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VI

NARRATIVES AND NON-NARRATIVES: ASPECTS OF WELSH ARTHURIAN TRADITION

Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan

Writing in his *Tours of Wales*, published in 1781, the renowned traveller and scholar Thomas Pennant, of Downing in Flintshire, gives an account of various places he had seen in Anglesey, including the following brief but telling reference:

Above Llanddona is a high hill, called *Bwrdd Arthur* or *Arthur's* round table; the true name was probably *Din*, or *Dinas Sulwy*; for a church immediately beneath bears that of *Llanfihangel Din Sulwy*.¹

Pennant notes that the hill, a limestone pavement, provides natural defences and that these were enhanced by building ramparts, but it is his comments on the place-name that are particularly significant. In a single sentence he notes that the spot now has an Arthurian name, but demolishes any idea of its antiquity and authenticity. *Bwrdd Arthur* is tersely and correctly dismissed as a late accretion. Today we might characterise this Arthurianisation of a non-Arthurian Welsh place-name as an example of the persistent popularity of Arthurian tradition in Wales, or with a slightly different emphasis, a reflex of a late, learned tradition ousting a 'genuine' native tradition. Here, as so often, we may blame Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose Arthurian narrative first enchanted Welsh audiences in the twelfth century, presenting as it did an irresistible image of a heroic past when, as descendants of Brutus, their ancestors the Brythoniaid or Brythons ruled the entire island of Britain, an image which was to shape Welsh political attitudes and provide virtually the only political discourse for centuries. As late as 1716, only sixty-five years before Pennant with his educated and critical mind visited Llanddona, Theophilus Evans published his *Drych y Prif Oesoedd*, a history of Wales which retained intact the Galfridian vision of early British history.² Untroubled by Polydore Vergil's devastating demolition of this myth two centuries

¹ Thomas Pennant, *Tours in Wales*, ed. Sir John Rhŷs (Caernarfon, 1883) III, 42.

² The only modern edition is that of G. H. Hughes (Cardiff, 1961).

previously, Evans clung to the comforting illusion of the Welsh nation as a heroic people robbed of their birthright through treachery alone. The renaming of Din Sulwy may not be directly due to Evans, but it is consistent with the mood of early modern rural Wales.

This small reference by Pennant thus raises some important questions about the nature of Welsh Arthurian traditions, about the interplay of oral and written traditions, about the constant evolution of individual traditions, about narratives and about non-narrative, which may conceal narratives (as in the *Bwrdd Arthur* example), about the relationship between the local and the national (and even the international, as we shall see), and between past and present.

Another Arthurian site visited by Pennant, this time in Caernarfonshire, was Ffynnon Cegin Arthur (the Spring of Arthur's Kitchen),³ still visible, if overgrown, when I last visited it in the 1970s, but now, as I understand, virtually untraceable. Pennant hints at the possible, non-Arthurian, origin of the name when he states that the spring was the source of the river Cegin which reaches the sea at what is now Port Penrhyn, on the edge of Bangor.⁴ But the story of how this chalybeate spring with its healing powers came by its Arthurian name persisted into modern times and was recorded in 1908 by Myrddin Fardd in his collection of Caernarfonshire folklore entitled *Llên Gwerin Sir Gaernarfon*:

Y mae hon ar fferm a elwir Hendref, yn mhlwyf Llanddeiniolen. Bernir ddarod iddi dderbyn ei henw oddiwrth y dyb mai brasder hyddgig oedd yr irad a nofiai ar ei gwyneb, yr hwn, fel y tybid, a ddygid yno gan y ffrydiau oedd yn rhedeg drwy gegin yr enwog Dywysog Arthur, un o arwyr dychymygol yr hen Gymry, ac oddiar hyny priodolir iddi, hyd heddyw, lawer o rinweddau meddyginiaethol.⁵

(This [spring] is on a farm called Hendref in the parish of Llanddeiniolen. It is considered that it received its name from the belief that the oil which floated on its surface was venison fat, which, it was thought, was brought there by the streams which flowed through the kitchen of the famous Prince Arthur, one of the imaginary heroes of the Welsh of old, and from then down to today, many healing virtues are imputed to it.)

It is worth noting that Arthur, although grudgingly allowed the adjective 'famous', is now downgraded to 'prince', perhaps influenced by the contemporary celebrity of the 'Prince of Wales', eldest son of the English king. The

³ Ibid., p. 323.

⁴ That the source was at the spring may not be strictly true, for the Ordnance Survey map shows that Afon Cegin is fed by several separate streams, one of which passes close to Ffynnon Cegin Arthur but whose source is higher up, on the lower slopes of Moel Rhiwen, about a mile south-east of the spring. However, it has traditionally been regarded as the source and still is, as witness the Penisarwaun community website (<http://www.cynnal.co.uk/eimbro/pen/page14.html>).

⁵ J. Jones, 'Myrddin Fardd', in *Llên Gwerin Sir Gaernarfon* (Caernarfon, [1908]), pp. 169–70. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

author, perhaps keen to distance himself from earlier, more credulous generations, goes so far as to describe Arthur as 'un o arwyr dychymygol yr hen Gymry' ('one of the imaginary heroes of the Welsh of old'). Was this the end of the line for Arthur in Caernarfonshire? Perhaps so, for in my village in the 1950s when we children were told exciting tales about the warrior who slept under the hill by the lake called Marchlyn Mawr (now, alas, demystified by its incorporation into the Llanberis hydroelectric scheme), the sleeper ready to awake and restore to Wales its rightful independence was identified as Owain Lawgoch (Owen red-hand), not Arthur. Sir John Rhys in his *Welsh Folklore, Welsh and Manx*, published in 1901, records this same story of the redeemer hero sleeping in his underground cavern with his warriors, again by Marchlyn Mawr, but his version names Arthur, not Owain, as the sleeper.⁶ Yet by the 1950s, just a few miles away, Owain had replaced Arthur in the local tradition. One possible explanation might be that the original story had been about Owain, and had been arthurianised later, perhaps under learned influence, but with the Owain tradition persisting amongst the local people.⁷ Rhys did not meet his informant face-to-face but received details of the story by post, from a Mr Evan Lloyd Jones of Dinorwig, near Llanberis, who had published a series of articles on Caernarfonshire *llên gwerin* (folklore) in a periodical called *Llais y Wlad*, which was published nearby in Bangor, and in the north-American Welsh paper, *Y Drych*. Mr Lloyd Jones was thus an educated man and an antiquarian, who made 'use of the frequent opportunities he has in the Dinorwig quarries for gathering information as to *what used to be believed* by the people of Arfon and Anglesey' (my emphasis).⁸ The fact that the information was mediated by an enthusiastic 'antiquarian' rather than collected directly by Rhys, leads one to question the status of the Arthurian aspect of the story.

But to return to Ffynnon Cegin Arthur: Myrddin Fardd may have chosen for his book a title suggesting popular beliefs drawn from oral tradition, but in fact he was drawing heavily on written sources. Much of his information about the healing spring is borrowed from an earlier booklet devoted to the history and virtues of Ffynnon Cegin Arthur. This was written, in Welsh, by a London-based qualified doctor, Arthur Wynn Williams MD, MRCS, LSA (1819–86), and possibly first published as early as 1860, a new edition appearing about 1886.⁹ After explaining how patients may find their way to

⁶ Sir John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore, Welsh and Manx* (Oxford, 1901), pp. 235–8.

⁷ This may have been a common phenomenon in various parts of Wales as I have argued elsewhere. See C. Lloyd-Morgan, 'Qui était l'Arthur des Gallois?', *Pris-Ma* 11 (1995), 149–58.

⁸ Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, p. 234.

⁹ A. Wynn Williams, *Ffynnon Cegin Arthur, sef Ffynnon Ddurlhyd yn Llanddeiniolen* (Caernarfon, n.d.). The National Library of Wales catalogue of printed books supplies the date 1860, but the copy in my own possession is in a printing style postdating 1860; moreover it refers to Lord Edward Gordon Douglas Pennant, 1st baron Penrhyn (1800–86), as 'y diweddar Arglwydd Penrhyn' ('the late Lord Penrhyn'), p. 20. An English version of the booklet had been published as early as 1858, presumably for a very different audience.

the spring, he devotes the next chapter to explaining who Arthur was, 'gan na fyddai yn annyddorol i rai o fy narllenywyr wybod pwy ydoedd y Brenin Arthur' ('since it may not be without interest for some of my readers to know who King Arthur was').¹⁰ This comment indicates that Dr Wynn Williams believed that King Arthur would be an unfamiliar figure to many of his readers. Those readers were by definition Welsh-speakers, many of them would have had little or no English but were highly literate in their own language. To explain why he did not expect them to be familiar with the story of Arthur, we need to look more closely at those readers. Not only were they literate Welsh-speakers, they also needed to have money in their pockets if they were to spend 6d (2.5 p) – quite a large sum at the time – on Dr Wynn Williams' pamphlet. They apparently needed instructions to find the place (directions from Bangor, Llanberis and Caernarfon are given), so they lived within easy travelling distance but they did not know the area intimately. All these clues suggest the newly mobile industrial working class, more specifically quarrymen, the slate quarries within that radius being then at the height of their success. As the demand for labour increased and the wages compared favourably with those received by agricultural labourers, large numbers of men had left their native parishes, from other parts of Caernarfonshire but also from Anglesey, where many had been brought up in farming communities, and had come to take up waged work in the slate quarries of Bethesda, Llanberis or Dyffryn Nantlle. They were thus transplanted from a rural community, where traditions of all kinds might be preserved and transmitted orally, to an urbanised and more mixed one, where workers from many other districts came to settle in the new terraced houses in the quickly expanding villages and small towns, where social life revolved around the poles of chapel and tavern as much as around fairs and firesides. Increasingly the Welsh-speaking population of north-west Wales, whilst retaining and consolidating its language, was being cut off from centuries of tradition, a pattern repeated in other parts of Wales.

Faced with the need to reintroduce the story of King Arthur to his readers, Dr Wynn Williams, did so, perhaps unexpectedly, by providing a Welsh translation of extracts from Robert Fabian's *Chronicle*, a sixteenth-century chronicle, including a brief account of the exhumation of the bones of Arthur and his wife at Glastonbury in reign of Henry II, a narrative well known from the accounts given by Giraldus Cambrensis.¹¹ Dr Wynn Williams then quotes a further source for the exhumation, whom he names as Caradog of Llancarfan, but this cannot be true as Caradog would have been dead long before the exhumation took place. In fact the doctor's second source is very likely to have been David Powel's *Historie of Cambria now called Wales*

¹⁰ Wynn Williams, *Ffynnon Cegin Arthur*, p. 4. Readers were expected to know about Lord Penrhyn (see note 9 above) but not King Arthur!

¹¹ R. Fabian, *New Chronicles of England and France*, ed. H. Ellis (London, 1811). The portions translated into Welsh are caps. Cvi, Cvi.

(1584), a much-expanded and embellished version of Humphrey Llwyd's English translation of *Brut y Tywysogion*, the Welsh chronicle then attributed to Caradog of Llancarfan, left unpublished at Llwyd's death; Dr Wynn Williams could also have been misled by a comment in Theophilus Evans' *Drych y Prif Oesoedd* which refers the reader to Caradog's work.¹²

The learned Dr Wynn Williams, whose antiquarian research evidently rivalled his medical studies, goes on to investigate how Arthur came to be connected with the healing spring. He quotes a series of *englynion* (four-line stanzas in strict metre), whose authorship he could not establish, but which do not bear any signs of great age, though I too have as yet failed to trace their origin. These stanzas, he explains, reflect an old tradition that it was not through fighting with Mordred that Arthur met his end, as Robert Fabian's account states, but that he had withdrawn from centre stage. Sickened by the deceitful behaviour of his relatives and vassals ('ei berthynasau a'i ddeiliaid', p. 8), he and his famous knights retired to the mountains of Snowdonia where they lived in caves or underground dwellings, which Myrddin (Merlin) showed them. There they lived, spending their time feasting on venison and other good things. Dr Wynn Williams suggests that the fat from the venison was thought to be the thickness on the surface of the water, brought there by streams flowing through the kitchen, and that natural gases rising from the spring were identified as smoke from the kitchen fire. This is that same tradition to which Myrddin Fardd also refers briefly, as we have seen. Before returning to his medical theme and a scientific analysis of the chalybeate spring, the doctor first discusses the antiquities of the district, perhaps giving a hint that a pilgrimage to Ffynnon Cegin Arthur might be conveniently combined with seeing other local sights. By the 1880s, for waged workers in a rapidly industrialising and urbanising society, history and tradition were not so easily picked up from relatives or neighbours and the printed word, purchased with cash, was increasingly taking the place of oral tradition.

Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that until the nineteenth century Wales, even rural Wales, had depended only or even mainly on oral transmission to preserve its local and national traditions. From the Middle Ages onwards written texts played a crucial role in the development of Arthurian tales and traditions in Wales. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it was not uncommon for poets to be fully literate,¹³ even if they still sang for their supper at the homes of the gentry, and the last remnants of that tradition of

¹² For the account of the supposed exhumation see D. Powel, *The Historie of Cambria now called Wales* (repr. London, 1811), p. 173; for Theophilus Evans' comment: 'Y sawl a chwennycho hanes gyflawn am helynt tywysogion Cymru, darllened Groniel Caradoc o Llancarfan' ('He who wants the full story of the troubles of the Welsh princes, let him read Caradoc of Llancarfan's chronicle'), see *Drych y Prif Oesoedd*, ed. G. H. Hughes (Cardiff, 1961), p. 95. The ultimate source for the exhumation story was Giraldus Cambrensis in his *De Principis Instructione*, where details of the king's wounds and the discovery of the bones of the queen are given.

¹³ Fifteenth-century examples include Lewys Glyn Cothi and Gutun Owain, both of whom are also noted for their scribal activity.

the wandering poet dependent on the generosity of temporary patrons were still visible into the early years of the eighteenth century. The increasing pull of London, which was to lead to the formation of London-based Welsh societies such as the Gwyneddigion and the Cymmrodorion, helped to sound the death-knell of the old order. Many of those best placed to act as patrons for the last generations of wandering poets left their native land for England and turned to publishing texts they found in Welsh manuscripts, in a symbolic shift from voice to print, from a living present to a half-dead, and often only half-understood past. The abandonment of the poets by their former patrons is denounced in graphic terms by Sion (John) Powel (d. 1767) of Llansannan in 1766, following the return of his bardic teacher Evan Evans, 'Ieuan Fardd' from north Wales to his native Cardiganshire:

... i ba beth y Canaf Gywydd mwy yngwynedd, oddieithr galarnad iradus am nas gwelaf athraw na bardd yno mwy, nag un a edwyn gywreindeb Cerdd nag a gâr ddatcan gorchestawl gowydd o Gyfrodedd iaith Gomer. o bleid haws Cael gan Gymru ynfyd yr oes hon oganu'r Fruttanjaith, a chablu gwaith ei hên Feirdd, a chanu rhigymau Penrhyddion o Gymysgedig jeithoedd na cheisiaw cadw yn ddi lwgr iaith eu gwlad. – Mae'r Bonedd hefyd me[glis] tramor estron genedl, yn anghydnabyddus a diystyrlyd o jaith eu hên deidiau, yn Baldordd Saesonaeg, yn Codi ar eu tiroedd, yn gwasgu ar eu deiliaid, yn gorthrymu'r Tylodion, yn Preswyliaw y Nghaerludd, yn cadw Putteiniaid, y[n] meddwi ag yn godinebu: au hen Balasdaï au Llysoedd gynt, yn anghyfanedd yn ogofau Gwiliad a lladron, yn Gorlanau Geifr a Bychod. lle clywid ynddyn gynt blethiadau soniarus Telynau a phibau pereiddlais a phob offer Cerdd: haws yn awr yw clywed y Dylluan yn Canu a Chathod yn Cymmaru, a phob pryfaid drwg yn nythu, lle bu lawer hardd Balasdy mae'n awr yn waeth na beudy, heb Ddyn yn Cyfaneddu, i roi na bwyd na Gwely, ys mae'n haws i Fardd neu ymdeithydd yn awr, yn un o'r hongl-dai pen agored hyn dorri ei wddf na thorri ei newyn...¹⁴

(... what is the use of my singing a cywydd in Gwynedd any more, other than a sad lament, since I no longer see any teacher or poet there, nor anyone who might recognize the skilfulness of a poem nor recite a masterly cywydd in the intricate language of Gomer, for sooner does one get from the foolish Welsh of today the defamation of the British tongue, blaspheming against the work of the old bards, singing sloppy rhymes in a mixture of languages, rather than trying to preserve the purity of their national language. The nobility are like a foreign nation from overseas, ignorant and careless of their ancestors' tongue, babbling in English, mortgaging their land, squeezing their tenants, oppressing the poor, living in London, keeping prostitutes, getting drunk and committing adultery, whilst their ancient palaces and courts of yesteryear are deserted, are caves for bandits and thieves, enclosures for goats and bucks; where once was heard the tuneful harmonies of harps and sweet-voiced pipes and all kinds of musical instruments, now sooner may one hear the owl calling and cats

¹⁴ 'Llythyrau at Ddifydd Jones o Drefriw', ed. G. J. Williams, supplement to *The National Library of Wales Journal* series iii no. 2 (1943), 22.

copulating, and all kinds of horrible beasts nestling, where once was many a beautiful mansion it is now worse than a byre, without any man living there to provide food or a bed for the night, now it's easier for a poet or a traveller, in one of these dilapidated hovels, to cut his throat than to break his fast...)

This process was undoubtedly accelerated, from the late eighteenth century onwards, by the rise of new Nonconformist sects whose acolytes regarded traditional music, poetry and dance, as at best a distraction from higher things and at worst the work of the devil. The rapidity of the decline of these pursuits and the less colourful society which emerged were much regretted by Edward Jones (1752–1824), known as 'Bardd y Brenin' (the king's bard) from his appointment as harpist to George IV, in his book, *The Bardic Museum*, published in 1802. In terms more moderate but still echoing those of Sion Powel a few decades earlier, he denounced the changes which had taken place, though, given the circles in which he moved, it is not surprising that, unlike Powel, he laid the blame entirely at the door of the Nonconformists rather than the aristocracy:

This sudden decline of the national Minstrelsy, and Customs of Wales, is in a great degree to be attributed to the fanatic impostors, or illiterate plebeian preachers, who have too often been suffered to over-run the country, misleading the greater part of the common people from their lawful Church; and dissuading them from their innocent amusements, such as Singing, Dancing, and other rural Sports, and Games, which heretofore they had been accustomed to delight in, from the earliest time.¹⁵

Yet during the same period, whilst the old ways were being lost, a new history was being created. With Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams, 1747–1826) a new step was taken: the deliberate reinvention of the past.¹⁶ Much work remains to be done to establish exactly whether his researches were based on genuine written or oral sources then available and how much should be regarded as the product of an opium-inspired imagination, but there is no doubt that he himself embellished traditional material which he did find and it was certainly he who devised the history, regalia and rituals of the modern *gorsedd* of bards and the ceremonies of the eisteddfod. By promoting the use of a special bardic alphabet he had devised, based on authentic runes, he even reinvented a writing tradition as well as a written tradition. To reinvent the past for the greater glory of Wales might seem a radical and revolutionary act, consistent with the outlook of a man who fraternised with supporters of the French Revolution. But it was also an act which had medieval precedent, for Iolo could plausibly be described as the

¹⁵ E. Jones, *The Bardic Museum* (London, 1802), p. xvi.

¹⁶ See P. Morgan, *Iolo Morganwg* (Cardiff, 1975), and idem, 'From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 43–100. A research project to reassess the work of Iolo Morganwg is currently under way at the University of Wales Centre for Higher Welsh and Celtic Studies in Aberystwyth.

Geoffrey of Monmouth of his day, in so far as his romanticised vision of an early Wales of druids, bards and heroes with unbroken traditions stretching back into the mists of time, provided his readers with a positive and comforting view of the past at a time when to be Welsh in an increasingly anglicised environment was becoming ever more problematic.¹⁷ Like Geoffrey's vision, his too was not total invention but had some genuine traditional material at its core.

Iolo Morganwg's activity contrasts sharply with that of an earlier antiquarian, Lewis Morris (1701–65), whom Iolo once described, with breath-taking prejudice if not hypocrisy, as 'no better than a very shallow Coxcomb . . . and a man of infinite falsehood'.¹⁸ In fact Morris, a trained surveyor from a family with serious scientific interests, was very much an empiricist and seeker after truth. He took advantage of the travel necessary for his professional duties to record poems, stories and traditions from all classes of society, and his manuscripts and his voluminous correspondence with his brothers and with other Welshmen who shared his interests provide invaluable information about Welsh life in those last decades before the religious revivals of the late eighteenth century destroyed with their new puritanism so much of the old, admittedly often drink-fuelled, traditions. Fortunately for us, Lewis Morris was interested in Arthurian traditions and so records a number of snippets, both narrative and non-narrative, which he had picked up either directly from the *werin*, the labouring classes, or from other collectors. One of the latter was Dafydd Jones of Trefriw (?1708–1785), one of the first legally sanctioned printers in Wales and a man who shared with Morris a passionate and informed interest in Welsh poetry and traditions.

In a series of letters written between March and June 1757 the two men discussed Arthurian stories connected with Ynys Enlli (*anglice* Bardsey), the island off the western tip of Caernarfonshire, once home to a monastic settlement, separated from the mainland by such dangerous seas that three pilgrimages to Bardsey were said to be worth one to far distant Rome. That tradition began early, for in the *Liber Landavensis* the island is described as 'Roma Britanniae, propter longinquitatem et periculosum transitum mare' (Britain's Rome, because of the long and dangerous sea crossing).¹⁹ Lewis Morris first turns to this topic in the context of the discussion of the name Dewi, the name of the patron saint of Wales, a form for which Dafydd, his correspondent's

name, provides a doublet. Morris then refers to a tradition which he had picked up:

. . . y Brenin Arthur neu ei dad Uthur a ddygodd ei gâr Dewi St gydag ef o Lydaw, ag ai gwnaeth yn Archesgob Cymru yn lle'r Hên Ddyfrig yr hwn a aeth i Ynys Enlli i orphen ei oes.²⁰

(King Arthur or his father Uthur brought his relative St David with him from Brittany, and made him bishop instead of the aged Dubricius who went to live out his final years on Bardsey Island.)

Two days later, in his next letter, Morris expands on his theme:

. . . fe fu lawer Dewi heblaw Dewi'r Archesgob, ag ni wyddom ni'n dda pa fath fuchedd a ddilynodd hwnnw. fe allai nad anhebyg i Esgobion Cymru yn ein dyddiau ni. oni ddaeth ef gydag Uthur o Lydaw i gael bywoliaeth yma? ag oni throes Arthur yr Hen Ddyfrig Archesgob oi le a gorfu arno fynd i orphen ei oes i Fanachlog Enlli fal y cae Ddewi oedd yn gâr i'r Brenin fod yn archesgob Cymru? Nid seintiau oedd pob un a elwid yn seintiau gwedi hynny gan Bab rhufain. Dynion fal ninneu oeddynt, rhai'n dda a rhai'n ddidda.²¹

(. . . there was many a Dewi besides Dewi the Archbishop, and we do not know for certain what kind of life he led; perhaps not so different from the bishops of Wales in our days. Did he not come with Uthur from Brittany to make his living here? and did not Arthur turn the aged Dubricius out of his post and force him to live out his last years in the monastery on Bardsey, so that Dewi, who was related to the king, could become Archbishop? Not every one who was later called a saint by the Pope of Rome was a saint. They were men like us, some good, some not good.)

Where then did Lewis Morris find this material? One likely source is the work of the late-medieval Welsh poets, which was still a subject of great interest in Wales thanks to the labours of generations of manuscript collectors and copyists. At this time Wales had no university and therefore no major library, so Welsh manuscripts which had not left the country were perforce in private hands, but it was widely known who had what manuscripts, and it was often possible to borrow manuscripts or to consult and copy them in their owner's house.²² Lewis Morris himself in about 1740 drew up a list of all the people in Wales he knew of who had manuscripts in their

¹⁷ On negative English attitudes towards Wales and the Welsh at this period, expressed through both visual and literary images, see P. Lord, *Words with Pictures: Welsh Images and Images of Wales in the Popular Press, 1640–1860* (Aberystwyth, 1995), and M. Dearnley, *Distant Fields: Eighteenth-Century Fictions of Wales* (Cardiff, 2001).

¹⁸ In Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, NLW MS 13118B (*olim* MS Llanover C.31), p. 93, c. 1805, quoted in H. Owen, *The Life and Works of Lewis Morris (Llewelyn Ddu o Fôn)* (n.p., 1951), pp. xcix–c.

¹⁹ Quoted in B. F. Roberts, 'Enlli'r Oesoedd Canol', in *Enlli*, ed. R. G. Jones and C. J. Arnold (Cardiff, 1996), pp. 21–48 (p. 36).

²⁰ G. J. Williams, 'Llythyrau at Dafydd Jones o Drefriw', p. 3, letter dated 14 March 1757.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²² This practice is reflected in another letter from Lewis Morris to Dafydd Jones, dated 27 February 1757; see 'Llythyrau at Dafydd Jones o Drefriw', pp. 1–2. An earlier example is provided by the lexicographer Dr John Davies, Mallwyd, who was apparently able to transcribe the entire contents of Llyfr Taliesin (the Book of Taliesin, now National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 2) at the private library at Hengwrt in Meirionnydd between 1631 and 1634; see M. Hayock, 'Llyfr Taliesin', *National Library of Wales Journal* 25 no. 4 (1988), 357–86 (p. 370 and n. 127). Similarly William Maurice (d. 1680) spent much time working on the Welsh manuscripts at Hengwrt (see *Dictionary of Welsh Biography down to 1940* (London, 1959), p. 625).

possession.²³ The story of Dewi succeeding Dyfrig as Arthur's Archbishop is referred to by the poets Gutun Owain and Lewis Glyn Cothi in the late fifteenth century, but the latter is the more likely to be the source used by Lewis Morris, for he himself owned a manuscript of the poet's works.²⁴ It should be noted, however, that neither poet mentions that Arthur had Dyfrig ousted against his will, but a variant narrative of Dyfrig's retirement to Enlli is evoked in the *Liber Landavensis*, where he hands over his episcopacy to St Teilo, not to David.²⁵ The Life of St Teilo, however, maintains that Dyfrig retired from his post as archbishop of Caerleon [*sic*] in order to make way for St David.²⁶ But in view of the fact that Thomas Pennant, visiting Bardsey some forty years later than Lewis Morris, records that Dyfrig 'almost worn out with age, resigning his see to St David, retired [t]here', it is likely that this was the local version of the story in the eighteenth century and that Morris was not dependent on his manuscripts alone for this tale.²⁷

The tradition which Morris mentions, that King Arthur was related to St David, is an ancient one, for *Bonedd y Saint* makes the saint Arthur's great nephew.²⁸ One Welsh version of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, NLW MS 3036B (*olim* Mostyn MS 117), copied in the early fourteenth century²⁹ echoes this, making Non, David's mother, the daughter of Anna, daughter of Uthyr Pendragon, this time making the saint the king's nephew. However, *Brut Dingestow* (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, NLW MS 5266B) follows the *Historia* in referring to David as the king's uncle.³⁰ As Elissa Henken has pointed out:

It would seem that there was a need felt to have the two great men related, that the traditionally most important relationship of nephew and uncle was maintained, but that there was some uncertainty as to which man held which position in the relationship.³¹

²³ Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, NLW MS 604D, p. 83; an annotated transcript, made in 1788 by the Rev. David Ellis (1739–95) when curate of Amlwch, is now NLW MS 17B, pp. 82–3. See also H. Owen, *The Life and Works of Lewis Morris*, pp. 181, 213.

²⁴ In a letter to Dafydd Jones, dated 18 November 1757, he states: '... mae gennifi yn agos i drichant o Gywyddau ac owdlau y Bardd hwnnw mewn un llyfr, a llawer ohono gwedi ei sgrifennu allan o lyfr oi law ei hun' ('I have nigh on three hundred cywyddau and awdlau by that poet in one volume, many of them written out from a book in his own hand'). See 'Llythyrau at Ddafydd Jones o Dre Friw', p. 11 and p. 33, n. 30. G. J. Williams suggests that this was London, British Library, MS Add. 14871, a copy made by Dr John Davies, Mallwyd, from two earlier manuscripts, Peniarth 70 and Peniarth 109, the latter being in the hand of Lewys Glyn Cothi. Lewis Morris, he adds, had bought Dr Davies's copy for a shilling in 1728.

²⁵ See Elissa Henken, *Traditions of the Welsh Saints* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 130, and further references given there.

²⁶ *Lives of the British Saints*, ed. S. Baring-Gould and J. Fisher, 4 vols. (London, 1907–13), II, 310–11.

²⁷ Pennant, *Tours*, II, 370.

²⁸ See P. C. Bartrum, *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (Cardiff, 1966), pp. 54–5.

²⁹ J. G. Evans, *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language* (London, 1898–1910), I, 62, states that it was copied in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, but I have followed the dating given by Daniel Huws in *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Cardiff and Aberystwyth, 2000), p. 59.

³⁰ *Brut Dingestow*, ed. H. Lewis (Cardiff, 1942), p. 161.

³¹ *Traditions of the Welsh Saints* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 32.

The detail in Morris's letter that Dewi had come from Brittany with Uthyr is more puzzling, but may represent a confusion with the Breton associations of Dyfrig, who appears in the Breton Life of St Samson, where he ordains Samson; a similar tradition is preserved in the *Liber Landavensis*.³² Although the cult of both Dewi and his mother, Non, is attested in Brittany from at least the thirteenth century and still persists, according to Rhigyfarch's *Vita Dewi* was born and bred in Wales, spending most of his life there, although he did travel on the continent.³³

Lewis Morris's narrative, in his letter to Dafydd Jones, of how Dyfrig came to Enlli thus brings together elements which, in variant forms, can be easily traced back to the early written sources, and we may note that whilst the earliest of those sources, which are in Latin or Welsh prose, provide us with at least the bare bones of the narrative, links in the chain of tradition are often provided by non-narrative sources, notably the work of the poets. It is not always realised by scholars from outside Wales that Welsh traditionally made a sharp distinction between poetry and prose, with prose alone being used as a vehicle for narrative, and whilst poetry might refer to narrative traditions, the narrative poem did not fully develop until the early modern period and forms such as the ballad were late arrivals in Wales.³⁴ Medieval Welsh poetry might refer to a narrative, or assume familiarity with a narrative, but it would not itself tell the story. Yet all too often the lack of a surviving written prose version means that we are reliant on the often less comprehensive sources of poetry, and of oral traditions where recorded.

The story of Dyfrig, Dewi and Arthur was not the only Arthurian narrative connected with Bardsey that had caught the interest of Lewis Morris, and, indeed of his friend Dafydd Jones of Trefriw. In 1737 Lewis Morris, whose first profession was as a land surveyor, had been appointed by the navy office in London to undertake a hydrographic survey of some of the Welsh ports. The work got underway in earnest in 1741 and the fruits of his work would be published in 1748 under the slightly misleading title *Plans of Harbours, Bays, and Roads in St George's and the Bristol Channels*.³⁵ In May 1742, Morris wrote to William Fychan or Vaughan:

Off of Bardsey I observe a great overfall of the sea on a Bank never observd. by any Hydrographer in any Chart, But the place is so well known amongst the

³² *Ibid.*, p. 103.

³³ See Rhigyfarch's *Life of St David*, ed. J. W. James (Cardiff, 1967). On the Breton cult of Dewi and Non, see Y. Le Berre, B. Tanguy and Y.-P. Castel, *Buez Santez Nonn, Mystère breton: Vie de sainte Nonne* (Trefflevenez and Brest, 1999).

³⁴ The development of narrative poetry is first seen in the free-metre forms from the Elizabethan period onwards and owes much to English influence. See, for example, T. Parry, *Baledi'r Ddeunawfed ganrif* (Cardiff, 1935); T. H. Parry-Williams, *Canu Rhydd Cymmar* (Cardiff, 1932); C. Davies, 'Early Free-Metre Poetry', in *A Guide to Welsh Literature c. 1530–1700*, ed. R. G. Gruffydd (Cardiff, 1997), pp. 75–99, and N. Lloyd, 'Later Free-Metre Poetry', in *ibid.*, pp. 100–27.

³⁵ Published in digital form on the website of the National Library of Wales, at <http://www.llgc.org.uk/drych.lem/lem001.html>. A second printed edition of the *Plans* was issued by his son, William Morris, in 1801.

neighbours that it has acquired a name among the Antient Britons which it keeps to this day.

That name was Gorffrydau Caswennan.³⁶ Morris continues:

... and one of the antient Poets describing the positiveness of his mistress, most Elegantly says

Os anodd o Gaswennan
Droi ar Lif or dwr i'r Lan
Dau anos na mynd yno
Troi Bun or Natur y Bo.

(If it was hard from Caswennan to turn to windward from the water to the shore, twice as hard as that is to change a girl's nature.)

These four lines Lewis Morris elsewhere attributes to a poet called Robert Leiaf, about whom little is known, but Morris confidently dates the poem around 1450.³⁷ This is repeated in the transcripts of Lewis Morris's manuscripts made by Edward Jones ('Bardd y Brenin').³⁸ Robert Leiaf may be related to the fifteenth-century Denbighshire-born poet Gruffudd Leiaf, in which case Morris's date is entirely plausible.³⁹ The poem in which these lines occur is, however, also attributed to other and more famous poets, including Bedo Aeddren, Bedo Brwynllys, Ieuan Dyfi, Llawdden and Dafydd ap Gwilym. Apart from Dafydd ap Gwilym, who flourished in the mid-fourteenth century, these poets all lived in the fifteenth century, and Ieuan Dyfi was still alive in the early sixteenth. The uncertainty of attribution and the variant readings within the poem are typical of the manuscript tradition of Welsh poetry in the early modern period. What is also characteristic is that the poem itself gives no further detail, for the audience is assumed to be familiar with the story to which the poet alludes. The fact that many of the poets to whom the manuscripts attribute the poem are not from Pen-llŷn – the mainland region nearest to Enlli – hints that the dangers of Caswennan were well known to audiences outside the immediate local area. This poem is a *cywydd* without any given title but which starts 'Y ferch a'r ael wine fain' (The girl with the thin reddish eyebrows).⁴⁰ Here the poet, whoever he is, refers in passing to the story of Caswennan, following the common practice among Welsh poets of drawing on well-known narrative material to supply

metaphors or comparisons in poems on quite other themes. The poem, in its extant exemplars at least, makes no mention of Arthur. Yet Lewis Morris in his published *Plans of Harbours* explicitly links the story with Arthur in a note on his chart of the north entrance to Bardsey sound:

There is a Bank of Sand about a mile W.S.W. of Bardsey, on which you have not two Fathom at Low Water.

King Arthur (as is reported) had a ship called Gwennan Cast away there, Hence the Place is called Gorffrydau Caswennan.

He repeats this in his *Celtic Remains*, a dictionary of Welsh place-names richly annotated, left unpublished at his death.⁴¹

Caswennan; a sunken bank near Bardsey Isle, where King Arthur's favourite ship called Gwennan was cast away. The overfall there is called *Gorffrydau* or streams of Caswennan to this day.⁴²

From this evidence it appears that by Lewis Morris's day, that is by the 1740s, Gorffrydau Caswennan, where a sunken bank and strong currents constituted a danger to shipping, was linked in the local tradition with king Arthur. Arthur had a ship called Gwennan, so Caswennan can be interpreted as 'hateful to Gwennan', hateful because she was cast away there. Again in transcripts from Lewis Morris's manuscripts, this time in the hand of Evan Evans ('Ieuan Brydydd Hir' or 'Ieuan Fardd', 1731–88), we find the following note:

Caswennan, lle atcas i Longau rhwng Enlli â Llyn; yno torrodd Llong i Arthur a elwid Gwennan o hynny y gelwir y lle Ffrydiau Gwennan.⁴³

(Caswennan, a hateful place for ships, between Bardsey and Llyn (i.e. the Llŷn peninsula); it was there that was broken a ship belonging to Arthur, called Gwennan [the white one] because of which the place was called Ffrydiau Gwennan [Gwennan's streams or currents].)

But Morris had added:

This is a mistake of David Jones for Ffrydiau Caswennan (rightly called Gorffrydiau Caswennan) lie between Ynys Enlli and the Channel and is a great overfall. It is sometimes mentioned by one of the Poets and is noted for its strong tides.

³⁶ University of Wales, Bangor, MS Mostyn 7585, quoted by D. Wyn Wiliam in 'Caswennan', *Tlysau'r Hen Oesoedd. Cymdeithas Morrisiaid Môn* 9 (April 2001), 10–13 (p. 10). For a fuller discussion of the Caswennan material, see N. Bullinga, 'Arthurs schipbreuk', in *Arthur, Brigit, Conn, Deirdre... Verhaal, taal en recht in de Keltische wereld. Liber amicorum voor Leni van Strien-Gerritsen*, ed. I. Gence, B. Jaski and B. Smelik (Nijmegen, 2003), pp. 51–61.

³⁷ *Plans of Harbours*, p. 11.

³⁸ Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, NLW MS 37B, p. 128.

³⁹ See *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, s.n. Gruffudd Leiaf.

⁴⁰ This poem is found in its entirety in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, NLW MS 3037B (*olim* Mostyn 129), p. 134.

⁴¹ The first part, contained in London, British Library, MS Add. 14910–11, was published by Daniel Silvan Evans (London, 1878); a copy made from the same manuscript exemplar by Lewis Morris's nephew, Richard Morris, is now Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, NLW MS 1735D; the second part, NLW MS 1680A, still unpublished, was preserved among the manuscripts of Gwallter Mechain who had been asked to edit the work for publication but failed to do so. See 'Llythyrau at Ddwydd Jones o Drefriw', pp. 30–2.

⁴² BL, Add. MS 14910, p. 149; quoted in Dafydd Wyn Wiliam, 'Caswennan', p. 11.

⁴³ Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, NLW MS 1668B, p. 3.

This comment shows that Morris had been discussing this tradition in his correspondence with Dafydd Jones of Trefriw, but there is little doubt that he had heard this onomastic tale from local people who knew the tricky sea-roads between Bardsey and the mainland, for he continues:

It hath been shewed m[e] by the Natives of Llyn and Bardsey, in my survey of the coast. Lewis Morris.⁴⁴

In the tradition collected by Lewis Morris, Caswennan was a toponym, with the Gwennan element identified as the name of Arthur's ship, but there is no authority for this in the medieval sources. Apart from the *cywydd* discussed earlier, there are two other poems, both of the fourteenth century, one by Gruffydd Gryg and one by Hywel ab Einion Lygliw, which mention Caswennan,⁴⁵ apparently as a place-name, presumably the same sunken bank off Bardsey, well known as a danger to shipping. Hywel ab Einion Lygliw's reference to 'berw Caswennan' (the 'boiling' or 'turmoil' of Caswennan) is consistent with this. But in none of these references is there any mention of Arthur, nor of his ship Gwennan.

A further twist in the evolution of this tradition comes to light in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, this time in north-east Wales. In the 1580s the important collector and copier of manuscripts, Roger Morris of Coed-y-Talwrn in the parish of Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd, recorded the following tale in what is now Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Cwrtmawr MS 530 (p. 150):⁴⁶

Madoc ap Owain gwynedd oedd voriwr mawr a chwannoc i drafel ac am na alle o vodd arall entrio i'r Sygnedd gwneuthur ac adeilad a wnaeth long heb hayarn ond i hoylio a chym keirw rhac llyncku or mor hwnnw hi ai galw oi gwneuthuriad Gwennangorn ac ynn honno i nofiodd y moredd wrth i blesser ac i trafaeliodd i lawer o wledydd tra mor yn ddiareswyd ond wrth ddymchwelyd adre ynn gyfagos at Ynys Enlli yr yskyttiodd phrydie yno hi yn greulon ac ai hamharodd ymhell ac am hynny uyth hyd heddiw i gelwir y mann hwnnw ar y mor phrydie kaswennan[.] Yr ystori honn a ddoeth o law bwy

⁴⁴ NLW MS 1668B, p. 4. That the tradition remained current is shown by the reference to it in Appendix III to Richard Fenton's *Tours in Wales*, ed. J. Fisher (London, 1917), p. 329: 'There is to the West of [Bardsey] a reef of Sand, dry at low Ebbs, which at full tide causes a heavy sea, which makes a dreadful noise, and is very dangerous. It is called Gorffrydau Caswennan, the Torrents of Caswennan, which tradition says took its name from a ship of Arthur's of that name lost there.' This information was acquired by Fenton from a manuscript dated 1814, compiled by the quarry official and antiquarian, William Williams (1738–1817) of Llandygái, see Fisher's introduction to *Tours*, p. vii. On William Williams, see D. G. Jones, *Un o wŷr y Medra – Bywyd a Gwaith William Williams, Llandygái* (Denbigh, 1999).

⁴⁵ See Dafydd Wyn Wiliam, 'Caswennan', p. 10, and p. 12, notes 1–2, where bibliographical references are given.

⁴⁶ Formerly MS Llanwrin 1, under which title it is described by J. G. Evans, *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language*, II, 367–70. Roger Morris adopted the system of representing Modern Welsh /w/, /ll/ and /dd/ by under-dotting /w/, /l/ and /d/, but I have standardised, using the more familiar graphs for these in my transcript.

gilydd dann warant gredadwy o hynny hyd heddiw/ Velly i dyvod Edwart ap Sion wynn i mi 1582 y 13 o vis Mawrth[.]

(Madog ab Owain Gwynedd was a great sea-voyager and eager to travel and because he could by no other means enter the Sugnedd, he did make and build a ship without iron, but nailed it with stag's horn so that that sea would not swallow her; and called her Gwenangorn [the white one of horn] because of the way she was made; and in her he sailed the seas at his pleasure and travelled to many lands across the sea without any fear, but on returning home, near Bardsey the currents (ffrydie) shook her cruelly and threw her far off course and for this reason that place in the sea has ever since been called Ffrydie Caswennan. This story came from one hand to another under credible guarantee down to this day. So it was told to me by Edward ap Sion Wynn the 13 of March 1582.)

Sugnedd can mean a quagmire, a quicksand or a whirlpool, literally a place that sucks one in, but in this account the importance of building a ship without iron suggests that it was a place with some kind of magnetic field which would draw down into it anything containing iron. This reflects a very ancient tradition among seafaring peoples: it is attested in the *One Thousand and One Nights*, for example, where a loadstone mountain draws out the nails from any ship in its vicinity so that the vessel's structure falls apart, whilst in the Welsh context it is found in *Branwen*, the second of *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* (the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*), where the river Llinon in Ireland is said to have loadstones on its bed so that no boats or other craft will venture upon the water.⁴⁷ This detail of how and why the ship was built without iron, carefully recorded by Roger Morris, is missing from the other sources relating to Caswennan, although the ship is still called Gwenan as in the story known to Lewis Morris. But instead of Arthur, the owner and captain of the ship is Madog ab Owain Gwynedd. Owain Gwynedd, who lived from about 1100 to 1170 was king of Gwynedd. According to the genealogies, Owain Gwynedd had a large progeny by various mothers, and one of his sons was called Madog.⁴⁸ It is to this Madog that the myth of Prince Madog, the supposed early discoverer of America, came to be attached, and in some very late versions of the story his ship was again called Gwennangorn, perhaps under the influence of Roger Morris's story.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ In the *Stories from the Thousand and One Nights* the Third Calendar's tale relates how as the ships drew near to the mountain, the current carried them towards it and when the ships were close to it, they fell apart, and all the nails, and everything else that was of iron, flew from them towards the loadstone. For *Branwen*, see *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, ed. I. Williams (Cardiff, 1930), p. 40: 'A mein sugyn yssyd ygwaelawt yr auon, ny eill na llong na llestyr arnei,' ('And there are loadstones at the bottom of the river, so that no ship nor vessel can go upon it.')

⁴⁸ The offspring of Owain Gwynedd are listed in *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* ed. P. C. Bartrum (Cardiff, 1966), pp. 96–8, where Madog appears under [m].

⁴⁹ The pioneering work on the Madog tradition is Thomas Stephens' posthumously published *Madoc* (London and New York, 1893), which used modern critical tools to demolish the contention that the legend had any historical basis. For a more recent study, see G. A. Williams, *Madoc: The Making of a Myth* (London, 1979). The earliest known reference to the story is in David Powel's *Historie of*

Roger Morris had access to a wide range of manuscripts from which he copied a variety of prose and verse texts, and this particular manuscript includes transcripts from earlier manuscripts,⁵⁰ but in the colophon to this particular tale he states unequivocally that this was a tale from oral tradition. He stresses that it has come down through the years thanks to reliable storytellers, his authority here being the name of his direct informant, Edward ap Sion Wynn (*anglice*, Edward son of John Wynn), whose precise identity is difficult to establish in view of the plethora of Wynn families in north Wales. It is tempting, however, to imagine a connection with the John Wyn of Bodwrda who was known to the authorities as 'the captain of the pirates of Ynys Enlli' and is named in a comment on the sin of piracy in a manuscript of Roger Morris's contemporary, the Catholic Robert Gwyn (*fl.* 1568–91).⁵¹ Roger Morris, in the firmest possible authority *topos*, gives us the exact date on which he was told the story, 13 March 1582. So far I have traced only one other exemplar of the tale linking Madog ab Owain Gwynedd with the Caswennan story, and this is a direct transcript from Morris's manuscript, made by that other important north-eastern collector and copier of manuscripts, John Jones of Gellilyfdy in Flintshire (born some time between about 1578 and 1583, died ?1658). John Jones includes Roger Morris's colophon, which he attributes to Morris himself before dating his own transcript October 1607.⁵² In his many surviving manuscripts John Jones reveals a considerable interest in Arthurian material, often recording texts not otherwise attested or a version significantly different from those found in earlier manuscripts. He must therefore have had access to many manuscript sources now lost to us.⁵³ Had John Jones come across an Arthurian version of the Caswennan onomastic tale, he would surely have recorded it, but as far as I can establish, no such version can be found in his manuscripts.

Cambria now called Wales of 1584 (repr. 1811), pp. 166–7, see pp. 118–19 and note 12 above. The fact that Roger Morris, who acquired the story of Madog two years before the publication of Powel's work, does not refer to the discovery of America nor to a number of details in the later Madog tradition suggest that these were not known to him. Morris, like Humphrey Llwyd, was from Denbighshire and seems to have lived there all his life, unlike Llwyd: it seems unlikely, therefore, that Llwyd was evoking a local popular tradition. Powel's claim that Gutun Owain, a poet and copyist associated with Basingwerk abbey in neighbouring Flintshire, referred to the Madog story, is not borne out by Gutun's surviving manuscripts.

⁵⁰ The Life of St Martin, the text immediately preceding the Madog ab Owain Gwynedd tale in Roger Morris's manuscript (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Cwrtmawr 530), was copied from National Library of Wales, NLW MS 3026C (*olim* Mostyn 88), a manuscript in the hand of the poet Gutun Owain and dated 1488–89: see J. G. Evans, *Reports*, II, 369.

⁵¹ Cardiff, Central Library, MS Hafod 14, see G. Bowen, 'Roman Catholic Prose and its Background', in *A Guide to Welsh Literature c. 1530–1700*, ed. R. G. Gruffydd, pp. 210–40 (p. 228), and G. Bowen, *Welsh Recusant Writings* (Cardiff, 1999), p. 41.

⁵² Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 216B, pp. 59–60. It is worth noting that John Jones seems not to have known the story of Madog discovering America, otherwise he would surely have mentioned it here.

⁵³ This is true, for example, of his account of the Birth of Arthur in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 215B, which appears to be independent of the narrative in NLW MS 1A, a subject to which I hope to return elsewhere. See also note 57 below.

The pattern that emerges, therefore, is of an onomastic tale, originally without any Arthurian connections, but which by the first half of the eighteenth century had been drawn into the Arthurian orbit and properly Arthurianised. Why this should happen cannot be proven, but one possible reason is the existence of other Arthurian traditions connected with Bardsey, such as Arthur sending Dyfrig (Dubricius) there to retire, which we have already discussed, and also that of Myrddin/Merlin having his treasures there, kept in a Tŷ Gwydr (house of glass). The latter was a story known to Lewis Morris in the first half of the eighteenth century, for he recorded it in his *Celtic Remains*.⁵⁴ The earliest extant source in Welsh to record this tradition dates, however, from the mid-sixteenth century, being a marginal note in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 147. This states that Myrddin took *Tri Thlws ar Ddeg Ynys Brydain*, the Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain, with him to his Tŷ Gwydr.⁵⁵ This is not however, the earliest source to connect Myrddin with Enlli/Bardsey. The poet and herald Gruffudd Hiraethog (d. 1564), states in his expanded version of *Enwen Ynys Prydein* in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 163 that Myrddin was buried on the island,⁵⁶ but already in the fifteenth century poets such as Huw Cae Llwyd (*fl.* 1431–1504) and Huw Rheinallt (*fl.* c. 1471–94) were referring to Myrddin's Tŷ Gwydr. The poets of that period did not, however, specify where that house was localised, and they link Myrddin's retirement not with his curatorial duties with respect to the Thirteen Treasures, as the scribe in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 147 and Lewis Morris do, but with a love affair – a clear echo of the French *Prose Merlin*, which was by then known in Wales.⁵⁷ But the tradition of Myrddin living out his last days on Enlli and being buried there is recorded in a still earlier and perhaps unexpected source, Ranulf Higden's Latin chronicle, the *Polychronicon* completed in 1340.⁵⁸ Exactly how the chronicler acquired this information is not clear, but since he was a monk in Chester, a stone's throw from the Welsh border, it need not surprise us.

The pattern that emerges from studying these few particular examples, chosen more or less at random within an area well-known to me, would be

⁵⁴ For references to Myrddin and his treasures see Silvan Evans' edition of the *Celtic Remains*, pp. 170, 326.

⁵⁵ The note is on p. 14: see J. G. Evans, *Reports*, I, 911, where the date of the manuscripts is given as c. 1566. For the *Tri Thlws ar Ddeg* see *Triodd Ynys Prydein*, ed. R. Bromwich, 2nd edn (Cardiff, 1978), pp. 474, 560, also B. F. Roberts, 'Enlli'r Oesoedd Canol', p. 43, and further references there given.

⁵⁶ '... ac yn yr ynys honn y kladdwyd Merddin vab Morfryn' (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 163, pt 2, p. 8), see J. G. Evans, *Reports* I, 950, and cf. B. F. Roberts, 'Enlli'r Oesoedd Canol', p. 42.

⁵⁷ For the references by the poets see Bromwich, *Triodd Ynys Prydein*, pp. 474, 560; evidence of the *Prose Merlin* circulating in medieval Wales can be found in the prose fragment relating the Birth of Arthur found in NLW MS 1A, copied in the second half of the fifteenth century, see J. H. Davies, 'A Welsh Version of the Birth of Arthur', *Y Cymmrodor* 24 (1913), pp. 247–64, and note 53 above.

⁵⁸ *Polychronicon* i, 38 (Rolls Series, London, 1865), I, 416–18, quoted in B. F. Roberts, 'Enlli'r Oesoedd Canol', p. 42, see also Bromwich, *Triodd Ynys Prydein*, p. 560. On the date of the *Polychronicon* see A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England* (London, 1982), pp. 44–5.

repeated, I believe, if we took examples from elsewhere in Wales. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries traditions had become increasingly fragmented, and those which did survive did so because they were either straightforward onomastic tales, providing a brief narrative explanation for a local place-name, or because they were attached in some other way to a specific feature in the landscape. It is, of course, a truism within studies of oral tradition that stories are more likely to survive if firmly linked with a specific place such as a rock, a tree, a lake, or an early fortification, than if they lack a specific geographical location. But the antiquity of such stories is not always certain, as witness Bwrdd Arthur and Ffynnon Cegin Arthur which provide examples of a probably late Arthurianisation which, in the case of Bwrdd Arthur, ousted an older place-name. Yet older Arthurian traditions did survive, though often in a form rather different from that preserved in the medieval sources or those of the sixteenth century.

The split in Welsh tradition between poetry and prose, with prose as the exclusive medium for narrative, must be one of the reasons for the gradual disintegration of the vast stock of narrative material which must have been common knowledge amongst the Welsh in the Middle Ages. As long as oral tradition retained its vitality, as it did for long after the advent of the written word, stories about king Arthur and his warriors, to take only one strand from this complex fabric, could flourish and poets could assume that their audience, in whichever part of the country they found themselves, would pick up on the briefest of references, would experience a wide range of resonances from a line or half a line evoking a particular individual or a particular incident. From our very earliest surviving complete texts in Welsh, the *Hengerdd*, or Old Welsh poetry, it is evident that the amount of narrative material which has been lost far outweighs that which has survived. Very occasionally sources from elsewhere can provide the necessary background: the classic example is that of 'Cerdd Ysgolan', an Old Welsh poem preserved in the thirteenth-century Black Book of Carmarthen. 'Cerdd Ysgolan' clearly refers to some narrative known to the poet but which was not otherwise attested in Welsh sources except for even briefer passing references. It was only when Donatien Laurent collected a new, fuller version of the Breton *gwerz* about Ysgolan which at last provided that narrative in its entirety, that the full significance of the Welsh poem was revealed.⁵⁹ But this was an exceptional case. All too many of the Arthurian references in the poems in the Black Book of Carmarthen and the Book of Taliesin, such as the *Pa gur*: . . poem and *Preiddeu Annwfn*, not to mention the Myrddin poems,

⁵⁹ D. Laurent, 'La gwerz de Skolan et la légende de Merlin', *Ethnologie française* i 3-4 (1971), 19-54, cf. A. O. H. Jarman, 'Cerdd Ysgolan', *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* 10 (1977), 51-78. Versions of the same *gwerz* had been collected in the nineteenth century by Villemarqué, who recognised the affinities between them and the Welsh poem in the Black Book of Carmarthen, but these were incomplete compared with those collected by Donatien Laurent in the 1960s.

remain unexplained because the stories that lay behind them have been lost.⁶⁰ Despite many optimistic attempts at exegesis over the last century, not least by *arthuromanes*, at present we can do no more than speculate as to the precise shape these stories once took.

If the earliest sources in Welsh are poetry and therefore non-narrative, what of the earliest prose? Here the problem is a lack of material, for comparatively little narrative prose is Arthurian. The Arthurian tale regarded as the earliest in Welsh, and certainly the only Arthurian narrative which seems to have reached something like its present form before the intrusion of Geoffrey of Monmouth, is *Culhwch ac Olwen*. It has been plausibly argued that the story as it has come down to us represents a comparatively late Arthurianisation of what was not originally an Arthurian narrative. As it stands the tale provides us with a wealth of information but like an iceberg conceals a greater mass that lies beneath the surface. In the lists of the knights at Arthur's court, for instance, or in the list of tasks to be performed by the young hero if he is to win the hand of the giant's daughter, we find countless throw-away references to individuals, to incidents or to triads, which hint at what we have lost. Occasionally we can glean enough information from the context and, if we are lucky, combine it with brief references elsewhere, to allow us to guess at the rough outline of the story that informed one line or one phrase, a story which would have enhanced the contemporary audience's appreciation of the tale as a whole. One example, chosen at random is the story of Mabon fab Modron and Eiddoel fab Aer, the prisoners of Caer Loyw.⁶¹

Apart from *Culhwch* the only other Arthurian narratives preserved in the two main manuscript compendia, the White Book of Rhydderch and the Red Book of Hergest, are the tales of *Geraint*, *Owain* and *Peredur*, which were undoubtedly influenced as they are by the *Erec*, *Yvain* and *Perceval* of Chrétien de Troyes and by other French romances of the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, and finally *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, found only in the Red Book and which, I have argued elsewhere, probably postdates those three; moreover, whilst it reveals familiarity with earlier narrative traditions, it is a conscious literary composition rather than the kind of narrative which has evolved over time as it passed down generations of story-tellers, as *Culhwch ac Olwen* or *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* did. To these rather sparse prose records we may add material in Latin texts, from the *Historia Brittonum* to saints lives, which incorporate elements from the vernacular tradition. These may range from the briefest references, to Carn Cafall in the *Historia Brittonum*, for example, to proper narratives, such as that of Arthur

⁶⁰ See, for example, P. Sims-Williams, 'The Early Welsh Arthurian Poems', in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. R. Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman and B. F. Roberts (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 33-71.

⁶¹ See *Culhwch ac Olwen*, ed. R. Bromwich and D. S. Evans (Cardiff, 1997), pp. xliii-1 (in Welsh); a briefer account is given in their English edition (Cardiff, 1992), pp. lx-lxii.

and Melwas in the *Vita* of St Gildas by Caradog of Llancarfan.⁶² Here the native, vernacular, orally transmitted traditions speak through the Latin, written versions, demonstrating that during the Middle Ages those two traditions were not separate but overlapping, and that those compiling Latin texts, for all their book-learning, had not become separated from their native culture, any more than were those who first set down in writing the early Welsh poems or prose tales.⁶³ And although Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* is undoubtedly a composed work, it draws on at least some older Welsh traditions, which must have facilitated its re-translation into Welsh.

Another major vernacular source is of course the Triads, that invaluable short-hand collection of traditions, grouped conveniently in threes as a mnemonic device.⁶⁴ Here again, however, this source constantly reminds us that it is *only* the tip of the iceberg which is visible. Occasionally a helpful redactor, especially in the later manuscripts, will flesh out the bones with explanatory notes, but all too often, if a tradition is not attested elsewhere, we are left with little more than evidence for the existence of a story we no longer possess in its entirety. The Triads give us a checklist of what traditions were considered worthy of preservation but they do not provide a full taxonomy of those traditions. Nevertheless, the Triads are a useful reminder of the constant interplay between the oral and the written. In their earliest written form they transferred into that newer medium traditions taken directly from oral tradition, but as time goes on written sources begin to feed back into the oral tradition. In the early fifteenth century, for instance, new Triads were composed drawing on a written Welsh translation of French grail romances, and references to this newer, imported material quickly began to find their way into the orally performed work of the poets.

This movement between written and oral transmission, the reciprocal influence of one on the other, was to continue for centuries. There gradually emerged a class of literate, educated Welshmen [*sic*] who took an antiquarian interest in stories preserved locally in oral tradition as well as in book learning. Elis Gruffydd, in the first half of the sixteenth century, had his feet in both camps. He had had access to manuscripts in Welsh, French, Latin and English, as well as early printed books, but in compiling his chronicle of the history of the world, based mainly on such written sources, he could not resist the temptation to introduce folktales and snippets of traditional lore,

including onomastic tales, which he had undoubtedly acquired from oral tradition, not from books.⁶⁵ His English contemporary, Leland, found evidence that in his day the Welsh were still well-versed in the history and geography of their native land, hinting at the prevalence of stories linked with specific locations:

... The nature of the Welsh is, and always has been, to regard it as manifestly contemptible to know about outside matters and not about their own. From youth, therefore, they religiously learn first the genealogies of their ancestors and then the antiquities of their homeland. I might venture to claim that there is no race which can so easily give information on the topography of surrounding places, on its cities, its mountains, its lakes, its rivers and their courses. I should never have been prepared to believe that the Welsh were so well versed in their local affairs if I had not in person heard their communications everywhere throughout Wales.⁶⁶

By the seventeenth century Welsh antiquarian scholars realised the importance of combining research in books and manuscripts with field work. Edward Lhuyd (1660–1709) through his *Parochial Queries* questionnaires and his own travels with his trained assistants acquired valuable evidence of locally preserved traditions.⁶⁷ His method acknowledges a realisation that by Lhuyd's day oral traditions were becoming essentially local. The breakdown of the bardic world must have been a significant factor here, for the poets who had treated large swathes of the country as their constituency would have exerted a powerful unifying force, reminding audiences from Anglesey to Cardiganshire or from Radnorshire to Glamorgan of their common inheritance of story-material and other traditional lore. Lewis Morris a few decades later was perhaps even more successful than Lhuyd, although the loss of so many of Lhuyd's manuscripts through fire in the nineteenth century renders fair comparison impossible. But whereas Edward Lhuyd lived most of his life outside Wales, and his life was one of the town-based scholar, Lewis Morris lived and worked mainly in rural Wales, and his occupations as surveyor, lead mine developer and farmer, brought him constantly into contact with those ordinary working people who come so vividly to life in his correspondence and from whom he learned so much. We owe a debt of gratitude to

⁶² On Carn Cafall, see, for example, B. F. Roberts, 'Culhwch ac Olwen, the Triads, Saints' Lives', in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, pp. 73–95 (pp. 90–1), and O. J. Padel, *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 7–8; on the Arthur and Melwas story, see B. F. Roberts, 'Culhwch ac Olwen', pp. 83–4, P. Sims-Williams, 'The Early Welsh Arthurian Poems', in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, p. 60, and O. J. Padel, *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature*, pp. 43–6.

⁶³ A similar phenomenon may be observed in Brittany: see Caroline Brett, 'Breton Latin Literature as Evidence for Literature in the Vernacular, A.D. 800–1300', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 18 (1989) 1–25.

⁶⁴ See Bromwich, *Triodd Ynys Prydein*.

⁶⁵ C. Lloyd-Morgan, 'Oral et écrit dans la chronique d'Elis Gruffydd', *Kreiz 5, Études sur la Bretagne et les Pays Celtiques* (1995), 179–86; eadem, 'Elis Gruffydd a Thrawdodiad Cymraeg Calais a Chlwyd', *Cof Cenedl* 11 (1996), 29–58.

⁶⁶ Translation by J. P. Carley from Leland's account of Dafydd Morgan of Llandaff in his *Commentarii de Scriptoribus Britannicis*, ed. A. Hall (Oxford, 1709), cap. DLXXIII, 'De Davide Tavensi', pp. 464–5. I am most grateful to Professor Carley for drawing my attention to this account and for permission to quote from his translation. It is worth noting that one of the copies of Hall's edition now held at the National Library of Wales (shelfmark W.s. 1709 (8)) contains autograph annotations by Lewis Morris.

⁶⁷ On Edward Lhuyd see, for example, *Life and Letters of Edward Lhuyd, Second Keeper of the Museum Ashmoleanum*, ed. R. T. Gunther (Oxford, 1945); for further bibliographical references see T. Parry and M. Morgan, *Llyfryddiaeth Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg* (Cardiff, 1976), pp. 153–4, and G. Watts, *Llyfryddiaeth Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg, Cyfrol 2* (Cardiff, 1986), pp. 117–18.

those both within Wales and outside it, who secured the preservation of our early literary and historical manuscripts, but in acknowledging the inestimable value of those formal records of our poetry and prose, our narratives and non-narratives, we should not underestimate the value of the less imposing manuscripts and publications of more recent times, compiled from local informants. The material collected and preserved by Edward Lhuyd, Lewis Morris, Thomas Pennant and others may represent but the locally preserved *disjecta membra* of a once great tradition shared by a wider population, but taken with the material recorded in written form these fragments provide a far fuller picture than we would otherwise have. But they also show us, as does the testimony of much later sources such as the publications of Dr Wynn Williams and Myrddin Fardd, that tradition is never static, that stories are constantly recycled, replenished from other sources, sometimes oral, sometimes written, and adapted to suit new circumstances, new audiences. Change is the only constant.

