

Essay plan on the topic ‘To what extent was “love” an important theme in the poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym and should he be remembered primarily as a medieval courtly love poet?’

Introduction

This essay will look at the process that would be used to create an essay that would answer the question ‘To what extent was “love” an important theme in the poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym and should he be remembered primarily as a medieval courtly love poet?’

It will look at how a mind map would be used as the initial start point for the essay, and then expand out to show a more detailed structure of headings that would be used within the essay. Within that detailed structure, information will be given as to the type and source of information that would be used within each section. Finally, a bibliography of the sources used for the research of this essay plan and that would be used within the overall essay if it were to be written in full.

Planning methodology

The planning of this essay would begin with reading the essay brief that is provided within Moodle. Without this it would not be possible to understand the requirements of the essay and could lead to the essay answering a totally different question to the one originally posed.

Once this is understood, a mind map of the question is created to provide some initial thoughts on topics for the essay. These topics can then provide some initial research into answering the questions that have been posed. As a result of the initial research, the mind map can be expanded to include other relevant areas that may be suggested by asking ‘what is the next obvious question?’ This can then lead to further research to expand the mind map and ultimately lead to a well-rounded level of research and information that would inform the essay answer. The mind map can then also be used to provide a framework of headings for the essay. These can be written down, and shuffled as required, to provide a comprehensive and coherent flow through the essay to ensure that the original question that was posed is fully answered.

Essay plan

For the purposes of this assignment, sub-headings will be shown showing the structure of the overall essay were it to be written and submitted.

Background: The initial section of the essay would look at the background of Dafydd ap Gwilym. Although not a specific section of the essay question itself, an understanding of the background of the poet, his early life, and the type of societal structure that he grew up in and was living in would provide useful context to the reader for the rest of the findings and arguments within the essay. The essay background would also look at when Dafydd ap Gwilym was born and died so that comparisons could be made later in the essay to when courtly love poetry first came into existence, and whether the period of Dafydd ap Gwilym's life would coincide with this genre. This would be referenced from the 'Dictionary of Welsh Biography' website entry¹. This particular entry on the website appears to have been written by Professor Dafydd Johnston, who lectures on Celtic literature, including a section specifically on Dafydd ap Gwilym, as part of the BA Celtic Studies course, as the name cited at the bottom of the webpage matches that of the UWTSD professor. This would however need to be confirmed, potentially by contacting the professor himself. Assuming that the authorship was confirmed, it would provide a good level of assurance that the comments and information contained on the webpage were true and could be trusted.

Definition and theme of courtly love: As one of the main questions posed by the essay would be whether ap Gwilym should 'be remembered primarily as a medieval courtly love poet', it would seem prudent to understand what a courtly love poet actually is and what style of poetry they would produce. In this way, a comparison of the style of poetry considered as courtly love and the style of poetry produced by ap Gwilym could be made. From looking at the entries on the British Library² and Ancient History Encyclopedia³ websites, it can be seen that a poet producing courtly love literature would be writing about the rituals that would take place within courts, between the ladies of the court and the knights. These rituals would typically be where the knight would display bravery and loyalty to the lady of the court and

¹ Dictionary of Welsh Biography, *Dafydd ap Gwilym (c. 1315 – c. 1350), poet*, (2018) <<https://biography.wales/article/s12-DAFY-APG-1340>> [accessed 11 November 2020].

² British Library, *Courtly Love* <<https://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item107724.html>> [accessed 12 November 2020].

³ Ancient History Encyclopedia, *Courtly Love* (2019), <https://www.ancient.eu/Courtly_Love/> [accessed 12 November 2020].

also to their Lord in order to win the patronage of the lady, rather than any physical relationship.

Main themes of Dafydd ap Gwilym's poetry: Following on from the section noted above, to allow for a comparison of the poetry style of Dafydd ap Gwilym and that of 'courtly love', it would be necessary to look at the particular style of poetry used by Dafydd ap Gwilym and the themes that he employed within his poetry. By looking at some of the main and common themes used within ap Gwilym's poems, it would be possible to draw a comparison to the definition provided in the previous section. Within this section, the essay would also look at whether 'love' was an important theme overall within ap Gwilym's work, rather than specifically 'courtly love'. To be able to do this, the essay would need to look at a broader definition of love and some of the central themes that exists within ap Gwilym's body of work. This would introduce poems such as '*Merched Llanbadarn*', '*Trafferth mewn tafarn*', and '*Y Rhugl Groen*', all of which have a more sexual and illicit context to the love that is presented within them when compared to that which might be seen as a main theme of 'courtly love'. The essay would also look at an essay on Dafyddapgwilym.net by Huw Meirion Edwards, who works as both an author and a senior lecturer in the Department of Welsh at Aberystwyth University, which looks specifically at the literary context of the work of Dafydd ap Gwilym. Within this Edwards states that approximately 80% of the work of Dafydd ap Gwilym relates to love and the natural world⁴.

Courtly love as parody: Within this section, the essay would explore the arguments put forward by Diana Luft in her article for the *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquim*⁵ in which she suggests that ap Gwilym used themes from continental poetry, not for its own sake but to provide a parody of the theme and actually emphasise how complex Welsh poetry was. Within this section, although a deviation from the main questions of the essay, it would be useful to introduce the concepts of the metres, i.e. the structure and rhythm of the verse that was written, that ap Gwilym used within his poetry as research suggests that he is often credited with either devising or at least heavily using and promoting the use of specific metres. With the introduction of this, it would be possible to argue that ap Gwilym was not

⁴ Swansea University, *Dafydd ap Gwilym* <

http://www.dafyddapgwilym.net/docs/The%20Literary%20Context.pdf?utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=Permanent&utm_content=Literary%20Context%20Essay&utm_source=website&utm_term=Essay> [accessed 12 November 2020].

⁵ Diana Luft, 'Genre and Diction in the Poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym; The Revelation of Cultural Tension' *Proceedings of the Harvard Colloquim*, 18/19 (1998/1999), pp. 278-297.

merely copying the ‘courtly love’ style of writing associated with continental poetry, but was in fact innovating and pushing the boundaries within modern poetry of the time. As evidence of this, the National Library of Wales website would be cited, which suggests that ap Gwilym did indeed increase the popularity of this particular style of poetry.⁶

Contemporaries of ap Gwilym: This section of the essay would introduce Gruffudd Gryg who was one of ap Gwilym’s contemporaries in the field of poetry within Wales. It is noted that a quote is attributed to Gryg that makes the suggestion that ap Gwilym relied too greatly on the style of ‘courtly love’ within his poetry. This could be used as a counter argument to the findings from the previous section. By providing a counter argument within the essay, the narrative can present a more balanced view prior to presenting any conclusions.

Secondary literature and evaluation of sources: This section would look at some of the arguments from the secondary literature i.e. literature that is reviewing the poetry of ap Gwilym rather than the poetry itself. As part of this, attention would be drawn to the Dictionary of Welsh Biography in which the article on Dafydd ap Gwilym appears to have been written by a professor who lectures on Celtic Literature for UWTSD. As has been mentioned earlier in the essay plan, the authorship of this webpage would need to be verified. However, assuming that the authorship is as has been suggested, it is interesting to note that the website references as further reading the Wikipedia page on Dafydd ap Gwilym. Wikipedia is generally regarded as an unsuitable source to reference within an academic context as the provenance of the information presented within it cannot be guaranteed.

Sample paragraph. Below is provided a sample paragraph that would be created for the essay. This paragraph would form part of the section that has been referred to above as ‘Main themes of Dafydd ap Gwilym’s poetry’.

If we look at the themes within Dafydd ap Gwilym’s poetry, we can see that although there is praise poetry created for specific patrons, a large amount of the poems are based around a theme of love, nature and a combination of the two. Within the ‘Dictionary of Welsh Biography’ Dafydd Johnson notes that ‘Dafydd ap Gwilym’s primary subject was sexual love.’, and that ‘his love poetry celebrated the joys of extra-marital sex’.⁷ If we then compare

⁶ The National Library of Wales, *Dafydd ap Gwilym and the Cywyddwyr*, (2020) <<https://www.library.wales/discover/digital-gallery/manuscripts/the-middle-ages/dafydd-ap-gwilym-and-the-cywyddwyr>> [accessed 11 November 2020].

⁷ Dafydd Johnston, ‘Dictionary of Welsh Biography’, *Dafydd ap Gwilym (c. 1315 – c. 1350), poet*, (2018) <<https://biography.wales/article/s12-DAFY-APG-1340>> [accessed 11 November 2020].

this to the definition of courtly love from the earlier section, we could be drawn to conclude that the two themes are in opposition to one another. As was noted before, courtly love as a theme within literature, showed an individual such as a knight being in devoted service and self-sacrifice to a lady of the court, and that this was a noble endeavour.⁸ This would appear to be in contrast to the theme of poems such as ‘Trafferth mewn tafarn’ and ‘Y Rhugl Groen’, in which ap Gwilym has, respectively, the person in the poem, presumably himself, attempting to instigate a sexual liaison with a girl who was described as ‘a fair slender maid’⁹, but failing due to falling over during the night whilst attempting to get to her room, and being interrupted in a sexual liaison by a shepherd¹⁰. It could be argued further that this type of expression of love not only does not fit with the concept of courtly love but is closer to the concept put forward in a quote attributed to ap Gwilym that ‘carnal love was blessed by God’.¹¹

Word Count: 1946.

⁸ British Library, *Courtly Love* <<https://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item107724.html>> [accessed 12 November 2020].

⁹ Swansea University, *Dafydd ap Gwilym* <http://www.dafyddapgwilym.net/index_eng.php> [accessed 12 November 2020].

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Dafydd Johnston, ‘Dictionary of Welsh Biography’, *Dafydd ap Gwilym (c. 1315 – c. 1350), poet*, (2018) <<https://biography.wales/article/s12-DAFY-APG-1340>> [accessed 11 November 2020].

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