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THE LOVE POETRY OF DAFYDD AP GWILYM

HELEN FULTON

University of Sydney

IN retrospect, the literary scene in fourteenth century Britain seems dominated by the figure of Chaucer. His poetry marked a new phase in the native tradition, reviving it with new blood from France, and establishing the English language finally as a major literary medium. But in another part of Britain, a poet writing in a different language was simultaneously making a vital contribution to the poetic tradition of his own people. He was the Welsh poet Dafydd ap Gwilym.¹

Just as Chaucer was both conservative and innovatory in his contribution to English poetry, so Dafydd continued and yet modified the existing poetic models of Wales. Unlike Chaucer, however, he inherited a centuries-old tradition of formal praise-poetry, composed by a socially important class of professional bards writing for royal and aristocratic patrons.² Conservative and backward-looking by nature, the bards continued to use the same metres and themes as their predecessors even after the fall of the royal families and the loss of Welsh independence. By the time Dafydd was writing, about 1350 to 1360, Wales had been under the jurisdiction of the English crown for nearly a century, and Dafydd and his contemporaries were composing their poems for a new class of noblemen, the *uchelwyr*. Dafydd himself belonged to one of these aristocratic families, whose members often held important office as administrators of the Principality. The background to Dafydd's poetry, therefore, is as aristocratic as that supposed for the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, or even, though on a smaller scale, that of Chaucer himself.

The innovations made by Dafydd ap Gwilym (literally, David son of William) are, broadly speaking, in the areas of metre and content. Expertise in the use of a large variety of complex metres was an essential attribute of the professional bards. While Dafydd was obviously proficient in the metres considered appropriate for serious poetry, he chose to use a simple metre, the *cywydd*, borrowed from popular poetry, for the majority of his poems.³ His subject matter is also a departure from the traditional eulogies and elegies: inspired in part by the dominant theme of *amour courtois* in French poetry, Dafydd's work is largely lyrical and subjective, extolling love and nature with a freshness and sensitivity

The Love Poetry of Dafydd Ap Gwilym

which brought a new mood to medieval Welsh poetry.⁴

Of the one hundred and fifty poems attributed to Dafydd ap Gwilym,⁵ well over a hundred are love poems. The pursuit of love, its success or failure, had a tireless attraction for him, and presumably appealed also to his aristocratic audiences of friends, hosts and guests. His poems reflect an assortment of moods associated with love — the bliss of being with his lover, the despair after rejection, the sometimes comical disgust over a thwarted meeting, or the hope with which he sends a love message to a girl he admires. Throughout all these experiences, his tone is philosophical, often lighthearted, never bitter, and he himself emerges as a charismatic figure, full of an unquenchable joy and vitality. This is surely an impression of the poet himself, and not merely one of the persona he sometimes uses to exemplify a particular experience.

The logical counterpart of this commitment to earthly pleasures is a spontaneous appreciation of the natural world, and this Dafydd also evinces with genuine exuberance and pleasure. In fact, love itself is seen in the context of nature, with the countryside providing the natural (in both senses of the word) surroundings for the poet's encounters. His joy in seeking love is exactly paralleled by his delight in nature, in every bird, tree, plant and animal which form part of his beloved countryside. Here Dafydd is much more recognizably a successor of the earliest Welsh bards, whose affinity with nature and evocative expressions of nature imagery are endemic to Celtic poetry in its entirety.⁶

These two themes, then, love and nature, preoccupy Dafydd above all, and they are inevitably and inextricably combined in many of his poems; one is interpreted through the other. Sometimes this relationship is quite explicit, as in the poem *I Wahodd Dyddgu*, 'Invitation to Dyddgu', in which Dafydd imagines a woodland dwelling which his lover can share with him:

'Nid addawaf, da ddiwedd,
I'm aur ond eos a medd;
Eos gefnllwyd ysgafnllef
A bronfraith ddigrifiaith gref.
Ygus dwf, ac ystafell
O fedw ir, a fu dŷ well?
'Tra fôm allan dan y dail.
Ein ceinnerth fedw a'n cynnail.
Llofft i'r adar i chwarae.
Llwyn mwyn, llyna'r llun y mae.'

(GDG no. 119, 13-22.)

Helen Fulton

'I can promise nothing (a happy ending) to my golden girl but a nightingale and mead; a grey-backed clear-voiced nightingale and a sturdy thrush of cheerful song. Is there a growth, and a room of fresh birches, which could be a better house? While we are out beneath the leaves, our fine strong birches contain us. A loft for the birds to play in: a gentle grove, behold the picture it makes.'

Here the countryside in all its natural beauty is evoked specifically as the most fitting place to meet his lover, and his joy in these surroundings reflects his anticipation of the projected meeting. A room provided by the trees, and sustenance from the bird-song, are infinitely preferable to any man-made provisions; all the necessities of life and more can be supplied by nature's own creations in the wood.

This enjoyment of earthly pleasures in simple, natural surroundings reflects Dafydd's preference for all things natural, and a corresponding rejection of artificiality. This includes the appearance of the girls he admires; in one poem he criticizes the use of jewels as ornaments, telling his lover:

'Gwell wyd mewn pais wenllwyn wiw
Nog iarles mewn gwisg eurlliw.'

(GDG no. 49, 37-38.)

'You are better, in a fitting pale petticoat, than a countess in a golden dress.'

Characteristically, throughout his love poetry, Dafydd praises a woman's eyes or mouth or hair, hardly ever her dress or jewellery or superficial appearance. A woman can be compared to a jewel, as a symbol of flawless beauty, but the only ornament she need wear is a garland of flowers.

Dafydd's rejection of artificiality extends to the form of the poetry itself. This conforms to the complex patterns of rhyme and alliteration known as *cynghanedd*,⁷ an essential element of medieval Welsh poetry, yet avoids the conventional exaggerations of the courtly love tradition; the imagery is as simple and unstrained as the natural world from which it is often drawn. Compare this stanza of Chaucer's with one of Dafydd's:

'Hide, Absolon, thy gilte tresses clere;
Ester, ley thou thy mekenesse all adown;
Hide, Jonathas, all thy frendly manere;
Penalopee, and Marcia Catoun,
Make of your wif hode no comparisoun;

The Love Poetry of Dafydd Ap Gwilym

Hide ye youre beautes, Isoude and Heleine:
My lady cometh that all this may disteine.’⁸

‘Mal eiry y rhiw, lliw llywy,
Wyneb bun; mi a wn pwy.
Ffynhonnau difas glasddeigr,
Yw gloywon olygon Eigr,
Aeron glân, dirperan’ glod,
Eurychaeth Mab Mair uchod.’

(GDG no. 30, 19-24.)

‘Like mountain snow, a bright colour, is the maiden’s face; I know who. Deep fountains of pale tears are the bright eyes of Eigr, fair maid of Aeron: they deserve praise, gold-craft of the Son of Mary above.’

The superb construction of Chaucer’s stanza, and the formality and dignity of his words, make it a very striking piece of poetic art. The repetition of *Hide*, the invocation of beautiful women from past history, contrast with the present tense of *My lady cometh*, conveying pride and confidence, and emphasising her greater beauty. There is subtlety in his *Make of your wif hode no comparisoun*: he is implying that there can be no comparison because his lady is by far the superior, yet at the same time he is suggesting the comparison himself. Dafydd’s stanza does not attempt a similar double meaning, or employ the same elevated diction, but his figurative language gives a richness to what is basically a simple range of words. He also compares his lover with a legendary heroine of renowned beauty — Eigr, the mother of Arthur — but his phrasing is less rhetorical, less conscious of being a poetic convention, and consequently more subjective and sympathetic. Whereas Chaucer achieves his effect through the accumulation of a number of names belonging to the same category, Dafydd relies on a variety of simple comparisons and metaphors to place his girl in the world of nature, which is also the world of God. The image of the girl’s eyes as worked gold with Christ as the goldsmith is a skilfully controlled metaphor which implies Dafydd’s worship of both the girl and of Christ who created her.

Dafydd’s sense of comfort and fulfillment in a woodland setting is reinforced by a contrasting mood which is often associated with a domestic or urban environment. His rueful and ironically humorous accounts of failures or frustrations in love are inevitably set against the mundane background of a house, village, or even

church, places where the poet feels confined and disadvantaged. The poem *Trafferth Mewn Tafarn*, 'Trouble in a Tavern' (GDG no. 124) is an amusing saga in the *fabliau* tradition of Dafydd's disastrous attempt to keep an assignation made in a tavern, and exemplifies the ineptness and gaucherie often attributed by Dafydd to himself, or perhaps to a caricature of himself, when conducting his courting within four walls. The imagery reflects the disreputable nature of the projected affair, with references to articles of an unromantic and domestic flavour, such as the meal which Dafydd consumes while making the assignation, and the variety of stools, tables, pots and dishes with which he involuntarily comes into contact while searching for the girl's room at the dead of night. A similar mood is created in *Tri Phorthor Eiddig*, 'The Three Gatekeepers of the Jealous Husband' (GDG no. 80) in which Dafydd is kept at bay by a fierce dog, a creaking door, and an old hag: these all combine to prevent him meeting his lover, who is married to *Yr Eiddig*, the stock figure of the 'Jealous Husband.'⁹ In contrast to these two poems is the mood evoked in *Campau Bun*, 'The Maiden's Virtues' (GDG no. 56). Here the setting is similarly domestic, but suggests comfort and nobility rather than the more plebeian context of the previous poems. The scene is still associated with failure in love, as Dafydd sorrowfully laments his rejection by his girl while he sits sleepless by the fire. Thus settings other than the woodland have a definite function in Dafydd's poetry, to provide opportunities for humour and irony, or grief and regret, and also to emphasise his preference for the countryside beyond the confines of the town.

Often in Dafydd's poetry, praise of nature is seen as a means to an end: just as he makes use of the birch trees for his own purposes, so he rarely hesitates to appropriate the birds, animals, and elements of the natural world in order to further his pursuit of love. There are poems to the moon, the stars, the wind, and to a large variety of birds, many of whom are enlisted as his *llatai*, or love-messenger, and are entrusted with a message of praise and love for his girl. These poems characteristically begin with a sparkling description of the subject whose very essence is captured through a lively accumulation of imagery, metaphor and personification — a technique perfected by Dafydd and known as *dylfu*. This, for example, is how he describes the *ceiliog bronfraith*, the thrush:

'Y ceiliog serchog ei sôn
Bronfraith dilediaith loywdon,
Deg loywiaith, doe a glywais,

The Love Poetry of Dafydd Ap Gwilym

Dawn fad lon, dan fedw ei lais,
Ba ryw ddim a fai berach
Plethiad no'i chwibaniad bach?
Plygain y darllain deirllith,
Plu yw ei gasul i'n plith.
Pell y clywir uwch tiroedd
Ei lef o lwyn a'ilyw floedd
Proffwyd rhiw, praff awdur hoed,
Pencerdd gloyw angerdd glyngoed.
Pob llais diwael yn ael nant
A gân ef o'i gu nwyfiant,
Pob caniad mad mydr angerdd,
Pob cainc o'r organ, pob cerdd,
Pob cwlm addwyn er mwyn merch.'

(GDG no. 28, 1-17.)

'The thrush, pleasant its sound, thrush of pure accent, clear-bright, fair bright language — yesterday I heard, a merry talent, his voice under a birch tree; is there anything which could be sweeter plaited than his litle whistling? Matins, he reads the three lessons, feathers his chasuble, in our midst. Far above the land is heard his cry from a grove, and his clear call. Hill prophet, great author of longing, bright poet of passion of the glen-wood. Every excellent voice in the brow of the brook, he sings from his beloved vivacity; every song a happy metre of passion, every tune of the organ, every musical art, every fine trill for the sake of a girl.'

A complex interweaving of brief images is the basis on which our impression of the thrush is constructed. Yet throughout this passage, Dafydd describes virtually nothing except the voice of the thrush, starting with its quality and leading on to the places where the bird sings, and the kind of music he makes. The thrush is personified briefly as a priest, there is the merest allusion to him as prophet and poet *par excellence*. But inevitably Dafydd sees him as one of his own kind, a poet singing in praise of love, a substitute virtuoso for Dafydd himself.

Obviously Dafydd's use of the theme of nature in love poetry is not unique or original. He was to some extent developing this combination of the two themes used by the *gogynfeirdd*, the twelfth and thirteenth century bards of Wales,¹⁰ but he was probably influenced also by French lyrics of the period, by the techniques of Provençal troubadours and *chanson populaire*, in which the growth of love was associated with the springtime flourishing

Helen Fulton

of nature.¹¹ However, his poetry indicates very strongly that he took this convention only to interpret it according to his own priorities, and the result is a very subjective view of Dafydd's sense of oneness with the natural world. For most English poets of the period, on the other hand, the theme of nature never became more than a conventional motif, a recognized means of establishing a particular atmosphere. Chaucer's use of nature imagery for the purposes of his narrative art in *The Canterbury Tales* is highly specialised and skilful; but this lyric poem from early fourteenth century England aims to do no more than illustrate the spring *topos* by means of a list of simple images:

'The rose railleth hire rode,
The leves on the lighte wode
Waxen all with wille.
The mone mandeth hire ble,
The lilye is lossom to se,
The fennel and the fille.
Wowes this wilde drakes,
Miles murgeth huere makes,
Ase strem that striketh stille.
Mody meneth, so doth mo;
Ichot ich am on of tho
For love that likes ille.'

(*'Lenten is come with love to toune'*, 13-24)¹²

The poem is relieved by its unpretentiousness and the variety of the imagery, but it lacks the subtlety and sophistication with which Dafydd ap Gwilym relates nature and love. Here the two are simply juxtaposed, with the earthy references to the *wilde drakes* and *miles* prefacing and contrasting with the poet's confession of failure in love. Compare this extract from Dafydd's poem to the month of May:

'Dillyn beirdd ni'm rhydwyllai,
Da fyd ym oedd dyfod Mai.
Harddwas teg a'm anrhegai,
Hylaw ŵr mawr hael yw'r Mai.
Anfones ym iawn fwnai,
Glas defyll glân mwyngyll Mai.
Ffloringod brig ni'm digiai,
Fflŵr-dy-lis gyfoeth mis Mai.
Diongl rhag brad y'm cadwai,
Dan esgyll dail mentyll Mai.'

(GDG no. 23, 7-16.)

The Love Poetry of Dafydd Ap Gwilym

'Poets' perfection, he would not deceive me, good fortune to me was the coming of May. A fair handsome youth who would bring gifts to me, a handy man, great and generous, is May. He sent to me true wealth, green slices of fair gentle twigs of May. Florins of tree-tops would not displease me, fleur-de-lis of the wealth of the May-month. Smooth, from treachery he would save me, under wings of foliage of May's mantles.'

All the conventional aspects of May — its beauty, mildness, and abundant new growth — are captured in striking images, of the handsome youth instead of the usual feminine personification, and of the bright new buds appearing like freshly minted coins. The normal extension of springtime as the season for loving is made obliquely through Dafydd's implications that May is his ally and supporter, more trustworthy and generous than any of his female lovers. Later in the poem there are brief references to a maiden whom he must appease, and to May as a love-messenger, but the whole notion of love is thoroughly integrated into the seasonal imagery so that the poet has no need to spell it out for us in the manner of the English poem.

There is another aspect of Dafydd's response to the natural world which helps to reinforce his deeply felt affinity with it: this is his habit of criticising various natural phenomena and blaming them when the course of love does not run smoothly. Thus he apostrophises the mist which descends to spoil his assignation with a girl, saying *rhedri gleision i'm rhwystraw*, 'rows of whey to hinder me', and *toron gwrddonig tiredd*, 'boorish cloak of the country' (GDG no. 68, 16 & 30). In another seasonal poem he compares January unfavourably with May as a blight on the normal activities of lovers:

'Annhebyg i'r mis dig du
A gerydd i bawb garu.'

(GDG no. 69, 31-32.)

'Unlike the black angry month, which punishes everyone in love.' He is not above chastising one of his love messengers either if the hapless bird is at all dilatory, as in the opening to *Cyrchu Lleian*, 'Fetching a Nun':

'Dadlitia'r diwyd latai,
Hwnt o'r Mars dwg hynt er Mai.
Gedaist, ciliaist myn Celi,
Arnaf y mae d'eisiau di.'

(GDG no. 113, 1-4.)

Helen Fulton

'Shed your rage, hard-working love messenger: yonder from the Marches, take a course for May. You left, you flew away by Heaven — I have need of you!'

In yet another poem, *Cyngor y Biogen*, 'The Magpie's Advice', Dafydd and the magpie engage in an acrimonious argument about the futility of Dafydd's pursuit of love. The magpie is brutally honest, and maddeningly practical:

'Gwell yt, myn Mair air aren,
Garllaw tân, y gŵr llwyd hen,
Nog yma 'mhlith gwlith a glaw
Yn yr irlwyn ar oerlaw.'

(GDG no. 63, 37-40.)

'Better for you, a wise word by St. Mary, to stay by the fire, you old grey man, then here amidst dew and rain in the green grove with the cold and wet.'

There is an amusing contrast between Dafydd's imagery before this interruption, of fresh new-leaved trees and heavenly birdsong counterpointing his mood of sweet self-pity, and his spirited retaliation against the bird's advice:

'Mwtlai wyd di, mae't liw tyg,
Mae't lys hagr, mae't lais hygryg.'

(GDG no. 63, 57-58.)

'A motley thing you are, with your fine colour and your disreputable following and your croaking voice.'

The ease with which Dafydd personifies the woodland inhabitants reflects his complete communion with them, a relationship founded firmly on respect and love. He feels at home in natural surroundings, able to be himself and follow his own desires. He has no scruples about recruiting the aid of anything at hand, be it bird, tree, season or weather, but at the same time he is looking for approval and support from the countryside, an acknowledgement that nature is his ally and refuge. The occasional realization that natural forces cannot always be manipulated at his will is both a source of wonder to him and a cause for complaint.

Dafydd ap Gwilym's love poetry therefore has some affinities with the mainstream of medieval European lyric poetry, in his use of conventional nature *topoi* and a subjective view of love; but his approach to the theme of nature in connection with the pursuit of love is strikingly original and fresh. Similarly, he has been influenced by some of the concepts of *fin amor*, as is shown by his

The Love Poetry of Dafydd Ap Gwilym

occasional comparisons of girls with the sun or the moon, and his use of recognizable metaphors such as being wounded by the shaft of love. But again, he takes these conventions only to mould them to his own ideals of the nature of love and its place in his life. He is neither the swooning love-servant nor the courtly lover nobly suffering the pangs of unrequited love, both of whom appear in Chaucer's poetry. Rather than addressing doleful poems to the object of his love, he vents his emotions on the world of nature, using it as a go-between, and his polished use of this technique sets him apart from his contemporaries, both within and outside Wales.

The second major departure in Dafydd's poetry is his method of incorporating a religious theme into much of his work. None of his poems are purely devotional in the manner of many Latin, French and English lyrics of the Middle Ages, but love of God is as pervasive in his work as his enjoyment of secular love. In fact, by linking both kinds of love to his appreciation of nature, Dafydd manages to imply an equation between the two which is audacious but never blasphemous. Just as he regards the woodland as the natural place to meet his lover, so he sees it also as the most fitting place to worship God, in preference to man-made churches and orthodox doctrine. He uses God's creations as a medium through which he can reach God himself, as well as a medium for the expression of secular love.

This dual function of nature is clearly expressed in one of his most famous poems, *Offeren Y Llwyn*, 'The Mass of the Grove'. In this, a grove of birch trees is imagined to be a form of church, a sacred area of worship, and a thrush is personified as the priest, but also as a love-messenger:

'Pellennig, pwyll ei annwyd,
Pell ei siwrnai'r llatai llwyd.
Yma y doeth o swydd goeth Gaer,
Am ei erchi ò'm eurchwaer,
Geiriog, heb un gair gwarant,
Sef y cyrch, i Nentyrch nant.
Morfudd a'i hanfonasai,
Mydr ganiadaeth mab maeth Mai. . .

Mi a glywwn mewn gloywiaith
Ddatganu, nid methu, maith,
Darllain i'r plwyf, nid rhwyf rhus,
Efengyl yn ddifyngus.'

(GDG no. 122, 7-14, 21-24.)

Helen Fulton

'From far away, discretion his nature, far the journey of the holy love-messenger. He came here, from Carmarthen's rich county, because he was asked by my golden girl — wordy, without one word of safe-conduct — to this very spot, to Nentyrch brook. Morfudd had sent him, a metre of singing of a son of May's nurture. . . .

I heard in bright language a chanting, without faltering, for a long time; a reading to the people, not too spirited, of the gospel, without mumbling.'

The status of the thrush is immediately evident in *Ilatai llwyd*, 'holy love messenger'. The adjective *llwyd* can also mean 'grey', referring to the colour of the bird, and even suggesting the robes of a monk. He is sanctified because he sings in the service of God, but also because he carries a sacred message from Dafydd's girl, Morfudd. Thus, by extension, Dafydd's love is also exalted and glorified, so that he obtains the approval not only of the natural world, but of God himself.

This element of self-justification and self-interest is a pervasive part of his love poetry, symbolized by his easy appropriation of God's creations for his own purposes. He tends to interpret religious doctrine and the will of God in ways which are most favourable to his own interests on earth rather than to the securing of a place in Heaven. He sees religion as an inherent part of his life-style, and not a separate activity confined to Sundays in church. Religious imagery is inseparably bound to his perceptions of nature, just as the world of nature is the ever-present setting for his love encounters, so that religion, nature, and love are but three aspects of the same response to the world. When Dafydd is walking in the darkness thinking of his lover, he praises the moon as his only source of light, referring to it as *afrlladen o nen y nef*, 'mass wafer from the roof of heaven', and *dysgl saig y saint*, 'feast cup of the saints' (GDG no. 67, 28 & 30). Similarly, the lark is personified as a chorister, a preacher of God — *cantor o gapel Celi*, 'singer in the chapel of Heaven' (GDG no. 114, 27) — in order to express the poet's pleasure in the bird as a potential servant of his own, to carry a love-message to his girl.

So convincing is Dafydd's imagery that even to his listeners there seems nothing incongruous in his application of religious terminology to his purely secular concerns. Moreover, he goes further than borrowing church property for his metaphors and God's creations for his love messages, and actually appeals to saints, monks and nuns to assist him. In *Galw ar Ddwynwen*,

The Love Poetry of Dafydd Ap Gwilym

'Appeal to Dwynwen' (GDG no. 94) he asks the patron saint of lovers, Dwynwen, to intercede for him with his lover Morfudd, using all the conventional religious devices of prayers, offerings and appeals to a saint, in an attempt to move Morfudd by heavenly means when earthly ones have failed. This procedure is at least orthodox and acceptable, whereas Dafydd's determination to obtain a nun from the convent in another poem (*Cyrchu Lleian*, 'Fetching a Nun', GDG no. 113) is bold to the point of blasphemy.

Dafydd, however, has a genuine love of God that precludes deliberate and direct blasphemy. He may find the rigid approach to worship as exemplified by monks and nuns, and even communal services in church, restricting and remote from his own conception of God, but he nonetheless possesses a very fundamental belief in the enveloping presence of God, a presence which he finds reflected in the natural world. His love of nature therefore has a two-fold basis, being an earthly paradise on the one hand where he can woo his lovers, and at the same time a means of de-mystifying God, of bringing God into his own secular world rather than attempting to reach up to God through monasticism and religious doctrine.

His stance is made explicitly clear in *Y Bardd a'r Brawd Llwyd*, 'The Poet and the Grey Friar' (GDG no. 137) in which Dafydd converses with a monk and defends the orthodoxy of celebrating love. The monk represents the critics of Dafydd's love poetry, real or imagined. He says:

' "Mi a rown yt gyngor da:
O cheraist eiliw ewyn,
Lliw papir, oed hir hyd hyn,
Llaesa boen y dydd a ddaw;
Lles yw i'th enaid beidiaw,
A thewi â'r cywyddau,
Ac arfer o'th baderau.' "

(GDG no. 137, 20-26.)

'I will give you some good advice: if you have loved the foam-coloured one, colour of paper, for a long time until now, lessen the pain of the day which is coming; there is benefit for your soul if you cease, and are silent with your rhymes, and practise your prayers.'

This is the kind of attitude that Dafydd rejects most strongly in his love poetry, the idea that secular love and religious devotion have no place together and should be rigidly separated; and also the notion that a preoccupation with secular pursuits automatically

Helen Fulton

closes the gates of Heaven. He replies in witty rhetoric which challenges the Friar's own ability to sermonize:

‘“Nid ydyw Duw mor greulon
Ag y dywaid hen ddynion.
Ni chyll Duw enaid gŵr mwyn
Er caru gwraig na morwyn.
Tripheth a gerir drwy'r byd:
Gwraig a hinon ac iechyd. . .

O'r nef y cad digrifwch
Ac o uffern bob tristwch.
Cerdd a bair yn llawenach
Hen ac ieuanc, claf ac iach.
Cyn rheitied i mi brydu
Ag i tithau bregethu.
A chyn iawned ym glera
Ag i tithau gardota.
Pand englynion ac odlau
Yw'r hymnau a'r segwensiau? . . .

Amser a rodded i fwyd
Ac amser i olochwyd,
Ac amser i bregethu,
Ac amser i gyfanheddu.”’

(GDG no. 137, 37-42; 49-58; 63-66.)

‘God is not as cruel as old men say. God will not lose the soul of a gentle man for loving a woman or a maiden. There are three things loved throughout the world: a woman, and fine weather, and good health. . .

From heaven is obtained pleasure, and from hell every sadness. It is poetry which brings more joy to old and young, sick and well. It is as necessary for me to compose verse as for you to preach, and as fitting for me to wander as a minstrel as for you to seek alms. Are not the hymns and sequences but englyns and odes? . . .

There is given a time for food and a time for prayer, a time for preaching and a time for entertaining.’

Thus Dafydd defends his profession as a poet and his obligation to entertain with his songs and poems, using a diction and syntax which is strongly reminiscent of biblical oratory. The oppositions of Heaven and Hell, old and young, sick and whole; the list of the

The Love Poetry of Dafydd Ap Gwilym

three things universally loved; the rhetorical question — these are all devices of learned rhetoric used in formal speeches and sermons. In addition, the sequence using the repetition of *amser*, 'time', is surely a brief allusion to the famous passage in Ecclesiastes 3, beginning 'A time to be born, and a time to die.'

Dafydd has clearly beaten the Grey Friar on his own ground, and his clever use of rhetoric and imagery make his argument very convincing, despite its essential tenuousness. It is partly a matter of his adopting the pleasanter of two life-styles, a choice which he attempts, successfully, to justify by expressing his conviction, based on supreme optimism rather than definite proof, that God does not disapprove of his enjoyment of earthly love. Dafydd is therefore able to satisfy himself, and his listeners, that his association of the natural world and the spiritual world as interchangeable elements in his imagery of secular love is entirely orthodox and praise-worthy.

This same poem provides another example of Dafydd's creative adaptation of a conventional poetic mode to something out of the ordinary. Debate or dialogue poems are common in medieval France and England, both in Latin and the vernacular. These are either secular, in which a lover converses with his lady, or religious, often involving a debate between the body and the soul, or perhaps between Jesus and one of his disciples.¹³ Another kind of debate poem is that in which the respective merits of poet or scholar and a soldier or knight are argued, and Dafydd has also written a poem on this theme.¹⁴ But the combination of the religious and the secular, as in *Y Bardd a'r Brawd Llwyd*, is not handled so wittily elsewhere; the idea of opposing a man of religion and a poet devoted to the pursuit of worldly pleasures did not occur to the minstrels and poets of Europe. Dafydd's poem has a particular relevance within the context of his own poetic corpus, but it reinforces the fact that he was not composing his poetry in a vacuum and indeed was able to make original contributions to the established poetic traditions of Europe.

In Dafydd ap Gwilym, then, we find another fourteenth century poet, whose output was large, and whose name was well-known within his own country, translating contemporary European poetic conventions into his own language and into the context of an already established native tradition. For these reasons alone, Dafydd merits a place in any overview of medieval poetry. Moreover, his poems in themselves are works of art, the result of an innate harmony between language and metre. He has been called a love poet and a nature poet, but to classify him as one is to

negate the simultaneous presence of the other, for the two themes are virtually inseparable. Secular love and religious worship are intimately connected with his love of nature and, unlike other medieval poets, Dafydd enjoys the natural world as much for its own sake as for the possibilities it provides for secular and spiritual love. His is a personal philosophy, not the mere reflection of a school of thought, and through images of nature and devotion and worldly love he states his basic need for freedom to pursue earthly joy on his own terms, and thereby to find the spiritual support on which he depends so greatly.

NOTES

¹ For the life of Dafydd ap Gwilym, see Rachel Bromwich, *Dafydd ap Gwilym*, Writers of Wales series, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1974.

² See J. Lloyd-Jones, 'The Court Poets of the Welsh Princes', *Proceedings of the British Academy* vol. 34 (1948), 167-197; H. I. Bell, *The Development of Welsh Poetry*, Oxford, 1936; H. I. Bell, *The Nature of Poetry as conceived by the Welsh Bards*, Taylorian Lecture 1955, Oxford, 1955.

³ For an introduction to bardic metres and *cynghanedd*, see Thomas Parry, *A History of Welsh Literature*, translated by H. I. Bell, Oxford, 1955, pp. 121-126, 133-149; and Gwyn Williams, *An Introduction to Welsh Poetry*, Faber & Faber Ltd., London, 1953, pp. 232-247.

⁴ The nature of Dafydd's contribution to fourteenth century Welsh poetry is discussed by Rachel Bromwich in *Tradition and Innovation in the Poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1967; reprinted 1972.

⁵ I refer to the definitive edition of Dafydd's poems by Thomas Parry, *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1952; second edition 1963. This edition (1963) is henceforth abbreviated to GDG, and all quotations are taken from it, using Parry's numbers.

⁶ The earliest Celtic nature poetry, both Welsh and Irish, was often gnomic in character; these are discussed and translated by K. H. Jackson in *Early Celtic Nature Poetry*, Cambridge, 1935; reprinted Folcroft Library Editions, Pa., 1974 (limited edition). For a wider view, see J. Glyn Davies, 'The Welsh Bard and the Poetry of External Nature', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1912-1914), 81-128.

⁷ See note 3.

⁸ This extract is taken from R. T. Davies (Ed.), *Medieval English Lyrics*, Faber & Faber Ltd., London, 1963, p. 134.

⁹ For a translation of these two poems, and others by Dafydd, see J. P. Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Lyrics*, Macmillan, London, 1965. Dafydd's motif of the Jealous Husband may well have its origins in 'Le Jaloux' of the *Roman de la Rose*: for a discussion of the character see John V. Fleming, *The Roman de la Rose, A Study in Allegory and Iconography*, Princeton University Press, 1969, p. 154 ff.; Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer*, Cornell University Press, 1975, p. 39 ff.

¹⁰ In particular, poems of the *gogynfeirdd* ('quite early poets') known as *gorhoffedd* or 'boasting' poems, illustrate most clearly the native tradition

The Love Poetry of Dafydd Ap Gwilym

which influenced Dafydd. See, for example, a poem of the twelfth century prince of North Wales, Hywel ab Owain Gwynedd, beginning

'I love a fine hillside's shining fortress,
Where a fair girl loves watching a seagull',

in J. P. Clancy, *The Earliest Welsh Poetry*, Macmillan, 1970, p. 129.

¹¹ For examples of this, see Peter Dronke, *The Medieval Lyric*, Hutchinson University Library, London, 1968, especially the love poem by the twelfth century Guillaume of Aquitaine, p. 115, and the chapter on the *alba*, p. 167 ff. Other examples can be found in J. J. Wilhelm, *Seven Troubadours, The Creators of Modern Verse*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970, pp. 48-50; and L. T. Topsfield, *Troubadours and Love*, Cambridge University Press, 1975, pp. 74-78. Rachel Bromwich discusses the possible influence of the *Roman de la Rose* and *reverdies* poems on Dafydd in *Tradition and Innovation in the Poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym* (op. cit.).

¹² Davies, *Medieval English Lyrics* (op. cit.), p. 84.

¹³ For a survey of secular debate poems in Latin, see the section on 'The Poetical Debate' in F. J. E. Raby, *A History of Secular Latin Poetry in the Middle Ages*, vol. 2, Oxford, 1934; second edition 1957, pp. 282-308. Raby mentions the most popular types of debate — e.g. between summer and winter, knight and clerk, death and man — and gives examples of several, especially love debates. Examples of dialogue poems in Middle English and Provençal poetry can be found in Davies, *Medieval English Lyrics* (op. cit.), p. 75 (between Judas and Christ), and J. J. Wilhelm, *Seven Troubadours* (op. cit.), p. 80 (a pastoral poem by Marcabrun describing an encounter between a nobleman and a shepherdess).

¹⁴ GDG. No. 58, *Merch yn Edliw Ei Lyfrdra*, 'A girl reproaches his Cowardice'. Other debate or dialogue poems by Dafydd include No. 77, *Amau ar Gam*, in which Dafydd questions Morfudd's love; and No. 141, *Ei Gysgod*, 'His Shadow', which is similar to a debate between body and soul.