Review: *The Poems of Dafydd ap Gwilym* (Clancy)

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This is an excellent collection. It cannot pretend to be comprehensive by any means, but as an illustration of the rich material available in the Irish and Welsh grammatical traditions, it would be hard to better.

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The Poems of Dafydd ap Gwilym. Translated by Joseph P. Clancy. Brown Dog Books, Bath, 2016. 390 pp. £17.50. ISBN 978-1-78545-089-1.

These literary translations of the complete poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym are the first to be based on the recent new edition which was published online in 2007 and in print in 2010 as *Cerddi Dafydd ap Gwilym*, edited by Johnston et al. However, being the fruit of many years' labour, they understandably also bear witness to the continuing influence of the previous standard edition, Thomas Parry's *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym* (1952). For those who came to know Dafydd ap Gwilym's poetry through Parry's edition it has been no small matter to come to terms with a new text, emotionally as well as intellectually, and it is to Joseph Clancy's credit that he was able to reshape his translation project to take account of the latest scholarship. These translations represent his personal understanding of the poetry, which inevitably reflects both the new and the old editions.

The canon is that of the new edition, including the three newly added poems and excluding those now deemed not to be Dafydd's genuine work, with the exception of one to the song thrush retained by way of comparison with another on the same subject (but I suspect also out of reluctance to lose such a charming nature lyric). The source texts seem to be mostly those of the new edition, but line-order occasionally follows Parry, as do a few lines of dubious authenticity which are retained, most notably four towards the end of the depiction of Morfudd's old age which are a stray passage from the poem about the hare but will, I fear, have a long after-life due to their association with this emotional highpoint in Parry's edition.

In one important sense this collection is independent of both editions of the Welsh texts in that it presents the poems in an entirely new order, building on suggestions by R. Geraint Gruffydd and others to offer a tentative chronological sequence rather than grouping by genre. This is a significant critical interpretation of Dafydd's work, backed up by a thoughtful introductory essay, and it produces some interesting new juxtapositions, such as bringing together all the poems relating to Gwynedd, and those in which the poet is in a position of exile. It makes a big difference that both religious and praise poems are spread throughout the collection and thus much more central to the work than in their usual position as prelude to the larger body of love and nature poetry. Chronological arrangement could result in a naively literal reading, but that danger is countered by emphasis on the various literary personas which the poet adopts. Nevertheless, I would have liked to have seen more acknowledgement of alternative interpretations, such as the possibility that the description

of Morfudd's old age is visionary foresight with the aim of turning the friar's sermon into a dire warning to her on the *carpe diem* theme.

This is an explicitly Christian interpretation of the life experience conveyed by the poetry, drawing out both the celebration of God's grace in the natural world and the awareness of the consequences of sin. Clancy's own Catholic faith is one of his strengths as a translator of medieval poetry, evident in his sympathetic rendering of the *englynion* to the Rood at Carmarthen and of 'The Woodland Mass'. Here is a passage from the latter (pp. 177–8), which should be read in the light of the interesting suggestion made in a note that the elevation of the host may refer to the sunrise:

> Then rose on a hill of ash-trees
> Sacred wafer from good leaf,
> And from the grove's near corner
> The slim sweet-voiced nightingale,
> The vale's songstress, rang sanctus,
> Shrill whistle, to heaven's dome,
> And the offering was lofted
> To the vault above the grove,
> Worship of our Lord the Father,
> A chalice of bliss and love.

We see here Clancy's translation technique, developed over more than fifty years engagement with the *cywydd* metre, beginning with *Medieval Welsh Lyrics*, published in 1965. One of the main aims is to convey a sense of the movement of the verse, using a seven-syllable line as a base from which variation of mostly one syllable either way is permitted, and line-endings alternately stressed and unstressed, reflecting the rhyming pattern of the *cywydd* couplet. Light alliteration and vowel harmonies give occasional hints of the *cynghanedd*, and indeed that last line above is not far off being full *cynghanedd sain*. Given these self-imposed constraints, it is remarkable how much of the sense of the Welsh text is retained. Comparison with the versions of Dafydd ap Gwilym poems published in Clancy's 1965 collection reveals a process of revision bringing the translations closer to the original, not just in sense but also in word-order. The *sangiadau* interrupting the main sentence are generally retained as parentheses in the translations (for instance 'shrill whistle' in the passage above), and although some readers may find this feature disturbing at first, it is an essential part of the strategy of reflecting the movement of the verse, and also facilitates comparison with the original texts. Anyone who does so will find many deft touches to admire, such as the epithets for the girl Dafydd eyes up in Llanbadarn church and the God on whom he turns his back to do so: *coeth* and *gwiwgoeth* are nicely rendered as 'graceful' and 'gracious'.

Joseph Clancy sadly died just a few months after this volume was published. The poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym was the greatest single challenge which he faced as translator of Welsh literature, and this collection constitutes a fitting conclusion to his long and distinguished career.

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Peritia: Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland, vol. 26. Edited by Elva Johnston and Daíbhí Ó Cróinín. 2015. Brepols, Turnhout. 294 pp. €68. ISBN 978-2-503-55100-5. ISSN 0332-1592.

That one learned journal reviews another — especially one where over the years the same scholars have contributed to both — may seem a little incestuous; however, there are good reasons for drawing attention to this volume of *Peritia*. For this journal's first 25 volumes, albeit that some of them were combination volumes, over the past thirty-six years — volume 1 appeared in 1982 — one man was responsible: the late Professor Donnchadh Ó Corráin of University College, Cork. He saw that there was a need for a journal that brought the various strands of early medieval studies, with particular reference to Ireland, together in one place: linguists would stand next to historians and archaeologists; those working on Irish texts would sit beside those working on Latin; those working on the history of ideas would rub shoulders with those studying early Irish farming. The mix has proven itself. *Peritia* is one of the few journals that is known and respected across the disciplines. Some time before he died, Ó Corráin handed over the concern to two new editors, both, like himself, primarily historians: Elva Johnston of University College, Dublin, and Daíbhí Ó Cróinín of the National University of Ireland, Galway, and this volume is the first fruits of their editorship. And as befits a well-planned handover, the volume is dedicated to Donnchadh. Brepols, the publisher of *Peritia*, have taken the opportunity to give it a new cover and a fresh typographical look. This is striking and elegant, but will be a curse for librarians who still take the journal in paper format because the new volume is taller and wider than the old one (171×253mm as against 168×239mm). For the reader, however, this new shape and binding make a book that opens better and sits open more easily while one reads it.

So what has one got? First of all, eight major articles of around twenty pages each. For this alone one is thankful because of the increasing tendency to have very strict word-limits, so that arguments in many journals are tailored not to the problem but to the canvas available. These papers — all of them — have that pleasing quality of answering the topic they set, going into the necessary detail, and reflecting the state of scholarship. One cannot put a quart