

6-2-2021

## The Bard in Napoleonic France and Revivalist Wales: a contrasting symbol of nationality, resistance and liminality

Shelley Morwenna Williams

*Jesus College at the University of Oxford*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.uwm.edu/ekeltoi>



Part of the [Celtic Studies Commons](#), [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [Folklore Commons](#), [History Commons](#), [History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#), and the [Linguistics Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Williams, Shelley Morwenna (2021) "The Bard in Napoleonic France and Revivalist Wales: a contrasting symbol of nationality, resistance and liminality," *e-Keltoi: Journal of Interdisciplinary Celtic Studies*: Vol. 4 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://dc.uwm.edu/ekeltoi/vol4/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UWM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in e-Keltoi: Journal of Interdisciplinary Celtic Studies by an authorized administrator of UWM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [open-access@uwm.edu](mailto:open-access@uwm.edu).



## ***The Bard in Napoleonic France and Revivalist Wales: a contrasting symbol of nationality, resistance and liminality***

Shelley Morwenna Williams, Jesus College at the University of Oxford

### **Abstract**

Spurred by antiquarianism and the quest for a pan-Celtic, non-classical mythology, two infamous translators and forgers sparked influential and prolific artistic production in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. James Macpherson (1736-1796) and his Ossian provided fuel to the fire stoked by Napoleon Bonaparte for a new imperial art, and Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwg, 1747-1826) contributed to an ardent cultural revival in Wales. Both writers have garnered renewed scholarly attention in recent decades, mostly focused on uncovering the genuine Celtic and medieval sources from which they so liberally borrowed. However, scant attention has been paid to the art inspired by Macpherson and Morganwg, especially in comparison with each other. Often art media featuring neo-Celtic bards are broadly categorized together under the term “Early Romanticism.” While there are meaningful parallels in the art of Napoleonic France and the art of the Welsh Celtic Revival, understanding their differences offers valuable insights and a more sophisticated view of the period to which they belonged. Both nations were experiencing tremendous but totally different upheavals, yet their artists used mirroring subject matter to express popular sentiments. Why was the Bard such a popular, and indeed political, figure in the art of France and Wales? In this paper, I offer a comparative analysis of the Bard viewed through the lens of the paintings, poetry, music and sculpture of French Ossianism and the Welsh Celtic Revival. Artists of both nations were inspired to use the Bard as a conduit to express social and civic flux, nationality, and liminality, but to different ends. Ultimately, the Bard was an artistic implement for nation building in both France and Wales, but the differences illuminate the historical contexts of each. By closely examining and contrasting the Bard as a singular subject matter in art, this study offers a new perspective on this under-explored part of European art history.

### **Keywords**

Celticism, medievalism, Ossian, James Macpherson, Iolo Morganwg, bards, Napoleonic art, Welsh nationalism

### **Introduction**

“Raise, ye bards, the song!” James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian*

Two of history's most devoted antiquarians and notorious forgers were born at the right time for their talents: James Macpherson (1736-1796) in Scotland and Edward Williams (1747-1826), better known by his bardic name, Iolo Morganwg, of Wales. James Macpherson's heroes, Fingal and Ossian, attracted the attention of the scholarly community in Britain, and captured the imagination of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) in France.<sup>1</sup> Iolo Morganwg's poetic verse, manuscripts and recreation of bardo-druidic rituals made its way into the Welsh heart, and informed Welsh identity.<sup>2</sup> In Wales the revival of its medieval bardic and druidic heritage worked as a unifying force to spark Welsh pride and nationalism at a time of oppression due to English prejudice. By contrast, French Ossianism was not a revivalist movement; it was a purely 19<sup>th</sup> century one. Ossianic and bardic subjects gave French artists a thematic outlet to explore romantic fantasies through a northern European mythological subject matter, in accordance with imperial tastes and trends. In both Wales and France, the Bard in art was a figure of liminality and nationalism, reflecting how each country, in different ways, was transforming. By focusing on artistic depictions of bards, a more nuanced interpretation of the prevailing moods, political situations and national sentiment of both Wales and France is offered in this study. A scholarly treatment of the Bard in both France and Wales as a contrasting symbol has not been undertaken to date, and some of the artworks considered in this paper have never been studied in this fashion. There are also striking similarities between both cultural movements that prove just as insightful as the differences. I provide a new view of the twin neo-Celtic zeitgeist viewed through the prism of a singular and fascinating subject matter: The Bard.<sup>3</sup>

The intense desire to discover/recover a pan-Celtic, valorous past on a par with Homeric epics and the Greco-Roman pantheon was a movement of the heart as much as the head. The desire was deeply felt, an effect of the identity-building of Europe in the long 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was answered with excellent scholarship in folklore, linguistics and history, but also by the ultimately fanciful and imaginative creation of fictional narratives. In Germany the *Nibelungenlied*, a collection of folk songs and tales was published circa 1800, in Finland Elias Lönnrot's version of the *Kalevala* was published in 1835, in Paris Prosper Mérimée invented a Balkan poet, Hyacinthe Maglanovich in the 1820s, to name only a handful of examples.<sup>4</sup> Impelled perhaps as much by passion as by profit, forgers claiming false source material also provided what society craved most: an epic past intrinsic to northern Europe on equal footing with the classical world. As described recently by Frances Fowle, European Celticism in the 18-20<sup>th</sup> centuries drew from

“the discoveries of archaeologists and antiquarians, linguists and social anthropologists; it was, at least initially, an attempt by artists to regain contact with their primitive cultural roots and emulate a bygone age.”<sup>5</sup> Celticism grew from a nostalgic longing for romance and heroism with a northern flair, in part a reaction against the intense rationalism of the Enlightenment and its radical advancements. There are two reasons why Macpherson’s and Iolo’s forgeries and translations are exceptional: 1) their early publication dates position them as the forerunners of all that would come after them, and 2) they provided the impetus for art production in France and Wales, respectively. The focus of this study is on Macpherson and Iolo’s mythologies, their spectacular impact on the culture and art of France and Wales, and how they interrelate and contrast, to provide new insights into the socio-historical developments of the time.

James MacPherson’s Ossian and Iolo Morganwg’s bardic revivals have been treated as footnotes to contemporary historical movements rather than as the substantial, influential and important developments to which textual sources, literature, art and music attest.<sup>6</sup> Recent scholarship has reassessed Macpherson’s Gaelic sources and Morganwg’s essential place in Welsh nation-building.<sup>7</sup> Both men made use of a considerable amount of *bone fide* Celtic source material, albeit dressed up in sweeping romanticism and fancy. Both men also were instrumental in bringing serious scholarly attention to Celtic poetry and culture at a crucial time. What has not been fully investigated are the compelling parallels between these sister movements, a connection made artistically in the image of the Bard in paintings, sculpture, poetry and opera. A passing familiarity with artistic visions of the Bard in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in France and Wales may broadly lump them together as neo-Celtic, early Romantic imaginings, but a closer critical reading reveals the totally different roles of the Bard in both nations. Why was the Bard an ideal figure to articulate the socio-political situations in France and Wales? Secondly, in Wales the Bard endured in various iterations, whereas in France the Bard virtually died with Napoleon. Why did the Bard survive with such longevity in Wales, and with such brevity in France as an artistic subject?

### **Gaelic poetry, James Macpherson and Ossian**

In 1707, the Parliament of the Kingdom of Scotland was disbanded and incorporated into the Parliament of Great Britain. Stripped of its monarchy and parliament, Scottish society sought new ways to differentiate itself from its Anglican neighbors through scholarship and a revival of

indigenous songs, poems and histories. “Enlightenment Edinburgh” was led by luminaries such as Allan Ramsay (1686-1758), who worked tirelessly to revive the Scottish literary past. He had a vision of a new Scottish nationalism centered on its Gaelic history, which Jeff Strabone described as: “[an] emerging world of polite Scottish readers in the age of print: that they would develop a taste for long-dead poets presented anew in bardic garb.”<sup>8</sup> Between 1724-1727 Allan Ramsay published *The Ever Green: being a Collection of Scots Poems wrote by the Ingenious before 1600*, which reproduced portions of *The Bannatyne Manuscript*, a 16<sup>th</sup>-century compilation of Scottish poems. This contributed greatly to the study of medieval Scottish literature and revival of vernacular culture.<sup>9</sup> Ramsay’s work was not a direct translation of the source documents however, as he also embellished or transformed the text for a modern audience and included two of his own poems.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, his imaginative contributions were forgiven because he could point to a physical manuscript as his source.

In 1761 when James Macpherson announced his discovery of the long-lost poetry of Ossian from the third century, its fantastic “antiquity” snagged headlines and turned heads. He published *Fingal, an Ancient Epic Poem in Six Books, together with Several Other Poems composed by Ossian, the Son of Fingal, translated from the Gaelic Language* months later, with *The Works of Ossian* following in 1765. They were presented as a collection of Gaelic tales, written in episodic poetic prose with little circumstantial references. The stories concern heroes, battles and sentimental lovers, often tragic, and the shadowy landscape is as much a character as the *dramatis personae*. The leading men are loosely derived from Irish and Scottish mythology,<sup>11</sup> whereas many of the women are Macpherson’s inventions. The text is theatrical, dignified and tragic, a contributor to early Romanticism in its appeal to emotions and sentimentality. The Celts are presented as noble savages in a classical Roman world, with vague allusions to Roman emperors, as in Macpherson’s “Comala: a Dramatic Poem.”<sup>12</sup> Macpherson indiscriminately borrowed from Irish and Scottish sources without attribution or discernment and produced a muddled mixture of Celtic and Romantic themes.

Academics were immediately skeptical of *Ossian*’s purported antiquity, particularly because Macpherson never produced the manuscripts from which he translated the stories. With Ramsay as the standard to compare against Macpherson’s work, his sources seemed shaky indeed. Welshman Lewis Morris doubted the validity of Macpherson’s stories, stating: “If they were handed down by illiterate shepherds or minstrels, without rhyme or numbers, pray what

was the *bondage* that kept the words together?”<sup>13</sup> Samuel Johnson led the scholarly opposition, and within fifty years Ossian and Fingal were deemed the creations of Macpherson, albeit alluring and convincing creations. Recent scholarship however has closely reviewed *The Poems of Ossian* and found that in fact much of it has authentic Gaelic origins. As Paul F. Moulton wrote: “Most modern scholars on the subject now agree that the majority of the poems are based on genuine, ancient Gaelic poetry, but that Macpherson’s claim he had found a lost epic was overly ambitious.”<sup>14</sup> The nearly instantaneous dismissal of Macpherson’s Gaelic sources was a reaction against his method of collecting source material, which relied on traditional songs, ballads, and hand-me-down stories.<sup>15</sup> He also embellished the source material with grandiloquent flourishes, what Derick S. Thomson coined “Macphersonic touches.”<sup>16</sup> Macpherson’s poems were therefore liberal translations of a largely oral tradition, many of which can be corroborated with Gaelic sources, but which are so conflated with florid inventions as to make it nearly impossible to tease out the Celtic from the Romantic.

Despite the critical rejection of Macpherson’s professed scholarship in academic circles, Ossianic tales proved a modernist vehicle to express nostalgia, primitivism, and affairs of state.<sup>17</sup> Beyond Scotland’s borders, Ossianism was hungrily devoured by European and American audiences, as it readily fed the “sense of primitivism and sentimentalism that had been stimulated by earlier anti-rationalist statements,” as Paul J. Degategno has argued.<sup>18</sup> In 1777, Pierre le Tourneur translated Macpherson’s publications into French, and in France Ossianism took on a new life. *Fingal* and Macpherson’s other Ossianic stories enjoyed imperial support from Napoleon Bonaparte; it was rumored he kept a copy of Ossian’s works by his side while campaigning, and in his later life in exile on St. Helena he would read passages aloud to his men.<sup>19</sup> Playing to Napoleon’s tastes, musicians and artists created works with overtly Ossianic themes.<sup>20</sup> More than two hundred contemporary musical pieces reference Ossian, with varying levels of success.<sup>21</sup> In 1804, composer Jean-Francois le Sueur wrote and produced an opera, *Ossian, ou Les Bards*, theatrically presenting Macpherson’s stories through song and drama.<sup>22</sup> It was performed first at the Académie Impériale de Musique, supported by Napoleon, and enjoyed hundreds of performances over many years. Le Sueur’s opera created such a sensation that Napoleon publicly congratulated him and made him a chevalier of the Légion d’Honneur, the grandest honor for a French civilian that included a lifelong pension.<sup>23</sup>

In one of the most memorable scenes in the opera, bardic druids and a choir with twelve

harps welcome the sunrise, in a fantastical re-imagining of a Celtic past.<sup>24</sup> Annelies Andries argued that le Sueur's opera was an emphatic exercise in uniting the arts in the service of nation-building, "...crafted to pay tribute to the political achievements of France's new ruler, Napoleon, and capitalised on his enthusiasm for James Macpherson's 'translations' of the epic poems of Ossian."<sup>25</sup> The opera was certainly the product of its era: despite its Celtic inspiration, there are few Gaelic references anywhere in *Les Bards*. The actors wore classically Grecian dress reminiscent of the public festivals of the Revolution which served to unite the people under the ideals of the new government.<sup>26</sup> As Christopher Smith noted, "the Gaelic becomes Gallic to respond to French nationalism and religiosity."<sup>27</sup> Here the bard becomes a peculiarly French creation, reflecting the taste of the nation's rulers and the search for a mythology all their own by the French people. The enigmatic nature of the Bard allowed for nearly any interpretation and was open to any symbolic purpose. Murky historicity allowed the Bard to readily absorb socio-political intentions as an artistic symbol. In Napoleonic France, Ossian and the Bard stood as northern European versions of Homer's heroes, a mythology as old and grand as classical antiquity. Ossianism in France, therefore, was an outlet for the imaginative fixation on a fabled Celtic past, a mode of political demonstration, and distinctly Napoleonic.<sup>28</sup> Ossianism was also perhaps a move toward legitimizing the social upheaval of contemporary France. The paradigm-shattering revolutions of the last century and Napoleon's rigorous new vision for France left the old world, defined by the Roman Empire and Catholicism, behind. By drawing on a more ancient, indigenous past, Ossianism provided a "new" history that better represented the aspirations of Le Consulat.

Legions of painters were inspired by the *Poems of Ossian*, but for this study only two oil paintings will be examined.<sup>29</sup> The first is Anne-Louis Girodet's excessively titled *The Ghosts of French Heroes, Killed in the Service of Their Country, Led by Victory, Arrive to Live in the Aerial Elysium Where the Ghosts of Ossian and his Valiant Warriors Gather to Render to Them in their Voyage of Immortality and Glory a Festive of Peace and of Friendship* (1802) (Fig. 1). This was one of a pair of paintings commissioned to adorn a public reception room at Josephine and Napoleon's palace, Malmaison, outside Paris. Every decorative element at Malmaison was chosen specifically to convey a message, from Josephine's beloved swan motifs to Napoleon's canopied war room.<sup>30</sup> Today, Malmaison's preserved rooms stand like the set of an abandoned stage play, awaiting the entrance of actors to bring it to life. The set is now peopled only by the





Figure 1. Anne-Louis Girodet de Roucy-Trioson, *The Ghosts of French Heroes* (1802).

figures in the paintings, which Ossian haunts like an elusive phantom. In this context, Girodet's painting presents the viewer with a vision of the lofty, militaristic aspirations, sentimental imaginings, and artistic ambitions that once emanated from the center of Napoleon's universe.

Anne-Louis Girodet's luminous painting features Ossian in the center welcoming the recently fallen commanders of Napoleon's legions to the realm of the honored dead. His purpose was described to Napoleon thus: "I have tried to trace the *apothéose des héros* for whom France mourns."<sup>31</sup> Apotheosis, fallen heroes and eulogies are hallmarks of Greco-Roman culture, but the painting also incorporates the modern and Ossianic in a wild synthesis.<sup>32</sup> Appearing more Homeric than druidic, Ossian tenderly offers an embrace to the fallen commander General Desaix as a son returning.<sup>33</sup> Surrounding them are other fallen soldiers from all ranks of the



military.<sup>34</sup> Most of the men were former soldiers easily recognizable to a contemporary audience. Above them flies the allegorical vision of Liberty, holding aloft a caduceus of peace and an honorary bundle of palm fronds, crowned with the Gallic cock. The painting is filled with spiritual flesh, lit by an ethereal, dazzling light reflective of the starry heavens. Intangible, glowing orbs are stars, placing the setting in the night sky, somewhere between the Christian heaven, Nordic Valhalla and Elysium. The painting presents a sea of human forms, a concentration of fantastical characters from ancient and modern phantasmagoria. The Maids of Morven, wrapped loosely in diaphanous veils, act as a pearly wave wafting the heroes to the starlit sky, their eyes adoringly trained on Napoleon's commanders. The painting echoes Macpherson's language: florid, heroic, aspirational, and poetic. Fallen heroes in an astral plane lit by moonlight are images derived directly from Macpherson's text:

"Rise, moon, thou daughter of the sky! Look from between thy clouds; rise, that I may behold the gleam of his steel on the field of his promise. Or rather let the meteor, that lights our fathers through the night, come, with its red beam, to show me the way to my fallen hero."<sup>35</sup>

This is a plea uttered by Comala, princess of the Orkney Isles, forlorn atop a hill waiting for Fingal to return from battle. Both the painting and textual images are romanticized fuel for heroism in battle and the noble pursuit of nation-building in Napoleonic France.

Through the medium of mythological and spiritual subject matter centered on the Bard, Girodet's painting includes overtly political messages. The Gallic rooster shelters the dove of peace, protecting it from the retreating Austrian eagle, alluding to Bonaparte's victory over the Austrians in 1800.<sup>36</sup> The painting is a direct allusion to the festivals celebrating the peace treaty signed at Lunéville, equally inspired by neoclassical and neo-Celtic imagery.<sup>37</sup> Or, as more pointedly stated by Albert Boime, Ossian served "to lend an air of mystery and enchantment to the sordid realities of Napoleon's imperialism."<sup>38</sup> Bonaparte's military leaders are welcomed as victorious heroes like Fingal into a fantastic moonlit paradise. Their campaigns and militaristic advances are accordingly recognized as sanctified and similar in spirit to those in age-old mythologies, justifying through mythological means the aggressive conquest of neighboring nations.<sup>39</sup>

The second Ossianic painting, by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, titled *Dream of Ossian* of 1813 (Fig. 2), was commissioned for the ceiling of one of the rooms in the Quirinal Palace in Rome, where it did not reside long before being returned to the artist. The subject



Figure 2. Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *Dream of Ossian* (1813).

matter was inspired by the ending of Macpherson's "The War of Inis-thona." The composition presents a dreaming Ossian surrounded by a cloud of ancestral phantoms. Ossian's late wife, Everallin, breaches the gap between living and dead with a gentle touch to his elbow, flanked by their lost son Oscar on the right. Residing in the center of the composition, mysteriously hooded, is Amir, King of Inisthona, a compatriot of Fingal. The spirits emerge from a dreamscape,

hauntingly translucent, an example of the interest in the effects of moonlight, stars and darkness *en vogue* at the time.<sup>40</sup> Sleeping on his harp in a dark mountainous setting, Ossian is the medium for the heroic dead. Through his storytelling and musical panegyrics, Ossian brings to life the stories of those beyond the grave. This is, after all, one of the greatest preoccupations of a druidic bard, according to Macpherson and certifiable Celtic histories.

Ingres was a figurehead of the Neoclassical movement at the Royal Academy in Paris, and a student of Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825). In comparison to David's firmly Neoclassical paintings, such as *Oath of the Horatii* (1784) or *The Death of Socrates* (1787), Girodet's and Ingres' paintings appear as flights of fancy, existing in a fantastical setting between this world and the next. Stylistically, they lie somewhere between David's staunchly narrative works and Henry Fuseli's phantasmagoric compositions, such as *The Nightmare* (1781). Re-inventing a Celtic past in the trappings of a classical one, these paintings demonstrate a romantic theme: lost Celto-druidic arts existing in a liminal setting, in which the Bard was the perfect subject. Consequently, the Bard was used to portray the dark side of revolution, violence and death on the battlefield, heroically justified through mythic apparitions.

Ossian's hold on the French imagination, though powerful, was short-lived, however. Ossian and druidic bards fell out of favor gradually between 1800, when Macpherson was exposed as a fraud, and Napoleon Bonaparte's death in 1821.<sup>41</sup> They disappear from French paintings and music almost entirely after 1850 and are never again revived on a large scale. During his French heyday, the Bard served as a symbol of societal refashioning, national pride and an iconographic tool to glorify the vagaries of battle, beloved by Napoleon Bonaparte. I suggest that it is because of Napoleon's imaginative fixation on Ossian that the Bard was such a short-lived artistic phenomenon in France. It was a figure borrowed from Gaelic lore to portray specifically Napoleonic ambitions, and accordingly dissipated with the waning of Napoleonic influence. While the Bard may have similarly acted as a conduit for nationalistic and political ideas in Wales, the Welsh context provided more fertile ground for a neo-Celtic renaissance, as is explored below.

## **Iolo Morganwg and Welsh Bardism**

Edward Williams / Iolo Morganwg, born 1747 in the Vale of Glamorgan, trained and worked as a stonemason all his life. It was not his work in stone that earned his place in history,

of course. He was a reader, a poet, a forger, a laudanum addict, a Welsh enthusiast, and a self-proclaimed bard of the ancient order. He collected medieval and modern manuscripts, so many that his tiny house was filled to overflowing, causing many manuscripts to suffer from dampness and disorder. In his later years, his addiction to laudanum induced either hallucinations or spurts of enormous creativity. He often could not tell the difference between genuine documents and those he had manufactured. In 1789 Iolo published a collection of poetry he claimed were originally written by the medieval Welsh poet, Dafydd ap Gwilym (14<sup>th</sup> century), from manuscripts he purportedly discovered. They were in fact invented by Iolo but this would not be revealed for more than a hundred years. Iolo Morganwg was sensitive to the Celtic craze both at home and abroad, and actively capitalized on it. When he was attempting to publish an ambitious work titled *History of the Druids* in 1795, it was suggested that he wait for a brokered peace between France and England, because both the publisher and Morganwg knew there was an eager audience for bardic material in France.<sup>42</sup> Iolo wrote to his wife Peggy: “Stare not and wonder as much as you please, but I have it in serious contemplation to take you and the Children to Paris.”<sup>43</sup> From extant records, Iolo never did visit or move to Paris, but the potential for success there was clear. The related political developments and literary trajectories in both Wales and France may have been parallel rather than intersecting, but the parallels were clear to those producing material for the neo-Celtic currents, as evidenced in Iolo’s letter to his wife.

In 1896 Owen M. Edwards, a publisher and author, finally confirmed Iolo’s publications as fraudulent, which had first been suggested by Professor J. Morris Jones a few years prior. There were three reasons for the long-delayed discrediting of Iolo’s published poems. First, Welsh scholarship and writing historically have not received as much attention as English or even Scottish works. Secondly, the poems were written in strict Welsh meter - no small feat - proving Iolo was fluent in medieval Welsh poetry. In short, Iolo was a gifted writer, and his poems were near enough in form and subject matter to medieval Welsh poetry to be convincing. In fact, Iolo’s writings are at times so convincing that a Ph.D. program at the University of Wales in Aberyswyth is currently dedicated to undoing his webs, stating: “The project sets out to explain how this flawed genius constructed a complex historical and creative synthesis in his vision of the history and significance of Wales.” Thirdly, the Welsh culture and nation needed a national history, one that was noble and dignified, and Iolo answered that need by inventing the Order of the Bards, opening the curtain to a marvelous past and a new cultural future.<sup>44</sup> As the

Welsh historian Prys Morgan has argued, “Iolo made the bard the central figure in the Welsh historical pageant.”<sup>45</sup>

Along with the rest of Western Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Wales was searching for a national identity through a nonclassical mythology.<sup>46</sup> The difference between Continental Europe and Wales was that Wales indeed *had* a genuine, distinguished Celtic mythology and bardic tradition.<sup>47</sup> Therefore the Bard was a vital element of building Welsh nationhood in a more powerful manner than the rest of Europe.<sup>48</sup> Literary works such as the *Mabinogi* and the Poetry of the Princes had actual historicity and relevance.<sup>49</sup> In 1764, Evan Evans published *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Ancient Welsh Bards*, a groundbreaking collection of authentic medieval Welsh poetry.<sup>50</sup> In the preface, Evans intimates it was in fact James Macpherson’s publications of Ossian’s poems that prompted him to provide a Welsh response, although Evans could produce the original manuscripts and proof of medieval pedigree. Evan Evans consciously called on Welsh poets to “take up the mantle of the bards and rally the nation, not in mourning but in rage against injustice.”<sup>51</sup> Macpherson’s Ossian became a mouthpiece for the imperial ambitions and warmongering of Napoleonic France, but in Wales the Bard would rage against centuries of injustice due to British imperialism.

### **The Bard as artistic impetus**

One of the earliest and consequential literary contributions to Welsh bardism was Thomas Gray’s poem *The Bard: a Pindaric Ode* (1757), a metered poem romanticizing and narrating the bardicide of King Edward I (1239-1307).<sup>52</sup> The final moment, when the last bard is about to throw himself over a windswept cliff, is imagined in lines 35-48:

On dreary Arvon’s shore they lie,  
 Smear’d with gore, and ghastly pale:  
 Far, far aloof the affrighted ravens sail;  
 The famish’d eagle screams and passes by.  
 Dear lost companions of my tuneful art,  
 Dear, as the light that visits these sad eyes,  
 Dear, as the ruddy drops that warm my heart,  
 Ye died amidst your dying country’s cries –  
 No more I weep. They do not sleep.  
 On yonder cliffs, a grisly band,  
 I see them sit, they linger yet,  
 Avengers of their native land:



With me in dreadful harmony they join,  
And weave with bloody hands the tissue of thy line.

Thomas Gray's poetic image of the bard was informed by paintings he saw during his travels in Italy with Horace Walpole between 1739-41. He attributed his vision of the bard partially to Raphael's oil painting *Ezekiel's Vision* (1518, Palatine Gallery of Palazzo Pitti, Florence) (Fig. 3), and the fresco *Moses Breaking the Law* by Parmigianino in Santa Maria della Steccata (c. 1531), Parma (Fig. 4).<sup>53</sup> In both Italian paintings, the primary figures are captured in the last



Figure 3. Raphael, *Ezekiel's Vision* (1518).



Figure 4. Parmigianino, *Moses* (1531).

moment before wreaking destruction and violence, causing the calamitous end of an epoch. Moses's fury ripples from his brow through his body, the stone tablets raised high over his head, ready to hurl them to the ground. Raphael's God, wrapped in vengeful red, descends in his prophesied chariot to signal the end of time on earth. Gray's bard is similarly captured in the last moment before ultimate violence and the end of an epoch, and by channelling that drama and

tragedy into his bard, Gray elevates Edward's bardicide to Biblical proportions. Later artists transmitted the robust energy and impending doom of the Italian painters and Gray's bard to create a potent image, sufficient to rouse Welsh rage against injustice. Whether legendary or factual, King Edward's infamy and the destruction of the medieval bards became a rallying cry for anti-English sentiment, and the bard became a cultural and political symbol for Welsh nationalism.<sup>54</sup> Spurred by the poem and increasing Welsh cultural awareness, anti-Edwardian sentiment grew so strong that by the 1790s "some of the wilder democrats in London-Welsh circles found it hard to resist the temptation to urinate on Edward I's grave at Westminster."<sup>55</sup> Gray's poem struck all the right chords for Welsh nationalists and Celticists and his rousing image of the bard at cliff's edge provided the consummate subject for politicized, romanticized art production.

It was in this context that the artist Thomas Jones (1742-1893) began his career. He studied painting under the famed Welsh landscapist, Richard Wilson (1714-1782) and painted *The Bard* in 1774 (Fig. 5), which he believed was one of his 'best' paintings. When the painting was exhibited in 1774 it received general praise from critics, exemplified by the *Middlesex*



Figure 5. Thomas Jones, *The Bard* (1774).

*Journal*, which proclaimed it "finely romantic...a most capital piece."<sup>56</sup> Inspired by Thomas Gray's *The Bard*, the painting captures the drama, tragedy and sentiment of the poem. A hoary-



headed sage stands upon a dark precipice, windswept and forlorn. The bard clings to his harp at the end of his life, an emblem of the poetry, knowledge and craft that die with him. The enormous, sensitive scenery is a product of Jones' tutelage from Wilson. It is a blustery, craggy cliffside, the bard at his last sunset, the summation of an era violently ended by King Edward. A vision of Stonehenge looms in the background, which Jones visited in 1769. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Stonehenge did not belong to a Neolithic past in the popular imagination, but instead to an age of druidic rituals, a locus for the mystery and romanticism of the Celtic bards.<sup>57</sup> Thomas Jones' *The Bard* introduces the image of the bard as a specifically Welsh entity. In French Ossianism the Bard symbolized a *primitif*, "a dark and primal northern world inhabited by heroes and spirits correspond[ing] to a growing cult of subjectivity and irrationalism."<sup>58</sup> Contrastingly, in Wales the Bard represented a repressed national history, a reason to be recognized and celebrated on a global stage, as will be explored further below. The Bard in art epitomized the Welsh desire for recognition as a culture and a people separate from England. It was a highly suitable and natural choice, and forevermore a Welsh mascot.

Thomas Gray's *The Bard* inspired many artistic interpretations of the same trope on this elegiac theme that Kate Trumpener has termed the "survival in destruction" motif.<sup>59</sup> This was manifest again in *The Last Bard* by Philippe de Loutherbourg in 1784 (Fig. 6), likely the most famous iteration of the motif.<sup>60</sup> His work was the frontispiece for Edward Jones's *Musical and Poetical Relations of the Welsh Bards*, a significant contribution to Celtic studies. Here the Bard is the central figure amidst a whirling wind and raging sea. The Welsh landscape presents the very edge of existence, uncultivated and deadly. Edward's troops cry for blood on the opposite shore, as the Bard faces his destruction. The harp is monumental, an appropriate image for the beginning of a book of music and poetry. The bard casts his eyes upon his impending doom, plucking his last notes on his harp, as if in a previsioning of the loss to Welsh culture his death represents. That a visualization of Gray's poem should introduce a major work of Welsh history and literature, and not some other image, speaks to its significance as a thematic lightning rod for Welsh nationalism. Here the Bard is not a hijacked Celtic stage character as was he was in Napoleonic Paris, but the perfect choice to represent authentic Welsh civilization to an international audience, as exemplified by the next work to be discussed. A nearly identical Bard materializes in John Evan Thomas's (1810-1873) sculpture *The Death of Tewdrig*, 1848-1856 (Fig. 7), shown at the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations in Hyde Park



Figure 6. Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, *The Last Bard* (1784).



Figure 7. John Evan Thomas, *The Death of Tewdrig* (1848-1856).

in 1851. Sculpted more than ninety years after Thomas Gray's bardic poem, this work attests to the vibrant, long life of bardism and Celtic Revival in Wales. The work was originally sculpted as a submission to the Abergavenny Eisteddfod arts competition of 1848, a uniquely Welsh festival celebrating home-grown talent and culture. King Tewdrig (Tewdrig ap Teithfallt, died c. 630 CE), saint and king of Glamorgan, forcefully thrusts a cross forward at the victory over the Saxons at the Battle of Mathern. His daughter, Marchell, tenderly attends to him in his last moments. Unlike Fingal or Amir, Tewdrig almost certainly lived and ruled, as recorded in the 12<sup>th</sup>-century *Book of Llandaff*, a translation of which was published in Wales in 1840.<sup>61</sup>

The noble king Tewdrig was coaxed out of his early retirement and sacred hermitage to protect his son and the Welsh kingdom from Saxon forces. An angel foretold the king's fate: he would lead his men once more into battle, and upon seeing his face the enemy would flee, but not before he should receive a mortal wound. King Tewdrig cheerfully obeyed and died nobly, as the angel predicted. It is the king's last moments that Thomas chose to depict, with a bard as the

intermediary between the event and the audience. Again situated in the liminal space between life and death, the bard stages his panegyric. The muscular, aged performer focuses all his powers as a storyteller to conjure this scene which is so lucid and complete that the characters materialize before our eyes. The Bard is the vital key in reviving Welsh history in a literal way here, he is the conduit through which Welsh history is recreated and celebrated. By presenting Welsh history in this way, Wales was granted an honored place as an independent cultural entity, particularly as it represented Wales in Queen Victoria and Albert's Crystal Palace Exhibition for the world to see.

*The Death of Tewdrig* can be seen as a visual rebuttal to anti-Welsh actions taken by the English government in the four years prior to its creation. In 1844, a government report declared that the rural dwellers of Wales (70% of whom could only speak Welsh) must learn English to become prosperous and beneficial to the country at large. A Welsh legislator, William Williams, put in a complaint that the government had done little to help Welsh school children learn English. His grievances, as well as others', resulted in the government's Commission on Welsh Education in 1846, the publication of which became known as *The Treason of the Blue Books* in 1847. The *Blue Books* declared the Welsh a barbaric people, uncivilized and impossible to teach. It condemned the Welsh as "dirty and mendacious," and damned Welsh women as "unchaste slatterns."<sup>62</sup> This did nothing to endear the English to their Welsh neighbors and rather than retreating under the flag of English authority, the Welsh struck back with a strong sense of nationhood and a revival of Celtic druidism, as commemorated in contemporary artistic endeavors. The summation of this cultural awakening was the institution of the National Eisteddfod in 1861, an arts festival and competition which relied heavily on Iolo Morganwg's writings as guides to ceremonies and dress. Wales was recognized as a singular entity among "every civilized community and the remotest corners of the globe" that participated in the Great Exhibition, which *The Times* of Oct. 1851 highlighted as an opportunity to present "Welshness" to an international viewership.<sup>63</sup> The Bard was presented masterfully in John Evan Thomas's sculpture, first at the Eisteddfod and then at the Great Exhibition.

The final example of the persistence of the bard in art media is Henry Clarence Whaite's *The Archdruid: a Throne in a Grove* (1898) (Fig. 8).<sup>64</sup> Henry Clarence Whaite (1828–1912) was a celebrated artist and a founding member of the Royal Cambrian Academy of Art as well as a participant in the National Eisteddfod of Wales.<sup>65</sup> Continuing in the same vein as Thomas



Jones's *The Bard*, Whaite's impressionistic painting contains the three essential elements of a bardic image: the ancient bard, a fantastic landscape and a megalithic circle. But in this painting these elements take on different roles than in the previous examples: the landscape becomes the primary focus while the figure of the bard is secondary. The center of the composition features a



Figure 8. Henry Clarence Whaite, *The Archdruid* (1898).

sweeping oak tree, bright like a flame, a profusion of leaves and branches twisting to fill the canvas. The oak provides a magnificent throne for the archdruid, who blends seamlessly into the roots of the tree. The stone circle is abbreviated, only a small portion visible beyond the tree's enormous trunk. The archdruid is no longer a solitary figure, he is at the rear of a procession, the endpoint of a winding pageant. The azure robes, costumes and regalia reflect those worn by the Gorsedd bards at the eisteddfodau, which Whaite may have witnessed in person. A mustachioed prince presents himself to the archdruid, crossing his chest with a spear in a patriotic salute, perhaps returning from battle and recounting the tale. Unlike the soldiers and heroes of French Ossianic paintings, there are no contemporary allusions to fallen men. No figures are identifiable as specific individuals, as they were in Girodet's *Ossian*. All is imagined, timeless, a gorgeous vision of the spirit of Welsh heroism and arts, a visual reverberation of Welsh cultural revival. This is the essential difference between French Ossianism and Welsh bardism: although both conflated romantic imagination with Celtic history and myth, in Wales this manifested itself as a revival of identity while in France it was a politically fueled and transient fashion.

The reversal of focus in Whaite's paintings, from the bard himself to the landscape, may reflect a shift in the Welsh mindset. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Wales had emerged from the shadow of England with its own national identity. The condemnatory *Blue Books* were eventually forgotten in English and Welsh consciousness, as Wales confidently rose as an independent society. The landscape could now speak for itself, and no longer needed a popular mythical icon to stand for its history and tradition. Similarly, the mystery and fame of the druidic stone circle is no longer a primary focus, it is no longer needed to represent the ancient heritage of Wales. The oak tree takes its place, like the dignified history of Wales revived. It is continually branching into new areas, and not a completed, man-made relic like Stonehenge, but an organic and evolving living legacy, with deep roots and hopeful branches.

The Bard was a historical figure, a national myth, and the key source for "bardic nationalism" in Wales.<sup>66</sup> Iolo's fabrications became a deeply imbedded and cherished tradition and remain so. Even Owen Edwards, who exposed Iolo as a fraud in concrete terms as mentioned above, praised Iolo's Gorsedd in the same breath. He described Iolo's falsified manuscripts and the consequential role of the bard in the Welsh imagination as follows:

"The Gorsedd, divested of the humbug which is too often associated with it, might serve a good purpose. It might be used to show to the thousands that frequent the Eisteddfod

how Literature and Music and Art are honoured in our Republic of Letters in an Eisteddfod that is the creation of a literary peasantry.”<sup>67</sup>

Iolo Morganwg’s druidic inventions and the subsequent institution of the National Eisteddfod were crucial in re-making the Welsh as a “literary peasantry” instead of a nation of “dirty and mendacious” savages as proclaimed by the *Blue Books*. The eisteddfod affirmed Wales as a “Republic of Letters,” instead of a backward country with a dysfunctional language.<sup>68</sup> The bard served as an emblem of Welsh history, the search for a shared mythology, of Welsh identity and perseverance.<sup>69</sup> In fact, Welsh bardism was so successful at creating a storied past and proud future that the English “got in on the act,” as Jeff Strabone wrote, by co-opting Welsh bards and Scottish poetry under an umbrella “British” categorization.<sup>70</sup> Eventually the image of the Bard in painting and sculpture faded as a primary subject matter in Welsh art, but continued in spirit well into the twentieth century, most frequently surfacing in the honorary eisteddfod chairs and awards.

## **Analysis and Conclusion**

Despite the divergent trajectories discussed in this study, French and Welsh treatments of the Bard also shared some elements. Specifically, the setting is an important visual and metaphysical aspect in both French Ossianic and Welsh bardic art. In the examples studied in this paper (and many more besides), bards are placed in a liminal setting: an indefinable, transitory space, such as a sunset or sunrise, between life and death, or somewhere between land and sea, earth and heaven.<sup>71</sup> In le Sueur’s opera the druids and singers were joined by a harpswell to herald the sunrise, Girodet’s and Igres’s bards were the liminal medium between this world and the spiritual, and John Evan Thomas’s bard conjured the death of Tewdrig through song. Thomas Jones’ bard eminently falls into another dimension, physically in the sea and spiritually in the afterlife. Bards therefore existed in the imagination of the Celtic twilight, forever liminal, a well-spring of national identity. Joep Leerssen has said concerning the Ossian’s liminality: “Ossian is not a member of human society but rather a remote ambassador to the ontological outer fringes, relaying messages from other spheres to his audience.”<sup>72</sup> In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries Wales and France were in demonstrable and painful flux, politically and culturally. Like the Bard, both nations were figuratively in a liminal setting. The image of the Bard in this sense could represent these fluctuating situations and give a deeper meaning to

them. In this respect, the ancient Celts and bards functioned as Juliette Wood stated, “[in] the periphery to changing geographical, political, linguistic, cultural and even spiritual centres.”<sup>73</sup> It is through this bardic periphery that weighty topics were addressed, like wartime bloodshed in France or centuries of English oppression in Wales.

The search for a national identity and the desire for a northern European mythology created a cultural climate that culminated in the bardic translations and forgeries of James Macpherson and Iolo Morganwg. They inflamed the imaginations of artists in France and Wales with surprisingly different results. Why was the Bard an ideal figure to articulate the socio-political situations in both nations? In France the Bard became the visual manifestation of a romanticized nostalgia, a *primitif*, and a favorite of Napoleon Bonaparte, utilized as a political symbol justifying aggression. Celticism in Napoleonic France also acted as a counterbalance to the strident rationalism of the Enlightenment. In Wales the Bard was a highly charged figure, embodying Welsh anticolonial sentiments, and sparked a cultural awakening the effects of which continue to reverberate.<sup>74</sup> The longevity of the Bard in Welsh painting far surpassed the French Ossian, despite Iolo and Macpherson’s shared fate as exposed frauds. This is due, in part, to the fact that Iolo’s bards were an idealized remembrance of an actual past, whereas Ossian was a mythical figure from a borrowed past, and accordingly disappeared following the death of its most ardent patron. France and Wales were nations undergoing momentous changes, and both sought a native heritage as an expression of political and social desires. These desires were fulfilled by the Bard, a contrasting symbol of nationality, resistance and liminality.

**Acknowledgements:** Many thanks are due to *e-Keltoi*’s editor, Dr. Bettina Arnold, for her guidance and vision, and to the reviewers who generously offered their time and advice, vastly improving this article. I am also indebted to Dr. Heather Belknap of Brigham Young University, whose teaching and encouragement made this research possible. I am also grateful to my father for taking me to visit Malmaison, and for my mother and my aunt Carol who cared for my children at that difficult time allowing me to do so.

**Note on publication:** The research and writing for this article were first undertaken as part of a graduate seminar in Fall term of 2007, “Studies in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Art,” taught by Dr. Heather Belknap at Brigham Young University. It is also the summation of three semesters of Welsh language courses taught by Tom Taylor. I presented a version of this article at the Celtic Studies Association of North America annual conference at Colgate University in 2007. On 14



July 2013 it was published online as a blog post, accessible [here](#). With significant revisions and edits as suggested by two blind reviews, the present version appears here in *e-Keltoi*.

## Figure Credits

Figure 1. Anne-Louis Girodet de Roucy-Trioson, *The Ghosts of French Heroes, Killed in the Service of Their Country, Led by Victory, Arrive to Live in the Aerial Elysium Where the Ghosts of Ossian and his Valiant Warriors Gather to Render to Them in their Voyage of Immortality and Glory a Festive of Peace and of Friendship*, 1802, oil on canvas. Exhibited in the Salon of 1802, now in the collection of Chateau de Malmaison, Rueil-Malmaison, France. (Source: image available under the Creative Commons License).

Figure 2. Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *Dream of Ossian*, 1813, oil on canvas. Today in the collections of Musée Ingres, Montauban, France. (Source: image available under the Creative Commons License).

Figure 3. Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino), *Ezekiel's Vision*, 1518, Palatine Gallery of Palazzo Pitti, Florence. Oil on panel. Image in the public domain.

Figure 4. Parmigianino (Girolamo Francesco Maria Mazzola), *Moses holding the Tables of the Law above his head*, 1531, engraved by Domenico Cunego and published: Gavin Hamilton, *Schola Italica picturae* (Romae: G. Hamilton, 1773), plate 16. Etching and engraving. © Photo: Royal Academy of Arts, London.

Figure 5. Thomas Jones, *The Bard*, 1774, oil on canvas. Today in the collections of Amgueddfa Cymru / National Museum Wales. (Source: image under Universal (CC0 1.0) Public Domain Dedication).

Figure 6. Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg, *The Last Bard*, 1784, engraving. Figures engraved by John Hall (1739–1797) in London. Today in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image under Universal (CC0 1.0) Public Domain Dedication.

Figure 7. John Evan Thomas, *The Death of Tewdrig*, 1848, bronze sculpture cast by Elkington & Co, Birmingham and Liverpool. Today in the collections of Amgueddfa Cymru / National Museum Wales. Image under Universal (CC0 1.0) Public Domain Dedication.

Figure 8. Henry Clarence Whaite, *The Archdruid: a Throne in a Grove*, 1898, oil on canvas. Image under Universal (CC0 1.0) Public Domain Dedication.

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> James Macpherson, *Fingal, an Ancient Epic Poem in Six Books, together with Several Other Poems composed by Ossian, the Son of Fingal, translated from the Gaelic Language* (London: T. Becket and P. A. de Hondt, 1762). Fiona J. Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988). Paul J. Degategno, *James Macpherson* (Boston: Twayne, 1989). For research on Scottish responses to Macpherson's Ossian and greater neo-Celticism, see: John Morrison, *Painting the Nation*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), pp. 185-223.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Williams, *Barddoniaeth Dafydd ab Gwilym* (London: H. Baldwin & E. & T. Williams, 1789). Taliesin Williams (edt.), *Iolo Manuscripts: a Selection of Ancient Welsh Manuscripts* (Llandoverly: William Rees Publishers, 1888).

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the Bard in Great Britain generally, see: Sam Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity: Ancient Britain and the Romantic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). From pg. 46: "For Celtic advocates the bardic tradition was one of the most important cultural forms in ancient British society. Not only had it preserved the authentic ancestral voices of the past, but it also demonstrated the creative genius and literary sophistication of the bards themselves. Bardic literature, along with the closely related field of Druidic learning, indicated the high level of intellectual attainment possessed by ancestral Britons in an heroic age."

<sup>4</sup> R. J. W. Evans, "'The Manuscripts': the Culture and Politics of Forgery in Central Europe." Essay in: *Rattleskull Genius, the Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg*, Geraint H. Jenkins ed., (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), p. 52-54. Ossian inspired interest beyond France as well: Tomáš Hlobil, "Ossianism in the Bohemian Lands." *The Modern Language Review* (101/3 2006), pp. 789-797.

<sup>5</sup> Frances Fowle, "The Celtic Revival in Britain & Ireland: Reconstructing the Past, c. AD 1600-1920." Chapter in: *Celts: Art and Identity*, Farley, Julia and Fraser Hunter (eds) (London: British Museum, 2015), pp. 234-260, p. 237.

<sup>6</sup> Paul F. Moulton, "A Controversy Discarded and "Ossian" Revealed: an Argument for a Renewed Consideration of "The Poems of Ossian." *College Music Symposium* (49/50 2009/2010), pp. 392-401. Moulton states, p. 392: "Most who encountered literature that mentions *The Poems of Ossian* will be dissuaded from interest in the poems, since the majority of writings dismiss the poems outright." However, he further argues that "...its historical weights alone makes casual dismissals unacceptable, and its undeniable impact on music, literature and art should not be overlooked." Also: Howard Gaskill, ed. *Ossian Revisited* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), see the introduction.

<sup>7</sup> John Savarese, "Ossian's Folk Psychology." *ELH* (80/3 2013), pp. 715-745. Gaskill, *Ossian Revisited*, p. 1: "No useful purpose is served by resorting to the snide and sneering tones which disfigure so much of the literature of Macpherson. Too often these result from the ill-masked ignorance, prejudice, and embarrassment."

<sup>8</sup> Jeff Strabone, *Poetry and British Nationalisms in the Bardic Eighteenth Century: Imagined Antiquities* (Palgrave Studies in the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Cultures of Print, e-book 2018), p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> In Jeff Strabone's "Allan Ramsay and Thomas Ruddiman: Two Ways of Reviving Scotland's Dead Poets," chapter in: *Poetry and British Nationalisms in the Bardic Eighteenth Century: Imagined Antiquities*, he wrote of Allan Ramsay: "As poet and as editor, Ramsay was a major figure of the eighteenth century, not just for Scots poetry but for his role in the development of cultural nationalism in

the British nations and for his contributions to Romanticism. He redirected antiquarian energies to the production of print editions of medieval manuscripts to be read by common readers; he created the bardic model for the anthology of national relics which, in its many proliferations, became an important supply of source material and poetic forms for British poets; he vernacularized classical genres in ways that expanded the capacities of Scots as a poetic language; and he called the Scottish nation to rally to the defense of its own language and poetic traditions as an act of cultural nationalism. For these reasons, I argue, histories of British Romanticism should begin with Ramsay.” (79)

<sup>10</sup> Jeff Strabone: “If any text could be regarded as a sacred national treasure, it was the Bannatyne Manuscript, whose importance to the nation Ramsay clearly understood, yet he poured his effort into altering it line by line. This apparently was how a nationalist editor proceeded in the 1720s. For us to call this “bad” editing would be an abdication of our scholarly duty to understand the past: in this case, how a poet and editor at one point in the past understood the poetry of an earlier point in the past.” (95)

<sup>11</sup> For more information on the Irish sources and controversy, see the article on “Ossian” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, June 13, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ossian>.

<sup>12</sup> James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian* (London: Lackington, Allen and Co., 1803), p. 231.

<sup>13</sup> “Letter from Morris to Lort,” c. 1763, printed in: J. Saunders Lewis, *A School of Welsh Augustans* (London 1924), p. 134. Quoted in: Fiona J. Stafford, *The Sublime Savage; a Study of James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), p. 164.

<sup>14</sup> Paul F. Moulton, “A Controversy Discarded and “Ossian” Revealed: an Argument for a Renewed Consideration of “The Poems of Ossian.” *College Music Symposium* (49/50 2009/2010), pp. 392-401, p. 393.

<sup>15</sup> Scholars of the period only accredited textual sources such as manuscripts, and oral traditions were scorned. See: Derick S. Thomson, *The Gaelic Sources of Macpherson’s ‘Ossian’* (Folcroft: The Folcroft Press, 1952, 1969), p. 5-9. Donald E. Meek, “The Gaelic Ballads of Scotland: Creativity and Adaptation,” chapter in: *Ossian Revisited*, pp. 19-48.

<sup>16</sup> Thomson, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Uwe Böker wrote of this desire for philosophical primitivism and Ossian in his chapter: “The Marketing of Macpherson: the International Book Trade and the first Phase of German Ossian Reception,” in *Ossian Revisited*. From page 74: “The main reasons for the European success [of Macpherson’s Ossian] were, as research has suggested, undoubtedly various: apart from those elements that inspired the politically minded moderate Edinburgh literati, what fascinated continental contemporaries was, amongst other things, the Rousseau-like natural refinement of the Ossianic heroes, as well as that ‘joy of grief which arose from the contemplation of an irretrievably lost past; the strange and sometimes dazzling imagery and style similar to that found in the Bible; the rhythmical language of its poetic prose, which, freed from classical rigour, seemed to bear witness to the force of expression ascribed to earliest stages of society; and the almost mythical portrayal of a people and its culture, which apparently took on the role of a model society along the lines of a new philosophical primitivism and a yearning for freedom from the restraints of absolutism.” See also: Bernard Degout, “Ossian entre Napoléon et Chateaubriand.” *Napoleonica. La Revue* (2/34 2019), pp. 2-17; p. 4-5.

<sup>18</sup> Paul J. Degategno, “‘The Source of Daily and Exalted Pleasure,’: Jefferson Reads the Poems of Ossian,” chapter in *Ossian Revisited*, p. 94.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Smith, “Ossian, ou Les Bards: an Opera by Jean-Francois le Sueur.” Essay in: *From Gaelic to Romantic: Ossianic Translations*, Fiona Stafford and Howard Gaskill eds. (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), p. 154.

<sup>20</sup> Albert Boime described this style as an “Ossianic mode”: Albert Boime, *Art in the Age of Bonapartism, 1800-1815* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 54-71.

<sup>21</sup> Manuela Jahrmärker, *Ossian: eine Figur und eine Idee des europäischen Musiktheaters um 1800* (Cologne: Medienservice und Verlag Dr. Ulrich Tank, 1993), p. 311-37. Matthias Wessel, *Die Ossian-Dichtung in der musikalischen Komposition* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1994), p. 212-253.

<sup>22</sup> Annelies Andries, “Uniting the Arts to Stage the Nation: Le Sueur's “Ossian” (1804) in Napoleonic Paris.” *Cambridge Opera Journal* (31/ 2-3 2019), pp. 153-187.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, 153-54.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, 159.

<sup>25</sup> Andries, 154.

<sup>26</sup> Jean Mongrédien, *La Musique Française des Lumières au Romantisme: 1789-1830* (Paris: Flammarion, 1986), p. 34-37.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, 159.

<sup>28</sup> Frank George Healy, *The Literary Culture of Napoleon* (Geneva, 1959), p. 120–1 and 127–32.

<sup>29</sup> The first major painting of Ossianic themes was Paul Duqueylar’s *Ossian Singing a Funeral Hymn*, exhibited at the Salon of 1800 in Paris.

<sup>30</sup> Armand Guerinot, ed., *Le Chateau de Malmaison* (Paris, part of the *Librarie d’Architecture et d’Art Decoratif* series, 1900-1910). Concerning Ossianism in French art, Albert Boime p. 59: “There was a definite sense of defeat among the popular classes after the failure to organize a society on the basis of liberty, equality, and fraternity. It is this combination of contradictory circumstances, have a sense of glory and a sense of defeat and failure, that created a climate receptive to the Ossianic poetry. The melancholy mood of the Ossianic paintings, the lunar quality, the vague, misty settings, the heroic, unreflective actions, and the fatalistic philosophy fit the mindset of French society during the peak years of the Napoleonic regime. The Ossianic heroes may have occupied “aerial places” and cloudy, celestial domains, but their geographical and chronological proximity made them more accessible than the heroes of Greece and Rome, and their pantheistic and pessimistic view of life prevented a sentimental gloss of their actual experience.”

<sup>31</sup> A. Coupin, *Oeuvres posthumes de Girodet-Trioson* (Paris: Jules Renouard, 1829), vol 2, p. 284-297. Also: G. Levintine, *Girodet-Trioson: an Iconographical Study* (New York, 1978). G. Levintine, “L’Ossian de Girodet et l’actualité politique sous le Consulat,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (6/48 1956), pp. 39-56.

<sup>32</sup> Boime, 68.

---

<sup>33</sup> Ossian depicted as a blind bard can trace its beginnings to Nikolai Abildgaard's painting *Blind Ossian Singing his Swan Song* (1785), oil on canvas, National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen. Frances Fowle: "His lack of sight symbolized inner vision, a motif that recalls Homer's characterization as a blind bard. The image was widely disseminated through John Frederik Clemens's 1787 engraving and became the frontispiece for numerous translations." (241).

<sup>34</sup> Boime, 62.

<sup>35</sup> James Macpherson, *Collection of British Authors, vol. CXVI: The Poems of Ossian* (Leipzig: Bernh, 1847), p. 139.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Crow, *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 249.

<sup>37</sup> Annalies Andries: "Literary scholar Tili Boon Cuillé and art historian George Levitine have argued that the symbolic content of this painting celebrated the settlement of two major conflicts in 1801: the Treaty of Lunéville, ending the hostilities with Austria, and the Concordat with Pope Pius VII, which restored the relationship between France and the Roman Catholic Church." Sources: George Levitine, "L'aigle épouvanté de l' 'Ossian' de Girodet et l'aigle effrayé du mausolée de Turenne." *Gazette des beaux-arts* (1974), pp. 319–23; and Tili Boon Cuillé, "From Myth to Religion in Ossian's France." Chapter in: *The Super-Enlightenment: Daring to Know too Much*, ed. Dan Edelstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 251–2.

<sup>38</sup> Boime, 64.

<sup>39</sup> Frances Fowle wrote: "This apparently 'Celtic' image is none other than blatant political propaganda, designed to encourage the French to get behind their leader." (242).

<sup>40</sup> Albert Boime's wonderful discussion of meteoric light, crystals, electricity and Galvanism in relation to this painting: *ibid* 59-72.

<sup>41</sup> Bernard Degout, "Ossian entre Napoléon et Chateaubriand." *Napoleonica. La Revue* 2019/2 (N° 34), pp. 2 - 17; p. 4-5.

<sup>42</sup> Damian Walford Davies, *Presences that Disturb: Models of Romantic Identity in the Literature and Culture of the 1790s* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002) p. 143.

<sup>43</sup> The National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, MS 21285E/850; 19 February 1795. Quoted in: Damian Walford Davies, p. 143.

<sup>44</sup> Adam Coward, "Exiled Trojans or the Sons of Gomer Wales's Origins in the long Eighteenth Century." Chapter in: Lotte Jensen, ed., *The Roots of Nationalism: National Identity Formation in Early Modern Europe, 1600-1815* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), pp. 167-181.

<sup>45</sup> Prys Morgan, "From a Death to a View: the Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period." Essay in: *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 83.

<sup>46</sup> Prys Morgan, *The Eighteenth Century Renaissance* (Swansea: C. Davies, 1981).

<sup>47</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>48</sup> M. Wynn Thomas, *Corresponding Cultures: the Two Literatures of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), p. 18. Concerning the antiquarian revival of Welsh poetry: “Wales was in part awakened to the national distinctiveness of its ancient literary culture partly by viewing it through the eyes of England.” Also: Jane Aaron, “Bardic Anticolonialism,” in: Jane Aaron and Chris Williams, *Postcolonial Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), p. 137-158, 141.

<sup>49</sup> In 1838 Lady Charlotte Guest translated the *Mabinogi*, which brought considerable attention to Welsh literature.

<sup>50</sup> Evan Evans (Ieuan Prydydd), *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Ancient Welsh Bards* (London: Dodsley’s, 1764). Reprinted: Montgomery: John Pryse, 1862. See Jeff Strabone, “The Fall and Rise of the Welsh Bards, or, how the English became British.” Chapter in: Jeff Strabone, *Poetry and British Nationalisms in the Bardic Eighteenth Century: Imagined Antiquities* (Palgrave Studies in the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Cultures of Print, e-book 2018), pp. 123-214.

<sup>51</sup> Strabone, 165.

<sup>52</sup> This poem is considered by many the first creative work of the Celtic Revival: F. I. McCarthy, “The Bard of Thomas Gray, its composition and its use by painters.” *National Library of Wales Journal*, 14, pp. 105-12. Also: James Mulholland, “Gray’s Ambition: Printed Voices and Performing Bards in the Later Poetry.” *ELH* (75/1 2008), pp. 109-134. Thomas Gray’s response to James Macpherson’s publication is quite interesting to note: “The Erse Fragments have been publish’d five weeks ago in Scotland...I continue to think them genuine, tho’ my reasons for believing the contrary are rather stronger than ever: but I will have them antique, for I never knew a Scotchman of my own time, that could read, much less write, poetry; & such poetry too!” From Gray to Mason, 7 August 1760. Thomas Gray, *The Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), vol. II, p. 690. The direct inspiration for the poem was the account of bardicide in the second volume of Thomas Carte’s *A General History of England*, 4 vols. (London, 1747-1755; vol. 2, 1750). See also: Thomas Gray, Roger Lonsdale (ed.), *The Poems of Thomas Gray*, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith (London: Longmans, 1969), p. 177-183.

<sup>53</sup> Oliver Fairclough, *'Cambria's curse': images of the Bard 1750-1850* (Cardiff: National Museums & Galleries of Wales, 2001), “The Paintings.”

<sup>54</sup> King Edward I (1239 – 1307 CE) incorporated Wales into England in 1284 under the Statute of Rhuddlan.

<sup>55</sup> Geraint H. Jenkins, “Historical Writing in the Eighteenth Century,” in: *A Guide to Welsh Literature, c. 1700-1800*, ed. Branwen Jarvis (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 34-35.

<sup>56</sup> Ann Sumner and Greg Smith, *Thomas Jones, an Artist Rediscovered* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 142.

<sup>57</sup> In 1721 William Stukeley described Stonehenge as a “Celtic temple” for druids in his archaeological drawings and writings, the first time in print attesting to the association of Stonehenge with magical Celticism. Stukely, Cardiff MS 4.26 ff. 125-9. William Stukely, *Stonehenge: a Temple Restor’d to the British Druids* (London: W. Innys and R. Maney, 1740). D.B. Haycock, *William Stukeley: Science,*

---

*Religion and Archaeology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002), p. 128. Also: Fowle, p. 239.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Crow, 247. See also Fiona Stafford, p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> Kate Truempener, *Bardic Nationalism: the Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> Oliver Fairclough, "Hall and Middleman, after Philippe de Louthembourg, *The Bard*, 1784."

<sup>61</sup> Tewdrig is recorded in Charter 141 of the *Book of Llandaf*. John Reuben Davies, *The Book of Llandaf and the Norman Church in Wales* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), see the introduction and p. 137. William Jenkins Rees, *The Liber landavensis, Llyfr Teilo, or, The ancient register of the cathedral church of Llandaff; from mss. in the libraries of Hengwrt, and of Jesus College, Oxford* (Llandovery: W. Rees, 1840). Translated from Latin and Welsh into English. Tewdrig was also briefly mentioned in Iolo Morganwg's writings: Taliesin Williams and Thomas Price ed., *Iolo Manuscripts: A Selection of Ancient Welsh Manuscripts, in Prose and Verse, from the Collection Made by the Late Edward Williams, Iolo Morganwg, for the Purpose of Forming a Continuation of the Myfyrian Archaiology; and Subsequently Proposed as Materials for a New History of Wales* (Llandovery: William Rees, 1848), p. 534.

<sup>62</sup> Prys Morgan, *Wales: An Illustrated History* (Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2005), p. 250.

<sup>63</sup> *The Times*, "The Final Day," 13 Oct 1851, p. 5. Also: "Afterlives." In *The Great Exhibition, 1851: a Sourcebook*, ed. Jonathan Shears, pp. 186-228 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 186-228.

<sup>64</sup> The Conwy Valley, perhaps because of its popularity due to the supposed connection to Thomas Gray's poem, would eventually turn into a highly influential Welsh artists' colony, where Clarence Whaite was living at the time he painted *The Archdruid*.

<sup>65</sup> W. J. Slater, *Catalogue: Royal Cambrian Academy of Art* (Plas Mawr, Conway, 1905). Also: John T. Koch, *Celtic Culture: a Historical Encyclopedia* (ABC-CLIO, 2005), p. 116.

<sup>66</sup> Sarah Prescott, "Gray's Pale Spectre": Evan Evans, Thomas Gray, and the Rise of Welsh Bardic Nationalism." *Modern Philology* (104/1 2006), pp. 72-95; p. 72. For a comparison of bardism in Scotland and Wales, see Jeff Strabone, p. 124.

<sup>67</sup> Owen Edwards, *Wales; A National Magazine for the English-Speaking Parts of Wales*, vol. III, no. 25 (1896), p. 235. Reprinted: Forgotten Books, 2018.

<sup>68</sup> W. Gareth Evans, "The British state and Welsh language education, 1850-1914," in: Geraint H. Jenkins, ed., *The Welsh Language and its Social Domains* (University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 472-480.

<sup>69</sup> Sarah Prescott, 82: "...to recover the work of the bards is to undo the oppression of Edward and the English nation by acts of scholarly defiance that are not necessarily depoliticized." Kate Truempener, 6: The bard acted as "the mouthpiece for a whole society, articulating its values, chronicling its history, and mourning the insoluble tragedy of its collapse." Also: Murray G. H. Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Jane Aaron and Christ Williams, eds.



*Postcolonial Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005); Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004).

<sup>70</sup> Strabone, 124.

<sup>71</sup> Joep Leerssen, "Ossianic Liminality: Between Native Tradition and Pre-romantic Taste." Essay in: *From Gaelic to Romantic: Ossianic Translations*, edited by Fiona Stafford and Howard Gaskill (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), p. 7.

<sup>72</sup> Leerssen, 7.

<sup>73</sup> Juliette Wood, "Perceptions of the Past in Welsh Folklore Studies." *Folklore* (108, 1997), p. 94.

<sup>74</sup> Prescott, 75.