Dorian Llywelyn

Celticity

the second of three essays

Three Landscapes project
Stanford 2000 –

1.1

On Monday morning of the first week of August, 1984, in a stone circle in a park surrounded by houses, in the small Welsh coastal town of Fishguard, I was inducted as an Ovate of the Rank of Musicians, into the Order of Bards of the Island of Britain, and received a new title, by which I would henceforth be know in my dealings with that body - Telynor Tawe, the Harpist of the River Tawe, the river at whose mouth stands the city of Swansea, my home town.   Wearing the green robes of my rank, I was detained at the entry point of the circle by the Herald Bard, a large sheathed ceremonial sword blocking my way until the point when my name was called. I climbed the steps up to the central stone, where the Archdruid Elerydd, a Presbyterian minister, dressed in gold satin and wearing a golden torque around his neck, wittily welcomed me, and announced my new title to the crowd. The Mistress of the Robes then placed my new headress, a sort of veil, on my head, and I went to stand with the rest of my ranks.

The druidical ceremonies of the Gorsedd, the Order of the Bards of the Island of Britain, date back to the late 18th century, and are best understood in that context of social and political fervor. At an early point in the 19th century, the Gorsedd became attached to the national Eisteddfod of Wales: this cultural gathering is in itself reformatting of a medieval Welsh gathering of court poets and musicians, a recreation or restoration inspired by a group of literary Anglican parsons. Over the course of the 19th century the druidical Gorsedd seems to have been a typically Welsh mix of formality and informality, but its current form dates back to the 1930's, and indeed the druidic robes and rituals have more than an element of Hollywood and Art Deco around them.

Today Gorsedd and Eisteddfod represent a once-a-year manifestation of a particular form of national identity: a cultural one, where culture is closely defined around set forms of perfomative art, largely in the fields of literature and music; a linguistic one, for this is the one area of Welsh life which is officially monolingually Welsh; a social one, for this is the equivalent of a genteel taking the waters by a class of people; and a media event, for the bardic ceremonies are a rare visual expression of national identity in a culture which is aniconic or which has rendered invisible.

My own dealings with the Eisteddfod date back to my earliest years, when I saw it on television: what it was in my upbringing - blilingual, upper-working-class, industrial - that made me respond to it, I do not know, but I did know two, connected things: that it touched something I felt to be lacking in me concerning nationality, and that it was the beginning of a desire to play the harp, the national Welsh instrument which features prominently in the Gorsedd and eisteddfodic competetive art-forms.

When I asked at a very early age, I was told by my grandmother that harps were only played in North Wales, and that we were from the South. At a distance of many years, I recognize in my early longings and in my grandmother's response something about the nature of Welsh national identity - that it is often

experienced in terms of duty or guilt at insufficiency, that it is connected with performance, and that it is often considered to exist elsewhere.

My interest in the harp coincided with a political and linguistic awakening in my early adolescence, and was part of it, for I began to read voraciously not only about harps, harpists, and harp music, but to find out about eisteddfodic Welshness which was not part of my family's tradition, and learnt to speak and eventually write grammatically-refined Welsh. At the age of 15, becoming a member of the Gorsedd was one of my prime ambitions. I knew even then that its druidic pretensions had no historical base: but the aspirations, political and cultural, that the Gorsedd enshrined and represented, were also my aspirations. By the time I could actually sit the (comparatively easy) practical and theoretical entry exams (membership to the lower ranks is by exam or by invitation, this latter being a form of national system which honors individuals for their cultural contributions or outstanding achievements), I was on the point of entering the seminary to become a Catholic priest. At that point, I was consciously not only fulfilling an adolescent ambition, but saying something about the nature of the Welshness I aspired to, in which my religion would be accepted as an integral part of national identity: out of a membership of about 2000, the Gorsedd includes less than a dozen Catholics, most of whom are clergymen and scholars.

The particular nature of eisteddfodic druidry continues to baffle outsiders, for it is ceremony, rather than ritual. And although I often identify Welsh identity as being a sort of quasi-religion, the ceremonies of the Gorsedd are theist, but not that theist : Geraint, one eminent recent Archdruid, is a noted humanist. It would be a difficult task to dissect and describe and interpret the different levels of meaning and social interaction that the Gorsedd represents in Wales - and indeed beyond Wales. There exist now three sub-Gorseddau, in Cornwall, Brittany, and Patagonia, whose subtexts are different from Wales.   What is curious is how the fake ceremonies and even the costumes of the Gorsedd have been taken over by the various ranks of neo-pagan druids who gather for the solstices at Stonhenge and other places. A quick search of the internet amongst various grandly-titled eccentrics and New-Agers, reveals that Blakean imaginings of holy Britishness are alive and kicking, that the Druid revival of the 18th century and its associated purview, namely, Celticism, is with us still, a potent mythic crucible at the beginning of the third millennium, almost two thousand years after the disappearance of the last druids from the Isle of Britain.

1.2

Any great house, especially one in ruins, can easily serve as a magnet for myths - whether we understand "myth" in its a popular sense as an untruth, or in its more technical sense of a group of beliefs which enable a group of people to discover meaning and pattern in their lives. Whatever the historical reality untruth of these, they easily find a home in the field of meanings and shifting desires which such buildings embody.   Some of the earliest Welsh literature, the Canu Heledd, muses around ruins, the voice of the mad-woman who grieves for her kinsfolk lost in battle expressing a national grief which has echoed down through the centuries. One of the great topoi of Welsh literature is mieri lle bu mawredd -

now here are brambles where once was greatness - and antiquarian interest in ruins has in English literature a history dating back to at least Tudor times.

Hafod, the brambled ruin which was once the greatness of the estate of Thomas Johnes in upland Ceredigion has its own share of myths and half-truths: the Hafod ghost was well known in the large house which Johnes' Hafod replaced; the composer Handel was widely believed to have visited the house, and been inspired to write his 'Hallelujah chorus' by the lusty singing of the Methodists at nearby Llangeitho; Coleridge is believed to have been inspired to write his 'Kublai Khan' after visiting Johnes' pleasure-palace in the late 1790's; and the great fire at Hafod of 1805,, the uneven commercial success of Johnes' improving the capacities of the land at Hafod, the fire in the estate church in the 1930's which destroyed the iconic monument to Mariamne, daughter of Thomas and Jane Johnes, have all contributed to the belief in a 'curse of Hafod' body of myth.

It has been widely claimed that the first map of the estate - printed in George Cumberland's gushing An Attempt to Describe Hafod of 1796 - , was engraved by William Blake. Distinctive calligraphy with elaborate curlicues has been identified as being that of the poet. The map shows the location of features which have now disappeared - a conservatory, estate cottages; it does not include features which were added later, such as Mariamne's garden. And it anticipates one feature which both Cumberland and Johnes dreamed of adding - a "Druid temple. " One of Cumberland's walks describes the changing scenery of the Ystwyth valley, " in the midst, a smooth mound rises among the shades, and seems designed by nature as a center; where if a druid's temple never stood, a druid's temple is unquestionably called for."

Johnes, it seems, never built the Druidical Temple. But his desire to do so places him in the middle of an aesthetic and antiquarian current whose sources are distant, whose manifestations are varied and complex but which continues to flow today, not only in the Welsh National Eisteddfod nor Stonhenge. For as an Ovate of the Rank of Musicians I find myself, somewhat embarrassingly, to be part of a wide associative phenomenon which places me in my green robes, even at some distance, in the company of Glastonbury hippies, Cornish nationalists, Arthurian enthusiasts, believers in Celtic Spirituality of various hues, as well as more august scholars who worry away at irregular verb-forms in Old Irish or who dig holes in the ground at pre-historic Insular sites.

The attested history of the druids themselves is limited to a few, well known sources, Tacitus and Posidonius' accounts prime among them. It is precisely the scarcity of those classical sources which has continued to make the Druids such an attractive prospect in the imaginative reconstruction of the past, for the less that is known about them, the more can be projected on to them. Druidical interest of Johnes' own time is part of a wide ecology of enthusiasms which includes a number of fields: interest in the ancient British past, with all the shimmering ambiguity implied by the epithet "British" ;
the arts of picturesque landscape gardening, powered by the desire to discover or recreate evocatively the untouched urwelt of nature untouched by civilization;the 18th century rediscovery and creation of

national traditions, in the search for the past; and not least, exploration into the contested field of comparative Celtic linguistics, itself a political act.

Blake's own interest in Druidic lore found expression in his well-nigh incomprehensible ramblings on spiritual freedom in his Jerusalem. The history of the druids of the imagination is that of the Golden Age as socially desirable artefact, theatre of desire.   The long history of druidic manifestation well exceeds what I can say within the limits of this essay. It has in any case been written about in great detail by many writers. I wish merely to note its perdurance, but also its close relationship and overlapping with something closer to home - namely the world of Celticism. Amongst the few Welsh visitors to Hafod of whom there is record, two men stand out - Iolo Morgannwg (Edward Williams) and William Owen Pughe, both of whom were druidical and Celtic enthusiasts, and creators of important Welsh national myths which continue to influence the European-looking, post-industrial and cosmopolitcan Wales of the third millennium.

I have written in other places about insider and outsider views of Wales, making my j'accuse at the world of the Picturesque and its related world of hafodism, the creation of the rural retreat.   It is very clear that until the very last years of the eighteenth century (namely the apogée of the Picturesque), that even had they known about the existence of the Druids, no Welsh person would ever have considered themselves to have any direct connection with them. It would be easy to make the case for English interest in the re-creation and re-discovery of a distant British, druidical past present in Wales and other places, as typical imperialist strategy . The Romantic tourist (and is not all tourism Romantic?) after all, finds what she deserves or desires in the places she visits, often by a process which renders invisible or over-simple what is actually there.   In this case, Druidical interest could be seen as an exclusively outsider view. But the reality will not submit to such easy description or polarization.

We do not know Johnes' own attitude towards Wales and Welshness: the fragmentary evidence too susceptible to easy anachronistic reconstructions on our part. Johnes was culturally distant from the sort of Welshness which surrounded him, if by that we mean the monolingual tenantry of Hafod. On the other hand, he was also an eminent member of county society, and a patron of Welsh scholars. We have ample evidence however of the interests Iolo Morgannwg and William Owen. Iolo - a poet, stone-cutter, antiquarian, laudanum-addict and bankrupt - had visited Hafod to copy Johnes' medieval Welsh manuscripts . Pughe, a lexicographer and linguist, mixed in the same Welsh-exile circles in London as Iolo. He was responsible for publishing the first modern editions of medieval Welsh poetry, and is best remembered today as the author of a Welsh and English Dictionary which attempted to reshape Welsh orthography to reflect his belief that Welsh was the primitive ursprache of humankind, a changeless monument of ancient classicism. In London, both had mixed in Radical circles, and in 1792, Iolo held the first meeting of the Order of Bards of the Island of Britain, on Primrose Hill London - the intellectual capital of Wales. London was chosen for this public display - totally of Iolo's invention - of an order of Bards which he claimed descended in unbroken, apostolic succession, from the druids to Iolo himself. This theatrical, self-conscious display of nationality adumbrated later Romantic European cultural

nationalism.   And it is in this latter current that perhaps I find the meaning of my own membership of the Gorsedd.

Iolo's inventiveness included stunning literary forgeries, in terms of craft, they far supersede the work of Macpherson or Chatterton, and his poems in the style of Dafydd ap Gwilym, greatest of late medieval Welsh bards - were only detected as being forgeries in the first half of the twentieth centry. Beyond individual poems, he created a whole plethora of druidic lore.   To evaluate this juridically in terms of truth vs. lies is not a useful exercise, for to the extent that his desire was to create a dignified past for Wales on which to base a better future, then his projects can be seen as honorable ones. And most significantly, the myths created by Iolo have been long-lived, despite having been unmasked: despite their inventedness, they have taken on their own objective history. In each towns and city in Wales which the peripatetic Eisteddfod has taken place, the modern stone circles remain as a visual reminder of national aspirations to an ancient past which continues into the present. But in all honesty, I do not know what many people think these stones are, nor how many people know their real and imputed ancestry.

Despite their close connection and phenomenological similarity, there exists, I believe, a highly important difference between Iolo's espousal of druidism and the English interest. English 18th century druidism is essentially an a-historic, anti-intellectual , and dilettante escape from the modern realities of an aristocratic world. Iolo on the other hand co-opts Ancient Britain into a vision of history which demands a voice for and a visual expression of Wales : this is a conscious and self-conscious assertion of a nationality which must be performed in order for it to exist.

Iolo's signal willingness to espouse the most Romantic as well as the most revolutionary of theories makes of him a paradoxical figure. Despite his poverty, he saw himself as a dignified inheritor of the culture of ancient Britain, embodying and acting out a grandeur and grandiosity of cultural claims, and Iolo's myths have been a central, rallying point for Welsh cultural activity.   Yet without doubt, this visitor to Hafod was a major contributor to that myth of a static, timeless Wales which has not served the people of Wales well, and it is possible to see something in him of the Uncle Tom, folklorically playing out a caricature of nationality .

And yet Iolo also is an excellent example of the permeability of cultures, a typical European in the split between his avowed allegiances and the variegation of the influences which formed him : radicalism, Unitarianism, and the wider stage of late 18th century political and aesthetic ideologies. Much of Iolo's very self-consciously Welsh life was spent in England, and the Gorsedd itself is a creation of exile.   Like so many Welshmen, myself included, Iolo's ancestry and language was mixed and conflicted: his druid-myths can be seen as a longing for existential completeness. Since the finalization of the anschluss of Wales in 1536 by the Tudors, Welsh exiles had found themselves in London, and London continued to be the capital of Wales for several hundred years. Exilic consciousness is a significant part of Welsh life, in that many Welsh cultural entrepreneurs worked to create a new Wales from a position of exile in England and beyond. Yi-Fu Tuan notes that a sense of place is most strongly felt in exile. Similarly, a

wellknown Welsh adage claims that Gorau Cymro, Cymro oddi cartref - the most patriotic Welsh are those who live outside the country. Exile sharpens the awareness of existential difference, but also blurs the practical edges between cultures, and is a prime force towards cultural hybridity. There is much English DNA in what are perceived as such pure Welsh cultural manifestations as the Gorsedd.

If a simple cultural opposition of Welsh vs. English, insider vs. outside is insufficient, neither will one based on class do either: the literary and cultural societies to which Iolo belonged included sympathizers of Tom Paine. The Order of Bards at an early point in its existence was under government suspicion for its sympathies with Irish republicanism and French Jacobinism Iolo was also received by Johnes, Member of Parliament and a colonel in a militia. Likewise, Pughe, whose culturally-patriotic ideas of also contributed to a hermetically-sealed, timeless Wales , was also a member of the circle of Southey, a devotee of the English prophetess Joanna Southcottand received a D.Litt from the University of Oxford for his translation, into fairly execrable Welsh, of Milton's Paradise Lost.

And both Iolo and Pughe, in their own ways, were influenced by and contributed towards the Europe-wide Celtimania of the 18th century,

1.3

For a Welshman - and an academic Welshman, at that - to use to the world "Celt," is to walk on to contested and uncomfortable territory, for the term itself refers to a plethora of subjects, times, places and peoples.   In recent years, the "Celtic spirituality" movement has become a major publishing industry: like magazine editors putting photos of the Princess (sic) of Wales on their covers in the 1980's and 1990's, publishers know that to include "celtic" in titles increases sales. The phenomenon of neo-Celtic spirituality in its various versions - Irish and Catholic, generic and Anglican, pagan and new-age, feminist and ecologist - is worthy of analysis in itself. My own discomfort with it is partly scholarly, for it is a field which tends to be driven by emotions rather than rigor, and partly political: for I believe that "the Celtic", like 'the British," is a term which dissolves the awkward particularity and angst of Wales into a generic vagueness, embracing it into a wider commonwealth of soft edges and suave velleities. It is perhaps for this reason that in the Gorsedd ceremonies, where I know that there is an authentic social reality beyond the slightly daft ritual, I am embarrassed by the presence of the Great Bard of the Cornish Gorsedd in his theatrical tin crown, and by the tokenistic inclusion in the ceremonies of the Chairing and Crowning of the Bard of goodwill speeches in Manx and Cornish.

Classical references to Keltoi or Celtae are geographically and culturally vague - one claim is that the best translation of the word would be 'wogs.' In all cases, the term designates people who are 'not one of us,' namely not belonging to a world of civilization, either geographically or culturally, and it is a terms which had fallen out of use certainly by Late Antiquity. Much is speculation in the field of the Celtic, but one thing is certain, and held by all reputable scholars: no group of people ever referred to itself as being "Celts" or to their language, religion, or culture as being "Celtic" until the 18th century.

The linguistic work of the Welsh -born first keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, Edward Lhuyd was a milestone in the modern study of the Celtic languages. Lhuyd's own work arises out of a European-wide interest and search for the originary language of humanity. By the 18th century, the tangled web of Indo-European linguistics, archaeological and geological theories, were beginning to take something vaguely resembling their modern form. In European intellectual consciousness and fashion, the Celts re-emerged gradually between 1650 and 1850 from an ancient darkness, sometimes identified with the Ancient Britons - the pre-Roman, pre-Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of Wales, sometimes associated with the Druids, sometimes confused with Teutons, Gauls or Scythians or the offspring of Noah as the various national ur-myths were taken apart and reassembled. The work of linguistic archaeology always carried a political undertone, for Welshmen especially: Welsh being the signal badge of national identity, the possibility of showing it to be graced with an ancient pedigree equal to that of Hebrew, Greek, or Latin was a vindication of wounded national pride in the face of English representations of the language as gibberish.

Linguistically, aided by the theories, discoveries and mistakes of a not inconsiderable number of Welsh antiquarians and scholars, the understanding grew that the language spoken in Wales was in fact a linear descendent of the ancient British tongue, a discovery which went in tandem with two important developments : the discovery of the Welsh landscape, and the need to consolidate into a new Great Britishness, the Protestant hybrid-state created by the Union of England and Scotland in 1707. "British," formerly used to describe the Welsh, now became the descriptor of a new sense of nationality, defined by Protestant religion. The Union of Scotland, Ireland, and England (Wales having been assimilated into the English collective some two hundred years earlier), was an ideology dominated by the drive towards empire.

The instinct that the most ancient is also the most authentic posits an idea of time and history which flies in the face of the notion of progress. The search for the past - and the belief that it can be discovered and recovered was part of the great matrix of European Romanticism , and can be read simultaneously as a revolt against the values of the Enlightenment and as a lineal descendent of it. At the beginning of the 18th century an early account of a journey through North Wales describes the landscape of Wales is viewed by an anonymous lawyer as "the fag end of creation, the very rubbish of Noah's flood". This reflection applied creationist ideas equally to peoples as to geology. The mountainous landscape has not yet taken on any positive value for the metropolitan visitor. In a concatenation between place and inhabitant, the same writer describes the Welsh as sub-human, "some sort of pre-Adamites," also not ascribing any value towards the primitive or the pre-cultrual. Later on in that same century,the Picturesque landscape tradition alternately harmonized the landscape with inhabitants - by including in it only its most picturesque inhabitants -, or else emptied it of history or inhabitants, to the point where one Louisa Castle on a pleasure trip through Wales in 1838, sees Wales as "a country created by nature precisely for those English people who do not possess the time to seek diversions on the continent."

Somewhere between these two extremes lies the world of Celtic, druidic and bardic enthusiasm : this is an interested interest which may take benign as well as imperialist, indigenized as well as foreign forms, and it continues to be participated in by Welsh and English alike, although in various ways, as I have suggested was the case with Iolo and the English aristocratic enthusiasts. Literary historians conventionally date the exponential rise in interest in Wales with the publication of Thomas Grey's The Bard in 1757 - an account of the self-immolation of the last of the Welsh bards in defiance of an order by Edward I that the Welsh bards should be hanged for their 'disloyalty' to the English Crown. This account is historically dubious, attensted initiallly only in 1750. Grey places his Bard in a Wales of the sublime, an imagined geographical dramatic mise-en-scene for an equally dramatic account of tragic heroism , in a combination of two values constantly popularly ascribed to the Celts, namely warring and art.

A detailed analysis of Grey's bard reveals interesting DNA: the visual description of the Bard himself derived, according to Grey himself, from at least two pre-existent templates: paintings of the Supreme Being in the vision of Ezekiel, by Raphael, and Moses breaking the Tablets of the Law, by Parmigiano. Grey's bard vaticinates the end of Edward's dynasty, a prophecy which, with hindsight, suggests the rising of the Anglo-Welsh Tudors. The passion (in both senses) of the Romantic, Celtic bard incorporates a Great-British message, one which is Protestant and Unionist. In the case of Gray's Bard, the ancient-Britishness of the Welsh is co-opted into and yields to a modern Great-Britishness, venerable British antiquity legitimating the modern imperial state. What I would wish to argue is that from its very inception, Celticism has embodied such submerged messages. In short, it is an ideology in exactly the same way as "Wales" or "Britain" are ideological constructs, real precisely because of, rather than in spite of, their constructed nature.

Like those two concepts, "Celtic" is an infinitely malleable term, and once which consistently carries notes of remoteness, geographical and temporal and cultural. The fact that it is a construct with a complex trajectory in the European history of ideas is widely recognized by professional academics: yet its very malleability is what allows it to to exercise a powerful political function in the definition of center and peripherality.

Significantly, the immediate inspiration for Grey's Bard was a visit to Cambridge by the Welsh harper John Parry. It is in the milieu of spectacle and performativity, creativity and inspiration, poetry and music that Celticism most characteristically places its Celts. The repertoire of this skilled harper was conservative, old-fashioned and provincial, his tunes most likely to have been English and no older than the 17th century. For Gray though, they were ancient beyond counting, and the blind harpist himself a living exhibit in an museum of ancient British aesthetics - though this ethnographical specimen of musical primitivism was himself an author of book in English on the Welsh bardic tradition, in which he had suggested that traditional features of Welsh harp music were druidic in origin.

The harp features in all medieval and Renaissance music throughout Europe, but became associated with Wales as a badge of Welshness only in the 18th century: the survival in Wales of what was an Italian

Baroque version of the harp, and its denomination as the Welsh triple harp is only one example of how conservative cultural survivals - others being 'Welsh costume' , 'Welsh dressers,' - whose existence is due almost exclusively to poverty, become adopted as symbols of the national and the anciently-authentic. Doubtless this background I had absorbed by cultural osmosis at a very early age, and it was this that drew me to the harp.

Gray's Bard, with its description of the sublime landscape of Snowdonia - which Gray never visited - , rapidly unleashed a whole torrent of representations in engravings, paintings and prints, to the extent that rapidly, it took on an iconic function as representing the spirit of Wales, Ancient Britain, and the Celtic. Thomas Jones' painting, The Bard, of 1774 brought together Grey's Bard, a rocky and windswept landscape of Snowdonia in North Wales, and a transplanted Stonehenge. This associationism brought together in the public imagination the world of the ancient Britons, the Celts, the Druids (to whom the construction of Stonehenge had already been ascribed by the English antiquarians Thomas Stukely and John Aubrey), the medieval Welsh bards, and the Welsh landscape.

In the popular imaginations of both Wales and England at least, this an association which, has proved highly resilient. The very rock "on which the Bard had stood" rapidly became a tourist attraction in the Conwy valley. Such interesting permeability between fiction and reality informs much tourism. But it is also a good example of how what a landscape signifies is informed by the pre-existing cultural material that we bring to our viewing of it. Stonehenge itself informs the design of the modern Gorsedd circles: where Iolo's stone circle, laid out on Primrose Hill, was a temporary circle of large pebbles set out to remind the English tentative that London is in fact Caer Lludd, the ancient capital of the Isle of Britain, upon which the Welsh have a claim prior to the English, later circles are substantial, semi-permanent standing stones whose design derives from the ancient (and certainly not 'Celtic' nor druidic) stone circles of Britain.

The history of those representations in print and painting inspired by Gray's Bard - a history which spans some 150 years or so - shows a development. Increasingly, the Bard and his setting are dehistoricized, separated from the self-immolation story . Instead, we find the Bard placed him in a sublime, but non-specific, representative landscape and in a theatrical pose. The Bard is transsubstantiated into a quintessential Romantic poet-as-hero, placed in an elemental encounter not with occupying military forces but with nature, in a struggle for human freedom of spirit. In short, he has been emptied of political content.

I argue above that the figure of the druid, originally an imported, category was coopted, indigenized and embraced by the Welsh, as a symbol of their own historicity, the result of which process was that the same symbol carried two different meanings, depending on the perspective and knowledges of the viewer. Such double-vision, I believe, characterizes the Druidism of today, in its knowing staginess which is visible to all, and its interior workings, which are accesible only through language and familiarity with this sector of Welsh society. In the same way, the Romantic figure of the bard had

begun as an outsider-view interpretation of a sketchily-attested episode in Welsh history, carrying Great-British and Protestant undertones. The medieval Welsh bard had been an establishment-figure of meticulously-defined social status, whose milieu was the courts of kings and nobles, not the individualistic promethean manifestation of the life-force of the Romantic re-visualization. Yet within a few years of the publication of Gray's Ode, and in the spirit of Great-British Celtimania spurred upon by Macpherson's Ossian literature of the 1760's, the Ancient-British Bard was voraciously seized upon by the Welsh as a dignified symbol of their own nationality, after some centuries of print representation of the Welsh as little more than comic rustics. The same symbol carries different meanings - imperial or revindicatory - according to the knowleges with which it is accessed.

The London-based Welsh harpist and antiquarian Edward Jones, Bardd y Brenin, published his Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards in 1784. The second edition included a frontispiece inspired by Gray's Ode, an etching by the Picturesque artist and stage-designer Philippe de Loutherberg, which portrayed the Welsh Bard in a dramatic, sublime landscape. Jones' book contains a wealth of informed, insider knowledge about early Welsh poets and traditional Welsh music ; yet the pictorial imaging of this was an English one, deriving from an English literary model. Published by a Welsh exile in London, it was aimed at an English readership, and can be seen as an apologetics of national identity. In this, it resembles the two volumes of the Tours in Wales of Thomas Pennant, whose work contributed much to persuade fashionable English readers that the matter of Wales was intellectually interesting. Both works are detailed, specific studies, written with deep familiarity with their subjects : Pennant's interest in the historical import of Welsh landmarks and landscapes makes of him a very different tour-guide than the vast majority of English-authored guides to Wales.

As I noted above, Welsh antiquarian interest in places, monuments , and ruins dated back at least the Tudor period, and Edward Jones' book extends the span of such studies; but it is also a book which exists in a sensitive mentality of reaction to a sense of national pride injured by an English unawareness or caricaturing of Wales. As such, it is an attempt to correct the political imbalances of such portrayal. But it is not only reactive. Such antiquarian interest also typifies a general attitude towards the past. At a time when Great-British interests were coopting Wales into its own larger of British national identity, Welsh interests were using exactly the same elements and icons in their own project of nation-building.

In short, the Welsh embracing of the ancient British world was ambiguous, a typically Welsh and British mixture of homogeneity and particularity . For at the same time as works by Pennant and Edward Jones are directed towards English readers, they are also saying something about the Welsh to the Welsh, or at least the middle-class Welsh capable of reading in English. The project of national (re-)construction is therefore an ambiguous one, involving two discourses and two audiences: an external, imperial, Great-British one, and an internal, nationalist, Welsh one. The latter is invisible to the former, with the result that the process involves a Trojan-horse, secret-society codification or sleight of hand. But this collusion in cultural invisibility can also be seen as a lack of self-confidence, a reaction to the psychological trauma caused by the experience of the aggression of colonialism. And if for English readers, the Welsh project is

hidden away surreptitiously within the Great-British project, Welsh readers on the other hand have the typical colonized-person's bifocal schizophrenia, in that their understanding of their own history and landscape is inevitably informed by two different sets of knowledges.

The presence of the leisured, monied classes of England is everywhere within the landscape art tradition which portrays Wales. The same may be true of Iolo's and Pughe's attempts at creating a national identity, in that they are self-conscious, reactive acts performed with one eye upon England, anxious for applause. Such theatrical performativity, I believe, is a key element in many elements of 'traditional' Welsh manifestations of nationality. As I have asserted, following Yi Fu Tuan, the awareness of national distinctiveness is most often heightened and dramatized when we are in exile: and there is more than a sense in which Iolo's own Ancient-British, Celtic, Welshness is an exilic, folkloric version of national identity - a Welshness performed, existing within performance and as performance, in an interplay of illusion and fantasy with the realities of desire.   What those desires might be, where they come from, and where they lead to is what I now wish to explore.

1.4

The smaller, "Celtic," nations of Great Britain have been in varying forms of relationship with England for most of their recognizable history. Their very existence has been defined to a large extent by the presence of their larger and not always benign neighbour. It would be easy to see Wales in terms of post-colonial criticism, in an easy bipolar pattern of subalternity and hegemonism vis a vis England. The questions of complicated and fraught power relationships between Europe and "the East" are magisterially delineated in Edward Said's Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism.And they seductively lend themselves to the naming and analysis of a related phenomenon called Celticism, one in which, as in the case of Asia, urban intellectuals from one culture have imposed a static image upon a series of others, by eliding over or denying their history - a tendency which overlaps with Romanticism and primitivism. And as in the case of the mystic Orient, the twilit Celtic has lent itself and in its turn been produced by a whole set of power imbalances. Originating in the eighteenth century, Celticism has waned and waxed over the last two hundred years in accordance with the needs of a culturally-dominant center; it has taken various forms, gone through a number of revivals, been set to polticial and religious work, been indigenized and re-indigenized, borrowed, begged and stolen. In all of its two hundred year history, it has continued to thrive, as an expression of metropolitan ideas and feelings about the ideal organization and nature of the world.

One of the most typical features is attitude is a tendency towards an extreme and simplistic existential polarization: undesirable features felt to be lacking, rare or endangered in the mainstream culture are 'discovered' to be present in the Celtic periphery, a periphery which may be variously geographic - the wild, unpeopled and unhistoried landscapes which are the "Wales" of the English art tradition; or temporal - the infinitely alluring past which may be created and recreated imaginatively to meet the appetites or needs of the present; or cultural - the idealization of particular societies which are felt to

embody desirable values. This results in a combination of projection of those desirable values upon a people or a period with an act of acquisition of objects or attitudes felt to enshire those values. Such fashionable appropriation of "authenticity," which is often discovered to be an attractive commodity at the moment of its virtual disappearance. Precisely because the values of fashion are by there very nature subject to change, then the content of the 'authentic' is likewise fickle. In no case though, does the relationship of periphery and center change, nor does the role of the Celtic as being reliquary of the past. I can think of no example in which such values as modernity, the avant-garde, urbanity or cosmopolitan-ness are ascribed to the Celtic. And it is not for nothing that I chose to play an anciently-attested musical instrument, that to Welsh ears, my title has an antique ring (without it being possible to pin down the exact period in which court harpers were referred to by such poetic titles as mine), and that I am dressed for Gorsedd ceremonies in a 1930's costume, in modern fabric, whose design-ancestry includes so many other non-specifically ancient bards and whose ultimate root is an a bas-relief showing three cucullati, ancient Celtic lares et penates.

So modern Celticism (and all Celticism is modern) continues the ancient pattern ifound in classical writers, of ascribing to Celticity otherness and primitiveness, with the important change that in industrialized societies, primitiveness has now acquired a desirable patina. Thus we find the visitors to Hafod and to Wales charmed by the roughness of the surrounding landscape (roughness being a prime value of the Picturesque). The falling-down cottage with its quaint inhabitants is socially and morally far from the metropolis, and that very otherness constitutes its attractiveness, in exactly the same way as The Bard's mantic posturings reflect a jadedness with the artifices of urban society.

But such is the power of this ascription of primitiveness that it affects all: 'nativist' attitudes towards Wales arise at the point when Welsh people learn to see themselves from the outside - largely with the acquistion of bilingualism , from the 16th century onwards.   As a child, I acquired a whole set of attitudes which involved national identity, language and religion, a dislike of modernity and a nostalgia for the past, and a quasi-religious sense that I was 'not Welsh enough.' The harp and the Gorsedd were symbols of my attempt to redress that felt cultural deficiency, but my attempt is not an exception. The genius of Iolo and others in the 18th century was to hitch their dreams of restoring national eminence and of redeeming Wales to a racehorse of a cultural current.

The creation from the 18th century onwards by linguists, historians and archaeologists of a people or a civilization called "the Celts" is a simplifying process involving polarization of national characterisitcs. Another mark of the beast of Celticisim is its cavalier tendency toward genericizing. The qualities ascribed to the Celtic from the 18th century are well-known and find their maximum expression in Matthew Arnold's On the Study of Celtic Literature and the work which inspired it, Ernest Renan's 1867 essay Sur la poésie celtique. Arnold's source-literature was largely that of the medieval Welsh saga material, the Mabinogion, first translated into English by Lady Charlotte wife of the industrialist ironmaster, Joseph Guest, owner of the largest ironworks in the world. Arnold's Celts - unlike Guest's Welsh ironworkers whose tendency to riot meant that he had to employ a private militia - exists against

a background metropolitan values: rule, order, culture, control, processedness, intellect, footlessness, material, rational, scientific. Such a universe defines 'the Celtic' by saying what 'the Celtic' is not. In comparison with this world (largely that of mercantile, industrial and quotidian values), the glamorized, Romanticized 'Celtic' values and metaphors are those of freedom, spontaneity, nature, informality, wholesomeness, emotion, rootedness, spiritual, artistic.

Importantly, Arnold sees no future rôle for the Celtic languages of Great Britain, the indisputable marker of distinct cultural idenity: their value is that of being a cultural museum or quarry for the continued construction of a homogenized and anglicized imperial state. Celtic qualities , nevertheless are admired, and may be re-acquired from the Celtic periphery by the Great-British or French center, in a purely pragmatic and utilitarian manner . Significantly, many of the points made positively concerning the Celts by Renan are repeated in his anti-Islamic orientalizing work.

The association of the Celts almost exclusively with the past is yet another of the structuring elements of Celticism, and one which most reveals its essence as a structure of the imagination. The first aristocratic visitors to Wales visited there - and continue to go there - in order to "experience the past," or at least the most attractive values of the past, to record a vanishing world, in the same way that game parks function today. The making of history is always an act of ideology and selection. The intellectual strategy of Celticism tends strongly to annul or elide the details of history into a vague, associative and generalized pastness. The slow emergence of the sciences of geology, comparative linguistics, and archaeology meant that the savants of the 17th , 18th and 19th centuries could not so easily distinguish time-scales, and could easily fit under one conceptual umbrella the stone circles of the Bronze Age, the faked poetry of Ossian, Queen Boadicea's revolt against the Romans, Tacitus' druids and Welsh rural harp music . The fact that later scholarship has failed to give precision to general perceptions of and enthusiasm for things Celtic suggests that more visceral things are at work in Celticism.

In teaching classes and giving lectures on 'Celtic Christianity,' in Wales I have been repeatedly struck how few of the people genuinely enthused by this new field are themselves Welsh. The history of the Irish espousal of the Celtic has a very different trajectory, but I have noted time and time again how the Celtic appeals most strongly to good-willed people in search of some sense of belonging and rootedness in a post-modern world. In my classes I have purposely done a number of things: eschewed the world Celtic and its cognates, in a desire to foster scholarly - and cultural - precision; traced the history of the category of the Celtic; pointed out that no serious historian concedes that such an animal as "the Celtic Church," understood as an identifiable corporation, ever existed; and traced the history of this "Celtic Church" to its roots in Henrician anti-Catholic propaganda, in both Welsh and English. And yet such is the density of desire around the category Celtic that intellectual endeavour and factual-based learning often does not penetrate very deeply: we believe what we choose to believe, and perhaps what we need to believe.

The Celtic as it is viewed from the outside in neo-Celticism is, as I have argued, a projection of modern and urban appetites for existential redemption. It tells us nothing about ancient Celtic peoples and their civilizations Celtic but speaks eloquently instead interests of the people who have created it, and who wish its existence.

 But there do exist people who, I hold, are actively disenfranchised by these prevailing Celtic myths.

Since cultural and linguistic inheritance does not work as does biology and genetics, it is a gross simplification to define as Celts the current day inhabitants of Scotland, Wales , Ireland, and Brittany. But a minority of these people are speakers of Celtic languages, and many of them live within historical experiences of domination and cultural legacy which is closely connected to Celticism.

The cultural heredity of these peripheral societies tends to work along a set of dualities, which are equally as polarized as are those of the Celticist mentality. Dilys Davies, a Welsh psychotherapist, draws on the work of contemporary therapists in Ireland in her construction of national schemata which represent what for lack of a better term we might call an insider-Celtic experience. On the one side, the culturally dominant group is perceived and experience as being imposing, successful, superior, powerful, active, and innovative. The subaltern, Celtic (i.e. Irish or Welsh) peoples are perceived by themselves as well as by others as being submissive, inferior, dependent, helpless, compliant, passive and filled with self-doubt.   Such cultural opinions rapidly become self-fulfilling and autonomous, to the extent that they take on an objective reality. In the case of the Welsh and the Irish, Davies notes fatalism, docility and passivity as being among the common psychological results of political subjugation. The fiery, warrior, Celts of stereotypical presentation, have become the depressed youth of North Dublin and the Welsh valleys. Common to both Ireland and Wales, in comments made by writers from within these communities, are a sense of worthlessness, a lack of pride, and a loss of confidence.

Now a comparison of the psychology of Dilys Davies' modern Irish and Welsh and Matthew Arnold's Celts reveals some differences and similarities. In both cases, we are dealing with a binary universe of different constellations of perception and meaning. In the case of Arnold's Celticism, the Celtic-other is seen partly as desirable but also partly as something threatening, possessed of dangerous element which can only be neutralized by being embraced and assimilated into a wider whole : the imperium.   In Davies' case, the glamorizing tendencies of Celticism are nowhere experienced by the Welsh and the Irish - but the experience of being silenced and dominated is the same. It seems reasonable therefore to posit a relationship between cultural Celticism and the economic and social processes of the relationship between the Great-British imperium and its client nations. In both cases, the result is the same - the silencing and eradication of autonomy and identity. The very search for existential authenticity which Celticism manifests, results in the further marginalization of the periphery from control over its own reality and self-understanding.

As we have seen, one of the techniques commonly used by the center in its creation of the category of the Celtic is its cavalier attitude towards time and history. Related to this is a Celticist tendency to confuse disciplines and taxonomies. Edward Lhuyd had grouped together in the Welsh, Bretons, the Irish and the Gaelic speakers of the Scottish Highlands and islands in a linguistic category called "Celtic." But the popular use of the word has long transcended the sphere of language. It shares with Romanticism - from which it derives - an anti-intellectual, emotive preference for vagueness and globalizing generalization. It is ambiguous because it is popular and used to mean many different things, associating them all into a comfortably imprecise and loose quasi-unity; and it popular because it is ambiguous and therefore open to a wide range of uses according to pre-existent needs. "Celtic Spirituality," to take one example, eclectically and easily mixes together art objects from early "Celtic" continental cultures such as La Tène, selections from the penitential writings of early Irish monks, the illuminated manuscripts of Welsh medieval praise poetry, with the remains of Hebridean folk prayers collected (and retouched) in the early 20th century, blithely assuming the existence of a connecting narrative which defines all these objects as Celtic, and discovering a shared essence in them all. In exactly the same way, 19th century scholars, poets and administrators had lumped together Islamic, Hindu and Far-eastern cultural products of 5000 or more years under the umbrella "Oriental."

The result of this generalizing approach is the eradication of the specific, sharper corners in the field - those aspects of Welsh, Irish, Scottish and Breton experiences which will not easily fit into the frame of the Celtic twilight. And prime amongst these is the contemporary existence of those nations, whose daily life in no ways resembles the essentialist projections of the Celticists. Such eradication then means seeing and portraying what does not exist, because the Celtic exists only as a project of imaginative reconstruction of the past. In addition, it ineluctably involves not seeing nor portraying significant elements what does exist in Scotland, Wales, Ireland and elsewhere in the modern day, because to include it in consideration would be to de-mask the pretensions and the limitations of the Celticist hermeneutic filter). At a point when "Celt" evokes in the public imagination a world of radicality, chicness, mercantile entrepreneuriality, full employment, future-focussed self-confidence, and urban sophistication, then perhaps it will be a useful and constructive category for the inhabitants of Aberdeen, Brest and Cefncoedycymmer. At that point, we will know that we have escaped from the Druid-circles into which we have been concentrated and corralled for too long.

At this point, however, we might seem have traveled a long way from Thomas Johnes' and his never-to-be-built druid temple, and the stone Gorsedd circles of modern Wales. But the ideologies concerning towards land, history and inhabitants suggested by the such architectural follies as the druid-circle are with us still. A curious geodesic structure of associations continues to be at work, involving many different elements: the aesthetic appreciation of landscape (conceived of as untouched nature, even when the Picturesque gardeners had tweaked and primped the landscape to appear more natural than nature itself); the admixture of entertainment and knowledge involved in the apprehension of the past; the blurred boundary between what is in a place and what we wish to find there; and not least, a

permeability between different understandings of Britishness, a semantic sleight of hand which allows the past to be coopted into the ideological needs of the present.

 In the crassest of terms, the popular category of the Celtic makes it possible - or perhaps even necessary - to ignore Wales, in exactly the same way as the popular category of 'the Orient' expunged the details of different Asian cultures and periods of history, and both categories have historically worked to the benefit of the project of imperial expansion.   This ignoring is carried out either by a process of generalization - which detaches Wales from its own historical and social reality and inserting it into 'the Celtic' - , or else by an imposition of a perceptual grid, which views and portrays the its inhabitants, through the claude-glass of Romanticism.   The landscape-art tradition of a rural Wales peopled, if at all, by a few cheerful and compliant peasants existing in a child-like unselfconscious, in that garden of innocence, so close to Paradise, called Wales, is a close relation of the many Celtic revivals of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.

The constitutive nature of the Celtic as we have seen is difference and comparison - the Celtic is different from, therefore always constructed in reference to and comparison with a pre-existent culture, time, and mental and social framework: its difference is what makes it interesting and often attractive. But difference is always difference from something esle, always comparative, never substantive nor autonomous. Certainly landscape which is distinctive is interesting: but the emblematic Bard of so many drawings is inseparable from his landscape, and is in fact almost a hypostasis of it - with the result that the Celt, equally as much as the Celtic, is commodified, de-personalized: he is de-historicizes the imposition of a changeless, supra-historic essential identity of difference which he is called endless to verify by performing it. This imposition enables the ignoring of economic and cultural inferiority, and colludes with it.

The whole work of Frantz Fanon passionately illustrates that the binaries which Celticism typifies are in fact a simplification, an outsider perspective.   The object of colonialism on the one hand does not experience herself from within as being variously spontaneous, natural, primitive , informal, wholesomeness, rooted, spiritual or artistic, since these are comparative categories.   But such is the weight of the outsider view that she must also learn to see and experience herself, self-consciously, simultaneously, in the same way as she is seen and experienced from outside. She exists therefore in and as two frames of reference. "Every colonized people - in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality - finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country" (Black Skins White Masks, p.18). The process of 'death and burial of local cultural originality' in the relationship between Wales and England is a long and uneven one, but I would argue that Celticism has played a not insignificant role in that what the Welsh philosopher J.R.Jones called " cultural genocide by assimilation."   A Darwinian attitude towards historical development is the obverse face of the desire to celebrate the Celt.

Internally, the projection upon the Celtic of a highly constricted and prescriptive range of activities, attitudes, types, has redounded internally upon the people who have lived in the Celtic regions, in their relationships towards themselves. For the Irish, the Scots, the Welsh, the Bretons, by virtue of being colonized peoples, have learnt to look upon themselves, as it were from the outside, and adopt the identity of being "Celts" or Ancient Britons. And to the extent that it has been internalized, the myth of the Celtic continues to informs the sense of self, society and nationality within these 21st century cultures. At a point in its existential experience, a dominated group become convinced of its own cultural inferiority. In reaction to this, its members will seek ways of maintaining a sense of selfworth and dignity, which will allow them the illusion that they have some power over themselves. Typical amongst the reactive strategies will be that of collusion with the aggressor, by internalizing aspects of the dominator's power, locating oneself within his reality, out of a desire to regain some control: the self of the subaltern is then both dominated and dominator. My Gorsedd robes can be read as being a the livery of a servant: but I have wondered, in donning them each August, precisely which is the master I am serving - Wales or Britain?

Experiences of fatalism and docility, passivity and acceptance of dependency are common to dominated individuals, groups and peoples, One typical manifestation of cultural collusion with dominating powers is the willingness to be assimilated. The history of the Celtic speaking peoples of Scotland, Ireland, Wales or Brittany can be read as that of cultural assimilation into Great-Britishness or Francophonie, the Jew become, as it were, anti-Semite, and Wales from its earliest period has housed a conventionally-sized proportion of British assimilationists and collaborators. But another aspect of imperial collusion is exemplified in the way in which these peoples have accepted and embraced the cultural constructs of the Celtic, to the extent that it has become part of their own sense of themselves. The geographical placement of the Celtic - i.e. on the periphery of the metropolitan centers of England, France or Scotland, has been part and parcel of the appeal of Celticism, and a trope for cultural distance and comparison. The result of this is that a sense of place of a subaltern people is necessarily two-fold - they experience themselves as being simultaneously in the center (of their own world) and on the periphery (of the dominant center), in both geographical and cultural terms. And an off-shoot of this peripherality is a certain ease with the company of fellow-Celts and fellow-subalterns.

The history over the past two hundred or so years of inter-Celtic relationships - the influence of Irish nationalism upon Welsh, the re-construction of modern Cornish using Welsh and Breton, the development of the pan-Celtic movement illustrates that imperial myths can become lived historical reality in the lives of subaltern nations . The Great Durbar of 1911 witnesses to aristocratic Indians playing the role of being Indians as envisaged through Western eyes, colluding in great pomp with the Empire. Similarly, photographs of the 2nd Celtic congress of 1904 held in Caernarfon Castle (built by Edward I in his military campaign to suppress guerilla resistance to his invasion of Wales - the same king of Grey's Bard) show a wonderfully mongrel mix of Anglo-Irish protestant nobility, Breton nationalists, American enthusiasts, Welsh members of the Gorsedd and fledging-Cornish nationalists, actively performing Celticity in a wonderfully bizarre array of 'national costumes,' bardic robes and neo-

medieval Scots tartanry. More problematically, the Gorsedd has featured in that same castle among the cast-list for two highly theatrical 20th century Investitures of the heirs to the English crown as "Princes of Wales." Such pantomime and enthusiasm might be no more than merely vague laughable: but I believe all these events express succinctly the cultural constriction of British imperialism of which Celticism is an important part, a state of affairs which has resulted in a complex psychological interaction between national identity and self-conscious performance of that identity. The end result of Celticism has been to Celticize the Welsh, the Scots, and the Irish, by defining their identity, from without and from within.

1.5

Dilys Davies' work notes a number of the individual, interpersonal and national repercussions of cultural invasion. Talk of 'national character' is often Romantic essentialism, derives largely from Herder, and filtered through German and other idealism. Typically ideas of 'a national soul' suggest that each nation, in addition to having its own distinct language, also possesses a unity of spirit. Now ideas such as this are frequent not only in the language of Celticism - used equally by Welsh, Scots, English, and others - but they echo also in such phrases as 'un-American activities,' and "the British character."

 However, the fact is that nationality impacts upon the sense of self, not genetically nor essentially but as the result of a historical and sociological situation.

As we have seen , Fanon's work - from which Davies draws - points out how structures of external domination easily become internalized with the result that for the subaltern, being is coextensive and identical with being-dominated. In a situation where the external stereotype has become conflated with self-identity, we arrive at a situation where the answer to the existential questions 'who am I? Who are we?' (questions which themselves are far more typical of subaltern peoples and individuals than of dominating cultures) can only be answered by invoking outsider conceptions, based on comparison with the dominant consciousness. And the end result of this is that nationality becomes confused with national stereotype. In the case of the peoples of Wales and Ireland, both early assimilations into the British imperial collective, we may observe the complex of Celtic enthusiasm includes within its ingredients such things as nineteenth-century colonialist eugenics, and the Whig myth of progres, both of which contribute to the sense of inferiority and the self-depreciation of modern-day Celtic nations.

A modern ethnopsychological study of Welsh-speaking Welsh people closely connected with native performance traditions connected with the Eisteddfod, Carole Trosset's Welshness Performed, concretizes Davies' perceptions. Trosset deals with a group of people who are numerically small: only some 20% of the inhabitants of modern Wales speak Welsh, and of these a very small percentage involve themselves with the sort of consciously national cultural activities whose maximum visualiazation is the National Eisteddfod and the associated Gorsedd, but their symbolic value, as people who represent, for themselves and for others, certain notions of what it is to be Welsh, far outweigh their small numbers.

Trosset's study of a certain Welsh cultural elite describes is a constant interplay between two, positive values: self-conscious Welshness and the world of artistic performance. Trosset notes the concern within this stratum of Welsh society of maintaining the boundaries with the exterior, in a strictly polarized universe of "us versus them."

I have written and talked extensively about the Welsh sense of personhood and society as a quasi-religious one, and it is gratifying to see Trosset, an American, describe this part of Welsh-speaking society as a 'purity structure.' Here, a complex interplay of political and psychological factors means that immense efforts are put into group conformity - a collusion with the sort of monochrom essentialist, and nativist ideas about what constitutes being Welsh or Celtic. The almost inevitable result of this pressure is an existential gap arises between group conformity and inner personal reality. Davies' claims that the political bipolar constellation of dominance-submission results in difficulties in self-assertion. In the same light, we find Trosset describing the tendencies of Welsh social dynamics, towards self-censorship of the personal in favor of the communal

But by far the most salient component of both Davies' and Trosset's work in this respect is what Davies calls 'elaboration of the inner world,' a reactive creation of a personal reality which cannot be touched, got or invalidated.Davies views this reaction as one typically resulting from abuse: when a large enough number of people experience such political abuse, then we can be said to be dealing with a socio-political pathology. The personal reality created by such trauma is non-dialogic, suspicious of that exterior world which has injured it. In the case of Wales - as in the world of the Celtic mists from Druidic temples and 18th century Celtimania onwards - identity and fields of operation have been constricted to certain highly schematized realms of literature, poetry, music and religion, national or Celtic character constructed and construed as being visionary rather than practical, ornamental rather than mercantile. Given the symbolic importance of this view of national identity, Welsh national identity itself can be regarded as a form of performance , defined as "a situation in which a person is held accountable to an audience for a display of communicative competence." Trosset's work illustrates how performance and social styles are constantly coimplicated. But the performance of national identity can equally be regarded as a symptom of the the pathology caused by cultural oppression. Perhaps it is this sense of unhealthiness that has long kept me away from another Welsh Eisteddfod, the International Eisteddfod at Llangollen - for I do not wish to face the uncomfortable possibility that I, a member of the cultural "elite" as defined by Carole Trosset, might have anything in common with the manicured tourist-art folkloricities that draw the crowds there.

Pathology and performance are possible descriptors for the compulsion to perform nationality. Welsh nationality might be regarded, with a certain amount of justification, quite simply as a myth - i.e. a theatrical subterfuge of superficial display. Generations of Welsh and English people have indeed chosen to interpret it as such. But it may also be regarded as a myth in the proper sense, - system of meaning to be played out in ritual time , and existing only within that ritual time.   And the difference between those two understandings and experience of myth may be what differentiates Thomas Johnes' putative Druidic

temple, and Iolo Morgannwg's circle of pebbles, between outsider experience and portrayal of an entity called Wales, and more indigenous experience of their locality.

Now as we have seen, in a colonized society, particular that of the oldest of England's many embraces, indigenousness does not come in an uncompromised, untouched form, so that the Welsh inevitably experience both understandings of our national myths (the vitiating disembodied and generic fantasy of the Celtic, along with a more authentic and generative national performativity). If Welsh identity is a performance, then who is in the audience? The answer is complex: the English, the British , the Welsh, and those who are not sure precisely what they are.

In reaction to the threat of cultural extinction - but also in collusion with the schematic stereotyping which is a factor in that extinction - performing nationality bardically can be seen as an expression of the refusal to submit. It is an action which is therefore both rebellious and submissive. It is simply too easy to think that the performance of Welshness is a quaint Uncle-Tom willingness to be just a living exhibit in an anthropological museum. In the words of the Welsh literary critic Raymond Williams: "there is a very skilful kind of accommodation, finding a few ways to be recognized as different, which we then actively cultivate, while not notcing, beyond them, the profound resignation. These are some of the signs of a post-colonial culture, conscious all the time of its own real strengths and potentials, longing only to be itself but with ..too much on its back to be able consistently to face its future." Williams adequately describes the Welsh playing at being Welsh as imagined from the outside, the quasi-Celticist view.   But what I would wish to argue is that it is possible to find things of value within this performed nationality.

The constructs of a bipolar relationship of dominance and submission lead too easily into an 'outsider bad, insider good' emotionalism, the end effect of which is cultural self-denigration (of which Williams' is a good example). The role of submission is a pragmatic accommodation to a forceful status quo, one which at least permits survival: the self-immolation of Grey's Bard is a noble, dramatic gesture, but not good politics.   The stress on group conformity typical of Welsh society is it is true, a form of social compliance towards dominant culture. But it also enables the perpetuation of a sense of national identity, and as such has its limited uses.   The taboo against self-assertion is a reaction against cultural abuse - yet it also enables the dominated society to maintain their image of themselves as being unified, unity being one of the main strategies against cultural assimilation.   And the strength of the Welsh interest in cultural performance that it has been a way of subverting English fantasies, and of acting in ways which can be interpreted in one way by the outside, and experienced in different, codified and potentially subversive, manners from the inside,   Its tragic weakness is that is has accommodated itself into a tactical status quo from which it is possible to make guerrilla raids into the mainstream territory, but without the possibility of strategies for permanent re-occupation of lost territory. To seek to define - and then to perform - identity is only required of those whose sense of self has been injured. Defining one's national identity is a question which inevitably involves other nations. Only the large powers whose

psychological analogue is that of narcissism, in which there is no alterity, since all is Me or Us, are exempt from this.

If the self is made out of relationships, then the experience of the national Welsh self - and I find myself instinctively though embarrassedly using such terms, in spite of all I have written rejecting essentialism and Celticist generalizations - is one of relationships with things which are absent or disjunctive: the distance between Welsh culture as experienced from the inside and perceived from the outside; the hiatus between the sort of limited cultural manifestations of Welshness which typify the most self-consciously Welsh artistic traditions of song and poetry on the one hand, and on the other, the less distinctive and more compromised and creolized conditions of daily life; the distance between those conditions and an idealized past and an essential, transcendent cultural identity. Nationality as performance then can be seen as an act of desire, the mirror image of those desires which have led members of culturally dominant societies to project and discover their own desires on other peoples, times and places. The performing Celt has the more difficult role of being simultaneously her own self, and the shadow side of her own aspirations - being her own Druid, as it were, at the same time as she goes shopping like all Europeans in the same supermarkets, experiencing both identity with and alienation from all those storm-tossed Bards of the popular romantic imagination.

The experience of cultural domination causes an inevitable Fall from an Eden of national unawareness into a post-lapsarian self-consciousness where salvation simply cannot be gained by an attempt to retreat into a pure, homogenous past. Our own national cultures are all hybrid and dynamic. The desire for a timeless cultural purity is an objective historical factor (in that it has influenced and continues to influence how people think about themselves), but what it goes in search of is a chimera. The lament the disappearance of the Ancient Druids, whether, killed off by Caesar or the Catholic Church, is likely to be a self-indulgent and projective fantasy, not distantly related to those who lament the loss of the Hafod estate itself. Such laments - as Welsh literature from the early heroic ages attests - are pleasurable experiences, combines themes of historical disappearance with the delights of the imaginative reconstruction and one-sided relationship with the past. To lose the category of the Celtic, especially as applied, vaguely, to modern Wales, or Scotland or Ireland - would do us all a favour, jettisoning a whole ideological baggage which has defined us all in vague, artistic constrictions. For us to relinquish, along with that putative Celticity, our performing-monkey rôle would entail losses and gains - the loss of a secure, but vitiated national sense, but the gain of being able to break out of a constrictive entropy of identity.

The fact that the modern Celtic nations - and if "Celtic" is how they choose to define themselves, then that is an acceptable terminology - are fragmented, problematic, and actively in search of what and who they are. Those things are precisely what makes them nations in any modern, European sense of the world.

1.6

Each year, perhaps about the beginning of June, I apparently begin publically to say that this year, I will not go to the Eisteddfod in August. A ritual script has been gradually written, so that my people automatically say " but you always say that every year, and then you end up going."   I have long thought of the Eisteddfod field as being a sort of sacred place - not because I believe in nationality-as-religion, but because it resembles phenonomenoligically much of Mircea Eliade's descriptions of ancient Near-Eastern sanctuary-cities, in all sorts of intriguing ways, with its ritual behaviours, its sacred language, its richly hierarchical (cultural) priesthood and administrative class. There, the Druidic rites of the Gorsedd not only represents nationality - a nationality which is anything but representative - but makes present, visually, tactile-ly, sonically - a Wales which so easily otherwise is a subterranean, easily ignored, or disembodied cultural milieu .

I do not often these days, dress up in my official robes: it requires an investment of time which I am not willing to make; the robes are of unpleasant cotton-synthetic mixture which causes people to sweat profusely under the television lights; the head-dress frequently gives me headaches; the intemperate weather means that the outdoor ceremonies have to be performed indoors, losing the whole Picturesque element; and besides, I do not know well many of the maybe 200 people who regularly take part in the ceremonies, and feel frequently that everyone else does. The doubts about my sense of selfworth as a Welshman have not gone away with my membership of the Gorsedd, my harp playing, my thorough espousal of Welsh-language persona and politics, all of which suggest some deep, unabsolved cultural guilt.

Despite my reservations, which are deep. I nevertheless maintain my membership, which enables me to enter the Druidic circle in my neo-Celtic robes at any of the ceremonies, provided I reserve a place. The reality is that I am a fairly conventionally-conflicted Welshman, ambiguous in my attitude, neither able to dismiss the whole thing as conservative gallimaufry, since I but too easily embarrassed by it all. In the 1930's, a famous public spat was conducted in the columns of Y Faner , the Welsh literary and cultural weekly, between two men:
Albert Evans-Jones, poet, dramatist, and one of the most picturesquely photogenic of Archdruids. Cynan, his bardic name, was a pillar of the Welsh establishment who received a knighthood, and acted a censor for the Welsh-language stage, the equivalent of the English Lord Chamberlain, until the point as censorship was abolished. He was also reputedly an avid Freemason, and his reorganzing of Gorsedd ritual owes not a little to the rites of that body who, like the Gorsedd, claims ancient ancestry but which is basically a child of the Enlightenment. His adversary was Saunders Lewis, Catholic convert, playwright, intellectual giant, a man jailed for the first modern Welsh political protest in 1936.

The title of Lewis' article on the neo-druidic performance of the Gorsedd is "Pageant or Sacrament? " Cynan had defended the rituals of the Gorsedd as a welcome and colourful visual expression of nationality. Lewis expressed his doubts as to the value of such pageantry. So often protology expresses eschatology: and so often Welsh literature has expressed a Wales which was (heroically and tragically)

and which is dreamed of being (a restored and redeemed nation). In this pattern, the once and future nation functions like the words of Alice's White Queen: jam yesterday and jam tomorrow, but never jam today.

Iolo's druidic circle, unlike Johnes' never-to-be-built ornamental druidic temple, expressed something of his hopes for the future. Lewis dismissed the cod-antiquity of the Gorsedd as being unworthy of the future of Wales. Instead, he proposed a sacramental version of nationality: in the sacraments of the Church, the divine reality becomes present in the here and now, not as dream, or projection of hope or desire, but as reality. Such high Catholic theology cut little ice in the Calvinist Wales of the 1930's.

And if I do not often take my Catholic priesthood into the Gorsedd circle as once I thought I would frequently, nor walk in its rather rambly secular processions, neither do I play the harp much now. But when I do, I inevitably return to the works of John Thomas, Queen Victoria's harpist, and my great-grand-teacher. In that age of pro-Royalist Wales, Thomas was awarded by the Gorsedd the splendid title Pencerdd Gwalia, the chief musician of Wales, pencerdd being a medieval courtly title far more authentic than my own telynor. His arrangements of Welsh airs are the equivalent of Picturesque views of Wales - tailored to an English audience, fashionably adapted to modern taste. They are often meretricious, delightfully comforting to listen to, and they fall under a harpist's fingers with great ease, being wonderfully effective performance party-pieces.   In a search for greater authenticity, greater Welshness, I did try to learn, but ultimately failed, to play the Welsh triple harp: its silent presence in the various places I and the harp lived was a permanent cultural rebuke at the same time as a symbol of aspiration.

It is perhaps in search of that sacrament of a redeemed sense of nationality that I continue to visit the Eisteddfod every year, in a conflicted sense of duty, desire and search. I wander the Eisteddfod field with its hundreds of stalls, of commercial , educational, and cultural organizations. It is an astonishing array of activities for a group of less than a half-million Welsh speakers, and I wonder what Iolo Morgannwg would make of it, what William Owen Pughe might make of the Welsh spoken and written today. I do not wonder what Thomas Johnes, nor George Cumberland, nor any other genteel walkers at Hafod would make of this cultural bazaar. I walk not in the Welsh mountains, but up and down the alleyways of this temporary capital city of Welshness, constantly hoping that in be some yet-to-be-discovered place, stall or tent around the next corner, I might realize my desires, and find a sacrament of that   "avant-garde, urbane, sophisticated and cosmopolitan" Wales I have sketched above, and which I would like to be a citizen of . I am guessing - and hoping - that that wherever, whatever, and whenever that Wales will be, the words "Celtic", "druid," and perhaps even "bard" will be so unfamiliar as to sound like a foreign tongue.