

9. Gwilym ab Ieuan Hen

With Gwilym ab Ieuan Hen, this study travels to Gilfach Uchaf overlooking the river Teifi near Llandysul and back to Gwernan, in the area of Troed yr Aur, near Rhydlewis (p.54). Gwilym composed a composite *cywydd* for the family living at Gilfach, a *marwnad* to Dafydd ap Tomas with a *moliant* to his five sons.

Like many of the other poets little is known of Gwilym except from the evidence of his work. A.Eleri Davies in her collection of works by Deio ap Ieuan Du and Gwilym ab Ieuan Hen (GDIDaGIH) published twenty-four poems by Gwilym with appendices adding four other potential works. An examination of the events and lives of people for whom Gwilym composed suggests most of his poems come from the period between 1435 and 1470. Assuming he had the usual lengthy bardic apprenticeship, he was probably born in about 1415 (GDIDaGGIH, p. xxi).

Davies (p.xxii) proposes Gwilym ab Ieuan Hen's origins to be in the locality of Caereinion, a commote in mid Powys. Gwilym certainly appears to have spent a substantial part of his life in Heiliarth⁸⁴ as poet to the family of Ieuan Llwyd from Neuadd Wen (GDIDaGGIH I) and his brothers Hywel and Dafydd (II,III) as suggested by the couplet in a praise poem to the family: *Minnau er dyddiau diddeg/ Bardd yt wyf ar ben bwrdd teg* (II, 27-8).⁸⁵

Gwilym ab Ieuan Hen is another poet whose works straddle the political complexities of the Wars of the Roses. He created works for Yorkists, celebrating the coronation of Edward IV in 1461 (GDIDaGGIH, XXIV) and Lancastrians: In a *marwnad* to Siancyn Llwyd Gwilym makes a plea to William Herbert to free Siancyn's sons from the 'hyrddlam drwg' (terrible fate) of being imprisoned in Harlech Castle (XVI):⁸⁶

Od ydynt yn geidwadwy,

Mewn cwman tŵr cau maent hwy

Hir y mae gwŷr Llŷr yn llech,

Hyrddlam drwg fo i Harddlech!

(*GDIDaGGIH*, XVI.57-60)

Poetic Style and Themes

Gwilym's small collection of surviving compositions include most of the familiar genres of the period; with works of praise and *marwnadau*, poems of asking (XIII,IX), thanking (XX), celebration of a new building (XIX), and even a few *cywyddau serch* (XX,XXI,XXII, B1-B4). As will be seen below, he often includes religious and biblical themes in his work, as well as showing a familiarity with the stories of local saints too. His fluency with these traditions may reflect an education in a religious house.

Along with many others of his colleagues of the period Gwilym seems to relish the opportunity to entertain with *cywyddau serch*. Love sickness is a feature of his love poems, and he follows the medieval idea of romance associated with religion. He portrays the lover as a martyr for his love:

Gwn ofid, gwen, gwynfyd gŵr,

I’th aros fal merthyrwr;

Yr wy’eres mewn llesmair;

Gwna ryw gŵyn, er mwyn Mair!

Tario beunydd trwy boeni

Torri ywch fawl, tair och fi!

Cydchwardder pan henwer hon;

Oeri ac wylo mai'r galon.

(*GDIDaGGIH*, XXI.19-23,27-30)

Nature is used traditionally in his *cywyddau* to compare patrons favourably, such as with the familiar tropes of bravery and ferocity associated with lions and eagles. While Gwilym stays with the forms of poetry that were popular at the time he shows a remarkable capacity for the invention of simile and seems to enjoy the rhetorical question; as will be seen in the *marwnad* to Dafydd ap Tomas.

The Marwnad to Dafydd ap Tomas

Gwilym starts his eulogy to Dafydd ap Tomas of Gilfach-wen by calling on God and speaking in the sad spirit of Trystan from the story of Trystan and Esyllt - *Troes Duw'n fawr, Trystan wyf i, Tristed oedd Ddyfed trosti!*⁸⁷ (XVII.1-2). After including Dafydd's father Tomas, a great host is called upon to shout as Dafydd arrives at heaven's door (XVII.7-8). The following line joins a sangiad containing the enigmatic question : 'If not blessed in the battle?' with an assertion of Dafydd's innate ability (*dawn*) (9):

Troes Duw'n fawr, Trystan wyf i,

Tristed oedd Ddyfed trosti!

Dafydd y sy'n ymguddiaw -

Onid trist ym fynded draw -

Teyrn o waid, tarian noeth,

Dialedd yw rhoi dolef

Dros neb a gaffo drws nef.

Dawn mawr (ponid gwyn 'y myd?)

Yma a droes Duw am dristyd;

(*GDIDaGGIH*, XXI.19-23,27-30)

Reading this aloud the opening lines of the *cywydd* seems to cleverly emphasise the sound of the word ‘Trist’ and continues with sounds with ‘T’, ‘D’ and ‘R’ being underlined in the *cynghanedd*. What begins as a *marwnad* for the father then turns in celebration towards Dafydd ap Tomas’ five sons and their family property in the area of Is Aeron, Emlyn and Llandyfriog (11-40).⁸⁸

The Power of Five

The remainder of the poem is a clever demonstration of the power and pattern of five in the medieval world: Five berries from a fruit tree (48), five loaves (51), five hosts of Christ (52)⁸⁹ five leaders (54), five pipes (56), five halls (60), five brothers (61), five girdles of the earth,⁹⁰ five books of Moses,⁹¹ five words and the expectant womb of Mary (67,68),⁹² five words and lordship of the bread,⁹³ five senses (71), Five feasts of Mary,⁹⁴ the Five wounds of her Son (72),⁹⁵ The five ages before the Christian era.⁹⁶ The religious items in particular would have been familiar to most people at the time who attended mass and listened to biblical stories. The poet seems to make this work into a celebration of the family, with hints of irony and gentle fun sprinkled through the text, such as when he says of the words of consecration: ‘*Pum gair a bair o’r bara / Gorff Duw, wel dyna grefft da!* (69,70)’ (Well there’s a good craft!). This is a man confident with his audience:

Pawb a’u mawl ar dwf pob mis,

Pump o aeron pwmparis;

Arwydd y dôn o wraidd da -

Arwain pump o’r un pwmpa.

Â phum torth ef a borthed

Bum llu Crist bôm well o'u cred

Bu benllad i'r wlad o'r wledd;

Bu o'm pennaeath bump annedd;

Mae rhill o win gweddill gwyn,

Bumpib yn nhŷ pob impyn

Pum synnwyr, eryr arab,

Pum gwyl Mair, pum gweli" Mab;

Pwy a amau fod pumoes

Cyn Cred ac amcanu Croes?

Ystôr hoff nis diria rhaib;

Oes y pumoes i'r pumaib.

(*GDIDaGGIH XVII.47-56,71-76*)

As has been seen with other *marwnadau*, death was an opportunity for praise of all, a time for grief and a time to make people smile with the poet's skill. Here Gwilym entertains with amazing comparisons. For instance, in the lines above the poet moves immediately from the feast of the loaves and fishes to the feast in Gilfach with the five leaders with a range of white wines remaining, five casks (52-56). Gwilym ends powerfully, with a rhetorical question asking who would doubt the five ages that led to the birth of Christ? And suggesting boldly that the store of love present in that age will be present in the time of the five sons (73-75).

References

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Footnotes

⁸⁴ Heliarth (GDIDaGGIH I.11; II.6; III.2) an area associated with the family of Ieuan Llwyd ab Ieuan ab Owain of the area of Neuadd Wen in the parish of Llanerfyl. Llanerfyl is a village and community in Powys, located near the River Banwy.

⁸⁵ 'I since the days of not fair / poet I am on a table fair'. This is also a common *topos*, the poet lauding his host's table. So, it may be risky to read too much into it.

⁸⁶ Glanmor Williams (1987, p.201). William Herbert reclaimed Harlech Castle in 1468.

⁸⁷ 'Turn great God, Tristan I am, / sadness was over Dyfed'

⁸⁸ The notes in (GDIDaGGIH, p.157) refer to 6 children but only the five sons are named and emphasised in the poem: 1. Maredudd (38) of Is Coed, 2. Hywell (32) o Wernan, Aberteifi, 3. Rhys (27) o'r Gilfach-wen (19), Llandysul, 4. Tomas Fychan (27) o Landyfirog, 5. Gruffudd (24). The other child noted from the genealogies is a daughter, Marged.

⁸⁹ From miracle of the five loaves and two fishes and the feeding of the five thousand (Matt 14:14-22)

⁹⁰ The medieval equivalent of the lines of latitude. Astrolabes were used in late medieval Europe. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/astrolabe> accessed November 2016. It is also interesting to note that the GPC on its notes for the word 'Gwregys' records the same couplet in a source not currently attributed to Gwilym ab Ieuan Hen.

⁹¹ Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, Deuteronomy. RSV p. xxviii.

⁹² This probably refers to the words of Mary when hearing the news of her pregnancy (Annunciation): 'Do it unto me according to thy word' - Luke 1:38 - In Latin: *Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*.

⁹³ This seems to refer to the Latin words of consecration over the bread in the Roman Catholic Rite of the Mass:
Hoc est enim Corpus meum (For this is my body).

⁹⁴ The five feasts of Mary are referred to by Franciscan theologian St Bonaventure, popular with friars for preaching in the middle ages, that follows Mary from: 1. annunciation to; 2. the birth of Jesus; 3. The naming of Jesus; 4. Adoration of the Magi; 5. Presentation at the temple. Eric Doyle (trans) (1984). Also, it is reported, there were fayres held in Aberteifi (Cardigan) on five Marian feast days.

⁹⁵ Five wounds of Jesus on the Cross, through his hands, feet and side.

⁹⁶ <http://geiriadur.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html?pumoes>: GPC: *(the people of the) five ages or periods (usually of the time between the Creation and the coming of Christ according to medieval chronology)*.