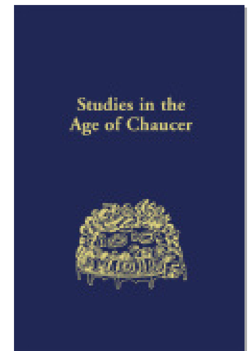
Dafydd ap Gwilym: Influences and Analogues by Huw M. Edwards (review)



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enhanced by translating *all* the Latin (and perhaps even parenthetically referring to uncontroversial sources, such as the many biblical verses).

Finally, his introduction asserts that his goal has not been to "emulate the conventions of alliterative verse" because this might impose "syntactical and linguistic patterns" that would not ring "true to contemporary ears" (p. xxiv). The goal is laudable even if not easily achieved, and the translation at times remains too dependent on modern cognates and the word order of the original (e.g., 1.100, 9.235–39, 11.218–24, and 12.197–202). Some slight departures from his line-by-line translation of the sometimes convoluted syntax of the Middle English might have made these truer to contemporary ears.

Economou has made the final version of *Piers Plowman* accessible in full for the first time in modern English. My qualified praise of his volume derives from what appears to be its uncertainty about how much of the scholarship first-time readers of the poem need to be alerted to if they are to appreciate the passion and learning, and what the translator helpfully terms the "magic realism" (p. xix), of this capacious poem. A teacher willing to complement Economou's introduction and notes will find this an attractive text for survey courses in medieval English literature.

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HUW M. EDWARDS. *Dafydd ap Gwilym: Influences and Analogues.* Oxford Modern Languages and Literature Monographs. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. Pp. xiii, 300. $70.00.

Dafydd ap Gwilym, the great poet of medieval Wales, was perhaps twenty years older than Chaucer, whom he never met. His legacy, like Chaucer's, comprises not only a body of poems but also the transformation of the poetry of his nation. Dafydd took up a continuous tradition of bardic poetry that proudly traced itself back to the sixth century, to the bards Aneirin and Taliesin, and with his contemporaries, the "men of the *cywydd*" (*Cywyddwyr*), he changed it utterly. The aristocratic bardic tradition was loosened and enriched by popular and folk traditions; classical and romance influences, the sensibilities of Ovid

and the troubadours, became part of Welsh poetry; and the form of poetry itself was changed, with the *cywydd*, a couplet-based form combining popular and bardic versification, becoming dominant. Without forgetting the old forms and old subjects, Welsh poetry found itself singing of new things in new ways. It still sang the praise-poems and elegies and satires of the old bards. But in the work of Dafydd ap Gwilym it sang more often of nature, of the birds and the wind and the changing seasons. And it especially sang of the nature of love, of the winds and seasons of love both high and low.

Dafydd's influence on the poets to follow was immense and permanent: he is still the major poet of the Welsh language. But what influenced him—what specific poems, poets, and medieval topoi were important to him and can be distinguished as formative elements in his poetry? The question of "external" influences—that is, external to Wales—has occupied scholarly study of Dafydd's poetry for most of this century. But here the situation is very different from that of Chaucer, whose sources in Latin, French, and Italian literature, a number of which he swallowed whole, have been fairly clear to see. There is no hard evidence that Dafydd knew either French or Latin (no one has suggested Italian), though his social position and historical situation make it likely that he knew at least something of both. As a lover and a poet he will refer to himself as "Ovid's man" ("dyn Ofydd") or say that he recalls "a psalm from Ovid's book" ("Salm yw 'nghof o lyfr Ofydd"). But do such allusions come directly from his reading of Ovid, from Continental intermediaries such as the *Roman de la Rose*, or from more local traditions, Anglo-Norman or Welsh, of Ovid as a love poet? Forms and motifs from the medieval European lyric tradition echo in Dafydd's verse—the dawn-song, the *sérénade*, the *pastourelle*, along with conventions of *amour courtois* such as the paradoxes of love's sweet pain, the need for secrecy in love, and the mistress's eyes as the agents and weapons of love. Again it would be good to know in specific terms—but we don't—what poems, what passages, from that wider tradition he carried in his memory and whether they came to him directly or through intermediaries of which we know nothing.

The final two chapters of *Dafydd ap Gwilym: Influences and Analogues* survey what is known and what can be surmised of such external influences. But the primary focus is elsewhere, and the rest of the book, about three-fourths of the whole, is concerned mainly with internal

influences, in particular with a "submerged tradition" of popular poetry composed and transmitted by wandering minstrels, a class of Welsh jongleurs known collectively as the *Clêr.* When the Edwardian conquest of the last of the independent Welsh princes in 1282 brought to an end princely patronage for the highly trained bards and their highly formal art, they turned for support to the growing class of landed gentry, making circuits from one hall to another. In doing so, they found themselves in the company of other wandering poets and musicians, who lacked formal bardic training and the official sanction of the bardic hierarchy. References to the *Clêr* in bardic poetry, which begin to appear early in the fourteenth century, tend to be disdainful and derogatory. None of their "unofficial" poetry survives from that time. But it has seemed likely that it would have been verse more responsive to an audience desiring entertainment as well as the formalities of praise, that it would have been more open to new forms and fashions in poetry, including those from abroad, and that the work of Dafydd and his contemporaries owes much to interactions with those wandering performers.

In his opening chapters Huw Edwards gathers up in detail evidence pointing to the existence and activities of that elusive class of popular entertainers. He returns often to the point that elements which might seem clearly to have come into Welsh poetic tradition directly from classical or Continental sources could actually derive from "an established blend of native and foreign modes developed in the verse of the *Clêr.*" This includes many of the innovations introduced by Dafydd and his contemporaries into the aristocratic tradition. To take just one example, where Edwards has a multitude, the poem "Dan y Bargod" ("Beneath the Eaves") is Dafydd's shivering complaint as he stands in the night before his beloved's locked door drenched by snow and rain. The form, the *sérénade*, has antecedents in Ovid and in Guillaume de Lorris, in Italian and Portuguese literature, and may have been in French popular verse as well. But it also has antecedents, Edwards suggests, in the "begging songs" of Welsh folk tradition—wassailing songs and wren-hunting songs associated with Yuletide. And it is possible that a fusion of all those traditions already existed in the subliterary verse of the *Clêr*, which provided both the basis for Dafydd's poem and the witty and ironic voice he adds to the Continental form.

Edwards points out in conclusion that Dafydd ap Gwilym, by fashioning "a new kind of poetry for a new age," enriched "not only the Welsh literary tradition but that of Western Europe as a whole." The final sentence of the book notes: "Beyond Wales, that contribution has

yet to be fully appreciated." That is due in part to much of the scholarly study and critical appreciation of Dafydd's poetry having been conducted in Welsh. Publishing this book in English signals a desire to include a much wider audience in that conversation, and the book will find a place on the shelves of medievalists and others next to other recent studies sharing that aim, notably Rachel Bromwich's *Aspects of the Poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym* (1986) and Helen Fulton's *Dafydd ap Gwilym and the European Context* (1989). Edwards has not, however, solved all the problems of addressing two audiences, and in a book dense with citation and documentation readers from that wider audience are likely to be presented with frequent minor puzzles. Key technical terms, for example, are in some cases discussed fully (*dyfalu, llatai*) and in others not at all (*awdl, cywyddau rhwystr*); quotations are supplied with translations in the text but not in the extensive notes; the mutation of initial consonants inherent to Celtic languages, which in Welsh changes *Clêr* to *Glêr*, *prydydd* (a principal bard) to *phrydydd*, or *cof* ("memory") to *nghof*, is maintained but never mentioned. Edwards's thoroughness in investigating his material and his accumulative method of argument also make it difficult at times to see the forest for the trees. What he writes of his final chapters applies to the whole: "Some of the analogues identified may appear somewhat trivial when examined in isolation, but seen in the wider context of a considerable body of cumulative evidence even the most minor parallels acquire a more powerful suggestiveness." Suggestive they are indeed, and richly so, though finally the cruel lack of concrete evidence forestalls firm conclusions. Edwards's book is a catalogue of questions rather than answers, a comprehensive gathering of things it would be wonderful to know about this marvelous poet.

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THOMAS J. FARRELL, ed. *Bakhtin and Medieval Voices.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995. Pp. xi, 240. $49.95.

Although certain theoretical paradigms prominent in the era of poststructuralism have met with decline or renewed hostility in recent years—deManian deconstruction and psychoanalysis especially—Bakhtin studies surge forward, with no sign of abatement. Thomas