

The heroic ideal and other 'Celtic' features in Welsh court poetry

The heroic ideal and other ‘Celtic’ features in Welsh court poetry

- What is the difference between heroic poetry and praise poetry?
- The heroic ideal in praise poetry, and how it is modified
- Other elements from our Celtic attributes list (nature, the prominent persona of the poet) – and more – to look out for in your reading

Heroic vs. praise poetry

- Heroic poetry is all about the heroic ideal.
 - a poet praising warriors known to him in his own time (this could also be called praise poetry)
 - OR, one looking back at, or recreating, or imagining, a much older conflict.
- Praise poetry is praise of a particular individual or group of individuals.
 - Heroism and generosity are very prominent but other attributes are also praised (especially in the later Middle Ages).
 - The term tends to be restricted to poems where we think the people praised were real and known to the poet.
- So the Gododdin, if composed in the sixth century, could be both a praise poem and a heroic poem.
- Or if it was composed in the ninth or tenth century we'd probably call it a heroic poem.
- **Praise poems were very common and had an important social and political role up until the end of the Middle Ages and beyond.**

‘Taliesin’ – the earliest praise poetry?

- Generosity in court and ferocity in battle
- The king as **defender**
- Emphasis on **victory and leadership** – no suggestion of the king (or his men) wanting to fight to the death just to gain renown

Lladdodd mab Nwython
O eurdorchogion
Cant o dëyrnedd
Hyd pan grybwyller.

**The son of Nwython slew / Of the gold-torqued / A hundred
princes / So that he might be praised**

Gododdin, ll. 927-30

A'th fo di gwas nyf gwerth na thechud

May you attain the abode of Heaven because you did not flee

Gododdin, l. 239

Rheget diffrydiad / Clod ior angorwlad

Rheged's defender, famed lord, your land's anchor

Taliesin, 'Urien Yrechwydd'

Ni byddwn lawen
Bei lleas Urien
Ys cu cyn iethydd
Iais cyngryn cyngryt
A briger wen olched
Ar elor ' ei dynged
A gran gwyarlled
Am waed gwyr gonodded
A gwr hewr bythig
A fei feddw ei wreig

I would not be happy
if Urien were slain.
He is most dear [to us] because he has gone off
shaking his spear-shaft.
With his whitewashed head of hair,
and a bier would bear him,
and a bloody cheek,
splattered with a hero's blood.
A stout steadfast hero,
whose wife would be widowed ...

... Go to the door and look, boy!
Listen, what is the sound! Does the earth shake?
Or is there an incursion of the sea?
[Rather] a growing chant from the foot soldiers...

Gwas y drws gwrandaw
Py drwft ai dayar a gryn
Ai mor a ddugyn
Dy gwyawg ychyngar wrth y pedydd

Taliesin, 'Ar Un Blynedd' (The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales, i, p. 56 (on GBS)); translation from Koch & Carey, *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 359-61

The Court Poets: professional poets associated with royal courts

The Poets of the Princes: the court poets of the 12th & 13th centuries



THE KING

From: *Leges Hywel Dda*

MS Peniarth 28, mid-13th century

An Introduction to Celtic Literatures (HPCS4005)

[Home](#)[My modules](#)[HPCS4005](#)

Welcome to the Module



Martin
Crampin
'Strata Florida
I'

This module offers students an overview of the literatures of the Celtic-speaking countries, with particular emphasis on Wales. From the earliest recorded bardic poetry through to contemporary writing, students will encounter a wide range of literary genres, including medieval tales, court poetry, mystery plays; folk ballads, poems and songs. The module also discusses the C18th-19th 'Celtic Revival', when much of this material was rediscovered and studied for the first time, and looks at examples of modern contemporary writers who have turned to these earlier texts for inspiration. While exploring the many similarities between the literary histories



Leganto Learning Lists

An Introduction to Celtic
Literatures (HPCS4005) (22
items)

Last updated yesterday

Holiadur Adborth Modiwl /

An Introduction to Celtic Literatures (HPCS4005)

Home

My modules

HPCS4005

Welcome to the Module



Martin
Crampin
'Strata Florida
I'

This module offers students an overview of the literatures of the Celtic-speaking countries, with particular emphasis on Wales. From the earliest recorded bardic poetry through to contemporary writing, students will encounter a wide range of literary genres, including medieval tales, court poetry, mystery plays; folk ballads, poems and songs. The module also discusses the C18th-19th 'Celtic Revival', when much of this material was rediscovered and studied for the first time, and looks at examples of modern contemporary writers who have turned to these earlier texts for inspiration. While exploring the many similarities between the literary histories

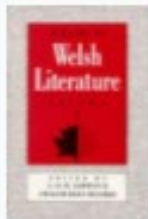


Leganto Reading Lists

An Introduction to Celtic
Literatures (HPCS4005) (22
items)

Last updated yesterday

Holiadur Adborth Modiwl /



book A guide to Welsh literature. Vol. 1 / Vol. 1

Hughes, Gwilym Rees.; Jarman, A. O. H., Rev. ed., Cardiff :, University of Wales, 1992.

Note: The scanned chapter on the court poetry is an excellent overview but note that it

Further

Available at Lampeter Campus Library Main Collection : 891.66 GUI [View online](#)

An Introduction to Celtic Literatures (HPCS4005)

Home

My modules

HPCS4005

Welcome to the Module



Martin
Crampin
'Strata Florida
I'

This module offers students an overview of the literatures of the Celtic-speaking countries, with particular emphasis on Wales. From the earliest recorded bardic poetry through to contemporary writing, students will encounter a wide range of literary genres, including medieval tales, court poetry, mystery plays; folk ballads, poems and songs. The module also discusses the C18th-19th 'Celtic Revival', when much of this material was rediscovered and studied for the first time, and looks at examples of modern contemporary writers who have turned to these earlier texts for inspiration. While exploring the many similarities between the literary histories

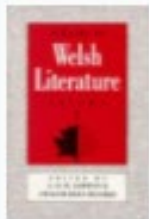


Leganto...ing Lists

An Introduction to Celtic
Literatures (HPCS4005) (22
items)

Last updated yesterday

Holiadur Adborth Modiwl /



book A guide to Welsh literature. Vol. 1 / Vol. 1

Hughes, Gwilym Rees.; Jarman, A. O. H., Rev. ed., Cardiff :, University of Wales, 1992.

Note: The scanned chapter on the court poetry is an excellent overview but note that it

Further

Available at Lampeter Campus Library Main Collection : 891.66 GUI [View online](#)



book Welsh verse

Conran, Anthony,, Bridgend :, Poetry Wales Press, 1967.

Further

Available at Lampeter Campus Library Main Collection : 891.66108 CON



The Edition

Beuno

Moliant i Feuno (Anon.), ed. Eurig Salisbury (published 29.12.20)

Cadfan

Llywelyn Fardd: *Canu i Gadfan*, ed. Ann Parry Owen (20.10.18)

Clydog

Vita Sancti Clitanci (Liber Landavensis/Vespasian A. xiv), ed. Ben Guy (12.9.19)

David

Gwynfardd Brycheiniog: *Canu i Ddewi*, ed. Ann Parry Owen (20.11.20)

Iolo Goch: *Mawl i Ddewi Sant*, ed. Dafydd Johnston (12.11.18)

Lewys Glyn Cothi: *Awdl-gywydd i Ddewi Sant*, ed. Dafydd Johnston (12.11.18)

Rhisiart Rhys: *Moliant i Ddewi*, ed. Eurig Salisbury (29.12.20)

The Court Poets: professional poets associated with royal courts

The Poets of the Princes: the court poets of the 12th & 13th centuries

- *bardd teulu* ‘household bard’
 - an officer of the king’s court
 - travels with the war-band
- *pencerdd* ‘chief of song’
 - head of the bardic order in a particular region
 - looser affiliation with the courts
- + lower status itinerant poets, minstrels, etc



THE KING

From: *Leges Hywel Dda*

MS Peniarth 28, mid-13th century

Echoes of Aneirin and Taliesin in 12th and 13th century court poetry:

- Ferocity and largesse
- Military imagery - bloodstained weapons, battered shields, reapers, etc
- The king or prince as defender
- The importance of fame...
- ... but, as in 'Taliesin' poems, not seeking death for the sake of fame. Victory in battle is all-important.

Elegies

- Praise of the departed – often very general, but may allude to death in battle
- Personal grief – real or professional (the poet does not exult in ‘glorious’ death like Aneirin)
- Expression of concern for the fate of the land in his absence
- Sometimes tempered by confident hope that son(s) and heir(s) will be worthy successor(s)
- Strong Christian message, desiring Heaven for the departed

Religious poems

- Poems praising God
- Confessional ('death bed') poems
- Poems praising saints and their shrines
 - Dewi Sant / St David
 - Cadfan
 - Tysilio

‘Gorhoffeddau’ – poets praising themselves!

- The two ‘Gorhoffedd’ poems by Gwalchmai ap Meilyr and Hywel ab Owain are allied to the praise tradition
- Poets praise *themselves* as warriors and lovers
- Attention paid to the natural world
- Significant that Hywel was a prince (son of Owain Gwynedd) i.e. not a professional poet – love poems too...
- Gwalchmai probably was a professional poet, sometimes at least, but seems also to have been a soldier fighting for Owain Gwynedd. He seems to have experimented a lot with different genres.

Summary: things to look out for

- Heroic/military elements – courage, role as defender, bringing victory
- Generosity, references to mead and wine
- Religious elements
- Nature (e.g. Gorhoffeddau)
- Poet's persona – strong characters, the heroes of their own poems, not afraid to criticize patrons

Also look out for the way the poet uses rhyme, alliteration, etc. to help achieve his aims...