

JEAN DE MEUN AND DAFYDD AP GWILYM

Not many French writers have been more influential than Jean de Meun (*ca.*1240-*ca.*1305). His completion of *Le Roman de la Rose*, with Guillaume de Lorris's original, was the most widely read secular poem of the entire Middle Ages, and survives in over three hundred manuscripts, many of them finely illustrated. Amongst Jean's readers was Geoffrey Chaucer, who took from him material expected and unexpected, including the Wife of Bath and Pardoner, based respectively on Jean's *La Vieille* and *Faux-Semblant*.¹ The *Gawain*-Poet and John Gower were likewise indebted to Jean's work.² But, it seems, they were not the only poets in fourteenth-century Britain whose verse was liberated by the *Roman*.

This leads us to Dafydd ap Gwilym (*ca.*1315-*ca.*1349), greatest poet of a nation of poets. It seems Dafydd may also have borrowed from Jean, since *Le Roman de la Rose* is apparently the source of one of his finest poems, an address to the north wind. What follows thus has three parts. We start with Dafydd's poem, beginning *Yr wybrwynt helynt hylaw*, 'The wind of the sky, deft its course', but usually known as *Y Gwynt*, 'The Wind' (it has no title in the manuscripts). We then go through a famous passage in *Le Roman de la Rose* on a tempest and fine weather. We end by discussing the *Roman* in fourteenth-century Wales and the possibility that the Welsh poem derives from the French one. If this paper is correct in sourcing Dafydd's lyric, it not only lets us see the poem in a new way, but also provides fresh evidence for the circulation of French books within medieval Wales. The implications of that for our understanding of Wales's greatest poet, as well as the literary and intellectual culture of Wales in his day, are obvious.

First, *Y Gwynt*. Although Dafydd's address to the wind is only 64 lines long, it has long been admired and translated.³ Since this paper has been written not only for Celticists but for specialists in French studies and medieval bibliography, we quote the poem in Rachel Bromwich's translation, even though an English version cannot (of course) convey the rhetorical splendour of the original. It begins as follows (lines 1-20):

Sky wind of impetuous course
Who travels yonder with your mighty shout,
You are a strange being, with a blustering voice,
Most reckless in the world, without foot or wing.
It is strange how marvellously you were sent
Lacking a foot, from out the store-house of the sky,
And how swiftly it is you run
This moment now across the slope above.
No need for a swift horse under you,
Nor bridge nor boat at river-mouth;
You will not drown; you have been indeed forewarned,
You have no corners, you will not get entangled.
Though you might winnow leaves, seizing the nests,
None will indict you, neither swift troop
Nor hand of magistrate will hold you back
Nor blue blade nor flood nor rain,
Neither officer nor retinue can hold you
In your lifetime, scatterer of the tree-tops' feathers;
No mother's son can strike you (wrong to mention)
No fire burns you, nor treachery restrains you.

Dafydd reflects, as a man living in a conquered land, on how the wind is free from the power of magistrates or posses of troops or betrayal by allies. Lines 21-32 return to description:

No eye can see you with your great barren wall:
A thousand hear you, nest of the great rain,
Swift-natured annotator of the clouds,
Fair leaper across nine fallow lands.
You are God's blessing over all the earth,
With harsh roar shattering the tops of oaks:
Your nature dry, tenacious creature,
Trampler of clouds, a mighty journey,
Shooter upon the snow-fields up above
Of futile noisy piles of chaff.
Tell me, devoted jewel,
Your journey, north wind of the valley?

Dafydd reflects further (lines 33-8) on the wind's freedom:

Bad weather agitates the sea:
You are a reveller upon the shore.
Eloquent author, you are an enchanter,
You are a sower, a pursuer of leaves,
A privileged jester upon the hill: you are a hurler
Of wild masts upon the white-breasted sea.

Dafydd ends (lines 39-64) by bidding the wind take a message of love to his girl Morfudd, ignoring the complaints of her hunchbacked husband *Y Bwa Bach*, 'Little Bow'.⁴ *Y Bwa Bach*, who has gone down as *par excellence* the *mari ridicule* of Welsh literature, really existed, being mentioned in a Cardigan assize roll of 1346.⁵

You fly the full length of the world,
The hill's limit; be above tonight,
Ah, man, and go to Uwch Euron,
Gentle and kind, with voice easily heard.
Do not stop, do not hold back,
Nor fear, in spite of the Bwa Bach,
That whining accuser, serving jealousy,
That land that nourished her is closed to me.
Woe is me that I placed serious love
On Morfydd, on my golden girl,
A maiden who has made me exiled from the land:
Run upwards towards her father's house.

Beat on the door, make it be opened
Before day to my messenger,
And find a way to her, if it may be had,
And, with complaining, voice my sighs.
You come from the unchanging planets;
Say this to my faithful generous one:

However long I may be in the world
I shall remain her faithful follower.
Without her all my looks are sorrowful:
If it be true she is not faithful to me.
Go up, and you will see the fair girl:
Go down, you darling of the sky,
Go to the fair pale slender maid
And come back safely: you are the sky's treasure.

Let us now turn to Jean. In an extended passage (lines 17880-18012) on *phénomènes naturels* he describes changes of the weather, which he believed were caused by the stars. This passage is available with a convenient English translation, which we shall use later on.⁶ Yet the French text below is quoted from the critical edition by Poirion, which presents some interesting variants and may cast light on the version known to Dafydd.⁷ Jean's description can be summarized as follows. It is the stars, he claims, which produce violent winds, thunder, the tearing-up of clouds, and widespread destruction on earth:

Si lor font les ventres crever,
La cholor et li movemens
Par orribles tornoiemens,
Et tempestes geter et foudres
Et par terre eslever les poudres,
Voire tors et clochiers abatre ...

Rivers burst their banks and fields are flooded when the heavens weep:

Et plorent si parfondement
Si fort et si espesement,
Que font les flueves desriver
Et contre les champs estriver ...

Fish find themselves as lords and masters over meadows and amongst oaks:

S'en vont comme seignor et mestre
Par champs, par pres, par vignes pestre,
Et s'esconcent contre les chesnes,
Delez les pins, delez les fresnes.

Fish even reach the towns, entering barns and cellars and installing themselves everywhere:

Resont li poisson ostelier;
N'i remaint granche ne celier
Ne leu si vaillant ne si chier
Que par tout ne s'aillent fichier.

Then comes fine weather. The air rejoices and laughs, the clouds are glad:

L'air ostent de tretoute s'ire
Et le font esbaudir et rire;

Et quant les nues aparçoivent
Que l'air si resbaudi reçoivent,
Adont se resjoïssent eles ...

The clouds make dresses of their colours, spinning out their substance in white thread, as if to sew up sleeves:

Si font voler de lor filé
Granz aguillies de fil blanches
Aussi cum por coudre lor manches.

Then clouds go on races, driving their horses over mountains and valleys like mad things:

Si font ateler lor chevaus,
Montent et passent mons et vaus,
Et s'enfuient come desvens ...

To the feet of their steeds Eolus, god of the winds, puts wings such as no bird has had:

Lor met es piés si bonnes eles
Que nus oisiaus n'ot onques teles.

Dafydd's *cywydd* resembles Jean's description not in direct translation of particular lines, in the way Chaucer (and, later, C. S. Lewis) translated him into fourteenth-century English. The rigorous metrical demands of Dafydd's poem, which is a *tour de force* of ingenuity, ruled that out. What Dafydd seems to have done was not translate but imitate, taking some sixteen themes or allusions and recasting them in his terms. The sixteen motifs common to both poems are: the wind's violence; personification; the wind's madness; feet and wings; storehouses; slopes; horses; dangerous waters; destruction of the natural world; oak trees; images for clouds; destruction of man's work; branches; laughter; the influence of stars; and, in general, the wind's exuberance. They are listed as they appear in Dafydd's poem, then compared with the lines in Jean that apparently lie behind them.

1. The wind's violence

Dafydd begins (lines 1-3) by depicting the wind as masterful, strong, and noisy:

Sky wind of impetuous course
Who travels yonder with your mighty shout,
You are a strange being with a blustering voice.

Jean, as we might expect, dwells at length on the wind as powerful and boisterous, as in this sample (lines 17892-6):

Si lor font les ventres crever
La cholor et li movemens
Par orribles tornoiemens,
Et tempestes geter et foudres
Et par terre eslever les poudres....

(And the bellies [of the clouds] are ripped open by the heat and the rush of air in dreadful whirlwinds, and tempests rise up and thunderbolts are hurled, and dust storms arise over the earth).

2. Personification

Dafydd considers the wind as a person. He (line 3) declares ‘You are a strange being, with a blustering voice’; he later refers to the wind as reveller, enchanter, sower, and jester. Jean uses personification less of the wind than of the clouds (lines 17923-4, 17928-9):

Ne ne prisent lors un festu
Le noir mantel qu’els on vestu.

(They do not care a straw for the black cloak they are wearing).

Si li aïdent a plorer
Cum s’en les deüst acorer.

(They help it [the sky] to weep, as though they were about to be put to death).

3. Madness

Dafydd (line 4) calls the wind *drud byd*, ‘most reckless in the world’, where *drud* has the senses ‘brave; foolish; cruel’; Jean (line 18005) says of the mounted winds, *Et s’enfuient comme desvens*, ‘They flee like mad things’.

4. Feet and wings

Dafydd (lines 4, 6) calls the wind one *heb droed heb adain*, ‘without foot or wing’, and *heb untroed*, ‘lacking a foot’. Jean (lines 18011-12) says the god of the winds gives steeds to the clouds, and then:

Lor met es piés si bonnes eles
Que nus oisiaus n’ot onques tels.

(He puts such good wings to their feet as no bird ever had).

5. Storage places

Dafydd (line 6) thinks the wind comes *o bantri wybr*, ‘from out the storehouse of the sky’; Jean comments on how storms send floods and their fish (line 17974) everywhere: *N’i remaint granche ne celier*, ‘Not a barn or cellar is left’ where they do not come.

6. Slopes

Dafydd tells how the wind runs (line 8) *dros y fron fry*, ‘across the slope above’; Jean (line 18004) imagines how clouds on their steeds *Montent et passent mons et vaus*, ‘Mount and drive over mountains and valleys’.

7. Horses

Dafydd remarks (line 9) on the wind, 'No need for a swift horse under you'; Jean tells how (line 18003) when clouds want to travel, *Si font ateler lor chevaus*, 'Then they have their horses harnessed'. A couplet by Jean (lines 18003-4) may hence lie behind two lines (8-9) in Dafydd's poem.

8. Dangerous waters

Dafydd, living in a land of many torrents, is careful to note (lines 10-11) that the wind needs no bridge or ferry:

Nor bridge nor boat at river-mouth;
You will not drown; you have been indeed forwarned.

He adds (line 16) that *na llif na glaw*, 'neither flood nor rain' holds back the wind.

Jean, with a poet's eye for the strangeness of floods, gives a long account of them, beginning (lines 17929-32) with the tears of the clouds:

Et plorent si profondement,
Si fort et si espesement,
Que font les flueves desriver
Et contre les champs estriver ...

(Their bitter tears fall so thick and fast that they make the rivers overflow and hurl themselves upon the fields).

9. Branches

These are broken in both poems. For Dafydd, the wind (line 26) goes 'With harsh roar shattering the tops of oaks'. Having said that nothing can prevent trees from being uprooted, Jean adds (lines 17903-4),

Ou que des branches n'aient routes,
Au mains une partie, ou toutes.

(Or having their branches broken, some at least if not all of them).

As Poirion's edition shows lines 17901-4 to be an interpolation, this borrowing (if it is such) may provide evidence on the corrupt text available to Dafydd.

10. Oak trees

In the same line (line 26) Dafydd refers specifically to 'tops of oaks'; Jean's text (lines 17945-6) mentions floodwaters amongst oaks:

Et s'esconcent contre les chesnes,

Delez les pins, delez les fresnes ...

(They invade the oaks, pines, and ashes).

As Poirion shows this couplet as an interpolation, it may again help identify the text that Dafydd could have known.

11. Clouds

Dafydd (lines 28-30) calls the wind:

Trampler of clouds, a mighty journey,
Shooter upon the snow-fields up above
Of futile noisy piles of chaff.

Jean also considers clouds in motion (lines 17995, 18000). In fine weather they put out what he calls fleeces, *Et les vont par l'air charpissant*, 'And then go drawing them out through the air', letting out 'needlefuls' of white thread, *Aussi cum por coudre lor manches*, 'As if to sew up their sleeves.'

12. Destruction of man's works

Dafydd's wind (lines 37-8) is a threat to mariners: 'you are a hurler/ Of white-breasted masts upon the wild sea'. Jean's storm (line 17897) is still wilder: *Voire tors et clochiers abatre*, 'And even towers and belfries are blown down'. A modification of the image is not hard to explain. To this day France has many Gothic *tors et clochiers*. But medieval Wales, where building funds might allow a church no more than a simple bell-cote, had few high steeples. Hence the apparent change from land to sea.

13. Laughter

Dafydd (line 37) calls the wind *breiniol chwarddwr bryn*, translated as 'privileged jester on the hill', though the basic sense of *chwarddwr* is both 'laughter' and 'one who makes others laugh'. Jean says how (lines 17985-6) when fine weather comes:

L'air ostent de tretoute s'ire
Et le font esbaudir et rire;

(They [the stars] clear the air of all its anger and make it rejoice and laugh).

14. Heavenly bodies

Of special interest is Dafydd's comment to the wind (line 55), *Deuy o'r sygnau diwael*, which Rachel Bromwich translates as 'You come from the unchanging planets', though this cannot be right, because planets do change, by moving. Hence their name, from the Greek for 'wanderer'. Also inexact is 'You come from the splendid stars' on the Dafydd ap Gwilym website at what is now the University of Swansea. The correct translation is 'You come from the excellent signs of the zodiac'. This parallels Jean's belief (line 17885) that stars (*les cieus*) make winds: *Les vens font il contrarier*, 'It is because of them that the winds strive together'.

15. We may end by noting how the exuberance (even *joie de vivre*) of winds is a feature set out by both poets, as should now be obvious. Dafydd does not talk of ‘Zephyrus eek with his sweete breeth’, though one might, superficially, have thought him a better messenger for a love-poem. It is the north wind’s stupendous energy that appealed to Dafydd’s imagination and intellect; perhaps aptly for what has been seen as a love-poem of sorrow and enforced separation.

It will be seen that, if Jean is Dafydd’s source, he does not translate him closely, but instead takes a complex of themes and images to create something new. Some of these parallels may, of course, be discounted. But, if Dafydd knew nothing of Jean’s work, it seems rather strange that he could write a poem that shares so much with the *Roman*, one of the most popular poems ever written, and (as we shall see) certainly read in fourteenth-century Wales. So much for what the poems have in common. Quite as interesting is what Dafydd adds (reference to the oppressions of English rule, a message at the close to Morfudd, his lover) and what he apparently leaves out. He disregards Jean’s dismissive comment (line 17908) on the superstition that winds are the work of devils (*Mes tex diz ne vaut deus navés*, ‘Such a saying is not worth two turnips’). Nor does he mention the corn, vines, blossom, or fruit that are ruined by storms; or the suffering of the poor when floods rot the harvest in the field. There is no mention of Jean’s pantheon (Bacchus, Ceres, Pan, Cybele, Eolus) or his satyrs and nymphs. It is not hard to see why. Dafydd here had no interest in Jean’s free-thinking rationalism. It was irrelevant to his love-poem, which is based upon the poet’s wonder at nature. Corn and vines, and perhaps blossom and fruit, have always been peripheral to Welsh agriculture, so no mention of them here. The distress of the poor was irrelevant to his purpose; though we may note that the lines (17937-8) on it seem an interpolation, so Dafydd may in any case not have known them (again, perhaps giving evidence on the written text of the *Roman* available to Dafydd). As for classical allusions, these tend to be peripheral to medieval Welsh poetry, which could draw upon its own Celtic traditions.

If Dafydd did read Jean and found inspiration in him for one of his greatest poems, it will receive support from a tragic political event about the time Dafydd was born. By sheer chance we actually have proof that *Le Roman de la Rose* was read in fourteenth-century Wales. In 1317, after a failed military rising, there took place at Cardiff the execution of Llywelyn Bren, former steward to Gilbert de Clare. Llywelyn’s goods were listed, including his books, amongst which was a copy of *Le Roman de la Rose*.⁸ Such listings of books were normal following executions for treason. They led Bruce McFarlane to make a grim jest: since most book inventories are those of traitors condemned to forfeiture, this points to an unlikely connection between literacy and crime.⁹

Llywelyn Bren’s volume of French verse has fuelled suggestions that *Le Roman de la Rose* was also read by Dafydd, though with the admission that, on the whole, none of the various parallels (all from the part by Guillaume de Lorris) ‘would appear conclusive’.¹⁰ As for the *cywydd* to the north wind, this has generally been related to native Welsh sources and not at all to French poetry. Three themes stand out: Dafydd’s use of the native technique of *dyfalu*; the relation of this text to an archaic riddling poem on the wind in the Book of Taliesin (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 2); and its allusions to political repression by the English government. Sir Thomas Parry summed up the address as conveying its subject, with a complex metrical framework, ‘through an abundance of similes and metaphors and with a striking fertility of invention’.¹¹ Parry later gave expert analysis of Dafydd’s verse technique and his

formidable powers of word-formation and adaption.¹² Another aspect is touched on by Professor Fulton, who, quoting the lines on the wind's freedom from arrest by officers of English government, sees the poem as embodying 'freedom and autonomy from the laws governing society'.¹³

Our focus on Dafydd's poem *vis-à-vis* Jean de Meun is sharpened by a riddle of 104 short lines in the Book of Taliesin. On the basis of the riddle's description of the wind as 'powerful' and 'without foot or head', it has been thought that Dafydd knew this poem. But recent scholars doubt this. Given his amazing poetic gifts, Dafydd is unlikely to have thought highly of this item of popular learning, even if he read it. A few lines give an idea of its breathless but somewhat thin style:

He's in field, he's in wood,
Handless and footless,
Ageless, sorrowless,
Forever hurtless;
And he's the same age
As the five epochs;
And he is older
Than many times fifty;
And he is as broad
As the earth's surface;
And he was not born,
And he is not seen,
On sea and on land
He sees not, unseen ...¹⁴

Despite citation of Chotzen and Edwards for this as Dafydd's possible source, Marged Haycock is sceptical. She comments merely on 'a few similar lines' to be found in the two poems.¹⁵ So we need not think that Dafydd took anything from this artless product of popular learning. (The referee of this paper observes that commentary on the poem in www.dafyddapgwilym.net agrees with Marged Haycock.)

Where, then, does the above leave us? There appear to be four conclusions, if it can be accepted that Jean's lines lie behind those of Dafydd. First, since Dafydd's address to the north wind might reasonably be described as a work of genius, it is of interest to see what it takes, leaves, and transforms as regards its ebullient French original. We can perform exercises on Dafydd's modes of composition which must deepen our respect for his gifts. Welsh scholars have been at a disadvantage compared with, for example, students of Shakespeare. While they have been able to study with ease how Shakespeare transformed Holinshed or Sir Thomas North, Welsh scholars have not been able to do the same with Dafydd, since so very few of his poems have had a known source. By comparing Dafydd with Jean we may now see Dafydd's powers of invention as slightly less fertile than Sir Thomas Parry thought, but (since the poem is a masterpiece) his gifts of imaginative transformation as all the more impressive. Since this paper was written, the new encyclopedia of Wales has come to hand, which comments on Dafydd's 'fruitful and playful imagination' manifest in the use of an animal, bird, 'or even the wind' as *llatai* or messenger in a love-poem.¹⁶ Dafydd is, of course, amongst the most original of poets; but we may respect him the more if we see how his gifts transformed what he found in another

poet.

Second, Dafydd's poem tends to confirm what we know from the library of Llywelyn Bren for the reading of *Le Roman de la Rose* in Wales. This has clear implications for the history of medieval Welsh libraries and, in general, of the book in Wales. (This paper's referee notes that there is a poem by Yr Ustus Llwyd to Rosier, son of Llywelyn Bren, in the third part of the Hendregadredd Manuscript, in the National Library. This part was copied in the 1330s near Llangeitho in Ceredigion, and contains poems by Dafydd himself, who was living there at the time. So Dafydd was closer to Llywelyn Bren's circle than one might have thought.) It implies that closer reading of Welsh texts will point to the existence there of many manuscripts which have not actually come down to us, but which surely existed.

Third, we can see that medieval French culture had deeper impact on Welsh poetry than has been supposed. The influence of medieval French literature on that of Wales has often been considered.¹⁷ But Dafydd's presumed reading of Jean puts it into a striking new light.

Finally, it implies that a really thorough reading of Dafydd's poems and the *Roman* will uncover further borrowings. An instance of what can be found may be suggested here, as we close. After discussing *les phénomènes naturels*, including storms and fine weather, Jean passes on to *les miroirs*, which can distort the images of whatever or whoever is placed before them, making them big, small, and so on. Now, Dafydd also has a poem (beginning *Ni thymbiais, ddewrdrais ddirdra*) on a mirror. He accuses it of revealing him as prematurely senile, thanks to love for a girl from Gwynedd; or else of being a 'cold deceiver', that ruins his natural good looks. If Dafydd had turned the page in his presumed copy of Jean de Meun, he would have discovered a lively account of mirrors that may have prompted his own equally lively poem. In short, comparison of Dafydd ap Gwilym and Jean de Meun would appear to offer a rich field of investigation for scholars young and old.

Andrew Breeze

University of Navarre, Pamplona

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- 2 J. J. Anderson, *Language and Imagination in the 'Gawai'-Poems* (Manchester, 2005), 102-3; Peter Nicholson, *Love and Ethics in Gower's 'Confessio Amantis'* (Ann Arbor, 2005), 28-9.
- 3 Dafydd ap Gwilym, *Fifty Poems*, trans. H. I. Bell and David Bell (London, 1942), 188-93; *Medieval Welsh Lyrics*, trans. J. P. Clancy (London, 1965), 71-3; *Twenty-Five Poems by Dafydd ap Gwilym*, trans. Nigel Heseltine, 2nd ed (Banbury, 1968), 17-19; and www.dafyddapgwilym.net
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- 5 David Jenkins, 'Enwau personau a lleoedd yng nghywyddau Dafydd ap Gwilym', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 8 (1935-7), 14-5; A. C. Breeze, *Medieval Welsh Literature* (Dublin, 1997), 115.
- 6 *The Penguin Book of French Verse: To the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Brian Woledge (Harmondsworth, 1961), 187-92.
- 7 Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Daniel Poirion (Paris, 1974), 477-81.
- 8 T. M. Chotzen, *Recherches sur la poésie de Dafydd ap Gwilym* (Amsterdam, 1927), 110; G. J. Williams, *Traddodiad Llenyddol Morgannwg* (Caerdydd, 1948), 146; C. W. Lewis, 'The literary tradition of Morgannwg', in *Glamorgan County History: The Middle Ages*, ed. T. B. Pugh (Cardiff, 1971), 449-554.
- 9 K. B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford, 1973), 237.
- 10 Rachel Bromwich, *Aspects of the Poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym* (Cardiff, 1986), 37-8, 73-5.
- 11 *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse*, ed. Thomas Parry (Oxford, 1962), 544.
- 12 Thomas Parry, 'Dafydd ap Gwilym', *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* 9 (1976), 41-56.
- 13 Helen Fulton, *Dafydd ap Gwilym and the European Context* (Cardiff, 1990), 167.
- 14 J. P. Clancy, *The Earliest Welsh Poetry* (London, 1970), 106.
- 15 H. M. Edwards, *Dafydd ap Gwilym: Influences and Analogues* (Oxford, 1996), 142; *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliesin*, ed. Marged Haycock (Aberystwyth, 2007), 330.
- 16 Anon., 'Dafydd ap Gwilym', in *The Welsh Academy Encyclopedia of Wales*, ed. John Davies, Nigel Jenkins, Menna Baines, and Peredur I. Lynch (Cardiff, 2008), 190.
- 17 Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'Rhai agweddau ar gyfieithu yng Nghymru yn yr Oesoedd Canol', *Ysgrifau Beirniadol*, 13 (1985), 134-45, and her 'Medieval Welsh tales or romances? Problems of genre and terminology', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 47 (2004), 41-58.