

The Poetry of the Nobility Forum

18 May 2019



It was a pleasure to see the Centre's Seminar Room full again this year for the annual Poetry of the Nobility Forum – twenty-five years since the first forum was held in 1994.

In Helen Williams-Ellis's opening paper, 'Catrin of Berain and her PR man', we learned how Catrin's second husband, Richard Clough, a very prosperous business man, made a great effort to promote himself visually by commissioning portraits of himself and his wife by leading artists of their day. But when Clough died in 1570, it was to the poet Wiliam Cynwal that Catrin herself turned for a similar PR service. It is clear that she had asked Cynwal to trace her ancestry and to gather together all the poetry that had been composed for her, her family and her ancestors. We are very fortunate that the book that Cynwal created has survived, namely Oxford Christ Church 184. (Helen is absent from the picture above.)

Dr Bleddyn Owen Huws, a senior lecturer in the Department of Welsh at Aberystwyth University, turned our attention to references to the poet's own body in Dafydd ap Gwilym's poetry. He showed us how Dafydd often seems to convey a tension between himself and his body: the body, of course, being an integral part of himself, but at the same time being separate and almost working against him.

In the last session before lunch, Gruffudd Antur's subject was Daniel Huws's great work, *A Repertory of Welsh Manuscripts and Scribes c.800 – c.1800*; Daniel also said

a few words about this important work which will be published in 2020. Gruffudd explained that he has made several important discoveries in the course of working as a researcher on the Repertory this year, including identifying the less formal hand of the fifteenth-century poet, Lewys Glyn Cothi. As a result, we now know that about 200 poems by Lewys (about 90% of his work) have survived in his own hand, including the famous elegy for his son Siôn.

Professor Dafydd Johnston's subject was lexical ambiguity in Dafydd ap Gwilym's poetry. He guided us through a number of quotations from the poetry, opening our eyes to the various layers of meaning that are often present. This led to a very interesting discussion about the nature of the poet's audience, and how a *datgeiniad* ('reciter') might help listeners to tune into these various layers of meaning.

To bring the day to an end, Dr Euryn Rhys Roberts of Bangor University discussed the lists of names of commotes and cantrefs that are found in a large number of Welsh manuscripts, and raised important questions regarding their existence and why scribes copied them. He drew attention to an early instance of such a list in Latin in the Red Book of the Exchequer (TNA PRO E164/2), copied c.1225, a list that seems to have been ignored by early twentieth-century Welsh historians.

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