

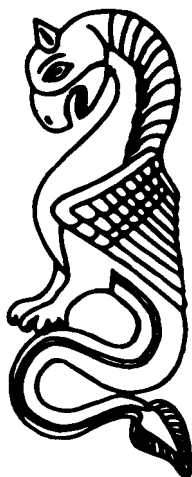
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## Article:

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## Dafydd ap Gwilym and Intertextuality

Helen Fulton

One of the unique aspects of Early English Literature and Language studies at the University of Sydney under the professorship of Leslie Rogers has been the promotion of modern English courses — including grammar and semiotics — alongside more traditional courses in Old and Middle English.<sup>1</sup> Such a combination has encouraged the practice of looking at medieval texts from the point of view of modern literary theory, rather than simply as philological curiosities or as 'words on the page' in need of close textual analysis. While acknowledging that the poems of Dafydd ap Gwilym amply reward a close reading, I would also suggest that a consideration of their wider social and literary context significantly expands the range of possible meanings available to us. The aim of this paper, then, is to examine the relationships between Dafydd's poems, other medieval literature, and contemporary Welsh society.

It is one of the central principles of current literary theory that texts construct their own reality.<sup>2</sup> This constructed reality refers only to other texts and not to the 'real world' outside literature. Something in a text can strike us as being 'true' because we know it has happened like that in other texts—books, poems, newspaper stories, TV documentaries, soap operas — and not necessarily because we know it happens like that in real life, from our own experience. An Emyr Humphreys novel such as *Flesh and Blood* (1974) can be described as 'realistic' in relation to the wider tradition of historical fiction, and in contrast to other non-realistic literary traditions such as medieval romance or folk-tale, the *Mabinogi*, for example. In other words, texts are defined in terms of other texts, not in terms of the real world that such texts supposedly reflect. This is the concept of *intertextuality*, the idea that texts refer only to each other and not directly to the real world.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of intertextuality operates equally well in the work of Dafydd ap Gwilym. The world constructed in the poems is not literally the real world of fourteenth-century Wales. Certainly, there are references to actual places, historical

people, material objects such as castles, jewellery, fur coats, musical instruments, not to mention the various species of birds and animals which inhabit the poems. Such things must actually have existed, concretely, in medieval Wales. But the meaning which they assume in the poems is constructed by the text itself, and by reference to other texts, rather than to the real historical world.

Let us consider a poem full of references to real places in Wales, *Taith i Garu* ('Journey for Love', *GDG*, 83).<sup>4</sup> The poet describes, in topographical detail, the overland journey he makes in order to meet his beloved, a journey which can easily be reconstructed by the modern reader with the help of an Ordnance Survey map. But readers and listeners of any period do not need to know or visualize the actual places of Celli Fledlyn, Pant Cwcell, Nant-y-Glo, and so on, in order to understand and interpret the poem. Taken by itself, the poem constructs a context for these places, makes them exist, and gives them a function quite independent of their topographical reality (their function being to emphasize the poet's effort to see his beloved, as a kind of humorous hyperbole); taken in relation to other texts, the poem is drawing on a literary convention in which real places are used to locate and explain a poetic or narrative experience. We can compare the listing of place-names during the episode of the hunting of the boar, Twrch Trwyth, in *Culhwch ac Olwen*,<sup>5</sup> which functions to dramatize the chase and indicate the extent of Arthur's domain; or the pairs of place-names used in the Harley Lyrics ('the wisest from Wirral to Wye')<sup>6</sup> to intensify the exceptional qualities of the poet's beloved. Such reference to other texts — intertextuality — is one of the most important ways by which meaning is constructed in individual texts.

Though many of Dafydd's poems can be read and appreciated in splendid isolation, some knowledge of other related texts is crucial to a full understanding of his achievement. Without the concept of intertextuality, the meaning of his poems cannot be completely realized. Each individual poem becomes more meaningful when read in relation to the others, and all the poems become more meaningful when read with reference to other literary texts.

We need to consider, then, the literary context from which Dafydd ap Gwilym composed his poems, and within which his poems made sense to his audiences. Another consideration is the position we, as modern readers, need to adopt to find the poems meaningful, a position from which the assumptions and attitudes of the poems are perceived as 'natural' or 'right' or even 'obvious'. Finally, I would like to demonstrate the importance of the historical context and how this can be used to help us understand the poems.

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There are three major areas from which Dafydd draws his poetic material. Firstly, there is the *cywydd* tradition of which he himself was a leading exponent.<sup>7</sup> The popularity of the *cywydd* metre rose as the old bardic order declined following the English conquest of Wales in 1282. Once the domain of lower-grade poets composing in an informal style, in contrast to the highbrow eulogies of the official court bards, the *cywydd* came to be the regular metre of the new 'all-purpose' poets such as Dafydd, who emerged after the conquest to serve the needs of the Welsh nobility under the Normans, the *uchelwyr*.

These poets could compose all types of verse, from the most formal eulogy to the most ribald anecdote, suiting the choice of metre and theme to particular audiences — influential patrons and their families, gatherings of other poets and peers, groups of clerics or monks wanting some secular entertainment. Though the *cywydd* was used for formal eulogy or religious verse, the majority of the numerous surviving *cywyddau* of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries take secular love as their theme. Another characteristic of this type of poem is that they were composed for 'courtly' audiences — the new Welsh nobility — and yet owe a large debt to the traditions of popular song, invariably oral and therefore inevitably lost.

The strictly regulated form of the *cywydd*, with seven syllables to each line, the alternation between a polysyllabic and monosyllabic rhyme word, and the use of strict *cynganedd* in every line, imposed significant constraints on the content, and in some measure dictated the characteristic style of *cywydd* poetry.<sup>8</sup> This is distinguished by its erratic syntactic flow, which sometimes proceeds undisturbed over several lines, sometimes breaks off for an intervening image or aside, sometimes is repeatedly and frequently ruptured by a virtually parallel syntactic structure moving along in alternate lines or half-lines. The pace of each poem is controlled by the skill of the poet, with varying degrees of success. But the demands of the metre require a great deal of ornamental and parenthetical words and phrases to supply the patterns of sound and rhyme fundamental to the *cywydd*. It is this factor which gives the *cywydd* its linguistic, aural, and thematic richness.

The tradition of the medieval *cywydd*, in its early flowering, is the main literary context for Dafydd's work. His skills as a *cywyddwr* have to be judged in relation to those of contemporary practitioners of the fourteenth century. In terms of meaning, his poems also have to be referred to the whole *cywydd* tradition, since his imagery, whether strikingly original or recognizably conventional, derives meaning from its difference from, or similarity to, other *cywydd* imagery. Furthermore, Dafydd's poems are self-referential, in that particular words or images or syntactic constructions acquire significance from the way Dafydd uses them: any

juxtaposition of the name *Dyddgu*, for example, with adjectives suggesting light or brilliance, immediately recalls similar juxtapositions in other poems, each one enhancing the strength of the others. When the same adjectives are then associated with the name or identity of another girl, the connotations of *Dyddgu*'s beauty and nobility are implicitly transferred to the new image.

The second area of intertextual reference is the old tradition of Welsh poetry which *Dafydd* and the *cywyddwyr* inherited from the *gogynfeirdd*, the court bards who dominated Welsh poetry before and during the English conquest of Wales.<sup>9</sup> From this tradition, *Dafydd* draws heroic references to warriors, the celebration of patriarchal virtues such as courage and leadership, the concept of the praise-poet who offers eulogies in return for payment, and, most fundamentally, the identity between ownership of land and ownership of women.

In the time of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century *gogynfeirdd*, when Wales was divided into separate kingdoms uneasily joined into shifting and unpredictable alliances, with each other and with the ever-encroaching Normans, ownership of land was the key to survival for the native Welsh dynasties. Along with their eulogies to individual princes and rulers, the *gogynfeirdd* celebrated the lands controlled by these rulers as an integral part of their identity and power. When they came to praise the beauty and nobility of the courtly women among their patrons, the poets often described them in close association with images of land and countryside. Women, too, were an important source of power and survival for patriarchal dynasties dependent on political alliances and the generation of heirs. In many cases, a prince who married into a wealthy family acquired not so much a wife as lands, possessions, and ultimately heirs, which would be crucial to his continued status.

It is not surprising, then, that we find many juxtaposed references to women and land in the praise poetry of the *gogynfeirdd*, for they both represent a significant and desirable kind of ownership. In *Hywel ab Owain Gwynedd*'s celebration of warrior ownership of North Wales, women are included at the end of a list of the natural advantages to be found in his principedom:

Caraf ei morfa a'i mynyddoedd  
A'i chaer ger ei choed a'i chain diroedd,  
A dolydd ei dwfr a'i dyffrynnoedd,  
A'i gwylain gwynnion a'i gwymp wragedd. (LH, p. 315)<sup>10</sup>

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I love its sea-border and its mountains, and its fortress near its woods and its fine lands, and its watered meadows and its valleys, and its white sea-gulls and its fair women.

At the beginning of his famous love-poem to Efa, daughter of Madog ap Maredudd, ruler of Powys, Cynddelw describes her as *cyfliw eiry gorwyn Gorwydd Epynt* (*LH*, p. 121), 'the same colour as bright snow on Gorwydd Epynt', linking the woman with the land to which she belongs, and which is also celebrated in the poem as an elaborate means of praising Madog, his patron. Another of the *gogynfeirdd*, Llywarch ap Llywelyn, weaves the imagery of battle and land together with love, three preoccupations central to the warrior aristocracy addressed by the court poets. He sends a stag as a love-messenger to Gwenlliant, *heb dymyr Tudur, tud o lysau* (*LH*, p. 289), 'past Tudur's lands, region of courts', and personifies the landscape as a woman:

Neur arwedd dyfroedd yn eu dyfrlle  
Gwisc gwynddail, gwiall gwedd adarre . . .  
Neur dug wisc, cantwisc gan y godre,  
Dolydd Caer Llion, dail lliaws bre. (*LH*, p. 290)

The waters in their river-bed wear a gown of fair leaves, twigs like a flock of birds . . . the meadows of Caer Llion wear a gown, a hundred gowns near the foot of the hill, a multitude of leaves at the top.

Obviously this association of women with landscape imagery is not unique to the Welsh court poets, but occurs in literature of many periods and places. When the device is used, however, it reveals something about the social attitude towards women shared by the users of that literature, the way women are perceived, and the kinds of functions they are thought to fulfil. In the case of the *gogynfeirdd*, the praise of land and women in terms of each other reveals a fundamental association between them, in social and practical ways, something so 'obvious' and 'natural' to the warrior society of independent Wales that such imagery is perceived as entirely conventional.

This close connexion between women and land was one of the basic functions of praise poetry inherited by the *cywyddwyr*. Since the political situation had changed drastically in Wales by the fourteenth century, the dynastic importance of

land-ownership had receded. However, lands were now acquired very often through marriage rather than through inheritance or warfare, so that as the cult of the warrior-prince declined, the cult of the eligible courtly woman increased. In *cywyddwyr* poetry, the overt identification of women with powerful land-holding dynasties is largely replaced with the convention of setting women in contexts suggestive of *uchelwyr* wealth and materialism, including pleasant tracts of rich woods and farmlands. Women are increasingly viewed as materially desirable assets for young *uchelwyr* seeking to maintain, restore, or establish the family fortunes in the wake of the English conquest.

This brings us to the third area of intertextual reference, that of French courtly literature, imported into Wales and England during and after the Norman Conquest. Since large areas of South Wales and the Marches were handed over to Norman barons from the time of the Conquest, and Anglo-Norman lords ruled the whole of Wales from 1284, it was inevitable that the French language and its literature should make a considerable impact in Wales, as it did in England.<sup>11</sup> The Welsh court poets continued to compose in traditional metres using their own language, but the native nobility for whom they were now composing were increasingly familiar with various aspects of French culture — material possessions, music, literature — and expected to see these things reflected in their own native praise-poetry as confirmation of their equally noble status. The conventions of French poetry and romance, both popular and courtly, were quickly absorbed into Welsh literature to the point where, in Dafydd's time, it is impossible to separate features which would have been recognized as demonstrably 'foreign' from those which were accepted as part of the native Welsh tradition.

Courtly love literature in France grew up in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in response to the social evolution of a new class of nobility, the independent knights. In the earlier stages of feudal society, knights were dependents of their feudal lords and had little economic power. But gradually knighthood came to acquire a status in its own right, and many knights rivalled their feudal lords in landholdings, inherited wealth, and the possession of vassals. Knights could acquire land as a reward for their services and could then pass this land on to their sons. For younger sons, who had no inheritance, the quickest route to economic power was often via marriage.<sup>12</sup>

It is no coincidence, then, that the prevailing type of medieval literature in France celebrated chivalry and courtly love and was directed at those immediately involved in these pursuits, the landowning nobility and those knights who sought to join it. The concept of chivalry, as defined in romance and lyric, confirmed the

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special status of knights and their right to enter the ruling aristocracy by virtue of their chivalric virtues — valour, generosity, dedication, spirituality. The literary conventions of courtly love installed the knights as perfect lovers and therefore as desirable marriage partners. The actual focus of courtly love literature is not the woman, who is remote, unattainable, often unnamed and depersonalized, but the courtly lover himself, whose words and actions are designed to win him the ultimate prize, an advantageous marriage, or, at worst, the patronage of a powerfully-placed (usually married) woman. The audiences for whom the literary conventions of love lyric and romance appear to be natural and right are the knights, the women who must marry them, and those who aspire to belong to the knightly class, particularly the emergent bourgeoisie of the later Middle Ages. Courtly love literature offers men the role models of chivalric knights who achieve worldly success through their own endeavours, while offering women the role models of noble beauties who by mere inactivity and passive acceptance of their lot will be rewarded by love and marriage.

The concerns of courtly love literature are therefore those of an influential class seeking to cement its position in the ruling hierarchy and to control the behaviour of its individual members by offering appropriate role models. The early troubadour lyrics of twelfth-century Provence were addressed to ambitious knights seeking advancement through marriage or patronage, while the lyrics and romances of northern France included the wealthy bourgeoisie among their audiences, an inclusion signified by the frequent references to material and consumer items, such as rich clothing and furnishings, and by the merciless satire of the lower bourgeoisie. Such references, almost entirely absent from troubadour poetry, were very consoling to those whose elevated social position depended more on wealth than on birth.

The position of the *uchelwyr* in fourteenth-century Wales was very comparable to that of the wealth-based nobility of northern France. Part of the reason why French literary conventions became so widely used in medieval Welsh poetry is that the messages they conveyed were as meaningful and relevant to the *uchelwyr* as they were to the French ruling classes. The whole ethos of courtly love stressed the courtliness of those who understood it, so the *uchelwyr* appreciation of courtly love poetry was an important way of identifying themselves with the Anglo-Normans who controlled their country. By supporting the composition of such poetry, the *uchelwyr* could demonstrate that they shared the same courtly tastes and practices, the same understanding of aristocratic values, as the Anglo-Normans, with whom they had to compete for power and status in Wales.



In fact, the *uchelwyr* as a social class corresponded almost exactly to the newly-established class of royal administrators and government servants which had grown up in France during the thirteenth century.<sup>13</sup> In both countries, this development accompanied a change in political organization: in France, the increasing power of the king in relation to his barons, and in Wales, the consolidation of Anglo-Norman, later English, control. With these increasingly centralized governments, a class of powerful administrators directly employed by the Crown emerged in both countries to oversee the implementation of uniform laws and institutions.

In Wales as well as in France, this emergent class needed to legitimate its status as a powerful elite. This was achieved partly by claims to noble descent, but more often through the display of material wealth — clothes, jewellery, furnishings, houses, and so on — which often rivalled and even surpassed that of the older established aristocracy. The administrators and wealthier bourgeoisie were usually based in or near large towns and therefore had access to the consumer items produced there, whereas the established aristocracy were land-owners living on their land without easy access to consumer goods and often without a supply of disposable cash either, since their wealth was more likely to be in the form of lands and vassals. It was the bourgeoisie, who dealt in cash services and trade, or the salaried administrators paid by the Crown, who increasingly came to acquire status through their money rather than through birth or land-ownership. Not uncommonly, rich townspeople would buy up lands belonging to impoverished noble families, or marry into such families, and so acquire land of their own, a desirable commodity.<sup>14</sup>

Dafydd's poems, addressed to *uchelwyr* audiences, have to be understood in this context of a relatively new social class seeking to legitimate itself within a wider framework of power. His use of themes and images traceable to Provençal or French or Latin lyrics — sickness, sleeplessness, dying for love, feeling the spears and arrows of love, the duality of love as both pleasure and pain, the indifference of the adored lady, and so on — depends not so much on a familiarity with these lyrics in the original, as on an understanding of what these conventions had to offer for his *uchelwyr* audiences. They were educated people who had some knowledge of continental literature, often in Welsh translations, enough to make intertextual connexions between non-Welsh texts and those which were composed specifically for them by Dafydd and the other *cywyddwyr*.<sup>15</sup> By adopting the language and imagery of continental courtly love poetry, Dafydd creates a courtly love hero who is entirely representative of *uchelwyr* values and locates this hero right in the place

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occupied by the chivalric knight of French literature. This is exactly the place where the *uchelwyr* wished to see themselves.

I have been discussing the major areas of intertextual reference in Dafydd's poetry and explaining the potency of these references for his audience. At the same time I have tried to indicate the subject position that modern readers are required to adopt in order to perceive the sentiments expressed by the poems as 'natural' and 'right' — that is, the position of a member of the *uchelwyr*, conscious of a noble Welsh past and of the need to consolidate a successful future as part of the ruling regime. It should also be obvious that the historical context of the poems is of major importance in understanding their particular function at that time. Though the poems construct their own reality, the historical and concrete reality need not therefore be dismissed as an irrelevance; on the contrary, it is the constant comparison of these types of reality which generates levels of meaning. It remains now for me to look at some individual poems from the corpus to illustrate and develop the ideas I have been outlining.

Dafydd's praise-poem to Dyddgu, noble daughter of Ieuan ap Gruffudd ap Llywelyn (*GDG*, 45), offers to its readers a complex tapestry of intertextual references. At the most simple level, Dafydd's allusions to his role as a court bard, to Dyddgu's role as a courtly love object, to her physical appearance, particularly her dark hair and pale skin, are greatly intensified by the frequent repetition of these motifs throughout the rest of his poetry. In *Caru Merch Fonheddig* ('Loving a Noble Girl', *GDG*, 37), Dyddgu is *merch naf gwaywsyth*, 'daughter of a straight-speared lord', and *dyn eiry peilliw*, 'girl flour-white like snow'; in *Morfudd a Dyddgu* ('Morfudd and Dyddgu', *GDG*, 79), she is *Dyddgu a'r ael liwddu leddf*, 'Dyddgu with the smooth black-coloured brow'; in *Dagrau Serch* ('Love's Tears', *GDG*, 95), she has *duon lygaid a dwyael*, 'black eyes and eyebrows' and is *didaer lun o Dewdwr lwyth*, 'a gentle form, of Tudor stock', while the poet describes himself as *dy gerddawr*, 'your poet', and explicitly asks for payment in return for his praises.

The constant repetition of this kind of diction and imagery, all suggesting Dyddgu's nobility of birth, her physical appearance, and the poet's function as court bard, intensify the significance of each poem to Dyddgu, as well as poems to other women. When Dafydd describes a woman as *dyn wythliw ton*, 'a girl eight times the colour of a wave' (*GDG*, 82, l. 4), or *dyn fain wengain ewyngorff*, 'slim, white, elegant, foam-bodied girl' (*GDG*, 78, l. 43), the images are redolent of beauty, nobility, and courtliness because of the accumulation of such diction throughout Dafydd's poems (and the *cywydd* tradition in general).

This is why the same type of imagery can be used with comic or ironic effect in the non-courtly poems, such as *Trafferth Mewn Tafarn* ('Trouble at the Tavern', *GDD*, 124), where the poet describes the girl he meets in the tavern as *lliw haul dwyrain*, 'colour of the rising sun', and *mau enaid teg*, 'my fair soul', and even *bun aelddu oedd*, 'she was a black-browed maiden', all courtly images which are humorously inappropriate in the context of this poem. But the humorous effect depends on cross-referencing with other poems where such imagery is used literally.

Another aspect of intertextuality in the poem to Dyddgu is the echoing of *gogynfeirdd* praise-poetry. Dyddgu's father is eulogized in the traditional bardic manner, using images whose precise significance must be constructed from *gogynfeirdd* texts, with all their implications of noble warrior heroism. The virtues attributed to Ieuan — bravery, generosity, leadership in battle — are almost anachronistic in terms of actual fourteenth-century Welsh society; they consciously belong to an earlier era when such virtues defined the ruling aristocracy. Yet Dafydd's listeners would have understood exactly the kind of man he was eulogizing and the qualities he admired in Ieuan: the real person, Ieuan ap Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, is reconstructed in Dafydd's poem and made into a warrior lord of pre-conquest Wales. To understand and admire this figure, the listener must refer to *gogynfeirdd* texts and their conventions of praise, not to the actual historical personage. In fact, the poem is not concerned with the real Ieuan but rather with its constructed figure of an archetypal heroic lord, whose poetic function is to symbolize Welsh martial glory and independence, and the noble ancestry from which Dyddgu is derived.

A third and explicit level of cross-referencing lies in the allusion in the Dyddgu poem to the story of Peredur.<sup>16</sup> Here again, the meaning of the poem has to be interpreted by drawing on knowledge of another text, beyond the poem itself. The more familiar the reader is with the Peredur story, the more meaningful and striking Dafydd's image appears to be. In addition, the reference to a courtly text automatically confers courtliness upon Dyddgu and, by association, the poet himself, who is implicitly identified with Peredur, an accomplished and illustrious Arthurian knight. Intertextuality works here to emphasize the function of the poem: to praise Dyddgu's extraordinary and almost supra-natural beauty, and to suggest the poet's own knightly qualities which make him a worthy suitor.

Finally, the meaning of the poem also depends on a wider range of intertextual references, that is, the whole tradition of European courtly love poetry. When Dafydd's poem is placed in the context of troubadour and trouvère verse, it becomes

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at once more explicable and more original. Conventions in the poem such as the extravagant declarations of sickness and sleeplessness, the suggestion of dying for love, and the emphasis on Dyddgu's beauty and nobility, only appear to be appropriate and natural because the poem belongs to this larger genre of courtly love poetry, with its well-established conventions. Dafydd's own persona as Dyddgu's suitor as well as praise-poet also seems 'normal' in terms of other courtly love texts, where the poet is typically both poet and aspiring lover. On the other hand, it is only by reading Dafydd's poem in the context of the whole genre that we can begin to explain his particular achievement, his departures from convention, and his use of other literary references.

I am arguing here that it is virtually impossible to construct a meaning for the Dyddgu poem (or any other text) by referring only to concrete historical reality. Knowledge of a text's historical location is a valuable key to understanding, but a text cannot be read as a literal reflection of that reality. The meaning of the Dyddgu poem has been constructed from intertextual references — to itself, to other Dafydd ap Gwilym poems, to other Welsh texts, to European texts — and it must be deconstructed in the same terms if its meaning is to be fully realized. The possible historical reality of Dyddgu and her father does not affect any literary interpretation of the poem, since the historical personages are not part of the poem at all: Ieuan and Dyddgu are poetic constructs, the one symbolizing traditional Welsh heroic values, the other symbolizing noble feminine beauty, inherited wealth, and the desirability for a man to possess both.

Such an approach undermines the attempts by earlier scholars to reconstruct Dafydd's own historical life from the 'evidence' of his poems.<sup>17</sup> However convincing the historical evidence may be that Dyddgu and Morfudd — and of course Dafydd himself — were real people living in the fourteenth century, it does not alter the fact that the characters in the poems are poetic creations, and the poems can be interpreted without knowing whether these characters ever really existed. Whatever Dafydd's intention was when he composed his verse — autobiographical, confessional, purely commercial — the poems actually function to reveal not the precise social and sexual relationships between the 'real' Dafydd, Morfudd, Dyddgu, and the others, but the interests, concerns, aspirations, fears, and prejudices of the fourteenth-century *uchelwyr* for whom he composed. The 'real people' named in the poems are characters constructed from other texts, other literary conventions, which makes them recognizable to the audience and gives them a symbolic function. There is no difference, then, between the figure of Morfudd

(possibly real and historical) and the figure of Eiddig, the jealous husband (a stock character of medieval literature).

Dafydd himself is no more 'real' in his poems than any of his other characters. Even though he consistently refers to himself in the first person, he constructs a poetic persona for himself to serve various poetic ends. Trying to analyze the 'real' Dafydd ap Gwilym on the basis of his poems is therefore a fruitless task, and in fact it is far more profitable to examine the poetic persona we are offered as part of an overall interpretation of each poem.

Dafydd's frequent representation of himself as a poet expecting his due financial reward corresponds to the troubadour persona of feudal knight in service to his liege-lord, that is, the woman herself. In exploiting the poet-patron relationship as a correlative of the lover-lady relationship, Dafydd is continuing a tradition begun with the *gogynfeirdd* in their *rhieingerddi* to noblewomen of royal households in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Wales.<sup>18</sup> But unlike the *gogynfeirdd*, who were secure in their positions as part of a bardic and social hierarchy, Dafydd represents a new type of poet whose position was no longer taken for granted. The royal households had disappeared after 1284, and poets had to seek patronage wherever they could find it, from the *uchelwyr*, from the Church, from English families serving the Crown in Wales.

Because of this relative instability and mobility of poets, Dafydd's assumption of the persona of traditional court poet is stylized and anachronistic in a way that it was not for the earlier *gogynfeirdd*. Moreover, Dafydd adopts a number of different personae in his poems, such as courtly lover, *clerwr*,<sup>19</sup> rustic suitor, adulterer, young squire, cleric, old man, and so on. This variety of authorial voices points to the fact that there was no unified and recognizable social position for poets in Dafydd's time, the old hierarchy of poets had fragmented into a whole range of composers, singers, and entertainers all dependent on the same patrons.

In his formal courtly love poetry, Dafydd uses his persona of traditional court poet to apply to his lady for reward, as a poet to a patron. In *Dagrau Serch* ('Love's Tears', *GDG*, 95), for example, he says:

Dêl i'th fryd dalu i'th frawd  
Dyfu yt wawd â'i dafawd

May it come into your mind to pay your brother for increasing  
your praise with his tongue.

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Such explicit connexions between praise and payment occur often in the poems and are obviously a conventional way of reminding *uchelwyr* patrons of their obligations to poets at a time when these obligations were no longer clearly understood by everyone. However, if the poet is also a lover, as he proclaims in his song, then the financial reward he seeks is a metaphor of sexual reward, a different kind of payment but just as material and earthly.

The purpose of Dafydd's eulogistic love poems is therefore twofold. By praising women in the style of continental court poetry, Dafydd is reinforcing their status, and consequently that of their families, as members of a noble and privileged class who share the traditions of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy; and by implicitly seeking sexual favours from the women he praises, Dafydd is acknowledging the importance of such women as marriage partners for young *uchelwyr* and those seeking entry to the ruling classes in Wales.

It is also a function of Dafydd's position as poet that many of his formal love poems have a moralistic attitude, particularly on the subject of fickleness and the need to fulfil obligations. Morfudd is often the target for these kinds of reproaches, as in *Morfudd Fel yr Haul* ('Morfudd Like the Sun', *GDG*, 42), *Gofyn Cymod* ('Asking for a Reconciliation', *GDG*, 52), and *Y Cariad a Wrthodwyd* ('The Rejected Lover', *GDG*, 93). Since petitions to women are so often metaphors, or displacements, of petitions to patrons, it is hard not to read such poems in the general context of the relationship between poets and the *uchelwyr* in fourteenth-century Wales. In condemning women's fickleness, Dafydd is also reminding the native nobility of their duty to support their own Welsh culture and not to be seduced by the status and prestige of imported literary conventions and social structures. Some of Dafydd's courtly love poems, such as *Cystudd Cariad* ('A Lover's Affliction', *GDG*, 90), *Saethu'r Ferch* ('Shooting the Girl', *GDG*, 100), and *Y Gwayw* ('The Spear', *GDG*, 111), are sufficiently hyperbolic and derivative to suggest a parody of familiar French courtly love imagery. At the same time, the wit and invention of these poems are the perfect advertisement for the superiority of the home-grown product.

Another area of influence from continental love poetry which Dafydd adapts to the native poetic tradition is the conflict between spiritual love and physical desire. In a sense, this is a conflict which Dafydd and the *cwyddwyr* necessarily inherited along with the whole courtly love convention, since the two are inseparable. The teaching of the Church was uniform and uncompromising on the subject of sexual activity in the medieval period. Love was to be consummated within marriage, and then only for the purposes of procreation. Yet medieval marriage was often for

social or political reasons which had little to do with love. The troubadours interpreted love as the source of all higher (knightly) virtues, while acknowledging that love also implied physical consummation, a sin outside marriage. Individual poets dealt with this paradox in various ways without ever reconciling it, since it was irreconcilable. The frequent use of imagery describing the conflicting joy and pain of love also expresses the fundamental paradox of courtly love, the incompatibility of spiritual ennoblement with physical desire.

The imagery of love's suffering seems to have been particularly potent both for the *gogynfeirdd* and later for Dafydd and the *cywyddwyr*. Such imagery must have appealed partly because of its close association with a courtly context, but also because it symbolizes social tensions and conflicts already present in Wales. Like the knightly class of Provence, the *uchelwyr* needed to assert their status in order to emerge from the older Welsh aristocracy and to claim equality with the Anglo-Norman establishment. Women as marriage partners were a crucial factor in assisting the rise of the *uchelwyr*, just as they were for the knights, and the poetic sufferings of unrequited love provided a literary legitimization of men's pursuit of wealthy and well-connected women.

Dafydd ap Gwilym tackles the problem of the courtly love paradox in much the same way as the troubadours, by separating the two halves of the paradox into two different genres, courtly eulogy and humorous satire. In his courtly love lyrics, such as *Dyddgu* (*GDG*, 45), *Talu Dyled* ('Paying a Debt', *GDG*, 34), and *Caru Merch Fonheddig* ('Loving a Noble Girl', *GDG*, 37), the poet declares his love without referring directly to physical desire. Its place is taken by the poet's expressed desire for financial reward, a desire that is, as I have said, equally materialistic and earthly, but less offensive to Christian sensibilities. But in his ribald and satirical poems such as *Y Rhugl Groen* ('The Rattle Bag', *GDG*, 125) and *Y Cwt Gwyddau* ('The Goose Shed', *GDG*, 126), the lover's intention is more or less explicitly sexual, and he is shown to be punished by means of physical discomfort or humiliation. More clearly than in troubadour poetry, the message of Dafydd's poems is Christian and conventional: courtly love is a metaphor of bardic patronage and noble marriage, not of mere physical possession, while sexual activity outside marriage is a punishable offence.

However, unlike the troubadours, Dafydd does find a way to suggest a compatibility between spiritual love and physical desire, by locating love in a woodland setting. For this device he is dependent on popular types of lyric and love song common in medieval France (especially the *reverdie*) which also owe something to contemporary Latin lyrics and the earlier classical tradition. Dafydd is

particularly renowned for his nature imagery, and it is clear from the work of other *cywyddwyr* that nature description and the theme of 'love in the woodland' had a special appeal for *uchelwyr* audiences.

Typical examples of Dafydd's use of the woodland as a trysting place include *I Wahodd Dyddgu* ('Invitation to Dyddgu', *GDG*, 119), *Merch ac Aderyn* ('A Girl and a Bird', *GDG*, 120), and *Y Deildy* ('The Leaf-House', *GDG*, 121). In these, the countryside is idealized as a place of beauty, simplicity, and sensual delight, full of visual glory, bird-song, and the embracing presence of God. Above all, the woodland suggests freedom from social constraints, release from restrictive conventions of courtship, and a place where spiritual love and physical passion can blamelessly merge.

Dafydd's nature poems, like those of the French poets, share the ideological function of confirming the status of a new nobility. The trysts that Dafydd describes in his nature poems, even the countryside itself, are literary constructs, not a mirror image of real events and places. The most common motifs in both the Welsh and French poems of this type are the beauties of nature, the delights of the countryside and the encouraging sound of bird-song. But none of these things represents the reality of country life which, in the Middle Ages, meant discomfort, damp, limited facilities, and above all the labour required to work the land in order to produce food.

Instead, the woodland is described as a metaphor of the court. The comforts, luxuries, and privileges of wealthy society are re-located in an apparently rustic setting. Dafydd describes trees as houses, with all the appointments of a courtly mansion: bird-song exists merely to entertain and delight the lovers, just as minstrels play to noble audiences; the lovers' pastimes — walking together, sharing food and drink, plaiting flowers into garlands — symbolize the leisure pursuits of a moneyed class which does not need to undertake physical labour on the land to survive. Above all, the pursuit of courtly love in the woodland epitomizes the refinement of *uchelwyr* life and social institutions. Because they understand the significance of courtly love, the *uchelwyr* must, by definition, be courtly.

Dafydd's nature poems therefore work on two levels. On the one hand the poet rejoices in the beauty of nature as a fitting and 'natural' context for love, but on the other he appropriates the woodland as a variant kind of noble and courtly setting — the woodland court. In so doing he creates a location which is highly artificial, rather than 'natural', one which denies the inherently rustic and non-courtly realities of the countryside. This locating of courtly practices within an apparently simple and unspoiled rustic haven works to confirm the noble status of an increasingly



town-based audience. The natural imagery evokes a spiritual appreciation of aesthetic beauty, which is felt to be characteristic of courtly audiences, but it also functions as a celebration of land and land-ownership as a mark of status. The land itself and the peasants who work it are a form of wealth, a symbol of nobility.

The wooing of a girl in the woodland is an important part of this celebration of courtly status. In the poems, the girl is eligible, willing, passive, sometimes not even present at all, except as a wish fulfilment. The natural surroundings suggest the benign presence of God, presiding over the ceremony of the rustic feast or *tryst*. The imagery itself implies the notion of consummation and physical union — the grove of tall straight birches, a crooked circle of trees, a bed of leaves.

All these things are a transformation of the reality of courtly marriage. The woman must be eligible, willing, passive, or perhaps not present at all when the marriage is arranged. The marriage is blessed by God and celebrated with a feast and music. Consummation of the marriage, for the purpose of generating heirs, is an essential way of legitimizing the union.

Dafydd's woodland poems therefore create an illusion which is particularly potent for his *uchelwyr* audiences. The illusion is that it is possible to escape from the trappings of courtly conventions and find a free love outside the complicated bonds of marriage. This illusion disguises the real aims and objectives of the *uchelwyr* as a class, which is to consolidate their power through land-ownership, the acquisition of wealth, advantageous marriage alliances, and the production of heirs. Through his poems, Dafydd is confirming the nobility of his audience — they understand the conventions of courtly love, the values of *courtoisie*, the aesthetic refinements of beauty and music, and the surroundings of court and castle. The countryside represents the display of wealth possible for the land-owning nobility and those who aspire to join it. The rural setting is deliberately kept apart from the urban setting of houses and taverns which is the world of the lower bourgeoisie from whom the *uchelwyr* want to dissociate themselves. Economic and agronomic aspects of the countryside are ignored, because these are irrelevant to the *uchelwyr* way of life.

This literary construct of the woodland, with its simplicity, lack of materialism, and spiritual uplifting, actually reinforces the materialism of *uchelwyr* life while reassuring them that they can participate in the courtly practices of the older Anglo-Norman aristocracy. But the illusion goes further — it encourages the *uchelwyr* to believe in their own importance and independent social status, while the political reality was that they were the servants of the English Crown and upper aristocracy, whose power they were helping to maintain.

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In all these ways, then, the 'woodland court' offers a solution to the paradox of courtly love. The solution is in fact marriage, though the poems do not explicitly say this. But the tryst between lovers or the oath exchanged by them, presided over by the benign presence of God, represented by the birds and animals, symbolizes an idealized form of courtly marriage, stripped of its political and economic realities. Dafydd's poems suggest that the fusion of spiritual love and physical desire can be perfectly achieved in the woodland; in fact, such a fusion was the medieval definition of marriage. This is the social institution that Dafydd is actually offering, attractively packaged in the familiar imagery of romantic and courtly love, to people for whom marriage was a political and socially necessary practice.

The corollary to the importance of marriage among the nobility is their disapproval of non-courtly alliances and those which cannot lead to marriage. In the poems to Morfudd, who is supposed to be a married woman, Dafydd presents himself either as a noble courtly lover, who can never win Morfudd, or as a foolish suitor whose pursuit of her leads nowhere except to his own humiliation. The message of both types of poem is clear: relationships which do not have marriage as their goal mean nothing but trouble and suffering.

Dafydd also shares in a rich literary tradition of ironic and satirical verse aimed primarily at those who pursue sexual gratification without spiritual love — either outside marriage or within a non-dynastic and non-courtly marriage, such as that between Morfudd and Bwa Bach. Such a love is repeatedly shown to be worthless, sterile, and non-courtly; and the figure of the lover, and sometimes that of the husband as well, becomes ridiculous and debased.

This tradition of satire and irony, as the obverse of courtly love, is found in the fabliau stories and poems of France, the ribald songs of the troubadours and goliards, and the humorous tales of Chaucer. It is fundamentally an anti-feminist satire, a means of controlling the sexual activity of women and reinforcing the Church's view of women as responsible for men's sinful desires.

But it is also a class-based satire, aimed at those who pursue love in a non-courtly way and are therefore not themselves courtly.<sup>20</sup> The objects of Chaucerian satire are typically bourgeois figures such as the Miller, Absolon the clerk, Damien the young squire, and so on. Similarly in Dafydd's humorous poems, the targets for his mockery are characters such as the boorish Eiddig, Bwa Bach, and the poet himself, adopting the persona of brash young squire (*Trafferth Mewn Tafarn*, 'Trouble at the Tavern', *GDG*, 124) or foolish rustic (*Merched Llanbadarn*, 'The Girls of Llanbadarn', *GDG*, 48; *Tri Phorthor Eiddig*, 'The Three Porters of Eiddig', *GDG*, 80). The humorous poems, then, do the same work as the serious

courtly love poems and eulogies, drawing on existing conventions to affirm the values of an elite.

I have been trying to show that an intertextual reading of Dafydd ap Gwilym's work, taking into account the literary and social context within which he was composing, is an important way of releasing meaning for modern readers of medieval texts. It is not merely a matter of tracing sources and analogues for Dafydd's themes and motifs, interesting and fruitful though this process may be. Even the fullest understanding of the literary context has only a limited value without some sense of the social context in which literary conventions are perceived as conventional.

Literature as a construct is a function of society. The meaning of texts, whether in terms of individual words or intertextual references, depends on the consensus of a social group. Texts are not only the products of a social context, they are also a way of expressing the concerns of the social group which produce them. Literary conventions, such as courtly love, do not simply reproduce actual social behaviour, they re-interpret social practices in ways that make them appear comprehensible, familiar, reassuring, and natural. Indeed, this is the main function of conservative literature, to disguise the tensions and oppositions within a power-based society so that the prevailing social order appears to be 'natural' and therefore right.

In order to understand Dafydd ap Gwilym's poems, then, the reader has to adopt a position from which their literary conventions (courtly love, love in the woodland, the glory of the countryside, eulogy in return for payment, mockery of non-courtly lovers) and their implicit social attitudes (courtly lovers are noblemen who live in the country, boorish lovers frequent towns and taverns and smallholdings, women are passive or unreliable and need to be wooed persuasively) appear to be normal, right, and even 'real'. The literary conventions used in the poems are those associated with courtly love, bardic eulogy, and satire; the social practices fundamental to the poems are marriage, land-ownership, and the maintaining of power. The audience to whom these things appear real and natural are an elite class of Welsh nobles, the *uchelwyr*, striving to maintain their hereditary prestige while identifying themselves with the Anglo-Norman ruling aristocracy.

Although the poems are not simply a mirror image of any concrete or historical reality, but a way of constructing that reality into an acceptable literary form, knowing something of the historical background helps us to understand why this type of literature — the love poems of the *cywyddwyr* — was so significant for a particular social group. By relating the historical context of *uchelwyr* life, the

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material objects, the places, and people, to the constructed context of the poems, we can begin to understand the intertextual meanings and functions these realities acquire as a result of being 'textualized' into a literary form. The danger lies in trying to 'realize' ('make real') the historical context from any given text, trying to move directly from the world of the poems to the historical reality, when no such path exists.

NOTES

- 1 Even more innovative, from my point of view, has been the gradual development and expansion of courses in Celtic Studies during the time of Leslie's professorship. It is in recognition of these two special achievements of Leslie's time as Professor of Early English Literature and Language — the development of comprehensive courses in Modern English and Celtic Studies — and in gratitude for the time I spent as Leslie's student and colleague, that I offer this contribution.
- 2 This idea of 'constructed reality' has its origins in the structuralist movement, which demonstrated that language does not reflect reality but produces it. See Terry Eagleton's discussion in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 107–08; also Terence Hawkes's convenient summary of Roland Barthes's work in *Structuralism and Semiotics* (London, 1977), pp. 106–22.
- 3 Intertextuality is described and discussed by (among others) Julia Kristeva in *Sémiotiké: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris, 1969).
- 4 All references to poems by Dafydd ap Gwilym refer to the standard edition by Thomas Parry, *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym (GDG)* (Cardiff, 1952). The poems have all been translated by Richard Loomis, *Dafydd ap Gwilym: The Poems* (Binghamton, New York, 1982), who follows Parry's numbering of the poems.
- 5 A translation of this tale appears in *The Mabinogion*, edited by Jeffrey Gantz (Harmondsworth, 1976), pp. 134–76.
- 6 See *The Harley Lyrics*, edited by G. L. Brook (Manchester, 1956), p. 31.
- 7 On the *cywydd*, see D. J. Bowen, 'Dafydd ap Gwilym a Datblygiad y Cywydd', *Llen Cymru*, 8 (1964), 1–32; Gwyn Williams, *An Introduction to Welsh Poetry* (London, 1953). For examples of *cywydd* poetry (other than Dafydd's) in English translations, see Joseph Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Lyrics* (London, 1965) and *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse in English*, edited by Gwyn Jones (Oxford, 1977).
- 8 Eurys Rowlands has a clear explanation of the *cywydd* metre and *cynganedd* in his introduction to *Poems of the Cywyddwyr* (Dublin, 1976), pp. xx–xlix.

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- 9 On the *gogynfeirdd* and their poetry, see J. E. Caerwyn Williams, *The Poets of the Welsh Princes* (Cardiff, 1978).
- 10 *Llawysgrif Hendregadredd*, edited by J. Morris-Jones and T. H. Parry-Williams (Cardiff, 1971).
- 11 For the history of medieval Wales, see Rhys Davies, *Lordship and Society in the March of Wales 1282–1400* (Oxford, 1978) and *Conquest, Co-Existence and Change* (Cardiff, 1987); Wendy Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1982).
- 12 The rise of the knights and its social implications are discussed by Georges Duby in *The Chivalrous Society* (London, 1977). See also Eric Koehler, 'Observations historiques et sociologiques sur la poésie des troubadours', *Cahiers de Civilization Médiévale*, 7 (1964), 27–51.
- 13 See Gerald A. Hodgett, *A Social and Economic History of Medieval Europe* (London, 1972).
- 14 The new wealth of the bourgeoisie in France is described by Edmond Faral in *La Vie quotidienne au temps de Saint Louis* (Paris, 1938).
- 15 French and Latin texts which were likely to have been available in fourteenth-century Wales have been discussed by Rachel Bromwich, 'Tradition and Innovation in the Poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym', in her *Aspects of the Poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym* (Cardiff, 1986), pp. 57–88.
- 16 The section of *Peredur fab Efwarg* relevant to this poem is in Gantz, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 232–33.
- 17 See, for example, E. B. Cowell, 'Dafydd ap Gwilym', *Y Cymmrodor*, 2 (1878) 101–132.
- 18 For examples of *rhieingerddi*, or 'songs to women', see the English translations by Joseph Clancy, *The Earliest Welsh Poetry* (London, 1970).
- 19 Literally, 'a member of the *clêr*', that is, a loosely constituted group of poets and singers without official patrons and usually educated as clerics, though not holding office. They are thought to be more or less equivalent to the continental goliards, or *clerici vagantes*, and may have been an important link between the popular song traditions of France and Wales.

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20 The French tradition of satire aimed at the bourgeoisie has been examined by Jean V. Alter, *Les Origines de la satire anti-bourgeoise en France: Moyen Âge – XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Geneva, 1966).