

Howel Dafi

(flourishing 1450-1480)

Howel Dafi's name was Hywel ap Dafydd ap Ieuan ap Rhys [1] and he was, according to Peniarth 101, from Raglan, where he was one of the bards-in-residence of the Herbert family at Raglan Castle, although his circuit encompassed Dynevor and Breconshire as well as Raglan. His poetry dated from about 1450 to 1480 so he was also with the family throughout William Herbert's rise to, and fall from, power. Many examples of his work have survived and while they included the standard topics of religion and love, the majority concerned praises dedicated to his patrons among the gentlemen of South Wales. He composed in rivalry with other poets and twice clashed with Guto'r Glyn in bardic controversies. He was said to have written a history of Britain, in Latin, and one of Wales in Welsh but if he did they have not survived. The next poem was addressed to Henry Myles, son of Miles ap Harry, and it would have been sung at Newcourt. The Welsh here is a direct transcription of the poem in the manuscript.

Cerdd i Harri Mil [2]

Harri Mil hwyr ym weled
y rryw grair yn hir o gret
avr y twr a roir y ti
ar dy hwr wyr dav Harri
difai oedd gyff Davydd Gam
dos ar ol dav Syr Wiliam
ar wyth osgl avr yth wisgwyt
or with ach i penn rraith wyt
Mil ap Harri mal peran
y kair y gaingk arwa gan
Mawr y(w) son am wyr sy iav
mil wynn am kennmyl inna
y dad garyad y goron
yn benn rraith hyt y bv n rron
ba ddrwc y bawb ddarogan
bod yr wyr or byt y ran
vwchaf o hil Addaf Llwyd
y wybodav n vab y dwyt
gwarev (n) abl bel a thabler
gwaodd pawb ai gywydd per
chwiliaw a dwylaw r Delyn
chwarav dawn a charv dyn
Se(i)giaw ngwledd gwr bonheddic
Saethv pan vo r ddav lv n ddic
o dav ryfel wrth drefydd
hyt ar y val dy dir vydd
tir i vor ddevtv r afonn
a thir y swydd a thras honn
breichiav Gwrgan Morgannwc
blodav gwinllannav Gweyn Llwg
llwyn o Gaer Llion a gaid

A Poem to Harri Mil [3]

*Harri Mil, it is unlikely that I shall see
In a long time one who is so revered in Christendom.
You are given the tower's gold
On your wage, grandson to two Harris, [i]
Dafydd Gam's lineage was faultless,
(May you) emulate the two Sir William's. [ii]
You were adorned with eight golden branches
Of eight generations / lineages, you are their chief.
Mil ap Harri, like a pear-tree
Will the branch be found? [iii]
Great is the talk about (the) younger grandson,
Mil Wyn, who praises me,
His father, beloved one of the Crown,
Was a leader for as long as he was in Rhone,
What harm could it make that everyone predicts
That the grandson (shall receive also) his share in the world.
Foremost of Addaf Llwyd's line,
In knowledge - are you - whilst (yet) a young man,
Confidently playing at ball and backgammon [iv],
Inviting everyone with his sweet cywydd,
Searching the harp with (both) his hands,
Playing (while) dancing, and loving a maiden,
Feasting in a noble man's feast,
Shooting when the two hosts are angry.
(As a result) of your war by (the) towns,
Your land will extend to the Vale,
Ifor's land on both sides of the river,
And the land of the Shire, and her lineage.
(The) arms of Gwrgan of Morgannwg,
(The) flowers of Gwynllwg's vineyards,
A grove from Caer Llion was had,*

llawr border llv Herberdyaid
 Eyas oll yth essillydd
 a dwywent vawr yth dent vydd
 a genais i gannos haf
 yth hyn gynt aeth yn gyntaf
 ef a weithian a ganwyf
 ytt Harri Mil gwr trwm wyf
 pa les o daw Saesnes hir
 y baradwys yn brodir
 Ni charaf anaf vnoet
 gwys or iaith gassa erioet
 a mawr y chwi vod merch wenn
 oedrannvs o hat Ronnwenn
 Na vynn oth vodd bes rroddynt
 nid gwell i chymmell no chynt
 kymmer verch Kymro varchawc
 avr i gyt war ai gawc
 kais verch addvain vgainmlwydd
 ac na chais verch Sais or swydd
 os dyfot yth ystafell
 nida ym hoes oth dai ym hell
 hwd av y bel hyt i bych
 hwdav vinnav pann vynnych
 helya herrwyr hil Harri
 heboc yr twyssoc wyt ti.

*The border lowland of a host of Herberts.
 All Euas shall be your offspring,
 And great Dwywent will be (accommodated) in your tent,
 (Though) I sang for a hundred summer nights
 To your elder afore, who was foremost,
 His (song) I now sing
 To (you) Harri Mil, I am a heavy (hearted) man,
 What good (would come from the arrival) of a tall English woman
 To the paradise of our country?
 I do not love, (a) blemish of a meeting (it would be),
 (Not one) groove of the most disagreeable language there ever was,
 And (yet it is) a great thing to you, that a fair, ageing girl
 Of Rhonwen's seed (does so).
 Do not seek (her) of your own accord if they give her,
 It would not be better to seek her (now) than afore -
 Take (instead) a Welsh knight's daughter,
 (?And) all his gold, ?in his pitcher [v].
 Seek a slender, twenty year-old girl,
 And do not seek the daughter of an Englishman from the Shire.
 If (she) comes to your room,
 She will not go far from your houses - during my time.
 Here, take the ball (i.e. excel) whilst you live. [vi]
 Give it to me when you wish.
 Hunt the outlaws, (you) of Harri's line,
 You are a hawk to the prince.*

[i] Henry Myles' grandfathers were Harri Ddu and Sir Harry Stradling.

[ii] Elizabeth Stradling was the daughter of Sir William ap Thomas Herbert of Raglan Castle and Gwladus Gam daughter of Sir Dafydd Gam, the Davy Gam in Shakespeare's *Henry V*. Elizabeth's brother was Sir William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke (1st creation).

[iii] *arwa gan* is unclear.

[iv] Usually backgammon or a similar board game.

[v] This line is short of one syllable. The text is obviously corrupt.

[vi] The image in this line derives from the Middle Welsh expression *dwyn y bêl*, literally to take/carry the ball, an expression derived from some ball-game. It is the equivalent of 'to excel'.

References

1. Biographical sources: Dictionary of Welsh National Biography.
2. Source: Peniarth MS 67. 66.
3. Translation and copyright Eurig Salisbury.