

# Iolo Morganwg and the Place of Authenticity within the Creation of a Welsh Cultural Identity

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The eighteenth century has been described as heralding a ‘cultural renaissance’ in Wales, in which that country’s literature, music and oral history became subjects of tremendous interest to numerous Welsh scholars, writers, romantics and patriots.<sup>1</sup> As a result, a series of patriotically motivated individuals – the most notable of whom was the poet and antiquarian Iolo Morganwg – came to formulate a unique Welsh identity in the face of an ongoing process of cultural integration into Britain.<sup>2</sup> With an impetus to restoring the Welsh to their ‘rightful place’ within Britain, this identity was constructed with a long view to the ancient past in mind. Yet, in pursuing the historical continuity of these Welsh traditions, the process by which the revivalists’ Welsh identity was established owed as much to deliberate invention, manipulation and forgery as it did to genuine historical discovery and national self-reflection. The historical importance of Iolo Morganwg and his fellow patriots, thus, rests upon the relationship between authenticity and identity. This relationship, it will be argued, is intricate, and by placing the revivalist movement firmly within its historical context, it becomes clear that the inventions and historical distortions of the revivalists were the products of a much greater cultural phenomenon.

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<sup>1</sup> Prys Morgan, *The Eighteenth Century Renaissance*, (Llandybie: Christopher Davies Publishers, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this essay, the term ‘revivalism’ is used to refer to those Welshmen who sought to establish or re-establish a Welsh identity based on tradition and mythology. It does *not* intend to have any overlap with the concurrent, but wholly distinct, Methodist revivalism. Indeed, as R.T. Jenkins remarked, the only true Welsh revival of the eighteenth century *was* the cultural revival (Morgan, *The Eighteenth Century Renaissance*, 13).

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Recent Welsh scholarship has sought to rescue Iolo from international obscurity, domestic neglect and academic contempt, with one eye upon his uniqueness and the other upon his genius.<sup>3</sup> This is significant, but the question of Iolo's *success* must also be posed, for in its absence he risks appearing as an interesting and unique, but largely inconsequential, historical figure, and one coloured disproportionately by his status as a deceiver. The subject of concern here, then, is not *how* Iolo and the Welsh revivalists operated but what they *achieved*. By interrogating this question, we find that Iolo, as an historical figure, has often been somewhat misrepresented. For this reason, this essay is largely an historiographical study, but its argument is intended to provoke wider considerations about the construction of national identities. Just what is it, it must be asked, that allows dead traditions to be resurrected with an enthusiasm and popularity absent from its previous incarnations, and how significant are the *novel* elements characteristic of its revived manifestation? How, in our context, did Iolo's seemingly peculiar traditions find such currency among the wider Welsh population, and what can this tell us about the role of 'authenticity' in the construction of national identities?<sup>4</sup>

In order to attempt to answer these questions, context is pivotal. The Wales in which the revivalist movement transpired was, by comparison to England, predominantly sparse and rural. The first official census of 1801 indicated an overall population of 587,000, compared with England's 8.3 million.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, despite the remarkable surge in Welsh mining, there was no urban population convergence on a scale anywhere near that witnessed in England. By the end of the eighteenth century, the ironworks centre of Merthyr Tydfil in the south-east was the country's most populous centre with a mere 7,700 people.<sup>6</sup> The most notable demographic and economic changes experienced by the Welsh throughout the eighteenth century owed significantly to an increased English presence, manifested in such developments as the 'demographic crisis' of the Glamorgan gentry; a striking outcome of which was the passing of many of the county's few great estates into English hands, resulting in a marked Anglicisation of its ruling elite.<sup>7</sup> This was especially problematic given the extensive and influential patronage displayed by landowning families in a Wales without a university, museum, academy or major library.<sup>8</sup>

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3 See, for example, Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), *A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005).

4 The time frame of this essay is restricted to Iolo's lifetime, but for an extensive survey of Iolo's legacy throughout the century following his death, in particular concerning the ways in which his project was reappropriated over time, see Marion Löffler, *The Literary and Historical Legacy of Iolo Morganwg, 1826-1926*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

5 Peter Thomas, 'The Remaking of Wales in the Eighteenth Century', in *The Remaking of Wales in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Trevor Herbert and Gareth Jones, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), 2. Geraint H. Jenkins, Richard Suggett and Eryn M. White, 'The Welsh Language in Early Modern Wales', in *The Welsh Language Before the Industrial Revolution*, ed. Geraint H. Jenkins (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 47.

6 Merthyr Tydfil's population of 7,705 was followed by Swansea's 6,099 and Carmarthen's 5,548. See Robert Anthony, "A very thriving place": the Peopling of Swansea in the Eighteenth Century', *Urban History*, Vol. 21, No. 1, (2005), 74. The Welsh copper export trade increased seven fold between 1750 and 1810, with Swansea's share of output producing some 90% of Britain's overall copper needs by 1799. During the 1780s, copper ore mining upon Parys Mountain in north Anglesey (the largest copper mine in Europe) alone produced an output one-third of Britain's overall total. See E.D. Evans, *A History of Wales: 1660-1815* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), 145-146

7 Philip Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class: The Glamorgan Gentry 1640-1790*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 38-42.

8 Jenkins et al, 'The Welsh Language', 78. Iolo wrote in 1801 that 'our literature has never experienced that degree of patronage and encouragement that would have enabled some individuals to usher it into the world' (*Myvyrian Archaeology of Wales*, I, (London, 1801), x) and as early as 1721, the poet Sion Prichard Prys wrote that Welsh 'Art weakened' and 'Language grown aged' was 'led astray on errant paths to the brink of their own destruction by those that formerly supported them' (quoted in Morgan, *The Eighteenth Century Renaissance*, 25).

The short-term result of these changes was the dissipation of a considerable number of Welsh customs and traditions that had hitherto sustained the values and cultures of the local populations.<sup>9</sup> Some of this was fostered by demographic integrations: this period saw the amalgamation of a significant number of English patricians with the Welsh gentry elite, a substantial diffusion of the working Welsh throughout the Isles, and a host of commercial and religious migrants relocating to the burgeoning towns of the south.<sup>10</sup> But the changing dynamic of Britain itself, and of its constituent regional identities, also contributed strongly. Disparities between Welsh and English cultures were, in actuality, by no means clear. Shropshire, Herefordshire and east Wales had, for example, become a 'regional culture' by the late eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Within the greater picture, this region was one of many in the diverse and overlapping patchworks of traditions, identities and loyalties that characterised eighteenth century Britain.<sup>12</sup> Wales was, in other words, not just one region of Britain, but many, and was unified almost exclusively by language.<sup>13</sup> Thus, even if it was possible (indeed, *necessary*) for new regional and national identities to harmoniously co-exist with Welsh uniqueness, the landscape against which the cultural revivalist movement transpired was nonetheless characterised by a dissipating Welsh unity.<sup>14</sup> This development existed parallel to the sense that the notion of 'Britishness' was inhibiting the celebration of Welsh distinctiveness through an encroaching cultural imperialism.<sup>15</sup>

By the mid-eighteenth century the Welsh tongue still remained prominent among the wider population, despite being in continuous decline among the upper classes.<sup>16</sup> English was spoken as the primary language only on the southern and eastern coasts, with a smattering of bilingual speakers throughout the remainder of the country.<sup>17</sup> However, for many Welsh patriots, the perceived decline of the Welsh language was a subject of particular concern. Above all other distinguishing features, the native tongue was deemed central to the unity of the Welsh as a nation.<sup>18</sup> Despite no obvious threat of immediate extinction, therefore, it was seen by the revivalists as requiring wider legitimacy, intellectual acceptance and, above all, reinvigoration.<sup>19</sup> It was for this reason that their project was largely couched in the positive terms of Welsh uniqueness rather

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9 Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 194, 214-215.

10 J.C.D. Clark, 'English History's Forgotten Context: Scotland, Ireland and Wales', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 1, (March 1989), 223.. Swansea tax data comparisons between 1670 and 1788 reveal an increase from 27 to 35% in English names, as compared to an increase in 'English long settled' names from 7 to 8%. See Anthony, "A very thriving place", 79, 84. By the end of the eighteenth century, there were an estimated 12,000 Welsh speakers in London. See Jenkins, et al, 'The Welsh Language', 60.

11 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009 (1994)), 16. Wales' central massif, referred to by Jenkins, Suggett and White as an impediment to the westward spread of English, must also have contributed to regional divergences in custom and culture. See Jenkins et al, 'The Welsh Language', 50-51.

12 Colley, *Britons*, 17.

13 Jenkins, et al, 'The Welsh Language', 46.

14 'Incorporation into the British state also meant the acceptance of national peculiarities'. S.J. Connolly, 'Ireland, Scotland and Wales in the Hanoverian State', in *Uniting the Kingdom?: The Making of British History*, eds. Alexander Grant and Keith Stringer, (London: Routledge, 1996), 196.

15 Geraint H. Jenkins, 'On the Trail of a Rattleskull Genius: Introduction', in *A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg*, ed. Geraint H. Jenkins, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), 17.

16 Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 194. It is estimated that about 90% of the population spoke Welsh as a first language. See Peter Thomas, 'The Remaking of Wales in the Eighteenth Century', 2.

17 Colley, *Britons*, 13. See also the map in Geraint H. Jenkins, *The Foundations of Modern Wales: 1642-1780*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 398.

18 Jeremy Black and Donald M. MacRaild, *Nineteenth Century Britain*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), 194.

19 Cathryn A. Charnell-White, *Bardic Circles: National, Regional and Personal Identity in the Bardic Vision of Iolo Morganwg*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), ch. 3.

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than more negative expressions of English imperialism.<sup>20</sup> Although the latter was essential to the background against which they operated, only rarely was it their direct object of attack.

Despite the native tongue's continued common usage, the threat of its eventual dissipation in a literary and cultural context remained very real. The official 1588 Welsh Bible remained prominent,<sup>21</sup> but by the beginning of the eighteenth century there had been little additional development in the print medium. Thomas Hearne, the early-eighteenth century collector and publisher of English chronicles, 'found it impossible to persuade Welshmen to put old Welsh manuscripts into print',<sup>22</sup> and many of his contemporaries saw little use or value in Welsh language texts.<sup>23</sup> Writing of his native tongue, Hearne's contemporary Thomas Jones lamented that languages 'have their infancy, foundation and beginning ... and their old age, declining and decays',<sup>24</sup> a pessimism shared, with a further half century's hindsight, by the Baptist minister Thomas Llewelyn, who remarked that because of 'daily intercourse and reciprocation of (commercial) benefits, the English language had gained more ground in the first half of the eighteenth century than in any other period'.<sup>25</sup> From the Restoration onwards, furthermore, a series of charitable societies, including the Welsh Trust and the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), had attempted to educate the Welsh poor in religious instruction using English-language texts.<sup>26</sup> An increased cultural integration with England promoted by the expansionary zeal of certain Protestant groups was, it appears, institutionally working towards the obsolescence of the Welsh tongue, whether consciously or not. Despite the inapplicability here of the term 'colonialism',<sup>27</sup> self-conscious attempts at mass Anglicisation are nevertheless apparent. With Wales a 'conquered country', wrote an advocate for Thomas Bowles, the English rector of the Welsh-speaking Trefdraeth parish in 1773, 'it is proper to introduce the English language' and had 'always been the policy of the legislature' to do so.<sup>28</sup>

The perception of precisely this sort of subsumption into an Anglo-centric model of 'Britishness' had two significant outcomes. It both inspired masses of monoglots to flock to the Methodists, whose Welsh language schools (such as Griffith Jones' phenomenally successful 'circulating schools')<sup>29</sup> had developed out of their evangelical mission, and was a key factor in the emergence of the cultural revivalist movement.<sup>30</sup> Though no supporters of Methodism,<sup>31</sup> the patriots were

20 While '[o]ne of the main aims of the cultural revival was to make the rest of Britain pay attention to things Welsh'. Morgan, *The Eighteenth Century Renaissance*, plate 13., Iolo's invented bardic tradition 'appealed to a large part of the Welsh nation while remaining, it was hoped, inoffensive to the English'. Marion Löffler, *The Literary and Historical Legacy of Iolo Morganwg*, 1.

21 Reginald Coupland, *Welsh and Scottish Nationalism: A Study*, (London: Collins, 1954), 58, 59 and 153.

22 Prys Morgan, '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 Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 47.

23 Morgan, *The Eighteenth Century Renaissance*, 19.

24 Geraint H. Jenkins, 'The Cultural Uses of the Welsh Language, 1660-1800', in *The Welsh Language Before the Industrial Revolution*, ed. Geraint H. Jenkins, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 369.

25 Jenkins et al, 'The Welsh Language', 103.

26 Jenkins, *Foundations of Modern Wales*, 198-203. For the politics of the SPCK, see Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 143-144.

27 Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 214.

28 Quoted in Geraint H. Jenkins, 'The New Enthusiasts', in *The Remaking of Wales in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Trevor Herbert and Gareth Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), 60.

29 Which, by the time of their founder's death in 1761, had taught some quarter of a million people to read Welsh. *Ibid.*, 54.

30 R. Paul Evans, 'Mythology and Tradition', in *The Remaking of Wales in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Trevor Herbert and Gareth Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), 149.

31 Iolo claimed to be rescuing traditional tales 'from that damnation with which they are threatened by Methodism' (quoted in

nevertheless able to capitalise upon the substantial levels of Welsh literacy the evangelicals had so extensively and rapidly facilitated. With this foundation, the increased production of books and pamphlets throughout the eighteenth century provided the Welsh language with an ongoing means of stability and, ultimately, an atmosphere within which patriotic ideas could spread and take root. The methods employed by the revivalists demonstrated an affirmative desire to *invent* a novel alternative, rather than a particular concern with stemming the flow of linguistic subsumption. This alternative would not only harness the latent potential for the Welsh language harboured among the still-predominantly Welsh-speaking population, but would also provide a cultural framework within which it could flourish.

It was against this background of revivalism that Iolo Morganwg came to significance. Iolo, born Edward Williams, hailed from Pennon in Glamorgan.<sup>32</sup> Historian G. H. Jenkins lists that he was a famed scholar, poet, musician, hymnologist, folklorist, theologian, botanist, geologist and horticulturalist, a list to which we may add antiquarian, scribe, radical, historian, patriot and forger.<sup>33</sup> Coming of age in a period of strong Welsh historical self-discovery, he was ‘the heir rather than the creator of the Welsh historical revival’,<sup>34</sup> and a member of the sizable community of Anglo-Welsh intellectuals and romantics which had become firmly established in London by the late-eighteenth century.<sup>35</sup> This community founded a multitude of patriotic societies, including the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion (established in 1751) and the more radical and populist Gwyneddigion Society (1770), with which Iolo was associated.<sup>36</sup> The constitution of the former provides a model example of the type of activity with which these societies, and the revivalists involved with them, were ostensibly concerned:

There is implanted in the Nature of Mankind, a strong Attachment to that Country which gave them Birth, and a laudable Curiosity to acquaint themselves with the genuine History and Antiquities of those People from whom they are immediately descended.<sup>37</sup>

These societies primarily encouraged the scholarly study of Welsh literature, language and history, and funded a vast publishing programme. By the time of Iolo’s involvement, however, their activities had become quite different. Motivated increasingly by romanticism, the revivalists sought to establish a national narrative which, while ostensibly based upon a foundation of rigorous scholarship, corresponded with their own idiosyncratic (and often politically driven) perceptions of Welsh identity.<sup>38</sup> Rather than being concerned with ‘genuine’ history, a significant amount of the

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Jenkins et al, ‘The Welsh Language’, 109), and his eighteenth century predecessors ‘thought of the Methodists as instruments of Anglicanism’ (Morgan, *The Eighteenth Century Renaissance*, 50).

32 ‘Iolo Morganwg’ – his bardic name, adopted permanently from about 1791 – means simply ‘Ned of Glamorgan’. See Charnell-White, *Bardic Circles*, 10-12.

33 Jenkins, *The Foundations of Modern Wales*, 387.

34 Prys Morgan, ‘Iolo Morganwg and Welsh Historical Traditions’, in *A Rattleskull Genius: The many faces of Iolo Morganwg*, ed. Geraint H. Jenkins, (Cardiff: Cardiff University Press, 2005), 257.

35 Fiona Stafford, ‘England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales’ in *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*, ed. Nicholas Roe, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 120-121.

36 The Gwyneddigion Society was established in part as a response to the ‘increasing Anglicisation of the Cymmrodorian Society as it recruited more and more gentry members’. See Branwen Jarvis, ‘Iolo Morganwg and the Welsh Cultural Background’, in *A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg* ed. Geraint H. Jenkins, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), 37.

37 ‘The Constitution of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion’, Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, National Library of Wales, <http://www.iolomorganwg.wales.ac.uk/pobl-londonwelsh.php>, accessed 12 August 2011.

38 Jenkins, ‘On the Trail of a Rattleskull Genius’, 15.

cultural revivalists' energy was instead dedicated to a very conscious distortion and invention of it.<sup>39</sup>

The revivalist movement as a whole is, however, difficult to succinctly characterise. For one, the motivations of the various individuals and groups were as diverse as politics, religion, community, 'Anglophobia'<sup>40</sup> and academia.<sup>41</sup> At the patriotic level in particular, there existed a strong consciousness of the anti-Welsh attitudes and prejudices inherent in the Anglocentric conception of Britishness.<sup>42</sup> Yet, although the creation of new traditions, myths and rituals was common throughout Europe in this period, it was also an era of great intellectual and cultural discovery, and these two activities were often interrelated.<sup>43</sup> That the fantasies and distortions of some revivalists would prompt confusion among those still concerned with more empirical scholarship is therefore unsurprising. For example, the Welsh language was effectively subjected to obscurantism by enthusiasts such as the antiquarian William Owen Pughe, who was engaged in attempting to prevent its slide into irrelevancy. Pughe systematically revised the entire language both syntactically and semantically, endeavouring to both rationalise the Welsh tongue and reveal it as 'closely related to the original language of mankind'.<sup>44</sup> His one hundred thousand word-strong *Geiriadur* (dictionary), with its vast quantity of 'pure' yet unused Welsh neologisms, and his *Gramadeg* (grammar), were sources of immense difficulty for Welsh writers in subsequent decades,<sup>45</sup> and the confusion caused by his orthographical revisions lasted for nearly a century.<sup>46</sup>

This important example goes some way in demonstrating the manner in which revivalist distortion solidified into something of consequence, and by extension became, in its own right, a source of 'legitimate' tradition. Iolo's inventions, however, had a greater patriotic and romantic appeal. Despite being subject to similar processes of solidification through rehearsal and repetition, therefore, these inventions warrant an analysis more rooted in a broad perspective. As an individual, Iolo was 'a contrary and contradictory figure',<sup>47</sup> and his revivalist project was extensive, with its balance between invention and legitimate scholarship rarely unambiguous. Turning his back on the London literati, Iolo became transfixed with the 'cultural distinctiveness of the Welsh', which he sought to validate in the face of apathy at home and inveterate prejudice in England.<sup>48</sup> Aware that, 'without a national university, a museum or a library, the Welsh would remain a neglected and marginalised people', he hoped a resurrection of the Welsh bardic tradition would function as the means by which this decline could be reversed.<sup>49</sup> His project centred upon the

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39 Many Welsh contemporaries of the revivalists, such as John Walters and Edward Davies, viewed their actions as 'wild inventing'. See R. Paul Evans, 'Mythology and Tradition', in *The Remaking of Wales in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Trevor Herbert and Gareth Jones, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), 153. The 'genuine scholarly' level of Celtic Study sat 'side-by-side' with 'an attempt to provide a theory of origins based largely on theory and conjecture'. See Jarvis, 'Welsh Cultural Background', 30.

40 Jenkins, 'On the Trail of a Rattleskull Genius', 17.

41 For a study on the mixed motivations of Iolo himself, see Charnell-White, *Bardic Circles*.

42 Ibid., ch. 3.

43 R.J.W. Evans, 'The Manuscripts': The Culture and Politics of Forgery in Central Europe', in *A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg*, ed. Geraint H. Jenkins, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005).

44 Davies, *A History of Wales*, 336.

45 Ibid., 336

46 Evans, *History of Wales*, 242. Among the irritated included Iolo himself. See Jenkins, 'On the Trail of a Rattleskull Genius', 23.

47 Charnell-White, *Bardic Circles*, 9.

48 Jenkins, 'On the Trail of a Rattleskull Genius', 17.

49 Ibid. For the various purposes the bardic tradition served, of which patriotism was just one (if the most significant and lasting), see Charnell-White, *Bardic Circles*.

Druids of Glamorgan, the last remaining guardians of ancient bardic traditions - traditions 'older than those of any other country in Europe') and the *gorsedd* (or 'assembly of bards').<sup>50</sup>

Over the course of thirty years, Iolo's *gorsedd* ceremonies evolved from 'simple, minimalist affairs' consisting of bards congregating at stone circles into a veritable pageantry that was ostentatious in its ceremony and very public in its appeal.<sup>51</sup> Armed with a 'fabricated metrical system, a spurious bardic alphabet and a bogus bardic lineage',<sup>52</sup> Iolo resurrected the dead art of what he termed 'bardism', and by combining it with the *gorsedd* (and, ultimately, with the eisteddfod), provided it with a public stage. The coalescence of the contemporaneously-revived eisteddfod and the *gorsedd* in 1819 is, indeed, his most lasting legacy.<sup>53</sup> Styling himself as the 'Bard of Liberty', he marked his revived eisteddfod tradition (fusing poetry, oral history, Welsh language and public performance) with an emphatically patriotic and radical purpose. His poetry was similarly styled, and his fabrication of a series of well-received works attributed to the great medieval poet Dafydd ap Gwilym is testament to both his technical proficiency and his ability to successfully channel and embody the mythical histories he embellished. But it was his bardo-druidism, with the *gorsedd* (the 'first modern Welsh national institution')<sup>54</sup> at its core, that best personifies the manner in which historical forgery was utilised in the service of patriotic cultural revivalism.

By the middle of the seventeenth century, bardism was effectively dead in its traditional form,<sup>55</sup> but the efforts of the revivalists – funded substantially by the London Societies – ensured its re-emergence as a national institution. Revived bardistry combined elements of its traditional incarnation with music and literature cloaked in the imagery of Iolo's own particular brands of Druidism and mythology. Significantly, though, it sought to maintain a pretence of continuity.<sup>56</sup> Druidism itself, with a particular emphasis on the special connection the Druids held with the Welsh - a connection different from that between Druidism and England - had been a scholarly obsession in the eighteenth century.<sup>57</sup> Yet as a result of its patriotic appropriation, it reached its greatest heights under Iolo. For him, the imagery of the bard and of the Druids embodied the importance of the Welsh language, Welsh national history and Welsh mythology. Further, as a Welsh tradition 'both older than, and superior to, Anglo-Saxon and even Roman culture', it harked back to a Wales free of English influence.<sup>58</sup>

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50 Davies, *History of Wales*, 335.

51 Charnell-White, *Bardic Circles*, 4.

52 *Ibid.*, 12.

53 Mary-Ann Constantine, 'Songs and Stones: Iolo Morganwg (1747-1826), Mason and Bard', *The Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 47, No. 2/3, (Summer 2006), 247, n. 1. This was not, however, immediately the case. See Löffler, *The Literary and Historical Legacy of Iolo Morganwg*, ch. 3.

54 Jenkins, 'On the Trail of a Rattleskull Genius', 14.

55 Morgan, 'From a Death to a View', 49. Morgan, *The Eighteenth Century Renaissance*, 22-23.

56 Morgan, 'From a Death to a View', 60 and 66. This is what makes it an 'invention of tradition'. See Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions' in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-14. Writing on the very first Gorsedd, in London in 1792, Iolo claimed that the 'Bardic Institution of the Ancient Britons, which is the same as the Druidic, has been from the earliest times, through all ages, to the present day, retained by the Welsh...and is now exactly the same that it was two thousand years ago'. Letter to *The Gentlemen's Magazine*, 1792, LXII, 957. In a brief third-person biography of himself submitted to the same magazine in 1789, he claimed himself and the Rev. Edward Evans of Aberdare to be 'the only legitimate descendents of the so-long-celebrated *Ancient British Bards*'. Letter to *Gentlemen's Magazine*, 1789, LIX, 976.

57 Morgan, 'From a Death to a View', 63.

58 Löffler, *The Literary and Historical Legacy of Iolo Morganwg*, 86. Iolo's manuscripts 'responded to English dominance'. See Evans, 'The Manuscripts', 51.

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It is therefore clear that Iolo operated within a particular socio-cultural context, of which his revivalist project was reflective. While some modern scholarship has endeavoured to extricate Iolo from a focus on his role as a manipulator and from depictions of him as an outlandish but innocuous eccentric, attempting instead to place him more squarely within this socio-cultural context,<sup>59</sup> such interpretations nevertheless remain strong. Alexander Murdoch's 1998 summary, for example, runs as follows:

Iolo Morganwg (Neddy from Glamorgan), whose name in English was Edward Williams, a laudanum addict and stonemason who reinvented both the idea of the Welsh bard and of druidic custom, and in a midst of sentiment and drug-induced hallucination created the modern romantic symbol of traditional Welsh culture, the eisteddfodau, in the very significant year of 1789.<sup>60</sup>

Such historical perceptions, however, do not stem strictly from external perspectives. In 1989, the great Welsh historian Sir Glanmor Williams described both Iolo and Pughe as injecting 'into their own and later generations a potent stimulus to historical curiosity and delight', despite infecting Wales with the 'virus of an uncritical and over-romanticised excitement about the past'.<sup>61</sup> Even historical interpretations that attempt to explain how cultural revivalism chimed with the wider population have often been equally unhelpful. Gwyn Thomas, for example, described Iolo as 'a great octopus squirting ink into the darkness of the waters' in order to prey 'on the naivety of his countrymen'.<sup>62</sup>

But the reality of revivalism as a phenomenon is considerably more complex. In actuality, the actions of the individuals concerned were reflective of a significant and well-established cultural phenomenon among Welsh intellectuals. Their project emerged primarily from the middling sorts and, as we have seen, was aimed at a wide audience comprised of both the lower and higher orders – the latter in order for the legitimacy of Welsh language and culture to find acceptance, the former to revel in its revived glory.<sup>63</sup> Their importance, thus, was more than academic. For this reason, even if Iolo is representative of a cultural revival running out of control, as Prys Morgan perhaps rightly claims,<sup>64</sup> and even if his fantastical inventions were indisputably connected in some degree to his laudanum addiction,<sup>65</sup> he and his revivalist compatriots ought not be sidelined for their peculiarities. The critical factor to bear in mind when considering this is that Iolo and his ideas, far from being ostracised by Welsh patriots and the wider community, were often, though not always,<sup>66</sup> excitedly adopted.

The growth in popularity of the eisteddfod serves as a model example. The poet Sion Rhydderch, when attending an eisteddfod in 1734, lamented that 'not half a dozen (poets) came in all', and that the event itself was characterised by 'signs of apathy, faint-heartedness and cowardice'.<sup>67</sup> However,

59 For a basic outline see Jenkins, 'On the Trail of a Rattleskull Genius', 1-28.

60 Alexander Murdoch, *British History 1660-1832: National Identity and Local Culture*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 100.

61 Löffler, *The Literary and Historical Legacy of Iolo Morganwg*, 8.

62 Quoted by Jenkins, 'On the Trail of a Rattleskull Genius', 4.

63 Jenkins, *Foundations of Modern Wales*, 38. Morgan, *The Eighteenth Century Renaissance*, 62.

64 Quoted in Evans, 'Mythology and Tradition', 150.

65 See Morgan, 'Iolo Morganwg and Welsh Historical Traditions', 262.

66 Löffler, *The Literary and Historical Legacy of Iolo Morganwg*, ch. 3

67 Sion Rhydderch's introduction to his *Almanac* for 1735, from Herbert and Jones, *The Remaking of Wales*, 160.

the (still reasonably small) crowd at the revived eisteddfod of 1789 – organised by the poet Jonathon Hughes and the exciseman Thomas Jones, and funded by the Gwyneddigion Society – gave such ‘a zest to the encouragement of native talent’ that ‘another [meeting] was immediately advertised to be held’,<sup>68</sup> in which a new competitive dimension was added, as well as new competitions for singers and musicians.<sup>69</sup> As a consequence, the revived eisteddfod was more than just a nostalgic reproduction of a dead tradition. Instead, it was ‘a judicious blend ... of ancient tradition and ceremony combining with myth and innovation in an attempt to revitalise the institution and provide it with a more popular following’.<sup>70</sup> This appeal to popular sentiment was the key to the remarkable success of Welsh revivalism. The eisteddfod, through which a number of Iolo’s inventions found an outlet for public exhibition, attained a significant social standing *despite* the recentness of its resurgence being clear to many observers.<sup>71</sup> Here, a slow death preceded by only a generation or two an enthusiastic, if gradual, revival. An element of this was undoubtedly the coalescence of the revived tradition with a wish to reinvigorate a decaying ‘merrie Wales’. Yet this perhaps suggests that *any* tradition could have found currency in such conditions. As some traditions fared better than others among various groups and at different times, however, it cannot be the complete story.

Historians have nonetheless been argued with good reason that it is ‘all but impossible to write a political history of the lower classes in eighteenth century Wales, because they have left so few records of their opinions’.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, there is ambiguity in regard to the upper classes and particularly to the gentry, who exhibited both a determined ‘detachment from local culture and loyalties’ *and* an enthusiastic willingness to appropriate ‘antiquity and Welsh culture’ as political assets during the eighteenth century.<sup>73</sup> It is therefore necessary to abstract somewhat, and to assess some theoretical justifications for this phenomenon. In his influential studies of national identities, Anthony D. Smith has outlined ‘how historicist intellectuals press “science” and scientific method into the service of poetic constructs’.<sup>74</sup> The resultant mythologies, he continues, ‘are reconstructions of the communal past, which mix genuine scholarship with fantasy, and legend with objectively recorded data’.<sup>75</sup> But these ‘fantasies’ must be shaped, at least to some degree, by some sort of social expectation. For Iolo, a motivating impetus for his forgeries and manipulations stemmed from his impatience with the potential for legitimate scholarship – such as Evan Evans’ 1758 discovery of the lost sixth-century poetry of Aneirin<sup>76</sup> – to ‘excite the curiosity of the populace at large’.<sup>77</sup> His intention, in his own words, was to ‘reanimate the genius of our country’,<sup>78</sup> and his tremendous

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68 William Davies Leathart, *The Origin and Progress of the Gwyneddigion Society of London*, (1831), from *Ibid.*, 161.

69 Evans ‘Mythology and Tradition’, 152.

70 *Ibid.*, 152.

71 Including some nonplussed antiquarians such as John Walters of Llandough, who described bardism as ‘a *made Dish*’ and a ‘superficial acquaintance with the metempsychosis’ spiced ‘with an immoderate quantity of wild invention’. Quoted in Morgan, *The Eighteenth Century Renaissance*, 116.

72 Philip Jenkins, ‘Political Quiescence and Political Ferment’, in *The Remaking of Wales in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Trevor Herbert and Gareth Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), 19. Jenkins et al, ‘The Welsh Language’, 106.

73 Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 272.

74 Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 191.

75 *Ibid.*, 191.

76 Lewis Morris, the antiquary and poet, remarked upon its discovery that Aneirin’s *Gododin* was an epic ‘equal at least to the Iliad, Aeneid or Paradise Lost’, from H. Owen, (ed.), *Additional Letters of the Morris of Anglesey, 1735-1786*, (London: The Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, 1947 and 1949), 349.

77 Evans, ‘Mythology and Tradition’, 150.

78 *Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales*, xv.

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energy in assisting the publication of the *Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales* – the three volume collection of purported medieval Welsh poetry which was later found to have been comprised in large part of Iolo's forgeries – was devoted precisely to this task.<sup>79</sup>

Smith claims also that 'the more faithfully recorded, better documented and more comprehensive a *golden age*, the more impact it can exert over later generations'.<sup>80</sup> This seems also to provide a critical underpinning of the revivalists' success, particularly in regard to their longevity. The appearance of scholarly rigour in the revivalists' works, coupled with the ambiguous nature of the romantic-enlightenment divide within their project, was important in providing their inventions with permanence and durability, and also in shielding them from future discoveries which may have undermined their authenticity. The 'golden age' itself – the 'era in which the community achieved its classical form, and which bequeathed a legacy of glorious memories and cultural achievements' – was central to the revivalists' Welsh vision.<sup>81</sup> The notion of the Welsh being the true preserved descendants of the Ancient Britons – a notion central to the revivalists' image of the Welsh nation, and especially to Iolo's bardic tradition<sup>82</sup> – was buttressed by their proud claims to have successfully survived the Roman invasion and on having continuously 'preserved their traditions distinct from those of other nations'.<sup>83</sup> Despite sitting uncomfortably alongside the array of Roman antiquities scattered throughout the southwest of the country,<sup>84</sup> this claim was given approbation by scholars of such standing as the great Welsh naturalist and Royal Society Fellow Thomas Pennant and the poet and lexicographer Lewis Morris, who argued that 'Men reckon it always a glorious and an honourable thing to be of the race of the first possessors and maintainers of a country'.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, although 'the idea that Wales was the home of an ancient British race of Trojan origin' was found to be lacking in historicity, 'it nevertheless survived as a part of patriotic Welsh culture' in the eighteenth century,<sup>86</sup> as did Iolo's patently false claim that the Welsh language was 'not under the necessity of borrowing a single term ... from other languages, ancient or modern'.<sup>87</sup> The constant propagation of scholarly discoveries unfavourable to such stories represented a dramatic threat to a Welsh heritage that was already pressured by increased integration into Britain and the demise of local identities. In his 1804 history of South Wales, Benjamin Heath Malkin lamented the degraded state of the Welsh nation, for whom 'a long connection (had) melted the manners and the language into those of the predominant power' such that 'we cannot help but regret that the union of interests was necessary to be obtained, at the

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79 Morgan, *The Eighteenth Century Renaissance*, 84. Morgan argues, further, that 'Iolo's success as a literary inventor ... is really an adverse comment on the incomplete nature of the Welsh Renaissance, incomplete because it had not been accompanied by a network of criticism or a structure of learning'. See *Ibid.*, 113.

80 Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 263, emphasis added.

81 Smith, *Ethnic Origins*, 190.

82 Defining themselves as the 'Ancient British' and subsequently struggling 'to gain a proper recognition of their part in British history' rather than separating themselves from the rest of Britain, writes Morgan, 'was the keynote of Welsh patriotism in the eighteenth century' See Morgan, *The Eighteenth Century Renaissance*, 57.

83 Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: the Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth Century Britain*, (London: Continuum, 2004), 141.

84 *Ibid.*, 141.

85 Sweet, *Antiquaries*, 141. Thomas Pennant's 1774 *Tour in Wales* begins: 'I now speak of my native country, celebrated in our earliest history for its valour and tenaciousness of liberty; for the stand it made against the *Romans*; for its slaughter of their legions...' See Thomas Pennant, *Tours in Wales*, Vol. 1, (London, 1810), 3.

86 S.J. Connolly, 'Ireland, Scotland and Wales', 199.

87 *Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales*, xv.

expense of patriotic feeling'.<sup>88</sup> The importance of these fictions to the distinct identity of the Welsh people cannot therefore be underestimated.

To whom the inventions appealed is consequently of great importance. Despite developing concurrently with a wider revivalist movement, Iolo's successes were largely limited to his home country. Whereas contemporaneous historico-literary forgeries, such as James Macpherson's *Ossian* in Scotland, transcended national boundaries in popularity and in influence, Iolo's work remained at least at first almost exclusively a Welsh fascination.<sup>89</sup> R.J.W Evans claims that the *gorsedd* was an 'attractive, colourful and agreed' fiction which both connected 'to the true values of a pristine cultural tradition' and was 'eminently suited to the perceived needs of the nation'.<sup>90</sup> It was in other words, a reflexive construct, and not merely an imposition. Given this, then, Gwyn Thomas' 'naïve countrymen' would appear to have had a greater role to play than that of passive submitters to the 'great octopus', Iolo.

That there was a market for such inventions and manipulations is thus clear. But patriotic appeal is not, in and of itself, a sufficient explanation, for it assumes an overly simplistic reciprocity between the inventions of the revivalists and the wants of the Welsh population. Consequently, Prys Morgan's suggestion that 'since his (i.e. Iolo's) public was fairly ignorant and eager to be flattered, he ... had the means to put his sublime vision into practice', obscures a greater complexity.<sup>91</sup> The revivalists, rather, were required to exert considerable effort in ensuring the longevity of their ideas. In a 1789 letter to the Gwyneddigion Society reporting on the first revived eisteddfod of that February, Jonathon Hughes held poverty, 'unworldliness', faintheartedness and the uncommon nature of the custom as central to the event's initial inability to attract a wider crowd. Because there 'is neither profit nor advantage from such a custom', he wrote, extending 'the bounds of the Welsh language' was not an easily accomplished task. Still, his letter nevertheless demonstrates a manifest faith (ultimately repaid) in the eventual success of the event, with his supplication for financial assistance seeking to assist those 'who are trying to crawl after their Mother tongue (to come to walk'.<sup>92</sup> The public, thus, were not the impressionable *tabula rasa* of Morgan's assertion.

Nineteenth century French philosopher Ernest Renan claimed that because historical 'errors' and misrepresentations are 'essential to the creation of a nation', 'the advance of historical study often poses a threat to nationality'.<sup>93</sup> In the years following Iolo's death in 1826, this gradually became the case for his Welsh vision.<sup>94</sup> But the story during his lifetime was not quite so clear-cut. This essay has attempted to reconcile three interrelated elements of the revivalist phenomenon: the extent to which invented and distorted traditions are seen as such by those to whom it appeals; the reasons *why* they appeal in the first place; and the reasons why the 'inauthentic' elements of those traditions do not necessarily obstruct, but seemingly *facilitate*, this appeal. These interrelated elements demonstrate the intricacy of notions such as inauthenticity and legitimacy within the

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88 Quoted in Morgan, *The Eighteenth Century Renaissance*, 99.

89 Evans, 'The Manuscripts', 52. Löffler, *The Literary and Historical Legacy of Iolo Morganwg*, 70-76. Because the *Ossian* had unleashed a debate about value of oral traditions, Iolo sought to make his *gorsedd* 'as solidly reliable (and hence un-Ossianic) as possible'. See Constantine, 'Songs and Stones', 234. See also Mary-Ann Constantine, *The Truth Against the World: Iolo Morganwg and Romanic Forgery*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007) for a study of Iolo's place within the context of literary forgeries and romanticism in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britain.

90 Evans, 'The Manuscripts', 67.

91 Morgan, *The Eighteenth Century Renaissance*, 113.

92 From Evans, 'Mythology and Tradition', 160-161.

93 Ernest Renan, *What is a Nation?*, (Toronto, 1996), 19.

94 Löffler, *The Literary and Historical Legacy of Iolo Morganwg*.

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construction of national identities. By investigating the strength and urgency of the revivalists' motivating factors, the role of the population in accepting their inventions, and the overall process of mythmaking, we can begin to comprehend this intricacy. What patriots such as Iolo achieved is therefore of considerable consequence. To contemplate his 'inauthenticity' in isolation is therefore to risk neglecting this, and to fundamentally misplace his role in Welsh history.

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