

# Cynnwys

4 Golygyddol

## CERDDI

- 13 Dafydd Islwyn
- 23 Robat Powell
- 27 Morgan Owen
- 30 Sian Northey
- 39 Llŷr Gwyn Lewis
- 42 Dyfan Lewis
  
- 10 Cofio Dai Pen-Dre  
Idris Reynolds

# barddas

## YSGRIFAU

- 14 Y Dosbarth  
Siân Wyn Siencyn
- 18 Gŵyl Gerallt 2019  
Mari George
- 28 Newidiodd barddoniaeth fy mywyd i!  
Jo-Anne Hart
- 48 Cynghanedd/Kenganez (2)  
Aneirin Karadog

Beirniadaeth  
Cystadleuaeth yr Eglwys

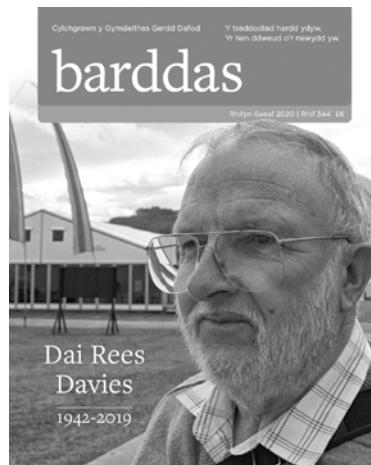
Ysgrifau  
Dafis

Llythyrau

## Newidiodd barddoniaeth fy mywyd i! Poetry Changed Me First: Understanding Place Through Poetry

Jo-Anne Hart

- 24 Ein Mamau Llenyddol (2)  
Alaw Mai Edwards
- 32 Awyr Iach  
Dewi Prysor
- 34 Llais y Meini (4)  
Guto Rhys
- 40 Aeron o Lwyni Eraill (3)  
Emyr Lewis
- 43 Cymru'r Beirdd (10)  
Dyfan Lewis
- 50 Cadwyni Papur  
Sian Northey



Llun y clawr:  
Tudur Dylan Jones

## Newidiodd barddoniaeth fy mywyd i!

### Poetry Changed Me First: Understanding Place Through Poetry

Jo-Anne Hart

I have long been interested in how power works. In college in California, I studied Political Science. But I learned a big lesson about power thanks to poetry. A visiting poetry professor from Iran hired my roommate as his assistant. She typed his materials at our kitchen table, where the light was strongest, and I began to read as she un-scrolled one from her portable typewriter. The manual roller made stuttering clicks as the pages unfurled from its coil. I was smitten by what I read. I hadn't seen much poetry in my modest education. Those first conjured images from a poem by Sohrab Sepehri remain with me even now, decades later: the sound of water's footsteps; a garden on the shadowy side of wisdom; washing a cup in the stream of memory. The hair at the back of my neck tingled. My blood felt uneven coursing through my veins.



*Mikki and Jo-Anne Hart*

My awakening from those pages of poetry would eventually chart my future course. The next term I signed up for Persian language class so that I could discover more. A couple years later, when I had learned enough for an instructor to assign poetry, I grew excited. The first poem I remember painstakingly making my way through in Persian was a modern one by Ahmad Shamlu in his disillusionment after the revolution in Iran. It started with these lines, which were so arresting that I was certain I was right to study the language:

“They smell your breath  
Lest you have said: I love you.”

I figured out how I could get a Persian language fellowship to pay for graduate school.

Considering that I wanted to study poetry, it was ironic that my funding sprang from national security concerns. During the cold war era, the Defense Department had calculated that if the US got into war in different parts of the world, they would need some Americans to speak the local languages. Persian was one of those so-called strategic languages but very few universities taught it. I was accepted into New York University to study Political Science concurrently with Persian literature. My program began with classical poets, Ferdowsi, Saadi, and Hafez. Then the Sufi, Rumi. Eventually, I made it to modern poetry and fell for one of Iran's most important contemporary poets, Forough Farrokhzad. She was a confident iconoclast who sometimes used mysticism in her feminist works. I read her *Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season*.

In another ironic twist, I went on, for the rest of my career, to specialize in Iran's politics, not its poetry. Yet my understanding of Iran is fundamentally shaped by Persian poetry. My professional energies have long been devoted to reducing Americans' sense of threat from Iran and specifically counseling against war between the US and Iran. I am convinced that without the empathy I gained through encountering Iran first through its culture, I would be more likely to "other" Iran as many do.

I have been washing my own cup in a stream of memories, with devoured poetry spilling across my mind ever since I arrived for my summer studies program last summer in Lampeter, Wales. I was there with a group of American writers working intensively with "a sense of place." Cymru (the name for Wales in Welsh) is a place of poets and I was fortunate enough that summer to hear from several Welsh poets. I was *hearing*, as much as seeing, Wales. Not in decades had I been surrounded by such a fullness of sound-scape. Or had my own attention directed to the intricacy of words and their aural impact. Wales can do that to a writer. There, I noticed the soft sibilance of sea shore words alongside the jagged concrete of rock and peak phrases. Rolling vowels like quilted rural hills. The repeating sounds in meter like the returning tides. For me, there, the fluid and verdant landscape melded with the language: poetry is the sound of Cymraeg green and the feel of surf trickling over Cymraeg stones.

Watching the timeless rooks patrolling Harlech Castle, I suddenly recalled that the Persian word "rukḥ" or rook, means "tower." And, the rook chess piece is a castle tower. How about that intersection as a "thin," liminal, space with words?

Again immersed in a land of poets, I began to perceive Welsh commonalities with Iran's poetic tradition. Rhyming and sound harmonies of

cynghanedd are meant to be sung, as is the epic poetry of Iran. I imagine I could find a similar obsession with sound patterns in *The Mabinogion* as in Iran's *The Shahnameh*.

Folktales and legends in Persian begin, "yeky bud; yeky na bud": Once there was; once there wasn't. Don't I recognize Wales expressing a similar sensibility? Echoes left afterwards in poetry might trace out a politics of the dispossessed. King Arthur, not only the 'once,' but the future king, too. The Shi'a of Iran have clung to their minority sect alongside the majority Sunni branch of Islam elsewhere in the region. Like Welsh secular legend, the Twelfth, or "Hidden," Imam of Shi'ism not only invokes a glorious past, but when out of occultation, will restore rightfulness to the future.

I knew of *hiraeth* before I arrived in promised Wales, but my feeling for the concept deepened each passing day there. I saw this *longing* as both large and small, universal and specific. I notice how Persian poetry resonates with *hiraeth*, too. A few lines of mystical Persian poetry I can still recite by heart, from Rumi, echo in my own:

Listen to the tale from the cut reed (pipe)  
crying from separation -  
the lament of infinite longing

Both Iran and Wales are ancient lands with past greatness baked into proud cultures. Poetry in both places has the power to carry forward *the*

*time before* to re-animate pride through the ages. The familiar Welsh cry, Yma o Hyd, *We Are Still Here*, could well be sung in Iran. Endurance and justice are touchstones. This collective nostalgia manifests a fiery lament born from subjugation. As I travel in Wales I feel the sustained wound of a minority long in the dark shadow of the hegemon. One can see its mark of power in past deforestation and lately poached water. If the Welsh pine for the return of something, maybe it is a wholeness, a making right to a national soul. Unjust "otherness" is also at root of the Shi'a spiritual minority experience. It doesn't surprise me that Wales has more poets than any other country in Europe. Or that Persian poetry is admired around the world. Poets ensure that *hiraeth* and the many sounds of the pierced heart are re-inscribed in each generation.

Without warning, poetry changed my life by inviting me to listen for the spirit-kindling sounds of human connection. And decades later, off the bus in Wales, poetry, open-mouthed, again extended its hand. It offered me a way to hear this land and trace *hiraeth*, here and beyond.

A few months later, as the U.S. and Iran now draw their political conflict closer to open warfare, for me it is not an abstract part of the world. Instead poetry gives me the human connection to Iran, as it does to Wales, and is available to us all, everywhere. My attachment to

Iran's poetry helps ground me in Iran's enduring national pride. Learning Iran's culture through its epics helps me now have a more visceral understanding for what many Iranians feel is unfairness, and bullying, at the hands of the U.S. I don't need to support either side's leaders as I deeply fear the potential for war.

And when an American president threatens to destroy Iran's cultural heritage in order to defeat the country politically, it is not only against international law; I know it is a violation of the human spirit. Poetry, however, transcends artifact and will always endure. Poetry cannot be bombed.

Can poetry also point the way toward reducing the hostilities between the U.S. and Iran? This Persian proverb, which I suspect is also common in other cultures, can serve as a call for conflict resolution. The immovable does not make peace; the coming together of people does that:

کوه به کوه نمیرسه ولی آدم به آدم می رسه

A mountain never meets a mountain,  
but a (hu)man meets a (hu)man.

I long to hear the sounds of such connections.



Jo-Anne Hart with mentor, **Pam Petro**, near Criccieth Castle and with poet **Rufus Mufasa** at the University of Wales, Lampeter, June 2019.

Jo-Anne Hart has a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree in Creative Writing and a PhD in Political Science. She teaches conflict transformation and global interdisciplinary studies at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts and lives with her spouse and their dog in Rhode Island. With gratitude to **Twm Morys**, **Pamela Petro**, and **Dominic Williams**.



# Newidiodd barddoniaeth fy mywyd i!

JO-ANNE HART

Bûm i â diddordeb ers talwm yn natur *grym*. Gwyddoniaeth Wleidyddol oedd fy mhwnic yn y coleg yng Nghalifornia, ond oddi wrth farddoniaeth y dysgais y wers bwysicaf am rym. Cyflogwyd y ferch oedd yn rhannu'r llety â mi yn deipydd gan athro barddoniaeth o Iran. Byddai'n teipio pethau'r athro wrth fwrdd y gegin lle roedd y golau gryfaf, a dechreuais i ddarllen wrth iddi eu tynnu o'i pheiriant. A dyna agoriad llygad oedd hynny; fu fawr o farddoniaeth cyn hynny yn fy addysg i. Mae'r delweddau cyntaf, o gerdd gan Sohrab Sepehri, yn aros ar fy nghof hyd heddiw, flynyddoedd yn diweddarach: sŵn traed y dŵr; gardd ar yr ochr dywyll i ddoethineb; golchi cwpan yn nant y cof. Cododd y blew ar fy ngwegil.

A'r dalennau hynny o farddoniaeth ymhen hir a hwyr a benderfynodd gwrs fy mywyd. Y tymor nesaf, cofrestrais mewn dosbarth Perseg ac ymhen cwpwl o flynyddoedd roeddwn wedi dysgu digon i astudio barddoniaeth. Cerdd fodern oedd y gerdd gyntaf rwy'n cofio pigo fy ffordd drwyddi, cerdd o waith Ahmad Shamlu am ddadrithiad yn sgil chwyldro Iran ym 1979. Roedd hi'n cychwyn â'r llinellau trawiadol hyn, a gwyddwn wrth eu darllen mai gwych o penderfyniad oedd mynd ati i astudio'r iaith:

Maen nhw'n oglau dy wynt  
Rhag ofn dy fod wedi dweud  
Rwy'n dy garu di...

Mi ddarganfyddais ffordd o gael cymrodoriaeth iaith Berseg i dalu am fy nghyrsiau gradd. O feddwl mai astudio barddoniaeth oedd fy mwriad, eironig braidd oedd bod y nawdd yn deillio o bryderon ynghylch diolgelwch cenedlaethol! Yn ystod y Rhyfel Oer, pan oedd yr Unol Daleithiau yn barod i dynnu rhyfel yn ei phen mewn amryfal rannau o'r byd, penderfynwyd bod angen Americanwyr oedd yn siarad yr ieithoedd lleol.

Roedd y Berseg, neu *Farsi*, yn un o'r ieithoedd 'strategol' hynny, ond chydig o brifysgolion oedd yn ei dysgu. Yn y



Mikki a Jo-Anne Hart

diwedd, cefais le ym Mhrifysgol Efrog Newydd i astudio Gwyddoniaeth Wleidyddol ar y cyd â barddoniaeth Berseg. Cychwynnodd y cwrs â'r beirdd clasurol, Ferdowsi, Saadi a Hafez. Wedyn y bardd Swffiaidd, Rumi. O dipyn i beth, cyrhaeddais at y beirdd modern a gwirioni ar waith un o feirdd cyfoes pwysicaf Iran, Forogh Farrokhad. Roedd hon yn ddryllwraig delwau ddiedifar oedd weithiau yn defnyddio adleisiau cyfriniol yn eu gwaith ffeministaidd. Darllenais ei *Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season*.

Mewn tro bach eironig arall i'r hanes, bûm am weddill fy ngyrfa yn arbenigo, nid ar farddoniaeth Iran, ond ar ei gwleidyddiaeth. Ond barddoniaeth Berseg yn y bôn sydd wedi llunio fy nealltwriaeth i o'r wlad. Bûm â'm holl egni proffesiynol i ers talwm yn ceisio lleddfu ofn yr Americanwyr fod Iran yn fygythiad, ac yn benodol yn cynghori yn erbyn iddyn nhw fynd i ryfel. Oni bai imi ddod i adnabod Iran drwy ei diwylliant, mae'n bur debyg y byddwn innau wedi ei 'dieithrio' hi yr un fath â chymaint o bobol eraill.

Bûm innau yn golchi fy nghwpan yn nant y cof ers imi gyrraedd yn yr ysgol haf yn Llanbedr Pont Steffan y llynedd. Bûm yno gyda chriw o sgrifenywyr o America yn mynd i'r afael â thema'r 'man a lle'. Gwlad beirdd ydi Cymru, a bûm yn ffodus yr haf hwnnw i glywed amryw o feirdd Cymraeg wrthi. Roeddwn yn *chlywed* Cymru llawn

cymaint ag yn ei gweld. Ni fûm i ers blynyddoedd yng nghanol llong gwlad o sŵn felly, yn cael tynnu fy sylw at gywreinerwydd geiriau a'u hergyd yn y glust. Gall Cymru wneud hynny i sgrifennwr.

Wrth wyllo'r brain uwchben castell Harlech, cofiais yn sydyn fod y gair Perseg '*rukh*' yn golygu tŵr, tarddiad yr enw Saesneg '*rook*' ar y castell mewn gêm o wyddbwyll. A dyna ddechrau gweld pethau yn gyffredin rhwng Cymru a thraddodiad barddonol Iran. Pethau i'w canu yw odlau a chynganeddion, yr un fath â barddoniaeth epig Iran. Rwy'n dychmygu bod y *Mabinogi* a *Shanameh* Iran yn debyg o ran eu rhythmau.

Mae chwedlau Perseg yn cychwyn â'r ymadrodd '*yeki bud, yeki nabud...*', 'unwaith bu, unwaith ni fu...' Onid oeddwn yn gweld meddylfryd tebyg yng Nghymru, lle mae'r Brenin Arthur draw yn ei ogof yn rhywle yn disgwyl am yr alwad i ddychwelyd at ei bobol? Mae'r Shi'a yn Iran wedi glynu wrth eu sect leiafrifol nhwythau wrth ochr y gangen fwyafrifol o grefydd Islam, Sunni. Maen nhw'n credu y daw'r Deuddegfed Imam, Imam 'Cuddiedig' y Shi'a, i adfer gogoniant y gorffennol.

Mi wyddwn i am hiraeth cyn imi gyrraedd yng Nghymru, ond deuthum i ddeall mwy amdano bob dydd. Fe'i gwelwn i yn fawr ac yn fach, yn gyffredinol ac yn benodol. Mae barddoniaeth Berseg yn llawn hiraeth hefyd. Mae'r llinellau hyn yn dal ar fy nghof yn y gwreiddiol:

Gwranda ar chwedl y bib frwynen  
sy'n wyllo o fod ar wahân  
- cwyn hiraeth diderfyn...

Gwledydd hynafol yw Iran a Chymru a'u gorffennol gogoneddus wedi ei grasu, fel petai, ar ddiwylliant balch. Mae barddoniaeth y ddwy wlad â'r grym i gario'r amser gynt yn ei flaen ac ail-danio eu hysbryd drwy'r oesoedd - gellid canu 'Yma o hyd' yn Iran hefyd. Dyfalbarhad a chyfiawnder ydi'r meini prawf. Galargan tanllyd yw hiraeth, wedi ei geni o orthrwm. Wrth deithio yng Nghymru, a gweld lle bu coed a dŵr yn cael eu hysbeilio, teimlwn glwy parhaol lleiafrif yng nghysgod y grym gormesol.

Os yw'r Cymry yn hiraethu am gael rhywbeth yn ôl, efallai mai cael bod yn gyfan eto yw hwnnw, gwneud iawn â'r enaid cenedlaethol. Mae 'dieithrio' annheg wrth wraidd

profiad lleiafrifol y Shi'a hefyd. Dyw hi'n synnu dim arnaf i fod mwy o feirdd yng Nghymru nag yn yr un wlad arall yn Ewrop, na bod y fath fri ar farddoniaeth Berseg drwy'r byd. Y beirdd sy'n sicrhau bod amryfal synau'r galon fach yn torri yn cael eu cofnodi o'r newydd ym mhob cenedlaeth.

Heb rybudd, newidiodd barddoniaeth fy mywyd i wrth fy ngwahodd i wrando ar synau'r gyfathrach rhwng pobl sy'n cynnu'r ysbryd. Flynyddoedd yn ddiweddarach wrth ddod oddi ar y bws yng Nghymru, estynnodd barddoniaeth ei llaw eto; cynigiodd imi ffordd o glywed y wlad hon, ac i olrhain hiraeth yno a'r tu hwnt.

Ychydig fisoedd yn ddiweddarach, a'r twrw rhwng yr Unol Daleithiau ac Iran yn mynd yn nes at daro, nid rhan haniaethol o'r byd ydi barddoniaeth. Barddoniaeth i mi ydi'r cysylltiad dynol ag Iran ac â Chymru, ac mae ar gael inni i gyd ym mhobman. Wedi dod i ddeall am ddiwylliant Iran drwy ei barddoniaeth, rydw i'n deall pam mae llawer yn Iran yn teimlo bod yr Unol Daleithiau yn eu trin yn annheg, yn eu bwlio nhw. Does dim rhaid imi gefnogi llywodraeth yr un o'r ddwy wlad i fod ag ofn efallai y daw rhyfel. A phan fydd arlywydd Americanaidd yn bygwth dinistrio etifeddiaeth ddiwyllianol Iran er mwyn gorchyfygu'r wlad yn wleidyddol, nid yn unig mae hynny yn erbyn y gyfraith ryngwladol, mae'n drais yn erbyn yr ysbryd dynol. Ond mae barddoniaeth yn codi uwchlaw creiriau. Allwch chi ddim bomio barddoniaeth. A all barddoniaeth leddfu'r elyniaeth rhwng yr Unol Daleithiau ac Iran? Gallai'r ddihareb Berseg hon, sy'n gyfarwydd mewn llawer o wahanol ieithoedd, fod yn alwad i gymodi:

دسریم مدآ ب مدآ, دسریمن موک ب موک

'Fydd mynydd byth yn cyfarfod mynydd, ond mae dyn yn cyfarfod dyn...' Dyw gwrthod symud ddim yn creu heddwch; pobol yn dod at ei gilydd sy'n gwneud hynny. Mae hiraeth arnaf am gael clywed sŵn hynny!

**Mae gan Jo-Anne Hart radd mewn Ysgrifennu Creadigol a PhD mewn Gwyddoniaeth Wleidyddol. Mae hi'n dysgu *Conflict Transformation a Global Interdisciplinary Studies* ym Mhrifysgol Lesley yn Cambridge, Massachusetts, ac yn byw yn Rhode Island efo'i phriod a'u ci, Mikki.**

Cylchgrawn y Gymdeithas Gerdd Dafod

Y traddodiad hardd ydyw,  
Yr hen ddweud o'r newydd yw.

# barddas

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