

Orality versus Literacy: A Consideration of 18th-century Welsh Cultural Nationalism

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Abstract: The eighteenth-century Britain saw a rise of antiquarian interests in ancient bardic tradition in the so-called Celtic peripheries of the British Isles. Katie Trumpener finds there the formation of national identities generated by the concept that their national history is combined with a specific cultural institution of the bardism, and coins 'the bardic nationalism' to describe such nationalist antiquarianism. The model of the bardic nationalism is arguably James Macpherson's translations of Ossianic epics, which were enthusiastically received by English and Continental readers in general, but not so much by Welsh antiquaries in particular. By juxtaposing the Welsh Evan Evans's bardic translations to Macpherson's work, the present paper attributes the reason of the Welsh disregard for the Scottish Ossian to the discrepancy between the Welsh and Scottish scholarly notions of orality as the medium of transmitting the history conveyed by the bards. To Macpherson, folk memory of the Gaelic past should be valid because of their oral culture uncontaminated by the Roman conquest. In contrast, Evans sides with the literary tradition which was introduced by the Romans and sustained by the manuscript culture of monasteries and courts. Through the argument, the paper also points out the danger of smoothing various representations of cultural nationalism in the British peripheries under the monolithic term of bardic nationalism.

1. Introduction: Antiquarian Interests and Bardic Nationalism in post-1707 Britain

That the ancient Scots were of Celtic original, is past all doubt. Their conformity with the Celtic nations in language, manners and religion, proves it to a full demonstration. The Celtae, a great and mighty people, altogether distinct from the Goths and Teutones, once extended their dominion over all the west of Europe; but seem to have had their most full and compleat establishment in Gaul. Whatever the Celtae or Gauls are mentioned by ancient writers, we seldom fail to hear of their Druids and their Bards; the institution of which

two orders, was the capital distinction of their manners and policy. The Druids were their philosophers and priests; the Bards, their poets and recorders of heroic actions: And both these orders of men, seem to have subsisted among them, as chief members of the state, from time immemorial. We must not therefore imagine the Celtae to have been altogether a gross and rude nation.

*From A Critical Dissertation on the Poems
of Ossian by Hugh Blair*

In 1765, Hugh Blair, one of the principal advocates of the Scottish Enlightenment, wrote the above passage to the London reading public in support of much debated work of his protégé from the Scottish Highlands named James Macpherson (1736–1796).¹

Four years before Macpherson had published an English translation of an ancient Gaelic epic entitled as *Fingal*, then *Temora* in 1763, both allegedly composed by a third-century Scottish bard Ossian. Although he claimed to have compiled his texts from Gaelic materials collected during his highlands tours, Macpherson's work invited both enthusiasm and doubt of its authenticity among his contemporaries. In response to such public reception, Blair's *Critical Dissertation* attributed the inheritance of the instituted learned class of the Celts to the sophisticated artistry and delicacy of sentiment in the Ossianic poetry, maintaining that those pre-Christian Scots had not been as barbarous as one might imagine.

Macpherson's *Ossian* was soon followed by the publication in a similar vein, such as *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards* by Evan Evans in 1764, Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* in 1765, and Edward Jones's *Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards* in 1784. In his discussion of the eighteenth-century vogue of Primitivism, Pittock defines Macpherson's role there as 'the determining point of a nexus of work devoted to rediscovering and rehabilitating the literature of a fading orality, especially when it bore a Celtic tinge' (1997: 155).

In these seemingly non-political literary movements of ballad-collecting and antiquarian publication, Trumpener, in turn, sees a generation of a new kind of nationalism inspired by the bard, which she calls bardic nationalism. According to her, the bardic persona stimulates a distinctive national identity in the Celtic nations, as opposed to the Anglocentric Britishness being forged in the post-1707 era:

Responding in particular to [English] Enlightenment dismissal of Gaelic oral traditions, Irish and Scottish antiquaries reconceive national history and literary history under the sign of the bard. According to their theories, bardic performance binds the

nation together across time and across social divides; it reanimates a national landscape made desolate first by conquest and then by modernization, infusing it with historical memory. A figure both of the traditional aristocratic culture that preceded English occupation and of continued national resistance to that occupation, the bard symbolizes the central role of literature in defining national identity (Trumpener 1997: xii).

As Linda Colley points out in her influential study of the eighteenth-century British identity (1992), the Act of Union between England and Scotland in 1707 promoted a reformation of national consciousness which could hopefully integrate the people now united under the common designation of the Britons. The remote past and the ancient landscape of the British Isles then provided the ruling and cultured class both in England and in the peripheries with the cradle of a specifically British nationhood of the day, uncontaminated by classical, Catholic, and Continental European traditions.

We should expect, however, that the sense of homogenous Britain rooted in its antiquities must have been legitimate only on rhetorical and strategic levels of politics and ideology as any nationhood of an imagined community should be. Elsewhere the issue of ownership mattered. Macpherson's portrayal of the valiant yet civilised Highlanders in the mythic Caledonian past may have highlighted 'the refusal of a nation to give up its culture in support of the [British] empire' (Trumpener 1997: 8), thus encouraging a national pride among his fellow Scots which had been recently devastated by the failure of the Jacobite rising and subsequent demilitarisation under the English occupation. At the same time, the fact that the romantic sentiment of *Ossian* was shared by the English proves that it must have presented a national character which could be approved by the polite English society as well. The process of inventing the

Britishness becomes, then, a discursive sphere in which the cultural nationalism of the British peripheries and the English appropriation or exploitation of these indigenous traditions at their own causes are dynamically interlaced.

It leads to the objective of this paper. Trumpener's bardic nationalism is an apt term to describe regional politico-cultural challenges against the idea of a unified British ideology under the English hegemony. Yet I detect in the use of Trumpener's bardic nationalism as well as in Pittock's Primitivism, a disregard for diversities in the nationalist stands among the British margins. Rather I would like to show, by examining the work of Evan Evans, which Prescott (2008) regards as the ground-breaking attempt of Welsh bardic nationalism, that the symbolic role of the bard to the Welsh antiquaries was to represent not 'the resistance of vernacular oral traditions to the historical pressures of English imperialism' (Trumpener 1997: 33), but the persistence of the native learned tradition kept in written and textual form.

2 . 'The Cultivation of the British or Welsh Language'

The eighteenth-century cultural nationalism of Wales shows a peculiar structure compared to that of the other British peripheries: it had an institutional centre in London, while sustaining a cultural network between the metropolitan and the home country. The London headquarter was the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion which was founded by Richard Morris of the Navy Office in 1751. The membership ranged from Welsh middle-classes in London to the Corresponding members in Wales, the latter to be mostly gentry and scholarly clerics, such as William Vaughan of Corsygedol, Thomas Pennant of Downing, the Rev. Goronwy Owen, and the Rev. Evan Evans. It also attracted the English with antiquarian interests in Wales such as the Hon. Daines Barrington,

an English judge on the North Wales circuit.

Although its main activity was a monthly gathering of the London Welsh in a tavern, the Society's ideals were prescribed as 'the Cultivation of the British Language, and a Search into Antiquities,' according to Constitutions printed in 1755 (Jenkins and Ramage 1951: 230). The author of the Constitutions, Lewis Morris of Anglesey (1701-65), was Richard's elder brother and a patriotic antiquary of the day. In the introductory part, Morris stresses that the competence in a national language is requisite for studying the history and culture of any nation; and he continues to say:

And as the British or Welsh, is the Language of the original Inhabitants of Great Britain; without a Critical Knowledge of it, it will be found extremely difficult, if not impracticable, to investigate the most ancient British Antiquities with any degree of Success. This Observation, ... is likewise supported by ... the late Bishop Nicolson, who, in his English Historical Library, recommends the Study of the British Language, as necessary Acquisition to compleat an English Antiquary [My italics]. (Jenkins and Ramage 1951: 227)

Lewis Morris's proposition that the study of the Welsh language and its tradition should become a cornerstone of the researches into the history and antiquities of Great Britain comes from the general understanding of Welsh as the oldest remaining British tongue. Declaring themselves as 'Cymmrodorion,' to mean the aboriginal inhabitants in Welsh, the Society functioned as a focal point of people both in and outside London who committed themselves to the study of ancient British tradition, the inheritance of which was believed by them to remain in Welsh culture.

Lewis Morris was a pivot of the Welsh or 'British' revival and frequently corresponded with the so-called 'Morris circle' among English *literati* including Tho-

mas Gray (1716–1771). Gray and other ambitious English writers of the circle, such as William Mason and Thomas Percy, were attempting to create the vernacular literature of Britain, independent of the classical exemplars. In this regard they shared the enthusiasm for British antiquities with the Cymmrodorion; they were indeed all ‘Briton mad’ just as the Morris brothers were.² Thus, to them, British native history and culture preserved in Wales must have looked like a treasure house of artistic inspirations. The circle’s literary activities resulted in the first major public attention to the figure of the bard, prior to the Ossian fever.

The Bard. A Pindanc Ode published by Gray in 1757 was, according to *Advertisement*, based on a ‘Tradition current in Wales, that EDWARD the First, when he completed the conquest of that country, ordered all the Bards, that fell into his hands, to be put to death.’³ The novelty of the theme and the dramatic scene made the ode widely accepted. Much publicised representations of Gray’s Welsh bard by English and Welsh painters also stirred up its popularity (see Smiles 1994: 50–61).

Evan Evan’s *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards* is another significant product born in such a cross-cultural milieu of the Cymmrodorion. It can be regarded as a Welsh counterpart of Macpherson’s *Ossian*. There is, however, one remarkable difference from the Ossianic case, that is, Evans’s statement that all his collection came from an authentic manuscript, not from oral tradition while Macpherson’s work mostly owed to contemporary informants in the Highlands.

This discrepancy between the two branches of the bardic nationalism proposes several questions, one of which is concerning the bearer of the bardism: is the tradition transmitted through folk memory, or by means of scribal learning, and which is, we can assume, more reliable machinery of reproducing the past? Finally, why does the English oppression of the

bards feature so much in the Welsh bardic history while it doesn’t in the Scottish version, although Scotland also suffered from the Edwardian invasions?

The succeeding part of the paper examines the characteristics of Welsh cultural nationalism represented in Evan’s *Specimens* and his interpretation of the killings of the medieval Welsh bards.

3 . The Legend of the Edwardian Bardicide

The earliest record of the massacre of the Welsh bards by Edward I appears in a seventeenth-century paper, entitled as *The History of the Gwedir Family*, written by Sir John Wynn (1553–1627). The passage in question occurs just after a story about Robert ap Meredith, who was once a supporter of Owain Glyndwr at his rising, but was received a pardon from Henry IV, then prince of Wales, in 1408. Wynn quotes a poem by early fifteenth-century poet Rhys Goch Eryri to Robert in exile, then comments as follows:

This is the most ancient song I can find extant which is addressed to any of my ancestors since the raigne of Edward the First, who caused our bards all to be hanged by martial law, as stirrers of the people to sedition, whose example being followed by the governours of Wales, until Henry the Fourth his time, was the utter destruction of that sort of men. Sithence, this kind of people were at some further libertie to sing and to keep pedigrees, as in ancient time they were wont, since which we have some light of antiquitie by their songes and writings. From the reigne of Edward the First to Henry the Fourth, there is therefore noe certainty, or very little, of things done, other than what is to be found in the Princes records, which now, by tossing the same from the Exchequer at Carnarvon to the Tower, and to the offices in the Exchequer at London, as alsoe

by ill keeping and ordering of late dayes, are become a chaos and confusion from a total neglect of method and order, as would be needful for him who would be ascertained of the truth of things done from time to time (50-1).

Sir John was one of the most prominent gentry in North Wales, who owned the Gwydir estate in the vales of Conwy. His intension of writing a family chronicle was apparently to boast the antiquity and glory of his pedigree he claimed to be descended from Owain Gwynedd (c. 1100-1170), king of Gwynedd. In this regard, the episode of the killing of the bards may have been inserted to justify the lack of old bardic poems dedicated to such a great family as the Wynn, as Carr assumes (1995: 10).

Although Sir John's work was not been published until 1770,⁴ it found a place in the second volume of a Jacobite historian Thomas Carte's *A General History of England*, issued in 1750, which reads:

The onely set of men among the *Welsh*, that had reason to complain of *Edward's* severity, were the *Bards*, who used to put those remains of the antient *Britains* in mind of the valiant deeds of their ancestors: he ordered them all to be hanged, as inciters of the people to sedition. Politicks in this point got the better of the king's natural lenity: and those, who were afterwards entrusted with the government of the country, following his example, the profession becoming dangerous, gradually declined, and, in a little time, that sort of men was utterly destroyed (196).

Being an English writer, Carte detects 'politics' rather than 'cruelty' in the English king's execution of the bards. They had to be terminated because their social function of stirring up the Welsh national pride in heroism was regarded as a potential threat to the conquerors. Whether be a fact of not, the massacre of

the Welsh bards and the successive persecution of them were thus rationalised and historicised, and, with the great popularity of Thomas Gray's *The Bard*, they eventually became authentic components of the discourse concerning the English conquest of Wales in 1282.

4. Thomas Gray and the Massacre of the Bards

From the early 1750s, Gray began working on the history of poetry, hopefully to explore a possibility of creating a genuine British poem. He read Carte's *History* in 1755, and took a composition of a 'British Ode'⁵ about the Welsh bard confronting his doom. His portrayal of the bard was inspired by the figure of John Parry, a blind Welsh harpist to Sir Watkin Williams Wynne of Wynnstay, the second *penllywydd* (chief president) of the Cymmrodorion after William Vaughan. Gray's letter to Mason tells his excitements when he saw Parry's performance at a harp recital in Cambridge in May 1757:

there is no faith in Man, no, not in a Welch-Man, and yet Mr. Parry has been here, & scratch'd out such ravishing blind Harmony, such tunes of a thousand year old with names enough to choak you, as have set all the learned body a'dancing, & inspired them with due reverence for *Odikle* [i.e. his Ode], whenever it shall appear. Mr. Parry (you must know) it was, that has put *Odikle* in motion again ... (Correspondence 501f).

There months later, *The Bard* was published from the Strawberry Hill Press, established by Horace Walpole.

5. Evan Evans and the Massacre of the Bards

To a Welsh cleric and scholar Evan Evans (1731-88), the 'inhuman massacre of the Bards made by that cruel tyrant Edward the First' (1764: 45) was also a stimulus to drive him to compile his 1764's anthology of Welsh bardic poetry. His preface reads:

The following poems, from among many others of greater length, and of equal merit, were taken from a manuscript of the learned Dr. Davies, author of the Dictionary, which he had transcribed from antient vellum MS. which was wrote, partly in Edward the second and third's time, and partly in Henry the fifth's, containing the works of all the Bards from the Conquest to the death of Llewelyn, the last prince of the British line. This is a noble treasure, and very rare to be met with; for Edward the first ordered all our Bards, and their works, to be destroyed, as is attested by Sir John Wynne of Gwydir, in the history he compiled of his ancestors at Carnarvon. What remained of their works were conveyed in his time to the Exchequer, where he complains they lay in great confusion, when he had occasion to consult them (iii-iv).

The 'specimens' he selected from the Welsh bardic literature are as follows:

I. *A Poem composed by Owain Cyveiliog, prince of Powys, entitled by him HIRLAS... He flourished about A.D. 1160, in the time of Owain Gwynedd and his son David.*

II. *A Poem to Myfanwy Fechan of Castell Dinas Bran, composed by Howel-ap-Lygliw, a Bard who flourished about A.D. 1390.*

III. *An Ode of David Benfras to Llewelyn the Great, Prince of Wales, A.D. 1240.*

IV. *A Poem to Llewelyn the Great, composed by*

Einion the Son of Gwgan, about 1244.

V. *A Panegyric upon Owain Gwynedd, Prince of North Wales, by Gwalchmai, the Son of Melir, in the Year 1157.*

VI. *An Elegy to Nest, the daughter of Howel by Einion the son of Gwalchmai, about the year 1240.*

VII. *A Poem to Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, or Llywelyn the Great; In which many of his victories are celebrated; Composed by Llywarch Brydydd y Moch, a Bard, who, according to Mr. Edward Llwyd of the Museum's Catalogue of the British writers, flourished about the year 1240.*

VIII. *An Ode in five parts, to Llewelyn, the son of Gruffudd, last prince of Wales of the British line, composed by Llygad Gwr, about the year 1270.*

IX. *A Poem, intituled the Ode of the Months, composed by Gwylim Ddu of Arfon, to Sir Gruffudd Llwyd, of Tregarnedd and Dinorweg.*

X. *Taliesin's Poem to Elphin, the Son of Gwyddno Garanir, king of Cantre' Gwaelodd, to comfort him upon his ill success at the Wear; and to exhort him to trust in Divine Providence.*

There is something peculiar to Evans's choice of poems. Except the poem attributed to the sixth-century legendary Taliesin, one of the earliest British bards mentioned in the record, the rest of them are all from the post-Norman conquest of England; two of them belong to the reign of Owain Gwynedd in mid twelfth century, four to be connected to Llywelyn the Great around 1240, and one to Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the Last Prince of Wales, whose death in 1282 terminated the independence of Wales against the English invasions. The latest (II) is a love poem composed in the time of Henry IV of England.

In short, the bulk of the bardic specimens is taken from the *Gogynfeirdd*, or the court poets of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, whose office was mainly to compose panegyrics of their patrons in intricate *awdl* or *cynghanedd* metres. But why is so? Were these

specimens meant to exhibit the reader the last sparkle of the fading bardic literature before the Edwardian bardicide? Or was the purpose of publishing his translations to testify the antiquity and grandeur of bardic tradition as in the case of Macpherson? If so, why shouldn't he have selected earlier works of more heroic kind?

Evans did know the existence of *Y Gododdin*, the extant earliest poem in Welsh, which recites a fatal battle between a North British tribe and Anglo-Saxons, fought near the present Edinburgh about 600. More than that, according to Lewis Morris's letter in 1758, Evans made a 'discovery' of old manuscript, 'an epic Poem in the British called Gododdin, equal at least to the Iliad, Aeneid or Paradise Lost' (Additional Letters I: 349). Evans translated some parts of *Y Gododdin* into Latin, which appeared in his Latin *Dissertatio* on the bardic history included in the *Specimens*.

The reason why he declined to publish its English version might be an obscurity of the text itself. In the Welsh section entitled as 'At y Cymry' (To the Welsh), he expresses doubts about the date of *Ossian* on the historical grounds, and questions if the poem had been that old, how Macpherson could have translated it so cleverly:

The work of our own Bards, being a hundred years after that, is beyond the understanding of the men most skilled and expert in the old British tongue. Who amongst us could take the *Gododdin*, Work of Aneurin of the Flowing Verse, King of the Bards, and translate it as fluently as did the translator of *Fingal* and *Temora*? I think that none could dare to take such a task on him. (Evans 1764: 105) ⁶

Here the untranslatability of the old Welsh poetry overtly conveys Evans's dismissal of Macpherson's exploits as a vain act of showing off antiques dressed up in elegant, modern attire. Such skepticism toward

Macpherson's *Ossian* seems to be shared by other Welsh scholars. Lewis Morris writes around 1760:

Rhyme, says he [Macpherson] (pref.p.6) is seldom used, but the cadence and the length of the line varied so as to suit the senses, and neither set to music nor sung, some in MS. but more by oral tradition. In gods name what title such stuff to be called Poetry without rhyme or numbers and mostly by oral tradition and yet in the highlands of North Britain this is called versification. ... *If they were handed down by succession of the Northern bards* (pref. p.6) *they must be in MSS.* and should be Poetry ... if they were handed down by illiterate shepherds or minstrels without rhyme or numbers, pray what was the bandage that kept the rhymes together. [My italics] (Additional Letters 2: 467)

The issue raised here is the opposition between oral and literary traditions, or between folk memory and manuscripts in terms of reliable medium of transmission.

Oral or Written?

Sweet comments that 'Evan Evan's *Specimens* ... claimed its authority from a manuscript which had survived from the period before Edward I's bardic blood letting, rather than, as in the case of *Ossian*, being manufactured for contemporary tastes' (2004:140). In reality, Macpherson too publicly admitted he had consulted written sources, and Gaskill (1991: 9f) argues that he did possess old manuscripts containing Ossianic materials, but failed to produce them, because he had not translated his poems from these written sources due to their illegible language. Yet Macpherson would have approved his achievements as he claims the exceeding tenaciousness of oral survival over written and printed culture. According to his *Dissertation of Ossian*, Northern Europe remained

illiterate 'till long after the institution of the bards,' therefore 'the most precious monuments of their nation' was delivered by oral tradition, and the bardic verse itself suited that purpose because 'if one line had been remembered in a stanza, it was almost impossible to forget the rest.' He goes further to say that the oral chronicle of the old Germans 'would have remained to the day, had not learning [and writing] been introduced.' Against such a backdrop Scotland emerges as a reservoir of ancient bardic works:

If other nations then, that had been often overrun by enemies, and had sent abroad and received colonies, could, for many ages, preserve, by oral tradition, their laws and histories uncorrupted, it is much more probable that the ancient Scots, a people so free of intermixture with foreigners, and so strongly attached to the memory of their ancestors, had the works of their bards handed down with great purity.

From 'A Dissertation concerning the Antiquities, & c. of the Poems of Ossian' ⁷

Macpherson boasts the 'purity' of Scottish bardic tradition, free from the Roman conquest, and regards the orality as its quintessential nature. In contrast, Evans emphasises that the key to retrieve the whole legacy of bardism lies in exploring into a long literary tradition established since Romano-British times (Constantine 2004: 70). His credo is reflected in the Appendix where he illustrates how the future antiquarian project should be carried:

Now the method I would propose to a person that would carry this project into execution, is, that as soon as he is become master of the ancient British language, as far as it can be learned, ... he should endeavour to procure access to the great collections of ancient British MSS... By this means he would be enabled in time to ascertain the true reading in

many MSS. that have been altered and mangled by the ignorance of transcribers.... We should by the means of such a person have a great many monuments of genius brought to light, that are now mouldering away with age, and a great many passages in history illustrated and confirmed that are now dark and dubious. Whole poems of great length and merit might be retrieved, not inferior, perhaps, to Ossian's productions, if indeed those extraordinary poems are of so ancient date, as his translator avers them to be (154f).

Manuscripts supersede folk memory. While the bards died out and their work became obsolete, one could eventually decipher the meanings as long as their writings remain. This trust in manuscripts may explain inconsistencies between the English and the Welsh receptions of the Edwardian bardic. Carte writes the bardic profession 'was utterly destroyed' in Wales after the English conquest. Therefore, Gray, based on Carte's account, featured the last surviving bard who, having cursed on the conqueror and his line, throws himself from a high rock into the deep of the torrent of Conwy. The image of Gray's solitary bard with 'hoary hair streamed like a meteor' and 'robed in the sable garb of woe' is merged into a sublime wilderness of Welsh mountains, and becomes the *genius loci* of the imaginary landscape conjured up by Gray who had never been to North Wales. The violent death of the bard is an element requisite, in artistic terms, for giving a finishing touch to this dramatic tableau.⁸

As for Evans, unlike Gray, he consulted not Carte's version but John Wynn's manuscripts kept in the library of North Welsh gentry, Sir Roger Mostyn (Evans 1764: 45), to whom his *Specimens* was dedicated. Interestingly, on one occasion Evans comments that 'It is not improbable that our Bard might have been one of those who suffered in the cause of his country, though he had the good luck to escape Edward's fury

(46),’ which suggests he does not take the bardic holocaust literally. This is natural enough, for if all the Welsh bards were doomed to death upon the Edwardian conquest, why could the bardic work of later days still remain? John Wynn, the one responsible for the legend, did quote a fifteenth-century poem composed for one of his ancestors. The point Wynn intended to make seems that the events during the conquest are obscure because the loss and ill-preservation of written records in times of war.

From the Welsh perspective, the story of the massacre of the Welsh bards was not so much a rigid historical fact as an exemplar myth to articulate everlasting English threats to their language and culture. Yet again if manuscripts survive, people continue to learn the bardic diction and trope, thereby becoming able to compose *cyghanedd*.

Presenting *Specimens* in three languages, Evans shows three different personae. In the English translations, he offers the examples of the greatest ‘remains of antient and genuine pieces’ (1764: i) of bardism to the English readers, especially his supporters in England such as Daines Barrington, Gray, and Percy because they are comrades in antiquarian quests into the field where the Welsh language is synonymous to the British language, and the Welsh antiquities to the British ones.⁹

In *De Bardis Dissertatio*, Evans’s Latin voice addresses to international Celtic scholars. In so doing, he is following his Welsh predecessor Edward Lhuyd, simultaneously fulfilling Lhuyd’s lack of ‘the thorough understanding the ancient British Bards and historians’ and ‘attention to the old MSS’ (154). Thus, Evans accounts the history of the British bards from the earliest known record to the sixteenth century, giving specimens of them in the original Welsh with Latin translations. He also refers to Edward I’s tyranny towards the bards, accuses the king of putting ‘many of them’ to hang (et multos suspendi secit, 89), and states that the succeeding persecutions of his followers

caused the bards ‘whence completely become rare from that time right until 1400’ (unde sit ut admodum sint rari ab eo tempore usque ad annum 1400, 89), the year of Owain Glyndwr’s rising against the English throne.

In the Welsh section, Evans is more overtly patriotic: he stresses that in order to challenge the English claims ‘that we do not possess anything in poetry which would be worth showing, I did my best to translate this small Collection, in order to cast away, if possible, that reproach’ (104).¹⁰ He also explains that the reason of his choosing the *Gogynfeirdd* is that their works show the most fruitful collaboration between the bard and the patron, and exhibit the noble spirits of the Welsh people:

At the time of the Princes, ... the Bards were witness of the prowess and generosity of their Princes, and they themselves were brave warriors. ... Apart from this, the Princes were victorious in their battles with the *English* and this caused the Bards to strive to immortalise their splendid deeds; and to praise their courage in such a worthy cause as protecting their Country and their Freedom against a Foreign nation who had deprived them of the Patrimony of their Ancestors. These were certainly Texts worthy of the Bards to sing about, and a mode suitable for letting their Subjects respect them and honour them (106).¹¹

Evans’s work exemplifies the Welsh cultural nationalism in the eighteenth century. There is not much militant kind of antagonism against the English as one might expect, but more of the national pride in their self-definition of the original inhabitants of Britain, as well as in the status of the bards as custodians of their history and heroic deeds. The learned tradition of bardism was secured by scholarly institution of manuscript making while both bards and scholars flourished under the patronage of the rulers and gen-

try. The ‘cultivation’ of the Welsh manuscript heritage, together with the revival of the gentry’s commitment in their native culture, was the most urgent task set by the early activists of the Welsh literary nationalism. As one of the forerunner, Evans picked up Latin, the paragon of the written learned language.¹²

Notes

1. Originally, Blair’s *Dissertation* appeared in 1763 to follow the publication of *Fingal*. It was expanded and published in 1765, shortly before the revised *Works of Ossian* in two volumes, in the second volume of which the present edition was included. Quotation is from Gaskill ed., 1996: 349f.
2. The phrase was used by William Morris in a letter to his brother Richard, 14 October 1762. Quoted from Solkin 1982: 87.
3. The Thomas Gray Archive, at the University of Oxford, Alexander Huber ed. (<http://www.thomasgray.org/cgi-bin/display.cgi?text=bapo>). Accessed 20/9/09.
4. It is the English Cymmrodorion, Daines Barrington who first edited and published *The History* through a London publisher in 1770. The text used in this paper is based on a revised edition, published in Ruthin in 1827 (see Bibliography).
5. Letter to Bedingfield, Aug. 27, 1756 (Correspondence: 475).
6. Ond pei canniatteid eu bod hwy yno cyn hynny, ni fyddai hynny ronyn nes i brofi *Ossian* mor hyned ag i dywedir ei fod. O herwydd ped fuasai, Pa fodd i mae ei gyfieithydd yn medru ei ddeongli mor hyfedr? I mae gwaith ein Beirdd ni, sydd gant o flynyddoedd ar ol hynny, tu hwnt i ddeall y Gwyr cywreiniaf a medrusaf yn yr hen *Frutaniath*. Pwy o honom ni a gymmerai’r *Gododin*, Gwaith *Aneurin Gwawdrydd*, Fychdeyrn Beirdd, a’i gyfieithu mor llathraidd ag i gwnaeth cyfieithydd *Ffingal a Themora*? Ir wyfi yn meddwl nad oes neb a ryfygei gymmeryd y fath orchest arno.
7. The full title is ‘A Dissertation concerning the Antiquities, & c. of the Poems of Ossian the Son of Fingal.’ The quotation is from the 1765 edition of *The Works of Ossian: Fingal* (Gaskill ed. 1996: 49f).
8. The pictorial nature of *The Bard* can be explained from the fact that Gray was inspired by two paintings in his portrayal of the Welsh bard, Raphael’s Vision of Ezekiel and Parmingianino’s Moses breaking the Tablets, not to mention the picturesque figure of the actual bard John Parry. See Correspondence 476f.
9. Daines Barrington encouraged Evans to translate Welsh bardic poetry and showed them to Thomas Gray. Thomas Percy also supported the publication through correspondence with him.
10. Ond gan i’r *Saeson* daeru, na feddwm ddim mewn prydyddiaeth a dâl ei ddangos; mi a wnaethum fy ngorau er cyfieithu y Casgliad bychan yma, i fwrw heibio, os yw bossibl, y gogan hwnnw:
11. Eithr yn amser y Tywysogion, ... ir oedd y Beirdd yn dystion o ddewredd a mawfrydigrwydd [sic] eu Tywysogion; ac ir oeddynt eu hunain yn filwyr glewion. ... Heblaw hyn, ir oedd y Tywysogion yma yn fuddugawl yn eu rhyfeloedd a’r *Saeson*, ac ir oedd hynny yn peri i’r Beirdd ymorchestu, i dragywyddoli eu gweithredoedd ardderchog; ac i foli eu gwroldeb, mewn achos mor glodfawr ag amddiffyn eu Gwlad a’u Rhyddid, yn erbyn Estron genedl, a’u difuddiasei o Dreftadaeth eu Hynafiaid. Ir oedd y rhain yn ddiau yn Destunau gwiw i Feirdd ganu arnynt, ac yn fodd cymmwys i beri i’w Deiliaid eu perchi a’u hanrhydeddu;
12. It is interesting to see the profound impact of Ossian on German cultural scenes alongside the

Welsh reception. Though I am yet prepared for a full discussion, I would like to suggest that the sense of affinity the Welsh traditionally felt in the Mediterranean world might explain their lack of enthusiasm in the Ossianic poems. In the period of emerging nationalism, most of northern European countries sought for the ground of their national identity against the Graeco-Roman heritage. To them, the ethos, the landscape, the diction and the mythology found in the work of Ossian represented the specimen of indigenous cultures rooted in the Norse cultural milieu, quite independent of the Mediterranean muse. On the other hand, the Welsh lore tended to associate their origin to the Trojan Brutus or the Hebrew Gomer, but seemingly not so positively to the specifically Northern terrain.

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