

Opening up the Archives of Welsh Poetry: Welshness and Englishness during the Hundred Years' War¹

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Introducing the corpus of medieval Welsh poetry

The National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth holds a very substantial collection of manuscripts containing poetry in the Welsh language from the last centuries of the Middle Ages. Some of these manuscripts date to the late medieval period itself; indeed, a few were written by actual poets.² But for the great bulk of the poetry we have to rely on later copies, mainly written down in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These are the work of interested gentlemen, humanist scholars and professional poets who wished to preserve copies of their predecessors' work. In fact about half of the relevant manuscripts are deposited in the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth. There are two other major collections in Wales, at Cardiff and Bangor, as well as many more manuscripts deposited in the British Library in London and the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Over the years, the National Library of Wales has made great efforts to acquire microfilm copies of Welsh manuscripts held in other libraries. The result is that almost all the materials which we need in order to edit the poetry are available in Aberystwyth.

The dimensions of late medieval Welsh poetry are seldom appreciated even within the country, let alone elsewhere. At the latest estimate, some 59 poets who worked during the fourteenth century have left us samples of their work.³ As to the fifteenth century, the period which concerns us here, no estimate has yet been made, but there will probably not be less than a hundred poets, ranging from those with only one or two surviving poems to Guto'r Glyn with more than 120 and Lewys Glyn Cothi with around 238. The task of editing this material has been going on for over a century. A milestone was reached in 1952 with the publication of Thomas Parry's *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym* (Caerdydd, 1952). This work set the pattern, and over the years a number of high quality editions have appeared, the most significant being Dafydd Johnston's *Gwaith Iolo Goch* (Caerdydd, 1988) and *Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi* (Caerdydd, 1995). In the 1990s the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, having completed a seven-volume edition of the poetry of the

¹ This paper is intended to convey to an audience with little or no previous acquaintance with medieval Welsh poetry some of the possibilities which this very large body of writings has for the historian.

² Aberystwyth, NLW Peniarth 70 and 109 are collections of the works of Lewys Glyn Cothi, in his own hand; Peniarth 67 contains mainly poetry by Hywel Dafí, again in his own hand. Other manuscripts probably belonged to patrons and contain autograph poems by numerous authors, for instance Peniarth 54. The earliest manuscript containing poems by Guto'r Glyn, the subject of this study, is Peniarth 57 (c.1440), but it does not include any of his poems concerning the war in France.

³ See Barry J. Lewis and Twm Morys (eds.), *Gwaith Madog Benfras ac Eraill o Feirdd y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Ddeg* (Aberystwyth, 2007), pp. 1–7, for a complete list.

Welsh princes (c.1100–c.1282) turned to a systematic programme of editing later medieval poetry. The resulting series *Beirdd yr Uchelwyr*, or ‘Poets of the Nobility’, now contains some 36 volumes, over eighty poets and some 44,000 lines of verse from the period between about 1300 and about 1550. And most recently of all, medieval Welsh poetry has gone electronic with the launch of the Dafydd ap Gwilym website based at Swansea University.⁴ In the next few years the new Guto’r Glyn website planned by the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies will continue this trend, and it is to Guto’r Glyn that this paper will be devoted.

Welshmen in the Hundred Years’ War

Although the task of editing is far from complete, enough of the archive has now been opened up to allow us to start asking interesting questions of it. My aim here is to demonstrate the kind of questioning which might be possible by looking at only one topic into which the poetry might offer us an entrance. What can the poetry tell us about the attitudes of the Welsh élite to the English wars in France between 1337 and 1453 – the so-called Hundred Years’ War – and particularly the final part of the wars, the struggle for control of Normandy in the 1430s and 1440s? What is the potential – and also the limitations – of the poetry as a source? Can it tell us how far the leaders of Welsh society identified with the English cause in these wars?

Admittedly, most of the answer to this question is not going to be found in poetry, however interesting it might be. Most of the answer will be found in the surviving records of the English government, which allow us to establish exactly who went to fight in France in the various campaigns. Several scholars have gone looking for Welshmen in these records, notably Howell T. Evans and Tony Carr, and recently Adam Chapman.⁵ They have discovered that many Welshmen did indeed fight in France with the English armies. Some of them even became prominent captains, and two of these will concern us here, for they were also patrons of Guto’r Glyn. Sir Richard Gethin of Builth served in the 1420s and 1430s. He was present at the crucial siege of Orléans in 1429. Later in the 1430s he commanded the strategically important town of Mantes, between Rouen and Paris. Even better known was Mathew Gough, originally from Maelor in northeast Wales. Gough took part in the conquest of Maine in the 1420s, and when Henry VI decided to restore Maine to Charles VII in

⁴ <www.dafyddapgwilym.net>. This edition, overseen by Dafydd Johnston, is bilingual with full English translations of the poems.

⁵ Howell T. Evans, *Wales and the Wars of the Roses* (Cambridge, 1915), especially Chapter III ‘Wales and the French Wars—Mathew Gough’; A. D. Carr, ‘Welshmen and the Hundred Years’ War’, *Welsh History Review*, 4 (1968–9), 21–46. Adam Chapman is engaged in a Ph.D. thesis on the subject and is a research assistant for the extremely valuable ‘The Medieval Soldier’ project based at Southampton University, which is creating an online database of the English soldiers of the period (see <www.medievalsoldier.org>).

1447, he chose Gough to oversee the transfer of the capital, Le Mans. Gough was almost killed at Formigny in 1450, the battle which ended English rule in Normandy.⁶

Individuals like Mathew Gough in particular became famous enough to be written about by contemporary chroniclers. Of them we can know something, both concerning their actions and a little of what contemporary ‘public opinion’ thought of them. But the bulk of the soldiers who fought in France are for us names and nothing more. Though the records can give us names, they cannot tell us about attitudes. Fortunately another Welsh soldier, one who was in France at the same time as Richard Gethin and Mathew Gough, can take us into domains not accessible through documentary records. In the list of archers who went to France with the duke of York in 1441, we find the name *Gitto Glyn*.⁷ This is Guto’r Glyn, a professional praise-poet; in fact, the best-known and most significant Welsh poet of the fifteenth century. It is due to his presence in France that it will be possible to spend this paper looking at contemporary views about service in France: in particular, the nature of Welsh participation in the war and the allegiances of Guto’s patrons, especially with regard to the English polity in whose name the war was fought.

Contextualising the poetry of Guto’r Glyn

As with any potential historical source, it is necessary to understand the nature, context and purpose of Guto’r Glyn’s poetry before it can safely be interpreted, and since the Welsh tradition of praise-poetry is a closed book to the great majority of people, I propose to give a fairly detailed description here. Most of the Welsh poetry of the later Middle Ages is praise-poetry, and it was composed for the property-owning section of Welsh society, the so-called *uchelwyr* (literally ‘high men’). These men could vary from great lords such as William Herbert of Raglan, who eventually became earl of Pembroke, down to minor local gentry and even parish priests. This disparate group was united by the marks of *uchelwr*-status, namely ownership of land and the essential requirement to know one’s own lineage, for lineage determined inheritance. Naturally status involved also material prosperity: comfortable houses, good food and drink, luxurious clothing, the consumption of expensive, often imported, goods. Much has been written on the values of the English aristocracy and gentry of this time, and it carries over virtually seamlessly to Wales. Above all else, social pressures demanded that men preserve their honour, or *worship*, as it was often known in the English of the time.⁸ Bravery in battle, justice in administration,

⁶ For the careers of these two men see Evans (previous note), and for Gough’s role in the tortuous transfer of Maine, see R. A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI* (2nd edn., Stroud, 1998), pp. 499–506.

⁷ TNA E101/53/33, m 2, col. 1, line 35. We owe this discovery to the researches of a member of our project team, Eurig Salisbury. A reproduction of this section of the list is to be found in Eurig Salisbury, *Ar Drywydd Guto’r Glyn ap Siancyn y Glyn* (Aberystwyth, 2007), frontispiece.

⁸ See Michael Hicks, *English Political Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 2002), pp. 17–19. There are several near-equivalent Welsh words, including *braint*, though that word has a more precise meaning in legal contexts (one’s legal status), *urddas* and *anrhydedd*.

liberality in spending, keeping one's word: all of these counted towards maintaining one's standing in society. But for the Welsh *uchelwyr*, these values were reinforced by more than the largely inarticulate processes of social pressure. They were put into words by a class of professional poets, who travelled from house to house, praising the *uchelwyr* for upholding these values; and, occasionally, attacking them when they did not. Indeed, at least by the fifteenth century, it seems to have been all but a social requirement for *uchelwyr* to welcome poets into their houses. It is their beholdenness to this poetry, rather than any difference in values, which distinguishes the Welsh *uchelwyr* from the equivalent social groups in England. So in Wales, when we're looking for an articulation of social values, we do not need to turn to less explicit sources, such as imaginative literature. Instead we can find those values made plain for us to see in specific, individually tailored praise-poems to real men and women.

But in Wales there is a further complication. It was a conquered country. The conquest had taken more than two centuries, but by the early 1280s it was complete, and the revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr in 1400 could not reverse it. Wales was divided: about half belonged directly to the English Crown, the rest was divided into the so-called Marcher Lordships and was held by major English nobles. Many English settlers came to Wales in these centuries, and many of the administrative positions in Wales came to be held by Englishmen. This was aggravated by the response to the revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr. Laws were passed which banned Welshmen from holding official posts in Wales (albeit that enforcement was another matter). So the Welsh *uchelwyr* of Guto'r Glyn's time were in a paradoxical situation, one familiar enough in a colonial context. Within their own communities, they were leaders, protectors, and also oppressors: men with power. But they themselves were precariously situated underneath yet higher powers, the marcher lords and the English king and their officials. For their part, the English rulers had to come to terms with the *uchelwyr*. They could not administer Wales, collect rents and dues, recruit Welsh soldiers for their wars, or keep the peace without the cooperation of the *uchelwyr*. Naturally the Welsh landowners used this fact to reinforce their dominance over their own communities. But there was still the nagging question of their *worship*. Was honour compatible with the often denigrating inferiority which Welshmen were consigned to? This question was not resolved in our period, and it forms a fault-line which runs through the poetry.⁹

⁹ There is a large literature on this subject. See Glyn Roberts, *Aspects of Welsh History* (Cardiff, 1969), especially 'Wales and England: Antipathy and Sympathy 1282–1485', pp. 295–318; Rees Davies, 'Race Relations in Post-Conquest Wales: Confrontation and Compromise', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1975), 32–56, and his *The Age of Conquest: Wales 1063–1415* (Oxford, 1987), especially chapters 15–17. Specifically on poetic responses, see David Johnston, 'Iolo Goch and the English: Welsh Poetry and Politics in the Fourteenth Century', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 12 (winter 1986), 73–98.

The involvement of Guto'r Glyn in the war in France

Many of Guto'r Glyn's early patrons lived in marcher lordships which belonged to Richard duke of York (*ob.* 1460). They served the duke in various capacities in their local areas. In 1436, and again in 1441, Richard duke of York led expeditions to Normandy. Normandy had been in English hands since the early 1420s, but after the English advance failed before Orléans in 1429, the duchy came under increasing pressure from the resurgent French. Armies were sent from England almost every year to supplement the garrison troops in Normandy. I believe that Guto'r Glyn went on both of the duke's expeditions, but unfortunately we have a full list of soldiers only for the second one.¹⁰ It is not practical to present here all of the arguments for the reconstruction of Guto's military career which will be followed in this paper, but I hope to do so elsewhere in the near future.¹¹ There is, in short, evidence in his poems that he was in France in 1436 as well as his externally evidenced presence in 1441, and that evidence will emerge from the discussion as it develops below.

It was one of the local *uchelwyr* who served the duke of York who recruited Guto'r Glyn for his army. Henry Griffith of Bacton in Herefordshire was an early patron of Guto'r Glyn. Our evidence for his role in recruiting the poet comes from Guto himself, albeit some decades after the event. Guto recalled the favour after Henry Griffith died (1467×77):

Dug fi at y dug of Iorc
Dan amod cael deunawmore.¹²

*He took me to the duke of York
With the promise of getting eighteen marks.*

The eighteen marks must have been Guto's salary, but for what period of service is uncertain. Guto's military service in France is directly reflected in some five poems, listed below in what is argued here to be their chronological order:

- 1) Praise for Mathew Gough, probably 1436
'Pan sonier i'n amser ni' (GGI² poem iii)
- 2) Praise for Richard Gethin, probably 1437
'Oer oedd weled urddolion' (GGI² poem i)

¹⁰ Above, note 6.

¹¹ The previous account is Saunders Lewis, 'Gyrfa Filwrol Guto'r Glyn' in J. E. Caerwyn Williams (ed.), *Ysgrifau Beirniadol IX* (Dinbych, 1976), pp. 80–99, which however is wildly speculative. 1436 and 1441 are the only occasions when Guto'r Glyn can be credibly shown to have been in France, and neither period of service was likely to have lasted for long.

¹² John Llywelyn Williams and Ifor Williams (eds.), *Gwaith Guto'r Glyn* (Caerdydd, 1939; 2nd edn., 1961), lxxxiii.23–4, from here on referred to as GGI². All subsequent quotations from Guto'r Glyn will be from this edition. The Guto'r Glyn project (see above) will establish a new critical edition with English translation in the next few years.

- 3) Praise for Richard Gethin's gift to Guto'r Glyn (by Ieuan ap Hywel Swrdwal), probably 1437
'Mawr y sonian' amdanaw'¹³
- 4) Gratitude for the freedom of Richard Gethin, probably 1437
'Y mae glaw am a glywais' (GGI² poem ii)
- 5) Thomas ap Watkin's drinking contest, 1441
'Teimlwr gwŷr, teml iôr gwiwrent' (GGI² poem iv)

One poem in the list is actually by a different poet, Ieuan ap Hywel Swrdwal, but it tells us a great deal about Guto's relationship with Sir Richard Gethin and so will also be discussed here.

It is likely that the poem for Mathew Gough was composed in France in 1436, though we cannot rule out the possibility that it was written in Wales after Guto returned home. But it certainly reflects the events of 1436, a time of deep crisis for English Normandy.¹⁴ The English had just lost their main ally, John duke of Burgundy, and their leader, John duke of Bedford (*ob.* 1435). At the end of 1435 the peasantry of eastern Normandy revolted and the English lost control of many areas. Then at the end of January 1436 a French force under the famous generals La Hire and Poton de Xaintrailles reached Rouen, the capital of Normandy. But they found the city on guard, and so retreated to Ry, some 10 miles east. On 2 February the garrison of Rouen made a sally and routed them. It was not until 7 June 1436 that Richard, duke of York arrived in Normandy with reinforcements. His troops proceeded to reduce the rebellious countryside around Rouen, and the crisis came to an end with the capital once again secure. It cannot yet be shown that Mathew Gough took part in the February campaign near Rouen, but that is the most likely explanation for the fact that Guto'r Glyn's praise of Mathew Gough relates to an action fought near Rouen:

Pan fu ymgyrchu gorchest
Ym min Rôn, â'i wayw mewn rest,
La Her a roes law i hwn,
Felly gwnâi betai Botwn.¹⁵

*When the contest was being fought
At the edge of Rouen, with his [MG's] spear in its rest,
La Hire yielded to him,
Even Poton would have done the same.*

And there are clear indications that this was a time of crisis:

¹³ Dylan Foster Evans (ed.), *Gwaith Hywel Swrdwal a'i Deulu* (Aberystwyth, 2000), poem 24; from here on referred to as GHS.

¹⁴ The following reconstruction of events follows A. J. Pollard, *John Talbot and the War in France, 1427–1453* (London and New Jersey, 1983), pp. 21–5.

¹⁵ GGI² iii.15–18.

Gwayw a chorff Mathau Goch hael
A gyfyd Lloegr o’u gafael ...
F’enaïd wrth ein rhaid yn Rhôn.¹⁶

*It is noble Mathew Gough’s spear and body
Which will rescue England from their grasp ...
My dear friend in our hour of need in Rouen.*

In all likelihood Guto arrived that July with the duke’s army, in time to hear of the action while memories were still relatively fresh. It was also during 1436 that Guto met Sir Richard Gethin, who commanded important garrisons on the frontier between English-held Normandy and the Paris region. Richard Gethin rewarded the poet with a golden cloak, and when he returned home Guto spread his praises around Wales, as was expected of him. This would have been in 1437 in all likelihood. At least one of the poems Guto composed to celebrate Richard Gethin in Wales has survived, the second item in the list given above. It is, however, from another poet that we learn about the fine cloak which Guto earned. Ieuan ap Hywel Swrdwal, in a poem which echoes some of the phrasing of Guto’s own poem (and which can therefore be shown to be a contemporary reaction to it), congratulated both poet and patron (poem three in the list). Ieuan’s source of information about Richard Gethin’s exploits was clearly Guto himself. Here we can see the way in which poets could act as news-carriers, telling people back home how the war was going:

Mae ei glod fal rhod y rhôm:
Y Guto a’i dug atom ...
Aeth yma fal gwaith amod
Mab Siancyn y Glyn â’r glod.¹⁷

*His [Richard Gethin’s] praises roll like a wheel between him and us:
It was Guto who brought them to us ...
Siancyn y Glyn’s son, as if fulfilling a pledge,
Brought the praise here.*

The other poem to Richard Gethin, item four in the list, is not clearly dateable. Guto has heard a false rumour that Gethin had been captured, but it turns out not to be true, and the poet expresses his relief at the news and his hatred of the treacherous Normans who, in his view, invented such a malicious lie. By implication this poem again was probably composed in Wales, so in 1437 or not much later.¹⁸ The final poem in the list, to Thomas ap Watkin of Llanddewi Rhydderch in Gwent, was

¹⁶ GGI² iii.11–12, 23.

¹⁷ GHS 24.37–8, 41–2.

¹⁸ Richard Gethin disappears from the record after 1438. Other men are recorded in the posts which he formerly held in that year, see A. Marshall, ‘The Role of English War Captains in England and Normandy, 1436–1461’ (MA Wales [Swansea], 1975), pp. 240–1 for captains of Conches, pp. 258–9 for captains of Mantes. On present knowledge, therefore, none of the poetry discussed here is likely to date after 1438.

composed just before both men left for France. Since Thomas ap Watkin is also named in the muster roll of the 1441 expedition,¹⁹ it is likely that the poem belongs to the early part of that year (although there is nothing to disprove a connection with the 1436 expedition).

The allegiances of the poetry

There cannot be any doubt that, in the poems of Guto'r Glyn, England, *Lloegr*, commands the proper allegiance of Welshmen. We have already seen Guto's belief that Mathew Gough would rescue *England's* cause from the French. And he calls Richard Gethin 'England's lion, and its hand, and its eye' (*Llew Lloegr a'i llaw a'i llygad*, GGI² i.39). Technically and legally Wales, both March and Principality, lay outside the realm of England. Yet by Guto'r Glyn's time this was already something of an anachronism. His patrons were very clearly knocking on the doors of the English ruling élite, demanding entry in a loud voice.²⁰ When the poets make this kind of positive reference to England, that is one sign of this development. At the same time, Guto'r Glyn is very careful – we might say punctilious – to insist on his patrons' Welsh identity and loyalties. So Richard Gethin is 'the gem of all Wales' (*gem ar holl Gymry*, GGI² i.42) and 'the flower of Wales' (*blodeuyn Cymru*, GGI² ii.11), and his alleged capture by the French is described as 'misery for Wales' (*adwyth i Gymru*, GGI² ii.19). As for Mathew Gough, 'the Welshmen who love him' were sad when he was imprisoned by the French in 1432 (*Trist fu y Cymry a'i câr*, GGI² iii.46). Gough was back in action by the time Guto'r Glyn met him (in 1436, as argued above). The conclusion of the poem for him is very instructive:

Cymro da ei Gymræg
Cymered air Cymru deg;
A gair Ffrainc, lle gorffer och,
A gair Lloegr i'r gŵr lliwgoch.²¹

*A Welshman who speaks good Welsh,
Let him receive the pledge of fair Wales;
And the pledge of France, when men are forced to groan,
And the pledge of England for the red-haired man.*

The emphasis on Gough's Welshness reaches a peak of insistence here. Indeed it is hard to recall any other patron of Guto'r Glyn's whose Welsh credentials needed this amount of boosting. And if we turn what Ieuan ap Hywel Swrdwal had to say after Guto returned to Wales, I think we can see why. Ieuan calls Richard Gethin 'Wales' delight' (*gwynfyd Cymru*, GHS 24.67): so far, so uncontroversial. But he does not

¹⁹ As demonstrated in Salisbury, *Ar Drywydd Guto'r Glyn ap Siancyn y Glyn*, p. 16.

²⁰ The career of William Herbert, first earl of Pembroke (*ob.* 1469) is the clearest example. See D. H. Thomas, *The Herberts of Raglan and the Battle of Edgecote 1469* (Enfield, 1994).

²¹ GGI² iii.61–4.

mention England at all. His explanation of why Richard Gethin is in France is an exercise in saying as little as possible:

Am goron yn ymguraw
Y meistr oedd yn y maes draw.²²

*Exchanging blows for the sake of a crown:
That was the master's work over there on the field of battle.*

And there are a couple of dark hints in his poem of different allegiances. For Ieuan remembers Richard Gethin's father, Rhys Gethin; and Rhys Gethin had been a prominent rebel under Owain Glyn Dŵr:

Ei dad a dorrai siad Sais.²³
His father would crack an English skull.

And perhaps, just perhaps, Richard Gethin might follow in his father's footsteps:

Ef a ddaw, nid wyf addáin,
Ryw dro i Gymry druain
Â dydd da wrth dorri dur,
O bai raid, ail Beredur.²⁴

*One day (I am not ignorant of this)
He will come to the luckless Welsh
Bringing a good day of smashing steel,
If need arise, a second Perceval.*

This is all very vague. The nature of the 'need' in the last line is left unsaid, but in conjunction with the praise for Rhys Gethin, it is difficult to regard the meaning as more than thinly veiled. It should be remembered that there was a persistent tradition of prophecy poetry in late medieval Wales. The common theme of the surviving prophecy poems (which number in the hundreds) is that some kind of redeemer will come to rescue the Welsh from servitude and dishonour. This will involve the defeat of the English, and even their expulsion from the island of Britain which they illegitimately occupy. Undoubtedly Ieuan ap Hywel Swrdwal is referring to this kind of belief, and at least hinting that Richard Gethin might be the man, the *Mab Darogan* or 'Son of Prophecy'.²⁵ There is no sign of this kind of discontent in Guto'r Glyn's poems for Richard Gethin or Mathew Gough, but it is very possible that the emphasis

²² GHS 24.23–4.

²³ GHS 24.32. For the career of Rhys Gethin, see Cledwyn Fychan, *Pwy Oedd Rhys Gethin? Yr Ymchwil am Gadfridog Owain Glyndŵr* (Aberystwyth, 2007).

²⁴ GHS 24.19–22.

²⁵ There is a convenient and valuable account in English of Welsh prophecy in Gruffydd Aled Williams, 'The Bardic Road to Bosworth: A Welsh View of Henry Tudor', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1986), 7–31.

on Welshness in all three of them anticipates the kind of sentiments expressed by Ieuan ap Hywel Swrdwal. ‘National’ feeling in late medieval Welsh poetry is a complex, layered and ultimately inconsistent concept, and the poets had to pick their way carefully through it. Many of Guto’r Glyn’s early patrons came from families and affinities which had opposed the rebellion of Owain Glyn Dŵr at the beginning of the century.²⁶

And yet, it is intriguing to find that these positive feelings for *Lloegr* are not always present in Guto’s later poetry. Guto’s involvement in the war may not have lasted beyond 1441/2, and he lived on for several decades after the French wars had ended. Those years witnessed civil war, a division of loyalties and the rise of a Welshman and patron of Guto’s, William Herbert of Raglan, to overwhelming authority in Wales. Summoned to parliament as a lord in 1453, Herbert was the first Welshman of full blood to receive an earldom (1468). In these very different circumstances, *Lloegr* was an entity to be challenged:

Dwg Forgannwg a Gwynedd,
Gwna’n un o Gonwy i Nedd.
O digia Lloegr a’i dugiaid,
Cymry a dry yn dy raid.²⁷

*Take Glamorgan and Gwynedd,
Make it all one from the Conwy to the Nedd.
If England and its dukes object,
Wales will come to your need.*

Challenged, but also feared: what will happen to Herbert while he is absent in London, in *Lloegr*?

Od aeth atunt i Lundain,
Argelwch mawr i’r gwalch main.
Ofni ydd wyf, oni ddêl,
Drac Hensiest a’i drwg honsel.
Ofni Lloegr a’m f’un llygad,
A’i bribwyr oll yn bwrw brad.²⁸

*If he has gone to them in London,
May the slender hawk have good protection.
I’m afraid, unless he returns,
Of the ways of Hengest and his wicked backhanders.
I am afraid of England on account of that man who is my one eye,*

²⁶ The Havards of Brecon, for instance, or the descendants of Dafydd Gam of Brecon. The latter’s daughter married Sir William ap Thomas of Raglan, a councillor of the duke of York and an early patron of Guto’r Glyn.

²⁷ GGI² xlviii.67–70.

²⁸ GGI² l.17–22.

And afraid of all its bribers plotting treachery.

There is no straightforward Welsh attitude to things English in this poetry. Indeed, the more I considered this problem in working on this paper, the more difficult it has seemed to justify the title which I chose at the beginning. ‘Englishness’, in particular, is not a useful term. We need to recognise three different entities which we can call ‘English’. The first is the Crown, to which Welshmen owed allegiance; questioning of that allegiance is exceptionally rare in the poetry. Guto’r Glyn himself talks of ‘wearing on my breast the arms of my king’ (... *dwyn ... Ar fy mron arfau ’mrenin*, GGI² xlvii.41–2). It is hard to exaggerate the degree to which the late medieval poets accept the authority of the English Crown. There are indeed poems in praise of individual kings.²⁹ Patrons are commended for their loyalty and service to the Crown. It is even possible to argue that the prophecy poems reinforce the concept of the Crown, for their demand is either for the recognition of a Welsh ruler in proper subordination to the Crown of Britain (silently taken to be the same thing as the Crown of England), or more radically to see a Welshman taking that Crown.

The second entity is the realm of England, often deliberately confused with *Prydain*, Britain. Increasingly with time the poetry talks positively about *Lloegr*, England. *Lloegr* is the political entity, the realm over which the wearer of the Crown is rightful king. Seen in this light, Welshmen such as Richard Gethin or William Herbert can be defenders of *Lloegr*. But, seen as the country of the English people, *Lloegr* is still a negative concept, a threat and a source of dishonour for Welshmen. For the third entity, the English people themselves, are still the enemy. Dislike of the English can take the form of casual contempt. Here, for instance, is Guto’r Glyn praising one of his patrons for owning a book in the Welsh language:

Llyfr eto yn llaw Frytwn,
Llin Hors ni ddarllenai hwn.³⁰

*And another book in the hand of a Briton (i.e. Welshman),
Horsa’s descendants couldn’t read this.*

But feelings could run deeper. On another occasion, Guto addresses a different patron of his whose hand had been cut off for striking another man at Edward IV’s court. ‘It was a strong hand against England’, the poet insists (*Llaw gref yn erbyn Lloegr oedd*, GGI² xxxix.22). Moreover:

Ni thorrem yn y Cemais
Dy law, Siôn, er dulio Sais.
Ni rôi Bowys y bys bach
Er naw-Sais a’u harneisiach.³¹

²⁹ Guto’r Glyn himself addresses Edward IV (GGI² poem lix). A century earlier Iolo Goch addressed Edward III. See Dafydd Johnston (ed.), *Gwaith Iolo Goch* (Caerdydd, 1988), poem i.

³⁰ GGI² cxviii.51–2.

*We wouldn't have cut off your hand, Siôn,
In Cemais for striking an Englishman.
Powys wouldn't surrender even the little finger
For nine Englishmen and all their gear.*

And at other times the dislike can be virulent:

Gwenwyn gantun' ugeinwaith
Gael yn iarll ŵr glew o'n iaith.³²

*It's poison for them [the English] twenty times over,
To have as an earl a brave man of our tongue/nation.*

That is what Guto'r Glyn says about English resentment at the rise of William Herbert to an earldom. The poem, which dates to the last year of Herbert's life, reads all too presciently when we recall that Herbert's rise did indeed lead to great resentment on the part of Richard Neville, earl of Warwick, and Edward IV's brother George duke of Clarence. In July 1469 these men would condemn Herbert to execution, though whether Herbert's Welsh ancestry, rather than his influence with the king, played a part in their resentment is questionable. But it is typical of the attitude of medieval Welsh poetry that such complex powerplays tend to be reduced to a simple national dichotomy between Welsh and English. It is noticeable that even though men such as Mathew Gough may be praised for fighting for *Lloegr*, Guto'r Glyn does not actually mention that they fought alongside *Saeson*, Englishmen. Perhaps that would be too much to stomach.

The war in France is only a small part of the story of Welsh attitudes to things 'English' in the fifteenth century. We have seen that the war may have been a focus of unity: Guto'r Glyn's early poetry certainly identifies with *Lloegr* as the cause for which he fought in Normandy. And one sign of increasing integration between the identities of Welsh *uchelwyr* and Englishmen is the Welsh community adopting the same common enemies as the English. The most obvious enemy is the French, though they are actually the least demonised. France, in Guto'r Glyn's words, is 'the rich country' (*y wlad oludawg*, GGI² i.18). French generals are called by their names and maintain a chivalric identity as worthy opponents:

La Her a roes law i hwn,
Felly gwnâi betai Botwn.³³

*La Hire acknowledged his supremacy,
Even Poton would have done the same.*

³¹ GGI² xxxix.29–32.

³² GGI² l.25–6.

³³ GGI² iii.17–18.

Even Ieuan ap Hywel Swrdwal acknowledges, almost in passing, that Richard Gethin ‘would put a bridle on a Frenchman’ (*ffrwynai Ffranc*, GHS 24.15). But there is in general surprisingly little interest in the French as an enemy. The Scots and the Irish, on the other hand, are subhuman, just as they are in contemporary English propaganda. There is absolutely no concept of solidarity with them in the poetry: Celticness is a modern concept.³⁴ Equally, the poets share the English obsession with aliens, foreigners within the realm. The records of fifteenth century England are full of deeply xenophobic references to aliens within the kingdom,³⁵ and the Welsh borrowed both the word and the sentiment. Here is Guto’r Glyn, after the execution of William Herbert:

Doed aliwns, nis didolir,
O dôn’, pwy a’u lludd i dir?³⁶

*Let aliens come, they won’t be banished,
If they come, who now will stop them from landing?*

The exaggerated gesture of despair (*après lui, le déluge!*) is a topos of medieval Welsh elegies, but the very ease with which the topos could be adapted to the current obsession with foreigners simply underlines how deeply the Welshman shared the English obsession with aliens (though in England Guto might have been considered an alien himself!).³⁷

Conclusion: late medieval Welsh poetry and nationality

So far we have seen that late medieval Welsh poetry can tell us something about political attitudes. Precisely whose attitudes we are encountering is a question which presents itself: those of individual poets, of the poetic order (if such a monolithic entity existed) or of the patrons who paid for the poetry? That Guto’r Glyn was not a mere cypher of his patrons is amply indicated by such poems as GGI² poem xlvi, in which he acts as a spokesman for the gentry of north Wales, pleading with the

³⁴ Cf. Johnston, ‘Iolo Goch and the English: Welsh Poetry and Politics in the Fourteenth Century’, 87–9; Proinsias Mac Cana, ‘Ireland and Wales in the Middle Ages: An Overview’ in Karen Jankulak and Jonathan M. Wooding (eds.), *Ireland and Wales in the Middle Ages* (Dublin, 2007), pp. 26–8.

³⁵ See Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI*, pp. 167–71.

³⁶ GGI² liii.75–6.

³⁷ Anti-alien legislation passed by the English parliament specifically excluded the Welsh from the definition of an alien, since they were subjects of the English Crown. See Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI*, p. 168. Yet the mere fact that this had to be stated underlines the ambiguous status of Welshmen, half-integrated into and half-excluded from the English polity. In a poem in which he describes his adventures droving sheep from Merioneth to the English Midlands, Guto mentions Englishmen mocking his language as one of the many inconveniences which he suffered (GGI² xxxi.44).

victorious William Herbert to spare their homes and bodies from his vengeance,³⁸ or by GG² poem lxxxii, a barbed and presumably highly embarrassing assault on Henry Griffith for his reluctance adequately to reward his poets. This is a question which requires further consideration, and with regard to other poets of the period as well. It is also a question which is unlikely to be answered to everyone's satisfaction, for we possess only (a selection of) poetic texts, not direct evidence for what audiences and patrons thought of them. But rather than exploring this problem further, I want to devote the last section of this paper to thinking about a more fundamental limitation of the poetry as a source for medieval nationality in particular, namely that the degree of its investment in nationality is open to debate. For a start, the war in France is not actually a major theme for the poets. Welsh poetry, after all, is overwhelmingly concerned with what went on at home, not the occasional adventure on the Continent. But the fundamental problem is the nature of Welsh poetry, its functions and its genres. Quite simply, nationality is not the prime concern. It *is* a fault-line running through the poetry, but it is rarely what the poets were aiming primarily to talk about. In this sense, our readings of medieval nationality have much in common with, say, gendered or ecocritical readings. That is, they interrogate the texts for concerns which were not necessarily explicit concerns either of the authors or of their audience. This *is* legitimate, but we should be aware that when we first posit nationality as our theme, and only then ask what the texts have to say about it, we are reading anachronistically.

What really matters in medieval Welsh praise-poetry is personal honour. This is required by the nature of the medium: to compose a poem of praise for someone, or alternatively to patronise a poem of praise for oneself, forged a social bond between patron and poet which was demonstrated by the public performance of the poem. The act of patronage itself was a sign of the patron's honour, while the poet's acceptance of that patronage indicated that the patron was indeed worthy. Service and personal honour, therefore, were the subjects of the poetry. Guto'r Glyn does not really praise his patrons for fighting in France. He praises them for fighting at all. Any enemy will do, really, so long as his patrons can fulfil their roles as men of honour and chivalry and prove their loyalty to their own lords. That also is how Ieuan ap Hywel Swrddwal can praise Richard Gethin for fighting the French – on the English side – and immediately afterwards praise his father for smashing English skulls, in the same poem. What matters is the performance:

Ni throes ei gefn ar efnys –
Naddo 'rïoed, led ei droed, Rys.³⁹

*Rhys never turned his back on an enemy –
No indeed, never, he did not retreat even one step.*

³⁸ The occasion was Herbert's capture of Harlech Castle in 1468 and the subsequent crushing of the last Lancastrian resistance to Edward IV in north Wales.

³⁹ GHS 24.33–4.

One can read hundreds of medieval Welsh praise poems, and always the ethos is recognisable. The poets are frankly obsessive in their viewing of the world through the prism of their patron's honour and well-being, his *worship*. The political context in which the patron performs his proper social role is a deeply subordinate issue, so long as he does perform it, and so long as that political context allows him to.

The last of Guto'r Glyn's poems on the war well illustrates these points. Early in 1441, probably, Guto called on a patron of his named Thomas ap Watkin. Both Guto himself, and Thomas ap Watkin, were due to join the duke of York's army in France in a matter of weeks. Guto suggests a drinking competition. Let us, he says, set the French wines out on the table: they can be the French leaders, the Dauphin, La Hire, Poton de Xaintrailles. And we, the poets, will be the other side. The poets give their war-cry – 'St George' – and the wines reply with 'St Denis'. In his study of Guto'r Glyn, the critic and nationalist politician Saunders Lewis was provoked by these lines into making this bitter comment:

... yr oedd digon eto'n fyw ym Mhowys ac yng Ngwent a glywsai 'Sain Siôr' yn atseinio ar ddygwyl y sant, Ebrill 23, 1406, pan laddwyd dros fil o fyddin Glyndŵr a mab i'r tywysog yn eu plith. 'Dyw disgybl Llywelyn ab y Moel yn cofio dim am hynny.⁴⁰

... *there were many still alive in Powys and in Gwent who had heard the cry of 'St George' echoing on the saint's own day, 23 April 1406, when over a thousand men of [Owain] Glyndŵr's army were killed, his own son among them. The pupil of Llywelyn ab y Moel [Guto'r Glyn] doesn't recall any of this.*

This poem should offer a warning against placing too great an emphasis on nationality as a factor in late medieval Welsh writing. Saunders Lewis himself goes on to put his finger on the vital point:

Mae'r cywydd i Domas ap Watkin Fychan yn cyhoeddi'n ddigri ac yn orfoleddus y nwyfiant a'r asbri a'r direidi dibris a oedd yn gyrru'r bardd yn ôl at Fathau Goch a'r *Duke of York*.⁴¹

The poem to Thomas ap Watkin conveys ... the excitement, the high spirits and heedless sense of fun which drove the poet back to Mathew Gough and the duke of York.

This is the ethos of medieval chivalry. It is a warrior code. War is noble, and men are supposed to fight and to enjoy fighting. The most important value, much more than any national abstraction, is personal loyalty to one's lord. Look at what Guto says to Thomas ap Watkin:

⁴⁰ Lewis, 'Gyrfa Filwrol Guto'r Glyn', p. 88.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Onid ei yno, nid af!⁴²
If you don't go, I won't either!

So much for duty to the Crown! Guto is joking, of course, but the nature of the joke is revealing about the importance of the personal bond. We have already seen that it was through his personal bond with a patron, Henry Griffith, that Guto came to join the army in the first place. Again, the only time when Guto's Glyn uses truly harsh language of the Normans is when he wrongly believes that his patron, Richard Gethin, had been captured:

Taeru a wnâi'r traeturiaid,
Trwst i'n plith er tristáu'n plaid.⁴³

*The traitors' claims were all noise
Spread amongst us to our dismay.*

These lines are followed by a long diatribe against the Normans as liars and cowards, 'little dogs' utterly unfit to contend with a 'ruddy stag' like Richard Gethin (GGI² ii.54). There is nothing so harsh as the language in this poem in any of the others. It took the endangering of a personal bond to extract from Guto's Glyn this level of xenophobic anger. One might compare the outpouring of anti-English rage at the execution of William Herbert in 1469.⁴⁴

The ethos of chivalry is deeply foreign to twenty-first century Western readers. Anyone who doubts this should read carefully Guto's Glyn's poem for Mathew Gough (GGI² poem iii). Gough is praised precisely for *not* being a cautious warrior:

Gŵr antur ydyw'r mur mau,
Gwŷr antur a gân yntau.⁴⁵

*The wall which defends me is a man of daring,
And it's men of daring whom he loves too.*

Never mind that Mathew Gough was in fact captured and held prisoner, an event referred to in lines 43ff. Evidently his ransom was paid, a matter which the poet regards as of no consequence for his hero, for Mathew does not care for 'coin' or 'worldly goods', preferring instead 'men and horses' (GGI² iii.53–6). War is a game to be enjoyed, like hunting:

⁴² GGI² iv.20.

⁴³ GGI² ii.29–30.

⁴⁴ Guto's Glyn's elegy for Herbert is GGI² poem liii, in which the English are 'traitors' (l.52). The poet Hywel Swrdwal urges vengeance on the English, who are 'lollards and traitors of old' and 'whoresons of Horsa and Hengest' (GHS 7.21, 38). There is much more in this vein by these and other poets.

⁴⁵ GGI² iii.33–4.

Heliant goed a heolydd,
(Ho-Hw, La Her) fal hely hydd.
Mair a ro hoedl i'm heryr,
Mathau, i warau â'i wŷr.⁴⁶

*They [Mathew Gough's men] hunt through woods and tracks,
'Halloo! La Hire!', like hunting a stag.
May Mary give long life to my eagle,
For Mathew and his men to have their sport.*

If it's not a game (*warau*), then it's a dance, 'a great dance all through Anjou and Maine' (*Dawns mawr ar hyd Ainsio a Maen*, GGI² iii.20). Huge numbers of ordinary people were slaughtered in these campaigns of deliberate devastation of the countryside, the notorious *chevauchées*. But there is total contempt for the ordinary people:

Gŵr yw o gorff ac arial,
Gwerin gwlad Dolffin a'i tâl.⁴⁷

*[Mathew Gough] is a man in body and courage:
It's the common folk of the Dauphin's land who pay the price.*

It is in the nature of late medieval Welsh poetry that it should overwhelmingly concentrate on the personal bond between poet and patron, and so that it should overwhelmingly emphasise personal honour over any other concern. It does not contain grand national manifestos or sweeping chronicles of national history – of whatever nation. The absence of such things is in effect generically determined. And given that a very great number of people devoted considerable resources to paying for this poetry, it has to be argued that it must reflect their true concerns. If national feeling is not as important as personal honour, then that should make us wary of turning nationality into the main concern of the poetry. The key point is this: for as long as the poets felt that their own personal patrons were getting the *worship* that they felt they deserved, then nationality is no more than a background issue. The problem of Welsh identity within an English polity could be left to one side, and indeed aspects at least of the English polity could be accepted as appropriate foci for Welshmen's allegiance. Maintaining the English cause in France offered men like Mathew Gough and Richard Gethin an opportunity to display their chivalry. It was only when the poets felt that their patrons were not being honoured properly that Welshness suddenly starts to grate against the English framework of politics, and bitterness comes to the surface. True the harmony was fragile. That much is clear from the mass of strongly anti-English prophetic poetry which survives from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The prophecies of a restoration of the Welsh to real

⁴⁶ GGI² iii.39–42.

⁴⁷ GGI² iii.51–2.

leadership, to at least the principedom of Wales, if not to a Crown of Britain itself, were potent. The semi-colonial position of the *uchelwyr* remained a source of poisonous tensions between Welsh and English. Too often, in their estimation, Welshmen did not receive the *worship* owing to them. So the bitterness could be extremely virulent, as has been seen in this paper, but it must be set alongside the abundant evidence that the Welsh élite identified many of their interests with the English polity, as indeed had been the case for centuries.

So is late medieval Welsh poetry actually a poor source for evaluating national feeling? This does not necessarily follow. Welshness is fundamental to the poetry. Without it, the poetry has no reason to exist. The poetry is the common articulation of a cultural community which shares a language. Moreover the Welsh/English interface is, as has already been stated, a faultline which runs through the work of poets like Guto'r Glyn. It is simply necessary for us to read with an awareness that the poets consistently interpret nationality in personal, individual terms. The well-being of its patrons, not an abstract national cause, is the rationale of the praise-poetry.