Mythmaking, Madoc, and Movement:

Manifestations of Welsh Patriotism in the Long Eighteenth Century

Clara Zonis

Professor Morrison

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In the mid-twentieth century, Welsh poet R.S. Thomas wrote, "There is no present in Wales, and no future; there is only the past."[1] Ideas about the medieval have always seemed to creep into the everyday lives of the Welsh, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also in the present day. This predisposition to the past arises in their language—Welsh teachers have joked that there is no future for Welsh, but with enough activism and outreach, there could be—a joke which refers to the lack of a future tense in Welsh as well as the minority status of the language, which has improved over the past few decades. But the past is present in more than just linguistics. It is apparent in the features of the landscape, through Welsh poetry, and especially in the stories they tell about themselves. This sentiment, that the past is "not such a foreign country,"[2] as historian Mary-Anne Constantin has said, has been repeated by countless Welsh poets, academics and intellectuals, and speaks to an idea that would seem quite alien to people from many other cultures—this idea that the history of a place and its people is never too far away. However, there is a question of how *true* the historical traditions that the Welsh participated in during this period were. In a country where cultural mythology and origin story is so integral to the contemporary culture, the line between fact and fiction, between history and myth, was and still is blurred. The Welsh certainly engaged in the processes of mythmaking in before the eighteenth century—much of their proto-patriotic poetry focuses on ideas of a mythic origin for the Welsh people which depended on the reproduction of oral story traditions into spoken poetry and written narratives. But in the eighteenth century, mythmaking accelerated in Wales as patriotic sentiments grew and, in the latter part of the century into the early nineteenth century, British Romanticism grew as a literary movement that influenced cultural movements of

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[1] Thomas, R.S. "A Welsh Landscape" in *The Poems of R.S. Thomas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1986).
[2] Constantin, Mary-Anne. ""British Bards": The Concept of Laboring Class Poetry in Eighteenth-Century Wales" in Goodridge, John and Bridget Keegan *A History of British Working Class Literature.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 103.

so-called "Druidomania" and "Celtomania"[3] in Wales. Cultural mythology motivated people in Wales to build intellectual movements, but ideas about a mythic past, that is, a past that has been mythologized, also motivated some people in Wales to emigrate and create diasporic communities. This, especially, was motivated by stories about a twelfth century Welsh prince, named Madoc, who supposedly traveled from his home in Wales to America in the twelfth century, in order to escape the wars of succession that erupted among his brothers after their father's death. His story had been told throughout history in various forms, and while some Welsh idealists thought of it as justification for their ideas about emigration or new Welsh colonies, at the same time the myth of Madoc had also been used to legitimize British colonialism in the Americas in a way that superseded the original "claim" of both the Spanish conquistadors and the indigenous people of the Western hemisphere.

A HISTORY OF WALES AND MYTH-MAKING

Many historians tend to look at Welsh history as a part of the whole that is English history, despite the fact that Wales still has its own unique history. They almost tend to look at Wales as a region of England, despite the fact that it is its own nation. The reason that scholars of the eighteenth century tend to consider Wales as a part of England is that, by the time that the Act of Union in 1707 was ratified, bringing Scotland into the United Kingdom and establishing much of the Great Britain that we see today, Wales had already been united with England politically for hundreds of years. And by the time that the 1800 Act of Union which integrated Ireland into the extant United Kingdom was ratified, Wales had already been part of the English state for two-hundred and sixty-five years. In 1535, Henry VIII passed the Laws in Wales act,

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[3] Jenkins, Geraint A. "Wales in the Eighteenth Century" in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons Inc.) 2002, 399.

which integrated Wales into the English political system so that they became the Kingdom of England and Wales. England had already had political control over Wales for two hundred and fifty years before this point, as the last independent Welsh prince, Llewelyn ap Gruffudd, was killed by the armies of Edward I of England in 1282. Henry VIII's Laws in Wales act solidified Wales as a part of the Kingdom of England and Wales, strengthening the once the marginal control that the English had had over Wales. The law made it so that the Welsh became subjects of the English king, and thus subject to the same laws as English subjects. The introduction to the Laws in Wales Act of 1535 explains that:

> Because that the People of the same Dominion have and do daily use a [speech] nothing like, ne consonant to the natural Mother Tongue used within this Realm, some rude and ignorant People have made Distinction and Diversity between the King's Subjects of this Realm.[4]

The law essentially stated that because Welsh people who were living under English rule spoke a different language, it gave people the impression that they were not subject to the same statues and decrees that the King of England and his parliament instituted. Therefore, this law was implemented in order to make clear that the Welsh were subjects of the same king and the same laws, as the English crown attempted to consolidate power over both England and the Principality of Wales. The law also stated that no person who spoke Welsh could hold political or legal office in England, Wales, or anywhere else that the King held control of, or else they would lose their office and the privileges it came with.[5] Even still, most people in Wales continued to speak Welsh, although by consequence of this law, the landed gentry in Wales were quickly anglicized in order to maintain status, which had far-reaching effects on the culture of Wales for centuries to come. The Laws in Wales acts were not repealed until 1993, meaning that

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[4] "Laws in Wales Act 1535 (repealed 21.12.1993)." legislation.gov.uk. The National Archives.
[5] King Henry VIII. *Laws in Wales Act 1535.* (Dalcassian Publishing Company, 2019), 14.

they were in effect for the entirety of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. As we encounter the writings of Welsh poets and patriots from this period of the "long eighteenth century", it is important to understand that this law was part of the background for the entire development of the Welsh patriotic movement and informed their view of the world in ways that aligned them with the Medieval and Renaissance Welsh past. Welsh people in the eighteenth century were not simply thinking back on and wishing for some nebulously medieval idealized past, the way that modern people today think back on, say, the 1950s in America as a perfect and idyllic time. Instead, they were thinking about this idealized version of the medieval past because it was the last time in which they were an independent "nation." By aligning themselves with this independent Wales of days gone by, Welsh people in the eighteenth century were manufacturing an identity as a group of people who were distinct from the English who ruled over them. Many historians in recent decades have written about the way that Welsh identity manufactured itself in opposition to English hegemony through means of historical retellings, poetry, mythology, and eventually, political activism.

The historian Gwyn A. Williams wrote, in his essay entitled, "When was Wales?" that the Welsh people, "make and remake day by day, year after year," and that Wales is "an artefact which the Welsh produce."[6] Which is to say, the country of Wales is more than just land—it is its people and their continued cultural memory. This is a romantic idea, but it is one that many other Welsh historians, authors and poets have echoed in different ways. Williams was a cultural historian, and, according to his website, "an authority on modern Socialism and Marxism," and "the history of Wales, especially in respect of its urban and Radical traditions in the eighteenth

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[6] Williams, Gwyn A. "When Was Wales?" (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1979), pp. 23.

and nineteenth centuries."[7] His lecture "When Was Wales?" works as an important framework for understanding the way that the Welsh think about their history by explaining the path that Welsh history has taken and gives special attention to the problem of Welsh identity: what it means to be Welsh, now and in the past. He explained that the Welsh "are a people with plenty of traditions but no historical memory," and, furthermore, "no historical autonomy."[8] What this means is that Welsh history has always existed as a peripheral concern of historians of English history, and very rarely is any historical work done on Wales specifically. This is what makes tradition and cultural mythology so important in Wales—when you do not have the means or the autonomy to study your own history, you tell the stories that have been passed down to you through generations instead. Williams investigated one of Wales's more important cultural myths in his book *Madoc: The Legend of the Welsh Discovery of America.* In this book he was especially attentive to the various ways in which both the Welsh and the English utilized the legend of this twelfth century Welsh prince for their own means and, be they colonial or escapist in nature. He also investigated the legend of the so-called "Welsh Indians" who supposedly descended from Prince Madoc, the effects of their myth and the "Madoc fever" which "gripped both sides of the Atlantic in the 1790s."[9] His work pays special attention to the myths that people *believed* about Madoc, and by extension, themselves.

The legend of Prince Madoc is one that fundamentally connects the Welsh people at this time to their medieval past, whether or not that past is true to life. At this time, the Welsh were nominally interested in preserving their past to raise Wales and the Welsh people to their

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[7] "Gwyn Alfred Williams," Professor Gwyn Alfred Williams: a people's remembrancer, last updated April 6, 2016. https://www.gwynalfwilliams.co.uk/index.php#

[8] Gwyn A. Williams, "When Was Wales?" p. 13

[9] Williams, Gwyn A. *Madoc: The Legend of the Welsh Discovery of America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), back cover.

idealized former glory. In the eighteenth century, according to Geraint Jenkins, Wales was "a quiescent backwater,"[10] and "since 98 percent of the population were disenfranchised, there was no 'Welsh question' or possibility of contesting English hegemony."[11] In response to their general disenfranchisement and in order to take control of their own historical narrative, Welsh people were engaged in the practice of cultural mythmaking. Cultural mythmaking is an imprecise term but can be said to generally refer to the way that societies produce and reproduce popular narratives, histories, and mythologies in order to define a people group and tell them who they are or where they came from. These stories are not necessarily always true—what matters is that a society believes them, and that that belief influences their actions and relationships amongst themselves and in interactions with other people-groups. So, although the stories the Welsh people told about their past were certainly inspired by real historical events and trends, the stories they told and chose to preserve said much more about how they perceived their present situation and their future than it did about the actual medieval past of Wales. This narrative dissonance was the case for the mythology that emerged surrounding the legend of Prince Madoc, just as it was the case for the mythology about their origins as a people-group.

In Geraint H. Jenkins' chapter "Wales in the Eighteenth Century" from H.T. Dickinson's *Companion to Eighteenth Century Britain,* he looks at the context of larger cultural movements, especially the growth of Welsh religious movements throughout the eighteenth century like Methodism. Although much of his chapter is focused specifically on investigating the origins and developments of religious movements in Wales, much of the context for these movements are also important as context for the growing awareness of "Welshness" and cultural mythmaking

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[10] Jenkins, Geraint A. "Wales in the Eighteenth Century" in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons Inc.) 2002, 394.
[11] Ibid, 394.

that learned middle-class Welsh people were engaged in during this time. He discusses the growing literacy of common people in Wales, both "septuagenarians weeping with joy as they acquired rudimentary reading skills in their twilight years" and "precocious five-year-old children who became fluent readers of Welsh within three months."[12] Growing literacy rates allowed for more people to participate in their cultural history through reading and writing, or as Jenkins says, "the upsurge in educational provision revitalized the established church, [...] and injected a new life into the native tongue,"[13] and also betokened a powerful desire for education and self-improvement."[14]

Jenkins also addresses the growing relevance of print culture which coincided with the growing literacy rates, to the point that in 1718 there was only one printer in the whole of Wales,[15] but by the end of the century, "there were fifty printers sustaining a flourishing book trade throughout Wales."[16] This is important because print culture contributed hugely to the popularity of poets like Edward Williams who published his poetic work in pamphlets, a form of literature which became prevalent due to the growing accessibility of printmaking. Like many other Welsh historians studying this period, Jenkins pays special attention to the antiquarian movement in Wales, as books like Edward Lhuyd's *Archaeologia Britannica* (1707) which "demonstrated the common Celtic origin of the Breton, Cornish, and Welsh languages,"[17] and contributed to the dual phenomenon of "Celtomania" and "Druidomania." Jenkins believes that Lhuyd's book is responsible for a, "new appreciation of the affinity of the Celtic languages"[18]

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[12] Jenkins, 398.
[13] Jenkins, 398.
[14] Jenkins, 398.
[15] Jenkins, 398.
[16] Jenkins, 398.
[17] Jenkins, 399.
[18] Jenkins, 399.

but that his "untimely death" led to "a propensity for fantasy and myth-making."[19] While Jenkins seems to attribute this affinity for mythmaking during this period to widespread misreading of books of legitimate scholarship, people have always used their history to understand their present, especially when they mean to push a specific agenda, in this case, the glorification of Wales and Welsh culture. Nevertheless, he attributes much of the cultural mythmaking during this period to the "scholars and savants who established London-based societies like the Cymmrodorion (1751) and the Gwyneddigion (1770)."[20] In all, Jenkins' chapter is an important overview of the cultural movements in Wales during the eighteenth century in the context of religion, growing literacy, and a growing need to create national myths about Wales's origins in a rapidly changing world. His work provides context for the sort of culture that Welsh people were operating in and gives context to how people thought about themselves at this time.

In contrast to the historians working in the field of Welsh history, many non-Welsh historians have taken a much different view on the path that Welsh culture took in the eighteenth century. Traditional historians take a more conservative look at Welsh cultural identity—they tend to lump Welsh culture in with broad English phenomenon in the centuries succeeding the sixteenth, as Wales's governmental powers were officially tied to England's during that century. By the eighteenth century, the political bond between Wales and England was more or less completely solidified, and Welsh people of the upper classes were moving between Wales and England at an increased rate. The historian Linda Colley, who wrote the book, "Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837" took a position on British nationalism which was at once new and controversial yet very traditional in terms of her discussion of Wales's part in this "British

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[19] Jenkins, 399.
[20] Ibid, 399.

nationalism" which she conceptualized. Colley approaches the beginnings and development of so called "British" nationalism by way of discussing how the countries which were part of the UK participated in this union between the countries, as opposed to how they may have seen themselves in the context of their own countries. She explains that "war with France brought Britons into confrontation with an obviously hostile Other and encouraged them to define themselves collectively against it."[21] Basically, Colley argues that opposition to the French, and to Catholicism, allowed the insular nations included in the United Kingdom to give up defining themselves in opposition to each other, and allowed for the growth of a homogenized nationalism which encompassed England, Scotland, and Wales. In Colley's conception of the early United Kingdom, there was a unity between the nations of that insular island which is reinforced by a cultural myth that pits the Protestant Britons against the Catholic French. To her, this Protestant unity was a more important binder than any myths that nations within the United Kingdom might have come up with about themselves.

Colley did not leave any room in her argument for the divisions between Protestant religions, for one thing. She argued that opposition to Catholicism acted as "a powerful cement between the English, the Welsh, and the Scots"[22] even as there were "abundant and serious"[23] dissonances between the different Protestant sects which obviously divided them as well. In terms of Protestant religion in Wales, she asserts that "over eighty different Welsh language almanacs are known to have circulated [in Wales] in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries"[24] and quotes Geraint H. Jenkins as saying that all these almanacs were "shot through

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[21] Colley, Linda. *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 5.
[22] Colley, 23.
[23] Colley, 19.
[24] Colley, 22.

with the most vigorous anti-Roman animus"[25] Colley's idea of a unified Protestant nation is ideal for her argument, but it is not well supported. Looking at James Horn's chapter "British Diaspora: Emigration from Britain, 1680-1815" in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Eighteenth Century*, we see that Welsh emigration trends in the eighteenth century do not support her claims. Horn explains that while for the most part, "Welsh emigration can be accounted part of the broader English movement" one notable exception to this rule was the "movement of Nonconformists, notably Quakers and Baptists," who emigrated to America in "a steady if modest flow"[26] Just religious divisions within Colley's conception of a nebulously Protestant United Kingdom was enough to drive Welsh people out of Wales. This is easy to see, and the stories that people in Wales were telling about themselves and about their English neighbors would reinforce this division in a way that Colley's argument, Anglocentric as it was, could not or did not account for.

POETRY AND PATRIOTISM IN WALES

The Welsh tradition of poetry writing and recitation goes back centuries, into the early Middle Ages, as bardic figures like Taliesin and Aneirin were creating and performing poetry in the fifth and sixth centuries. During the Medieval period, poetry read in the courts was highly regulated and was often generated as a means of flattering a prince or lord into taking certain actions, usually through complex verse and historical or mythological allusion. This may not seem important to a discussion of the production of poetry in the eighteenth century, but when one is discussing Welsh poetry, this connection is essential. Poetry was an extremely important cultural product in Wales during the Middle Ages, and the Middle Ages were an extremely

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[25] Jenkins, Geraint H. in Colley, Linda *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837,* 22.
[26] James Horn, "British Diaspora: Emigration from Britain, 1680-1815" in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 38-39.

important aspect of the Welsh identity during the eighteenth century, and beyond. The poets of the eighteenth century often consciously alluded to Medieval poets and concepts in their own work, and many used traditional Medieval poetic forms. These poets of the eighteenth century considered themselves the inheritors of their medieval literary traditions in a way that was very different from the new literary movements of their English neighbors. This is not to say that divisions did not exist between different groups of poets. For example, as we will see later, there was somewhat of a class division between writers at this time, and so many poets who came from upper- and middle-class backgrounds valued the traditional forms of Welsh poetry passed down, likely orally, from the Middle Ages, while laboring class poets more often worked with newer forms like ballads. Traditional Welsh poetry was notoriously complex in terms of form, as it depended greatly on corresponding consonants, rhyme, *and* stressed syllables, a combination which took great skill to achieve. And, due to their complexity, even Welsh speakers may have a difficult time parsing traditional Welsh verse. Because of this, some poets worked in freer verse poetry, writing things like ballads and hymns that had fewer constraints in terms of the syllabic and alliterative qualities of forms like the *cynghanedd* or "chiming" form, or one of the many *englynion* forms which are much more traditional and take greater skill.

Systems of court poetry developed throughout the Middle Ages but had fallen out of the cultural retinue by the early modern period, as much of Wales's native institutions had either been subsumed into the English systems or destroyed. Historian Mary-Ann Constantine explains that "by the mid-eighteenth century the social structures which sustained professional Welsh poetry had all but crumbled" because "many of the gentry were non-Welsh-speaking either because they were English who had married into Welsh families or because their political and social focus was on London, Chester, Bath, or Bristol and they spent relatively little time in

Wales."[1] Celtic identity and especially Welsh identity had become more difficult to maintain a connection to, especially for the upper echelons of society if they wanted to maintain their wealth and their status. As Linda Colley says, men of status in the so-called Celtic Fringe often married English wives because it allowed them "improved access to influence and power,"[2] especially in that it gave them access to "higher echelons of state employment at home, something which greater Celtic affluence could not by itself necessarily accomplish."[3] Celtic elites created connections with their English neighbors that worked to their advantage, but an unintended side effect of the Welsh elites maintenance of power was this "crumbling" of the social structures which had supported professional Welsh poets during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Professional poetry simply was not a priority for the Welsh elites at this time. This development, in combination with the lack of interest by what central social institutions did exist in Wales, like the Welsh Anglican church, in maintaining "Welsh language culture"[27] led to the breakdown of the kind of professional Welsh poetry which had existed in previous centuries. Those poetic systems of patronage had been almost entirely supported by upper class people and especially noble families in Wales. Instead, from this point on, the creation of Welsh language poetry was left mostly to "amateurs and antiquarians."[28]

The production of poetry became a middle- and lower-class affair, which was supported by the increased literacy of the lower classes in this period. But because professional poetry had almost entirely died out, very few poets were proficient with the traditional forms, the *canu caeth,* meaning constrained verse. Instead, many working-class poets wrote in *canu rhydd,* or free verse. This, according to Constantin, led to some disdain from the educated middle-class

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[27] Constantin, 103.
[28] Constantin, 103.

poets, who wanted the traditional forms to take precedence. Poets like Evan Evans, an Anglican minister, and Goronwy Owens, widely regarded as one of the most talented poets of this era of Welsh poetry, called the poets who wrote "free meter" poetry, "rhymesters" and "bumpkins"[29] Even still, these "bumpkins" were responsible in large part for the revival of the uniquely Welsh poetic movement in this period. There was this "kind of poetic social mobility"[30] that formed, which allowed for different demographics to be involved in the production of poetry, but these new, laboring class poets often met together in "local *eisteddfodau* (poetic gatherings, usually held in taverns)" and these occasional meetings eventually gave rise to the National *Eisteddfod*, which "would be more formally revived at the end of the 1780s by the London Welsh societies."[31] The National *Eisteddfod* still exists today, although its modern iteration was founded in 1861;[32] it is an important poetry competition in Wales, where people from all over the country come to perform their poetry and music. The existence of the *Eisteddfod* To illustrate the importance of the laboring class poets in this new national movement, one should note that Edward Williams, a stonemason and perpetual wanderer, is today considered one of the founders of the *Eisteddfod.* As Wales struggled to keep up with the rapid growth of industry in England and Scotland, many of their people were living in relative poverty. But these people of the lower classes, as literacy rates increased, were instrumental in the formation of the modern Welsh love of poetry. They helped to further intertwine Welsh identity and the production of poetry.

Welsh poets, regardless of their background, did not just write poetry for the sake of writing poetry—it was more than an art form. Welsh poets in the eighteenth century began

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[29] Constantin, 104.
[30] Constantin, 104.
[31] Constantin, 105.
[32] "About Us" Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Cymru, last modified May 15, 2022, https://eisteddfod.wales/about-us.

writing from a place of patriotic fervor where before Welsh poets had written mostly for the entertainment of their lords. During this time, poets began writing "Cambria poems,"[33] which glorified the country of Wales and its marginalized history. Evan Evans, also known by his bardic pseudonym *Ieuan Brydydd Hir,*[34] wrote a poem called *The Love of Our Country* which had a two-fold purpose in that it refuted negative English stereotypes about Wales, while also attempting to raise the status of Welsh history in the eyes of Welsh people themselves. It was written to Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, who was, according to Gwyn Williams, "a 'red-hot Welshman' ('hot-arsed' as a compatriot called him in discreet Welsh) and a great hater of Saxons."[35] In the introduction to the poem, Evans wrote that "the following poem was wrote chiefly to inculcate the love of their country to men of learning and fortune in Wales."[36] The main purpose of the poem was to draw up patriotic sentiment in Evans' fellow Welshmen, especially those of "learning and fortune," perhaps referring to the fact that much of the upper-class and the gentry in Wales had been thoroughly anglicized by the eighteenth century, and thus might require instruction on why they should love their country. Dr. Sarah Prescott explains in her chapter "Patriotic Poems of Eighteenth-Century Wales" that Evan Evans and other poets writing patriotic poems during this period were trying to "connect the poetic and the patriotic projects together" and that *The Love of Our Country* "[was] part of a broader attempt to wrest the representation of Wales and Welsh history away from 'Saxon' writers, who are inevitably partial and biased."[37] Hence Evans' note to the reader continued with a question: "What have I, who am a Welshman, to do with English poetry? I answer, That the ill usage our country has of late years

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[33] Prescott, Sarah. "'Cambria Triumphans': Patriotic Poems of Eighteenth-Century Wales" in *Eighteenth-Century Writing from Wales: Bards and Britons.* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), 85.

[34] Roughly translates to Evan the Tall Bard

[35] Williams, Gwyn, *Madoc,* 92-93.

[36] Evans, Evan. "The Love of Our Country" (Carnarvon, Printed by H. Humphreys, 1875) 5.

[37] Prescott, 87.

received from English writers will warrant and justify any, the very dullest retainer of the Muses to stand up in its defenses."[38] In this we see that Evans seemed to view it as his duty to write panegyric poetry to his country—in fact, he charged any writer, even the "dullest retainer of the Muses," which is to say, the worst of poets, to write something praising their country.

This poem was written with patriotism in mind, for the purpose of praising Evans' country. As was discussed earlier, the Medieval past played an indispensable role in the way that people, especially poets, understood and espoused their love of country, and Evans' "The Love of Country" was no exception to that rule. Within this poem, Evans mentioned many figures out of medieval Welsh history, and mentioned them specifically in the context of patriotic ardor. Of the medieval poet, Taliesin, he wrote that "Urien and Maelgwn, ancient heroes, shine / in thy fam'd odes, Taliesin the divine."[39] Taliesin was a famous Medieval poet from the seventh century,[40] whose works were recorded in a manuscript now known as *y Llyfr Taliesin* or "The Book of Taliesin," and Urien, who he mentioned in the line before, was Taliesin's patron. By calling on this bard from ages past Evans brought the medieval past back into the present tense and utilized the past in order to form a cohesive patriotic narrative that had use for him in his eighteenth century life. He alluded to other poets and heroes of that period in the same stanza, saying that "Old Llywarch and Aneurin still proclaim, / How Britons fought for glory and fame; / Whole troops of Saxons in the field they mow'd."[41] Old Llywarch referred to the early Medieval poet known most commonly as Llywarch Hen[42] and Aneurin[43] was a contemporary of Taliesin

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[38] Evans, 5.
[39] Evans, 14.
[40] Edward Williams, also known as Iolo Morganwg, named his son, Taliesin Williams, after this famous Medieval Welsh bard.
[41] Evans, 14.
[42] *Hen* means old.
[43] Also spelled Aneirin, as seen elsewhere in this paper.

famous for writing *The Gododdin*, a sixth century elegy written for the warriors who died in the north of Britain at Catraeth. By naming all of these ancient poets in his poem, Evans implicitly aligned himself with those poets and the poetic tradition that he attempted to carry on in the name of patriotic love for his country. From there he recounted the rest of Welsh history, making sure to mention notable Welsh national heroes from the medieval and early modern period such as "good King Howel"[44] and "Glyndwr."[45] Evans discussed history in order to express his patriotic fervor, and by doing so reiterated the importance of medieval history to the contemporary Welsh conception of their Welsh identity. And, by doing so in poetic form, he reinforced the Welsh love of poetry and its part in Welsh identity as well.

The way that poetry was produced in Wales was changing dramatically in the eighteenth century. Before, in the medieval period, the professional poets of Wales wrote their poems in praise of their lords under a highly codified system of poetic training and recitation. But due to the breakdown of the professional poetic system after the English usurped power from the Welsh in the early modern period, poets in Wales were freer to experiment with form and content. Many poets came from middle- and lower-class backgrounds, as rates of literacy were increasing in Wales at this time which made poetry writing a much more accessible vocation. Even with these advances taking place, though, Welsh poets still felt beholden to tradition in many ways. Wales manufactured its own national identity which was separate from English or British identity by "locat[ing…] their patriotism in the glory of Wales bardic past and the resilience of the Welsh language."[46] Welsh poetry, especially patriotic poetry, in the eighteenth century, and

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[44] Evans, 19. Howel the Good, known in Welsh as Hywel Dda, was famous for writing the traditional Welsh law code followed from the tenth century and which was voided by the Laws in Wales acts of 1535 and 1542. Alluding to Hywel clearly shows the relevance of this centuries old offence even in the eighteenth century.

[45] Ibid, 23.

[46] Prescott, 85.

despite advances in form and function, relied very much on narratives and figures from the past to form its meaning. Narratives from the past were important to the Welsh identity during the eighteenth century, making them important to Welsh-identified poetry during that time period. While a lot of poetry addressed national heroes, one specific national hero became more prevalent during the eighteenth century. As the eighteenth century wore on, more and more stories and poems addressed the subject of Prince Madoc, and his journey to America.

MADOC

According to historian Jerry Hunter, the first known mention of the hero Madoc comes to us from the 15th century. As with many of the traditional narratives from Wales, this first version of Madoc came to us from a poem. Maredudd ap Rhys, a late Medieval Welsh poet, wrote a short *cywydd* poem, in which he compared himself as the speaker of the poem to a character named Madog. We see no evidence of any of the colonial connections or allusions to an exodus from Wales to America or any other location. The only real hint of the dimensions the story would take on later was that this Madog was the son or heir in some way, of Owain of Gwynedd, and was apparently skilled as a sailor. Hunter's translation of the Welsh poem reads,

> Splendid Madog, of great countenance,
> Proper scion of Owain Gwynedd,
> He did not desire land, he was my inspiration,
> Nor [did he desire] great wealth other than the seas.[47]

There is no mention of Madoc's journey to America, or any other foreign land, as we come to see in later texts. Of course, this poem was written before Columbus' journey to the Americas, and thus poems and narratives written about Madoc's seafaring ways take on a different

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[47] Jerry Hunter. "Myth and Historiography: One Hundred and Sixty Years of Madog and the Madogwys." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 46 (2016): 39.

dimension after 1492. We see this in the *Historie of Cambria*, written originally in the 12th century by Caradoc of Llancarfan, then added to in the 16th century by Humphrey Llwyd, which was then translated, expanded upon and published in English by David Powel in 1584. In this book we find another early mention of Madoc son of Owain Gwynedd, but the story has been added to in great detail. Powel writes:

> *Madoc* another of *Owen Gwyneth* his [sons] left the land in contention betwixt his brethren, and prepared [certain] ships with men and munition, and sought [adventures] by seas, sailing West, & [leaving] the coast of Ireland so far north, that he came to a land [unknown], where he saw [many] strange things.[48]

Just as in Maredudd ap Rhys' poem, the author associated Madoc with Owain ap Gwynedd, here anglicized to *Owen Gwyneth*. But his story had become more detailed by this point—instead of simply being cast as a fine sailor, Madoc was instead a Prince of Wales, caught up in a war of succession between his many brothers after the death of his father. It becomes clear that, in this telling of the story, Madoc did not sail for pleasure or to hone his skill, but as a final effort to escape what was quickly becoming a dangerous and unmanageable situation. Powel says that Madoc encountered *manie strange things* in his travels to the "land unknown," and then continues:

> And [after] he had returned home and declared the [pleasant] & fruitfull countries that he had [seen] [without] inhabitants; and [upon] the [contrary] part, for what barren and wild ground his brethren and [nephews] did [murder] one another: he [prepared] a number of ships, and got with him such men and women as were desirous to [live] in quietnes[s], and taking [leave] of his [friends] [took] his [journey] thitherward again.[49]

In this section, Powel explains that Madoc returned home to Wales after escaping the violence of his brothers and wanted to tell them of the things he had seen in those "pleasant and fruitfull

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[48] Powel, David et al. *The historie of Cambria, now called Wales* pp. 227-228. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A17946.0001.001/1:28?rgn=div1;view=fulltext. Spelling modernized by myself.

[49] Powel, 228. Spelling modernized by myself.

countries," but upon seeing the destruction that his family had wrought upon their native land and upon one another, decided to leave once more with his companions, who wanted to "live in quietness" instead of suffering through the violence and instability of this period in Welsh history. The story seems altogether mythical, while it also speaks to the bloodiness of these familial conflicts over royal succession. The most important part, though, in terms of the Madoc legend as it came to be told in later times, comes when Powel says of the land Madoc escaped to "This land must needs be some part of that country of which the Spaniardes affirme [themselves] to be the first finders […]; for by reason & order of Cosmographie, this land, to the which Madoc came, must needs be some part of [Nova Hispania] or Florida."[50] Powel published this work in 1584, nearly one hundred years after Columbus sailed to the Americas. He asserted that Madoc's journey ended in what had become, by this point, New Spain, a choice which Jerry Hunter says speaks to the relevance of the "contemporary struggle between Britain and Spain."[51] After the "discovery" of the Americas by Christopher Columbus and the subsequent race for territory, the Pope gave a papal bull in 1493 which worked in tandem with a treaty between the Spanish and the Portuguese to "[divide] the New World between Spain and Portugal."[52] Then, during the Elizabethan era, there was an influx of Welshmen in positions of power in and around the English court, and they brought their Welsh stories and sensibilities with them. This, in concurrence with English Protestantism and open hostility with the Spanish because of the English desire to begin a colonial project, created the perfect storm in which English and Welshmen began writing stories about Madoc, the twelfth century Welsh prince who discovered America before the Spanish, in order to justify their colonial interests. Therefore, Powel was not

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[50] Powel, 228.
[51] Hunter, 42.
[52] Williams, *Madoc,* 40.

the only author interested in this as a topic, and he was not the only person to assert that Madoc discovered the Americas before the Spanish did for this very reason. Other written accounts from the same time come from the likes of John Dee, a Welsh mathematician and occultist employed in the court of Elizabeth I until he was attacked by a mob for being a magician, but who supposedly wrote his "Title Royal" addressed to Queen Elizabeth in order to justify Humphrey Gilbert's "application for colonization."[53] Humphrey Gilbert was an Englishman who had attempted to travel to the Americas before, but his ships sank and so Dee petitioned Queen Elizabeth for a second journey. In 1583, "Gilbert's fleet sailed, equipped with yet another map from Dee. [The expedition] failed. In September, Edward Hayes returned with news of its misfortunes and the death of its leader."[54]

This did not stop supporters of the colonial project from writing, or from using the Madoc story as justification for their ideals. George Peckham, another Englishman, wrote in his *True Reporte* (1583) that:

> [It] is very evident that the planting there shall in time right [amply] enlarge her Majesties Territories and Dominions (or I might rather say) restore to her Highness [ancient] right and interest in those Countries, into which a noble and [worthy] personage, [lineally] descended from the blood royal, borne in Wales, named Madock ap Owen Gwyneth, departing from the coast of England, about the [year] of our Lord God 1170 arrived and there planted himself, and his Colonies, and returned himself to England, leaving certain of his people there, as appeareth in an [ancient Welsh] Chronicle.[55]

Here we see clearly that Madoc's myth was used directly as a justification for British colonial rule in the Americas. Not only would creating colonies in America "enlarge her Majesties Territories and Dominions," Peckham asserts that conquering territory in the New World would

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[53] Hunter, 38.

[54] G. Williams, *Madoc,* 41.

[55] Peckham, George. *True Reporte,* 1583. Quoted in Williams, Gwyn A. *Madoc: The Legend of the Welsh Discovery of America,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 41.

actually "restore" the Crown's holdings in the New World, as a British prince had, supposedly, already formed colonies there. This idea became very important later on in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as these stories form the basis for both the Welsh intellectual idea that they could escape persecution in their native land by escaping to the Americas as we see in Powel's translation of the Welsh tale, but they also continue to be utilized in a colonial and imperial context, as the English continue to use the story to justify their power in America. In the Americas themselves, it shortly takes on a new kind of power, too. If Madoc left some of his men there in the Americas and possibly returned there himself, then by that logic his descendants would be living among the native tribes there, mixed in with the indigenous peoples of the New World. While in Elizabethan Wales and England, the legend of Madoc was used by intellectuals and imperial supporters for their own agendas, the myth of the "Welsh Indians" grew out of this idea that Madoc's descendants had assimilated into the indigenous people-groups of the American continents, and by the eighteenth century, legends about the "Welsh Indians" had become infused in the larger canon of popular Welsh cultural narratives.

Madoc's myth was uniquely utilized in the British political sphere, as the English used it to justify their colonial project in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, while the Welsh's use of the Madoc myth in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries took a different tone. We find that in this era, the Welsh fascination with Prince Madoc and his myth grew, and Welsh antiquarians during this period continued to tell the same or similar stories of Madoc's discovery of America. But in addition to retellings of the rather simplistic traditional narrative— Madoc leaving Wales to seek solace in America—these new purveyors of the myth began to include discussions and postulations about the supposed "Welsh Indian" descendants of Madoc and his companions. There were many different books and pamphlets written during the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the intent of investigating the origins of the "Welsh

Indians," or the *madogwys,* as they would come to be known. For example, in 1791, John

Williams, a reverend, published a book called "An enquiry into the truth of the tradition,

concerning the Discovery of America, By Prince Madog ab Owen Gwynedd, about the year,

1170," which investigated the myth of Prince Madoc, and compared it to the more widely

accepted histories of the first Europeans in the Americas.

In his appraisal of the story of Madoc, Rev. Williams relied on various sources which

discussed Madoc's mythical journey to America. One of his most interesting uses of a source

came when he tried to use the world of Giraldus Cambrensis, otherwise known as Gerald of

Wales, a medieval chronicler and popular source for stories about Welsh history. What is

interesting about his mention of Gerald of Wales' accounts is that he could not actually *use* any

of Gerald's work as a source for his investigation of Madoc's journey to Wales. He explained

that he "[could not] find any thing upon the subject [of Madoc's journey],"[56] which made sense

considering that stories of Madoc's journey to America did not actually date back to the time in

which Madoc probably lived, nearly concurrently with Gerald of Wales. But instead of taking the

absence of Madoc's story from Gerald's account as evidence that perhaps the legend was not

true, Williams tried to justify the absence. He explained:

> When Prince Madoc, the supposed first European discoverer of America sailed, Giraldus
> was about 25 years of age, and probably abroad for education. He therefore might have
> no intelligence of transactions which took place in a distant and, to him, little known part
> of the world.[57]

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[56] Williams, John. *An Inquiry into the Truth of the Tradition, Concerning the Discovery of America by Prince Madoc ab Owen Gwynedd, about the year 1170.* (London: Printed by J. Brown, 1791), accessed through the National Library of Wales, 1. https://www.library.wales/digital-exhibitions-space/digital-exhibitions/europeana-rise-of-literacy/history-books/an-enquiry-into-the-truth-of-the-tradition-concerning-the-discovery-of-america-by-prince-madog-ab-owen-gwynedd-about-the-year-1170#?c=&m=&s=&cv=6&xywh=-898%2C-1%2C3933%

[57] Williams, 6

Williams excused the lack of proving evidence in the works of Gerald of Wales by saying that

Gerald was likely away at university when the ships sailed to America. As humorous as this

image is, it is an important reminder of the weight which some scholars and antiquarians in

Wales during the eighteenth century still gave medieval thinkers and chroniclers like Gerald of

Wales. Luckily for Williams, Gerald of Wales was not the only source available to him. He also

used Humphrey Llwyd, whose work appeared previously in this paper as adapted by Dr. David

Powel in 1584. Williams claimed that Llwyd's account of Madoc's journey had "the strongest

Semblance of Truth, for it is plain, natural, and simple."[58] He also used a Richard Hayklut as a

source, a historian whose account of Madoc's journey was published in his work *Principle*

Navigations in 1599.[59] The text of Hayklut's account was nearly identical to that of Powel's,

giving us more evidence that people were telling pretty much the same story about Madoc from

the first publication of his journey onward. One other interesting note from John Williams'

Enquiry comes toward the end of the book, in which he refutes suspicions against the truth of

Madoc's journey to America. According to Williams, a Dr. Robertson claimed that Dr. Powel

and Humphrey Llwyd's accounts of Madoc's discovery of America were not to be believed

because there was no evidence. But Williams refutes this, first by saying that "there are several

Events, mentioned in History, now commonly believed, which have no memorials."[60] But then

he said something very interesting—he mentioned "the poems of Ossian and Fingal" which were

apparently written some 1400 years after the events described in them transpired. Williams then

said that "the silence of History for about 1400 years is much more unfriendly to the Authenticity

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[58] Williams, *Enquiry,* 8.
[59] Davies, Arthur. "Prince Madoc and the Discovery of America in 1477." *The Geographical Journal* 150, no. 3 (1984): 363–72. https://doi.org/10.2307/634332. p. 364.
[60] Williams, *Enquiry*, 63.

of these Poems, than that of about 400 to the truth of Madog's voyages."[61] Williams paid

attention to the time elapsed between the writing of the poem and the actual events described, but

believed that such a long amount of time was not too long for the story to be lost. There was a

willingness to believe in the legend of Madoc beyond what some would deem logical, which

shows the grip that the story had on the popular imagination at the time.

While antiquarians were trying to suss out the accuracy of Madoc's legend, his story

became a popular tool for Welsh political poets in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who

were looking to influence emigration and political movements. Edward Williams, for example,

the poet from Glamorgan who was responsible in part for reviving the National *Eisteddfod,*[62] and

also for re-creating the practice of Druidism in his own image, became fascinated with the legend

of Madoc when, according to Gwyn Williams, "he saw warships leave for the American War"[63]

which is to say the American Revolution. One could say that this image being the cause for

Edward Williams' remembrance of Madoc's legend is an indicator of the power that Madoc had

as a colonial, imperial figure in the eighteenth century, even though the imperial origins of

Madoc's myths, from writers like John Dee and George Peckham, were hundreds of years old by

that point. Although not in direct response to the image of ships leaving to fight in the

Revolutionary War, Williams later wrote a poem which explicitly addressed both the general

Welsh origin myths about Saxon or English oppression and the story of Madoc's escape to

America. Williams' poem was called "Address to the Inhabitants of Wales. Exhorting them to

emigrate, with William Penn, to Pennsylvania" and it first appeared in print in his pamphlet

"Poems and Pastorals Vol. II" (1794). The aim of the poem was to draw comparisons between

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[61] Williams, 64.
[62] Williams, *Madoc,* 101.
[63] Ibid, 100.

the violence of Madoc's brothers' war of succession, and the oppression that the Welsh suffered at the hands of the English from the Middle Ages to the then-present day. The Address is an important microcosm of the "rage to go to America,"[64] which overtook much of the Welsh middle-class in the late eighteenth century. Furthermore, the role that Madoc's journey to America played in the poem's narrative speaks to the importance that Madoc took on as a prefiguration of the possibility of Welsh emigration. In the first section of the poem, Williams rehearsed the popular story of Welsh oppression at the hands of the English. The poem begins by addressing a presumably Welsh reader, as it says, "YE, sprung from Britain's ancient race, / Whilst Tyranny, with shameless face, / Enslaves your native plains;"[65] Williams called the Welsh "Britain's ancient race" because of the widespread belief in Wales that their ancestors were the original inhabitants of the British Isles, going back all the way to the time before the Romans entered Britain. This speaks to the general importance of the Welsh connection to the past, and the way that connection informed the way that the Welsh felt about the English and about themselves. Because they saw themselves as the inheritors of the island, they in turn saw the English as those who exerted a tyrannical kind of power over them. Williams intentionally brought this context into the poem early so that it would connect with the driving message of the poem, that Welsh people should emigrate in order to escape the tyrannical rule of their *Saesneg*[66] neighbors.

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[64] Williams, *Madoc,* 95.

[65] Williams, Edward. "Address to The Inhabitants of Wales," in Edwards, Elizabeth, *English Language Poetry from Wales 1789-1806.* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013.) pp. 102.

[66] The Welsh word for "English." It is derived from "Saxon," the Germanic tribe that the English people are said to have descended from. The rivalry between the Welsh and the Saxons goes back to late Antiquity, as the Saxons were said to be responsible for pushing the Ancient Britons out of "England" all the way to the west coast, where Wales now is. This history and rivalry lives on in the Welsh language itself.

The way that Williams' poetry engaged with the traditional Welsh understanding of their relationship with the English as the oppressed versus the oppressor speaks to the staying power of that narrative in Welsh culture during the eighteenth century. Of course, this was not the only cultural narrative or myth that had a strong grip on Welsh society during this time—Williams also alluded to the story of Prince Madoc in this poem as a prefiguration of what he pled for his fellow Welshmen to do—escape from the "tyranny of a CROWN."[67] Except, instead of escaping bloody wars of royal succession like Madoc did in the twelfth century, they would be escaping the oppressive rule of the English Crown. Williams alluded not only to Madoc's escape from Wales, but also to earlier Welsh journeys to America that existed within recorded history. Specifically, Williams made use of the history of emigration of Welsh Quakers to Pennsylvania, led by William Penn only about a century earlier, between 1682 and 1700.[68] Penn and his people moved to Pennsylvania to escape religious persecution; laws were passed which forbid them from gathering or practicing their religion,[69] and so it was easy for Penn to persuade them to emigrate. Williams drew on this historical emigration movement to write his own poem pressing Welsh people to escape not religious persecution, but persecution on the basis of place of origin. He blended historical allusion with the beginnings of what would become nationalism in the late nineteenth and especially the twentieth centuries.

Turning back to Williams' use of Penn's journey to Pennsylvania, the poet urged his fellow Welshmen to "'scape with bounteous PENN / to distant Realms of Peace,"[70] in his "Address." He used this allusion to assure his reader that the emigration which he was urging

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[67] E. Williams, "Address", 106.

[68] Jenkins, Geraint H. *The Foundations of Modern Wales: Wales 1642-1780.* Edited by Glanmor Williams. (Oxford: University of Wales Press, 1987), 191.

[69] Ibid, 190.

[70] E. Williams, "Address," 105.

them towards had been successful in the past. Moving on from this more recent historical allusion, Williams brought in references to Madoc's journey to the Americas as a further personification of his hope for the possibility Welsh emigration. He set up this parallel by first saying that Madoc and his fleet, "quit the gory sod of Wales, / Proud Snowdon's height, Silurian vales, / And Mona's ravag'd plain,"[71] personifying the Snowdonia Mountain range as *proud,* even as he described the very land of the Welsh countryside as *gory* and *ravag'd.* In this section Williams used the Welsh landscape as a kind of symbol for the Welsh people as he viewed them—disenfranchised and in need of recovery, but still proud and full of history. Williams described the condition of the Welsh people by describing the landscape, and then gave them the solution for their perceived woe—Williams wrote, "Haste! and forsake your meagre hills / […] / Where Madoc's offspring still abides, Or in the Land where Penn presides, Will end our tranquil days."[72] Williams in this stanza explicitly linked the medieval past with the more recent, and used that linkage to push his audience to the final conclusion: that Welsh people must emigrate to America to escape oppression and live in peace.

In another, more implicit show of bringing the past into the present through the Madoc myth, Williams paraphrased a section of Dr. Powel's description of Madoc's journey in his *Historie of Cambria* in his "Address." Powel describes Madoc "[leaving] the coast of Ireland so far north, that he came to *a land unknowne"*[73] meaning the New World. In his "Address," Williams wrote that Madoc, "from the tumults of a Crown, / sought shelter in a *world unknown.*"[74] In this small line, we see how much the poets and historians of the eighteenth

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[71] Ibid, 106.
[72] E. Williams, 107.
[73] Powel, 228.
[74] E. Williams, 106.

century depended on the writings of the past to build their narratives about Madoc. He also took care to compare Madoc's flight from Wales, inspired by a war of royal succession between his brothers, to the exodus of Welsh people from Wales in the eighteenth century, escaping the oppressive rule of the English Crown. Williams' poem brought together various Welsh narratives in order to make his point about Welsh emigration. In essence, the poem's message was simple: *we as the Welsh people are being mistreated, therefore, we should leave just as our predecessors did.* But the poem brought in the historical and cultural context of the period in order to make Williams' message even more pressing and relevant to the people he wrote for.

The myth of Madoc's journey to America was hugely important to people in the British Isles from the Elizabethan era into the eighteenth century. It is still important to those with Welsh ancestry today—just as an example, the Welsh Studies Institute in North America is called the Cymdeithas Madog, or the Madog Society. The popularity of Madoc's story can be attributed to the Welsh identification with their medieval past in general, as they saw themselves as the inheritors of the British Isles. Their identification with the Middle Ages resulted from this perceived slight by the English, as well as the actual fact that Wales had not been an independent kingdom or country since the Middle Ages. And the Welsh people's identification with the Middle Ages resulted in their producing poetry that reproduced Medieval concepts and forms, even as they adapted and changed with the times. Madoc may not have actually traveled to America—in fact, he almost certainly did not. But the effects of his legend on the Welsh people who read it cannot be overstated or overlooked, just as the Welsh themselves can no longer be overlooked.

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