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Dafydd Llwyd's poem

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I am no expert on Welsh bardic poetry, but it seems to me that some comment is needed on Andrew Breeze's article in *The Ricardian*, Vol XVIII, 2008, 'A Welsh Poem of 1485 and Richard III'.

Dr Breeze claims that it gives us 'an insight into Richard's reputation immediately after his death'. However, it seems evident that Dafydd, like so many Welshmen, was already engaged in Henry Tudor's cause. Dr Breeze acknowledges the well known report that the invader, as he marched his army through Wales picking up supporters with offers of patronage, had already consulted the bard/prognosticator and received a prediction of success.

From Ralph Griffiths and Roger Thomas (*The Making of the Tudor Dynasty*, p.143) we hear that 'Practically all Dafydd Llwyd's poems in honour of Henry Tudor were addressed to him as king, after his victory at Bosworth', which indicates that he had produced earlier poems in Henry's honour. This was not a bard whose opinions were unengaged.

Whether he was well- or ill-informed about the historical events mentioned in his poem, undoubtedly Dafydd would have heard plenty of defamatory stories about Richard from Henry and his entourage. From the line about Buckingham losing his head 'for no good reason', he shows himself adopting the Tudor stance on a very recent event in Wales – the rebellion into which his own countrymen were reluctantly dragged – in which connection any (non-Tudor) audience would recognize that the duke was executed for a very good reason indeed.

Looking at the few references to facts in the poem, with 90 percent being mere vilification and versification, we cannot be at all confident that any of Dafydd's views came from his own impartial conclusions or experiential background. Did Welsh bards take so much interest in what the English royals did to each other that this type of adulatory poem could really be categorized as providing 'insight into Richard's reputation'? Far from 'the blackening of Richard's name [beginning] within a few days of his death', I would assert that it had already been blackened all the way from Milford Haven to Bosworth Field.

To cite Dafydd's poem as indicative of contemporaneous opinion is like saying the same of Pietro Carmeliano, who similarly rushed to pen fawning verses to Henry VII (see Charles Ross, *Richard III*, p.xxii: 'Carmeliano ... saw no problem of conscience in praising Richard when alive and reviling him when dead').

I fear I must also take issue with the observation that Dafydd's remarks about Richard murdering Edward V and his brother had been anticipated by the Crowland chronicler, Domenico Mancini and contemporary London chronicles. Surely we all know that Crowland contains nothing of the sort. And Mancini, although spicing up his narrative with tempting morsels of foreboding about their possible fate, actually admitted in so many words that he had no idea what happened to them. As for the London chronicles, I know of no such remarks in any chronicle whose date of writing has been shown to anticipate Dafydd's poem, which Dr Breeze dates to the summer of 1485.

Referring again to Griffiths and Thomas, on page 97 we read, 'Dafydd Llwyd was no hack poet obediently mouthing the sentiments that a wealthy patron wanted to hear. He came from a prominent

family long settled in the Dyfi Valley in Western Powys and he therefore could afford to express his own opinions in his verse'. I cannot see, however, that this independence meant he spoke for the generality of people who, in Dr Breeze's words, 'woke up to hear of Henry Tudor's victory'. Henry may not have been his patron, but it is impossible to claim that the bard had no personal investment in writing in praise of an idealized Henry and a vilified Richard, even if it was only an emotional, or patriotic, or even (like Shakespeare) an artistic investment.