



Tensions on the periphery: Breton druids in Cardiff (1899)

Heather Williams

To cite this article: Heather Williams (2023) Tensions on the periphery: Breton druids in Cardiff (1899), *Studies in Travel Writing*, 26:1, 71-84, DOI: [10.1080/13645145.2023.2212869](https://doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2023.2212869)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2023.2212869>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 08 Jun 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 519



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Tensions on the periphery: Breton druids in Cardiff (1899)

Heather Williams 

Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Aberystwyth, UK

ABSTRACT

This article moves beyond the more usual focus on hierarchical relations between “major” and “minor” cultures to contribute to the emerging debate on the importance of the relations of peripheries with each other, by seeking out the hidden tensions in a rich corpus of travel writing relating to a neo-druidic event in Cardiff in 1899, to which a group of enthusiastic Bretons, mostly from the ranks of the newly formed Union Régionaliste Bretonne [Breton Regionalist Union], were invited. The main texts analysed are by Anatole Le Braz, Charles Le Goffic, François Jaffrennou and Frañsez Vallée. These texts are in French, Breton and Welsh. The analysis reveals tensions within Breton regionalism as well as tensions between two minority cultures.

KEYWORDS

Travel writing; pan-Celticism; Brittany; Wales; neo-druidism; Cardiff

Introduction

Wales and Brittany are two “minoritised” cultures situated on the western fringe of Europe, united by linguistic ancestry and by similar relationships with globally dominant neighbours to the East. Welsh and Breton cultures have made use of each other over the last two centuries to a point where it is impossible to understand the trajectory of one without examining its relation to the other. For Bretons Wales has often functioned as inspiration, or as a political and linguistic model of best practice. Key instances include La Villemarqué’s 1838 visit to Wales, the 1899 pan-Celtic Eisteddfod in Cardiff, and the aftermath of WW2 when Breton activists accused of collaboration sought refuge in Wales. There is a corresponding idea in Welsh culture of Brittany as an exotic, “other” version of home. This special relationship is underpinned by a lot of travel in both directions, and naturally a rich tradition of travel writing has resulted from this. As well as formal travelogues there are letters, shorter travel articles in the daily and periodical press, and travel poetry, in French, Welsh, Breton and English (Le Disez 2002; Williams 2018; Jones, Tully, and Williams 2020).

Minority cultures are often enough travelled to and written about, sometimes in condescending terms, by a traveller who is a confident member of a major culture such as French or English, and whose journey is conceived as a movement away from the centre towards the periphery. Such condescension has received the attention of travel

CONTACT Heather Williams  h.williams@wales.ac.uk

This article has been republished with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

writing scholars, under the names of postcolonial criticism, and more recently ethical criticism (Forsdick, Fowler, and Kostova 2014; Islam 1996). However, travel writers who belong to minoritised cultures, and especially those who write in a lesser-used language, still lack visibility within our field, as it remains under the shadow of a reductive “national language literary ecology” (Cronin 2018, 4). Pioneering work by Michael Cronin aims to remedy this. On the simplest level his analyses of Irish-language travelogues have contributed to a re-centring of minority languages as a way of exploring the literature and practice of travel. But further, he has shown how a major global language can become inadequate if it lacks the vocabulary or turns of phrase with which to describe the distinctive features of a place. Thus, English becomes “minoritised” in the face of features of landscape, flora, fauna, that are unknown to it (Cronin 2016, 195, 197).

The range of travel texts treated by scholarship in travel writing needs expanding, as source material to date has mainly been in majority languages (Williams 2019, 151), and even when minorities are discussed, these tend not to be seen in full because a centre-periphery model currently dominates our view. If it fully embraces minoritisation, and the focus this provides on the role of mobility or displacement in travel writing, scholarship can move beyond a reductionist approach to texts. As Cronin argues, the strategic minoritisation of the major languages of industrial development can replace an ideology of extractivism (Cronin 2016, 197). Voices within literary studies more generally are similarly calling for a new attitude towards “peripheral” material: for Galin Thihanov there is no clear distinction, and he advocates “marginocentricity”, in which “centre and periphery become fluid, mobile and provisional, prone to swapping their places and exchanging cultural valances” (2014, 186). Clearly it would benefit our field to “centre” the peripheries, or in the words of Craig Cairns: “to refuse to write our cultural histories on the model of nineteenth-century railways that run from the centre to the periphery and back again on a single track” (2007, 32).

This article seeks to show what happens when the centre-periphery model is rejected, and as such is part of a “loosely ethical imperative” in the field to “challenge dominant voices and explore alternative means of intercultural contact and communication” (Forsdick, Fowler, and Kostova 2014, 3). So rather than focus on French travelogues to Brittany, or English ones to Wales, this article takes two cultures on the notional periphery to probe the “lateral networks” *between* these rather than the “vertical” connections that we typically find when examining the relationship between centre and periphery, or major and minority cultures (Shih and Lionnet 2001). Furthermore, it takes a decolonising multilingual approach, ignoring linguistic hierarchies, and heeding recent calls to treat sources in minoritised languages on an equal footing with those written in major colonial languages (Gosetti 2019; Phipps 2019). This approach, combined with close textual analysis, will reveal the complexity of intercultural relations at the margins: it is much more subtle than a simple brotherhood of (small) nations. My focus is on the rich corpus of travel writing relating to a neo-druidic festival in Cardiff in 1899, to which a group of enthusiastic Bretons, mostly from the ranks of the newly formed Union Régionaliste Bretonne [Breton Regionalist Union], were invited, along with representatives from other Celtic countries.

The Breton visitors arrived in Cardiff carrying the weight of almost a century of expectation, as Celticity had grown in popularity in France following the Revolution. At a time when scholars the length and breadth of Europe were attempting to prove that their

nation preserved the “cultural prestige” of the Celts, the French had something of a “linguistic trick up their sleeve” in the form of Brittany (Stewart 2021, 224). The Académie celtique, founded in 1805 to investigate the Celtic origins of the whole of France, shined a spotlight on Brittany as a precious last living link to a Celtic or Gaulish past, at a time when the idea of Gaulish ancestry suited the needs of the new Republic (the Gauls were favoured as the ancestors of the *peuple*). By the middle of the century, this version of France’s collective past was well-established (Crossley 1993). However, the Bretons themselves gradually came to favour a different foundation story and explanation of their cultural specificity: that of the emigration of Saints from Wales. Guiomar shows how the Breton revival gradually sheds the Gaulish/Celtic theory with increasing vehemence each decade, culminating in the 1850s. Thus, a story of cohesion and reconciliation is traded for one that stresses the difference between Brittany and the rest of France (Guiomar 1982, 200). Rio draws out ways in which the Gaulish narrative and emigration narrative were in opposition, in so far as the former grew out of French nationalism (Rio 2012, 44), and the latter stressed Brittany’s “difference” (63). Other Breton nation-builders liked to stress that they were doubly Celtic because they were both Welsh-Celtic and French-Celtic (i.e. Gaulish), an idea that was embraced by key writers Auguste Brizeux (1803–1858), Hersart de La Villemarqué (1815–1895) and Ernest Renan (1823–1892) (Rio 2012). Anatole Le Braz (1859–1926) takes this line, claiming that the Bretons are Celtic twice over because they are made up of émigrés from Britain and Celtic-speaking Gallo-Romans, in his preface to Taldir’s poetry (Taldir-Jaffrennou 1903, ix).

Many Bretons certainly thought that Celticity was best observed in Wales, and this is why Hersart de La Villemarqué was so delighted to make his trip in 1838. An ambitious young nobleman, he was at the time planning what would become perhaps the most influential book ever written about Brittany. His *Barzaz Breiz* (1839) is a collection of Breton ballads that caused a bitter row over authenticity, but is now accepted as a mixture of genuine notetaking and somewhat naïve embellishment, typical of its age (Laurent 1989; Constantine 1996; Blanchard 2006). Formative in this was his visit to Abergavenny in 1838, where he was fêted and honoured by the Welsh at an *eisteddfod*, one of a series of festivals organised between 1834 and 1853 by a cultural revival group known as the “Cymreigyddion”. Held under the patronage of Augusta Hall née Waddington, or Lady Llanover (also known as Gwenynen Gwent), these were international in ambition, receiving visitors from Europe and beyond, and with scholars from France and Germany competing in the annual essay competitions (Morgan 2007; Thomas 1978, 1988). With this visit, La Villemarqué cemented modern inter-Celtic relations. Indeed, the Cardiff travelogues show that the fin-de-siècle delegates were conscious that they were travelling in his footsteps (Taldir-Jaffrennou 1912, 32). La Villemarqué was officially in Britain to study Welsh language and literature in its relationship with Breton language and literature and to consult the Welsh manuscripts in the library of Jesus College, Oxford, and had sought the support of the Education Minister of France for his trip, thus giving his Welsh hosts the impression that he was among them as the envoy of the King of France.¹ In reality, however, the highlight of the trip for him was the ceremony in which he was made a bard by William Ellis Jones, “Cawrdaf” (179–1848). He wrote home ecstatically: “Je suis barde maintenant, vraiment barde! barde titré!! et j’ai été reçu selon les anciens rites des V^e et VI^e siècles, qui se sont transmis jusqu’à nous” [I am a bard now, a real bard! An official bard, and I was received following the ancient

rites of the fifth and sixth centuries that have been handed down to us] (Constantine and Postic 2019, 59).²

In his letters home, La Villemarqué also makes the claim that “mon breton est entendu de tout le monde” [my Breton is understood by all] (Constantine and Postic 2019, 60), wishing to give the impression of mutual comprehension. He played a key role in promoting this myth, which would become a motif in travelogues between the two regions (Williams 2018). As well as regaling his audience with the Saint-Cast story, about a battle in which the French defeated the English because Welsh soldiers hearing and understanding the Breton soldiers sing refused to fight their kin (Guillorell and Laurent 2007), La Villemarqué notably composed a song for the occasion: “Kan Aouen Eistezvod” [Song of the *eisteddfod* muse]. It was written in a rather opportunistic hybrid language that struck the perfect balance between Breton and Welsh,³ which was subsequently exposed by commentators in both Brittany and Wales as pure, enthusiastic opportunism, a manipulation of fact to convince both sides of the closeness of their kinship (Constantine 2016, 226; Williams 2019). This willingness to manipulate evidence in order to further his own vision continued after his visit, as Constantine has noted in a discussion of the *Barzaz Breiz* (Constantine 2007, 177).

The Bretons at the pan-Celtic Cardiff Eisteddfod of 1899

The bardic enthusiasm felt by and propagated by La Villemarqué had developed into fully-fledged pan-Celticism by the turn of the century, with the Pan-Celtic Association formally founded in Dublin (1900). While the neo-druidic “Gorsedd Beirdd Ynys Prydain” [The assembly of the bards of the Island of Britain] dates from a ceremony held in London in 1792, masterminded by Welshman Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams (1747–1826), it only later (1819) became associated with the *eisteddfod*. The *eisteddfod* itself then developed into an annual, national festival, and by Cardiff 1899 was a major event lasting a week and attracting thousands of spectators and competitors, supported by Cardiff council, and receiving much media coverage. At this Cardiff iteration there was enhanced pageantry with new druidic costumes and accessories designed by Hubert von Herkommer (1849–1914), and a brand-new ceremony that unified two parts of a symbolic sword. On the French side Charles Le Goffic (1863–1932) had recently formed the Fédération Bretonne de Paris [Breton Federation of Paris] (1889), and in Brittany the Union Régionaliste Bretonne had just taken shape [Breton Regionalist Union] (1898), but the Bretons felt that they had some catching up to do when they were invited to take part in the Cardiff festivities. Their reactions are written up in the following texts: Anatole Le Braz, *La Terre du passé* (1901), alongside the private travel diary only published in 1999; Charles Le Goffic, “Chez Taffy: quinze jours dans la Galles du sud” (1901, 1908, 1912); Taldir-Jaffrennou, *La Genèse d'un mouvement* (1912), *Eur wech e oa* (1944), articles in *Cymru* (1899), *Gwerziou gant Abhervé ha Taldir* (1899), *Les poèmes de Taldir ab Herminn* (1903); Frañsez Vallée – serialised travelogue in Breton in *Kroaz ar Vretoned* (1899) and *Gwalarn* (1926–1929), *Gwerziou gant Abhervé ha Taldir* (1899).

These show a conflicted attitude towards the Welsh version of neo-druidism. There is a desire to copy a vibrant and successful model, and indeed a Breton *gorsedd* “Goursez Gourenez Breiz-Izel” [Gorsedd of the peninsula of Lower Brittany] was founded, under the patronage of the Archdruid of Wales, as a direct result of their visit, on 1 September

1900. However, some of the travelogues betray the author's need to mark out their distance. Religion, republicanism, and the Breton language itself were just some of the fault lines in the Breton movement at this time, all of which demonstrate how difficult it was for Bretons to strike a balance between being an enthusiastic Breton but also not appearing unpatriotic towards France and the French state. A further complication is the power structure resulting from the fact that the Welsh got there first and considered their *gorsedd* to be the mother *gorsedd*; as M. Wynn Thomas puts it, "the Welsh could be jealous guardians of their cultural ascendancy over the other Celtic nations" (Thomas 2016, 158). At times of conflict within the Breton movement, both sides would have gained legitimacy by enlisting the support of the Welsh. In short, the relationship between minorities is not necessarily easy, and even fellow minorities are not necessarily equal. Our Breton travel writers show very different responses, with the contrasting characterisations of Welsh culture suggesting the importance of language knowledge. As we might expect, the two who had learnt Welsh (Taldir-Jaffrennou and Vallée) are overall more enthusiastic and less critical of what they see in Wales than the two who did not (Le Braz and Le Goffic). However, we also find that the writers tailor their message to their intended readership. The pressure on Bretons to find an acceptable balance between Frenchness and Bretonness becomes evident through a close reading of the texts generated by the Cardiff trip.

Unity with the Welsh, or the overseas Celts, is a motif in these Cardiff texts. They are peppered with expressions like: "cette nation sœur de la mienne" [this sister nation to my own], "mes chers compatriotes" [my dear compatriots] of the Welsh, "notre glorieuse Race celtique" [our glorious Celtic Race] (in the singular), "nos communs ancêtres" [our shared ancestors] (Taldir-Jaffrennou, *Genèse*, 32–33). The message is that "we" are one country, one family (the words "sisters", "brothers", "cousins" all appear), albeit separated by the sea and by an accident of history; and furthermore "we" have one language, one tradition, one body of poetry. A visual symbol of this unity was the ceremony, held for the first time in Cardiff, where the Breton half and the Welsh half of a sword were unified, an action described as the first joining in twelve hundred years. *Peu importe* that the ceremony itself was a Romantic fabrication by iconic poet Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869), in a poem composed for the Abergavenny Cymreigyddion Eisteddfod of 1838 (Jones, Tully, and Williams 2020, 109). However, beneath the surface cracks between the two cultures can be observed when private notes are contrasted with published travelogues, when textual variants are tracked through successive editions, and when a multilingual perspective is adopted.

Anatole Le Braz and Charles Le Goffic

In his private travel notes, Anatole Le Braz describes the Welsh Archdruid, Reverend Rowland Williams (known as Hwfa Môn) (1823–1905), as having a frightening sort of face and voice, malicious and explosive: "les grimaces de son visage glabre, ses yeux de malice, ses soudains éclats de voix, terminés soudain par un rictus bon enfant" (Le Braz 1999, 316) [the grimace on his clean-shaven face, his malicious eyes, his sudden shouts, ending suddenly in a good-natured grin]. Also in his private notes Le Braz suggests that surely the druids' costumes are ironic? They are astonishing, and remind him of a play by Molière: 'm'a un peu rappelé *Le Malade imaginaire* [...] les costumes

prêtent encore à l'étonnement. On dirait des dominos de mascarades, de mauvais oripeaux de carnivals' (316) [...] reminded me a bit of *The Hypochondriac* [...] the costumes cannot fail to astonish you. They make you think of masquerade costumes, awful carnival rags]. For him, the whole scene is comic, rather like a fairground minus the acrobats: "... qui rappelle un champ de foire d'où les voitures de saltimbanques sont parties" (318) [reminiscent of a fairground when the acrobats' vehicles have left]. But in his published travelogue this becomes a much more polite musing, where he uses the words "beauté" [beauty] and "spectacle" [show] to suggest that what he sees is all rather attractive: "Il ne laissait cependant pas d'avoir sa beauté, le spectacle de ces druides blancs, de ces bardes bleus et de ces ovates verts, évoluant, comme une théorie de mages antiques, sur les fonds vaporeux de Cathay's Park" (Le Braz 1901, 329) [It did not, however, lack beauty, the spectacle of these white druids, these blue bards and green ovates, rising, like a procession of ancient magi, from the misty depths of Cathays Park]. In print, although he retains the Molière comparison, he is contrite about his unfortunate thought: "C'était évidemment d'un effet plus magistral que n'importe quelle figuration d'opéra. Cela avait toutefois un peu le tort d'y faire penser, et le visage glabre du Rév. Williams, sa mimique parfois trop expressive, n'étaient pas, il faut bien le dire, pour écarter ce rapprochement fâcheux" (329) [The effect was of course more magnificent than any opera. The trouble was, it couldn't help but remind one of such a performance; and the clean-shaven face of Reverend Williams, his exaggerated expressions, did nothing, it has to be said, to banish this unfortunate thought].

Whereas in his private notes he was scathing, claiming that the ceremony leaves him cold, and that he feels no sense of belonging, Le Braz's revisions, and self-censorship, make his published account more polite and guarded. The material that he adds as he revises his text is also telling. He adds cultural referencing, for instance a brief note on the emigration of saints as he sets sail from Saint Malo is developed to express a connection to his ancestors and a dislike for the villainous Saxons: "la tempête saxonne" [the Saxon storm] (Le Braz 1901, 319). His revisions to the description of the train journey from Southampton to south Wales have been analysed by Le Gall who says he rewrites his initial impression of the English countryside in order to exaggerate the difference between it and Wales (Le Gall 2002, 228). To convey his experience of travelling westwards towards Wales he introduces a reference to Ernest Renan (Le Braz 1901, 323), recalling the opening phrases of the latter's essay "La poésie des races celtiques" (1854), and thereby inserting himself in a prestigious line of francophone Breton writers who had succeeded in mainstream French literary life. On the *eisteddfod* itself, he adds some gravitas, for instance to his account of the sword-joining ceremony, and is also impressed by the music. He does present Wales as a Celtic success, on account of its balance between industry and culture, and its outward-lookingness (pan-Celticism), and goes as far as to use the vocabulary of kinship "familiale", "fraternité", and to describe it as "une autre patrie" [another fatherland] (Le Braz 1901, 321), but ominously adds "Vive la France!" (1901, 332).

Charles Le Goffic's successive versions of his Cardiff text can also be compared as he made revisions to his published travelogue. First of all he contents himself, like Le Braz, with mocking the spectacle. He also finds the costumes to be in bad taste and claims that the druids look like they have rushed out in the middle of the night wrapped in their bedclothes: "ce costume, sauf pour les druides, témoigne d'un mauvais goût

parfait. Bardes et ovates ont l'air d'avoir été surpris par quelque catastrophe nocturne et de s'être enveloppés précipitamment dans un de leurs rideaux de lit", (Le Goffic 1901, II, 466) [this costume, with the exception of the druids, displays absolute bad taste. Bards and ovates look like some nocturnal catastrophe has taken them by surprise, and made them wrap themselves hurriedly in their bed curtains]. His description of the archdruid is hugely expanded from this in 1901:

couronné de chêne, barré du pectoral d'or, la voix rauque et profonde, était d'une magnifique couleur locale. Sa blanche silhouette se détachait lumineusement sur les sombres verdure de Carthays-Park [sic]. Près de lui flottait la bannière bleue ... (1901, II, 466–467)

[crowned in oak, with the golden breastplate across his chest, the deep, throaty voice lent magnificent local colour. His white silhouette provided bright contrast with the deep greenery of Cathays Park. Next to him, the blue flag flew ...]

To this in 1908:

Mais Hwfa-Môn, couronné de chêne, sanglé du pectoral d'or, était d'une magnifique couleur locale. Quelle plastique! Quel gosier d'airain et, pour dire le mot, quels coups de gueule! J'ai encore dans les oreilles cette voix rauque, caverneuse et qui couvrait cependant d'énormes espaces. Debout sur la pierre du Destin, il haranguait en "welsh" les délégations étrangères réunies sur les pelouses ombrées de Carthays [sic.] Park. Nous ne comprenions pas une syllabe de ce qu'il éructait, et ses rugissements nous émouvaient exactement comme eussent pu faire ceux d'un lamantin ou d'un auroch préhistorique. Sur sa tête flottait la bannière bleue ... (1908, 221–222)

[But Hwfa Môn, crowned in oak, with the golden breastplate strapped across his chest, lent magnificent local colour. What a figure! What a solid voice and, not to mince words, what yelling! I can still hear that throaty, cavernous voice that can cover vast distances. Standing on the logan-stone, he harangued in "Welsh" the foreign delegations gathered on the shaded lawns of Cathays Park. We did not understand a single syllable of what he belched forth, and his roars moved us exactly as would those of a manatee or a prehistoric auroch. Above his head the blue flag flew ...]

Now, as well as sounding quite shocked, and using insulting language (to belch), he is claiming that this vast, unforgettable voice is not understood – not one syllable of it, which shatters the myth of mutual understanding so vehemently promoted by La Ville-Marqué. Contemporary Welsh descriptions of his voice concur that his diction and pronunciation were notable: "who else could pronounce 'll' and 'ch' like Hwfa Môn?" (Parry 1907, 14), but the stress in the Welsh sources is on how clearly and fully he articulates every single sound: "Cai y gwefusolion, y deintolion, y cegolion, a'r gorchfantolion yr un chwarae teg" (Parry 1907, 96) [the labials, the dentals, the gutturals, the palatal consonants all received equal attention]. It is claimed in his memorial collection that people flocked to watch him and specially to hear him speak (Parry 1907, 46).

When Le Goffic animalises the Welsh and the Welsh language by using the word "roar" and comparing the archdruid to a "manatee" [a large and primitive sea mammal] or a prehistoric "auroch" [a large, extinct bovine], not only is he subverting the "one language" motif and busting the myth of mutual understanding, but by comparing Celts to animals he is also aligning himself with a long anti-Celtic tradition. Balzac had famously compared Bretons to animals in his novel on the counter-Revolution *Les Chouans* (1829), where we are told from the opening page that the men seem to fuse naturally with the

animal skins they wear for protection: “Les mèches plates de leurs longs cheveux s’unissaient si habituellement aux poils de la peau de chèvre [...] on pouvait facilement prendre cette peau pour la leur ...” [clumps of their long, straight, hair merged so easily with the hairs of their goat skins [...] one could easily mistake this skin for their own ...] (Balzac 1972, 22).

Both Le Braz and Le Goffic are uncomfortable with what they see as the pageantry of the ceremonies at the *eisteddfod*. While Le Braz conceals his true scepticism and aims for careful politeness, Le Goffic steps up his criticism at each opportunity, and in his revised version of 1908 makes another significant addition that marks out his distance and protects his ambition to gain French approval. Here, he makes the new claim that the Archdruid Hwfa Môn inspired terror in him, and that the only reason he took part in this ceremony was because he was too scared not to, even raising the spectre of human sacrifice:

Nous nous conformâmes scrupuleusement au rituel. Et, quand nous ne l’eussions pas fait par courtoisie, nous l’eussions certainement fait sous le coup de l’espèce de terreur sacrée dont nous emplissait la présence d’Hwfa-Môn. Cet homme est une force de la Nature: on ne lui résiste pas. Il a bardifié un Jésuite, le R. P. Hayde; il bardifierait Armand Dayot, si ce farouche anti barde, quelque jour, se risquait à Carthays Park ... [*sic*] (Le Goffic 1908, 222–223).

[We obeyed the ritual absolutely. And, if we hadn’t done so out of politeness, we would certainly have done so under the effect of a kind of sacred terror that Hwfa Môn’s presence filled us with. This man is a force of nature: there is no resisting him. He has already bardified a Jesuit, R.P. Hayde; he would even bardify Armand Dayot, should that fierce anti-Bard ever chance a visit to Cathays Park.]

What we see in Le Goffic’s work, by far the most substantial travelogue studied here, is a careful distancing from the Welsh culture that he encountered at Cardiff, which had disappointed him (Le Gall 2001, 309), but perhaps also confirmed him in his own career plans. The ways in which Le Goffic distances himself can be subtle, as he clearly does not want to upset the pro-Welsh camp. For instance, choosing to call the Welsh “gallois” instead of the favoured pan-Celtic expressions such as: “Bretons d’outre-mer” [overseas Bretons] that stress kinship. He is particularly opposed to the costumes associated in Wales with cultural revival, and was not pleased when fellow traveller the Marquis de L’Estourbeillon (1858–1946) copied the idea and added costumes to the Union Régionaliste Bretonne’s proceedings (Le Gall 2001, 302). Le Goffic deemed these inauthentic and patronising, only good for tourists. “Je ne me déguise plus en *nigous*” [I won’t dress up as a *nigous* anymore, emphasis in the original], he would later declare (Le Gall 2001, 304).⁴ A preface that he wrote not long afterwards for fellow-traveller Taldir-Jaffrennou’s pan-Celtic and regionalist poetry collection (1903) reads like a denial of Wales and thus pan-Celticism. Le Goffic’s preface manages to avoid writing about Wales at all, only taking account of Taldir’s rooted, Breton poems, ignoring his travel or pan-Celtic poems. Le Goffic, though a part of the story of pan-Celticism, and though accepted as a member of the *gorsedd* of bards in Cardiff, is only interested in the Barrèsian idea of rootedness. In other words, he was a French regionalist who wanted not so much to reject Frenchness and bypass Paris as to tweak Paris a little and make it more accepting of regional customs and traditions. It was his ambition to become the next Renan (Le Gall 2001, 164; Thomas 2021, 233), and, just like that most influential of French regionalists Maurice Barrès (1862–

1923), to be elected to the Académie française (Thomas 2021). This is why Le Goffic might be considered pro-Breton but not pro-Celtic, at pains to show his distance from the Welsh as well as the Irish models of cultural revival, as this is surely why he does not attend the Dublin congress of 1901.

Taldir-Jaffrennou and Frañsez Vallée

François Taldir (1879–1956) and Francis Vallée (1860–1949), pupil and teacher respectively, reveal a very different attitude. They made several return trips to Wales after the Cardiff *eisteddfod*, and both spoke and wrote good Welsh, enabling them to publish a pioneering book of travel writing in the form of a bilingual collection of travel poems, half in the language of the travellers (Breton) and half in the language of the travellee (Welsh) (Taldir-Jaffrennou and Vallée 1899). Their attitudes towards Wales (and Brittany) must be traced across different languages because they both wrote in Breton, French and Welsh. Taldir's respect for the Welsh Archdruid is clear: he writes a poem to him in *An Delen Dir* (1900), and dedicates the poem "Les yeux des étoiles" to him in *Les Poèmes de Taldir* (1903). He declares the Welsh language a "langue âpre et sauvage pourtant si savoureuse et si nuancée" [rugged and wild/natural language and yet so flavourful and so subtle], and so the archdruid's voice is for him: "une formule sonore, qui croulait sur les assistants en vocables rocailleux" [a sonorous offering that fell as harsh words over those present] (Taldir-Jaffrennou, *Genèse* 34, 35). Neither animal nor frightening – in stark contrast to Le Goffic's pronouncements – the druid's voice is praised for its strength and power: it is a "voix de fer" [voice of iron], like an "éclat de tempête" (thunderburst) (Taldir-Jaffrennou 1903, 399).

Vallée published a series of travel accounts authored alternately by himself and Taldir-Jaffrennou in his Breton-language periodical *Kroaz ar Vretoned*. These included a Breton-language pre-travelogue or anticipatory account of travel to Wales that Taldir-Jaffrennou wrote in 1899, before he had actually left home. In this piece he imagined everything to be better in Wales. Most importantly, Celtic languages and Breton are respected there, rather than disdained as they are in Brittany (*Kroaz* 1899, 77). He has various words for the Welsh language: "the Breton of Great Britain", "Wales's Breton" or even "brezonek" [Breton] (*Kroaz* 1899, 81), and refers to the Welsh people as "Bretoned deuz Bro-Gymru" [Bretons from Wales] (*Kroaz* 1899, 82), all chosen to emphasise closeness. Sometimes he just uses the word "Breton" to mean Welsh, so as to hammer home the difference between the two countries: a Celtic language is taught in schools and respected in Wales. Better still, he explains, Wales has annual festivals, such as the one planned for Cardiff that he is about to visit. So keen is he to stress the connection between the two cultures that he then retells the Saint-Cast story, the story so dear to La Villemarqué.

It may seem that this pair of travellers, who can find no fault with Wales, have just gone native. If Le Braz and Le Goffic were marking out their distance from Wales and druidism in order to protect their positions as respectable players within French regionalism, then it should follow that Taldir and Vallée are taking a risk. The evidence of their outputs is that they were also mindful of these tensions between French identity and Bretonness. For instance, Vallée's report on the Welsh delegation's visit to an inter-Celtic festival in Vannes in 1899 makes the conciliatory remark that the Welsh brothers set a good example in that they teach the Bretons to always remain attached to both their countries:

“Breiz ha Frañs” [Brittany and France]. I have shown that Taldir-Jaffrennou is more cautious when writing in French or Breton, but less so when writing journalism in Welsh. For instance, the persecution narrative of Brittany’s treatment by France is stronger in his Welsh articles; in 1898 in the children’s magazine *Cymru’r Plant*, to which he regularly contributed a column, he claims that France persecuted the Breton language after defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, and that the Celts of Arvor hate the “foreign” French so much that they killed the cockerel, its symbol (Williams 2021, 202). Here he also condemns France by using a violent image of a French King gouging out the eyes of bards (Williams 2021, 202). Just like Le Braz and Le Goffic, Taldir-Jaffrennou and Vallée seem very aware of their target audience. A different readership encouraging a different message.

The tensions within Breton identity detected in this Breton writing are in line with the findings of historians of French regionalism. The pioneering work of Anne-Marie Thiesse on the literary outputs of the “petites patries” (1991, 1997), led to subtle discussion of the French “model” in which “all local elements retained their particularity, but as contributions to a broader entity that transcended them” (Gerson 2003, 230). More recent work on the period 1890–1914 (Baycroft 2021) acknowledges the paradoxical nature of the French celebration of diversity, noting that difference was only accepted so long as it did not stray into politics, meaning that regionalist groups “had to assert their loyalty to France constantly and to bend over backwards to demonstrate that they were not political movements” (Baycroft 2021, 63). Baycroft’s generalisations about the “wary and aggressive” (58) climate in France at this time are borne out by our Breton travellers. The detail of their texts indeed suggest that it was risky for them to appear anti-republican, or to resist French identity.

On their return to Brittany, some of these newly invested druids formed a Breton equivalent of the *gorsedd*, and the story of its development provides further evidence of these excruciating tensions. The fact that it was formed in secret in Paris, by Taldir-Jaffrennou, Yann Ar Fusteg (1855–1910) and Welshman John Kelt Edwards (1875–1934) speaks volumes about their fears of ridicule and religious objections (Bowen 1991, 383). These fears proved real, as they were sometimes refused permission to hold druidic meetings or ceremonies in Brittany because local authorities believed that they were anti-Christian. Tellingly, the first time the Breton *gorsedd* was discussed openly in the press in Brittany was in the context of a French President passing through Brest on his way to Russia. As he passed through the Breton port in May 1902 the president was greeted by the bards of the Breton *gorsedd*, and offered a poem in Breton by Taldir-Jaffrennou in honour of the occasion (Bowen 1991, 384). This shows a Celtic identity that chose to go public only when a safely French, republican, occasion presented itself. It shows an effort not to look like a “threat” to national unity, and is in line with Baycroft’s characterisation of regionalists as suffering “fear of suspicion of disloyalty” (60). As a result of these tensions, neo-druids in Brittany were constantly in conflict with each other, along the main fault lines of religion and the Breton language. Even Barrès, or especially Barrès, that key player in French regionalism, and also friend and role model of Charles Le Goffic, warned that the Breton language risked damaging the unity of French expression (Le Gall 2001, 176). Though these were clearly a reflection of the French political context, they also led to something of a power struggle with the Welsh *gorsedd*, or mother *gorsedd*. Brittany resented the controlling attitude of the Welsh, but needed Welsh recognition because the Welsh refused to acknowledge *gorseddau* set up in its own image that

did not conform to its vision, particularly if these were un-Christian, and they refused invitations and requests whenever the Bretons were in dispute (Bowen 1991, 400). Indeed, the perception of the *gorsedd* as a Welsh import is cited by Le Stum as one of the reasons for its failure (Le Stum 1998, 9). Thus, we see a hierarchy on the periphery, or within a fellowship of minorities.

Conclusion

Analysis of these texts has exposed tensions. On one level there are certainly tensions between the “petite patrie” and a French regionalism that looks towards Paris, and Celtic nationalism that looked beyond France to Wales. On another level there are tensions between occupants of “the periphery” of minorities. These tensions at the periphery are only revealed by a translingual approach that rejects the hierarchy of languages that has characterised research in the arts and humanities. I have adopted the decolonising approach to multilingualism advocated by Phipps (2019), and taken the non-hierarchical view of multilingualism in France urged by Gosetti (2019). As such it responds to the growing call to dismantle the monolingualising (Forsdick 2017) tendencies of our field and to re-examine the multilingual past and present of literature in French (Edwards and Hogarth 2019).

The periphery was produced by the nation building exemplified by nineteenth-century France, and the nationalisation of language, that was a big part of this, created “minority” languages. It is worth stressing in conclusion that being on the periphery is not automatically “better” or more virtuous than being at the centre. Analysis of these travel texts has shown the periphery to be a complex place, fraught with tensions and competing ambitions. On the matter of smaller nations forming brotherhoods of solidarity, Simon Brooks’s recent history of Welsh multiethnicity has identified another complexity. Brooks argues that in Welsh discourse, the solidarity between “smaller” nations can be rather fabricated as it is exaggerated in order to prove a point. He attributes a valorisation and mythologising of the Welsh people’s multiethnicity at the end of the nineteenth century to a desire to prove that a small nation is not necessarily a narrow one (Brooks 2021, 81–85). This “desire” could be compared to the tensions felt by Breton writers, and also suggests the imprint of the centre on minority-minority relations even when these appear to escape mediation by the centre. Mediation by the centre might be the very use of the French language (as opposed to Breton or Welsh in this case), or it might include a reliance on cultural references gained from a French education. More research is needed on the forms that the imprint of the centre can take, but in the case of these Breton travelogues and neo-druidism, it is the fear of rejection by the centre, and is particularly observable when textual variants are scrutinised and a multilingual approach is taken.

Notes

1. Louis-Philippe, under the July Monarchy.
2. All translations are my own.
3. Published a few days later as a trilingual ‘feuille volante’, with translations into Welsh and English arranged by Thomas Price. A number have survived in the National Library of Wales and in the La Villemarqué family archives kept at Kernault, Finistère. In due course La Villemarqué’s French translation was published in the *Gazette de France*.

4. This term is used by Le Goffic to mean a stereotypical Breton. It derives from the Breton “an hini goz” meaning “the old one” (in the feminine). I should like to thank Ronan Calvez for his expert guidance on this word.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Heather Williams  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8684-1921>

References

- Balzac, Honoré. 1972. In *Les Chouans*, edited by Pierre Gascar. Paris: Gallimard.
- Baycroft, Timothy. 2021. “National Diversity, Regionalism and Decentralism in France.” In *Region and State in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, edited by J. Augusteijn and E. Storm, 57–68. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Blanchard, Nelly. 2006. *Barzaz Breiz: une fiction pour s’inventer*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes.
- Bowen. 1991. *Geraint and Zonia, Hanes Gorsedd y Beirdd*. Dinbych: Barddas.
- Brooks, Simon. 2021. *Hanes y Cymru: Lleiafrifoedd Ethnig a’r Gwareiddiad Cymraeg*. Cardiff: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru.
- Cairns, Craig. 2007. “Centring on the Peripheries.” In *Centring the Peripheries: Studies in Scandinavian, Scottish, Gaelic and Greenlandic Literature*, edited by Bjarne Thorup Thomsen, 13–38. Norwich: Norvik Press. cited in Chitnis, Rajendra. 2019. “Introduction.” In *Translating the Literature of Small European Nations*, edited by Chitnis, Rajendra, Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen, Rhian Atkin and Zoran Milutinovic, 1–7. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press (4).
- Constantine, Mary-Ann. 1996. *Breton Ballads*. Aberystwyth: Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies.
- Constantine, Mary-Ann. 2007. *The Truth Against the World*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Constantine, Mary-Ann. 2016. “La ‘sainte terre de Cambrie’: La Villemarqué et le romantisme gallois.” In *Au-delà du Barzaz Breiz: Théodore Hersart de La Villemarqué*, edited by Nelly Blanchard and Fañch Postic, 209–226. Brest: CRBC.
- Constantine, Mary-Ann, and Fañch Postic. 2019. “‘C’est mon journal de voyage’: La Villemarqué’s Letters from Wales, 1838–1839”. Accessed 14 March 2022. <https://hal.univ-brest.fr/hal-02350747/document>.
- Cronin, Michael. 2016. “Minority Reports: Travel, Language and the Politics of Microspecion.” *Studies in Travel Writing* 20 (2): 190–199. doi:10.1080/13645145.2016.1173440.
- Cronin, Michael. 2018. “Translation Studies and the Common Cause.” *Modern Languages Open* 1: 3–7. doi:10.3828/mlo.v0i0.225.
- Crossley, Ceri. 1993. *French Historians and Romanticism: Thierry, Guizot, the Saint-Simonians, Quinet, Michelet*. London: Routledge.
- Cymru. [journal].
- Cymru’r Plant. [journal].
- Edwards, Natalie, and Christopher Hogarth. 2019. “Translingual Writing in French, Beyond the Language of Adoption”, introduction to *Translingual Writing in French and Francophone Literature* (*L’Esprit Créateur*, 59 (4): 1–11.
- Forsdick, Charles. 2017. “Global France, Global French: Beyond the Monolingual.” *Contemporary French Civilization* 42 (1): 13–29. doi:10.3828/cfc.2017.2.
- Forsdick, Charles, Corinne Fowler, and Ludmilla Kostova. 2014. “Introduction: Ethics on the Move.” In *Travel and Ethics: Theory and Practice*, edited by Charles Forsdick, Corinne Fowler, and Ludmilla Kostova, 1–15. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Gerson. 2003. *Stéphane, The Pride of Place: Local Memories and Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century France*. London: Cornell University Press.
- Gosetti, Valentina. 2019. "Poetry Anthologists as Translingual Mediators: The Example of Adolphe van Bever's *Les Poètes du terroir*." *L'Esprit créateur* 59 (4): 40–53. doi:10.1353/esp.2019.0040.
- Guillourel, Eva, and Donatien Laurent. 2007. "Chanson politique et histoire: le combat de Saint-Cast et les Anglais sur les côtes de Bretagne au XVIIIe siècle." In Vol. 114 of *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest*, 167–184. Presses universitaires de Rennes. <https://doi.org/10.4000/abpo.475>
- Guioimar, Jean-Yves. 1982. "Quand les bretonistes répudièrent la Gaule (1840–1850)." In *Nos ancêtres les Gaulois, actes du colloque international de Clermont-Ferrand*, edited by Jean Ehrard and Paul Viallaneix, 195–201. Clermont-Ferrand: Association des Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines.
- Islam, Manzurul. 1996. *The Ethics of Travel: From Marco Polo to Kafka*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Jones, Kathryn N., Carol Tully, and Heather Williams. 2020. *Hidden Text, Hidden Nation: (Re)Discoveries of Wales in French and German Travel Writing (1750–2015)*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. *Kroaz ar Vretoned*. [journal].
- La Villemarqué, Hersart de. 1839. Vol. 2 of *Barzaz Breiz: chants populaires de la Bretagne*. Paris: Charpentier.
- Laurent, Donatien. 1989. *Aux sources du Barzaz-Breiz: la mémoire d'un peuple*. Douarnenez: Ar Men.
- Le Braz, Anatole. 1901. "Pèlerinage celtique." In *La Terre du passé*, 315–333. Paris: Calmann Lévy.
- Le Braz, Anatole. 1999. "Voyage au pays de Galles." In *Voyage en Irlande, au pays de Galles et en Angleterre*, edited by Alain Tanguy, 307–320. Rennes: Terre de Brume.
- Le Disez, Jean-Yves. 2002. *Étrange Bretagne: récits de voyages britanniques en Bretagne (1830–1900)*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes.
- Le Gall, Jean André. 2001. *Charles Le Goffic ou la difficulté d'être breton: biographie*. Guingamp: Éditions de la Plomée.
- Le Gall. 2002. "Illusion celtique et désillusion galloise: Anatole Le Braz et Charles Le Goffic (1899)." In Vol. 2 of *Seuils et traverses: enjeux de l'écriture de voyage*, edited by Jean-Yves Le Disez and Jan Borm, 1 225–232. Brest: CRBC.
- Le Goffic, Charles. 1901. "Chez Taffy: quinze jours dans la Galles du sud." *La Revue hebdomadaire* 5: 6–7. (May 1901) 448–68 and (June 1901), 22–50, 229–250, 369–935, 520–547; subsequently reprinted in the second series of *L'Âme bretonne* (1908, revised and augmented 1912), 225–390.
- Le Goffic, Charles. 1901. 'Chez Taffy: quinze jours dans la Galles du sud', *La Revue hebdomadaire* 5: 6–7 (May 1901) 448–68 and (June 1901), 22–50, 229–250, 369–935, 520–547.
- Le Goffic, Charles, 1908, *L'âme bretonne*. Paris, Champion.
- Le Goffic, Charles, 1912, *L'âme bretonne*. Paris: Champion.
- Le Stum, Philippe. 1998. *Le Néo-druidisme en Bretagne*. Rennes: Ouest-France.
- Morgan, Prys. 2007. "Lady Llanover (1802–1896), 'Gwenynen Gwent'." *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* new series vol. 13: 94–106. available online https://www.cymmrodorion.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/6_Lady-Llanover.pdf
- Parry, W. J. 1907. *Cofiant Hwfa Môn*. Manchester: Thomas Griffiths.
- Phipps, Alison. 2019. *Decolonising Multilingualism: Struggles to Decreate*. Bristol/Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters.
- Renan, Ernest. 1854. "La poésie des races celtiques." *Revue des Deux Mondes* 5: 473–506. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/44694648.pdf>
- Rio, Joseph. 2012. "Celtisme et constructions historiographiques en Bretagne, du XVIe au XIXe siècles." In *Le Celtisme et l'interceltisme aujourd'hui*, edited by Yann Bévant and Gwendal Denis, 39–63. Rennes: Tir.
- Shih, Shu-mei, and Françoise Lionnet. 2001. "Introduction: Thinking Through the Minor, Transnationally." In *Minor Transnationalism*, edited by Shu-mei Shih and Françoise Lionnet, 1–23. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Stewart, Ian B. 2021. "Language and the National Past in Napoleonic France: Reassessing the Académie Celtique, 1805–1813." *French History* 35 (2): 219–242. doi:10.1093/fh/craa050.

- Taldir-Jaffrennou, Fañch. 1899. "Tro yng Ngogledd Cymru." *Cymru*, 17: 221–224, and "Llanberis a Beddgelert: Fel y gwelodd Llydawr Hwyt." *Cymru*, 18: 41.
- Taldir-Jaffrennou, Fañch. 1900. *An Delen Dir (La Harpe d'acier): avec portrait de l'auteur, dessins et illustrations de MM. John Edwards et Émile Hamonic*. Saint-Brieuc: René Prudhomme. Accessed 30 April 2022. http://bibliotheque.idbe-bzh.org/data/cle_71/An_Delen_Dir_.pdf.
- Taldir-Jaffrennou, Fañch. 1903. *Barzaz / Les poèmes de Taldir ab Herninn, préfaces d'Anatole Le Braz et Charles Le Goffic; traductions en vers français de H. de La Guichardière, Yves Berthou et Le Garrec; en vers gallois de Thomas Gwyn Jones; en languedocien de Cavalier; en écossais et en anglais de Miss Carmichael et Fournier d'Albe*. 2nd ed. Paris: Champion. Accessed 14 March 2022. <http://bibliotheque.idbe-bzh.org/document.php?id=les-poemes-de-taldir-17752&l=fr>.
- Taldir-Jaffrennou, Fañch. 1912. *La Genèse d'un mouvement*. Carhaix: Imprimerie-Librairie du Peuple.
- Taldir-Jaffrennou, Fañch. 1944. *Eur wech e oa*. Carhaix: Éditions Armorica.
- Taldir-Jaffrennou, Fañch, and Frañsez Vallée. 1899. *Gwerziou gant Abhervé ha Taldir (brezouneg ha kemraeg kenver-oua-kenver, Er coffadwriaeth am eu taith yn Nghymru*. Sant-Brieg: F. Guyou. Accessed 14 March 2022. <https://archive.org/details/gwerziougantabh00jaffgoog/page/n22/mode/2up>.
- Thiesse, Anne-Marie. 1991. *Écrire la France: le mouvement littéraire régionaliste de la Belle Époque à la Libération*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- Thiesse, Anne-Marie. 1997. *Ils apprenaient la France: l'exaltation des régions dans le discours patriotique*. Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.
- Thihanov, Galin. 2014. "Do "Minor Literatures" Still Exist? The Fortunes of a Concept in the Changing Frameworks of Literary History." In *Reexamining the National-Philological Legacy: Quest for a New Paradigm?*, edited by Vladimir Biti, 169–190. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Thomas, Mair Elvet. 1978. *Afiath yng Ngwent: Hanes Cymdeithas Cymreigyddion y Fenni, 1833–1854*. Cardiff: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru.
- Thomas, Mair Elvet. 1988. *The Welsh Spirit of Gwent*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Thomas, M. Wynn. 2016. *The Nations of Wales: 1890-1914*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Thomas, Mannaig. 2021. "La Bretagne à l'Académie française." *Nottingham French Studies* 60 (2): 223–238. doi:10.3366/nfs.2021.0318.
- Vallée, Frañsez. 1926-1929. "Envorennoù diwar va beajou e Breiz-Veur hag Iwerzon (1899-1907)." *Gwalarn: Kelc'hgelaouenn lennegel trimiziek* 7-10: 12–17 (1926-29).
- Vallée, Frañsez. "Untitled". Serialised travelogue in Breton in *Kroaz ar Vretoned* (1899).
- Williams, Heather. 2018. "Travelling Ideas Between Wales and Brittany." *VTU Review: Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences* "St. Cyril and St. Methodius" University of Veliko Tarnovo, 2 (1): 47–54.
- Williams, Heather. 2019. "Minority." In *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies: A Critical Glossary*, edited by Charles Forsdick, Zoë Kinsley, and Kathryn Walchester, 151–153. London: Anthem.
- Williams, Heather. 2021. "Are the Bretons French? The Case of François Jaffrennou/Taldir ab Hernin." *Nottingham French Studies* 60 (2): 192–205. doi:10.3366/nfs.2021.0316.