd a'ch mainc,

Gorllewin â'ch gwŷr ieuainc.

Llaw a therfyn llath hirfawr

Llew un gorff â lleon gawr,

Llei notych, llew un natur,

Llai yw ofn dyn rhag llafn dur.

Ti yw'r dewr at rai dyrys,

Ti yw'r hael a gaiff tir Rhys.

Rhoent aur ar yr rhent tiroedd,

Rhodd ar ei chap, Rhydderch oedd.

....

(BLIRhN 59.1-7,17-24,31-34, 37-40)

The poem seems to indicate that Rydderch, the younger son of the famous Rhys of Tywyn, was given office under Richard III,¹⁰⁷ (59.52) Edward IV's brother. It has been seen, in what must have been a later poem (GLGC 72), that Lewys Glyn Cothi refers to Rhydderch's service as a squire for Henry VII (p.47). If this is the case, it would be interesting to know how he navigated the sensitive transition from the follower of a Yorkist king to a Tudor one. Perhaps as the poems emphasise, his military service was an important factor? The *moliant* ends with a reference to Rydderch's brother, Thomas, from whom he inherited the estate.

The Asking Poem for a Bull

Rhys' stirring words of honour for Rhydderch contrast with the following 'asking' poem. Here, it appears, Rhys Nanmor is sent off by Rhydderch to Siôn Fychan, in Glamorgan, bearing gifts and a message of greeting and request contained in a *cywydd*. In effect the poet becomes a kind of gift himself, creator and bearer of a message of praise:

Siôn Fychan hyd Forgannwg

....

Rhydderch, llythyr iawnserch insel,

Ap Rhys, wyf papur a sel.

Arglwydd llys megis a merch,

Dawn iawn yw dwyn i annerch.

Musig a eilw 'mysg eleirch

Mal gwin gwyn milgwn a meirch.

....

(BLIRhN 53.1, 21-26)

After addressing Sion Fychan and praising him, his descendants and their various homelands in Glamorgan, Brycheiniog, Buellt and Gwynedd he then announces that Rhydderch ap Rhys is the sender of this 'letter fine, love sealed' and that 'I am the paper and the seal' (53.21-22). The next lines seem to indicate that Rhys brought gifts from Rhydderch with him: 'Music and requests including a swan, white wine, greyhound and horse' (53.24-26). When the poem turns into a request, it has the feel of an exchange; gifts of bardic praise and other lavish items for 'a lusty bull, a bull of the white land'. Rhys seems to indicate that this is a long-standing request, and seems to try and minimise the petition with humour by saying 'I am not asking you to give me the Twrch Trwyth no much much less than that':¹⁰⁸

Eisieu tarw gwres teirw' Grwyn,

Sion Fychan sy yn f'achwyn.

Am hen fawr ymofyn fydd,

Am fwdwl i'm hafodydd.

Nid erchit rodd yn Dwrch Trwyth

Ond ddwbl dan i ddeubwyth.

....

(BLIRhN 53.29-33)

Bleddyn Huws (1998, p.85) suggests that the genre of asking poems, on behalf of a requester other than the poet themselves, developed around the time of the Eisteddfod in Caerfyrddin 1451. At least, that is about the time when this form of the genre becomes popular. This fits with the *floruit* of Rhys Nanmor who must have been writing through the end of the 15th century into the reign of Henry VIII. It is notable that the pattern of this asking poem is congruent with the structure observed by Huws (p.87):

Already in this poem the first two components have been observed. The final 40 lines of this 80-line poem are a collection of elaborate and occasionally obscure comparisons (*dyfalu*), mostly exemplifying the characteristics of the animal being requested. While the images might be hard to understand, in the context of a request for a bull they are colourful and entertaining. For example, the bull is ‘a fat alderman, heavy eyebrows in mist (53.45)’, and ‘Flashes of lightning there were like an augur¹⁰⁹ (53.50)’:

Aldermon tew, aeldrwm mewn tARTH,

a thabwrdd iaith ddeuheubarth;

wb wb cadbibau cedyrn,

yn waed y caed hyd y cyrn.

....

Ystrad, ai'n drais trwy dân draw

feltau 'roedd felly drwyddaw.

(BLIRhN 53.45-48,49-50)

The poem concludes with a striking collection of couplets, a mix of *cymeriad geiriol* on 'lliw' (colour) and *llu* (multitude), the comparisons remain difficult to interpret, yet when read out loud they sound compelling. The words certainly emphasise the colour and feisty nature of the bull (bullock), such as 'gorse fires roaring' (53.80):

Lliw'r elin o'r glin i'r glog

Lliw sgwd fal llawes godog

Llu o'i hil a wna lle i hau

Lliw eithin yn danllwythau

Llurig ffres fal holl rug Frainc

Lliwydd dillad lloi ifainc.

(BLIRhN 53.77-82)

6. Red Bull

Rhys Nanmor took himself from the comfort of Tywyn by the Teifi, with gifts and an asking poem to Siôn Fychan in Glamorgan, in the hope of returning with a fiery bull. If the exchange of praise and produce was successful, then he was probably assured of further patronage from both patrons. The successful poet's skills went far beyond talent with words; they were at heart grounded in the relationship the bard was able to establish with the *uchelwr* and his household.

References

Ellis, M.G (1959), *Rhys Nanmor, (fl.1480-1513), poet a native of Merioneth*, in Dictionary of Welsh Biography [Online]. Available at <http://yba.llgc.org.uk/en/s-RHYS-NAN-1480.html> (Accessed October 20th 2016).

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Footnotes

¹⁰⁵ The similarity of name 'Nanmor' comes from their shared place of origin in Nantmor, Gwynedd, not from any known family relationship. See Ellis, M.G (1959), *Rhys Nanmor*, Dictionary of Welsh Biography.

¹⁰⁶ 'Rhys' land' refers to the estates of the Tywyn family, descended from Rhys ap Maredudd. The family held significant lands in southern Ceredigion.

¹⁰⁷ Richard III reigned 1483-1485. The poem suggests Rhydderch held office under this Yorkist king before the Tudor accession.

¹⁰⁸ Twrch Trwyth is the great boar from the tale of *Culhwch ac Olwen* in the Mabinogion. The reference uses this legendary beast as hyperbole - the poet is not asking for something as impossible as the Twrch Trwyth.

¹⁰⁹ The image of 'augur' (*ddewin*) combined with lightning and fire creates a vivid picture of the bull's power and appearance.