

'Trwy ddulliau chwyldro yn unig y mae llwyddo [Success will only be gained by revolutionary methods.]' Saunders Lewis, *Tynged yr Iaith* (1962).

Using this quotation, analyse/critically analyse the extent to which at least two of your key texts ('Relics') present conservative and/or revolutionary approaches to Celtic Revivalism.

The Celtic Revival emerged in the eighteenth century in response to growing concerns about the declining status of Welsh literature, language, history, music, and traditions. Initially driven by middle-class antiquarians, the movement soon attracted others of similar social standing who sought to expand its scope to protect all aspects of Welsh culture believed to be under threat.¹ This cultural reawakening coincided with the wider rise of clubs and societies that brought together individuals with shared interests—one notable example being the Society of Cymmrodorion.² Aspects of the Celtic Revival continued throughout the following centuries and on 13th February 1963 Saunders Lewis made his now famous speech *Tynged yr Iaith* which has become known as one of the most influential pieces of twentieth century Welsh political and cultural writing.^{3 4}

There were several ideological forces behind the Celtic Revival including nationalism, conservatism, radicalism, revolution, cultural nationalism and political nationalism. Of these, this essay will focus primarily on conservatism and revolutionary approaches but as there is often some blurring of the edges and overlap between the ideologies it is useful to first look at the key points of each before looking at specific examples.

Nationalism was a keystone of the Celtic Revival which allowed people to view themselves as distinct nations, each with their own cultural identity and unique past. From the nationalistic climate that underpinned the Celtic Revival people started to develop a renewed sense of their own cultural identity based on native language, writing, art and local history. This relearning of both national and individual cultural identity lead to a modern national consciousness providing a nostalgic, emotional driver for the Celtic Revival. Conservatism was an important part of the Celtic Revival that placed a strong emphasis on the ways of the past including traditions, customs and moral values which were considered to have been intrinsic to authentic Celtic culture. It was the fear of loss of these key elements, due to Anglicization and the growth of the industry, that caused deep concern resulting in an ideology that was founded on an approach of protection and preservation of the authentic cultural forms. In contrast, radicalism moved the Revival

¹ Iain McCalman, and others, eds., *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age : British Culture, 1776-1832*, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 1999), <<https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/display/10.1093/acref/9780199245437.001.0001/acref-9780199245437-e-729?rskey=TXfVJq&result=1>> [accessed online 15 January 2026]

² Roger L. Emerson, 'Clubs and Societies' in Alan Charles Kors (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of the Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2002). pp.66 - 74

³ Lewis, John, Saunderson, *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, <https://biography.wales/article/s10-LEWI-SAU-1893>

⁴ Saunders, Lewis, *State of the Nation*, <<https://morris.cymru/testun/saunders-lewis-fate-of-the-language.html>> [accessed online 15 January 2026]

forward and away from pure nostalgia giving it a more political slant with a greater sense of urgency that took on an anti-imperial view embracing cultural resistance and anti-establishment sentiment.

The relationship between the cultural and the political aspects of the Celtic Revival were very deeply related to each other, and it is from this symbiotic relationship that the revolutionary ideology developed. Nationalism was responsible for raising the level of consciousness which, combined with the need to preserve and conserve the past, led to a sense of identity that resulted in a political form of radicalism with a need to question Anglicization in an anti-colonial context. It is unlikely that a revolutionary ideology would have happen within the Celtic Revival without the prior development of these other ideologies and that revolutionary action was, for some, a necessary further step to preserve cultural identity and resistance change. Cultural nationalism was at the heart of the Celtic Revival and was unique to each of the Celtic Nations. It was very much about the preservation and revival of Celtic languages and expressions of cultural identity. There was also a forward-looking aspect to the ideology that encouraged artistic expression that both respected and was influenced by the historical culture. In Wales, this led to the creation of the National Eisteddfod which set a high standard of cultural excellence for contemporary cultural works. As cultural nationalism grew, so too did a sense of national pride and identity which then fuelled the radical and revolutionary ideologies. In contrast, political nationalism was responsible for moving the Celtic Revival away from being just cultural by introducing to the masses the idea that their cultural uniqueness warranted recognition of them as a nation and with that the power to self-govern. None of the ideologies described above existed in isolation, rather they were intertwined with each other, and it is this very complex relationship that led to the way in which the Celtic Revival evolved.

The two main texts that will be used for this essay are Saunderson's Lewis', *Tynged yr Iaith*, (1962) and *The Constitutions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (London, 1755). These texts are very different in nature to each other and come from completely different times. Lewis delivered a speech on BBC radio which aimed to highlight the decline of the Welsh language that he predicted would lead to the death of the language. His aim was to raise awareness and to send out a rallying call to the people of Wales in which he stated the need for urgent and direct action. Whilst the Society of Cymmrodorion was also concerned with the Welsh language it can be seen from the Constitution that it took a totally different approach to that proposed in Lewis' speech.

An important factor that influenced the Celtic Revival was the greater social and political environments of the time. During the eighteenth century there was little room for political dissent by the individual British nations as it was a time which saw the consolidation of imperial and administrative structures. This resulted in a cultural revivalism taking the form of scholarship and antiquarian pursuits by the Welsh elite. This allowed people to

validate the importance of Welsh culture yet without causing any rifts with the British state. However, this environmental climate had changed by the twentieth century with huge changes caused by the development of industry and mass migration both within and into Wales which had a significant impact on the traditional Welsh-speaking communities. This change was so significant that it created a cultural crisis so large that it could not be addressed by the earlier approach of preservation and cultural stewardship. It was in direct response to this crisis that Saunders Lewis gave his speech to the ordinary Welsh-speaking people, changing the onus for change away from the social elite to the general population combined with a call for revolutionary action if the Welsh language was to survive.

Both works address the need for the preservation and revival of interest in Welsh culture, but they are significantly different in terms of how they came into being; who they were created by; the beliefs and ideologies that they contain; their aims and their intended audience. They demonstrate very different approaches coming from mostly contrasting ideologies and highlight the transition over time from a very exclusive, society-based approach to Welsh cultural revival, that targeted the social elite, to a modern form of linguistic nationalism that aimed for mass political mobilisation to achieve its goals. *Tynged yr Iaith* was written and delivered in Welsh by Saunders Lewis (1893-1985) on a BBC radio program in February 1962. Lewis had a long and varied career being best known as a Welsh dramatist, critic and co-founder of the political party that later went on to become Plaid Cymru. The speech was made as a direct response to the 1961 census that recorded a 36% decline in Welsh speakers, compared to the census of 1931, and at a time when there was a growing awareness and heightened level of concern about the future of the Welsh language. The speech opens with a warning that used shock tactics to highlight the perilous state of the language, '*Y mae'r Gymraeg yn wynebu ei therfyn*' ("The Welsh language is facing its end"). Due to Lewis' intellectual stature and long-standing commitment to Welsh cultural nationalism he gains the ear of the people as he delivers a grave and personal prophecy in a tone intended to move the masses listening to the broadcast to take immediate action to prevent the fast-approaching death of the Welsh language. In his speech, Lewis mentioned, *The Constitutions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* and their aim, '... to restore breadth of interest and the culture of nobility to the Welsh language.'⁵ This was a text drawn up by members of the London-based Welsh cultural society that was founded in 1751 by brothers Lewis and Richard Morris.⁶ Whilst also looking to preserve the Welsh language, the aims of the society were threefold: social and benevolent; literary and antiquarian (with the emphasis on Welsh history and literature plus supporting the production of new books in Welsh); philanthropic (especially for the Welsh at home). Therefore, the

⁵ Saunders, Lewis, *State of the Nation*, <<https://morris.cymru/testun/saunders-lewis-fate-of-the-language.html>> [accessed online 15 January 2026]

⁶ The Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, <<https://www.cymmrodorion.org/the-society/our-history/>> [accessed 15 January 2026]

Cymmrodorion Constitutions were laid out in a very administrative and business-like way without any emotion without the emotion and sense of urgency that was conveyed by Lewis' speech. Whilst Lewis' was appealing to the masses, the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion actively sought out the patronage of society's elite and to be able to do this they styled themselves as a polite, conservative society. The contrast between Lewis' speech, delivered by an individual with prophetic message and the *Constitutions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* highlights, created by members of a polite society highlights the very different aims, audiences and ideologies of the two texts.

Despite their obvious differences, there is an underlying agreement between the two texts as both are motivated by cultural preservation. In the case of Lewis, it is primarily about the preservation of the language and in the case of The Cymmrodorions, the scope is greater and includes the preservation of Welsh antiquities and literature. Both approach their aims in a completely opposite way, Lewis calls for a form of activism, which might be described as anarchy, and The Cymmrodorions via the creation of a formal society that operated within a structure of rules, officers and hierarchy. Each, in their own way, saw Welsh identity as needing active intervention to survive. For Lewis, it was very specifically based on keeping the Welsh language alive by any means and for The Cymmrodorions the approach was law-abiding, based on scholarship and national pride. Lewis' speech is very radical in tone with the clear intention to provoke revolutionary action from its audience. One famous line from his speech is '*Trwy ddulliau chwyldro yn unig y mae llwyddo*', ('Success will only be gained by revolutionary methods') but not only does he make this rallying call, he also goes on to provide his listeners with suggestions as to types of revolutionary actions that might be incorporated the lives of ordinary people in a complete step-change away from traditional culture revivalism. He suggests direct action in the form of civil disobedience and public protest; mass mobilisation of the ordinary Welsh speaking population and direct confrontation with the state in areas such as broadcasting, road signs and education. All of which are delivered as part of a narrative intended to utilise the then climate of the time of anxiety and reinforce the message that the situation was at crisis point and urgent, direct intervention was needed. This clearly branded the situation as a political struggle that had long passed the point of being a cultural hobby. In complete contrast, *The Constitutions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* are devoid of any revolutionary ideology and are completely conservative advocating for cultural improvements instead of political agitation. Their carefully chosen emblem clearly demonstrates acceptance of a united British identity, posing no threat to the state including the Feathers of the English Prince of Wales and his motto, '*Ich Dien*', to indicate their connection or allegiance to the Royal Family. In addition to the revolutionary ideologies present in *Tynged yr Iaith*, there also exist several examples where Lewis has created a level of ambiguity between conservatism and revolutionary ideology. For example, his goals of preserving the Welsh language; restoring Welsh-speaking

communities and protecting the cultural heritage (as opposed to creating a new one) are all deeply conservative but to achieve these goals he is advocating revolutionary measures, thus creating a paradox. In his speech, Lewis criticises modernity such as Anglicisation, Industrial modernity and Bureaucratic state structures yet, at the same time, he calls for modern political activism, media pressure and organised protest movements thus relying on modern tactics and at the same time rejecting modernity. A further example of ambiguity is Lewis' call for radical change e.g. direct action and the need for a new form of national consciousness while he appeals to traditions like Christian moral duty and cultural continuity which merges revolutionary strategy with traditionalist rhetoric. Finally, Lewis rejects violence in his speech preferring instead a revolutionary ideology that is non-violent being cultural, Linguistic and Civic in nature. However, in the original Welsh version of the speech, Lewis uses the word *chwyldro* (revolution) is deliberately provocative, suggesting urgency and confrontation of a violent nature yet the actions he suggests are of a non-violent nature. This creates the final ideological ambiguity, is this conservative radicalism or radical conservatism?

In conclusion, *The Constitutions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* were written based on the completely conservative ideology of the Society with a three-fold aim that was very much concerned with the preservation of Welsh culture by means of national and cultural nationalism ideologies. This was achieved by peaceful means involving the philanthropic endeavours of members who were drawn for the social elite and who were not radical nor revolutionary in their views, rather seeking change through cultural methods. In contrast, *Tynged yr Iaith* is based on the rhetoric of revolutionary ideology but at the same time contains a deeper level of complexity that is created by the ideological ambiguity that Lewis included in his speech. Although Lewis inherited deep-seated conservative and preservationist ideals from earlier Celtic Revivalists, such as *The Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, he clearly distances himself from their polite, antiquarian approach replacing that with a call for cultural revolution to protect his fundamentally conservative vision of Welsh cultural identity. When viewed together, the two texts highlight the development and changes in the strategies and ideological tensions that insisted in Welsh cultural nationalism, from the eighteenth-century approach of cultural stewardship to the radical call to action of the twentieth century.

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