

Three Iwan Llwyd Poems

translated by David Lloyd

Aneirin

A poet of the Brythonic Gododdin tribe, Aneirin witnessed the c. 600 AD battle at Catraeth between Gododdin warriors and invading Angles of Bernicia and Deira, ending in disastrous defeat for the Gododdin. Aneirin then wrote one of the earliest surviving poems in Welsh – “The Gododdin” – describing battle scenes and the courage of warriors. (Translator’s Note)

With camera and helmet
you dropped from the churning chopper,
close to where battle raged,

then scrambled, crouching,
for the nearest cover, bullets
and bombs shrieking around you:

then past the flaming bones of tanks,
torn-off limbs, bleeding-out soldiers –
raw meat, pickings for crows:

you slogged through mud,
sometimes rising to snap a photo
of man-killing in living color

or black and white,
in Catraeth and Kampuchea,
the Somme and the Six Counties,

with wizardry and craft,
and the young men flocked to you,
transfixed by what they believed

your eye divined:
fame that outlives battle,
hint of immortality.

Aneirin

Gyda'th gamera a'th helmed
disgynaist o'r horfrennydd,
prin filltir o'r frwydr,

yna'i gwadnu hi'n dy gwrcwd
am y lloches agosaf, a'r ergydion
yn ffrwydo'n yfflon o'th gympas:

heibio i sgerbydau llosg y tanciau
a lludw'r cyrff gwag, y milwyr briwiedig
a'r cig amrwd a fwydai frain,

baglaist a syrthiaist drwy'r mwd,
gan godi weithiau i dynnu llun
dyn yn lladd mewn lliw:

mewn du a gwyn,
yng Nghatraeth a Kampuchea,
y Somme a'r Chwe Sir,

megaist gyfaredd a chyfarwyddyd,
a heidiai'r hogia i ateb dy gwestiynau
a dilyn â'u llygaid ragluniau'r lens:

rhoddaist iddynt fri a oroesai frwydr
a chip ar dragwyddoldeb
yn awen ddi-duedd y newyddiadurwr.

"Aneirin" reprinted by permission, originally published in *Dan Anesthetig* (Gwasg Taf, 1987)

Safeway

There is a light in Safeway at midnight:

and the shelves are stocked with treats,
ready for loading into the basket,
our daily bread from a supermarket,
a world always giving,
always more than enough:

in my unlit house
I listen to planes taking off,
rising slowly, keeping low,
seagulls of darkness targeting a gulf
after gorging themselves in garbage dumps,
in dung heaps:

I turn over and try to sleep,
hearing voices on the night airwaves:
"a useful war
clears the air after heat and damp,
slaps us from slumber,
shakes the glass house to its foundations."

Thank God there's a light in Safeway
with rays reaching deep into the night,
offering comfort and refuge
and the aroma of fresh baked bread:

it'll be open again tomorrow,
and I'll be there early
for the company of customers,
for the homey shapes of boxes and baskets,

for familiar tastes in plastic packages
for the thrill of super-shopping,
for the warmth of pennies,
for the promise of the "sell-by-date,"
for the security of choice,
for the unyielding touch of the credit card:

I hear the seagulls flocking home:

there is a light in Safeway at midnight:

I'll be safe in its cellars.

January 1991

Safeway

Mae golau yn Safeway am hanner nos:

ac mae'r silffoedd yn llawn cysuron,
wedi'u dethol yn barod i'w llwytho i'r fasedg,
yn fara beunyddiol archfarchnadol,
yn fyd ar agor drwy'r adeg,
yn fwy na digon:

minnau yn y tŷ tywyll
yn gwrando'r awyrennau'n gadael,
yn codi'n araf, yn cadw'n isel,
gwylanod y tywyllwch yn cyrchu culfor
ar ôl stwna'n y tomenni lludw,
yn y twmpathau tail:

troi drosodd a thrïo cysgu,
yn gwrando'r lleisiau ar donfeddi'r nos:
"fe wna rhyfel les,
clirio'r awyr ar ôl lleithder y tes,
chwalu tipyn ar ein hepian chwil,
ysgwyd y tŷ gwydyr i'w sylfeini."

a diolch byth bod golau yn Safeway
yn estyn ei belydrau i'r nos,
yn cynnig cysur a lloches
ac oglau bara newydd ei bobî:

bydd ar agor eto 'fory,
af i giwio'n gynnar,
i deimlo cwmni'r cwsmeriaid,
i deimlo siap cartrefol y bocsys a'r basgedi,

i deimlo blas cyfarwydd y pacedi plastig,
i deimlo gwefr y siwpyr-siopa,
i deimlo cynhesrwydd y ceinioga,
i deimlo sicrwydd y 'sell-by-date',
i deimlo diogelwch y dewis,
i deimlo cyffyrddiad cadarn y cerdy credyd:

clywaf y gwylanod yn heidio adre:

mae golau yn Safeway am hanner nos:

byddaf yn saff yn ei selerydd.

Ionawr 1991

"Safeway" reprinted by permission, originally published in *Dan fy Ngwynt* (Gwasg Taf, 1992)

War and Peace

We all go through the stations of the night,
sometimes in an instant:
a flash of light,

faces glimpsed at midnight
having missed another train
before tunneling back to darkness:

at other times, hours slumped
on an empty platform,
a clutch of bags for company;

or yawning out tales of stale journeys
over a plastic pint of beer
while the next journey's skeleton

sings a round on the loudspeaker:
"calling at Birmingham New Street,
Stafford, Rugby and London Euston."

We all go through the stations of the night,
anonymous, unfamiliar:
retreating faces and embraces

hurrying past,
swearing under our breath
at the cold coffee or the body on the tracks,

screaming at whoever will listen
that we missed our connection,
that we're trapped in the stations of the night.

Refugees by choice, we have not known
the brotherhood of shadow stations
where trains arrive from Sarajevo, Colombo and Phnom Penh

to pour out tears from packed carriages:
where terror and pity converge
on the platform's pinball machine,

soldiers, journalists, wailing
families, garish skeletons,
a junction of weeping,

bursting, knotted up:
each alone, running,
yet wanting touch,

wanting to see another, to find
at the outer reaches of unloved night
one who is ready for talk, for comfort,

who'll reach a hand across the tracks:
we all go through the stations of the night,
fingering magazines on grimy shelves,

thumbing headlines, not knowing the sweet spark
of connection in the synapse
between finger and thumb.

Rhyfel a Heddwch

Fe awn oll drwy orsafoedd y nos:
ar wib weithiau:
dim i'w weld ond rhuthr o olau

ac ambell wyneb drwy'r tywyllwch
wedi colli trê'n arall,
cyn twnelu i'r dŵch yn ôl:

dro arall, gan dreulio oriau
yn gwrcwd ar blatfform gwag
yng nghwmni rhes o fagiau

neu'n dylyfu straeon hen siwrneai
dros beint o gwrw plastig
a sgerbwd y siwrne nesaf

yn dôn gron ar y tannoy:
'calling at Birmingham New Street
Stafford, Rugby and London Euston.'

Fe awn oll drwy orsafoedd y nos:
yn amheronol, anghyfarwydd,
wynebau'n ffarwelio, yn cofleidio,

yn prysuro o'r tu arall heibio,
yn damio dan ein gwynt
fod y coffi'n oer neu fod corff ar y lein,

yn cega pwy bynnag a wnaiff wrando
am i ni golli cysylltiad,
am inni gael ein dal yng ngorsafoedd y nos.

Y ni, y ffoaduriaid o ddewis,
na wyddom frawdoliaeth y gorsafoedd tywyll
lle daw trennau o Sarajevo, Colombo a Phnom Penh

i dywallt eu gofid o'r cerbydau gorlawn:
lle mae gwae a thrueni'n gwau
ar beiriant 'pinball' y platfform,

yn filwyr a newyddiadurwyr, yn dwrw
o deuluoedd, yn sgerbydau o liwiau
egr, yn gyffordd o ddagrau,

yn fwrlwm, yn gwlwm drwy'i gilydd:
pob un ar ei ben ei hun
yn ffoi, ac eto eisiau cyffwrdd,

eisiau adnabod, eisiau dod o hyd
i galon ar gyrion y nos ddi-gariad
sy'n barod am eiliad i siarad, i gysuro,

sy'n estyn llaw ar draws y cledrau:
fe awn oll drwy orsafoedd y nos,
a bodio'r cylchgronau ar y silffoedd budur:

wrth fyseddu'r penawdau, ni wyddom y wefr
felys o gydio trugaredd, rhwng bys a bawd,
a rhyfeddu.

"Rhyfel a Heddwch" reprinted by permission, originally published in *Far Rockaway* (privately printed, 1997)

Born in 1957 in Llanidloes, Wales, Welsh-language poet **Iwan Llwyd** is the author of a dozen books, from his 1983 poetry collection *Sonedau Bore Sadwrn* (*Saturday Morning Sonnets*), to *Sonedau Pnawn Sul* (*Sunday Afternoon Sonnets*), published the year before his death in 2010. In 1990 Llwyd won the coveted "crown" at the National Eisteddfod for his long poem "Gwreichion" ("Sparks"). His 1997 poetry collection *Dan Ddylanwad* (*Under the Influence*) received the Welsh Book of the Year prize in 1997. In its obituary, *The Independent* described Llwyd as "One of the most accomplished poets of his generation" who "explored all the media through which he might find a wider audience for his poetry, including radio and television, as well as public readings and musical performances in his native Wales and the Americas."

Poet, fiction writer, and translator **David Lloyd** is the author of eleven books, including four poetry collections: *The Everyday Apocalypse*, *The Gospel According to Frank*, *Warriors* and *The Body's Compass*, forthcoming from Salmon Poetry. In 2022 he was co-recipient of the Paula Svonkin Creative Arts Award. He has received two Fulbright Scholar awards: in 2021 at Cardiff University, Wales, and in 2001 at Bangor University, Wales. In 2016 he received the M. Wynn Thomas Award for outstanding academic work in the field of Welsh Writing in English. In 2000, he was co-winner of the Poetry Society of America's Robert H. Winner Memorial Award, judged by W. D. Snodgrass. He directs the Creative Writing Program at Le Moyne College in Syracuse, NY.