

SIR JOHN RHŶS MEMORIAL LECTURE

THE WELSH METRICAL TREATISE
ATTRIBUTED TO EINION OFFEIRIAD

By THOMAS PARRY

Fellow of the Academy

Read 10 May 1961

WELSH poetry written between the middle of the twelfth century and the middle of the sixteenth century was formal in substance, conservative in metrical patterns, and archaic in language. It was the product of a tradition, flexible enough to admit of developments, but in which certain customs were regarded as indispensable and handed down with precision from one generation of poets to another.

Such a tradition presupposes bardic schools. Proficiency in the strict metres, and knowledge of the archaic words and syntactical constructions required of every competent Welsh poet, could only be acquired through personal instruction. Bardism being an exacting and honourable profession, its exponents doubtless had to undergo a course of training, if only to maintain the dignity and the 'mystery' of the craft. The exact nature of the training—by whom administered, its duration, the location of the schools, and the curriculum—is nowhere specified. The so-called 'Statute of Gruffudd ap Cynan', which occurs in sixteenth-century manuscripts, purports to give the organization of the bards at the time, with the implication that this was based on certain regulations promulgated by the King of Gwynedd in the twelfth century. It is generally agreed, however, that the 'Statute' as we have it cannot possibly be related to any changes in the bardic system which Gruffudd ap Cynan may have sponsored, but rather that it incorporates the rules drawn up at the Caerwys Eisteddfod of 1523. The bardic poetry of Ireland, which in all essentials corresponds closely to that of Wales, was the product of formal teaching in schools conducted for the purpose.¹ It is fair and reasonable to

¹ For a description of the Irish schools, drawn from an early eighteenth-century printed source, but regarded as reliable, see J. E. Caerwyn Williams, *Traddodiad Llenyddol Iwerddon* (1958), 129-35; O. J. Bergin, *The Journal of the Iverian Society*, v. 153-66.

assume that similar schools existed in Wales, or at least that there existed some facilities by which qualified poets could instruct young aspirants in the history, legends, words, and diction which formed the matter and style of their poetry, and in the intricate rules of prosody which governed its expression. No description of such schools has, however, survived.

Familiarity with the works of the poets makes it easy to infer what instructions of a practical kind would be necessary for the poets' pupils. But were they taught anything of a more general cultural nature? In view of their unquestioned allegiance to the literary customs and standards of their forebears, one is tempted to think that the instruction given was restrictive, and that it was not meant to make the individual personality susceptible to outside influences. This was not entirely so, although it is undoubtedly true to say that a poet could attain a very high point in his profession by adept emulation of his predecessors.

There is one document which historians of Welsh literature and thought have regarded as being of prime importance for understanding the background of medieval Welsh poetry. It is a treatise, usually referred to as 'Gramadeg Einion Offeiriad', of which the oldest copy is preserved in the Red Book of Hergest, written in the late fourteenth century. A slightly later copy is found in Llanstephan MS. 3. Two later incomplete copies occur in Bangor MS. 1 and Peniarth MS. 20, both of which were probably written in the early part of the fifteenth century.¹ Two facts concerning these four early copies seem to me to be of prime importance. First of all, they are not by any means identical. Though there is no serious diversity of substance, there are enough differences in the order of items, in the wording, and especially in the examples of the various metres given in the section on prosody to preclude the possibility of any three of them being direct copies of the fourth, or of all four being copies of one lost original. There has always been a tendency to regard the Red Book version, being the oldest, as the original work, but I can find no justification for this assumption.

Secondly, in none of these four manuscripts is there any indication of authorship, and it is not until the beginning of the

¹ A description of the manuscript sources, a discussion of the contents, and printed copies of the treatise as it occurs in the Red Book, Llanstephan 3, and Peniarth 20, will be found in G. J. Williams and E. J. Jones, *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid* (1934). The Bangor MS. 1 version was printed by Mr. J. T. Jones in *The Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, ii. 184-200.

seventeenth century that we find an author named. Sir Thomas Wiliems of Trefriw included in a manuscript collection of miscellaneous prose, which he wrote in 1609 and which is now known as Mostyn MS. 110, two copies of the treatise. One of these he attributes to 'Dafydd Ddu Athro o Degeingl', and the other to 'Einion Offeiriad o Wynedd'. Of Dafydd Ddu very little indeed is known; the title 'Athro' proves that he was a cleric. A few *cywyddau* are attributed to him, and so, on the authority of Dr. John Davies, is *Gwasanaeth Mair*, a translation of the *Officium Beatae Mariae*.¹ Einion Offeiriad, obviously another cleric, is not quite as obscure as Dafydd Ddu. His name occurs as 'Eygnon Yfferat' in the Ministers' Accounts for the year 1352-3 as having once been the owner of an acre of land in the commote of Mabwynion in Ceredigion,² which had escheated to the Crown. The implication is that Einion was then dead. Sir Thomas Wiliems, in the manuscript already mentioned, states that Einion was 'o Wynedd', which presumably means that he was a native of Gwynedd. This need not conflict with the statement that he owned land in Mabwynion, because his patron, Sir Rhys ap Gruffudd, in addition to being the holder of several offices under the Crown in Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire, was also bailiff of the forest of Snowdon and a member of the Penmynydd family. According to Sir Thomas Wiliems, Einion composed the 'grammar' in honour of Sir Rhys ap Gruffudd, and an *awdl* to the same patron is extant.³ This *awdl* (which will be the subject of comment later in this discussion) was probably written some time between 1322 and 1326.

One feature of the *awdl* has led most modern scholars to attribute the authorship of the 'grammar' to Einion Offeiriad. In the section of the 'grammar' dealing with the 24 metres, it is stated in two of the older manuscripts that three of the metres were invented by Einion (namely, *Hir-a-thoddaid*, *Cyrch-a-chweta*, and *Tawddgyrch Cadwynog*). Two of these metres appear in the *awdl*, and some missing lines may well account for the absence of the third. Thus, it is argued, the author of the poem, the inventor of the three metres and the compiler of the 'grammar' were probably one and the same person. On the other hand, in Peniarth MS. 20 it is stated that the innovator was Dafydd Ddu,

¹ Brynley F. Roberts, *Gwassanaeth Meir* (Caerdydd, 1961).

² *B.B.C.S.* x. 151.

³ Details of Rhys ap Gruffudd's career are given by Sir Ifor Williams in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1913-14, pp. 193-203, and the *awdl* is printed in *Y Cymmrodor*, xxvi. 134-8.

and it is worth noting that in *Gwasanaeth Mair*, already referred to as being attributed to Dafydd Ddu, the metre used for the translation of the hymn 'Ave Maris Stella' is the *Hir-a-thoddaid*, one of the new metres. As in the case of Einion and the *awdl* it is fair to suggest that Dafydd Ddu introduced one of his own inventions into a work of his own. Another point in Dafydd's favour is the fact (noted by Professor G. J. Williams¹) that he, and not Einion, is regarded by the poets of later generations as the authority on the bardic craft. Furthermore, the modified and expanded versions of the bardic grammar used by the *penceirddiaid* of the sixteenth century, such as Wiliam Llŷn and Simwnt Fychan, claim to be based on the work of Dafydd Ddu Athro. It will thus be seen that, judging by the meagre evidence available, it is Dafydd Ddu rather than Einion Offeiriad who should be credited with having standardized or revised the bardic rules of grammar and prosody, or whatever it was he did. It is sometimes maintained that Dafydd Ddu revised a work originally compiled by Einion. Chronologically this could no doubt have happened, because, as far as we are able to judge, Einion belonged to the first half of the fourteenth century and Dafydd Ddu to the second half. But as Professor G. J. Williams has shown, a comparison of the early extant copies of the treatise does not suggest that any of the surviving versions represent either Einion's original or Dafydd Ddu's revision.

Leaving aside the authorship, let us examine the treatise itself in order to discover (a) whether it embodies the whole or part of the instructions which the poets of the age may have imparted to their pupils, and (b) whether the section on prosody reflects bardic practice. The work divides naturally into two sections, the first dealing with grammar, and the second with the poet's craft.

The section on grammar need not detain us. Scholars have already pointed out that it is almost entirely a translation of some version of the Latin grammar associated with the names of Donatus and Priscianus,² whose works were popular in the Middle Ages. It is not meant to be a grammar in the modern sense of the word, that is, an account of the phonology and syntax of a particular language. It is the concept, current at the time, of grammar being a study in itself, which, along with

¹ G. J. Williams and E. J. Jones, *op. cit.* xxii.

² *Ibid.* xxxiv; Ifor Williams, *ŷ Cymrodor*, xxvi. 129.

logic and rhetoric, made up the *Trivium*. Based as it is on the grammatical features of the Latin language, a great deal of it bears no relevance to Welsh, and would in no way help the poets to gain a mastery of their medium. Included in it, however, is a long discussion of the syllable, with particular reference to the Welsh language. The syllables are classified according to the use made of them in Welsh poetry for purposes of rhyme and *cynganedd*, and this classification is undoubtedly part of the practical instruction given by the poets to their pupils. The poets' mastery of the peculiar syntactical constructions of the Welsh language and the copiousness of their vocabulary, both very conspicuous in their works, were obviously acquired by some other means than learning what the author of this 'grammar' furnished them with. Grammar was regarded as part of the intellectual equipment of a poet, a necessary cultural ingredient, quite apart from any practical use to which it might be put. In course of time new and more comprehensive grammatical treatises were translated. One such, written (and possibly first translated) in 1455, has retained a large number of the examples in the original Latin, although, as is well known, very few indeed of the poets knew the language. At the end of one copy the scribe has given in a note his justification for the study of grammar in the following words: 'Thus end the rules of grammar in the Welsh language, which a competent poet ('penkerdd o brydydd') should know, especially in regard to the Latin language and strange languages, because it is difficult to speak these languages properly without a knowledge of these rules, which make for correct pronunciation. But there is not much need for them in the Welsh language, for it is uncontaminated and not easily mispronounced. The art of grammar however is no less valid, because it is a fine acquirement, and in it lie the roots of proficiency in all languages.'¹ In spite of his confused reasoning the scribe's respect for grammar as one of the liberal arts is evident.

Scholars have long recognized the significance and purpose of the grammatical section of the bardic treatise, and we need not discuss it further. A study of the section on prosody, however, brings out certain points of interest, which have not elicited much comment from those who have written on this topic in the past. The tendency has been to regard the author as a prime authority on matters relating to the bardic craft, and consequently to treat his statements with great respect. Sir John

¹ G. J. Williams and E. J. Jones, op cit. 88.

Morris-Jones, writing in 1924, calls the treatise 'an authoritative work, the basis of all we know about the bardic craft'.¹ In the introduction to *Cerdd Dafod*, published in 1925, he expresses a slightly modified view, stating that the old metrical treatises are of great value for the light they throw on the *cynganedd* and the metres, but that the ultimate test is the works of the poets.² It is strange to find Morris-Jones, who himself subjected the metrical treatise to such a penetrating analysis in his *Cerdd Dafod*, conceding so much. It appears to me that the original author of the treatise (be it Einion Offeiriad, or Dafydd Ddu, or possibly someone else) was a clever and quite well-informed dilettante, who approached the bardic craft from a personal or un-bardic standpoint, and imposed upon it a system which was in many respects a reflection of his own whims. The system was definitely not a codification of existing practice. The resulting treatise gives great prominence to material which had no place in the bardic practice of the time, and ignores some features which were indispensable to it, an inevitable result, no doubt, of the scholastic and (to use a modern epithet) unscientific attitude of the age. This external approach to the bardic tradition tends to confirm the view that the author is either Einion Offeiriad or Dafydd Ddu, both of whom can be assumed to have been influenced by monastic or ecclesiastical learning.

To develop the argument in more detail it is necessary to fix a date for the compilation of the treatise in its original form. (What exactly was the content of that original form we do not know, because the earliest copy, namely that found in the Red Book of Hergest, doubtless carries some modifications of the original work because some of the examples of particular metres quoted are from the works of late fourteenth-century poets.) The technique of the bards developed so rapidly in the fourteenth century that before any deduction can be made from bardic practice one has to be fairly certain whether one is speaking of the beginning, the middle, or the end of the century. The *awdl* by Einion Offeiriad to Rhys ap Gruffudd is placed by Sir Ifor Williams between 1322 and 1326. As I have already mentioned, this *awdl* contains two of the metres which Einion Offeiriad is said to have invented. It is, therefore, fair to assume that the metrical treatise was composed about the same time, possibly a little earlier. To assess its relevance to contemporary bardic practice we must study the metrical features of the poems

¹ *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1923-4, p. 28.

² *Cerdd Dafod*, vii.

written by the poets who flourished in the first quarter of the fourteenth century, such as Gruffudd ap Dafydd ap Tudur, Goronwy Gyriog, Iorwerth Beli, Llywelyn Brydydd Hoddnant, Trahaearn, and Casnodyn. The poets of this period are not numerous, and the sum of their poems is small (for a reason which I will suggest later), but they are sufficient to give us a clear indication of the stage of development which the Welsh metrical system had reached at the time. To judge the validity of the rules as set out in the treatise it is also necessary to refer to the evolution of metrical practice in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, because the continuity of the tradition was such that the formulation of rules would inevitably be based on recognized custom.

Anyone reading this treatise would undoubtedly be surprised to find that it contains no description of *cynghanedd*, that most obvious of all the features of Welsh poetry. *Cynghanedd* evolved gradually and without conscious effort on the part of the bards over the period between 1100 and 1350.¹ It originated in a simple repetition of consonants and internal rhyme, and developed into a fixed system by the middle of the fourteenth century. By the first quarter of the century, which is the period to which the composition of the metrical treatise has been assigned, *cynghanedd* had assumed a complexity very nearly approaching that which was eventually stabilized, and all the poets writing at this time display a remarkably uniform pattern of metrical adornment. Such adornment was obviously regarded as indispensable to bardic compositions. Another very conspicuous feature of the poems of the period is *cymeriad llythrennol*, the repetition of the same consonant at the beginning of a number of lines. It is, therefore, strange that *cynghanedd* and *cymeriad* are only mentioned once in the treatise, where it is stated, 'Errors can occur in three places in a poem, namely, in the *cymeriadau* and the *cynghanedd* and the rhymes. . . . The *cymeriadau* are at the beginning of the lines, the *cynghanedd* in the middle, and the rhymes at the end.' The statement that the *cynghanedd* is in the middle of the line may be significant, because it does not correctly describe the lines of the poets of the period, whose *cynghanedd* is so developed as to fill the line except for a couple of syllables at the end. Einion Offeiriad, one of the reputed authors of the treatise, was not only conversant with these metrical practices, but also able to use them with masterly

¹ See 'Twf y Gynghanedd', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1936, p. 143.

competence in his *awdl*, already mentioned, to his patron, Rhys ap Gruffudd.

A substantial section of the treatise is devoted to a detailed and lucid account of the 24 metres. This classification has been accepted throughout the centuries as the authoritative statement of the rules governing all writings in the strict metres. Minor changes were, however, allowed. By the middle of the fifteenth century one form of *englyn* had been dropped and the *rhympunt hir* admitted, and at the eisteddfod held at Carmarthen about 1450 Dafydd ab Edmwnd introduced a further change by excluding two more *englyn* forms and substituting two new metres of his own invention.¹ But all the time the total of 24 was strictly adhered to.

It would be well at this point to consider the number 24, which is so faithfully preserved in spite of all modifications. It occurs in Welsh lore in several other connexions. Corresponding to the 24 metres of bardic craft we find the 24 measures of instrumental music.² Physically there were 24 feats.³ The number of the most powerful kings was 24,⁴ and so was the number of the best knights in Arthur's court.⁵ The noblest ancestors,⁶ the prime virtues,⁷ the wonders of the island of Britain,⁸ and, according to the laws, the officers of the king's court,⁹ all numbered 24. The author of the treatise gives an alphabet of 24 letters, though the number does not include all the sounds of the Welsh language. We would not be justified in attributing any deep significance to the number in any of these connexions; one is, of course, reminded of the 24 hours of the day. The 24 metres are divided in the treatise into two groups of 12, one group comprising *englynion* and *cywyddau* and the other the *awdl* measures. (This division was eliminated by the changes introduced later.) The number 12 had no doubt considerable astrological and scriptural significance—the 12 signs of the zodiac, the 12 months of the year, the 12 apostles. But whether the basic concept was 12 or 24, once the number had become established, there was a strong tendency to adhere to it, merely through force of attachment to the familiar, long after its symbolic significance had been forgotten. This was a general tendency in the Middle Ages. 'Although symbolic

¹ For a detailed account see J. Morris-Jones, *Cerdd Dafod*, pp. 348-52.

² *Report on MSS. in the Welsh Language*, ii. 335.

³ *Ibid.* 509.

⁴ *Ibid.* ii. 168.

⁵ *Ibid.* 304.

⁶ *Ibid.* 319.

⁷ *Ibid.* 304.

⁸ *Ibid.* i. 396.

⁹ S. J. Williams and J. Enoch Powell, *Llyfr Blegywryd*, p. 2.

numbers are profusely scattered through the pages of nearly all medieval writings, it is necessary to distinguish, especially in secular and unscientific literature, between the philosophical or scientific use of numbers, the symbolic, the imitative, and the merely naïve preference for certain commonly used numbers. Concerning the last, no more elaborate explanation need be sought than the very human predilection for repeating the commonplace.¹ This undoubtedly explains the frequent occurrence of the number 24 in Welsh traditional lore, and the author of the treatise was merely following the pattern.

A cursory study of the classification of metres shows that the author deliberately and violently brought the number of metres up to 24, thus disregarding the bardic practice of his time. The most obvious proof of this is that he is credited with having invented 3 of the 24. There is also included a borrowing from a medieval Latin verse form (*cywydd llosgyrnog*), which does not seem ever to have been used by any poet before the middle of the fifteenth century. John Morris-Jones in his analysis of the 24 metres has shown that only 12 metres were in actual use by the Gogynfeirdd, and that the author of the treatise doubled the number by clever and somewhat arrogant manipulation of recognized metres and by the inventions and the borrowing already mentioned.² To appreciate how arbitrarily all this was done it is necessary to go into some detail regarding particular metres, and as a preliminary consideration some remarks about the nature of the fundamental principles of Welsh metrics are called for.

The basic metrical units were the four-beat line and the six-beat line.³ Each of these was sometimes considered as two half-lines and sometimes as double lines, and a system of caesuras and rhymes made possible a number of variations. It is important to bear in mind that, with one exception, namely, the *englyn*, the stanza was not an original feature of Welsh prosody. A stanza can be defined as a number of lines of a certain length and rhythm linked together by a rhyme scheme to form a unit, which is repeated a number of times to make up a poem. Such a unit did not form the basis of the poems of the Welsh bards. These poems were rather a succession of line-units with varia-

¹ V. F. Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism*, p. 127. (My thanks are due to Mr. Alwyn D. Rees, M.A., for drawing my attention to this work.) For a discussion of numbers and the numerical system in Welsh see J. Loth, *Revue Celtique*, xxv. 144.

² *Cerdd Dafod*, pp. 358-9.

³ *Ibid.* 357.

tions of breaks and internal rhymes; furthermore they are monorhymes, two or more such monorhymes being sometimes linked together to form a long poem. There was, however, a tendency, which first becomes evident in the second half of the twelfth century, to place the variations at regular intervals in the poems and to break up a long sequence of lines into groups of four, thus producing what came very near to being stanza forms. But the notion of the stanza was not fully grasped, because it was still the custom to maintain one rhyme throughout the poem.

Let us return to the treatise. The author, probably owing to his familiarity with medieval Latin rhymed verse, is obviously thinking in terms of stanzas, because the three metres which he himself invented are described as having a fixed number of lines. His definition of the *gwawdodyn* prescribes a stanza of four lines, which proves that he was aware of the tendency of the bards to divide their poems into four-line sections. On the other hand, when the author discusses the *gwawdodyn hir*, he states that it may contain any number of lines, an admission which immediately precludes its being a stanza, and which is a more accurate description of the practice of the bards. It is also worth noting that the *gwawdodyn* is a blend of two other metres, namely, *cyhydedd naw ban* and *toddaid*, each of which the author has included and described separately. Another instance of the same sort of confusion is afforded by the author's definition of the metre called *byr-a-thoddaid*. This metre, he says, should begin with a *toddaid byr* (like the first two lines of an *englyn unodl union*), which is followed by any number of eight-syllable lines, and the metre ends with another *toddaid byr*. Here again we have an example of the author's inclination to put into stanza form what is really an irregular distribution of metrical variations in the works of the poets. Furthermore, the *toddaid byr*, which is an integral part of this metre and indeed a metre in its own right, is nowhere mentioned in the classification.

In spite of the author's predilection for stanza forms and his tendency to distort the facts of bardic practice to suit his own ends, he is constrained to accept the true line-unit on several occasions, as in the case of the *toddaid*, the *cyhydedd fer* and the *cyhydedd naw ban*, with the result that his list of metres is a confusion of two fundamental principles. His ignorance of the details of the bardic craft is further proved by his omission of some metres which were in constant use among the bards. It

has been said that he omitted the *toddaid byr*; he also omitted a variant of it, a triplet division of the six-beat line, which occurs frequently in medieval poetry and indeed forms part of the metre called *clogymach*, which the author includes and defines. As if to highlight his inconsistency he did include both the *cyhydedd hir* and the *toddaid*, although the one is a variant of the other, and in this he was justified, as the rhyme scheme is sufficiently different in the two forms to warrant their being regarded as two different metres.

Had the author been better informed with regard to certain tendencies in the use of metres among the bards, he might have discovered divisions and combinations which he could have interpreted as stanza forms. A contemporary of his, Iorwerth Fychan, sang a love ode which is divided into four-line sections like a *gwawdodyn* reversed.¹ Had this been included in the treatise as a metre, it might very well have gained the recognition which was accorded to the other metres. Similarly the *toddaid byr* joined to two lines of the *cyhydedd fer* was on the way to becoming a metrical unit.² The same combination with two lines added is also found.³

Enough has been said to show that the classification of the metres in the treatise is a purely arbitrary one, determined to a large extent by personal predilections. The point could be elaborated by a study of what is said about the various forms of *englynion*. What are we to make of it all? Is the treatise as we have it in the Red Book of Hergest a new edition, as it were, of an old corpus of regulations, or is it a compilation of rules deduced from the works of the bards and based on the author's own observations? No final answer can be given, but it would be safe to say that some of the contents are old, but that there is also a strong personal element. There are at least three signs of antiquity which deserve mention. In the first place, it has already been noted that the reference to *cynganedd* is surprisingly meagre for a work attributed to the first half of the fourteenth century. It is true that at this time *cynganedd* was in a fluid state, and that it was only about the middle of the century that

¹ *Llawysgrif Hendregadredd*, 325.

² *Ibid.* 135, 267-9, 282. This is denied by Morris-Jones (*C.D.*, p. 360), who maintains that the combination was avoided because a similar combination was available in the *englyn unodl union* and *englyn unodl crwca*. It appears to me, however, that, had this combination only been included as a metre by the author of our treatise or a previous prosodist, it would have been recognized as such.

³ *Ibid.* 146, 147.

it assumed the pattern which henceforth became stabilized. Yet the repetition of consonants and the combination of this with rhyme, which are the essentials of *cynghanedd*, had attained such a high degree of complexity in the works of the poets of the period, such as Gwilym Ddu o Arfon, Gruffudd ap Dafydd, Llywelyn Brydydd Hoddnant, and Casnodyn, that one would have expected a commentator on the craft of poetry to have given it some attention. The one reference to *cynghanedd* in the treatise, to the effect that it occurs *in the middle of the line*, seems to imply a description of the state of metrical adornment reached in the early part of the thirteenth century. Why the author of the treatise did not bring the reference up to date by amplifying it to suit the circumstances of the fourteenth century, it is difficult to say. It is true that the primitive *cynghanedd* of the period was not capable of precise definition or strict codification, but it was certainly not a random practice, and certain features were sufficiently distinctive and stable to admit of description. The implication is that the author was relying on an original work which belonged to a time when *cynghanedd* was a loose, indefinable feature of poetry.

Another intimation that parts of the treatise are based on early material is furnished by the example given of the *cywydd* metre. The origin of the *cywydd* is obscure. It first appeared in the works of Dafydd ap Gwilym (*fl.* 1340-70), who made extensive use of it, and there it ranges from simple poems of rhyming couplets with hardly any metrical ornament to poems which embody the most complicated metrical practices together with all the embellishments of rhetoric. Assuming that Dafydd ap Gwilym developed and perfected this metre, it is fair to conclude that it began as very unsophisticated writing and ended up by incorporating all the metrical complexities and the stylized diction of the traditional Poets of the Princes. The example given in the treatise¹ does not correspond to either end of this progression. Its style is not that of Dafydd ap Gwilym's more unadorned poems; it is rather the ornate style found in the stately *awdlau* of the traditional bards. On the other hand it does not conform to the rules of *cynghanedd* and accentuation which became indispensable to the *cywydd*. It suggests an archaic type of verse which the higher grades of bards must have practised at a fairly early period. If that is the case, it is strange and tantalizing that among the thousands of lines written by

¹ See particularly *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid*, 31, where the Llanstephan MS. 3 version gives an example of six lines.

the Poets of the Princes not a single example of the *cywydd* has survived.

Thirdly, there is a very old ring about the names of the metres. Such terms as *rhyfunt*, *toddaid*, *gwawdodyn*, *englyn*, *cywydd*, *clogyrnach* admit of no easy etymological explanation. On the other hand, the names of the new metres, *Hir-a-thoddaid*, *Cyrch-a-chweta*, and *Tawddgyrch Cadwynog* (invented as variously stated either by Einion Offeiriad or Dafydd Ddu) are obviously based on the old terminology and bear a discernible relationship to the structure of the metres with which they are associated.

From this brief analysis it becomes evident that the compiler of the treatise was utilizing traditional material which he manipulated according to his own preference and predilection. Some of this material formed part of the instruction imparted by the poets to their disciples. As already noted, interpolated into the section on grammar, which is an abridgement of the Latin grammar used in medieval schools, is a classification of the Welsh diphthongs, a classification entirely based on the functions of the diphthongs in prosody. Similarly at the end of the treatise we find a list of triads, which again no doubt incorporate some of the practical guidance given in the bardic schools. On the other hand, there is a section listing those properties of the Godhead, the Virgin, the saints, and the various categories of men which it was the duty of the poet to eulogize¹—another example of the author's personal contribution to bardic lore. It is, therefore, obvious that the treatise, taken as a whole, can in no way be regarded as a manual of instruction for aspiring bards, nor is it a product of the schools. It is the work of a man of learning, trained, one may imagine, in one of the monastic schools, who approached the bardic culture of his time with intelligence and interest, who understood it sufficiently well to give a correct account of certain aspects of it, but who also indulged his own whims to such a degree as to preclude the possibility of the work being an accurate reflection of current bardic practice.

Assuming the author to have been Einion Offeiriad, and the work to have been compiled in the first quarter of the fourteenth century, one is tempted to speculate as to why it should have been compiled at this particular time. Was it just an accident that one particular person became interested in the age-long native culture of his country, and endeavoured to amalgamate

¹ The philosophical background of this section has been demonstrated by Mr. Saunders Lewis in *Braslun o Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg*, chap. iv.

it with the learning which was acceptable to a wider circle and which he himself, in his capacity as cleric, had acquired? This may very well be the case, and our knowledge of the original author and of the circumstances of the time in Wales is so limited that any attempt at explaining what really happened should be undertaken with caution. However, a few salient facts emerge which justify one in comparing the age with a later period in the history of Welsh thought and drawing a few tentative conclusions.

The first quarter of the fourteenth century produced no great poets. Such poets as Iorwerth Beli, Llywelyn Brydydd Hoddnant, Iorwerth Fychan, Goronwy Gyriog, and Gwilym Ddu o Arfon are not among the foremost. The two best poets of the age, Casnodyn and Gruffudd ap Dafydd ap Tudur, do not appear to have been prolific writers, and of the works of the others only two or three poems occur in each case. This is significant. Equally noteworthy is the scarcity of the usual eulogistic poetry, which seems to have been supplanted by sophisticated poems to women and poems on religious subjects. The poetry of the period is in clear contrast, as regards both bulk and subject matter, to that of the previous century and a half, which rang with such noble names as those of Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr, Llywarch ap Llywelyn, Dafydd Benfras, Bleddyn Fardd, and Prydydd Bychan. The next group of great names belongs to the middle years and the second half of the fourteenth century, such men as Dafydd ap Gwilym, Gruffudd ap Maredudd, Llywelyn Goch, and Iolo Goch. In the closing years of the thirteenth century and the opening years of the fourteenth interest in bardism was at an ebb.

It does not require any strenuous mental effort to ascertain the reason for this state of affairs. It is not easy to assess the precise effect on cultural matters of the loss of Welsh independence with the death of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in 1282. There may be a tendency at times to dramatize the event, and magnify the political disaster into a national catastrophe. On the other hand, knowing as we do that many men of princely blood, such as Owain Cyfeiliog, and many men of noble rank, like the ancestors of Dafydd ap Gwilym, had often been on the side of the English king against their compatriots, and remembering the fragmentary state of Wales at the time, we realize that a firmly rooted Welshness and unity of tradition were able to ride the storms of political confusion unharmed, and we tend perhaps to minimize the calamitous nature of the fall of the last

independent Welsh prince. I will quote the memorable last sentence in Sir John Lloyd's *History of Wales*: 'It was for a far distant generation to see that the last Prince had not lived in vain, but by his life-work had helped to build solidly the enduring fabric of Welsh nationality.' This is no doubt the correct judgement, delivered by a man not given to excesses, but who was, nevertheless, of 'a far distant generation'. It is true that not all Llywelyn's compatriots loved or respected him; there was a plot against him and an attempt on his life by some of his own countrymen. But we are given a clear indication of what his death meant to at least one member of the bardic order in the elegy written by Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Coch. The sad solemnity of this poem, its utter despair, and its distracted contemplation of a bleak prospect, make it so different from the scores of other elegies on fallen princes that one cannot but believe that the poet looked upon the death of Llywelyn as a supreme tragedy.

The bardic order had for many centuries been closely intertwined with the great and small princely members of the ruling class. The imposition of the shire system after the conquest deprived a large number of princelings of their personal jurisdiction, though a few survived as minor marcher lords. In the course of time Welshmen were appointed to various offices under the Crown and came to wield a degree of limited authority comparable at least with that enjoyed by their predecessors in the days of independence. Their social status was such as to enable them to patronize the bards, and to enable the bards to recognize in them those virtues which they had been accustomed to extol in the princes of old. The patronage of the gentry generally and of the dignitaries of the Church, which seems to have become common by the second half of the fourteenth century, ensured the perpetuation of the bardic tradition and indeed gave it a powerful impetus. An important feature of the succeeding years, and one that has not hitherto been sufficiently appreciated, is the interest taken in the bardic craft by the gentry themselves, the elevation of bardism from being the occupation of a paid professional class to being the recreation of cultured men of means, though the professional class persisted. Several of the outstanding poets of the period, like Dafydd ap Gwilym, Madog Benfras, Llywelyn Goch, and Ieuan ap Rhydderch, were men of considerable social standing, who did not depend upon their craft for their livelihood. But the impact of the political changes resulting from the events of

1282 must have been temporarily disruptive to the bardic order, and the paucity of poetry in the period we are concerned with can thus be accounted for.

It was in these circumstances that Einion Offeiriad (if it was he) wrote his grammatical and metrical treatise. Whether the resurgence which came about in the middle of the fourteenth century was attributable to his efforts, or whether he was part of the general stabilizing process by which the bardic tradition found its feet again, it is by now impossible to decide. It may help us to understand his work in relation to his background if we compare his age with a later age, in which similar circumstances prevailed owing to the results of a political event becoming evident, and of which, with much more material at our disposal, we are better able to judge. The Act of Union of 1536, as has long been acknowledged, facilitated the anglicization of the Welsh gentry, thereby accelerating the decline of the native bardic tradition, and, what is much worse, preventing the introduction of new poetic standards. In the middle of the sixteenth century there must have been abundant signs that only an infusion of new blood could save the practice of poetry in Wales. There were some good poets still writing, but a great deal of the work produced was imitative and repetitive and utterly devoid of the throbbing vitality which characterized the poetry of the early years of the century. There were men who realized this, such as Gruffudd Hiraethog, herald, antiquary, and teacher of bards, and longed to have the bards, who formed the educated class of the time, made familiar with the new learning which those who had felt the influence of the Renaissance were coming to appreciate. Foremost among such men was Gruffydd Robert, the learned Catholic exile, who published the first part of his *Dosparth Byrr* in Milan in 1567. This remarkable work is strangely similar to that of Einion Offeiriad, in that both authors include a treatise on grammar and then the rules of Welsh prosody, but the difference between them in the way they approach their subject is very conspicuous.

Unlike Einion, Gruffydd Robert was not content with making his section on grammar a Welsh rendering of the grammar of the Latin language, regarded merely as an academic discipline. It is rather a descriptive grammar of the Welsh language, the first ever compiled, and a tribute to the author's scholarly ability to comprehend and formulate the rules of Welsh grammar. It should also be noted that Gruffydd Robert had in mind the expansion of the bardic craft to include the recognition and

refinement of the many free metres in use among unskilled versifiers, and its extension beyond the bardic order to any educated person who could be taught to write poetry. But having allowed for all the differences in outlook and achievement which two and a quarter centuries had brought about, I think it fair to maintain that the key to Einion's attitude to his subject is that of Gruffydd Robert. Like Gruffydd Robert, the great humanist, Einion was the product of a culture which differed from the native bardic tradition. Both men approached the bardic tradition from outside, and learnt all they could about it, probably from the poets themselves and possibly from whatever written source was available. They mastered the rules of prosody sufficiently well to be able to write poetry in the traditional manner. Both were no doubt aware that the writing of poetry as practised by the bards, and the requirements of the schools, tended to produce an attitude of exclusiveness which led to intolerant detachment and cramping isolation. It was their aim to introduce the bards to the broader culture of Europe—Einion by putting 'grammar', one of the liberal arts, within their reach, Gruffydd Robert by inducing them to study the distinctive qualities of their own language, and to enrich it, as the other nations of Europe were doing at the time, and to use it for the production of poetry with a much wider appeal than the eulogistic verse which was the basis of the activities of the Welsh poets.

Gruffydd Robert's work was a highly personal contribution by an enlightened scholar. I suggest that Einion Offeiriad's contribution was equally personal, and that the author was, by medieval standards, equally enlightened. I have endeavoured to show that Einion's classification of the 24 metres is in many respects an arbitrary one, and that he even invented three of them. To regard his treatise as a statement of general bardic practice or a codification of bardic rules, and thus to give it all the weight of an authoritative pronouncement, is to take a distorted view of its true function. I have already mentioned that Morris-Jones, while maintaining that a knowledge of the works of the poets was indispensable to the proper understanding of Welsh metrics, nevertheless attached great importance to Einion's work, and his own description of 'the old 24 metres' is merely an elaboration of Einion's remarks. This view of the man detracts from his significance and underrates his intention. His work is more than a contemporary account of current practice, valuable as such an account would doubtless be. It is

a charter for the bardic schools, meant, not to supplant the oral instruction given by the poets to their pupils, but rather to supplement it, and to widen the horizons of those who were concerned with the native Welsh culture.

To what extent did Einion succeed? The four oldest manuscripts of the treatise range in date from *c.* 1400 to *c.* 1450. One would not expect to find a copy, except in the handwriting of antiquaries, after 1450, because certain new regulations had come into force by then and changes were made in the substance of the treatise. The four old manuscripts, as already mentioned, are not by any means identical—there is sometimes a slight rearrangement of material, and the examples of the metres differ occasionally. If it is right to suppose that the treatise was composed towards the end of the first quarter of the fourteenth century, the amount and nature of the variations in these four manuscripts would justify us in concluding (1) that the treatise had been in use and had been modified to suit the taste or requirements of its users; (2) that it was held in considerable esteem, which precluded any major alterations being made to it. It is a fair surmise that for well over a century after it was first compiled, the treatise found favour with the poets. This is confirmed by the fact that some of the metres invented by Einion appear in the works of the poets towards the end of the century. Both Ieuan Llwyd and Y Proll made use of the metre *Tawddgyrch Cadwynog*. It follows that the four early copies of the treatise that have been preserved cannot represent the work as originally put together by Einion Offeiriad, but rather the slightly varied versions which the bards of the fourteenth century had been using. The general framework had been preserved; indeed no changes of a fundamental nature had been made. But some definitions had been modified, and some of the original metrical examples were dropped in favour of quotations from the works of 'contemporary' poets.

In the course of the fifteenth century certain major changes were made in the bardic treatise. A new and different grammar was translated. Certain modifications were made in the metres, particularly by Dafydd ab Edmwnd, who invented two new metres, and applied more rigid rules of rhyme and *cynghanedd* to some of the others. But the total number of 24 as stipulated by Einion was always strictly adhered to. The idea of a written curriculum for the bardic schools (no doubt to supplement what was taught orally) persisted to the end of the sixteenth century, when the age of the bards of the nobility was drawing

to its close. Copies in the hands of Simwnt Fychan, Wiliam Llŷn, and Wiliam Cynwal, the major figures of the period, have survived. The notion also persisted that grammar should form part of the curriculum. The grammar section was much expanded, but was more 'latinized' than ever, the examples in some cases being left in the original Latin, only to prove that the bardic copyists were utterly ignorant of that language.

Einion's treatise had therefore two lasting results. It fixed, quite arbitrarily, the number of the strict metres as 24, a theoretical, innocuous, and somewhat fatuous accomplishment, because it in no way governed the poet's choice of metres during the succeeding centuries. More important was the introduction of grammar as an essential component of bardic teaching, and the establishment of the concept of the subject as a study in itself divorced from any true understanding of a particular language. The tragedy was that the bards failed to rid themselves of this attitude of the medieval schoolmen, even though Gruffydd Robert, with the penetrating insight of the true Renaissance scholar, had shown that grammar, regarded as an analysis of the Welsh language, could have been a more profitable study and much more relevant to the requirements of their craft. It is somewhat ironical that Einion's most valuable bequest to posterity was the single stanza form *Hir-a-thoddaid*, which he himself devised. This became one of the favourite stanzas of nineteenth-century poets, and in it is embodied some of the finest poetry of our own age, in such poems as 'Ymadawiad Arthur', 'Eryri', and 'Yr Haf'.