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THE TURN OF THE TIDE: MELANCHOLY AND MODERNITY IN MID-VICTORIAN WALES¹

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ABSTRACT

When the English poet and critic Matthew Arnold looked west from Llandudno in 1864 at a land ‘where the past still lives’, he contributed to a body of English-language material that presented contemporary Wales as antique, attenuated, melancholy and ‘other’. This article assesses the historiography that informed Arnold’s perception, and looks at the contrast found in the period’s Welsh-language output, which was ‘unconcerned about models of its past’ and ‘never more confident in the sufficiency of its own immediate resources’. It surveys the modernity found, *inter alia*, in the institution of the eisteddfod, self-help manuals, advertisements for patent medicines, encyclopaedias and triumphalist Nonconformist histories. Wales, it concludes, would never be as melancholy or as modern again.

To judge by his poetry, Matthew Arnold was invariably beside himself beside the seaside. On Dover beach, famously, he listened to the ‘melancholy, long, withdrawing roar’ of the Sea of Faith, and elsewhere in his work the shore is invoked as a metaphor for cultural exile and retreat. The location emphasises the child’s marginality in ‘To a Gypsy Child by the Sea-Shore’; in ‘Stanzas Composed at Carnac’ the coast is

¹ This is an edited version of a lecture delivered under the joint auspices of Aberystwyth University and the Learned Society of Wales at Aberystwyth University, 27 October 2014. Some of the features of the lecture have been preserved in this version.

the site of lost remnants of druidism; and in ‘Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse’ the poet transports himself deftly from the ruins of the Carthusian monastery in *la France profonde* to ‘some far northern strand’, where

Thinking of his own Gods, a Greek
In pity and mournful awe might stand
Before some fallen Runic stone –
For both were faiths, and both are gone.²

To Dover, Douglas and Carnac, one can add the Cumbrian Coast, Provence, Calais, Gothland and Gibraltar – all spaces of loss and displacement in Arnold’s verse. And add, too, Llandudno, from his most-reprinted prose work, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867). It is 150 years since Arnold visited the National Eisteddfod there, in 1864 – in the same year, incidentally, that Llandudno Corporation adopted the title ‘Queen of the Welsh Resorts’³ – and looked along the coast. To the east, was the ‘Saxon hive’, out of which visitors swarmed by steam-boat, ‘taking possession of the beach and the lodging-houses’. To the west:

. . . Wales, where the past still lives, where every place has its tradition, every name its poetry and where the people, the genuine people, still knows this past, this tradition, this poetry, and lives with it, and clings to it; while, alas, the prosperous Saxon on the other side, the invader from Liverpool and Birkenhead, has long ago forgotten his.⁴

The binaries in Arnold’s coastal metaphor in relation to England and Wales – modernity and antiquity, frivolity and authenticity, movement and stasis, incursion and resistance, transience and tradition, the prose of the lodging-house and the poetry of the impenetrable place name, ‘like the solemn conjectural whisperings from almost fabulous times to ours, in the half-effaced, hardly deciphered, hieroglyphical memorials on an age-worn tomb’,⁵ as one writer put it – had been a staple of Anglo-Welsh

² Matthew Arnold, *Poems: Dramatic and Lyric Poems* (London, 1869), p. 219.

³ Gwenfair Parry, ‘“Queen of the Welsh resorts”: tourism and the Welsh language in Llandudno in the nineteenth century’, *ante*, 21, 1 (2002), 118–48.

⁴ Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London, 1867), p. 2.

⁵ Joseph Downes, *The Mountain Decameron*, vol. 1 (London, 1836), p. 5.

cultural relations since the turn of the century.⁶ The sources that Arnold consulted in preparing his essay – the three-volume *The Myvyrian Archaiology* (1801–7), Edward Davies’s *Celtic Researches* (1803), Charlotte Guest’s bowdlerized translations of the *Mabinogion* (1838–46) and Thomas Stephens’s, *The Literature of the Kymry* (1849), defined Wales for an English-speaking readership by juxtaposing ancient pre-eminence and implied contemporary impoverishment.

Had he looked elsewhere, among the work of commentators like himself, Arnold would have found numerous examples of the same assertion that the people of Wales, their language and literature, were best appreciated for what they had once been and were no longer.

The Welsh were typified, one anonymous writer opined, by ‘dull mysticism’ and ‘gloomy passion’, which contrasted starkly with ‘the lucid common-sense and unimpassioned judgment of England’.⁷ Another called them ‘this ancient people’, ‘this ancient race’, ‘this ancient, singular, and extremely interesting people’ and ‘a people who, in spite of oppression, injustice, and isolation, have nobly clung to the old faith’.⁸ ‘A correct view of the Welsh people, therefore’, a third wrote,

is that they have for about three thousand years inhabited a mountainous district, which may be termed the citadel of Britain; and during all that period have cherished certain ideas in relation to the nature of truth, and the rights and prerogatives of mind, differing from all other people, except the inspired writers.⁹

The spiritual and emotional separateness of an ancient race, orthodoxy taught, made them somewhat backward, but nonetheless loyal to the Crown:

Identified with Englishmen in their privileges, we cheerfully submit ourselves to their duties; partaking of their blessings, we claim a right to

⁶ On which, see: Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (London, 1992); Stephanie L. Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: the Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (Oxford, 2000); Huw Pryce, ‘Culture, identity, and the medieval revival in Victorian Wales’, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 31 (2011), 1–40.

⁷ ‘A Whig-Hater’, ‘Characters of the English, Scots and Irish’, *Blackwood’s Magazine* (1829), 820–1.

⁸ R. Rice Davies, *The Cambrian Sketchbook* (London, 1875), viii, ix, xii.

⁹ Samuel Jenkins, *Letters on Welsh History* (Philadelphia, 1852), p. 17.

share in their burdens; and allied to them, not only by political compact, but also by interest and affection, with undissembled sentiments we exclaim, May this great compacted nation the aggregate of kingdoms once rivals and foes, but now so happily concentrated and combined together . . . flourish, *until our native mountains fail to raise their hoary heads to the sky!*¹⁰

The Welsh language, by extension, was ‘noble and pathetic’:

Though it is subordinate to the general language of the Empire, which is the great vehicle of the national Literature, of Law, of the Senate, and the Court, as well as the first commercial transactions; let it be treated with some respect, if it were only from a regard to what it once was, the language of our Princes and our Heroes.¹¹

As for its literature, ‘the venerable ruin of a once grand national structure, the noblest remnant of the noblest race on earth’,¹² it merited attention as a curiosity:

The history of the literature of Wales is as peculiar as that of its language. It commences with poems ascribed to the 6th century, a period of almost classical antiquity . . . For the last six or seven hundred years its course may be distinctly traced, almost the ‘solitary pride’ of a nation that, amidst all obstacles and struggles, has been remarkably constant in its attachment to letters. It is true that the value of this literature is not to be compared for an instant with the value of our own, but it is a literature eminently curious and eminently British.¹³

Welsh literature, in short, was a relic. Moreover, this eminently curious, eminently British literature was still being discovered and disseminated. The Welsh Manuscript Society, founded in 1837, produced W. J. Rees’s

¹⁰ Edward Parry, *Royal Visits and Progresses to Wales, and the Border Counties* (London, 1850), p. 478.

¹¹ John Hughes, *An Essay, on the Ancient & Present State, of the Welsh Language* (London, 1822), p. 51.

¹² Latimer Maurice Jones, *The Welsh People and the Welsh Tongue* (Carmarthen, 1861), p. 5.

¹³ Thomas Watts, *A Sketch of the History of the Welsh Language and Literature* (privately printed, 1861), p. 20.

work on the twelfth-century records of Llandaff Cathedral in *Liber Landavensis* (1840) and his *Lives of the Cambro British Saints* (1853); Samuel Rush Meyrick transcribed Lewis Dwnn's pedigrees of noble families in *Heraldic Visitations of Wales* (1846). Taliesin ab Iolo brought out his father's largely fictitious work on lineages and druidical practice in *The Iolo Manuscripts* (1848), a work supplemented by John Williams (ab Ithel)'s edition of Iolo Morganwg's, *Barddas* (1862). Ab Ithel was a prolific editor over two decades, producing an edition of Aneurin's sixth-century epic poem, *Y Gododdin* (1852), the bardic grammar *Dosparth Edeyrn Dafod Aur* (1856), the medieval chronicles *Brut y Tywysogion* (1860) and *Annales Cambriae* (1860) and the thirteenth-century medical text *Meddygon Myddfai* (1861). The Cambrian Archaeological Society (founded in 1846) and the Cambrian Institute (1854), through which a version of the Welsh past would be disseminated in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* and the *Cambrian Journal* respectively, discoursed on topics ranging from comparisons of the Greek and bardic alphabets, cromlechs and tumuli, inscriptions, genealogy, topography and legends.

Meanwhile, English-language publications created a Casaubon-like plethora of pre-Christian, medieval and early modern concepts of the Welsh past, from Algernon Herbert's *Britannia after the Romans* (1836) and Aneurin Owen's *Ancient Laws and Institutes of Wales* (1842), through John Roberts's *Druidical Remains* (1842), John Allen Giles's *History of the Ancient Britons* (1847), William Basil Jones's, *Vestiges of the Gael in Gwynedd* (1851) and Thomas Wright's *The Celt, the Roman and the Saxon* (1852), to Beale Poste's *Britannia Antiqua* (1857), William Barnes's *Notes on Ancient Britain and the Britons* (1858), G. D. Barber's *Suggestions on the Ancient Britons* (1863), Louisa L. J. Menzies's *Legendary Tales of the Ancient Britons* (1864), Samuel Lyson's *Our British Ancestors* (1865), William Forbes Skene's *The Four Ancient Books of Wales* (1868) and Thomas Nicholas's *Annals and Antiquities of the Counties and County Families of Wales* (1872).

Arnold inherited this primitivist model of Welshness – evident throughout his book in the numerous references to 'Celtic genius' and 'lively Celtic nature' – and he brought to it a cluster of other familiar convictions: the civilizing and moral power of art, culture as the property of racial, social and linguistic elites, and the imperial desire for homogeneity. He brought to his analysis, too, the rudiments of a humanist historiography. Wales was a *memento mori*. For Arnold, drawing on Niebuhr and Vico, it was the fate of cultures to rise and fall. He

expresses it succinctly in ‘My Countrymen’, first published in 1866, again with the sea as a metaphor:

. . . and as often as I consider how history is a series of waves, coming gradually to a head and then breaking, and that, as the successive waves come up, one nation is seen at the top of this wave, and another of the next, I ask myself, counting all the waves that have come up, with England at the top of them: When the great wave that is mounting has come up, will she be at the top of it?¹⁴

Implicit in this notion is the allied consideration that cultures cannot resurrect themselves. Small wonder, then, that Arnold’s visit to Llandudno reified the same melancholy contrast that he observed between east and west. Watching the bards gather in the town to invest new members, he remarked:

The presiding genius of the mystic circle, in our hideous nineteenth-century costume relieved only by a green scarf, the wind drowning his voice and the dust powdering his whiskers, looked thoroughly wretched; so did the aspirants for bardic honours; and I believe, after about an hour of it, we all of us, as we stood shivering round the sacred stones, began half to wish for the Druid’s sacrificial knife to end our sufferings.¹⁵

The scene is more ‘wretched’ than ridiculous. It would be impressive, even noble, Arnold appears to suggest, if it were better done: if the wind dropped and if the ‘hideous nineteenth-century costume’ were hidden and if the dust, reminiscent of death and decay, were not blown into the air. Arnold sees it as an unfortunate, debased version of something that could and should be truer to itself.

Compare this, published in the same year, by another witness to an eisteddfod ceremony, the Welshman T. L. Thomas:

In yonder town, how happy were each street.
If it could, aye, retain the prints of feet
That through it haste to-day with nimble tread

¹⁴ Matthew Arnold, *Friendship’s Garland: Being the Conversations, Letters and Opinions of the Late Arminius, Baron Von Thunder-Ten-Tronckh* (London, 1871), pp. 161–2.

¹⁵ Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, p. 8.

To see old rites and moderm fashions wed! . . .
 While some their beauty bear like burning lamps.
 Others their mettle show in martial tramps;
 And these among, with gait and look most odd
 Appear, as convicts from the land of Nod.¹⁶

Thomas's lines take in the same scene, but the tone is more mock-heroic than melancholic. It is tempting to make two false assumptions here. The first is that Thomas doubts the antiquity of what he is describing. Not so. Like Arnold, and virtually everyone else in the 1860s, Thomas believed that the Eisteddfod had its origins in druidism. The second false assumption is that Thomas, writing in English, is addressing an implied English reader. Again, not so. The evidence of the rest of the text – the in-jokes, the referentially dense account of literary history, the occasional unglossed use of Welsh – suggests that his reader needs to be bilingual. Thomas writes in English more to exclude naïve monolingual Welshmen than to include monolingual Englishmen. And the joke Thomas shares with his urbane, bilingual contemporaries is that the Welsh literary past is not a relic. It is, rather, a palimpsest. Intervening generations have brought their inventiveness, self-importance, frailties and caprice to it. The difference between present and past is not caused by diminution or erosion; it is the product of accretion. Arnold, for instance, reads *The Myvyrian Archaiology* through its notional editor, Owen Jones. For him, it contains 'the treasures of his national literature . . . the great repertory of the literature of his nation'.¹⁷ Thomas, by contrast, includes its more influential co-editors, Iolo Morganwg and William Owen-Pughe (passed over as 'two friends' in Arnold's account) and labels them 'resurrection men':

Cambria no resurrection men e'er had,
 Save those whose birthdays, aye, should make her glad;
 Iolo and Idrison, and Myfyr – three –
 Who did in retrospect and prospect see
 Whatever could redound to Gwalia's honour,
 And all that industry could win, they won her

¹⁶ J. L. Thomas, (Ieuan Ddu), *Cambria upon Two Sticks: or, the Eisteddfod and the Readings* (Pontypridd, 1867), pp. 25, 26.

¹⁷ Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, p. 27.

Her long-forgot and buried works made known,
And to those treasured thoughts did add their own . . .¹⁸

The significance of *The Myvyrian Archaiology* for Thomas is that it operates ‘in retrospect and in prospect’ as the foundation for further enterprises in both languages: Iolo’s *Poems, Lyric and Pastoral* (1794) and Pughe’s translation of *Paradise Lost, Coll Gwynfa* (1819). Thomas’s historiography allows the marriage of ‘old rites and modern fashions’ and celebrates the addition of new thoughts to old. We are eavesdropping, with a simultaneous translation earpiece, on a Welsh conversation – and a curiously modern one at that.

There were extrinsic, material causes of modernity in mid-Victorian Wales, of course. By 1862 railways ran in every county; coal, iron, steel, copper and slate had made Wales the second most industrialized country in the world and, arguably, outside London and the English ports, the area of Britain most touched by inward migration. It is estimated that some 60,000 people emigrated from Wales to the USA during the period 1850–70, and Welshmen moved in substantial numbers to places as geographically diverse as Australia, Chile and Ukraine.¹⁹ My interest, however, is in the ‘resurrection men’ (men almost without exception) who were responsible for the self-created, intrinsic modernity of Welsh-speaking Wales. If we leave the simultaneous translation earpiece in place to listen in on other conversations that Arnold never heard, we find a Wales that was eager to do anything except cling to tradition, that was impatient to reform its existing institutions or promote others, and never more confident in the sufficiency of its own immediate resources. These resources were modest: no aestheticism or hint of agnosticism, no bawdy, no wit or wordplay, no example of alienation or confusion, nothing wildly experimental or intellectually challenging. That said, its mid-nineteenth-century literature, if we apply the meaning to the word that the period itself did, as all written material, was a more immediate and unmediated expression of the nation’s contemporary culture than at any period in its history. If Wales were never more melancholy, it was never – albeit in this

¹⁸ Thomas (Ieuan Ddu), *Cambria upon Two Sticks*, p. 15.

¹⁹ See, especially, chapter 6, ‘The Welsh’, in William E. Van Vugt, *Britain to America: Mid-nineteenth-century Immigrants to the United States* (Illinois, 1999), pp. 96–110; Ronald L. Lewis, *Welsh Americans: A History of Assimilation in the Coalfields* (North Carolina, 2008).

restricted sense – more modern. The point is best made, perhaps, by that most Victorian of devices, the itemized list.

THE EISTEDDFOD

Even if the Welsh believed that the eisteddfod had its origins in pre-Christian pantheism, that did not stop them from superimposing upon it contemporary ideas of popular culture and commercialism. In Llangollen in 1858, with one John Williams (ab Ithel) as impresario, it became a circus. The Gorsedd processed through the town accompanied by a brass band playing *Men of Harlech*. The crowd in the pavilion sang ‘O, Let the Kind Minstrel’; four contestants recited a Welsh translation of Caractacus’s speech at Rome; three brass bands presented a medley of Welsh airs, and a local landowner praised the Eisteddfod in English as an institution that could be relied upon to maintain the virtues of law and order and obedience to authority, even if the courts closed and parliament itself collapsed.²⁰ Prizes awarded during the week included £25 for an essay on the mineral resources of Wales, £30 and a golden tiara for another on the origins of bardism, £10 for an oil painting inspired by Thomas Gray’s ‘The Bard’, five guineas for a poem sympathising with Sir William and Lady Williams Wynn following a fire on their Wynnstay estate, £5 for another on ‘Welsh Heroes of the Crimea’, £5 again for an essay on ‘The advantages accruing to an Englishman from a knowledge of Welsh’ and £3 for an epitaph to Prince Llywelyn.²¹

The event that Arnold attended in 1864 called itself the Royal National Eisteddfod of Wales, run by a Council and a network of local committees. A ‘Social Science Section’ was introduced in 1862 by the London Welshman Hugh Owen, Arnold’s host in Llandudno.²² The

²⁰ On the central concepts of mid-nineteenth-century patriotism, specifically ‘liberty’, ‘virtue’ and ‘loyalty’, Paul O’Leary, ‘The languages of patriotism in Wales, 1840–1880’ in Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), *The Welsh Language and its Social Domains in the Nineteenth Century, 1801–1911* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 533–60.

²¹ For details of the event, see: Anon, ‘Gorsedd of the Bards of the Isle of Britain; and the Grand Eisteddfod held at Llangollen’, *Cambrian Journal*, (1858), 262–313, and James Kenward, *Ab Ithel: An Account of the Life and Writings of John Williams Ab Ithel* (Tenby, 1870), pp. 127–52.

²² Hywel Teifi Edwards, *Gŵyl Gwalia: Yr Eisteddfod yn Oes Aur Victoria 1858–1868* (Llandysul, 1980), pp. 53–112.

1863 gathering discussed the merits of a national university. Those attending in 1864 heard lectures on agriculture, geology, and the education of women. Audiences were entertained by a performance of the 'dramatic cantata' *Llewelyn*, with English words by Thomas Oliphant, and coloratura renditions from operettas.²³ As an English visitor remarked, 'Welshmen themselves smile at the strange antics and the clumsy gambols with which the semblance of antiquity is kept up'.²⁴

Had Arnold accepted Owen's second invitation to attend the National Eisteddfod in 1866, he could have wandered through exhibitions of industrial machinery and photography, with lectures on life assurance, nutrition, the benefits of friendly societies, and the threat posed by coastal erosion.²⁵ The reformed eisteddfod even had its own house magazine, *Yr Eisteddfod*, which first appeared in 1864. Its editor, Creuddynfab, apologized for giving poets 'efallai, fwy na'u rhan briodol' (perhaps more than their proper share) of a publication whose primary purpose was to publish essays on 'anghenion neillduol Cymru' (the particular needs of Wales),²⁶ from the state of housing, women's place in society and methods of teaching English to Welsh children, to the dangers of drunkenness among industrial workers.

Creuddynfab's magazine was one of 574 launched in the second half of the nineteenth century: nearly one new title a month for fifty years.²⁷ The majority were in Welsh, and the tone was unerringly contemporary. A look at the anonymous articles in the quarterly *Y Traethodydd* for 1864, in the year that Arnold looked east and west is instructive, with pieces on Germany, Denmark and Schleswig Holstein, public health, the steam engine, criticism of Palmerston's administration, geological evidence for a creator, and the advantages of education for the labouring classes.²⁸ In

²³ 'The National Eisteddfod', *The Welshman*, 4 September 1863, 3–4; 'The National Eisteddfod', *The Welshman*, 26 August 1864, 6.

²⁴ 'An English visitor', *The London Review of Politics, Society, Literature, Art, & Science*, 9 (1864), 259.

²⁵ *Programme of Meetings of the National Eisteddfod of Wales Held at Chester, September 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th, 1866* (London, 1866); John E. Thomas, *National Eisteddfod, held at Chester, 1866. Prize Essay upon the encroachment of the sea between the River Mersey and the Bristol Channel* (London, 1867).

²⁶ *Yr Eisteddfod, sef Cyhoeddiad Chwarterol y Sefydliad Cenedlaethol*, 1 (1864), vi, v.

²⁷ Huw Walters, *Llyfryddiaeth Cylchgronau Cymreig 1851–1900: A Bibliography of Welsh Periodicals 1851–1900* (Aberystwyth, 2003).

²⁸ [William Williams], 'Yr Allmaen, Denmarc a Schleswig Holstein', *Y Traethodydd*, 19 (1864), 225–33; [David Griffiths], 'Iechyd y bobl', *idem*, 157–70;

the same year, the radical Congregationalist magazine *Y Diwygiwr* entertained its readers with stories of how the Earl and Countess of Cawdor had fallen through the ice while skating at Stackpool Court in Pembrokeshire, of Garibaldi's visit to Britain, David Livingstone's adventures in Africa, developments in the American Civil War, and it argued the case for no taxation without representation. The Baptist monthly, *Y Greal*, carried accounts of the Battle of Heligoland, missionary activity in Ceylon and Trinidad, and essays on the social benefits of voluntary work and the human capacity to learn.

The press introduced Welsh readers to the modern advertisement. Those opening the Liberal weekly *Y Gwladgarwr* for Saturday 27 August 1864, in the week of Arnold's visit, were tempted by Williams's Anthelmintic or Worm Lozenges, and a preparation, called Hayman's Balsam of Horehound, which guaranteed to cure coughs, colds and congestion on the lungs.

INFORMATION TEXTS

The most prominent and numerous advertisements were for books. Books, one commentator wrote, 'yn rhyw dragwyddoli dynion ar y ddaear' (render men in a sense eternal on earth).

Y mae llyfrau da ymhob cangen o wybodaeth i'w cael yn awr am brisiau a'u gesyd yng nghyrhaedd pob dosbarth fel eu gilydd. Rhwng y perffei-thrydd ydys [sic] wedi ei gyrhaedd mewn peirianaeth a phob peth, gall gweithwyr yr oes hon, gydag ychydig iawn o hunan-ymwadiad, ddyfod i feddu y fath gasgliad o lyfrau ag nas gwelsid yn mhalasau tir feddianwyr ddwy ganrif yn ôl.

(There are books available now in all branches of knowledge for prices that put them within the reach of every class alike. Given the perfection we have reached in engineering and everything else, workers in this age, with a little self-denial, can come to own such a collection of books as was not seen in landowners' palaces two hundred years ago.)²⁹

[R. J. Richards], 'Y pleidiau gwladyddol a gweinyddiaeth Arglwydd Palmerston', idem, 400–10; [David Griffiths], 'Tystiolaeth daeareg i'r duwdod', idem, 83–90; [Thomas Levi], 'Manteision addysg i'r dosbarth gweithiol', idem, 21–9.

²⁹ David Griffith, *Morwyr Cymru* (Caernarfon, 1866), p. 45.

Fuelled by a growing literate population and fostered by chapel or workplace literary societies, the publication of information texts in Welsh became a sustainable commercial venture for the first and last time in the languages's history. The fact is graphically illustrated by *Addysg Chambers i'r Bobl* (1851–60), the translation of *Chambers's Information for the People*, R. S. Hughes's lavishly-illustrated two-volume translation of Oliver Goldsmith's *History of the Earth and Animated Nature*, which was published under the title *Hanes y Ddaear a'r Creaduriaid Byw* (1866), John Emlyn Jones and James Spinther James's two-volume gazetteer, *Y Parthysyllydd* (1870–5), with entries on everywhere from Mandelay to Matlock, and the anonymous *Rhyfeddodau Natur a Chelfyddyd* (1859). The latter consisted mostly of translations from English and it filled 450 closely-printed pages with wonders of the natural world and monuments to human ingenuity: Vesuvius and the boa constrictor, why spiders do not become trapped in their own webs, the Ice Palace in St Petersburg, burial rituals in China, the artesian well at Grenelle in Paris and plans to build a road under the Thames. The most impressive was John Parry's ten-volume, 7,500-page encyclopaedia, *Y Gwyddoniadur Cymreig* (1856–79), which was produced at an estimated cost of £20,000, and remains the largest publication ever in Welsh. It contained entries on John Henry Newman and Florence Nightingale, rationalism and shorthand, anthropology and whirling dervishes.

More specialized publications thrived, too. Edward Mills's *Y Darluniadur Anianyddol* (1850) served as a guide to astronomy, geography and geology. Budding physical geographers could turn to David Hughes's *Elfenau Daearyddiaeth* (1853). Cartography was addressed in John Roberts's *Cyfarwyddyd Eglur a Manwl i Ddeall a Defnyddio Mapiau* (1855), and astronomers could open *Elfenau Seryddiaeth* (1851), which was a translation of selections from Jeremiah Joyce's *Scientific Dialogues*. A translation of Alfred Smee's *Accidents and Emergencies*, which appeared under the title *Elfenau Meddyginiaeth* (1852), taught first aid, as did other guides to medicine and physiology, namely: *Y Meddyg Rhad* (1851), *Y Meddyg Teuluaidd* (1851), Thomas Williams's *Y Cydymaith Teuluaidd a Chyfarwyddwr i Iechyd* (1854), a translation of Jabez Hogg's *The Domestic Medical and Surgical Guide*, under the title *Y Cyfarwyddwr Meddygol Teuluaidd* (1856), and Taliesin T. Jones's *Y Traethiadur Gwyddorawl* (1869). The anonymous *Homœopathy* (1864) outlined the practice of alternative medicine in relation to fifteen common complaints; J. W. Jarvis, in *Pwyllwyddeg* (1854) introduced

readers to the secrets of phrenology and mesmerism; the anonymous *Elfenau Gallofyddiaeth* (1850) introduced mechanics, while W. T. Thomas's *Trefniedydd Cyfreithiol* (1863) dealt with the more mundane process of making a will and assigning property.

Dictionaries sold well. Ellis Jones's 1840 dictionary, expressly compiled for an age 'pan y mae awydd pob graddau a sefyllfa o ddynion am wybodaeth, yn ei hamrywiol ganghenau, yn cynhyddu' (the desire of men of all classes for various types of knowledge is increasing),³⁰ was augmented by Thomas Edwards's attempt a decade later to promote 'the introduction of new words and terms according to the exigency of modern times',³¹ and Silvan Evans's two-volume English and Welsh dictionary, *Geiriadur Seisoneg a Chymraeg* (1852, 1858), 'wedi ei gyfaddasu', as its subtitle had it, 'at sefyllfa bresennol Celfyddyd a Llenyddiaeth' (adapted to the present condition of art and literature).

The same energy invigorated the language itself. The middle years of the nineteenth century coined compounds and calques for an expanding world: *cerbydres* ('carriage-row', for train, 1848), *peisgylch* ('petticoat-circle', for crinoline, 1850), *perdoneg* ('sweet-tone-maker', for piano or harmonium, 1850), *mygllysnur* ('tobacco-essence', for nicotine, 1857), *pellseinyr* ('far-sounder', for telephone, 1858), *arwelliaeth* and *arwellyddiaeth* ('pipe-study', for hydraulics, 1861), *gorgrwth* (a diminutive of the traditional stringed instrument, *crwth*, for violoncello, 1863), and *peirianfa* ('machine-place', for factory, 1870).

Grammars ran in tandem with these publications. These included John Mendus Jones's *Practical Welsh Grammar* (1847), Edward Jones's *Ieithiadur* (1854), Thomas Rowlands's *A Grammar of the Welsh Language* (1853), Edward Roberts's *Grammadeg i'r [sic] Iaith Gymraeg* (1862), and William Owen's *Elfenau Gramadeg yr Iaith Gymraeg* (1868). As the advertisement for John Llewelyn Hughes's book on the elements of grammar for the use of boys in literary schools, *Elfenau Grammadeg at Wasanaeth Bechgyn Ysgolion Llenyddol* (1868), promised, 'Ceir ynddo ganoedd o reolau yr iaith, ac y maent wedi eu gosod mor ddeheuig ynddo, fel na raid i'r mwyaf hurt fethu eu deall' (It contains hundreds of rules concerning the language, and they are so skilfully explained that

³⁰ Ellis Jones, *A New Pocket Dictionary of the Welsh and English Languages* (Caernarfon, 1840), p. iii.

³¹ Thomas Edwards (Caerfallwch), *Geirlyfr Saesoneg a Chymraeg* (Holywell, 1850), p. v.

even the most stupid cannot fail to understand them). Those wishing to learn English were served by John Lewis's *A Graduated English-Welsh Spelling-Book* (1857), R. J. Pryse's *Cyfarwyddyd i Gymro Ddysgu yr Iaith Seisnig* (1849), T. Lloyd Phillips's *English-Welsh Handbook: Llawiadur i'r Iaith Seisnig* (1856) and James Rhys Kilsby Jones's *Cymhorth i Gymro* (1864).

Manuals on reading, elocution and public speaking proliferated, in William Rowlands's *Yr Arweinydd Esmwyth i Ddysgu Darllen Cymraeg* (1848), Evan Evans's *Coleg y Darlennydd* (1860), Iorwerth Glan Moelfro's *Elfenau Darllenyddiaeth* (1862), R. Herbert Williams's, *Y Traethiadur* (1868), Thomas Thomas's *Gramadeg Areithyddiaeth* (1873) and D. Oliver Edwards's *Maes yr Adroddwr* (1874). Training in shorthand was provided in J. Cadivor's *Pin yr Ysgrifenydd Buan* (1863) and James Williams's *Yr Arweinydd i Law-fer* (1877). John Jones's *Silliadur Newydd Llythyregawl* (1844), Edward Jones's *Y Silliedydd* (1852) and Evan Thomas Davies's *Cydymaith y Cymro* (1873) offered advice on spelling. Provision of the wherewithal for aspiring writers was completed by works on composition. Caledfryn's *Y Drych Barddonol* (1839), William Harris's *Yr Athrawydd Parod* (1849), Hugh Hughes's *Yr Ysgrifell Gymreig* (c.1850), William Thomas's *Clorian y Bardd* (1850), Robert Ellis's *Tafol y Beirdd* (1852), Creuddynfab's *Y Barddoniadur Cymreig* (1855, 1857) and Dafydd Morganwg's primer of strict-metre poetry, *Yr Ysgol Farddol* (1869), went beyond instruction in technique. They were instrumental in the creation and dissemination of a critical lexicon, with the first contesting translations of metaphor and simile (abstract and concrete), and the emergence of more nuanced vocabulary: *crebwyll*, the creative instinct; *darfelydd*, the imaginative capacity to frame poetic creation in images; and *arabedd*, the ability to do so with wit and originality.

As important were works on self-improvement: Thomas Binney's *Is it Possible to Make the Best of Both Worlds?* (1853), anonymously translated as *AYdyw yn Bosibl Gwneyd y Goreu o'r Ddau Fyd?* (1855), found echoes in home-grown notions of self-help, from rearing God-fearing children to honesty at work.³² One John Jones, in his translation of William

³² 'Gwladgarwr', *Teuluyddiaeth* (Swansea, 1855), E. Griffiths, *Byw i Bwrpas* (Swansea, 1861), Owen Roberts's *Cydymaith y Gweithiwr* (Dolgellau, 1862), Jonah Morgan, *Elfenau Teulu Dedwydd* (Aberdare, 1865), Nathaniel Davies, *Elfenau Dedwyddwch* (Llangollen, 1867), David Roberts, *Dedwyddwch Teuluaidd* (Bala, 1875).

Arthur's *The Successful Merchant, Y Masnachwr Lkwyddiannus* (1853) and A. Rowlands, *Llyfr y Siopwr: Elfennau Lkwyddiant Masnachol* (1868), advised shopkeepers on the niceties that would ensure success in retail. John Mills's *Hyfforddwr yr Efrwydydd* (1839) and William Jones's *Moeslyfr: Neu Egwyddorion a Defodau Moesgarwch* (1853) addressed etiquette. The *Duoglot Letter-Writer* (1848), *Humphreys' English-Welsh Letter Writer* (1860) and *The Modern English-Welsh Letter Writer for the Use of Ladies and Gentlemen* (1870) taught good form in the composition of letters of condolence, references for maids and the sending of an appropriate response to invitations to supper. Possibly the most comprehensive publication was the anonymous *Llyfr Pawb ar Bob-peth* (1877), a title that promised information and advice to everyone on everything. This jumble of guidance on recipes and cures for scurvy, the alleviation of nettle rash, how to kill caterpillars and loosen glass stoppers in bottles, with a perpetual calendar and a ready reckoner thrown in, reaches beyond the desire for knowledge, to hint at another Wales: a proto-Pooterish land of lace curtains (how to whiten), patent leather shoes and china teapots (how to clean), window boxes (how to install and maintain), and caged birds (how to train).

THE NONCONFORMIST ESTABLISHMENT

Josiah Thomas Jones's two-volume biographical dictionary, *Geiriadur Bywgraffyddol* (1867, 1870) is technically another information text. It does, however, serve to show how Welsh-speaking Wales regarded its past in the period. Rhodri Mawr, who ruled most of the land mass of Wales during the ninth century, merited a single-column entry. By contrast, one John Jones of Aberdare, a Unitarian minister, schoolmaster and editor of a denominational magazine, still living when his entry was made, was given three.³³

This John Jones, and hundreds like him who crowd the pages, are representatives of a Nonconformist culture that was simultaneously idealist and iconoclastic. According to the 1851 census, the first and last to gather data on religious worship, and exactly forty years after Methodists had seceded from the Anglican Communion to form the

³³ Josiah Thomas Jones (ed.), *Geiriadur Bywgraffyddol o Enwogion Cymru: O'r Oesoedd Boreuaf hyd yn Awr* (Aberdare, 1870), pp. 55–7 (p. 470).

Presbyterian Church of Wales, Nonconformists outnumbered Anglicans by four to one. The chapels that housed this growing constituency and the dates when they were built or extended, which were meticulously recorded over the main entrances, announced their own modernity, as too did Nonconformity's other contribution: the *cofiant* or spiritual biography. The early-nineteenth-century *cofiant* had been part prose elegy and part exemplar, dwelling on the moments of conversion and death of pioneers of the faith. By mid-century it had been democratized and institutionalized, moving away from homiletics and hero-driven history, not only to commemorate ministers and preachers but also to celebrate the social dynamism they helped to create in which the biographer operated, in what has been called the creation of 'a new Welsh nation'.³⁴ In the *cofiant*, the present looked back on the past with indulgence but no nostalgia; this, for instance, on the long-forgotten and unremarkable Revd Morgan Lewis, who was born in 1762 and who died in 1848:

Nid oedd ganddo nemawr o lyfrau, ond ychydig o rai Cymreig; ac nid oedd fawr o rai Cymreig yn moreuddydd ei oes ef at [*sic*] sydd yn yr oes hon. Nid oedd un esboniad ar y Bibl yn yr amser hwnnw; ond drwy drugaredd y mae y Cymry yn cael eu codi yn uchel yn y peth hwn: mae gennym ein geiriaduron, esboniadau, traethodau, ac amryw lyfrau gwerthfawr ereill, fel y Saeson.

(He had virtually no books other than a few Welsh ones, and very few Welsh ones in his early life compared to what there are in this age. There was no commentary on the Bible at that time, but mercifully the Welsh now fare well in this respect: we have our dictionaries, commentaries, essays and various other valuable books, just like the English.)³⁵

In Welsh-medium historiography of the period, the present was always present. 'Hanesiaeth', Dafydd Morganwg wrote, 'yw'r gadwyn sy'n uno'r gorphenol a'r presenol (The study of history is the chain that unites the past with the present):

³⁴ Prys Morgan, 'A nation of Nonconformists: Thomas Rees (1815–85) and Nonconformist history', in Neil Evans and Huw Pryce (eds), *Writing a Small Nation's Past: Wales in Comparative Perspective, 1850–1950* (Farnham, 2013), p. 108.

³⁵ Philip Griffiths, *Cofiant am y Parch. Morgan Lewis* (Swansea, 1849), p. 19.

Y cyfrwng hwn sy'n galluogi dyn i weled gweithredoedd gorchestol ei flaenafiaid, ac yn rhoddi iddo destyn llawenydd, trwy ddadblygu o'i flaen y dull y darfu i'r naill oes ddiwygio gweithredoedd yr oes flaenorol, nes dyfod o bethau i'w sefyllfa berffaith bresenol.

(This is the medium which enables man to see the triumphs of his forebears, and gives him cause for joy by unfolding before him the way in which each age has amended the actions of the previous age, until things have reached their present, perfected state.)³⁶

John Emlyn Jones's updating of Titus Lewis's civil and religious history of Great Britain, *Hanes Prydain Fawr yn Wladol a Chrefyddol* (1857), and others,³⁷ all took pains to make their accounts as contemporary as possible. All ended in the present and included material from the year of publication itself; all ended in teleological fulfilment.

The obverse of this faith in the present was a suspicion of the past. The Baptist minister William Roberts drew a disapproving gloved finger through the dust of what he called the Dark Ages of pre-Reformation Welsh history, and he asserted that the Mari Lwyd folk festival was the remnant of Maryolatry, that the eisteddfod – except in its Georgian and Victorian manifestations – was a dangerous pagan relic, and that literature before the advent of the Sunday school was worthless:

... diameu fod dynion galluog yn mhlith y Cymry yn y canrifoedd a aethant heibio, ond o herwydd nad oeddynt yn dod i gysylltiad â dim ag oedd yn eu cyfeirio at ris isaf dysgeidiaeth Gymreig, buont feirw heb adael cymaint ag enw wrth draethawd, nac englyn, na dim arall: mewn gair BUONT FEIRW.

(... doubtless, there were men of ability among the Welsh in past centuries, but because they did not come into contact with anything that directed them even to the lowest rung of Welsh learning they died without leaving behind a name attached to an essay or *englyn* or anything else. In a word, THEY DIED.)³⁸

³⁶ Dafydd Morganwg, *Hanes Morganwg* (Aberdare, 1874), p. 1.

³⁷ Owen Jones, *Hanes Cenedl y Cymry* (Caernarfon, 1861); Owen R. Ellis, *Hanes Prydain Fawr: O'r Cyfnod Boreuaf hyd yr Amser Presenol* (London, 1870); Robert John Pryse, *Hanes y Brytaniaid a'r Cymry* (two volumes, London, 1872–4).

³⁸ W. Roberts, *Crefydd yr Oesoedd Tywyll* (Caerdyddin, 1852), p. 34.

THE SENSE OF MODERNITY

The hand that held together this bundle of revived institutions, from the eisteddfod to the chapel, and the underlying notions of social and religious change that informed them, was a consciousness of modernity itself. Nostalgia did not reach back beyond personal experience.

'Yr Hen Amser Gynt' (The Days of Yore) suggests sentiment, but delivers nothing of the sort. Surveying the period between the Tudors and the Hanoverians, the essayist rejoiced that we have been spared the evils of gin shops, highwaymen, gambling dens, pickpockets, gangs of ruffians, unpaved roads, servants who do not know their station, quack doctors, letters that take weeks to arrive, bone-breaking stagecoaches, a diet of oats and barley bread, wicker-built houses, animal cruelty, judges who can be bought and presses that can be closed on the whim of a magistrate or an archbishop. Now,

Y mae pechod a throsedd yn cael eu dilyn i'w ffauau iselaf, nid yn unig gan law y gyfraith, ond hefyd gan lais tyner trugaredd a gras. Y mae symiau anghredadwy yn cael eu treulio bob blwyddyn i ddwyn goleuni y bywyd i dywyll-leoedd y ddaear, a llawn cymaint yn cael ei dreulio mewn ymdrechion i leshâu yr anwybodus a'r paganiaid yn ein gwlad ein hunain. Wreth ystyried yr holl bethau hyn, gellir dywedyd ein bod yn teimlo'n dra diolchgar am nad oeddym yn byw yn YR HEN AMSER GYNT.

(Sin and crime are tracked down to their deepest recesses, not only by the hand of the law but also by the gentle voice of mercy and grace. Incredible sums are spent each year to bring the light of life to the dark places of the earth, and every bit as much spent in efforts to aid the ignorant and the pagans in our own country. In considering all these things, it can be said that we feel most grateful that we did not live in THE DAYS OF YORE.)³⁹

As for the past's literary output, another writer questioned whether medieval praise poetry and legends were genuinely interesting, or whether they were kept for a reason comparable to the antiquarian's penchant for hoarding ancient pieces of rusting iron, and crumbling

³⁹ Anon, 'Yr hen amser gynt', *Y Traethodydd*, 19 (1864), 329.

bricks or because of the feeling that impels a mother to cherish her departed baby's toys, or a son to care with sacred devotion for his father's old hazel walking stick.⁴⁰

A columnist in *Y Tyst*, travelling by rail for the first time on the Llandrillo to Bala railway on Good Friday 1868, compared the age of steam with the days of the Glyndŵr rebellion of the early fifteenth century when Henry's troops had followed the same route, and he had good cause to rejoice that he was a child of the nineteenth century:

Wrth weled y defaid yn pori mor dawel, a'r wyn bach diniwaid yn mwynhau eu hunain mor nwyfus . . . ni's gallemlai na meddwl am y dyddiau gynt, blynyddoedd yr hen oesoedd pan gochid y meusydd dan garnau march rhyfel, ac y llenwid yr awyr a swm celanedd a gwae . . . Gymaint yw y cyfnewidiad erbyn heddyw. Dyma *invasion* eto ar wlad y gwron, ond *invasion* heddyw ydyw hon, yn lle dyfod i ladd, ac i losgi, ac i ddinystrio, wele ni heddyw Gymry a Saeson gyda'n gilydd yn dyfod i wledda ar brydferthion anian, ac i sugno awyr iach y mynyddoedd.

(As we watched the sheep grazing so quietly and the innocent little lambs enjoying themselves with such abandon . . . we could not but think about former days, years in the distant past when the fields were trampled by the hoofs of the warhorse and the air filled with carnage and woe . . . How changed things are today. Here is another invasion of our hero's land, but this is an invasion of today. Instead of coming to kill and burn and destroy, look at us, Welsh and English, together coming to feast on the beauties of nature and inhale the fresh mountain air.)⁴¹

Welsh-speaking Wales in the second half of the nineteenth century exuded an air of restless optimism. Two examples of this will suffice, and they hardly need commentary. Having listed Isaac Watts, John Milton and Isaac Newton in a book of essays, sermons and talks published in 1854 as examples of lives made famous by good actions, John Roberts (who was later to migrate to the United States) wrote:

⁴⁰ *Y Beirniad*, 10 (1868), 229: 'Ynte, a gedwir y naill am gyffelyb reswm i eiddo yr hynafiaethydd dros groni darnau – hen haiarn rhydlyd, a phriddfeini dadfeilliedig . . . ac a gedwir y lleill oddiar yr un teimlad ag a gymhella mam [sic] i drysori teganau ei baban ymadawedig, neu fab i ofalu yn gysegredig am hen ffon collen ei dad . . . ?'

⁴¹ *Y Tyst Cymreig*, 10 Mai 1868, 3.

Os bernir yn ol gweithredoedd, rhaid addef fod dynion enwocach yn y byd yn awr nag a fu erioedd o'r blaen. Chwilio i natur peth oedd nodweddiad oesau ein tadau, ymofyn pa ddefnydd a wna y peth yw nodweddiad yr oes hon. Gwyddent hwy fod y fath beth yn bod ag ager, ond yr oes hon a ddeallodd pa beth oedd dda. Gwyddent hwy fod y fath beth yn bod ag *electricity*, ond yr oes hon a ddeallodd pa beth yw da. Y mae dynion yn awr . . . wedi dysgu rhoddi ffrwyn ym mhen y fflamau tân a gwneud mellt yn genhadon iddynt.

(If one judges by actions, one must admit that there are more famous men in the world now than ever before. The feature of our fathers' age was enquiry into a thing; the feature of this age is to ask what use can be made of it. They knew that there was such a thing as gas, but it was this age that understood what it was for. They knew that there was such a thing as electricity, but it was this age that understood what good it can do. Men now . . . have learned to put a bridle on the flames of fire and make lightning bolts their messengers.)⁴²

The second example comes from one Thomas Griffiths, four years later, who praised the emergence of a vernacular press as the ultimate expression of a desire to know, control and improve the world:

Y mae'r oes bresenol yn neilltuol yn oes o gynydd mawr ac ymchwiliad difrifol. Y mae cymdeithas yn myned o dan gyfnewidiadau parhaus a phwysig . . . Y mae gorthrwm, cyfoeth, twyll, a rhagfarn yn colli eu goruchafiaeth, a gwybodaeth yn raddol yn enill tir. Y mae y *gwir* yn amcan ymchwiliad dwys, a deisyfiad taer; ac y mae goleuni yn parhau i gynyddu yn ei ddysgleirdeb dros y byd.

(This age is particularly one of great progress and serious research. Society is undergoing continuous and important innovations . . . Oppression, wealth, deceit and prejudice are losing their dominance, and knowledge is gradually gaining ground. The *truth* is an object of serious inquiry and urgent desire, and light continues to increase in its brilliance across the world.)⁴³

⁴² John Roberts, *Traethodau, Pregethau ac Ymddiddanion* (2nd edition, 1862), pp. 81–2.

⁴³ Thomas Griffiths, 'Defnyddioldeb y wasg', *Taliesin, sef Cylchgrawn Chwarterol at Wasanaeth y Cymdeithasau Llenyddol*, 2 (1860–1), 233.

In closing, I want to return to the seaside, and to look at it again, this time through the lens of Welsh modernity. Daniel Thomas Williams' poem 'Y Môr' (The Sea), composed in 1865, is a write-everything-you-know answer to the question 'What is the sea?' It opens with a divine invocation and goes on to discuss: the division of sea from land at the Creation; the sea as a source for snow, cloud, ice and rain; Noah's flood; facts about the depth and extent of the oceans; descriptions of marine creatures; praise of the diving-bell and a retelling of the Canute legend. The sea, we learn, controls the climate; its salinity is a sign of God's providence. It is, we are told, uniquely navigable by every type of vessel; then comes the relationship between the moon and the tides; and seabirds, shells and pebbles.

The story of a shipwreck in Part Five is a brief reminder of mortality:

Enyniad a ffrwydriad ffrom,
 A milystryw y *Maelstrom* –
 Trwy ei allu troellawl,
 Sugdyna, hona yn hawl –
 I eigion dwfn gwŷn y don –
 Aneilydd longau, deunydd, ac aml lengau dynion!
 Profir o hyd mai pryfyn
 Ber ei daith, llawn bâr yw dyn.

([Then come] the outbreak and fierce explosion, and the *Maelstrom* that destroys thousands. Through its swirling power, it sucks in and claims for the white depths of the wave innumerable ships, goods and hosts of men! It is proven again that man is a short-lived insect, full of anxiety.)

Part Six, however, hurries to re-establish human mastery of the sea:

Er y difrod, e ddyry y dyfroedd,
 I bawb eu porthiant – llwydd i bob parthoedd:
 I liniaru ing y glania rhengoedd
 O longau lenwad o lad uludoedd:
 Ni luddir i borthladdoedd – gynhyrchion –
 Oreu gynhwysion eurawg ynysoedd.

(Despite the destruction, the waters give their fill to all and bring prosperity to every land. Convoys of ships discharge their fill of blessed

riches to allay want. Ports are not denied the best produce and goods from golden islands.)

Williams goes on to discourse on the role of the sea in human civilization, from Tyre and Sidon to the invention of the compass, from Vasco da Gama to Columbus's discovery of America and the evils of the slave trade. After mentioning George Anson (circumnavigator of the globe), Sir Francis Drake and Captain James Cook, the poet explains how braving the sea can sharpen the mind, and he claims that it has formed the character of nations and promoted the spread of Christianity. Pausing only to remind readers how Jesus stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee and Moses led his people out of Egypt as the waves miraculously parted, it closes with praise to God.

Whatever else it is, Williams's ode is decidedly not the work of a Wales 'where the past still lives', as Matthew Arnold had asserted following his visit to Llandudno. It is closer in form to that popular Victorian entertainment, the magic-lantern lecture: busy, informative, superficial, eager to move on to the next picture, the next snippet. Indeed, those who bought Williams's ode were treated to a bonus: they received an accompanying lecture on the same subject teeming with names, coinages and facts. These included: the lives of Magellan, David Livingstone, Christopher Columbus and Benjamin Franklin; the workings of the telegraph (*rhaff bellebrol*) and the microscope (*mwyadur*). The reader was told that the sea covered a surface area of 148 million square miles; its depth at its deepest was calculated at five miles; coral was composed of sea creatures called *polypi*; the sea became less saline as it moved from the equator to the poles. The tide, Williams, further informed them, could rise to a height of thirty feet at the mouth of the River Indus.

Absurdly ambitious in conception, haphazard in execution and without a memorable line to commend them, the ode and the lecture together are nonetheless a remarkable cultural product. Williams, like hundreds of his contemporaries, brought to his task a mind well-versed in the Bible, and one fed on both popular science and deference to the pantheon of British heroes. If one were to criticize either on their own terms, it would be that they do not find space for Nelson and the heroic lighthouse keeper's daughter, Grace Darling. They are also strikingly non-Welsh. Nothing, in short, that looks westward.

When Matthew Arnold and Daniel Thomas Williams surveyed the sea from the land in the mid-1860s, both took it as a metaphor. Arnold was

captivated by its retreat: civilizations rise and fall. For Williams, on the other hand, the tide rushes in. It carried a ship freighted with facts and figures, evidence of human ingenuity and the inexorable victory of man over nature.

A little melancholy is appropriate for what Arnold and Williams alike saw. To re-quote Arnold: 'For both were faiths, and both are gone.' Half a century later, the roles were reversed. English was overwhelmingly the language of debate over home rule and disestablishment, the language of socialism and national institutions, not least in the University of Wales. English-medium interest in Welsh language and literature had moved from notions of national character to 'hard' academic disciplines, in Edward Anwyl's *Welsh Accidence* (1898) and *Welsh Syntax* (1899), Samuel J. Evans's *The Latin Element in Welsh* (1908) and *Studies in Welsh Phonology* (1909), W. Meredith Morris's *A Glossary of the Demetian Dialect of North Pembrokeshire* (1910), O. H. Fynes-Clinton's *The Welsh Vocabulary of the Bangor District* (1913), and J. Glyn Davies's *Welsh Metrics* (1911). As for literature, John Rhŷs's remark, in the preface to his new diplomatic text of Lady Charlotte Guest's 'prescientific' translation of the *Mabinogi*, that it had been revised to meet the demands of 'a more exacting age',⁴⁴ was a watchword for the whole enterprise.

Welsh-speaking Wales, by contrast, adopted two contrasting approaches to the past. The first was the idealized *gwerin* (or folk): rural, industrious, self-contained, vulnerable but content, divorced socially, linguistically, culturally and in religious and political allegiance from the industrial proletariat. Wales became a land of whitewashed cottages and anti-urbanism, and threatened essentialist authenticity.⁴⁵ T. Gwynn Jones's snapshot of a disappearing breed, represented by the cottager John Llwyd, in his turn-of-the-century novel provides a stark example:

Dacw fo yn dwad – hen Gymro gwledig, a rhadlon , a chartrefol . . .
 wyneb Cymreig, cerddediad Cymreig, ffon onnen Gymreig. Dillad
 brethyn cartref, clos pen-glin, crys gwlanen gartref, hosanau a wnaed o
 wlân defaid ei gymydog, ac esgidiau o'i waith ei hun. Edrychwch arno,
 welwch chi fawr o'i debyg eto, canys y mae gwareiddiad y bobl sy'n

⁴⁴ John Rhŷs and J. Gwenogvryn Evans (eds), *The Text of the Mabinogion from the Red Book of Hergest* (Oxford, 1887), pp. vii-viii.

⁴⁵ Prys Morgan, 'The gwerin of Wales: myth and reality' in Ian Hume and W. T. R. Pryce (eds), *The Welsh and their Country: Readings in the Social Science* (Llandysul, 1986), pp. 143–52.

siarad Saesneg yn dod, ac ni ddichon yr hen bobl gartrefol, a'u dulliau syml, sefyll ger gwydd ei fawredd.

(Here he comes – an old, rustic, homely Welshman . . . Welsh face, Welsh walk, Welsh ash walking stick. Homespun clothes, knee breeches, home-made woollen shirt, socks made from the fleece of his neighbour's sheep and shoes fashioned by himself. Look at him. You will not see many of his like again, because the civilization of those who speak English is coming, and the homely old people, with their simple ways, cannot withstand its might.)⁴⁶

Jones, in his ode of 1902, 'Ymadawiad Arthur' (The Departure of Arthur) was seminal, too, to the creation of a second imagined past: the lush pre-Raphaelite Wales conjured up in the period's eisteddfod poetry. Written in the borrowed vocabulary of the Middle Ages, eisteddfod output reimaged the Wales of the Mabinogi and Dafydd ap Gwilym, of Giraldus Cambrensis and Lord Rhys, the ruins of Strata Florida Abbey and the drowned kingdom of Cantre'r Gwaelod, and the timeless hills and mountains of the north and west.

If both Arnold and Jones sought a palliative for philistinism in Welsh medievalism, one was born too soon; the other, perhaps, too late. Just as modernity had challenged Arnold, the first stirrings of modernism overtook Jones. His 'Madog' (1917–18), ostensibly the story of the twelfth-century prince's voyage to the New World, is not only a treatise on the inescapability of armed conflict, it questions too the ability of historical imagination to reach beyond its circumstances. Madog's escape ends in failure as the tide turns:

Drylliwyd y môr yn droëllau, treiglwyd trwy wagle'r ffurfafen,
Rhwyg fel pe llyncai rhyw eigion gwag holl angerdd y gwynt . . .
Rhonciodd y llong, a rhyw wancus egni'n ei sugno a'i llyncu,
Trystiodd y tonnau trosti, bwlch ni ddangosai lle bu.

(The sea was shattered into whirlpools, a gash stretched through the void of the heavens, as the ocean consumed the passion of the wind . . . The ship rocked and a ravenous energy engulfed and swallowed it; the waves broke over it; not even a gap showed where it had been.)⁴⁷

⁴⁶ T. Gwynn Jones, *Gwedi Brad a Gofid* (Caernarfon, 1908), p. 5.

⁴⁷ T. Gwynn Jones, 'Madog', *Caniadau* (Wrecsam, 1934), 103, 104.

As one critic has observed:

The Middle Ages might sustain patriotic sentiment by lending legitimacy to the claims of the Welsh to be considered a historic nation, but they represented an era that had long since been superseded in the wake of union with England, rather than a source of patterns and ideals for the modern world. To remember medieval Wales is one thing, to revive it another matter altogether.⁴⁸

The Victorian Englishman and the Edwardian Welshman were both destined to be melancholy.

⁴⁸ Pryce, 'Culture, identity, and the medieval revival in Victorian Wales', 40.