

7. Iolo Goch

After one imagined poetic journey through Ceredigion (Dafydd ap Gwilym's poem in the previous chapter), Iolo Goch provides another. Iolo's is a conversation between the soul and the body in the *cywydd* metre, describing the route he has taken on his journeys receiving hospitality from patrons in return for poetry.

Iolo was probably a little younger than Dafydd ap Gwilym but contemporary enough to be able to write a *marwnad* to him and share his confidence in the *cywydd* metre. The dates of Iolo's poetry suggest he had a long life, spanning 1325 to 1397, Johnston (1993, ix). Given a period of poetic activity of over fifty years it is disappointing that only 39 of his poems have survived (IG x). In such a small body of work it is tantalising to come across a rich variety of subjects: From a poem to Edward III (IG 1), to various works to some of the most notable Welsh patrons of the day including Owain Glyndŵr (8,9,10), Ithel ap Robert (12,13,15), Tudur Fychan and family (4-6), Sir Rhys ap Gruffudd of Llansadwrn (7), and Sir Hywel of the Axe, constable of Cricieth Castle(2). Iolo was also a friend of the Church with poems to bishops and other clergy (16-19), though his view of Franciscan friars was less than complimentary with two satires saved for them (34,35). There are also other religious works (27,29-31) and some interesting secular poems such as a poem to the poet's beard (25) and one to the ploughman (28).

The Ploughman

The Ploughman gives a rare insight into the life of the agricultural class of the time. As Rachel Bromwich (1997,130) notes "it is unmatched in the work of any other of the early *cywyddwyr* - except by Dafydd ap Gwilym himself - in it's 'positive' rather than negative and 'perjorative', use of the device of *dyfalu*..."⁶⁶ The poem is a kind of assertion of the *status quo* (IG, xiii, also LIU,179) and a celebration of the value of the agricultural worker,

whose number had decreased after the plague. It is perhaps also a pointed criticism of lords who failed to treat their people fairly. Bromwich (*Op cit.*131) suggests the poem was directed at a clerical audience. In this praise poem to the ploughman, the clerics would have nodded at Iolo's stern comparison of the Lord God to some of the lords of the day:

Ni rydd farn eithr ar arnawdd,

Ni châr yn ei gyfar gawdd;

Ni ddeily ryfel, ni ddilyn,

Ni threisia am ei dda ddyn;

Ni bydd ry gadarn arnam,

Ni yrr hawl, gymredrawl gam,

Nid addas, myn dioddef,

Nid bywyd, nid byd heb ef.

IG 28.17-24

he does not pass judgement except on a
ploughman,

he does not like anger amongst his fellow
labourers;

he does not wage war, he does not persecute,
he does not rob a man of his goods by force;
he is never harsh towards us,

he makes no claim, forbearing fault;

it would not be right, by thy passion,

there would be no life, no world without him.

Translation from IG

The Conversation between Body and Soul

One can imagine the ploughman being a feature of the landscape of the following poem. In 'The conversation between the body and the soul' (IG 14), the body of the poet lies senseless in a drunken torpor, while his more virtuous soul goes wandering in search of the poet's wasted body through all the places they have previously travelled...

Enaid

Corff

Enaid

Ymddiddan, bwhwman hwyr,

A wnaeth yr enaid neithiwyr

Â'r corff oedd yn caru ffug,

Last night,
late

wandering
to and fro,

the soul

‘Mae ydd wyd, y corff meddw iawn?’

‘Beth?’ heb y corff anorffen,

‘Pa ddrwg, orhëwg, er hyn,

Pa gyfaillt, pwy a’i gofyn?’

‘Myfi ydwy, mau fydiaith

D’enaid teg a fu’n dwyn taith.’

(IG 14.1-3, 6-7, 11-12)

did
converse
with the
body
which
loved
falsity,
‘Where are
you,
drunken
body?’
‘What?’
said the
incomplete
body,
‘What evil,
wanton is
the reason
for this,
what
friend,
who asks
it?’
‘It is me,
my
worldly
language,
your fair
soul,
which has
been
travelling.’
Translation
from IG.

The Journey through Wales

This is an entertaining device allowing Iolo to create a picture of the poet's circuit and give a favourable mention to some of the places and people that have supported him. The

journey begins with a diversion to two parts of Gwynedd⁶⁷ (14.16) before commencing properly in Powys by going through the small commote of Ceri in Maelienydd (14.32) onto Newtown (14.33) with its long wooden planked bridge.⁶⁸ From there south to Elfael (14.41) a *cantref* in central eastern Wales and then west a little to Buellt (14.43) praising Phylip Dorddu (14.38) along the way. In the region of Buellt, the soul says ‘Thick were your tracks in Ystrad Tywi’ (14.47). The soul speaks as if the area of around Ystrad Tywi (Carmarthenshire) and Caer is better than the nine cantrefs of heaven⁶⁹ (*Gwell Caer na naw o nef*. 14.56). Given poems recorded for Rhys ap Gruffudd of Llansadwrn in Carmarthenshire (IG 7) and Sir Roger Mortimer (IG 20) from the marches and around Newtown, one can begin to see how the route of the soul sketches a map of Iolo’s patrons.

After visiting the castle town of Kidwelly in Glamorgan the poem uses the dialogue to flatter the Cistercian Abbey of Whitland (*Ty Gwyn ar Daf*) (14. 64-71). From that house of the white monks, Iolo’s soul takes the journey into Ceredigion highlighting the benefits of Parcrhydderch in Glyn Aeron, the home of Rhydderch ab Ieuan Llwyd of the lineage of Gwaethfoed (NBSA, p83, IG 14.76-77). E.D Jones notes that Lewys Glyn Cothi references Iolo Goch instructing and composing for Rhydderch in Glyn Aeron:⁷⁰

Iolo’r wir yng Nglyn Aeron

A wnaeth wers yn yr iaith hon;

Eithr y mab oedd athraw mawr

Ac i Rydderch yn gerddawr.

*(Quoted and translated in E.D Jones, 1943, p7,8
n.1, see also: GLGC, 58.21-24)*

“Iolo indeed in Glyn Aeron
composed a verse in this language;
But the young man was a great teacher
and bardd to Rhydderch.”

The generosity of the abbot of Strata Florida is mentioned, identified potentially as Llywelyn Fychan who was in that post between 1344 and 1381 (GIG XIV n82). The Lord of Caron who matches the abbot’s gift in the following couplet is suggested to be William

Clement, Lord of Tregaron, and it is thought he was the father of Mawd, the second wife of Rydderch, mentioned above (GIG XIV n.82, NBSA 78,n.9).

Hawdd gan Rydderch serchlawn

Roddi ei dda yn rhwydd iawn.

Abad, ni ad arnad ing,

Tir Fflur, er rhoi tair fflwring

Arglwydd Carawn, da iawn yw,

Arianrhif a wna'r unrhyw.

(IG 14.79-84)

Loving Rhydderch finds it easy

to give away his goods very freely.

The abbot of the land of Florida will not let you suffer any distress, though he give you three florins.

The lord of Caron, he is very good, will make up the same sum of money.

(Translation from IG)

Southern Ceredigion

As the soul's journey continues it arrives in the area of this essay's interest, southern Ceredigion, Iolo praises the family of Tywyn, and Dafydd from the area of Caerwedros:

Gruffudd hael, hawdd fydd cael ced,

Calon wyrion Gwrwared,

Ab Einion Fychan bennaeth

Enaid y gwyr yw; nid gwaeth

Dafydd, flodeuyn rhydd Rhos,

Ciriedrwydd, gwr Caerwedros,

Nid haws - gwn ei naws - gan neb

Hau arian yn ddihaereb.

Generous Gruffudd, it will be easy to get a gift, heart of the descendants of Gwrwared, son of Einion Fychan the chieftain, he is the soul of men, no worse is Dafydd, free flower of Rhos, bountifulness, the man of Caerwedros, no one finds it easier - I know his nature - to scatter money in exemplary fashion.

The descendants of Gruffudd, unconcealed gift, may he be in heaven, son of Ednyfed, (Translation from IG)

Wyrion Gruffudd, ddi-gudd ged,

Byd yn nef, fab Ednyfed,

(IG 14.85-94)

Gruffudd ab Einion Fychan was the great grandfather of Rhys ap Meredydd of Tywyn, Dafydd Nanmor's first patron. Gwrwared was the son of Cuhelyn Fardd (PWDN, p121, Dwnn v.I pp 43,59,61). D.H Roberts (p.78) suggests that the Dafydd from Caerwedros, is the same Dafydd referred to by Deio ap Ieuan Du in his description of the circuit of a poet discussed in the introduction (p.12 above) - *Dyfod at wyrion Dafydd / Dros y rhos, wtresur rhydd...* (GDIDaGIH 11.35-36).

Given the patronage Iolo received from all of the places mentioned in the soul's journey, the poem acts not only as generic message of praise to those who supported him and other poets as they travelled round the country, it could also have served as a kind of travel guide for others of talent who wished to follow in his footsteps. It is a pity that, apart from works for Owain Glyndŵr and Ithel ap Robert of Coedymynydd, there are no poems in Iolo's surviving body of work for the others he and his soul visited on this circuit (IG xi).

The section of the poem quoted above ends with praise for the generosity of the descendants of Gruffudd ab Ednyfed who probably lived in the area of Aberystwyth (14.95-102).⁷¹ The poet's voice is then returned to his body, who concludes by taking the journey homewards (14.103-124), via Sycharth, the court of Owain Glyndŵr. The final section returns to the separate circuit in Gwynedd where the poem began... (IG 14n): The 'heartland of the country' (*Perfeddwlad*) the commotes of Rhôs, Rhufoniog, Dyffryn Clwyd and Tegeingl.⁷² The closing moments are a tribute to Ithel ap Robert of Coedymynydd, Dean of St.Asaph, to whom the poem appears to be dedicated. It is in the generosity of this place that the body of the aging poet wishes to complete his life and end his travels (see also p.12 above):

Rhwyddaf dyn, rhydd yr eiddaw,

Neu ry gân dlawd ged o'i law.

Nid teg, nac addwyn, nid da

Bellach i gleiriach glera.

Parod yw it fal porwyl

Cystal ag ef, cais dal gŵyl.

(IG 14.115-116,121-124)

Most generous man, he gives his possessions,
a poor man would certainly get a gift from his
hand.

It is not fair, nor pleasant, nor good
for an old man to lead the life of a travelling
minstrel anymore.

Like a lord's feast the same is ready for you
as for him, seek to be present at the festival.
(Translation from IG)

References

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Footnotes

- ⁶⁷ GIG, p.257, note on line 16 - *Uwch Conwy* and *Is Conwy*
- ⁶⁸ *Y Drenewydd* - Founded at the end of the 13th century. See TDW(V2), p270.
- ⁶⁹ GIG, p.259, note on line 56 refers to articles discussing the meaning of this line - Eurys Rowlands titles his article with one interpretation, that 'Caeo is better than nine heavens'...
- ⁷⁰ D.Johnston in GIG, n.14.76-7 shows Guto'r Glyn placing Iolo in Glyn Aeron in a poem that mentions Iolo's ring given to him by Mawd, Rhydderch's second wife : GLGl (Cwydd Pwrs) XXV.5-6,41-42 (*A'r ail oedd fodrwy Iolo,/A roesai Fawd o'i ras fo.*)
- ⁷¹ GIG 14.93-4n : reports Lewis Dwnn vol1, 16 saying that Gruffudd ab Ednyfed of Ynys Mon had family and descendants in Aberllolyn in the parish of Llanychaearn near Aberystwyth. See also NBSA 78.
- ⁷² IG 13.76n - this is the area around St Asaph see:
<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/55/Gwynedd_General_Map.png> accessed Oct 14 2016.
Coedymynydd is likely to be the area now know as Mynydd y Cwm [Coed Cwm] close to St Asaph (SJ073769)
<<http://data.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/doc/50kGazetteer/55085>> accessed Oct 14 2016.