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Political Prophecy and the Trial of Rhys ap Gruffydd, 1530–31

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Over the past two decades, awareness of the importance of prophecy in the political and intellectual culture of medieval and early modern Britain has gained considerable ground.[1] A secular literary-political discourse concerned with the great events of high politics, and the fates of kings and territories, political prophecies survive in all major insular languages (English, Latin, French, Welsh, and from the later part of this period, Gaelic). Political prophetic production appears to have been most voluble in England and Wales, but for the most part (although with a few notable exceptions) scholarly emphasis has been placed on prophetic literatures in their national contexts, and the uses of prophecy on both sides of the Anglo-Welsh border have been addressed in relative isolation to one another.[2] However, the history of insular political prophecy is one that we cannot tell without a sizeable awareness of the cross-border transmission of prophetic material between Wales and England; and as a field of literary study it is necessarily comparative.

There is parity between a good deal of Welsh and English prophecy. This is rooted in the twelfth-century writings of Geoffrey of Monmouth, after whom we name the Galfridian prophetic and historical traditions active in both England and Wales. Alongside a sizeable measure of innovation, Geoffrey reworked Welsh material in his *Prophetiae Merlini*, which survive as Book VII of his *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*c*.1138), a work as attractive in a Welsh context as it was in an English one.[3] Common Galfridian

[1] The first major publication on this subject, from where the term "political prophecy" originates, is Rupert Taylor, *Political Prophecy in England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1911). The study of English political prophecy has been attracting increasing attention since the later part of the twentieth century. Howard Dobin, *Merlin's Disciples: Prophecy, Poetry, and Power in Renaissance England* (Stanford, Ca., 1990); Sharon Jansen, *Political Prophecy and Protest Under Henry VIII* (Woodbridge, 1991); Sharon Jansen, 'Prophecy, Propaganda, and Henry VIII: Arthurian Tradition in the Sixteenth Century,' in *King Arthur through the Ages,* ed. Valerie M. Lagorio and Mildred Leake Day (New York, 1990), 275–91; Tim Thornton, *Prophecy, Politics and the People in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 2006); L. A. Coote, *Prophecy and Public Affairs in Later Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2000). For the most recent study of Welsh political prophecy see Aled Llion Jones, *Darogan: Prophecy, Lament and Absent Heroes in Medieval Welsh Literature* (Cardiff, 2013), and also below, n. 2. This is in addition to important editions of Welsh prophetic texts, including most recently, Marged Haycock, *Prophecies from the Book of Taliesin* (Aberystwyth, 2013). For a recent discussion of the relationship between the English, Welsh and Scottish prophetic traditions, see Victoria Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place in Medieval England: From Geoffrey of Monmouth to Thomas of Erceldoune* (Cambridge, 2016).

[2] For important comparative work in this field see Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'Prophecy and Welsh Nationhood in the Fifteenth Century,' *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1985), 9–26; David Johnston, 'Iolo Goch and the English: Welsh Poetry and Politics in the Fourteenth Century', *Cambridge Medieval and Celtic Studies* 12 (1986), 73–98; Helen Fulton, *Welsh Prophecy and English Politics in the Later Middle Ages* (Aberystwyth, 2009). See also, Flood, above, n. 1.

[3] Geoffrey of Monmouth, Michael D. Reeve, ed.,

interests formed a basis for interchange between English and Welsh prophetic cultures throughout the Middle Ages and into the early modern period. Welsh engagements with English prophecy were particularly pronounced during the second half of the fifteenth century, contemporary with the dispute for the English throne between the houses of York and Lancaster, known as the Wars of the Roses. During these years, prophetic commentators were deeply invested in the accession to the English throne of candidates of Welsh descent – possibilities presented by Edward IV and his father Richard of York, and later Henry Tudor. This provided the occasion for the translations of English prophecies we find in Welsh manuscripts from the mid-fifteenth century onwards, and partial citations in the contemporary works of the Welsh poets of the *uchelwyr* (gentry) from the fifteenth century into the early sixteenth.[4]

There is far less evidence of the movement of prophetic material in the other direction, from Wales to England, during this period – a testament to the English and Welsh bilingualism of Welsh prophetic authors and readers, in contrast to the monolingualism of English authors and readers. There is one important instance, however, where we do see some evidence of English engagements with Welsh prophecy: the 1530–31 treason trial of the Welsh nobleman Rhys ap Gruffydd, who was charged (among other things) with a seditious engagement with political prophecy.[5] Contemporary with, and generally understood in direct relation to, the controversy surrounding Henry VIII's divorce proceedings and the break with Rome, Rhys's trial and execution have been regarded as something of a mirror to English and Welsh, and Catholic and Protestant, antipathies during this period.[6] In part by virtue of its relationship to the great political transformations of the 1530s, the trial has attracted important comment from historians, but thus far relatively little from literary scholars engaged with political prophecy.[7]

Rhys ap Gruffydd was the grandson of Rhys ap Thomas, a foremost Welsh ally of Henry Tudor, who proved instrumental in the latter's victory at the battle of Bosworth in 1485, which marked the very beginning of Tudor rule. This battle was anticipated, and subsequently celebrated, by Welsh prophetic authors, for whom the key Welsh political actors in the Tudor accession were the architects of a new age of British (that is, Welsh) political ascendancy.[8] Rhys the younger was a member of a family with an important place

and Neil Wright, transl., *The History of the Kings of Britain* (Woodbridge, 2007). For a discussion of Geoffrey's Welsh sources see Brynley F. Roberts, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and Welsh Historical Tradition,' *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 20 (1976), 29–40; Brynley F. Roberts, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *Brut y Brenhinedd*', in A. O. H. Jarman, Rachel Bromwich and Brynley F. Robert, eds., *Arthur of the Welsh* (Cardiff, 1991), 97–116; M. E. Griffiths, *Early Vaticination in Welsh with English Parallels* (Cardiff, 1937), 57–83; Karen Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth* (Cardiff, 2010), 78–93.

[4] In addition to Fulton and Lloyd-Morgan (above n2) see Victoria Flood, 'Henry Tudor and Lancastrian Prophecy in Wales', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 34 (2014), 67–86. For editions of a number of these prophecies, in addition to Fulton, see R. Wallis Evans, 'Daroganau', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 9 (1939), 314–19; R. Wallis Evans, 'Proffwydoliaeth y Disiau' and 'Proffwydoliaeth y Fflowrddelis', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 21 (1966), 324–333; R. Wallis Evans, 'Canu Darogan: testunau amrywiol', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 36 (1989), 84–96.

[5] The two most detailed accounts of the trial are found in W. Llewelyn Williams, 'A Welsh Insurrection', *Y Cymmrodor* 16 (1902), 1–95; R. A. Griffiths, *Sir Rhys ap Thomas and his Family: A Study in the Wars of the Roses and Early Tudor Politics* (Cardiff, 1993) 88–111. See also Glanmor Williams, *Recovery, Reorientation and Reformation: Wales, c.1415–1642* (Cardiff, 1981), 255–57; Jerry Hunter, *Soffestri'r Saeson: Hanesyddiaeth a hunaniaeth in oes y Tuduriaid* (Cardiff, 2000), 1–27.

[6] Griffiths, *Sir Rhys ap Thomas and his Family*, 100–11; Hunter, *Soffestri'r Saeson* esp. 12.

[7] This is with the notable exception of Hunter, *Soffestri'r Saeson*, 1–27.

[8] Gruffydd Aled Williams, 'The Bardic Road to Bosworth: A Welsh View of Henry Tudor', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1986), 7–31; David Rees, *The Son of Prophecy: Henry Tudor's Road to*

in this Welsh prophetic-historical narrative. This heritage is enshrined in the details of the charges raised against him – a historical episode in which political prophecy, and its uses on both sides of the Anglo-Welsh border, played an important part. In large part, a consequence of early Tudor royal favour towards the family of Rhys ap Thomas (which was by the early 1530s, however, on the decline), Rhys ap Gruffydd was also a visible figure in English politics, and was married to the daughter of the second Duke of Norfolk, uncle of Anne Boleyn.

It was alleged that Rhys was the leader of a plot to depose Henry and put the Scottish king on the English throne – an ambition which, the 1531 indictment records, was inspired by "antiqua… prophecia existit in Wallia videlicet that King Jamys [interpreted in the indictment as James V of Scotland] with the red hand and the ravens [identified as the ravens on the crest of Rhys's house, the south-west Welsh house of Dinefwr] should conquere all England."[9] The indictment alludes to a complete Welsh prophecy (summarised in English), but gives no further details than these. The treason charge has long been understood to be manufactured – Rhys was convicted on decidedly flimsy evidence, none of which convincingly suggests he was in contact with, and indeed had any particular interest in, the king of Scotland. It is generally assumed that he was convicted on the weight of the false confessions of James ap Gruffydd, a relative who was already in the tower, and a servant, Edward Lloyd, who were coerced, forced or blackmailed by an administration keen to get rid of a problematic Welsh political actor.[10]

Yet for all this, the terms of the indictment have often been understood to reflect a genuine prophecy in circulation in south Wales during this period, and known in some form within Rhys's household in Islington, north of London.[11] This is a problematic position, given the absence of most – although significantly not all – the components of the reputed prophecy from near-historical and contemporary Welsh political prophetic texts. Indeed, as Jerry Hunter has observed, the reputed prophecy cannot be traced to any single text surviving in Welsh, English or Latin.[12] Rather, it reads as a collection and distortion of Welsh and English historical and prophetic themes. The red hand is a term associated with the historical Welsh opponent of the English crown, Owain Lawgoch (Owain ap Thomas ap Rhodri; d. 1378). Although the earliest modern scholar of the trial, W. Llewelyn Williams, took this as evidence of the circulation of prophecies relating to Owain Lawgoch in south Wales (all the more remarkable given Owain's Gwynedd connection), this figure appears in no material concerned with the house of Dinefwr.[13] More recently, it has been suggested that the allusion contains the vestige of a more generalised Welsh prophetic structure (Owain was one of the names given to the *mab darogan*, the British deliverer), although any precise fit with material pertaining to house

Bosworth (London, 1985); Philip Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (Cambridge, 2010), 13–31; Flood, 'Henry Tudor and Lancastrian Prophecy in Wales'.

[9] I quote from the indictment as it is printed in Williams, 'A Welsh Insurrection', 33–4. The same charges are re-iterated in a seventeenth-century defence of Rhys written by his great-grandson Henry Rice, for which see Griffiths, *Sir Rhys ap Thomas and his Family*, 283–4. See also Williams, 'A Welsh Insurrection', 1–2.

[10] Williams, 'A Welsh Insurrection', 48; Griffiths, *Sir Rhys ap Thomas and his Family*, 102. A discussion of the role played by these two witnesses is found in a text on the attainder of Rhys ap Gruffydd that was probably compiled for Gruffydd Rice *c*. 1576. Printed by Griffiths, *Sir Rhys ap Thomas and his Family*, 291–93.

[11] For previous scholarly acceptance of the prophecy as real see Williams, 'A Welsh Insurrection', 50; Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy under Henry VIII*, 29, 149; Thornton, *Prophecy, Politics and the People*, 22.

[12] Hunter, *Soffestri'r Saeson,* 4. Griffiths also notes the absence of any evidence, excepting the indictment, of the existence of this prophecy – *Sir Rhys ap Gruffydd and his Family,* 103.

[13] Williams, 'A Welsh Insurrection', 33 n2.

of Dinefwr and their uses of the name Owain (discussed below) remains speculative.[14] We must note that nowhere in extant Welsh prophecy is any member of this family cast as a *mab darogan*: their role is always a supporting one, serving under a Tudor king. Unlike Owain Lawgoch or Owain Glyn Dŵr, they had no claim to royal descent.

As to the presence of "Jamys," although prophecies of an alliance between the Welsh and the Scots, among other peoples, do appear in earlier Welsh prophecies, this theme was of much greater contemporary interest in England than in Wales. English conceptualisations of the prophesied Cambro-Scottish alliance almost certainly had a large part to play in this aspect of the charge – the end product of a long cross-border literary-history, outlined below.

In fact, the only element of the reputed prophecy that we have any reason to believe directly reflects contemporary Welsh attitudes towards Rhys and his family is the raven, a figure at the centre of all extant Dinefwr prophecies. However, these are fundamentally loyalist works, deeply invested in the Tudor kingship and the privileged relationship of the heirs of Dinefwr to it, returning consistently to the scene of victory at Bosworth. These motifs belong to prophecies of the 1480s and '90s, which saw re-circulation and integration in prophetically-inflected praise poetry during the sixteenth century. I offer a new theory for the provenance of the prophecy quoted in the trial: it is as fabricated as the rest of the charges. However, the allegation can tell us something about the reception of Welsh prophetic elements in England during this period, and their re-conceptualisation by English interpreters.

The Ravens of Dinefwr in Welsh Prophetic Culture

The poetic encomium produced in England and Wales in the years surrounding the victory of Henry Tudor at the battle of Bosworth has long been the subject of literary-historical analysis.[15] This movement was not limited to works addressed to the new king alone, and the literary uses of a powerful post-Bosworth dynastic mythology by supporters of English allies of the king, the Stanley earls of Derby, has seen recent discussion.[16] The family of Henry's chief Welsh supporter, Rhys ap Thomas, fared similarly in the hands of Welsh panegyrists in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The many poems dedicated to Rhys and his heirs, telling of triumph at Bosworth, represent a discursive combining of praise poetry and political prophecy characteristic of the poets of the *uchelwyr*. Historically, the family were prolific poetic patrons, which in part accounts for the wealth of literary material relating to them. One of the defining features of this material is the presence of the raven, or ravens, of the house of Dinefwr. Rhys ap Thomas is referred to across these works as the *brân* (raven), an allusion to the three ravens on the family's crest.[17]

[14] Hunter, *Soffestri'r Saeson,* esp. 2, 21.

[15] In addition to n8, see David Carlson, 'King Arthur and Court Poems for the Birth of Arthur Tudor in 1486', *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 36 (1987), 147–83; David Starkey, 'King Henry and King Arthur', in James P. Carley and Felicity Riddy, eds., *Arthurian Literature XVI* (Cambridge, 1998), 171–96.

[16] Aisling Byrne and Victoria Flood, 'The Romance of the Stanleys: Regional and National Imaginings in the Percy Folio', *Viator 46* (2015), 327–52.

[17] For a description of the arms of Rhys ap Thomas, see Michael Powell Siddons, *The Development of Welsh Heraldry,* 4 vols (Aberystwyth, 1991–2006) II, 498–9; IV, 215, see also Plate 11, C, an image of the standard of Rhys ap Thomas from a manuscript collection, *c*. 1500, belonging to Mr Thomas Woodstock. See also,

There is a relatively substantial body of Welsh language poetry from this period concerned with the raven or ravens, and I can give only a small taster of it. Numerous examples are found in the works of Tudur Aled (writing between 1480 and 1526), who composed prophetic poems in *cywydd* metre (*cywyddau brud*) about Rhys ap Thomas and the role he was to, and did, play in the Tudor accession. We read of the ravens of Dinefwr as prophesied guarantors of the Tudor kingship. Tudur writes of a great battle that will secure Henry's right: "Trecha un draw 'n trychu'n y drin, / Tair bran, ond Duw, a'r Brenin" (The mightiest one there striking in battle, three ravens, but for God and the king!) (83–84).[18] This allusion is situated, as in all examples of the type, in the context of a familiar Welsh prophetic narrative, associated with Henry Tudor both before and after Bosworth. Henry was identified as a *mab darogan* (son of prophecy), who would (or had) cast out the *Saeson* (the English) from Britain, or at the very least, from Wales. This functioned as the final chapter in a revisionist historical narrative which began with the Saxon invasions of the fourth and fifth centuries, which had wrested insular sovereignty from the Britons (that is, the Welsh); a scene replayed later in relation to the Normans, and the Welsh conquests of subsequent kings of England. This imagining saw particular utility during the Wars of the Roses, which, it has been noted, were represented by the Welsh poets as disputes not between Lancastrians and Yorkists, but Britons and Saxons.[19] This paradigm was applied by Welsh partisans of both houses, but following Richard III's usurpation of the crown in 1483, these prophetic imaginings came down firmly on the side of the Lancastrian cause and Henry Tudor. Henry was to bring about Welsh territorial and political restoration, yet in the writings of a number of poets from this period, we read that he was not to be alone in this endeavour: he was to be aided by the raven or ravens of Dinefwr.

In another prophetic poem from the same period, directed at Henry Tudor, Dafydd Llwyd identifies the support of the raven as a fundamental component of Henry's return from continental exile and successful challenge of Richard. Henry calls the raven to him, who obliges with the speed of an arrow:

> Deled Harri Weddïwr,
> Lân ei daith, ar lan y dŵr;
> Galwed y frân dan ganu,
> Golau daith ar y gwlw du.
>
> (May Harry come, the one prayed for, holy his journey, to the water's edge; let him call the raven with song [or easily], bright journey on the black arrow-notch.)[20]
>
> (49–52)[21]

entry for Rhys ap Gruffydd, II, 492. For a brief discussion of poetic use of the ravens of Dinefwr, see I, 120–21, 129–34.

[18] T. Gwynn Jones, ed., *Gwaith Tudur Aled*, 2 vols (Cardiff, 1926), I, 69–71. For a brief overview of Tudur Aled's allusions to the raven, or ravens, of Dinefwr, in his poetry, see Siddons, *Development of Welsh Heraldry* I, 133–34. This includes a brief discussion of the couplet quoted above.

[19] Glanmor Williams, *Recovery, Reorientation and Reformation*, 7.

[20] Alternatively, line 51 might be translated, 'the raven calls with song'. 'Gwlw' in line 52 might also be translated as beak, or the notch in either end of a bow. It is possible that the term functions as a play on beak and arrow, a comment on the swift flight of the raven and its aggressive aspect.

[21] W. Leslie Richards, ed., *Gwaith Dafydd Llwyd o Fathafarn* (Cardiff, 1964), 25–26.

We also find this perception in a prose prophecy produced during the 1480s in anticipation of Henry's return – probably composed between his abortive attempt to seize the throne in October 1483 and his victory against Richard III in August 1485 – known as *Proffwydoliaeth y Wennol (The Prophecy of the Swallow)*.[22] The text survives in both Welsh and English language versions in Welsh manuscripts, although the Welsh language composition was probably the earlier of the two. Although the Welsh noun "gwennol" is feminine (a feature carried over into the use of personal pronouns in the English language text), the swallow is a common cipher for Henry Tudor, who is here certainly meant. He is aided by the raven:

> A'r rybydd a gaiff yn ddirgel gan y deryn bran … ac yna ir heta y wenol dros vor ai hadar a ant ar engkil r(hai) i vchelder y mynyddoedd dyrys eraill i ddirgel llechvae yn y dyffrynt nit a gida ac ef nam y rhan leia(f) or adar
>
> (And he shall receive a warning in secret from the raven … and then the swallow flies over the sea, and her birds retreat, some to the height of the wild mountains, others to secret hiding places in the valley, only the smallest part of his birds go with him.)
>
> (NLW, Peniarth MS 58, my transcription)[23]

> then by the menys of a crow he schall haue a dern warnyng… then schall the swallow fle ouer the see and her bryddys schall skatyr abrod some to the montens yn to the skerrys and som to dern valeys and woddys and with her schall go but the beste part of them.
>
> (NLW, Peniarth MS 53)[24]

The prophecy concludes with the swallow's triumphant return and the restoration of the Britons. *Proffwydoliaeth y Wennol* survives in a number of manuscripts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Peniarth 58 version (quoted above) suggests the particular longevity of the Tudor legend in Wales. The manuscript was compiled in the final quarter of the sixteenth century, but incorporates a sequence of prophetic materials pertaining to the accession of Henry VII, with strong claims to late fifteenth-century authorship and circulation. Two other manuscript witnesses have been associated with the sixteenth-century Welsh chronicler and enthusiastic collector of historical material, Elis Gruffydd, and stand roughly contemporary with the period of Rhys ap Gruffydd's alleged engagement with political prophecy.[25] During the sixteenth century, the raven or ravens of Dinefwr continued to be understood as a meaningful prophetic-historical cipher in Wales, relating to the very beginnings of the Tudor regime.

The prominence of the ravens in prophecy from the late fifteenth century must also be understood in relation to a pre-Tudor genealogical mythology. The ravens of Dinefwr were conventionally referred to as the ravens of Urien, a reference to a legend tracing the family's descent from the hero of the British Old North, Urien Rheged – who appears from as early as the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* as a defender of British interests against the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Bernicia.[26] A praise poem by Dafydd Llwyd to Rhys

[22] For a discussion of this prophecy and its sources see Flood, 'Henry Tudor and Lancastrian Prophecy in Wales'.

[23] With thanks to Erich Poppe for his advice regarding this translation.

[24] Transcribed by William Marx, *Index of Middle English Prose, Handlist XIV: Manuscripts in the National Library of Wales* (Cambridge, 1999), 34–35.

[25] Wallis Evans, 'Daroganau', 314–19.

[26] 'Historia Brittonum', in John Morris, ed., *Nennius: British History and the Welsh Annals* (London, 1980), §63.

ap Thomas, composed soon after Bosworth, incorporates a lengthy depiction of the military skill of the ravens of the son of Urien. This is framed as a protracted allusion to the dispute between Arthur's men and the ravens of Owain ap Urien, a reference to the thirteenth-century *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, where the two fight similarly:

> Wrth warae hwnt, Arthur hen,
> Mwy ei bara na mab Urien,
> Taera fu draw, twrf y drin,
> Y brain, ond gwŷr y brenin,
> Yn lladd megis llueddwyr
> Draw uwch gwynt yn drycha' gwŷr.
> Gŵr bellach a grybwyllwyd,
> Gwahardd dy frain, Owain wyd.

(In playing yonder, old Arthur, greater his endurance [/longevity] than Urien's son, the ravens were the fiercest there, [in] the clamour of the battle, but for the king's men, killing like warriors, there above the wind the most mutilated men. In the end, you [Rhys] are a celebrated man, restrain your ravens, you [Rhys] are Owain.)

(19–26)[27]

Dafydd then describes a recent attack on the English: "Myn y Grog mae i Loegr ddrogan, – / Meirw fry, neu 'mroi i'r frân!" (By the cross, there is a prophecy for England – dead bodies above, or surrendering to the raven!) (33–34). In the context of the poem as a whole, this passage is a vision of the battle of Bosworth, which revisits a familiar scene of contemporary Tudor prophecy. Rhys was understood to have brought the ambitions of Welsh political prophecy to fruition: the death or subjugation of the English (here meaning the Yorkists under Richard III), and the accession of Henry Tudor. We might the close similarity of its frame of reference to the Tudur Aled couplet quoted above, the same formulation is used ('ond gwŷr y brenin'; 'ond Duw, a'r Brenin'). The might of the ravens is great, but that of the king, be it of Henry or the legendary Arthur, is greater still. The role of the house of Dinefwr is fundamentally a supporting one.

In the wealth of prophetic and poetic production that flourished in the period surrounding the Tudor accession, the family appear always in the service of "Harri," that is: Henry Tudor. Rhys ap Thomas's support of Henry was a fundamental component of the late fifteenth-century poetic and prophetic uses of a dynastic mythology understood as stretching from the distant insular past to the birth of the Tudor dynasty.

Rhys ap Gruffydd and Dinefwr Prophecy

The adoption of the name "fitzuryen" appears as one of the charges made against Rhys ap Gruffydd at his trial. It was alleged that Rhys assumed this title in order to support his claim to the entire principality of Wales.[28] Although it is certainly not evidence of designs on all Wales, his use of the name may well have been genuine. It is applied to Rhys, celebrated as a hero in the image of his grandfather, in a praise poem (*cywydd moliant*) composed by Lewys Morgannwg for "Rhys Ieunc" (Young Rhys), probably relatively soon

[27] Dafydd Llwyd, 113–15.

[28] Williams, 'A Welsh Insurrection', 38.

after the death of Rhys ap Thomas in 1525. Lewys hails Rhys ap Gruffydd as the raven's chick and kin of Urien, among other accolades, positioning him as his grandfather's heir. This perception finds a number of direct statements in the poem, one of which holds a clue to the work's political context:

> Pa chwarae am swyddau sydd?
> Chwarae hasart uwch rhosydd.
> Main gynnau yw'ch disiau dur;
> Mawr uwch gwynt march ag antur.
> Dod fet a doed fwy atun;
> Dy wŷr meirch dau ŵr am un.
> Band ydynt bawb yn d'oedi?
> Bwrut oll. Dyn brau wyt ti.
> Deffroi henwaed, ffriw hoenus,
> Tomas yr wyt am Syr Rhys.
>
> (What game is there for offices? A game of hazard above uplands. Canon balls are your dice of steel; horse with courage great above wind. Place a bet and come closer to them; your horsemen are two men for one. Is not everyone waiting for you? You will overthrow all. You are a ready man. Spirited countenance, you are awakening the old blood of Thomas for Sir Rhys.)
>
> (37–46)[29]

Lewys is concerned with a battle for offices and territories, depicted as a military dice game, a motif that appears also in prophecies of the 1480s and '90s concerning the family (*Proffwydoliaeth y Wennol* and Dafydd Llwyd's Arthurian panegyric). Victory is secured as the old blood of Sir Rhys ap Thomas awakens in his grandson, Rhys ap Gruffydd. This awakening is associated with a very specific contemporary political context. Some lines later we read of the mobilisation of the ravens of Urien to this end, in a vision that could have been lifted directly from the anti-English imaginings of political prophecies of the 1480s: "Brud y sydd Ddydd Brawd i Sais / Brain mawrladd barwn Marlais" (Day of Judgment to the English is prophecy, the many-killing ravens of the baron of Marlais) (57–58). This passage alludes to an assault on the English by the ravens of the baron of Marlais, presumably Rhys ap Gruffydd (Abermarlais was the ancestral home of Rhys ap Thomas, on his mother's side).[30] This can be placed in the broader context of tensions regarding the control of political offices in south Wales formerly held by Rhys ap Thomas, after Rhys the elder's death in 1525.

Rhys the younger was not appointed to his grandfather's judicial roles – instead they went to Walter Devereux (the ninth Baron Ferrers), an English Marcher lord. This decision brought about a radical divorce between socio-economic and judicial power in south-west Wales, and appears to have created significant local tensions, represented in Lewys's poem in line with nationally-inflected antipathies: another chapter in the age-old struggle of the Welsh against the English. Hostilities between the affinities of Rhys ap Gruffydd and Ferrers led to a legal dispute in 1529 – the prelude to the treason charge

[29] A. Cynfael Lake (ed.), *Gwaith Lewys Morgannwg*, 2 vols (Aberystwyth, 2004), II, 382–84.

[30] Griffiths, *Sir Rhys ap Thomas and his Family*, 61.

of 1530–31, which established Rhys as both a troublemaker and a figure of resistance to royal officials in south-west Wales.

We might wonder if in his adoption of Fitz Urien, a family name which had been in use since the fourteenth century, like Lewys, Rhys attempted to assert something of the authority sundered from the house in 1525: it makes a genealogical-territorial claim, a reminder of the antiquity of his line. We can certainly understand the value of ciphers associated with Rhys ap Thomas in framing statements of localised territorial belonging during the 1520s, and the (perceived) inherited rights of his grandson. This was potent material for those tied to the fate of Dinefwr, yet Lewys's poem is a partisan imagining in no way conceived as oppositional to Henry VIII. Deeply invested in the Tudor crown, Lewys recalls (or imagines) Rhys's journey to London and St Paul's Cathedral, envisaged as the young man's assumption of his rightful place at the king's side:

> Aut ar lendid trwy Lundain
> A'th arf, Rhys, a rhuthr o frain,
> A'th lu gwŷr wrth heilio gwin
> A'ch tair brân, gwychder brenin.
> Yn Windsor mal Saint Iorus,
> Yn Mhowls a'r iach mal Syr Rhys.
> . . . Aut â'th wŷr at Wyth Harri.
>
> (You went in splendour through London with your weapon, Rhys, and an assault of ravens, and your host of men serving wine, and your three ravens, grandeur of a king. In Windsor like Saint George, in St Pauls with the pedigree like Sir Rhys. . . . You would go with your men to Henry VIII.)
>
> (15–22)

Later in the poem, Rhys appears in a prophetic imagining that places him directly in the king's service – the undertaking of a new crusade. Lewys calls to Rhys, "ofn tarw Dinefwr" (fierce bull of Dinefwr), summoning him to European conquests, and an alliance with Ferdinand of Spain and the legendary crusading king, Prester John (59–66).[31] Aside from its legendary allusions, the passage is grounded in the family's historical service to Henry VIII. It recalls the 1512 invasion of Gascony led by Ferdinand of Spain, joined by a retinue of 500 Welshmen led by Gruffydd ap Rhys (son of Rhys ap Thomas, and father of Rhys ap Gruffydd).[32] This was sanctioned by the Pope as the first step in an Anglo-Spanish alliance that was to conquer Jerusalem. Although the campaign ended badly, during the 1520s a new crusade continued to present powerful Tudor political capital, as did – at least for Lewys – the role the Dinefwr heir was to play in its realisation. Rhys's familial connections are foremost in Lewys's mind: he refers to Rhys using names from British pseudo-history, which appear in panegyrics to members of the house of Dinefwr from the mid-fifteenth century onwards – like his forebears, Rhys walks in the footsteps of Constantine (64) and Arthur (72) – figures who, we might note, were similarly associated with crusading histories.[33]

Although Rhys is hailed in imperial fashion, the real imperial hero of the text is Henry VIII. The conquests projected in the poem owe a great deal to conventional prophetic

[31] Lake, 564 n63.
[32] Ibid., 53.
[33] Griffiths, *Sir Rhys ap Thomas and his Family*, 19, 83.

depictions of the international career of a king of England. The most famous example of this is the fourteenth-century English *Prophecy of the Six Kings to follow John* (composed *c.*1312–27), a work with considerable popularity on both sides of the Anglo-Welsh border, which circulated in Anglo-Norman, English, Latin and Welsh versions into the sixteenth century.[34] The prophecy traces a series of historical and (originally) genuinely futurist kings to follow the reign of John, charting the domestic and international successes and failures of subsequent kings of England. In its account of the fourth king, the prophecy traces the conquests of the boar of Windsor (originally the future Edward III): the restoration of the Holy Land following the conquest of Paris, ending with the burial of the boar at the shrine of the Three Kings in Cologne. These place names appear in Lewys's poem as markers of insular crusading ambitions: Rhys is to conquer France, and continue to Cologne, "Hwde Gallis hyd Gwlen" (67).

In his use of this material, Lewys revisited a familiar prophetic paradigm applied to Henry VII during the 1480s, when Welsh pro-Tudor prophetic ambitions were drawn into relation with English crusading models. Although Henry VII's Welsh ancestry was the very foundation of Welsh interest in him, Welsh commentators also made much of the genealogical relationship to the kings of England which lay behind his royal claim, and drew on prophetic material conventionally associated with English kings, claimed it as British (in a Welsh sense) and re-worked it as a component of an antique vision of Saxon and British antipathy. We find a good example of this in a prophetic praise poem by Dafydd Llwyd to Henry Tudor, composed while Henry was still Earl of Richmond and not yet king. Dafydd imagines Henry's victory over the *Saeson* (English, here meaning the Yorkists) as an act which goes hand in hand with the winning of the Holy Cross, which is to say, the conquest of Jerusalem: "Gras hir yw cael y groes hon, / Oes isel ar y Saeson" (Winning that cross is long grace, a lowly time for the English) (17–18).[35] Crusading was co-opted as a conventional coda to the prophetic vison of British restoration in the early Tudor period, and these expectations were transferred from Henry VII to his son. This ambition is drawn on by Lewys Morgannwg as a vision of the royal service of Rhys ap Gruffydd, who is understood to be as instrumental in the service of the ambitions of the second Tudor king as his grandfather was to the first. Like Rhys ap Thomas, Rhys ap Gruffydd is to aid in the fulfilment of prophecies of the Tudor dynasty. In the early decades of the sixteenth century, not only the history but also the future of the houses of Tudor and Dinefwr were understood to be closely connected.

Lewys's poem was composed with particular localised ambitions and agendas in mind, but these are understood to be endorsed by past, and future, magnate and regional loyalty to the Tudor crown. The interests of the text are consistent with prophecies featuring the raven or ravens of Dinefwr from the 1480s onwards – all are invested in first the possibility, and later the reality, of a Tudor king of England. Nonetheless, the text gestures towards a broader cultural climate in south Wales during the mid-1520s, which was to intensify in the years that followed. Although the poet engages positively with royal authority, we might wonder if his perception of Rhys also reflects a possibility of the very same regional danger that – in denying Rhys ap Gruffydd his grandfather's offices – Henry VIII appears to have been keen to avoid: the cementation of an aristocratic power

[34] For discussion of the English versions see T. M. Smallwood, 'The Prophecy of the *Six Kings*', *Speculum* 60 (1985), 571–92. Welsh translations are discussed and edited by Fulton, *Welsh Prophecy and English Politics*.

[35] Dafydd Llwyd, 25–26.

base in south Wales, beyond direct royal control. Lewys gives a strong impression of Rhys's regional sovereignty. While Rhys goes to the service of the king, he is himself recognised as distinctly kingly, possessing "gwychder brenin" ('grandeur of a king'). What is more, in his journey to St Paul's, he is presented in the company of an armed retinue, "llu gwŷr". In this particular allusion, Lewys invokes a strategy common to partisan literature from both England and Wales during this period: in the celebration of a powerful patron, the military prowess of the retinue or affinity of the patron is also celebrated.[36] Panegyrics to the house of Dinefwr would have appealed to such men perhaps as much as to Rhys.

The danger of prophecy as a mode of address to both a regional magnate, and his broader affinity – or rather the currents of feeling this represented – was certainly clear to the government of Henry VIII. Engagements with dynastic prophecy saw legislative prohibitions during Henry's reign. Over ten years after Rhys's execution, in 1542, legislation was introduced against the prophetic applications of heraldic symbols (like the raven of Dinefwr), making it a felony to "declare any false prophecy upon occasion of arms, fields, letters, names, cognizances, or badges."[37] It has been suggested that the statute was an answer to aristocratic anxieties about the use of their arms in potentially seditious popular material, but it might equally reflect governmental recognition of the danger of a particular elite discourse.[38] During this period, genuinely aristocratic prophetic engagements were as dangerous as the better attested popular oppositional prophetic movements of this time.[39] Historically, political prophecy engaged with territorial claims, and the right to rule, both local and national. In its applications to the house of Dinefwr, this material appealed to an authority other than the King of England, to construct a claim to regional sovereignty understood to be beyond his immediate orbit.

We might also wonder if the suppression of dynastic prophesying, both in 1531 and 1542, was a royal exercise in discursive ownership. Although any direct engagement on Henry VIII's part with the prophetic vogue associated with his father remains uncertain, in England prophecy was (historically) the domain of kings.[40] In one respect, the precise details of the prophetic expectations surrounding Rhys need not have mattered in 1530–31: the presence of *any* prophetic expectation may have been enough. It presented a non-royal, potentially counter-authoritarian, rallying cry.

[36] Byrne and Flood, 'Romance of the Stanleys', esp. 342, 346.

[37] Taylor, *Political Prophecy*, 105.

[38] For the former suggestion see Thornton, *Prophecy, Politics and the People in Early Modern England*, 26.

[39] For an overview of the popular oppositional uses of prophecy during this period, in addition to Jansen, *Political Prophecy and Protest;* Thornton, *Prophecy, Politics and the People*, see G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police: The Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge, 1972), 54–62; Madeline Hope Dodds and Ruth Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace, 1536–37, and the Exeter Conspiracy, 1538,* 2 vols (Cambridge, 1915); Madeline H. Dodds, 'Political Prophecies in the Reign of Henry VIII', *Modern Language Review* 11 (1916), 276–84.

[40] The case for Henry's Galfridian historical and prophetic engagements was made long ago by Richard Koebner, '"The Imperial Crown of this Realm": Henry VIII, Constantine the Great, and Polydore Vergil', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 26 (1953), 29–52. This assumption has been subjected to scrutiny by Sydney Anglo, 'The British History in Early Tudor Propaganda', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 44 (1961), 17–48. See also Sydney Anglo, *Images of Tudor Kingship* (London, 1992), 40–60.

English Interpretive Categories

An element of genuine Welsh prophecy was introduced at some point in the interrogations and negotiations that informed the writing of the indictment (perhaps by James ap Gruffydd or Edward Lloyd) – for the ravens and the name Fitz Urien can be traced to Welsh sources. However, the charge that frames this material, the reputed alliance between Rhys and the Scottish king, functions in relation not to a Welsh but to an older English prophetic motif: the anti-English alliance. This prophetic concept takes its English origin from *Prophetiae Merlini* 110–14, where Geoffrey of Monmouth presented a union between the Welsh, the Cornish, the Bretons and the Scots against the English, led by the Welsh heroes Cynan and Cadwaladr:

> Cadualadrus Conanum uocabit et Albaniam in societatem accipiet. Tunc erit strages alienigenarum, tunc flumina sanguine manabunt, tunc erumpent Amorici montes et diademate Bruti coronabuntur. Replebitur Kambria laeticia, et robora Cornubiae uirescent. Nomine Bruti uocabitur insula, et nuncupatio extraneorum peribit.
>
> (Cadualdrus will summon Conanus and make Scotland his ally. Then the foreigners will be slaughtered, the rivers flow with blood, and the hills of Brittany burst forth and be crowned with Brutus's diadem. Wales will be filled with rejoicing and the Cornish oaks will flourish. The island will be called by Brutus's name and the foreign term will disappear.)

As is well-noted, this is a simplified re-working of the alliance between various insular peoples and other potential allies against the Saxon kingdom of Wessex, found in a number of Welsh political prophecies, most famously the tenth-century *Armes Prydein Vawr*.[41] Over the course of the next four centuries, re-emerging with particular force during crisis periods in English history, *Prophetiae* 110–14 came to function as a key to understanding Welsh political expectations. This was grounded, in large part, in Geoffrey's claim to an engagement with Welsh prophetic source traditions: he presented his *Prophetiae* as a translation of the prophecies of Merlin (an allusion to the Welsh Myrddin), "de Britannico in Latinum" (9). In England, the association of this text with Welsh prophecy was enduring: the *Prophetiae* provided a type of interpretive category for Welsh prophecy.

Prophetiae 110–14 inspired a number of English prophecies ventriloquizing anti-English sentiment. One of the most significant of these, which saw pronounced circulation during the 1530s, is the final figure of the *Six Kings*. The *Six Kings*-author envisaged the decline of English insular sovereignty under pressure from forces from the north, west and Ireland (represented by a wolf, a lion and a dragon) – interpreted for the greater part of the text's reception history as Scotland, Wales and Ireland. I quote from the conclusion of the fifteenth-century text known as the *English Couplet Version*:

[41] I. Williams and Rachel Bromwich (eds.), *Armes Prydein* (Dublin, 1972). For the most recent dating of the poem see T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 130–1064* (Oxford, 2013), 519–35. For another recent translation of the poem see G. R. Isaac, '"Armes Prydein Fawr" and St David', in J. Wyn Evans and Jonathan M. Wooding (eds.), *St David of Wales: Cult, Church and Nation* (Woodbridge, 2007), 161–81. For Geoffrey's acquaintance with this type of prophecy see above n3.

þan sall all Inglond on wonder wise,
Be euyn partid in thre parties;
Waters and woddes, feldes and towne
Bytwene þe dragon and the lyone,
And so, efter þat time, named sall it be
þe land of conquest in ilk cuntre.
þus sall be ayres of England kinde
Pas out of heritage, als we here finde.

(271–78)[42]

Prosecutions by the crown during the 1530s suggest that Henry was associated by a number of English dissidents with the final king of the prophecy: the "moldwarp", a "grete wretche" cursed by God, who is chased from the island to the sea by this coalition.[43] However, there is no evidence that the sequence possessed a similarly oppositional function in Wales. Indeed, although the *Six Kings* circulated in Wales, Welsh prophetic authors (such as Dafydd Llwyd and Lewys Morgannwg) were more interested in the text's imperial vision than its pessimistic conclusion.

The break with Rome was a time of paranoia about threats to the English crown, and the anti-English alliance is a particularly prevalent feature of English prophecy, both oppositional and pessimistic, in circulation during the 1530s (a number of examples of which are discussed further below). The reputed prophecy of the indictment can be understood in relation to contemporary English ideas about Welsh sedition, and corresponding misconceptions about Welsh prophecy, and its relationship to further reaching anti-English activities. As Helen Fulton has observed, the sixteenth century saw a particular English interest in 'Celtic' conspiracies, and their relationship to political prophecy.[44] Importantly, during this period there is no evidence of a sense of cultural commonality between Wales and Scotland (then as now). Although in his *Historia,* through the myth of the three sons of Brutus who ruled between them England, Scotland and Wales, Geoffrey of Monmouth established a case for common genealogical descent,[45] this does not appear to have been a particularly compelling idea in Tudor Wales or Scotland.[46] Certainly, we have no reason to believe that readers of Welsh prophecy during the sixteenth century had any particular interest in the Scottish future.

In the decades following Rhys ap Gruffydd's execution for his reputed prophesying of a Cambro-Scottish alliance, we find the production of the earliest chronicle accounts associating Owain Glyn Dŵr's early fifteenth-century programme for Welsh independence with the final sequence of the *Six Kings*. As Fulton has persuasively argued, this material cannot be understood as representative of Owain's political ambitions, which were far more coherent than this particular prophetic fantasy, and if they engaged with any prophetic tradition, it was Welsh rather than English. Rather, we can see Owain's location by English authors at "the centre of a moral panic about royal authority, about

[42] Printed in Joseph Hall (ed.), *Poems of Laurence Minot* (London, 1887), 87–105.

[43] Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy*, 34 (Mistress Amadas, 1533), 40–41 (Thomas Syson, the abbot of Garendon, 1536), 45 (Richard Bishop, 1536). See also the case of John Hale, discussed below. These are also discussed by Thornton, *Prophecy, Politics and the People,* Chapter 1.

[44] Helen Fulton, 'Owain Glyn Dŵr and the Uses of Prophecy', *Studia Celtica* 39 (2005), 105–21.

[45] *Historia,* II, lines 1–11.

[46] Ralph Griffiths, 'The Island of England in the Fifteenth Century: Perceptions of the Peoples of the British Isles', *Journal of Medieval History* 29 (2003), 177–200.

the un-Englishness of Wales and the Welsh, about external threats to English sovereignty from all sides."[47] We find a very similar process at work in Rhys's supposed prophecy, concerned with the same perceived threats to England and its king, and the un-Englishness of this Welsh nobleman. The sixteenth century saw the development of a profound anxiety about the seditious activities of the prophetically-enthused Welsh – a stereotype which finds its supreme manifestation at the very end of the sixteenth century, in the prophetic "Owen Glendower" of Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 1,* who was so enamoured with visions of the moldwarp and the lion.[48]

English Prophecies of the Raven of Dinefwr

The perceived relationship between the house of Dinefwr and the Cambro-Scottish threat is a feature of English prophetic compositions and rumours from the early 1530s. This provides the broader context of the first entry of this Welsh family into English prophetic discourse. Rhys ap Thomas is a notable absence in early English material concerned with the Tudor accession. In *ex eventu* English prophetic overviews of Bosworth, we read of Henry's support from the blue boar of the Earl of Oxford and the eagle of Sir Thomas Stanley, but nowhere do we read of the raven or ravens of Dinefwr.[49] The family took their prophetic fame in England from the negative associations of Rhys ap Gruffydd's alleged prophetic belief.

The ravens of Dinefwr were given a central place in English understandings of Welsh political prophecy. The contemporary Welsh chronicler Elis Gruffydd records an English retort to the supposed prophetic beliefs of the Welsh following Rhys's execution: if Welshmen were to look for Welsh traitors against the king, they would find them flying about the Tower of London in the mouths of ravens.[50] A joke at the expense of the dismembered corpse of Rhys ap Gruffydd, it implies that Welsh opponents of the Tudor regime were not the ravens of political prophecy but food for the ravens of the Tower; and that they were not heroes but traitors. In this reproach, a particular type of Welsh prophetic belief is constructed in order to be undercut. The disjunction between English assumptions about contemporary Welsh prophecy and Welsh prophecy itself was probably clear to the chronicler. Where he quotes prophecies pertaining to the house of Dinefwr, Elis Gruffydd borrows from the *cywyddau brud* of Dafydd Llwyd, concerning the role of the ravens at Bosworth, rather than the fabricated English prophecy of the indictment.[51]

Evidence of English interest in the ravens, and their association with the charges against Rhys, is preserved in British Library, Lansdowne MS 762 (c. 1531).[52] A London commonplace book compiled by Henry Rowse (a freeman of the city of London, and probably a constable), Lansdowne 762 contains a collection of prophecies concerned with historical and contemporary events. Alongside conventional representations of the Tudor accession

[47] Fulton, 'Owain Glyn Dŵr and the Uses of Prophecy', 119.

[48] William Shakespeare, *1 Henry IV,* 3.1, 146–53.

[49] Flood and Byrne, 'Romance of the Stanleys', 335–7.

[50] Hunter, *Soffestri'r Saeson*, 20.

[51] Ibid., 18.

[52] For a study of the manuscript see David R. Parker, *The Commonplace Book in Tudor London: An Examination of BL MSS Egerton 1995, Harley 2252, Lansdowne 762, and Oxford Balliol College MS 354* (Oxford, 1998), 129–65. For an itemisation of some of the manuscript's prophetic contents see H. L. D. Ward, *Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 2 vols (London, 1883–1910), I, 331–2.

(depicting Henry VII as a returning Briton and heir to Cadwaladr), its prophecies include multiple configurations of challenges to Tudor rule from Wales and Scotland. Although other potential threats appear in these texts – France, Flanders, Norway, Denmark and Spain feature on numerous occasions – Wales and Scotland are by far the most mentioned. In one prophecy of the collection we find a presentiment of Scottish and Welsh challenges to English insular hegemony in a sequence closely related to the fabricated prophecy of the indictment. I refer to a prophecy on fols 63^{v}–65^{r} beginning "The yere of our lord mcccclxxxiii."[53]

The prophecy presents a long historical retrospective which begins in 1483 with the death of Edward IV, and incorporates a number of historical Tudor and Yorkist ciphers. It is probably a composite text incorporating prophetic material from different periods, for its political motivations read confusingly. It contains prophetic ciphers conventionally (and positively) concerned with the return of Henry Tudor from the Continent to overthrow Richard III; hopes for the coronation of Edward IV's son Edward Prince of Wales (who died in 1483) or alternatively Richard III's son Edward of Middleham (who died in 1484), alongside an interest in one true "R" (a seemingly positive allusion to Richard III); and scenes of civil war in England and threats from Scotland and Wales. As Lesley Coote and Tim Thornton have observed, it probably contains pro-Ricardian material from the 1480s, although I suggest it draws on later influences also.[54]

The text's various obscurities aside, the sequence with which I am concerned can be relatively easily located in historical terms. It opens with a typical account of the Tudor accession, drawing on ciphers found in English prophecies from the 1480s onwards, including an allusion to the red rose of Lancaster and the king's Welsh descent, "the ix of cadwisladrus blode by name" (fol. 64^{r}). This precedes the arrival of a new political actor in the passage beginning on the top of the next folio: a black cow, or – much more plausibly, I suggest – a black crow, who travels across Britain to Scotland, with one "J":

> a blake c[r]owe shall come thorow bretteyne to albion
> wt hym a yong knyght whos name shalbe J
> born of the lyne of a kynge crowned wt thorne
> and shalbe called cosyn to Jesse
>
> (fol. 64^{v}; my transcription)

We can be relatively sure that "J" meant James V of Scotland. In the remainder of this sequence, this descendant of Jesse's line, and so relative of Christ, goes on to conquer Jerusalem. Both his biblical genealogy and his crusading career identify "J" with the crowned child, a prophetic figure in a widely circulated text of the reign of Henry VIII, also contained in Lansdowne 762, the *Prophesies of Rymour, Beid and Marlyng*.[55] The crowned child was probably originally intended to refer to the crusading expectations associated with Henry VIII, but during the 1530s it was applied by some in England to the Scottish king. The investigations of Thomas Cromwell's agents, particularly in the

[53] The prophecy is transcribed by V. J. Scattergood, *Politics and Prophecy in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1971), 386–90.

[54] Lesley Coote and Tim Thornton, 'Richard, Son of Richard: Richard III and Political Prophecy', *Historical Research* 73 (2000), 321–30, at 322–25.

[55] J. A. H. Murray, ed., *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* (London, 1875), 52–61. Discussed by Helen Cooper, 'Thomas of Erceldoune: Romance as Prophecy', in *Cultural Encounters in the Romance of Medieval England*, ed. Corinne Saunders (Cambridge, 2005), 171–87.

northern English counties, suggest that James was widely associated with the child by Englishmen who looked to the Scottish king as an alternative to Henry.[56]

In this broader context, the British crow offers a far more intelligible reading than the British cow (the latter is not a recognisable prophetic cipher, although the dun cow was a Beaufort crest associated with the Tudors). Like the Welsh *brân*, the English crow translates both as the modern English crow and raven: this is a reference to the reputed alliance between James of Scotland and the ravens of Dinefwr which appears in the prophecy of Rhys's indictment. This allusion operates in relation to the final lines of the prophecy, where we read of an unnamed knight's assault undertaken on behalf of a black crow, and an act of "vengeance" that will occur in the "sowth":

> A stowte knyght in a storme a bewgle shall blowe
> to reve vp his ratches & ron with open mouth
> and sle hym that neuer was borne for the blake crow
> because of the vengaunce that shall fale in the sowth.
>
> (fol. 65^{v}; my transcription)

This is a vision of the launching of hostilities against Henry by Rhys's reputed allies – perhaps the Welsh, perhaps the Scottish – following his execution in London. The slaying of he who "neuer was borne" is a probably variation on prophecies recorded from the 1530s that Henry will die in his mother's womb, meaning a church. This was a common prophecy during the religious controversies of this period.[57] In the current state of evidence, this is the only surviving reference to the raven of Dinefwr in an English political prophetic text. It was probably composed during, or shortly following, Rhys's trial (the bulk of the manuscript has been dated c. 1531), and although the red hand does not appear here, it comes very close to the reputed prophecy of the indictment.

It is difficult to say whether this sequence was in origin pessimistic or positively anticipatory. However, similar prophecies were known to English opponents of Henry, for whom Rhys's name presented a point of oppositional focus. After hearing news of Rhys's death, a group of prisoners at Ilford jail repeated a prophecy in the possession of one Old Harlock, probably William Harlock of Somerset, who was examined in the Tower of London in September 1530. Harlock made prophecies concerning the arrival of a "peacemaker" from the west. The prisoners repeated a new variation on this theme, adding that now "there should be such a gap in the west that all the thorns of England should have work enough to stop it."[58] This is a vision of a Welsh invasion. The seditious quality of these words is contextualised by another prophetic voice from a London jail, this time in 1534. Commenting on the execution of Rhys, John Hale, a vicar of Isleworth, expressed a presentiment that because of his death the Welsh would join with the Irish, "If they do so, doubt ye not but they shall have aid and strength enough in England."[59] Hale invokes that favourite of English prophetic structures: the anti-English alliance. He almost certainly had a variation of *Prophetiae* 110–14 in mind, probably, given his allusion to Ireland, the *Six Kings*. In the testimonies against him, we find that Hale appears to have associated Henry VIII with the despised last king of the English in the *Six Kings*: the

[56] Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy*, 66; Thornton, *Prophecy, Politics and the People*, 45.

[57] Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy*, 44.

[58] Quoted in Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy*, 29.

[59] Quoted in Griffiths, *Sir Rhys ap Thomas and his Family*, 110.

moldwarp.[60] This was but one among a number of re-imaginings of *Prophetiae* 110–14, to which the charges in the indictment appear to have naturally leant themselves.

We find one additional source from the 1530s that stands in an interesting relationship to these expectations. Across Lansdowne 762, Rowse pays particular attention to a dead man who leads a hostile alliance against London. All appearances of this figure in the manuscript are underlined – a significant notice in a collection with relatively little marginalia. First found in the early fifteenth-century anti-Lancastrian prophecy *Cock in the North*, the dead man appears as an ally of a lion and a dragon (taken from the anti-English union of the final sequence of the *Six Kings*), and conquers London, subduing a people identified as the Saxons. In the original uses of the prophecy in the early years of the fifteenth century, the dead man figured Richard II (deposed in 1399), returning to unseat his deposer, the first Lancastrian king, Henry IV. During the 1530s this medieval theme saw new uses. Although the dead man appears across the prophecies of the collection, Rowse's copy of *Cock in the North* provides the fullest statement of this expectation:

> They sey that the Saxons shall chese the*m* a lorde
> Which shall in shorte time them full sore bryng*e* vnder
> dede man shall com and make them accorde
> when they here hym speke yt shalbe grete vnder [sic: wonder]
> That he that was dede and buryed in sight
> shall ryse ageyne and leve here in londe
> In strength and in comforth of a yong knight
>
> (fol. 62^{v}; my transcription)[61]

For Rowse, the agent of this anti-English activity may well have been understood to be of a type with the raven and his union with "Jamys": an anticipation of a backlash to follow the death of Rhys, the dead man of the prophecy.

There is a certain unfortunate parity between Lewys Morgannwg's praise poem of the 1520s and Henry Rowse's prophetic engagements at the beginning of the following decade. In both, a Welshman marches on London. In the Welsh text, he is a welcome ally of the king; in the English, an agent of destruction. Lewys was, in his way, as wrong in his expectations as was Rowse.

Conclusion

In its original Welsh language context, political prophecy associated with the house of Dinefwr was conservative and fundamentally pro-Tudor. However, the limited elements of this material that circulated in England saw significant distortion and misrepresentation, and came to be understood, erroneously, as oppositional. In England during the 1530s, Dinefwr prophecy was inserted in an English prophetic narrative: Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae* 110–14, of which we might regard the reputed prophecy of the raven, James and the red hand as a particular re-imagining.

[60] Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy*, 37. For other near-contemporary identifications of Henry with the moldwarp see above n43.

[61] The prophecy is printed, and its applications during the 1530s are discussed, by Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy under Henry VIII*, 98–104.

Yet this distortion rested on the fundamental connectedness of English and Welsh political prophecy, facilitated by the introduction of the anti-English alliance to the English prophetic tradition by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth century, which came to be applied as an English interpretive category for Welsh prophecy. This figure acquired a new utility during the reign of Henry VIII as a means through which to approach Welsh prophetic and dynastic material circulating in the generation after Bosworth. The re-emergence of notions of the Welsh-led anti-English alliance, and its anachronistic applications to the circumstances surrounding the trial of Rhys ap Gruffydd, might be understood as a particular facet of the broader Tudor disavowal of early Welsh friends of the regime. The role of Wales and the Welsh in the origins of the Tudor kingship was forgotten, replaced by a perception of a Welsh threat. Even as Henry VII was still remembered in England as the heir to Cadwaladr, the line of Dinefwr, who had proved so useful to the Tudor cause at Bosworth, came to function as a by-word for prophetically-inspired Welsh sedition.[62]

[62] With thanks to Erich Poppe and Helen Fulton for comments on earlier drafts of this article, and advice on translation; and also to Aisling Byrne, Dafydd Johnston and the anonymous reader at the University of Wales Press.