

Vile Saxons and Ancient Britons: Wordsworth, the ambivalent Welsh tourist

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On the equinox of September 23 1792, as reported by the *Gentleman's Magazine* of the day, Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams), the self-styled 'Bard of Liberty', used the unlikely setting of London's Primrose Hill to stage an even more unlikely ceremony: the 'democratic Bards of Wales' performed a supposed druidic ritual sheathing a sword on an altar within a stone circle.

As Gwyn A. Williams reminds us, 'Iolo ... invented Welsh traditions the Welsh had never known.'¹ Yet, there are two elements to this invention which are significant, and may in part help to explain the attraction of Wales and the Welsh to the first generation Romantic poets in the 1790s, and to Wordsworth in particular.² Firstly, these neo-bards saw themselves very much as part of wider political movements; insisting on their radical and democratic credentials - credentials shared by the young Romantics - they allied themselves to the revolutions which had occurred over the Channel in France and across the Atlantic in America. Typical of these groups was the Gwyneddigion or 'men of North Wales', of whom Iolo Morganwg was one, who adopted the clearly French-inspired motto: 'Liberty in Church and State'. Secondly, the props used, the sword and more particularly the stone circle itself³, evoked both a sense of mystery and of potential opposition. The sword might be unsheathed and employed, however symbolically, against an oppressive regime at home just as it, or its modern counterparts, had actually been used abroad.

This strength of feeling was not simply limited to a relatively small group of London Welsh. Parts, particularly of North Wales, were equally inspired by revolutions elsewhere. Again, Gwyn A. Williams writes:

A strong and often very radical popular movement developed around Wrexham

and Denbigh ... During the troubles of the 1790s people forced a magistrate in Bala to wear wooden clogs, a symbol of slavery borrowed from the French Revolution ... papers went up in Bangor calling for people to pray for a British defeat in the wars against France.⁴

It was precisely these parts of 'radical' Wales which the young, radical Cambridge graduate, William Wordsworth, was to visit in the years either side of Iolo Morganwg's bardic ceremony. In 1791 and 1793, he undertook two walking tours in the company of his fellow graduate, the Welshman Robert Jones, of Plas-yn-Llan, Llangynhafal, near Ruthin, Denbighshire - a place in the heart of Welsh radicalism. The two had undertaken a similar tour of France and the Alps in 1790, when still undergraduates, which would provide much of the material for Wordsworth's *Descriptive Sketches* (1793) and for Book 6 of *The Prelude*. The connection again between things Welsh and things French, between locations of social unrest, might be noted. I want to suggest here that this connection is a vital one, however tenuous it might seem at this point; that Wordsworth's perception of Wales and the Welsh provides a key to understanding some of his larger political and, indeed, poetic uncertainties. The poetry produced from or at the time of these experiences begins to crystalize what might be seen as enduring Wordsworthian ambivalences.

Much has been written about Wordsworth's relationship with Robert Jones; much more has been written about his, and the general Romantic, and indeed romantic, attraction to Wales as a tourist experience, a land of myth and beauty.⁵ Clearly, Wordsworth **was** drawn to Wales by a sense of friendship and by the interest he shared with many late eighteenth early nineteenth century travellers in mountainous and sublime landscape. In many of the accounts relating Wordsworth to Wales, he is far from an uneasy tourist. The encounter is seen purely, or largely, as an aesthetic one. In one of the earliest critical treatments of the subject, W.J. Hughes set the

tone - a tone which persists - by remarking generally, though he had Wordsworth principally in mind, that 'the Romantic writers ... were unanimous in their eulogy of the country'.⁶ The same point is made, albeit in rather more politically charged language by a more recent critic: Miriam Griffiths observes that the eighteenth century tourists 'plundered the Welsh landscape for examples to reinforce their aesthetic preferences.'⁷ One of Dorothy Wordsworth's letters from the summer of 1791 captures both the personal and the aesthetic appeal of the country:

I often hear from my brother William who is now in Wales where I think he seem so happy that it is probable he will remain there all summer or a great part of it ... His friend Jones is a charming young man ... then there are mountains, rivers, woods and rocks, whose charms without any other inducement would be sufficient to tempt William to continue amongst them as long as possible ... his pleasures are chiefly of the imagination, he is never so happy as when in a beautiful country.

She adds to this possible romantic attachment; she writes here too: 'Who would not be happy enjoying the company of three young ladies in the Vale of Clwyd ...?'⁸ Who indeed? Beyond the dubious pleasures of 'three young ladies' however, as we might expect, the main thrust of this letter is to see Wordsworth, whether eulogising or plundering, as the contented tourist-poet 'in a beautiful country', indulging in the 'pleasures ... of the imagination'.

This same tone is evident in many of Wordsworth's own reports of his Welsh experience at this time. To give one example, he writes in August 1791:

visited the greater part of North Wales without having any reason to complain of disappointed expectations. But the sea-sunsets, which give such splendour to the vale of Clwyd, Snowdon, and the chair of Idris, the quiet village of Bethgelert, Menai and her Druids, the Alpine steeps of the Conway, and the still more interesting windings of the wizard stream of the Dee, remain yet untouched.⁹

Many of these sights were revisited during the 1793 tour. There is here, in the cataloguing and, particularly, in the phrase 'remain yet untouched', a sense of both eulogy and plunder. That Wordsworth sees no 'reason to complain of disappointed expectations' equally marks him as yet one more in a long line of tourists, in almost the modern sense of that word.

His desire to see 'Menai and her Druids' and this transfiguration of the Welsh into an 'Alpine' (French) landscape, might suggest a political, and indeed, poetic empathy beyond or at least in parallel with aesthetic eulogising or plundering.

Around the 1790s Wales became a kind of substitute or mirror for the revolutionary sites in Europe and America. There were, of course, simple practical reasons for this: as Griffiths reminds us, 'the closing of the Continent to English travellers during the Napoleonic wars'¹⁰ had much to do with it. In Snowdon Wales did simply offer a substitute for the denied scenic thrills of Mont Blanc, say. However, beyond this there was a kind of spiritualised political empathy. In relation to France, this can be seen in the actions of the protesters in Wrexham, Denbigh and elsewhere, and in the self-conscious modelling of the Welsh radical groups, particularly in London. In the American context this manifested itself most powerfully in the myth of Prince Madoc and the Welsh 'discovery' of America. Interestingly, much of the re-invention of this story, and much of the impetus of the subsequent Madogion movement, mass emigration to the American West, was supplied by Iolo Morganwg.¹¹ It is arguable that, as much as any other factor, it was this remoulding of Wales-as-America, or more accurately America-as-Wales, and, more particularly in Wordsworth's case Wales-as-France, which explains the poet's attraction to it. Even more significantly, it may be these acts of identification, both actual and imaginary, which explain finally his ambivalence as a Welsh tourist.

Some of Wordsworth's records of his Welsh experiences in the 1790s suggest the kind of positive, and overtly political identification with things French being made, in their different ways, by would be bards and popular protesters. In the 1805 *Prelude*, for example, he gives a very interesting view of the war between Britain and France:

And now the strengths of Britain was put forth
In league with confederated host;
Not in my single self alone I found

identification he would come to regret.

Clearly, then, the attractions of Wales were more than personal or aesthetic for Wordsworth. There are precise, if slightly obscured, political connections being made: both the poet, in his silence, and some of the Welsh people at any rate are involved in anti-British prayers in the mid-1790s. This similarity in response to the war against France is arguably not fortuitous; there is a deeper sense of identification, however much it might be based on the kind of re-invention being practised by figures like Iolo Morganwg, between at least the young Wordsworth and Wales. This identification goes to the heart of Wordsworth's sense of himself as a poet, and a user of language. It is an identification which rests primarily on Wordsworth's own ambivalent attraction to the figure of the druidic bard.

Of course, 'bards' and 'druids' need not be specifically Welsh. The imaginative appeal to a more general Celtic past is a long-standing one in English literature, and it gained particular momentum from the middle of the eighteenth century.¹⁵ Wordsworth, whose own knowledge of literature about the druids was extensive, is clearly part of this trend, which largely uses the 'druid' and the 'bard' as positive, nostalgic tokens. For example, he sees himself in an intriguing way in some lines discarded from Book 3 of the 1850 *Prelude*:

A youthful Druid taught in shady groves
Primaeval mysteries, a bard elect
To celebrate in sympathetic verse
Magnanimous exploits.¹⁶

And in 'Humanity', written in 1829, the poet becomes a replacement for the now absent 'Druid-priest':

Though, in the depths of sunless groves no more
The Druid-priest the hallowed Oak adore;
Yet, for the Initiate rocks and whispering trees
Do still perform mysterious office! (17-10)¹⁷

On one level this is simply a nostalgic sigh. Yet, this substitution may prove significant.

It is an absence equally apparent during the famous 'Ascent of Snowdon' passage in Book 13 of the 1805 *Prelude* (1 10-65). briefly, in this passage Wordsworth is, at least in part, an almost clichéd tourist: visiting one of the most famous sites of Wales, plundering its scenery. Yet, there is very little sense of him being **in** Wales, and any possible links with a druidic or bardic tradition are at best muted. Both this sense of replacement, and the later missed, or ignored, opportunities presented by Snowdon, might suggest, then, the same kind of discomfort with the possible radicalism of the druidic role as was expressed in the pro-French view of Book 10 of the *Prelude*. Wordsworth can except neither role completely. He finds it increasingly hard to believe in druids in any sense, just as he cannot quite stomach the killing of Englishmen; and, it can be argued that this refusal, both poetic and political, is intimately connected with his experience of Wales.

'[B]ard[s] elect' and 'Druid-priests', if they are to be found at all, might be as comfortable in a Cumbrian as a Cambrian location: Wordsworth was familiar with the supposed druidic circles of Long Meg and Shap, along with countless other remains in the Lake District. However, such figures were particularly re-invigorated as part of, what might be called, the radical Welsh agenda of Iolo Morganwg and others: it was his Gwyneddigion who breathed new life into the Eisteddfod tradition of bardic contest, as well as instigating the more historically dubious stone circle ceremony, or Gorsedd; he who forged documents to support his claims that **Welsh** bards had 'preserved, virtually intact, a continuous tradition of lore and wisdom going back to the original prehistoric Druids.'¹⁸ Clearly Wordsworth's interest in the Menai druids could be seen as one of more than touristic curiosity. It is this access to 'lore and wisdom', however fanciful, that would, in part, have drawn him to Wales. This is particularly so since the Welsh-Druid claim to visionary insight and knowledge rested upon a peculiar contemporary view of language, with which Wordsworth was familiar.

The first version of *Lyrical Ballads* was published in 1798; Wordsworth toured parts of Wales and the borders again in that year, producing 'Tintern Abbey'. Famously, in the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* he sees the poet as 'a man speaking to men'.¹⁹ This definition, which in itself suggests a kind of bardic role, also demands a simplicity or purity of language. Such a language was believed to exist in Wales. Wordsworth was familiar with the work of antiquarians and etymologists, who argued in ways similar to those of Iolo Morganwg, that Welsh, the language of the druids, was related to Hebrew and ancient Judaic truths. In some cases they even argued that it was a simple non-degenerate ur-language, predating Hebrew, close to nature and therefore containing even more ancient truths.²⁰ To a poet like Wordsworth - a man wishing to speak to all men, and to become an 'initiate' of the 'whispering trees' ('Humanity' 19) - such a language would have obvious appeal. And, of course, for him the similarity between 'Cumbria' or 'Cumberland' and 'Cambria', linking both to the Welsh 'Cymru' or 'Cymri', would suggest an even greater sense of Celtic and poetic kinship. In 1821 he poignantly notes the link in *Ecclesiastical Sonnet XII*:

Mark! how all things swerve
 From their known course, or vanish like a dream;
 Another language spreads from coast to coast,
 Only perchance some melancholy Stream
 And some indignant Hills old names preserve,
 When laws and creeds and people are all lost!
(19-14)²¹

In Wales this 'loss' of both language and ancient continuities was being resisted: in no small part, this resistance, the keeping of the language alive, was the work of the politically radical Welsh, and often the London-based groups.²² There is at least one direct connection between these groups and Wordsworth, and, interestingly it is specifically concerned with an interest in the Welsh language. An associate of Iolo Morganwg's, William Owen (later Owen Pughe) was a radical, druid enthusiast, and lexicographer; he was also part of William Blake's

circle. Wordsworth seems to have been familiar with his work, and as late as 1833 he wrote to Robert Jones asking for a copy of Pughe's Welsh dictionary, 'as I often wish to consult a book of this kind'.²³

This phase might suggest a kind of linguistic plundering, akin to the aesthetic and scenic appropriation of the tourist. Like so many, it seems that Wordsworth made no serious attempt to learn Welsh. This, a slight reluctance, perhaps to adopt a bardic role, and an understandable pulling away from complete sympathy with the French, and therefore, by extension, the Welsh cause, in registering an understandable discomfort over the actual deaths of Englishmen, do little to really undermine the picture of the eulogising poet. However, the extent to which Wordsworth was, perhaps, increasingly ambivalent about Wales and its radical, bardic, druidic pretensions might be gained from an analysis of the poem he wrote, and re-wrote, about his journey to Wales in 1793.

Wordsworth crossed Salisbury Plain in the high summer of 1793 (*Prelude* 1805 Bk 12 313ff; 1850 Bk 13 313f). He was en route from the Isle of Wight to Wales, to again visit Robert Jones. For the previous month he had watched the British fleet stationed off Portsmouth preparing to go to war against France (*Prelude* 1805 Bk 10 290f; 1850 Bk 10 315) - war had been formally declared in February 1793. There is here the familiar connection between things Welsh and things French, established by both the poet himself and the different groups of Welsh radicals, not least the neo-bards and druids. The crossing of Salisbury Plain figures largely in *The Prelude*; it is also the subject of a series of poems known, naturally as *The Salisbury Plain Poems*: 'Salisbury Plain', which was begun in 1793 while Wordsworth was in Wales; 'Adventures on Salisbury Plain' a reworking carried out between 1795-9, which contained the separately published poem 'The Female Vagrant', included in the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798; and, the final published version *Guilt and Sorrow* of 1841.²⁴

The larger subject matter of these poems, and the extent to which in revision they become increasingly conservative and depoliticised, has been examined elsewhere. Here, it might be enough to note that the Salisbury Plain experience is an example of what Stephen Gill has rightly called the 'poetry of protest'.²⁵ As such it is part of a general early Romantic response to the war with France. Yet, to realise that early drafts were written **in** Wales, about a journey **to** Wales, might ally it rather more closely to the radical, French-inspired uprisings in areas like Wrexham and Denbigh. And, of course, this connection is heightened since the focal point of Salisbury Plain itself, which figures largely in these poems and in Wordsworth's recollections of the same journey in *The Prelude*, is, what was imagined to be one of the most significant druidic sites in Britain: Stonehenge. It might be recalled that the druids were often perceived to be, both culturally and linguistically, not merely Celtic but in some sense specifically Welsh.

However unhistorical, the Welsh claim to the stone circle was a strong one: Iolo Morganwg (though his circles may only have been made of small stones or pebbles, which in itself might say something about the nature of the re-invented myth)²⁶ clearly re-staked this claim on top of Primrose Hill, with his sword, in 1792. This political act, with its larger French-American, anti-English, pro-Wales context, can be linked to one of the most enduring of Welsh, anti-English political myths; a myth, which when Wordsworth encountered it, had been relocated to Stonehenge.

During the Brecon Eisteddfod of 1822 the Cambrian Society of Gwent offered a medal for the best essay on 'The Credibility of the Massacre of British Nobles at Stonehenge'.²⁷ The 'massacre' here is a reference to the fifth century Welsh myth 'The Treason of the Long Knives' ('Brad y Cyllyll Hirion'): a story continually re-invented as a mark of Welsh oppression and English betrayal, which was particularly potent during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The story concerns Vortigern, the leader of the Britons, who relied on Saxon mercenaries led by

Hengest to defend his kingdom. The Saxons turned on their hosts. Here, the story can be picked up from one of its earliest sources, Nennius' ninth century *History of the British*:

Hengest ... sent envoys to ask for peace and make a permanent treaty ... [C]onference was convened, wher[e] the two sides, British and English [i.e. Saxon] should meet unarmed to confirm the treaty. But Hengest told his followers to hide their daggers ... saying `When I call out to you and say "English draw your knives", take your daggers ... and fall upon them ...' So the conference assembled, and the English, friendly in their words, but wolfish in heart and deed, sat down, like allies, man beside man. Hengest cried out as he said and all three hundred Seniors of King Vortigern were murdered.²⁸

The thought of the English as `wolfish in heart and deed' would, clearly, be appealing to the Welsh throughout history, who identified themselves, and their language, as the true British. As has been suggested, this view of the English gained fresh impetus in the climate of revolutionary fervour which existed from the 1790s. For example, Theophilus Jones used it to explain the then common, anti-English, Welsh proverb `Sais yw ef, Syn!' (`He's a Saxon, Watch out!'):

The treachery of the Saxons ... and their cruelty in exterminating in cold blood the nobility of the antient inhabitants ... still rankles in the bosoms of the indigenous sons of freedom.²⁹

The phrase `the nobility of the antient inhabitants', here, might be read simply to mean the nobles who were killed; yet, it might also suggest an inherent sense of nobility being denied to the Welsh as a whole. Clearly, to characterize them as `the indigenous sons of freedom' - a phrase which recalls Iolo Morganwg the `Bard of Liberty', and one which might have been attractive to the young Wordsworth - again, brings to mind what might be called the Welsh-French connection.

Wordsworth himself would have been familiar with a version of the `Long Knives' myth from Chatterton's *Battle of Hastings* of 1768 - Chatterton made use of Geoffrey of Monmouth's

twelfth century rendering of the myth, which in turn can be traced back to Nennius.³⁰ Here, Stonehenge was a monument erected by Merlin (who himself has been appropriated by the Welsh, not least of Carmarthen) to commemorate the massacre; clearly, though, in some retellings Stonehenge and Salisbury Plain were the site of the slaughter itself. So now, in a sense, Salisbury has joined France and America and become Wales, or at least a means of expressing Welsh discontent. This was a political discontent which Wordsworth shared, to an extent, at any rate, as we have seen, as he journeyed towards Wales in 1793.

In his recollections of this journey in *The Salisbury Plain Poems* and *The Prelude*, Wordsworth could still use largely positive druidic and bardic images, similar to the one he would later remove from the 1850 *Prelude*. For example, in the earliest poetical version of his experience, 'Salisbury Plain' written in Wales in 1793, he characterizes the druids as 'Long bearded forms with wands uplifted', who:

To vast assemblies, while shew each breath of night
Is hushed, the living fires that bright and slow
Rounding th'aetherial field in order go ...
[While] prelude of sweet sounds the moon beguiles
And charmed for many a league the hoary desert smiles.
(st. 22)³¹

Similarly in Book 12 of the 1805 *Prelude*, he experiences a 'reverie' '[u]pon the plain of Sarum' in which he sees 'bearded teachers, with white wands', 'guided' by 'breath/ of music' (1313-54).

Both of these extracts might be seen as a positive embracing of an essentially Welsh druidic and bardic culture, however fanciful: the ancient 'lore', and an almost orphic sense of the power of music, and, perhaps, by extension poetry itself. Equally, the sense of 'Salisbury Plain' as a protest poem is given extra weight if the use of stone circles by Iolo Morganwg, and of Stonehenge itself within re-workings of the 'Long Knives' myth, are recalled. The protest in the

poem is essentially the same as the protests of the Welsh.

So far so good: Wordsworth, the political radical en route to Wales, connects himself, through an elaborate set of images, figures, locations and associations, with radically political Wales, in its differing manifestations in the 1790s. Alan Lui neatly summarizes many of these connections when he says of Wordsworth, 'that, in the early 1790s the poet honed his long knife of subversion specifically on Welsh colonial discourse'.³² In this picture there is very little room for the ambivalent tourist I have already begun to suggest in some of Wordsworth encounters with Wales: the ambiguous silence in the Welsh church, the marked absence of the druid poetic persona, the superficial regard of language. However, more than any of these, essentially trivial points, there is a key element to the Salisbury Plain experience which, already in 1793 suggests, if not an absolute conservatism, then at least a moving away from the radical Welsh agenda.

In all of the versions of 'The Treason of the Long Knives', from Nennius to Chatterton and beyond, it is the Britons (Welsh) who are massacred or killed at Stonehenge or elsewhere. Crucially, Wordsworth reverses the situation imagined, for example by Chatterton. For Chatterton the stone circle is a memorial to Saxon (English) violence; for Wordsworth, even in 1793, things are not so clear. In *The Salisbury Plain Poems* he draws on another aspect of druid mythology, which developed along side the view of them as 'bearded teachers': this is what A.L. Owen characterizes as the 'barbaric' 'savage' or 'militant patriot' view of the druids, in which they were part themselves of a politically oppressive order.³³ To ignore this is to misrepresent, or at least to underplay an element of Wordsworth's potential view of the Welsh. If, in a sense Wales is France, then, just as idealistic revolution was turning into terror in France in 1793, so Wordsworth may have had some fears about the extreme Welsh patriotism, embodied in the figure of the militant patriot druid - yet again, Iolo Morganwg might be recalled. The most powerfully ambiguous image of the druid in 'Salisbury Plain' is very distinct from that of the

`bearded teacher' associated with calming music:

Though from huge wickers paled with circling fire
No longer horrid shrieks and dying cries
To ears of Daemon-Gods in peals aspire,
Though Treachery her sword no longer dyes
In the cold blood of Truce, still, reason's ray,
What does it more than while the tempests rise,
With starless glooms and sounds of loud dismay,
Reveal with still-born glimpse the terrors of our way?
(st. 48)³⁴

A.L. Owen notes rather cryptically that `Wordsworth ... was particularly fascinated by [druid] sacrifices'.³⁵ Much more should be made of this. The treacherous `sword' (l 428), here, might suggest the `Long Knives' myth; yet, it might also hint at the potential arming of the neo-bards and druids. Beyond this, to highlight the equally current and powerful myth of the druids being responsible for `a human sacrifice' (l 426), the killing of human beings, is to reverse the dynamic of the `Long Knives' story: here it is the druids, and by extension the Welsh, who are the perpetrators of violence. Here, there are glimpses of `the terrors' (l 432) possible both abroad and at home, and these `terrors' need not simple be restricted to the English or Government side. It is arguable that this passage marks the beginning of a longer journey for Wordsworth towards his later conservative position. Here, there is, by implication, no clear sense of eulogy, or even of anything but the most ambivalent political empathy. And here, there is a movement away from the poetic self-identification with the druidical bard figure. On a personal level, as will be seen, he had clear reasons not to eulogise.

Wordsworth was not alone among the English Romantics - and in this context, of course the word `English' carries an extra charge: `Sais yw ef, Syn!') (He's a Saxon, Watch out!) - in experiencing, as a plundering tourist, the understandable anger of the Welsh themselves. Coleridge, a similar tourist at a similar date, recalls causing a `pub room brawl' and catching `fleas from a Welsh democrat' whilst in Wales.³⁶ Wordsworth's own version of this kind of

encounter, which might stand as a corrective to his and Dorothy's positive endorsement of Welsh scenery, and more importantly to their apparent sense of Wales as a kind of home for the Wordsworthian poetic imagination, appears in a letter written in 1829. Here Wordsworth records visiting Thomas Pennant, whose own *A Tour in Wales* had a great influence on, what we might call the tourist trade to Wales, and not least upon Wordsworth's expectations.³⁷ He continues, and he is worth quoting at length:

Five and thirty years ago ... an event took place so characteristic of the Cambro Britains that I will venture upon a recital of it ... One day we sat down une partie quarrée at the Squire's Table, himself at the head; the Parson of the Parish, a bulky broad-faced man of between 50 and 60 at the foot and [Robert] Jones and I opposite each other. I must observe that 'the Man of God' had not unprofessionally been employed most part of the morning in Bottling the Squire's 'Cwrrw', anglisé strong Ale, this had reddened his face (we will suppose from the fumes) ... The conversation proceeded ... the Topic - the powers of the Welsh Language. 'They are marvellous' said the Rev. Taffy. 'Your English is not to be compared especially in, conciseness, we can often express in one word what you can scarce do in a long sentence.' 'That,' said I, 'is indeed wonderful be so kind as to favour me with an instance?' 'That I will' he answered. 'You know, perhaps, the word Tad?' 'Yes.' 'What does it mean?' 'Father' I replied. 'Well,' stammer'd the Priest in triumph, 'Tad and Father there you have it' ... I could not help smiling ...

whereupon, the incensed Welshman rose from his chair and brandished over me a huge sharp pointed carving knife ... he stood threat[e]ning me ... and heaping on my poor English head every reproachful epithet ... `You vile Saxon!' I recollect was one of his terms, `To come here and insult me an ancient Briton on my own territory!' ...³⁸

Beyond its rather uneasy humour, the contents of this letter might be seen, however unwittingly, as a complex engagement with, a playing with, the defining terms of Welsh identity and, indeed, Welsh radicalism. Here, there is an implicit undermining of the claims of made for the Welsh language; Wordsworth is very clearly **not** a man speaking to men. There is even a slight sense of Wales-as-France in some of the phrases: `une partie quarrée', `anglisé'. But most clearly, the anecdote is a reworking of the `Long Knives' myth.

Here Wordsworth becomes Hengest, the `vile Saxon', and like Hengest he, as a tourist, has invaded ancient British, or Welsh `territory'. The knives are out, or at least `a huge sharp pointed carving knife' is, but crucially this knife is drawn **by** and not **against** the `ancient Briton'. The ambiguity of Iolo Morganwg's ceremony - is the sword being put away, or is it being put away only to be used later? - is not apparent. However comically, `the Man of God' is imagined in the terms of the militant patriot, barbaric, druids of `Salisbury Plain', a poem probably being composed around the time of this incident: his is a kind of suspended `human sacrifice'. And what is under threat is precisely Wordsworth's sense, not of empathy politically or linguistically with the Welsh, but his very sense of having `a poor **English** head', of being English.

It might be worth noting that in his re-telling of the earlier tour of the Alps, in Book 6 of the 1805 *Prelude*, Wordsworth characterized himself and Robert Jones as `A lonely pair / Of Englishmen' (1 391-2). And, as I have suggested, it is arguably an Englishman who climbs

Snowdon at the conclusion of the poem. There is perhaps no greater 'insult' to a Welshman, which Jones clearly was, to use the language of the letter. Yet, if Jones is an 'Englishman', then, even the seating arrangements of the 'Long Knives' 'conference' are being echoed here. Beyond this, the very act of self-identification (why not 'a fellow Briton's head'? or 'a poor Celt's', 'a poor bard's', 'a poor poet's' or even simply 'a poor man's head?')³⁹, as much as the tone of the anecdote, might tell us much about Wordsworth's perception of the Welsh, and his use of Wales, certainly by 1829. He begins to step out of the stone circle of revolutionary intent or desire, perhaps, whilst choosing to see those inside in barbaric terms. Clearly, if nothing else the anecdote presents a very different picture of the tourist to that of the simple scenic eulogiser, or plunderer, or to that of the political empathiser. It is arguable that this is an ambivalence apparent as early as 1793 in the contrasting images of 'druids' presented in 'Salisbury Plain'; and, more than simple prejudice, it is arguable that this is an ambivalence at the heart of Wordsworth's own sense of himself as he becomes less of the Celtic or bardic radical, looking to France, and more of the reactionary Englishman, or 'vile Saxon'. 'Sais yw ef, Syn!' ('He's a Saxon, Watch out!'), indeed.

NOTES

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- ¹ See *When Was Wales?: A History of Wales* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1985) p.165. General information about Iolo Morganwg can be gleaned from Stuart Piggot's *The Druids* (Thames and Hudson: London, 1968) pp. 164 ff.
- ² For rather different perspectives on this see W.J. Hughes's *Wales and the Welsh in English Literature* (Hughes and Son: Wrexham, 1924) chps. 5-7, and D. Myrddin Lloyd's 'Wordsworth and Wales' in *National Library of Wales Journal* 6.4 (1950) pp. 338-52; and more recently two essays in *The Welsh Connection* ed. William Tydeman: Miriam Griffith's 'Wider Empire of the Sight' pp. 67-88, and Alun R. Jones's 'The Continuity of Friendship: William Wordsworth, Robert Jones and the Continental Tour of 1790' pp. 89-109; and R. Paul Evans's introduction to his edition of Thomas Pennant's *A Tour in Wales 1788, 81, 83* (Wrexham: Bridge Books, 1991)
- ³ For an analysis of the Welsh power of re-invention see Prys Morgan's 'From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period' in *The Invention of Tradition* ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Eric Ranger (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1983) pp. 65-6 focus particularly on the use of the stone circle.
- ⁴ From *When Was Wales?* p.169.
- ⁵ See n.2.
- ⁶ From *Wales and the Welsh in English Literature* p.130.
- ⁷ From 'Wider Empire of the Sight' p.86.
- ⁸ To Jane Pollard, July 1791. See *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* vol.1 *The Early Years* ed. Earnest de Selincourt rev. C.L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967) p. 51.
- ⁹ To William Mathews, August 1791; *ibid.*
- ¹⁰ See 'Wider Empire of the Sight' p.67
- ¹¹ For the Welsh identification with revolutionary America see *When Was Wales?* pp. 156-7, 170-1. For more general treatments of the Madoc story in its entirety, which resurfaces in the Romantic context of Southey's mammoth *Madoc*, see his *Madoc: the Making of a Myth* (Methuen: London, 1980).
- ¹² Quotations are taken from *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850* ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, Stephen Gill. The notes to this give some sense of the political background.
- ¹³ See *William Wordsworth: A Biography, the Early Years 1790-1803* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957) p. 224.
- ¹⁴ See, for example: *When Was Wales?* pp. 169-70; and E.D. Evans *A History of Wales, 1660-1815* (Cardiff: UWP 1976) pp. 221-30.
- ¹⁵ On this see *The Druids* chp. iv and A.L. Owen's *The Famous Druids: A Survey of Three Centuries of English Literature on the Druids* (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1962).
- ¹⁶ See *Prelude* ed. Earnest de Selincourt rev. H. Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959) p. 75n. For Wordsworth's knowledge of the druids see Stephen Gill's ed. *The Salisbury Plain Poems of William Wordsworth* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975) p.35 note to 1 424-7; and Robert Osborn's ed. *The Borderers* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982) pp. 420-21.
- ¹⁷ From *Wordsworth, Poetical Works* ed. Earnest de Selincourt (Oxford: O.U.P., 1989) p. 392.

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- ¹⁸ From *The Druids* p. 166.
- ¹⁹ This (in)famous remark is made in the 1802 "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* ed. Derek Roper (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1987) pp. 30-1.
- ²⁰ Wordsworth was familiar with the work of Henry Rowlands who was the most celebrated exponent of these theories; see n.16. For a discussion of Rowlands see *The Famous Druids* pp.73-82.
- ²¹ From *Poetical Works* p. 331. For linguistic kinship between Wales and the Northwest of England see Bud B. Khleif *Language, Ethnicity and Education in Wales* (The Hague: Mouton, 1980) p. 25.
- ²² See *When Was Wales?* pp. 163-7.
- ²³ See *Letters* vol. 5 *The Later Years Part II* ed. Earnest de Selincourt rev. A.G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979) p. 572. For the fascinating story of Owen Pughe and his connection to Romanticism see *The Druids* pp. 172-3.
- ²⁴ Gill's edition is referred to throughout; see n.16.
- ²⁵ See "'Adventures on Salisbury Plain" and Wordsworth Poetry of Protest' *Studies in Romanticism 2* (1972) pp. 48-65.
- ²⁶ See *The Druids* pp. 142-152.
- ²⁷ Prys Morgan discusses the endurance of this myth in the Welsh psyche in 'From Long Knives to Blue Books' in *Religion Language and Nationality in Wales* ed. R.R. Davies et al (Cardiff: UWP, 1979); this essay competition is discussed on p. 203.
- ²⁸ From John Morris ed. *Nennius: British History and the Welsh Annals* (London: Phillimore, 1980) p. 32.
- ²⁹ Cited in 'Long Knives to Blue Books' p. 202.
- ³⁰ See Francis Celoria 'Chatterton, Wordsworth, and Stonehenge' *Notes and Queries* (ns) 23 (1976) pp. 103-4. The various transformations of the story are discussed in 'Long Knives to Blue Books'.
- ³¹ From *Salisbury Plain Poems* p.27.
- ³² See 'Wordsworth and Subversion' *Yale Journal of Criticism* Spring (2) (1989) p. 70. Liu examines much of the material connecting Wordsworth to Wales, but crucially he sees the engagement as one of subversive identification rather than one of ambivalence, as I am suggesting here.
- ³³ From *Famous Druids* p.138.
- ³⁴ From *Salisbury Plain Poems* p. 35.
- ³⁵ See *Famous Druids* p. 163.
- ³⁶ See *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 6 vols. ed. E.L. Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956-71) Vol.1, pp. 84-5, 89-91.
- ³⁷ For an examination of Pennant's significance see 'From a Death to a View' pp. 52, 81-2; and *A Tour in Wales*: the description of Snowdon here (p. 72) clearly has an influence on both Wordsworth's expectations and the language he uses to describe his experience of the climbing of Snowdon.
- ³⁸ To George Huntly Gordon, May 1829 in *Letters The Later Years Part II* pp. 77-9. It is unclear from the letter whether this incident took place during the 1791 or 1793 tour.

³⁹ In *William Wordsworth: Intensity and Achievement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) chap. 1, attacking New Historicism, Thomas McFarland warns against what he calls 'the clamour of absence': an over scrutiny of what is not said, or of the way in which what might be a perfectly innocent expression is hiding something. I hope here that the opportunities for empathy with the Welsh do not make my point, or indeed this essay as a whole, too clamorous.