

Lewys Morgannwg

(flourishing 1520-1565)

Lewys Morgannwg [1] had the bardic name of Llywelyn ap Rhisiart, meaning chief bard of the three provinces. He came from Llantwit Major and was one of the most important of all the Glamorgan bards. His poems flowed smoothly, accurately following acknowledged bardic principles. His working period was from 1520 to 1565 the time of great changes in religion, language and law in Wales. As a result his religious poems are of exceptional interest and one addressed to Abbot Lleision, immediately before the Dissolution of Neath Abbey, provided a last, vivid picture of monastic life. Lewys had many patrons, his first being Sir Edward Stradling and he was a family bard of the Herbert family. This poem, a *cywydd*, was an eulogy to Blanche Milborne, the daughter of Simon Milborne and sister of Alice. She was Blanche Parry's aunt and very probably her godmother. Blanche Milborne married Sir William Herbert of Troy(e) after the death of her first husband in 1500.

Marwnad yr Arglwyddes Blaens [2]

Elegy to the Lady Blanche

Rhos oer fyned sir Fynwy
Ail Elen Goel o lan Gwy.
Mae'r Farn ym am feirw'n nes,
Marwgoel oedd am arglwyddes:
Bwrw Arglwyddes, brig loywddoeth,
Blaens, un ddawn Sibli hen Ddoeth;
Arglwyddes, teyrnes bwrdd tâl,
Bord Troe, tŷ Harbart rial,
Mal y wraig gynt, mawl rhag cam,
wrong, Marsia ar ôl marw Syr Wiliam.
Bwrw iawn henwaed brenhinoedd
Mal bwrw hen waed Mylbwrn oedd,
Ei llin o Went i ieirll Nordd
O'r lle hanffont ieirll Henffordd.

*Monmouthshire has become a cold plain,
(Because of the loss of) a peer to Elen Goel from the banks of the Wye,
For me, because of the dead, the Day of Judgement is nigh,
It was the death-omen of a lady:
Smiting Lady Blanche, (she of) bright, wise countenance,
(Whose) gift (was) akin to (that of) the old wise Sibyl.
The lady of the royal Herbert household,
Queen of the high table, the table of Troy,
Similar to the lady Marcia of yore, praise lest there be
Following the death of Sir William.
Smiting the ancient Milborne bloodline was akin to
Smiting the ancient true bloodline of Kings.
Her lineage, from Gwent to the northern Earls,
Is that from which the Earls of Hereford trace their ancestry.*

Arglwyddes breninesau,
Gofrner oedd ban oedd yn iau.
Hi a wyddiad yn weddus
Wybodau iarllsaw'r llys,
Gorcheidwad cyn ymadaw
Tŷ Harri Wyth a'i blant draw.
I Edwart Frenin ydoedd,
Uwch ei faeth, goruchaf oedd,
Waetio yr oedd at ei Ras,
Gywirddoeth wraig o urddas.

*(She was a) Lady (in charge) of Queens,
A governess she was in her youth.
She knew in a fitting manner
The accomplishments of the ladies of the court,
(And she was the) guardian, before she passed away,
Of Henry VIII's household and his children yonder.
To King Edward she was a true
(And) wise lady of dignity,
In charge of his fosterage (she was pre-eminent),
(And) she waited upon his Grace.*

Arglwyddys plas a gladden',
Troie, a'i llew lletyai'r ieirll hen.
Bu i frenin, bu fawr unwaith,
Roeso, a'i ieirll, Harri Saith.
Gweddu y bu tra fu fyw
Hon sydd frenhines heddiw.

*(She, whom) they buried, the Lady of the palace of Troy,
And her lion (i.e. William), gave hospitality to the old Earls.
A welcome was given to the King, Henry VII,
And his Earls; he was great once.
She gave service all her life,
To the one who is Queen today (i.e. Mary I).*

I dlawd gwan didlawd giniaw,
I'r dall hen rhôl fwyd â'i llaw.
Â'i llaw draw llywiau druain,
Lle da, rhoes dillad i'r rhain.
Diwarth y rhoes da wrth raid:
Dêl hyn yn dâl i'w henaid!

*(She gave) to the weak and poor a worthy meal,
To the old (and) blind she would give food with her hand.
With her hand yonder she would guide those who were forlorn,
A good place, (and) she clothed them.
She honourably gave generously in response to need,
Let this be a reward for her soul!*

Gwely Gonstans ag Elen
Merch Coel, hi a'i marchog hen,
O! Dduw gwyn, ni ddug annoeth,
Ysbeilioedd ddwyn Sibli Ddoeth.
Aeth wraig. Nid â fyth ar ôl
O'r oesoedd wraig mor rasol.

*Akin to Constantine and Elen
Daughter of Coel, she (Blanche) and her old knight,
Woe (that) blessed God did not take away an unwise (one),
He caused devastation by taking away (the) Wise Sybil.
The lady has gone. Never again will the ages witness the loss
Of a lady as full of grace as she.*

Mae i Blaens feibion fal Tonwen:
Beli o'i bron hi, Brân hen;
Dau frodyr, gwŷr difredych,
Dau feirch cad o farchog gwych:
Syr Siarls o hil Syr Wiliam,
Mor wych cawr â'r Marchog Cam.
Arhowch cloi aur Marchog Glas
Tros wart Hvmr, Meistr Tomas.
Dau filwr y'u dyfelynt
Wrth wŷr o gwr Arthur gynt.
Oes hir, eleirch Syr Wiliam!
Yn fyw maent. Mae nef i'w mam.

*Blanche has sons who are like Tonwen's:
Beli from her bosom, (and) old Brân,
Two brothers, men of honour,
Two battle-steeds issuing from an outstanding knight [i]:
Sir Charles of the line of Sir William,
A giant as great as he Marchog Cam [ii],
(And) delay the sealing of the Blue Knight's wealth [iii]
On account of the Humber's defender, master Thomas.
Two soldiers whom they compare
With men of Arthur's court of yore.
Long live the swans of Sir William!
They are alive - heaven awaits their mother.*

[i] The original has freich, a mutated form of braich / arm, which could be used metaphorically as 'defender', in which case this line would be *Two defenders in battle....*instead of *Two battle-steeds....*

[ii] Sir Dafydd Gam (Davy Gam in Shakespeare's *Henry V*), great-great-grandfather to Sir Charles and Sir Thomas (and Blanche Parry's great-great-great-grandfather through her Stradling grandmother). *Marchog Cam* translates loosely as 'the crooked knight', apparently on account of a physical peculiarity (possibly attained in battle).

[iii] Sir William ap Thomas Herbert, great-grandfather to Charles and Thomas, known as the 'Blue Knight of Gwent'.

References

1. Biographical sources: Dictionary of Welsh National Biography.
2. *Elegy to the Lady Blanche* Llansteffan MS 164, 118 (c.1624) published in A. Cynfael Lake, editor *Gwaith Lewys Morgannwg* vol.1 Aberystwyth 2005. I am grateful to Dr. Lake and Professor Geraint Jenkins for permission to use the modern Welsh and English translation. I am also grateful to Eurig Salisbury for his translation from the original. Both translations were comparable and serve to ensure complete accuracy for this important poem.