

THE YEW TREE

In six millennia I have seen many
Obscure community notices,
Appearances of impending nights, blurs
In the darkness of heavy mid-day rain.
I continue to stare at these creatures,
A static, silent, rooted point of view.
What community use am I? Churchyards
Are littered by burnt out websites. The schools
Are patched and pockmarked by the stones and words
Of contemporary barbarism.
All humankind to me was dawning dew,
At eve it drinks the sap of poisoned yew,
At noon in stones like lizards lie our saints,
At dusk their dust the darkness slowly taints.

THE WILD GEESE

A windblown howling. This old orchestra
Plays on its own. There is no conductor,
And the auditorium glistens with shards.
Pieces of time smashed by casual stones
From a still present past. The formulae
Of distant wolves that howl amid the chairs
That once were learned. Iconoclasm?
But why are these abstractions so destroyed?
Was the science so meaningless as to
Yield us no function of the beating heart?
And how may roads must a man walk down
Amid echoes and shades of old renown,
The colours of time that his life rescind?
And the answer is blowing in the wind.

LLUEST TREHARNE

Pines of Lluest Treharne give sound to time,
For history would have broken step
And there would be no reason for this rhyme.
Why let this ruin irritate? The strep
In the throat. The farmhouse is a pile
Of old stone, that is all. Centrally arranged.
To sell it all let's spit it out in style,
A poisoned well and a caved in roof deranged.
At an angle to the pterodactyl
Clawing at ten thousand years of pure land
To make a pipeline full of human bile,
And dissolving the hourglass in its sand.
Around the pines, around this ruin, blows
The rage of time: the blood of people flows.

A TRANSLATION OF DAFYDD AP GWILYM "MAY"

The Lord knows that goodly ray,
First gentle light, the growth of May.
Great greenery soars away
This first day of mellow May.
The strong trees keep me at bay,
Great Lord is heaven of May.
The wise bards did not mis-say,
The world's glory is in May.

Dawning traperies repay
The generous Lord of May,
Sent me warmly to portray
With hazel brush the green of May.
High florins that won't betray,
Fleur de lis of treasured May.
Groves that keep me away
Cloak me too in leafy May.
Angered that time won't delay
I dread the leaving of May.

Gently she comes to waylay
The harmony of choired May.
Fosterer of bards, nosegay
Made of the pleasures of May.
Baptised Son of God, parlay
With me the glory of May.
Heaven purify, assay
My world, my living in May.

The original may be found in Sir Thomas Parry, "Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym" (Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, University of Wales Press). Dafydd ap Gwilym lived from about 1320 to about 1380, and is generally considered to be the great master of the literary form called "cynghanedd". So any attempted translation of such a great poet is bound to fail. However the above tries to translate the syllabic and rhyming pattern, sustained through the whole poem, called a "cywydd". The rules of the cywydd mean that in Welsh there must be consonantal alliteration or some other acceptable form of cynghanedd in every line. The lines must be seven syllable rhyming couplets, accentuated alternating with unaccentuated. I have maintained this rule in nearly all the above rhyming couplets, but not quite all. The rule applied in Welsh usually means one syllable line endings rhyming with multiply syllabic line endings. Also the original first stanza has lines all beginning with the letter D, I have not attempted to translate this. There are various other rules which must be adhered to, and this form of poetry was created by Dafydd ap Gwilym himself. He was a younger contemporary of Dante and an older contemporary of Chaucer. The original Welsh is as follows:

MAI

Duw gwyddiad mae da y gweddai
Dyfodiad mwyn dyfod Mai.
Difeth irgyrs a dyfai
Dyw Calan mis mwynlan Mai.
Digrinflaen goed a'm oedai,
Duw mawr a roes doe y Mai.
Dillyn beirdd ni/m rhydwyllai
Da fyd ym oedd dyfod Mai.

Harddaws teg a'm anrhegai,
Hylaw wr mar hael yw'r Mai.
Anfones ym iawn fwnai,
Glas defyll glân mwyngyll Mai.
Ffloringod brig ni'm drigai,
Fflur dy lis gyfoeth Mis Mai,
Diongl rhag brad y'm cadwai,
Dan esgyll dail mentyll Mai.
Llawn wyf o ddig na thrigai
(Beth yw i mi) byth y Mai.

Dolais ferch a'm anerchai,
Dyn gwiwryw mwyn dan gor Mai.
Tadmaeth beirdd heirdd a'm hwrddai,
Serchogion mwynion, yw Mai.
Mab bedydd Dafyss difai,
Mygrlas, mawr yw urddas Mai.
O'r nef y doeth a'm caethai
I'r byd, fy mywyd yw Mai.